



## **Of Nutmeg and Forts: Indonesian Pride in the Banda Islands' Unique Natural and Cultural Landscape**

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### **Abstract**

This paper discusses the natural and cultural uniqueness of the Banda Islands in Indonesia, with a particular focus on the tiny islands' historical role as the sole source of nutmeg. Taking as its point of departure the Indonesian government's 2015 proposal to recognize the Banda Islands as a UNESCO World Heritage site, this article investigates the islands' features and their historical meanings, and explains the entanglement of the islands' tropical geography and Bandanese cultural heritage. Particular focus is given to the way in which the Bandanese people, and later the Dutch colonials, used and exploited the Banda Islands' natural resource of nutmeg, and how the Bandanese culture was shaped and reshaped through this process. The paper maps the transformation of this nature-culture landscape involving natural resources and their cultivation over the centuries; it additionally explores the various Dutch forts that were erected to defend the colonial spice trade and how these structures later became heritage treasures of the Banda Islands in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The paper argues that the process through which Banda's natural uniqueness created Bandanese culture also nearly caused its downfall, and the resurrection of indigenous Bandanese civilization necessitated an inclusive identity that incorporated Dutch colonial fortresses as reminders of the dark era of colonialism. The natural and cultural entanglement of the Bandanese landscape has created a sense of cultural pride.

**Keywords:** Banda Islands Civilization, UNESCO World Heritage, Natural and Cultural Landscapes, Nutmeg Cultivation, Indonesian Culture

## Introduction to the Banda Archipelago

Today, the history of the sleepy Banda Islands in Indonesia seems all but forgotten except to historians of maritime Southeast Asia and the residents of those islands—who have proudly protected the traditions that have stemmed from their unique landscape. It seems ironic that this relatively remote area of the Indonesian archipelago, situated far from the more well-traveled tourist destinations of Java and Bali, was once the home to one of the archipelago's proudest and most powerful civilizations. It was all because of the land on which this civilization took root. Banda now measures 172 square kilometers, with six inhabited islands (Neira, Banda Besar [Lonthoir], Rhun [Run], Ai, Hatta, and Syahrir) and five uninhabited islands (Gunung Api, Karaka, Manukang, Nailaka, and Batu Kapal) (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2018, pp. 7, 9). The islands of Hatta (previously known as Rosingain) and Syahrir are named after Indonesian national heroes who were exiled there during the latter days of Dutch colonial rule. Banda Besar, previously named Lonthoir/Lontar, is the largest of the islands.

Figure 1. *The Banda Islands*



(Lencer, 2013)

These islands are mere specks of land in an ever-present sea, something typical for Indonesia and the maritime Southeast Asian region. Nonetheless, they have something unique amongst Indonesia's seascapes. Natural treasures were found here on the Banda Islands, of which locals knew and Europeans learned by the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. A 1631 entry in the *Calendar of State Papers Colonial, East Indies and Persia* recording the colonial affairs of the English crown, clearly states, "Banda consists of six islands, viz., Lantar or Great Banda, Pooloroon, Pooloway, Rosingyn, Neira, and Gunong Api; all the nutmegs and mace in the world come from the first four islands... producing yearly 100 tons of mace and 400 tons of nutmeg" (Sainsbury, 1892, pp. 154–164). The islands and their surrounding seascape gave rise to an indigenous Bandanese civilization with a culture that is entangled with the islands, the sea, and the unique natural resource growing there. This paper will argue that the unique natural resource of nutmeg and mace, products of a single plant endemic only to these islands, and the exploitation of this spice was not only responsible for the magnificent civilization and culture of Banda but also nearly caused its complete destruction. At the same time, this extraordinary history heavily shapes the form of Bandanese culture today.

