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Mama Lima

The significance of women's role in protecting nature, nurture, and culture in Banda Islands

MUHAMMAD FARID AND JUUL SADÉE

ABSTRACT

The historiography of Banda has paid little attention to the existence of women. Stories involving women are mainly about romance, family, and suffering. In reality, the existence of “*Mama Lima*” (groups of five women) is very strong in the Banda tradition (*adat*). They are the carriers of knowledge and tradition, a consequence of matriarchy. They determine the content and implementation of *adat* ceremonies like *Buka kampong*, forming the set of social norms and customary law of the community. *Mama Lima* groups are a living example of women throughout the ages who have played a significant role in welfare, the environment, religion, spiritualism, education, and nature. This article discusses the position of women in Banda from its colonization in 1609: defending their land, customs, and descendants, to this day. The results show that Banda women have been practising gender equality for centuries, passing their functions on to the younger generation, and have become an example for all Bandanese today.

KEYWORDS:

Mama Lima, gender equality, *adat*, *Buka kampong*, Banda Islands.

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The Moluccan Islands in the Banda Sea have an ancient, special history of cross-cultural interaction, trade, and struggle to obtain goods, colonization by the Dutch, and their departure after Indonesia's independence. Within this larger group of islands lies the smaller archipelago of the Banda Islands. These islands are known for their spices, especially the nutmeg and mace. Nutmeg cultivation is now being affected by the changing climate. Much more rain makes drying the nuts more difficult. The coral reefs and marine life are beautiful but also struggling with (plastic) waste and the effects of climate change. Historically, the Banda Islands differ somewhat from the other Moluccan islands in terms of social structure. The *Mama Lima* (five) and *Mama Sembilan* (nine) groups are examples of this.¹

Groups of five and nine women are an important feature of the social structure of the people of Maluku and Seram in general. Frank L. Cooley (1987) notes that these two major groups are known by different names: *Ulisiwa* and *Ulilima* in North Maluku; *Patasiwa* and *Patalima* in Central Maluku; and *Ursiuw* and *Urlim* in Southeast Maluku. Nearly 300 years ago, François Valentijn (1724-1726) wrote that the origin of these groupings lay in the two main sultanates in North Maluku: Ternate and Tidore, between which the territory was divided. However, there is an oral tradition which tells a different story. It recounts that the separation was caused by three brothers living on Mount Nunusaku (Seram) who separated and settled in three different areas after the great flood; the oldest brother went to West Seram and his descendants became a group of nine, the second brother went to East Seram and his descendants became a group of five, and the youngest brother went to the small islands of the southern part of Seram which became the *uliate* or *uliasa* group (Des Alwi 2006: 7)

It is interesting to analyse and reveal the special role of women in the socio-cultural structure on Banda. The extent of their power and influence are worthy of sharing with a bigger audience. In doing so, we measure "gender equality" against the yardsticks of matriarchy, religion, spirituality, ecology within the cultural framework of the East and the West and provide insight into how the younger generations of Bandanese women are shaping this.

WOMEN IN THE CULTURAL HISTORY OF BANDA

Not much has been written about the role of women in Banda historiography. There are some works such as: *Mais qui était donc Nona Lantzius?* written by Pascal Guillaume,² and a short story in the writings of Des Alwi (2006) about an early-seventeenth-century Banda female warrior named Bhoi Kherang in his book *Sejarah Banda Naira*, History of Banda Naira.³ In addition to these two

¹ For a long time, the *Mama Lima* and *Mama Sembilan* existed in approximately equal numbers in the western and eastern parts of the Banda Islands respectively. After colonization, the *Mama Lima* groups spread all over the Banda Archipelago. Only on Lonthoir was there still a group *Mama Sembilan*. For this reason, the authors have chosen to mention only the *Mama Lima* in the title, the chapters, and where the activities of these two groups are generally discussed.

² Pascal Guillaume 2012. "Mais qui était donc Nona Lantzius? A propos d'une tombe de l'archipel des Banda", *Archipel* 83: 73-112

³ Des Alwi writes her name "Bhoi". But some traditional sources in *kabata* (folk-songs) write

works, there are also historical novels, for example, *Mirah dari Banda* by Hanna Rambé (2010) and the PhD thesis *Vaders en dochters* (Fathers and daughters) by Hans Straver (2018: 39-112).

These four works are certainly very useful, but not enough to understand who Banda women are and why they are so important in the socio-cultural life of the Bandanese to this day. However, in the oral tradition of Banda, women are very dominant. They are believed to be carriers of the traditions of the descendants of the original inhabitants, the protectors of nature and customs, and of the nutmeg forests and marine environment. These roles are described in the *Hikayat Banda*, an old handwritten manuscript by Neirabatij, *orang kaya* from Lonthoir, in 1922. The linguist Aone van Engelenhoven says that the manuscript is a record of oral history written by a copyist (W. Manuhutu and G. Pattipeilohy 2021).⁴ Although, Mohammad Hatta, the co-proclaimer of Indonesian independence, who returned to Java in 1943 after six years exile in Banda, had some doubts about the authenticity of Des Alwi's book, in the current research into the history of Banda, this intricate handwritten manuscript with its detailed illustrations plays a central role. The manuscript has now been digitized and made public by the Scheepvaart Museum in Amsterdam (D. Wildeman 2021).

Early versions of the manuscript mention a holy man named Djailin and his wife, Siti Galsoem, who had previously lived in the land of Makawei. At the command of Allah through the voice of the Angel Gabriel, they were ordered to go to the land of Andare. When they arrived, Galsoem wanted to eat *kayu siwa* (local name for *pohon delima*, the pomegranate tree).⁵ However, the fruit was hard to find. Therefore, the man who was a *wali* of Allah (holy person), suggested his wife pray two *rak'ahs* and asked Allah to let pomegranates grow again in the land of Andare.

After many prayers, a man named Ilija came to Siti Galsoem (in the ancient manuscript *Hikajat Banda* this is written Gelsoen, but in the pronunciation of *adat* people in Banda it is Galsum). He gave Galsoem a pomegranate, which he had received, from the female mountain, Boi Ijan, one of the names for *gunung api*.⁶ After eating the pomegranate, Siti Galsoem became pregnant and later bore seven children (J. van Donkersgoed and Muhammad Farid 2022: 418; Farid 2021: 15).

This first stanza of the *Hikayat* tells the story of the birth of Banda's first human using three keywords, Gunung Boi Ijan, *buah dalima* (delima fruit), and

it as "Boij". The authors have chosen to be consistent and use the spelling "Bhoi".

⁴ Interview with Aone van Engelenhoven (60 years), Leiden, 21-12-2022.