The Banda Islands' unique civilization and natural environment were brought back into the spotlight on January 30, 2015, when Indonesia proposed that the islands to be registered as a UNESCO World Heritage site called *The Historic and Marine Landscape of the Banda Islands* (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2015). The Banda Islands are one of the few sites that combine unique natural and cultural landscapes, cultivated over centuries and producing various cultural treasures and legacies. The UNESCO dossier outlines features of this uniqueness, including how these small islands—numbering no more than eleven in total and covering no more than 8,150 hectares of volcanic land—were central to the world spice trade and how the Dutch created a nutmeg plantation system to exploit the islands' resources (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2015). The file goes on to describe how the sea that cradles the Banda Archipelago is also home to a wide range of diverse marine species and fosters growing coral in a maritime region where coral is frequently under threat. Furthermore, various scholars, such as Winn (2010), have recognized that the Bandanese culture has reaffirmed itself despite its historical destruction and centuries of slavery. This fact adds further evidence to the Indonesian government's proposal that the Banda Archipelago, including its culture and history, be recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Yet this cultural reaffirmation also adds another unique dimension to this story, for how, given that the Dutch depopulated the Banda Archipelago and replaced its indigenous inhabitants with colonists and slaves, can the islanders reaffirm their culture? The answer to this intriguing question can be achieved through a historical analysis that weaves together the various episodes that explain the cultural and natural entanglement still visible in the Banda islands today.

## Bandanese Landscape and Society

According to research conducted by Bleeker, Lonthoir—the main island of the Banda Archipelago—formed from the rim of an ancient volcano with Neira and Gunung Api later emerging as new eruption cones of the same volcano (Linden, 1873, pp. 24–25). Gunung Api is recorded as erupting frequently, being one of the archipelago's most active volcanos. The Bandanese landscape has thus taken a unique form that has shaped the lives and habits of the Bandanese people. The archeological record indicates that Bandanese society emerged from the amalgamation of the diverse peoples who made the archipelago their home (Lape, 2000). The islands' unique resource of nutmeg and mace had been known outside of the Indonesian Archipelago for centuries, used for medical purposes by the Indians, Arabs, Europeans, and Chinese (Hancock, 2021, p. 31). However, none of these civilizations knew where the plant that produced these spices grew. Only in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century did the location of the Spice Islands become known. Tomé Pires in the handwritten record of his voyages between 1512 and 1515 writes: “The Malay merchants used to say that God made Timor for sandalwood and Banda for mace and the Moluccas for cloves.” (Pires, 1944, p, 204).

**Figure 2. The main Banda Islands**



The main Banda Islands (Gunung Api, Neira, and Lonthoir), with indigenous settlements, nutmeg trees, and geographical features; based on a historical map published in 1612 (Bry, 1612, p. Illustration XI).

Later centuries would see the plant transplanted to places as far afield as Grenada, but at the time the Banda Archipelago was the only place in the world where nutmeg grew.

The islands had the particular characteristics needed for *Myristica fragrans* to thrive. Nutmeg is made from the dried seed of the plant, while mace is made from the aril that covers the seeds inside the fruit. Dutch reports describe how the tree grew best on the loose and fertile soil of the volcanic slope, which had excellent drainage (Janse, 1898, p. 29). It could not handle severe temperature fluctuations and required regular rainfall. The tree also preferred to grow on mountains that were not too high (Janse, 1898, pp. 29–30). The Banda Islands, thus, provided the perfect environment. With the discovery of more land suitable to the specific needs of the tree in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, nutmeg was transplanted across various areas of the tropics — Mauritius and Africa, South America and the West Indies, and other islands in Indonesia and Malaysia (Warburg, 1897, pp. 209-257). Although the crops were successful, none of these new locations were ever as ideal as the tree's native Banda.

Having control of such an in-demand resource, the Bandanese civilization flourished in the southern part of what is now Maluku, but in historical records is known as the Moluccas. They were a strong and proud people, nominally within the sphere of influence of the Sultan of Ternate in the northern part of Maluku, but they nonetheless continued to resist foreign interference throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. It was during this period that the Bandanese established a trading centre, becoming not only a location that produced a particular commodity but also a market where merchants came to trade. Cloves were also traded on Banda in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, but that spice did not grow on the islands (Chijs, 1886, p. 6). Within the tiny archipelago, the predominance of the islands of Neira and Lonthoir as trading ports can be explained by the availability of harbours; there were four on Lonthoir and one on Neira, but none on the other islands (Pires, 1944, pp. 205–206). The principle of the Bandanese economy was free trade, and all could come to buy or trade. However, the Bandanese retained a monopoly on nutmeg and mace. In fact, the Bandanese focused so much on growing nutmeg that they neglected to grow other produce (aside from some fruits). They thus relied on traders to obtain their foodstuffs, as it was far easier to simply purchase them. Spices were thus the islands' predominant product by the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Meilink-Roelofs, 1962, p. 95).

Originally the Bandanese formed clans that often warred amongst themselves. However, they always came together when foreign invaders attacked the Banda Archipelago (Chijs, 1886, p. 3). Anthropological research shows that Bandanese society was organized into a *Siwa-Lima* system, with the *Lima* group more seagoing and the *Siwa* group more land-oriented (Valeri, 1989, p. 118). The language spoken in the archipelago is related to Papuan, and this indicates that people were already living there before the Austronesians entered the region (Dalby, 2002, p. 49). Austronesian migrants are believed to have entered Maluku (the Moluccas) later, gradually displacing the indigenous peoples (Bellwood, 2019, p. 216). The islands were thus already the lands of a society that had made its home and, despite some friction, managed to become a single people that

resisted all outsiders infringing on their way of life. They protected their resources and developed a prosperous society, one that traded in commodities grown outside the region, while the Bandanese, governed by a council of elders, were free to sell their produce (Warburg, 1897, p. 67). According to a Dutch eyewitness account from the early 1620s, a transformation had occurred in the islanders' social structure. In the 1500s, the Bandanese were governed by four kings; however, by the 1600s these kings had lost their power and been replaced by a council of elders and Islamic religious leaders (Leupe, 1855, p. 78). The author also estimated that 15,000 people lived in the region, including 4,000 warriors (Leupe, 1855, p. 76). Some Bandanese had converted to Islam, and thus the society consisted of both Muslims as well as animists (Barbosa, 1866, p. 200). By the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Banda Islands had extremely high levels of nutmeg production, reaching 1,200,000 pounds per annum (Warburg, 1897, p. 93). Bandanese women were in charge of cultivation, and foreign merchants exported the nutmeg (Meilink-Roelofs, 1962, p. 161). As many as 1,500 Javanese traders were said to be active in the nutmeg trade on Banda (Tiele, 1884, pp. 94–95). The Bandanese took a people that had been made up of various clans and gradually united them around the nutmeg tree. This society flourished.

### **Political Changes and the Conquest of the Banda Islands**

At the turn of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Bandanese were a powerful society. They resisted European attempts to encroach on their lands throughout the century and even managed to assist the people of Ambon—an island just north of the Banda Islands in the central region of Maluku—in fighting off the Europeans (Meilink-Roelofs, 1962, p. 161). The Portuguese were the first Europeans who tried to settle Banda during the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and the Dutch followed closely behind when they attempted to monopolize the nutmeg trade. Both, however, were met with hostility and subterfuge after various attempts at making treaties with the Bandanese. The Dutch, however, responded by sending more force. The first Dutch treaty, drafted in 1602, still reflected the power of the Bandanese as they promised to protect the Dutch against the Portuguese and Javanese, and prioritize Dutch access to nutmeg (Jonge, 1863, p. 264). However, it did not guarantee exclusivity (Kiers, 1943, p. 32). This was insufficient for the Dutch, who wanted to maximize profits. The Dutch repeatedly attempted to re-negotiate, as they saw the Bandanese as breaking the treaty. Although the Bandanese could not directly oppose the Dutch, they could easily retreat into the hills of Lonthoir, and eventually, the Dutch ships had no choice but to sail away to other regions of the Indonesian archipelago where they were needed more urgently. This stalemate led the Dutch to opt for a military option, one that culminated with the construction of Dutch fortresses on Banda and, more gruesomely, the near-total destruction of the Bandanese people. This bloody episode in Banda history began in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. In 1609, the Dutch landed in Banda Neira and carried out their orders to establish a fortress and force the Bandanese to sign a treaty that would facilitate Dutch access to nutmeg (Jonge, 1865, p. 94). In the ensuing

struggles, the Dutch just barely succeeded in building the structure — which later became Fort Nassau — on the ruins of an earlier Portuguese fort. The Bandanese could not prevent this Dutch intrusion, as they had come with a fleet of thirteen ships and more than 1,900 men (Tiele, 1884, pp. 86–87). The situation escalated, with victims on both sides, but the Dutch ended up in control of Banda Neira island (Jonge, 1865, p. 99). To strengthen their position after receiving further instructions that the Spice Islands had to be exclusively under Dutch control, they began building Fort Belgica in 1611 (Chijs, 1886, pp. 59-60). These two fortresses remain on the islands today and were included in Indonesia's proposal to UNESCO for World Heritage status. Finally, the Dutch had a firm grip on Banda Neira, which became the first island to change hands to Dutch control. The Bandanese, however, were by no means defeated. They were still in control of the other islands of the Banda Archipelago, and although the Dutch had clear naval superiority, the moment the fleet was gone, so too was their grip over the Bandanese.