⁵ *Kayu siwa* is the local name of the pomegranate tree, in Indonesian *pohon delima*. *Kayu* means 'tree', *siwa* means 'pomegranate'. The names *dalima* and pomegranate are also used. The author has chosen to keep the original spelling as used in the various stories. In everyday usage, the name "*dalima*" is used, and the author keeps to this even where there is no connection with the ancient writings.

⁶ Gunung Api is also called Gunung Boi Ijan. Other spellings are Boi Iljan and Boi Ijang, this is typical of oral history; depending on who is the narrator and who is taking notes. The authors use the name Ijan which is in everyday usage.

a mother, Siti Galsoem. In the myths of various civilizations, mountains are the starting point of human life. The Moluccans believe that their ancestors came from a mountain located in West Seram near Manusa Manuwe. This mountain, called Nunusaku, is considered sacred and is not easy for people to find, because it seems as if it does not exist. Nunusaku comes from the word *nunue* or *banyan*, 'a sort of tree', and *saku* 'water'. That is, under a banyan tree (*nunue*) there are three springs which are the sources of the rivers Eti, Tala, and Sapalewa. These three rivers still exist in Seram (D. Bartels 2017).

Likewise, in the belief of the Bandanese, Mount Boi Ijan, the name of a woman, now known as Gunung Api, is a sacred site to this day (Figure 1). The mountain is believed to be guarded by a woman and is also considered a kind of presager of bad weather. Some persisting beliefs among the people of Banda are that it will rain when the clouds cover one-third of the mountain (Alwi 2006).



Figure 1. Gunung Api or Mount Boi Ijan. (Photograph by Juul Sadée).



Figure 2. *Dalima* fruit. (Photograph by Juul Sadée).

The second keyword is “pomegranate”. This fruit is also considered sacred as it symbolizes the story of the birth of the Banda human. This significance is the reason that some traditional objects are shaped like this fruit. Even in front of the *adat* house of Lonthoir is a symbol in the form of this *dalima* fruit (Figure 2).

The third key word is the mother, Siti Galsoem. It is said that after eating the *dalima* fruit, she first gave birth to two children, and when she ate the fruit again, she gave birth to another five children. Galsoem’s role as mother and Djailin’s role as father did not end there. They nurtured their seven children and took care of them and kept them from danger. These children learned about nature and civilized life because they came from a royal lineage.

The role of God and His worship adds an obvious spiritual dimension and occupies an important place in the life of the Bandanese. Both the belief in God and the existence of sacred objects prove that the Bandanese feel very close to what they hold sacred. This includes the belief in ancestral spirits guarding over various aspects of life. Phillip Winn calls this situation a “blessed land”, that is, the harmonious blending of the sanctity of Islam and *adat* in the life of the Bandanese (1998: 77).

Besides the special story of Siti Galsoem, there is another beautiful story about a Bandanese woman named Cilu Bintang. The *Hikayat Banda* tells of Cilu Bintang, the youngest of the seven siblings. The story goes that the seven children moved from Mount Boi Ijang to Mount Kilseruah. After which, at the wish of Cilu Bintang, who wanted to find the place where the sun rises, they moved to a mountain called Keli Siang, on which they settled. Not long after, their home began to fill with new people. However, it was difficult for them and the new residents to find clean water. One day, while Cilu Bintang’s sister was cleaning the grass around the settlement, she stepped into a hole where water gushed from the ground and fell into it. Just as she did so, a cat whose body was soaking wet came out of the hole; this was a sign the brothers that there was enough usable water for the entire population. Herein lies the origin of the story of the Cilu Bintang well, a core part of the washing Parigi Pusaka tradition, which is ritualized once every ten years and continues to this day.

This story confirms the important role of Cilu Bintang in locating the critical water supply in the Banda Islands. The woman in this fragment of the story is repositioned as a “source of life” for society. Thereafter, Cilu Bintang’s brothers were very grateful for her supernatural powers. One of the peculiarities is that, at night, the brothers would often see rays of light emanating from their sister’s face like stars rising into the sky. Others saw them as the sun, and yet other brothers smelled her in the scent of *melur* (jasmine) flowers. From that moment on, the brothers called their sister Cilu Bintang Matahari Moestika Bunga Meloer Bulan-purnama (Cilu Star, Sun, Crown Meloer flower, Full Moon).

Over time, the growing trade in nutmeg and spices made the figure of Cilu Bintang more and more popular among the people of Banda and the Archipelago. In the old Banda manuscript *Hikayat Lonthoir* (M.S. Neirabatij 1922), a Portuguese captain, called the Prince of the East, wants to marry Cilu Bintang. As a dowry, the princess asked him for ninety-nine nutmeg trees.

The captain managed to collect these ninety-nine trees and had the right to marry the princess. Unfortunately, the captain died prematurely. So, the princess gave the nutmeg trees to her brothers and asked them to plant them on Mount Kulitcipu and Mount Bendera.

However, the version in the *Hikayat Banda* tells a different story. A prince from Timor, the “king of Majapahit” wanted to marry Princess Atek, daughter of King Mahmoud. However, the marriage proposal was rejected because the king of Majapahit was a Hindu. This refusal infuriated the king. He gathered a gang of Portuguese to help him attack Banda Naira. But King Mahmoud and his people continued to fight to save Banda from being taken over by the Portuguese. It was a war in which many people were killed.

Based on information in the *Nāgarakṛtāgama* by Mpu Prapañca about the king of Majapahit (Stuart O. Robson 1995), the marriage very probably took place in 1365. In *Sejarah Banda Naira*, Alwi (2006) records that the first Portuguese encounter on Banda Naira took place in 1512, as recorded in Francisco Serrao’s diary.

We sailed from Malacca on November 11, 1511 in the west wind season. When we left Malacca, we didn’t have much with us because the war with the Malay sultan was still going on. It turned out that during the two-month journey, the supplies we had brought with us became exhausted. To survive, everything on the ship had to be used for food, including cockroaches, ship rats, and rotten cheese. After two months of sailing, in mid-January 1512, we arrived at the beautiful island of Banda Naira. Many western adventurers try to reach this paradisiacal Banda archipelago, which is rich in nutmeg, and are rewarded with finding it.

The relationship between Java (Majapahit) and Banda Naira is important not only because Banda Naira is one of the areas in the eastern part of the archipelago under the influence of Majapahit, as told in *Nāgarakertāgama* by Mpu Prapañca (Robson 1995). It was also based on the spice trade and later seen as an ally to help curb Portuguese influence in the Moluccas in. A marriage between royalty, like that between Cilu Bintang and the ruler of Majapahit, can be understood as a political marriage, a marriage model which was a regular feature in the history of relations between kingdoms in Europe and in the archipelago.

WOMEN IN THE BANDA WAR 1621: THE LADY ADMIRAL BHOI KHERANG

As mentioned earlier, writings on Banda history have not emphasized the role of women, especially not as icons of resistance. Fortunately, we have several short stories written by Des Alwi, among them one in which an early-seventeenth-century female Banda warrior is briefly mentioned. Unfortunately, information about this female warrior from Banda has almost been lost and varies from source to source.

The one historical source about the female fighter from Banda Naira has been written about by Alwi (2006) in *Sejarah Banda Naira*, in which he calls her “Bhoi Kherang”. Although the descriptions in Alwi’s book are less than systematic

because they have been randomly divided into different parts, the information about this woman's heroism is indisputable. For example, Alwi mentions that Bhoi Kherang was the daughter of King Lautaka who was involved in several battles on Naira and was killed in battle against the Dutch in 1609 in which Admiral Verhoeven (the leader of the first VOC expedition to the Banda Islands) was also killed.

In 1621 Banda was subjugated by the military power of the governor-general of the Dutch East India Company (VOC), Jan Pieterszoon Coen, who managed to exterminate almost the entire population of Banda. Although many were massacred, some managed to escape into the mountains or to other islands. According to Vincent Loth's (1995) data, there were 15,000 inhabitants left, of whom a thousand were women: mothers, and children. The most painful tragedy was the slaughter of forty-four *orang kaya* 'rich men' (some say forty-eight) by Japanese mercenary samurai ronin at a well in Fort Nassau. After they were killed their bodies were dismembered and their heads stuck on bamboo poles. According to oral history, it rained for three months after the tragedy. After the rain had stopped, the mothers (widows) and their daughters returned to collect the strewn body parts of their husbands and fathers. After the pieces of the bodies were collected, they were bathed in a small well not far from Fort Nassau.⁷ This genocide of 1621 aroused the fury of Bhoi Kherang. She was involved in the mass mobilization of the widows of Lautaka against the VOC troops. Des Alwi says that the widows led by Bhoi Kherang fought steadfastly, even though armed only with kitchen utensils (Alwi 2006). The resistance of the widows and Bhoi Kherang's force was so strong that the VOC dubbed her "Lady Admiral" or "Commander of the Banda Sea". All the men of Banda were involved in the battle at Selamon during the first landing of the troops of Jan Pieterszoon Coen. Bhoi Kherang assumed the role of her father and led the "Mothers' Army" from Lautaka.

The debate about Bhoi Kherang makes the existence of this lady warrior of Banda even more unique in history. It is difficult to acknowledge the roles played by certain people in history without authentic documents. However, the enduring memory of the Bandanese about her, and the wide variety of oral and written versions of her story are indications of an acknowledgment that this woman was not a fictional character! It is also important to note that, although there are many versions about the origin of Bhoi Kherang, all of them agree that the grave of the heroine is on the hill of Lautaka. Pursuit of this archaeological evidence can certainly be an alternative to filling in the blanks in documents about historical sources.

WOMEN IN ADAT: MAMA LIMA

The stories of strong and dominant women in the history of struggle of the Banda people makes it abundantly clear why their roles in rituals and customs are so central. In the minds of the Bandanese, women are believed

⁷ Interview with Mohtar Talib (52 years), Banda Naira, 10-2-2022.

to be not only the guardians of the next generation, but also the “saviours” who succeeded in properly burying the bodies of their heroes. These heroes are their husbands, fathers, brothers, and sisters who have died defending their dignity, religion, customs, and their homeland from colonialism. The position of women in rituals is therefore very important.

One of the most important of these is the *Buka kampong* ritual (Figure 3). All the traditional villages on Banda Naira observe this ritual, although some parts are distinctive, different, and unique. For example, the ritual of *Buka kampong* in the native village of Ratou has different phases: (1) Meeting or consultation; (2) Rotating the *tampa siri* (betel-holder); (3) Bringing the betel-holder; (4) Preparation of utensils; (5) Rotating the *jaster* / crown; (6) Cutting the bamboo for the gate; (7) Turning big *siri* place; (8) Cutting bamboo for the *cakalele*; (9) *Buka puang*; (10) *Cakalele*; (11) Exit *belang kora-kora* (Figure 4); (12) Bathing *belang*; and (13) *Tutup kampong*. These different phases are flexible and depend on the unique character of each residential community in Banda, which has a total of seven traditional villages. Sometimes the ritual ceremony consists of the *cakalele* only and finishes with *Tutup kampong* without the *belang kora-kora* procession (Van Donkersgoed and Farid 2022: 428).



Figure 3. *Buka kampong*, gong (Photograph by Rusdi).

Buka kampong actually symbolizes the birth of a human being in which a woman plays the leading role. For the Bandanese, pregnancy and delivery are very important, because this is when a new life begins. It refers to the story told in the *Hikayat Banda* about Siti Galsoem in the land of Andare (Banda) (Ph. S. van Ronkel 1945; Farid 2021:15; Van Donkersgoed and Farid 2022).



Figure 4. *Kora-kora canoes* (Photograph by Juul Sadée).

The holding of a seven-day deliberation in the first phase of the traditional the *Buka kampung* ceremony is very important. Traditional stakeholders, religious leaders, and community leaders participate in the deliberation. But the most important of all members are the *Mama Lima* and *Bapak Lima*, who are its core members (Figure 5). They are the initiators of this traditional ceremony and without the presence of these two groups the ceremony cannot take place. The *Mama Lima* group consists of five mothers, the *Bapak Lima* of five fathers. The number five refers to the *adat* group *Lima* or *Orlima*.



Figure 5. *Mama Lima* and *Bapak Lima* during preparing for *Buka puang* (Photograph by Linda Frankemon).

The people of Banda have long adhered to two major groups: the group of five and the group of nine, which are hostile to each other. The origin of their enmity lies in the historical territorial tug-of-war between the sultanates of Ternate and Tidore. Pieter Leupe (1855: 79) writes that, between 1590 and 1600, the islands

of Banda were divided into groups of five which controlled the western part of Banda: Lonthoir, Samar, Neira, Rhun, and Ai. Meanwhile, the groups of nine controlled by the eastern part of Banda: Kombir, Selamon, Wayer, Dender, Lebetaka (Lautaka), and Rosengin. After the advent of colonialism, the entire Banda Archipelago adhered to the groups of five; only Lonthoir still adhered to the group of nine (Farid 2021; U. Thalib 2015: 50)

Alwi (2006) mentions that traditional villages in Banda has long been classified into two groups, namely “groups of five” (sometimes called *Orlima* or *Ulilima*) and the “groups of nine” (*Orsia* or *Ulisiwa*). The reason for this grouping is explained in several mythical and historical traditions. The first says that the groupings can be traced to the myth about a flood in the island of Seram which resulted in the separation of the population of the region into three parts. The *Ulisiwa* group was formed in West Seram, the *Ulilima* group in East Seram, and among the small islands to the south of Seram the *Uliase* group came into being. The second tradition says that the grouping occurred as the result of the exercise of power over the islands of Seram, Ambon, and their surroundings by the sultanates of Ternate and Tidore. The *Ulilima* group was an ally of Ternate, and the *Ulisiwa* group was under Tidore. The third tradition recounts that the separation of the *Ulilima* and *Ulisiwa* occurred as a consequence of the fierce competition between the king of Ternate and the king of Sahulau: the *Ulilima* falling under Ternate and the *Ulisiwa* under Sahulau (Alwi 2006: 7-11).