Another important episode of the struggle over nutmeg took place in 1615 and 1616. The English, who had also reached the Spice Islands, had, in 1615 managed to buy nutmeg from the people of Ai Island in the western part of the Banda Archipelago. The Dutch tried to prevent this trade but were forced by the Bandanese to retreat (Hall, 1955, p. 242). Infuriated by seeing their competition manage to obtain the valuable nutmeg, the Dutch returned in 1616 and outrightly captured Ai Island. After killing many Bandanese, and chasing the survivors away, the Dutch constructed Fort Revenge on the Island. A pattern started to appear. The Bandanese tried to cling to their traditions and way of life, but the Dutch wanted to control their important natural resources, and thus increased their military power in the region. However, it was only in 1621 that the final coup de grâce came when the Dutch arrived with a large fleet and captured all the remaining islands (except for Rhun). The Bandanese were either killed, enslaved, or chased out of the Banda Archipelago. Fort Hollandia was constructed on Lonthoir Island as the final major Dutch fort, but smaller fortifications were added later. Rhun Island fell to the Dutch after the Anglo–Dutch treaty of 1667, which also involved New Amsterdam (which later became New York).

### **Landscape Transformed: from Free Bandanese to Plantation Slaves**

The struggles of the 17<sup>th</sup> century brought doom to the Bandanese. It was the nadir of Bandanese society as their whole way of life ended. Most were dead. Many were captured and shipped off as slaves to Batavia where the Dutch had established their headquarters (later renamed Jakarta after Indonesia's independence). Some escaped to other islands and lived out their lives in exile. After the complete depopulation of the Banda Archipelago, it was still necessary to harvest the nutmeg; thus, labourers had to be brought back in. There is some scholarly debate as to whether the division of Banda into plantations came immediately or some time afterward. The first argument holds that, after

the conquest of the archipelago, the Governor-General of the Dutch East India Company Jan Pieterszoon Coen (who was in charge of the Dutch genocide of the Bandanese) instructed Martinus Sonck (the Dutch Governour of Banda) to hand out plots of land to Dutch civilians willing to work the land with slaves (Berg, 1873, p. LXXV). The more widespread opinion, however, seems to be that the Dutch constructed plantations on Banda Neira, Ai, and Lonthoir (Janse, 1898, p. 21), and Pieter Vlak (the new Dutch Governor of Banda) first began dividing the land into plantations in 1627. The need to continue harvesting the nutmeg, as well as the need for slave labour to do so, would have been obvious immediately. Land was divided into parcels of about 25 ‘souls’ or ‘heads’ (*zielen*) in size, with one ‘soul’ or ‘head’ being the amount of land one slave could work (Berg, 1873, p. LXXVI).