The important role of Banda women represented by the *Mama Lima* and *Mama Sembilan* is also visible in the procession that is performed to visit sites believed to be “owned by holy people” among the Banda ancestors. Among these many sacred sites in Banda, some are believed to belong to “holy women”, such as the sacred site of Bhoi Kherang on Lautaka Hill, the Parigi Laci site, and Kota Perempuan, Women’s Hill, on the island of Ai. To this day the Bandanese firmly believe that these three places have a “guardian” who is a woman.

In these cases, the *Buka kampong* ceremony is performed at these sacred places in the following order: 1) Parigi Laci, 2) Tomb of Bhoi Kherang, 3) Stone of the Mosque in Lautaka, and 4) Stone of Kadera in Lautaka (Amsi and Muhammad 2021: 4). The Parigi Laci site (Figure 6) and the Bhoi Kherang tomb (Figure 7) are believed to be the places at which a historical female figure was purified.

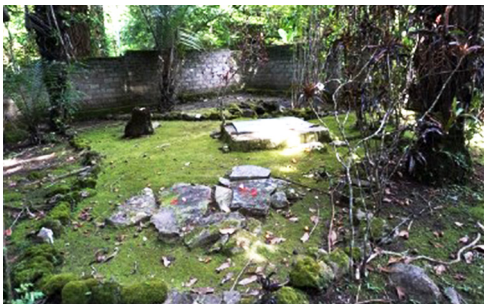


Figure 6. Parigi Laci (Photograph by Juul Sadée).



Figure 7. Respect at the grave of Bhoi Kherang (Copyright *ceritanonabanda.com*).

The second phase of the *Buka kampong* ceremony is the ritual of “rotating the holder of the betel *permisih*”, to ask permission from the ancestors. In a ritual, performed the day before the betel is brought to the holy place, prayers are said to God so that the observance of the event will be blessed, and permission obtained from the spirits of the ancestors. The follow-up to this is the third phase, in which the betel is taken to various places which are considered sacred.

This ritual continues with the preparation of the clothing and the props of the *cakalele* dancers, the fourth phase. This phase is performed by the *Mama Lima* or *Mama Sembilan* groups. The role of *Mama Lima* is again very dominant because, without their intervention, the costumes and attributes of the *cakalele* dancers will not be blessed. The fifth phase is called the swivelling of the *jaster* or crown worn by the *cakalele* troops. Only the *cakalele* participants, the *Mama Lima*, and the *Bapak Lima* are allowed to participate in this segment, the emphasis being on keeping the atmosphere calm.

In the sixth phase, the bamboo is cut to make a gate in which it is combined with coconut fronds and will eventually be placed in front of the traditional house. This process is carried out a day before the *Buka kampong* (opening of the house) procession. Followed by the seventh phase, the “rotating on the spot of the great *siri* (betel)” which is stored in the *adat* house (traditional house). Wherever the *cakalele* dancers perform, this betel holder always follows.

The eighth phase is “cutting the bamboo” for the *cakalele*. Traditionally five bamboo sticks are cut. Each bamboo stick is planted in front of the *adat* house, the venue where the *cakalele* dance will be performed. There are various rules associated with the process of cutting the bamboo for the *cakalele*, including the prescription that the bamboo should not touch the ground before it arrives at the traditional house. This differs from the rule for the bamboo used in front of the gate or for the front gate of the *adat* house. The bamboo is selected at specially designated places.

Why bamboo? The bamboo used in the *cakalele* is understood to personify the ancestors of the *orang kaya* (important men in the community) who died in the massacre of 1621. The piece of red cloth tied around the end of the bamboo is a symbol of the blood dripping from the severed heads which were stuck on bamboo poles. Another interpretation says that the red cloth, called a *patola*, is a symbol of “victory” (Farid 2021: 50). This allows the raising of the pieces of bamboo to be interpreted as, even though these men were killed, they still stand erect and symbolize victory because they never surrendered to colonialism.

The ninth phase of the *Buka puang* is performed at night. It begins with reading a prayer, dancing the *cakalele*, and then the waiting until the stroke of midnight. While waiting for the “unopened *puang*”, no visitor is allowed to enter the *adat* house except the father of five children, and the father and the mother of the *adat* parents. Waiting before an unopened house is understood to be waiting for the birth of a baby from the womb. But it can also be interpreted as waiting for a man to grow up, which is symbolized by “circumcision”.

That is, when the *puang* (home) is opened, it is a sign that the expected baby has been born from the womb or that males have reached adulthood (puberty, Islam). After the opening of the *puang*, community members are allowed to enter

the traditional house to view it (N. Amsi and Rafita Muhammad 2021: 5), and it is highly recommended that visitors make charitable donations.

The tenth phase is the day on which the *cakalele* dancers come into action. This ritual can be performed in front of the *adat* house, or sometimes in another place upon request. The *cakalele* dancers come out followed by the *mai-mai lima* and *maruka*. The *mai-mai lima* is a group of five girls, while *maruka* is a girl who has not had her period. Before the *cakalele* dancers commence their dance, they must pay their respects (*somba*) to the *mai-mai lima* and *maruka*. This shows great respect for women. After making a *somba* to the *mai-mai* and *maruka*, the *cakalele* dancers must also *somba* or pay their respects to the guests and community leaders who are present. This is a mark of a high appreciation which must include invited guests. After the *somba* ritual is completed, the *cakalele* dancers can perform their dance (Figure 8).



Figure 8. *Buka kampong* girls stand in the centre during the *cakalele* dance, while the dancers circle around them (Photographer unknown).



Figure 9. *Buka kampong*, men with ceremonial basket (Photograph by Rusdi).

In *Buka kampong*, three groups of women play an important role, namely the *Mama Lima* group, the *mai-mai* group, and the *maruka* group. The *Mama Lima* is responsible for making all the traditional artefacts including the *tampa siri* (basket for pinang and tobacco) (Figure 9), preparing the costumes, and helping to dress the *mai-mai* and *maruka* groups. The *Mama Lima* are the oldest and married. The *mai-mai* girls are younger but also preferably married. The *maruka* are young girls who have not yet menstruated. These three groups represent the Banda people after the genocide, where only mothers and daughters survived. They are the keepers of the *adat* for the Banda residents of the future.

These are the reasons that women, especially the figure of the *maruka* who is a little girl and will determine the next generation of Banda, are highly respected in the ritual of *Buka kampong*. Therefore, it is natural that the *cakalele* men do not dance before they have paid their respects to the women and the *maruka*.

The *cakalele* Banda is a unique traditional dance which is rich in meaning. Unlike the Maluku *cakalele* in general, which is a martial dance, the Banda *cakalele* is performed to locate the ghosts of the *datuks* (ancestors) who were murdered by the VOC army (Farid 2021: 50). Therefore, the *cakalele* Banda is not only an artistic display but is also imbued a strong spiritual value. This tenth phase is sometimes also performed in conjunction with the *belang kora-kora*, although there are also those who perform it on other days.

The eleventh phase is the bathing of the *belang* canoe on Tita Beach. This phase is performed jointly after the exciting *belang* competition between the *adat* villages. The moment of bathing the *belang* has great togetherness value because, after the *belang* troops have battled fiercely against each other, it ends with chatting and joking together as they bathe their *belang* boats, and the emotional tension dissipates.

MATRIARCHY AND MATRILINEARITY

Matriarchy is not the opposite of patriarchy. Kate Lister (2020) states that, in a matriarchy, power is divided equally between the sexes. Lister shares the vision of Heide Göttner-Abendroth (2012) who says that, in a matriarchy, both men and women collectively decide about social, cultural, political, and economic issues concerning the community. The matriarch is responsible for dividing the wealth. The mother is the central figure in the group. In matriarchies, female divinities are worshiped and nature is seen as feminine. Men embrace the status and significance of the mother in the community. However, not all anthropologists are unambiguous in their explanation of matriarchy. Research into several existing matriarchies confirms these minor differences.

Ceram is one of the largest islands of the Moluccan Archipelago. The origin of the Moluccan people, the Alfuru, lies on this island, called *Nusa Ina* or 'Mother Earth'; where they were formed from clay. *Nusa Ina* means 'Precious Earth' in the Alfurian language. Only much later did *Nusa Ina* come to mean 'Island Mother' or 'Mother Island'. Even before the arrival of Islam,

and later Christianity in the sixteenth century, a matriarchal society existed in this archipelago. The mother figure still plays an important role in the Moluccan community.

A Moluccan myth (Sylvia Belseran 2017) tells about the remote island of Miarthé. The location of the island is unknown. Miarthé is not linked to a specific place. Miarthé can appear anywhere, provided the circumstances are right and the listener has the temperament to be well-disposed towards hearing about it. The Moluccan oral culture has many such stories.

For a long time, Miarthé had been spared from patriarchal influences. *Raja Perempuan* (Queen) Wudkara ruled this peaceful island. Wudkara regularly invited pearl-fishers to keep up to date with life on the other islands. One day, however, she was told that men were slowly taking over the traditions and thinking about ruling. *Raja Perempuan* Wudkara became concerned but her husband would not listen; he saw an opportunity to seize his wife's power. On the advice of the moon goddess Dabiku, patroness of Miarthé, Wudkara and a group of women fled to another island where she founded a new community. The next day, the island of Miarthé disappeared into the sea.

Eighth of May 1621 is a historical date in the Banda Islands. Afterwards it was mainly women and children who survived on Banda after the massacre by Jan Pieterszoon Coen. This date marks the inception of a new social structure. Driven by the trauma resulting from this dramatic event, the women intuitively knew about the healing power of dance, music, theatre, and the visual arts. With the help of new ceremonies, they assumed the responsibility for the preservation and continuation of the *adat*.

To this day, these women, the *Mama Lima* and the *Mama Sembilan*, determine the set of social norms and customary law of the community. They play a significant role in the welfare, the environment, religion, spiritualism, education, and nature.

Banda's community has strong characteristics of a matriarchy, which fit the aforementioned description of Kate Lister (2020). Women in Banda exert a great influence on private, cultural, and social life. There are several situations in which men are obliged to ask the women, the *Mama Lima* and the mothers for permission to perform certain tasks. The *Orang Lima*, the important men, operate in close co-ordination with the *Mama Lima*. Banda society also has a matrilineal culture, and in this it differs from the other Moluccan islands. Children are given the name of their mother instead of that of father.

MATRIARCHY AND GENDER EQUALITY

It is quite clear that the relationship of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europeans to women was fundamentally different to the way native men related to women in Banda at that time. With few individual exceptions, gender relations in patriarchal European society were not equal, affecting the way men showed respect to women. In Coen's Europe there was a widely held opinion that all non-Europeans were just "monkeys". Therefore, it is impossible to say anything about respect shown to women in Banda.

Why is there so little to be found about women in Banda historiography of that time? Why is Bhoi Kherang, called the “Lady Admiral” by the Dutch, hardly known as opponent of the VOC army of Jan Pieterszoon Coen? Have the Calvinistic, paternalistic Dutch polished away historical facts out of pride, shame, prudishness, or sense of superiority? A quite reasonable assumption when we refer to the previous writing which mentions “dominant” women in these islands.

The study of old nautical charts has led to the discovery of islands which refer to women. As P.V. Lape (2002: 43-70) has stated, it seems that seventeenth-century sea-maps differ from each other, and that they are recognized as being particularly prone to the biases of their makers and publishers. Consulting Aone van Engelenhoven, lecturer at the Leiden University Institute for Area Studies, has led to a comparison with oral history, especially Moluccan oral history. He states that in oral history there is no truth and no falsehood. The question is, what do we believe: the narrated reality or the reality of the narration?⁸

Two old nautical charts of Banda raise interesting questions. In 1753, Jakob van der Schley drew a map of Banda on which Pulau Karaka, which was uninhabited, is called *Île des Femmes* or Keraka. Earlier, Johannes Janssonius mapped the Banda Islands and he noted present-day Pulau Syahrir or Pulau Pisang as *Pulau Maon ofte Vrouwen Eyland, Women’s Island*.⁹ Why were these islands called Islands of Women? These two islands have never been mentioned together on any other map and each has appeared just once on a map. This is an intriguing fact.

Historiography is neither free of prejudices, wishes, dreams, desires, or a constructed reality.¹⁰ Hopefully the following fragments can lead to more insight. One fragment is from Captain Elie Ripon who was employed by the VOC Company from 1618 to 1626. In his really fascinating diary, he writes with surprise that Bandanese girls lure the soldiers into bed with opium. This Swiss also writes that he finds the girls of Banda very beautiful and sensual. He also writes that the women like to give their men some mind-altering drugs so that they can have fun together longer (Leonard Blussé and Jaap de Moor 2016: 87-88).

Another fragment is from Layne Redmond about indigenous women from pre-colonial times up to today. In her book *En de drummers waren vrouwen* (1997) Redmond gives a wonderful overview of the history of female drummers from pre-colonial times to the present. Redmond does not speak literally about matriarchy in earlier times, but about completely different roles for men and women to today. A number of illustrations show women holding frame drums in their arms with which they played the rhythms of nature, the moon, and femininity, they practiced drumming as a ritual of spiritual awareness. Their rhythms had numerous variations in count that took their playing to great heights. Redmond mentions the Rebana. The name Rebana came from the Arabic word *Robbana* ‘Our Lord’. It is used in Islamic devotional music in

⁸ Interview with Aone van Engelenhoven (60 years) Leiden, 24-4-2019.

⁹ Purchased copy 2019; Janssonius, 1652.

¹⁰ Email exchange with Prof. Peter Lape (49 years), Seattle, 29-6-2020 and 17-7-2020.

Southeast Asia. The *Rebana* existed already before Islam came to Indonesia. It is an instrument that has traditionally been played by women, often dancing in a circle. Redmond also describes how in ancient times women priests taught men to make love as part of a feminine healing ritual through rhythm and trance (1997: 57). In present-day Banda, women still play a major role in performing and transmitting the *adat* (culture and tradition) rituals. One of the objects used is the *rebana* (Figure 10).



Figure 10. Young women on Keraka Island wearing *adat* costumes and holding *adat* objects like the *rebana* and the gong. (Copyright *ceritanonabanda.com*).

Combining knowledge of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European patriarchal culture and the fear of spirituality and women,¹¹ the study of ancient nautical charts, Captain Elie Ripon's journal, and Redmond's research on women, spirituality, and rhythm has created an interesting "blueprint". This "blueprint" fits the history of Banda and its cultural heritage today. A culture which reflects all layers of its ancient history: an indigenous culture, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, and colonialism and the current intertwinement of all these. The spirituality especially stands in close relationship to women and is still very much alive, surviving through the centuries, through observance of the *adat*.

Uninhabited Pulau Karaka, current Keraka, is very strategically located opposite Lewataka (Pulau Naira), current Lautaka, the *kampong* of Bhoi Kherang. To the west lie Pulau Ai and Pulau Run (Figure 11). Could Keraka have been a vantage point, shelter, or defensive site for the woman dubbed the Lady Admiral by Coen and her mother's army? Pulau Maon *ofte* Vrouwen Eyland (Women Island), present-day Pulau Syahrir, was also very strategically located at the mouth of the wide bay between Banda Naira and Banda Besar.

¹¹ In seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe, female spirituality was mistrusted and female healers were suspected of witchcraft. They were demonized and victimized during witch-hunts. This persecution caused the deaths of incredible numbers of mostly poor women (Amitav Ghosh 2021: 37).

Could Vrouwen Eyland have been a vantage point, a shelter for women, or did it have another function?¹²

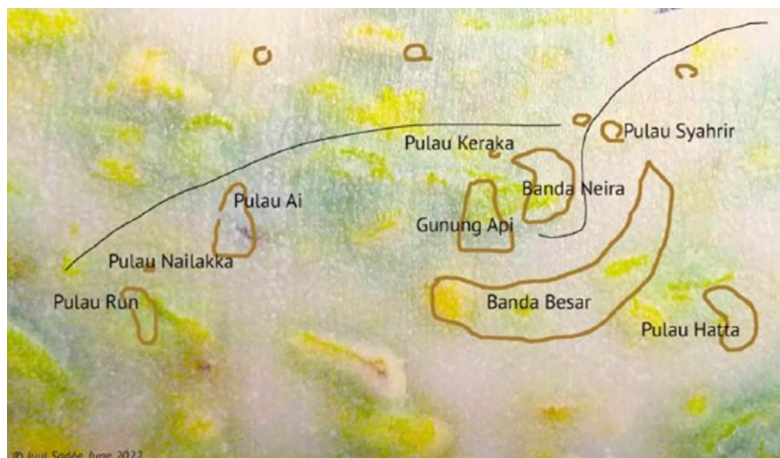


Figure 11. Map of the Banda Archipelago along the islands (Sadée 2022).

The Swiss Captain Ripon was in Banda with Coen, and he wrote that, on their arrival in the bay, many little boats with women approached their ships offering the crews fruit and flowers. Coen showed little respect for the Bandanese and called them Indians, savages (Blussé and De Moor 2016).

Can we conclude that Pulau Maon, also named Women's Island, also called Pulau Pisang/Syahrir, was perhaps the island to which the VOC men could turn to for women they saw as Bandanese whores? And if so, did these women already live there and were treated without respect or were they taken there as slaves to become whores for the Europeans?

Recent information, gained while speaking again with Pulau Pisang inhabitant R.J. Kadiri, says that the island was a women's prison during VOC. Pulau Rozengain, today's Pulau Hatta, was once called "Banditen Eyland" because it was where men had been imprisoned. Is this a politically correct statement?¹³

Be that as it may, the nautical charts show that they were made from a Western male perspective, possibly under pressure from a client. And, if we compare Layne Redmond's insights to the yardstick of gender equality and matriarchy, we can conclude that the Europeans colonized the Bandanese women, had taken possession of their bodies, and did not acknowledge that they were spiritual healers, not prostitutes. However, history shows that the women in Banda were and are resilient and that they have not let themselves be deprived of their self-respect. The *Mama Lima* have been the driving force in this and still are.

¹² Interview with Rudi Jasir Kadiri (60 years), Pulau Pisang, Banda, 17-2-2019.

¹³ Interview with Rudi Jasir Kadiri (60 years), Pulau Pisang, Banda, 21-10-2022.

When we talk about “gender equality”, from what perspective should we view it? Could it be that this is a buzzword which has arisen mainly from linear thinking? Does the term “gender respect” not fit Banda better and should be embraced as a new word for our current world in which many kinds of cultures meet? And how do the younger generations of Banda women shape this?

RECLAIMING THE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF WOMEN’S POWER

The Banda Islands “breathe”. Scattered over the islands, we find places which refer to the presence of historical women. On Pulau Run we find Women’s Hill. There is a holy cave, named *Lobang Hajar Aswad*, with the grave of a specially venerated religious woman as well as a man’s grave mound.¹⁴ On Pulau Ai lived a holy woman who is said to have spread Islam. There is also another women’s hill on which the women lived while their husbands fought against the Dutch and the English.¹⁵ On Karaka and Pisang we can find *kramat*, places sacred to women. On Banda Naira is the grave of Bhoi Kherang, which is believed to be a double grave, because her sister was buried with her. There is also the grave of Adeka and the Adeka Street, named after a woman from the story “Egeron and Adeka” by the Dutch writer Jan Frederik Helmers (1767-1813) (Straver 2018). The graves can only be visited under the guidance of designated Bandanese. The geographical indications make it clear that these special women of Banda still live on in the spirit of the Bandanese.

Intriguingly, in the story of Siti Galsoem, the Gunung Api also has a female name, Mount Boi Ijan. Also interesting is an article written by Timo Kaartinen (2012) about the Banda Eli people who call their ancestral homeland Fokorndan, which is related to the term *fukar wandan* or ‘Mount Banda’. In the *onotan* songs (local poetry), Mount Banda becomes the object of their intensive contemplation of a father who is separated from his sister. Kaartinen describes, among other things, how traditional knowledge is passed on through songs. Women play a major role in this.

The specialist in Moluccan oral history, Aone van Engelenhoven, has explained the different roles and ways man and women adopt while telling stories. Women speak in a low voice, almost whispering, for a very small public of one, two maybe four listeners in a small dark room. Men speak loudly to a very large audience in a public space. The stories are never the same; they depend on the listeners, the dynamic between listeners and narrator, the chosen subject, and the location.¹⁶

The oral history of Banda contains many stories about strong women. And even now Moluccan women are generally known for their strength, both physical and mental.

¹⁴ The *adat* on Pulau Run was Hindu until the Netherlands took possession of the island in 1667 through the exchange of Manhattan with the English, under the terms of the Treaty of Breda. Interview Burhan Lohor (50 years), Pulau Run, 5-3-2023.

¹⁵ Interview with Ayem Nasrun (40 years), Pulau Ai, Banda, 3-3-2023.

¹⁶ Interview with Aone van Engelenhoven (60 years) Leiden, 29-12-2015.

HOW DO WOMEN MAINTAIN AND SHAPE THEIR POWER IN BANDA TODAY

After 1621 the *perkeniers* system was established. Previously, the nutmeg trees has grown at random scattered across the islands. Partly because of the deliberate destruction of the trees as a strategy to obtain exclusive rights to the nutmeg cultivation and trade, new trees were planted in well-arranged *perks*. A *perk* or bed is an enclosed garden or plantation. VOC employees and their descendants, called *perkeniers*, managed the nutmeg plantations with the help of slaves from Banda and various other regions. When the *perkeniers* system was abolished in 1873, the Dutch planter families remained behind until Indonesia's independence in 1945. Dutch women on Banda fulfilled different roles. Some were teachers at the Dutch School, others the employers of domestic servants. It is unclear whether they mixed with the Bandanese. The political system was Dutch and patriarchal. However, the mutual relationships in the native Bandanese community were still based on the mother figure and a form of matriarchy.

In the book *A boy from Banda; A story of Spice Island childhood*, Des Alwi (2010) writes about his family history dating back to the eighteenth century after the arrival of his great-great-grandfather, Abdullah Baadilla. In his book, he mentions his grandmother, who seems to have been a wise, strong lady, several times. All the family members needed to ask her permission or justify what they were doing.

Des Alwi's granddaughter, Mita Alwi, is quite active on Banda. She is the manager of the Maulana Hotel, which also contains a small museum. She runs a nutmeg business and has initiated the establishment of a small factory in which plastic waste is turned into petrol. Mita established the Yayasan Warisan dan Budaya Banda Naira (Figure 12).



Figure 12. Young women doing a workshop at Banda Naira Heritage and Cultural Foundation (Copyright *ceritanonabanda.com*).

Mita Alwi is deeply committed to the well-being of Banda and its people and is unofficially called the *Mama Lima* from Kampong Namasawar. In February 2023, Mita inherited the official function of *Mama Lima* Kampong Ratou from her mother (Figure 13).¹⁷



Figure 13. Mita and Juul with *Mama Lima* and *Bapak Lima* at the *adat* house Kampong Ratou (Photographer unknown).

Mita Alwi's foundation, Yayasan Warisan dan Budaya Banda Naira, has recently adopted the *Arte Útil* (useful art) project Sabun Cerita Nona Banda (soap stories women [from] Banda). Interdisciplinary and visual artist Juul Sadée established the art-project Cerita Nona Banda in 2019 and cooperates closely with Universitas Banda Naira. Cerita Nona Banda is a social programme, which combines artistic research with historical research (for instance Figure 14) and oral history about women from Banda. The research leads to artworks and *Arte Útil*. The *Arte Útil* is a social economic, biological, and ecological sustainable and unique, artistic cosmetic product, created by Sadée in cooperation with the five young women from Banda who have studied history, marine life, and education (Figure 15)¹⁸. This product, soap, reflects the values for which the *Mama Lima* stands and fits into the programme of Cerita Nona Banda. In addition, it inspires the group one of whose participants will be a *Mama Sembilan* in the future. Sabun Cerita Nona Banda has been launched on 26 April, 2023.¹⁹

¹⁷ *Ratou* means 'queen', kampong Ratou on Banda Naira is the only kampong name which refers to a female leader. Here, the women play a significant role in the *adat* rituals. They play the *rebana*, called the *lot-lot* in Banda, at the beginning of *Buka kampong* and the "*Gong sembilan*" when the *cakalele* dance commences.

¹⁸ The five young women are Dianthy, Ade Tasya, Soraya, Hannatia, Megawati

¹⁹ Interview with Mita Alwi (36 years), Banda Naira, 14-10-2022.



Figure 14. Art intervention “Women, soul, and place” by Dyanthy Abidin at Fort Belgica, Banda Naira (Copyright ceritanonabanda.com).



Figure 15. Young students and alumni from UBN (Universitas Banda Naira) from the art project Cerita Nona Banda (Copyright ceritanonabanda.com).

Tamalia Alisjahbana is a *Mama Lima Luar*, the word *luar* means ‘outside’. Although she is not a native Bandanese, she is deeply concerned about Banda and has been given customary rights to protect and preserve the nature of Banda and is allowed to be part of the *adat* organization called *Mama Lima Luar*.

After the inter-religious riots of 1999 in Banda, the Christian villagers left the village of Ratou and, consequently, the remaining villagers could no longer perform their ancient traditional rituals nor could they dance the *cakalele* or participate in the *kora-kora* war canoe races because many of the members of the traditional council of Ratou had been Christians. The remaining Muslim members did not know all the rituals. Therefore, Des Alwi, the *orang kaya* of Banda asked Alisjahbana to come to Ambon where the Christians of Ratou had formed a new village and persuade some of them to return to Banda and teach the new traditional council the rituals, traditional songs, and dances so that Ratou Village could continue its ancient customs and traditions. Afterwards she received the great honour of being appointed a member of the Council of Elders of Ratou Village (Tamalia Alisjahbana 2005).

Tamalia Alisjahbana is an Indonesian cultural consultant specializing in law and journalism. Alisjahbana states that *adat* is a living organism; it can be adapted and changed over the years. During her online lecture Bandanese Cultural Heritage in 2021, Alisjahbana elaborated on the meaning and value of the *cakalele* to the Bandanese over the centuries, up to and including the present. For Banda, the *cakalele* is the dance to tell the story of the massacre and murder of the forty-four *orang kaya*. In the sixteenth century, when there were no psychologists, the *Mama Lima* already knew that dance, art, music, and theatre have a therapeutic effect and that they can heal the trauma (Alisjahbana 2021a). In the spirit of Alisjahbana, the social cultural art project Cerita Nona Banda shows engagement with history, *adat*, and society through art.

Also, on a global scale, the *Mama Lima* use their influence in the debate about decolonization. At the moment there are conversations all over the world about statues from the colonial era and the slavery past. Both Tamalia and Mita share the view that the statue of Jan Pieterszoon Coen in Hoorn (NL) should remain, but that the large pedestal should be used to tell the real story;

the story about Coen's victims who pleaded "but have you no compassion?". A story which repeats itself down the centuries and tragically reminds us of 2020 when Afro-American George Floyd in Minneapolis (USA) begged for the same compassion (Alisjahbana 2021b).

The tradition of the *Mama Lima* still exists as their office is inherited and can be succeeded to if there are family ties. They see their role as transferring traditions even though we are now living in the modern age. The *Mama Lima* have the roles of a "mama" for instance, looking after the children, especially the girls. They take note that all needs are fulfilled and draw attention to shortcomings. Passing on this tradition is very important for their children and grandchildren, because in the future they will continue this role.

To become a *Mama Lima* you must be heiress to one but, in case of an emergency, you can designate someone else as a replacement. The same conditions apply to the *mai-mai* if there is no other family. A *mai-mai* can be an unmarried girl, but it is preferable for her to be married and have children. However, nowadays the situation is changing and unmarried *mai-mai* are becoming more common. Unlike Selamon and Lontor as a whole, you must be a mother (who are married) to become *Mama Sembilan/mai-mai*. There is a rule that a *Mama Lima* or a *mai-mai* is not required to wear the *hijab*. However, in Namasawar most *Mama Lima* wears a white *hijab*.

The *Mama Lima* are a source of inspiration to the younger generation of women, to whom the tradition and customs of presiding over the care and wellbeing of people and the environment will be transferred. These duties include taking charge of cleaning up the island, the sea, and beaches, and improving the reefs using coral transplantation. Young women are very concerned about climate change because of which, for example, the nutmeg cultivation has been badly affected by the increase in rainfall.²⁰

In 1999, when the Ambon conflict was widespread in Maluku, the Christian population moved away from Banda. Research findings from 2017 and 2020 show that as many as 20 percent of Banda residents fled to areas around Banda such as Ambon and Tual. However, this emigration was compensated by migration to Banda by the Muslim communities from Ambon, Dobo, and Tual. Therefore, this in-and-out migration did not result in significant changes in the composition of the Banda population (Farid and Amsi 2017; Sridevi Barmula 2020).

Nevertheless, factual changes can be detected in the pattern of relations between communities, which are becoming increasingly tenuous or less familiar. In the past, different religious communities enjoyed strong bonds of solidarity and were always involved together in traditional and religious activities, including holding the *Buka kampong* ceremony, visiting old graves (*ziarah*), and praying together. Uniquely, several Arabic prayer texts have also been memorized and used by the Banda Christian community when performing their traditional rituals (Farid and Amsi 2017: 3). However,

²⁰ Interviews with Dyanthy Abidin (23 years), Megawati Abidin (23 years), Hanatia Puasa (23 years), Soraya Rahmad (23 years), Ade Tasya Telehala (18 years), Rahma Temarwut (30 years) in Banda Naira, 4-11-2022.

currently the social relations between the two groups are relatively more fraught; consequently, religious and customary activities tend to be carried out separately. The level of cohesiveness between groups in Banda society today tends to be decreasing drastically.

Since 2018 the total population of Banda has reached 20,711 where the male population is 10,392 and the female population is 10,319 (*Banda Subdistrict in Figures 2018*). Although the numbers differ, it is still relatively small between the two gender groups.

AGE	GENDER		TOTAL
	MALE	FEMALE	
0-14	2,477	2,320	4,797
15-64	7,384	7,528	14,912
65+	647	568	1,215
Total	10,508	10,416	20,924

Table 1. Banda population based on age and gender (*Banda Subdistrict in Figures 2020*).

The population of Banda has continued to grow in 2020 which shows a male population of 10,508 and 10,416 female (Table 1). In total, Banda's female population is slightly smaller than its male population, in which there is a preponderance of older men. In the age group between fifteen and sixty-four year, men form the minority. They leave Banda because of study or work on other islands of the Indonesian archipelago. Some of them do not return or only return at a later age.

Unquestionably, the role of women is much more dominant in almost all social institutions, for instance, the trade sector, government institutions, and educational institutions. Our research data from 2021 show that women occupy almost 80 percent of the economic and trade sectors. Most of the women who work in the economic sector are shop assistants (80%), market-stall owners (30%), and cold storage owners (10%) (Farid 2021).

Turning to those who work in the bureaucratic sector, research data show there are women civil servants many government agencies: District Office (50%), Penitentiary (45%), Education Office (50%), Village Office (60%). The women working in the formal and non-formal education sectors in Banda Naira are as follows: female lecturers at University Banda Naira (60%), female teachers in the senior high school in Banda (65%), female teachers at the junior high school in Banda (70%), female teachers at primary school (80%), female teachers in kindergarten (95%), female teachers in PAUD (Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini, 'preschool') (95%), female teachers/*ustazah* in TPQ (Taman Pengajian Quran, Quranic recitation school for young children) (90%) (Farid 2021).

From the above statistical data, it can be inferred that, although male dominate in the overall population of Banda, women still play a key role. What is very important is how dominant their role is in the education sector, almost 100 percent. Looking at the dominance of women in the education sector today can be said to be determinative for the Banda generations in the future.

CONCLUSION

When we talk about education, spirituality, nature, nurture, culture, and oral history, our conclusion must be that all these elements are intertwined and cannot be seen as separate entities. Traditionally they have been stored in the genes of Bandanese women. Undoubtedly, the women of Banda had and have a significant role in protecting nature, nurture, and culture. The number of female figures in oral history and the geographical designations referring to special women and the history of matriarchy, as recently redefined, are also important signifiers of this. In addition, the passing on of the *adat* by the *Mama Lima* is living proof of their enduring influence.

Adat is a phenomenon in flux, old customs can partially disappear and new ones can arise. How they will shape this is up to the new generations of women. The gender respect will also be part of it and the interpretation of gender equality might differ from debates about it in the rest of Asia and the world. Herein lays the challenge for the new generations of women.

It is very interesting to consider to what extent the women of Banda will need to reclaim their power or need to reclaim the acknowledgement of their power. This has everything to do with the decolonization of the (western) perspective on gender equality, the understanding of culture, and interpretation of (oral) history.

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