Ultimately, the archipelago was divided into 31 plantations on Ai, 39 on Lonthoir, and 3 on Neira (Berg, 1873, p. LXXVII). Ironically some Bandanese managed to return to Banda right away—as slaves. In 1621, 307 Bandanese women and children were sent back to Lonthoir to be sold as slaves there (Warburg, 1897, p. 107). In 1637, the Dutch government allowed the remaining Bandanese to return to Banda; in 1638, it was estimated that about 560 original inhabitants had done so, with less than half of these being free men (Warburg, 1897, p. 107). However, slaves were imported from all islands of the Dutch-controlled archipelago, while plantation holders consisted mostly of retired employees of the Dutch East India Company. This entire process transformed the culture and nature of Banda. The key resource, meanwhile, stayed the same, even as the exploitation process changed. On Rhun, for instance, all the nutmeg trees were cut down in 1638 to prevent smuggling (Janse, 1898, p. 24); these were only replaced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. An 18<sup>th</sup>-century report by Huysers describes the demise of Banda, stating that its people had been exterminated because they were unreliable and disloyal. As such, the islands were now populated by nobody but Europeans and other plantation renters/owners (Huysers, 1789, p. 38). Slaves came from various places, but according to this report many had been shipped from Timor Island for the collection and preparation of the nutmeg (Huysers, 1789, p. 50). Bleeker estimated that, in 1854, the islands were home to 6,333 exiles and slaves. The Dutch also kept a small military presence in the area to maintain control (Bleeker, 1856, pp. 244–245). Around 1760, the Buginese, one of Indonesia's mighty seafaring peoples known for their great trading ships that plied the archipelago as far as Australia, began to compete in the trade in nutmeg. In 1778, a hurricane destroyed most of the plantations in Banda. Janse described how it took until 1815 for nutmeg production to reach its previous level (Janse, 1898, p. 21). The early 19<sup>th</sup> century was catastrophic for nutmeg production in Banda. A second hurricane in 1815 again destroyed the crops, and in 1816 an earthquake destroyed the freshly repaired plantations. In 1820, a volcanic eruption on Gunung Api destroyed those plantations that had been spared until then (Janse, 1898, p. 22). Various droughts, earthquakes, and volcanic eruptions followed. The Indonesian application for UNESCO World Heritage

recognition also alludes to the most recent eruption of Gunung Api, which destroyed Banda's coral reefs in 1988, and notes that the coral has managed to not only grow back but is doing extremely well (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2015).

By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the plantation system found itself in neglect and disrepair (Linden, 1873, p. 8). Nonetheless, Dutch children studying geography in their textbooks learned about the Banda Islands, as well as the nutmeg cultivation plantations that covered large sections of Lonthoir, Neira, and Ai. (Schuiling, 1889, p. 492). "They [the plantations] are large gardens, which from the base of the mountains stretch out to the highest points of the volcanic ridges." In Lonthoir in particular, there was a regular pattern of adjacent square plots of land on both sides of the mountain ridge (Schuiling, 1889, p. 492).

The book then goes on to state that, from 1864 to 1873, the Dutch monopoly over nutmeg was slowly abolished. There were 25 plantations on Lonthoir, 6 on Ai, and 3 on Neira, employing (c. 1885–1886) about 3,000 people. Rosingain had 1 company that had started to cultivate nutmeg and Rhun held 2 (Schuiling, 1889, p. 492). About the original Bandanese population, the book ludicrously stated that the previous inhabitants of Banda have practically completely disappeared as "they had neither the desire nor the suitability" for nutmeg cultivation (Schuiling, 1889, p. 494).

Recent data from the Indonesian Bureau of Statistics (2007) records that 922.5 tons of nutmeg were produced in the islands, representing 39.5% of the Central Maluku Regency's entire production (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2018, p. 223). These islands were historically called the Spice Islands. The northern part, known for its cloves, had been home to rival sultans, with the most prominent ones based on the islands of Ternate and Tidore (in what is now the Indonesian province of North Maluku). The southern part only became administratively incorporated in the Maluku region later and is now part of Central Maluku Regency and home to the Banda islands and nutmeg. The land still produces the same resources it has since time immemorial, as the nutmeg trees continue to grow in its home soil. However, 19<sup>th</sup>-century records indicate that the ancestors of the 9,000 people who lived there in 1889 were largely descended from slaves from other islands or, after slavery had been abolished in 1860, the descendents of labourers (Schuiling, 1889, p. 494). These labourers consisted of contract workers from Java, Madura, and Buton (South Sulawesi) (Hermans, 1926, p. 9). However, the original Bandanese who had fled the massacre of 1621 and had spent generations living in exile were still around; an 1863 Dutch report stated several interesting facts, arguing that some people were returning to the lands of their ancestors every year (Vaynes Van Brakell, 1863, p.170). This is important, as it indicates that the original Bandanese people—despite being almost completely eradicated—did manage to maintain a connection to their ancestral homeland.

Nutmeg, the region's premier natural resource, was guarded by the Dutch through the various fortifications they built in the Banda Archipelago. Four major stone fortresses were constructed in this small area, clearly indicating the importance of the islands' produce: Forts Nassau and Belgica on Banda Neira, Fort Revenge on Ai, and Fort Hollandia on Lonthoir. Several smaller defensive structures were also constructed. Traders' access to Banda was deliberately limited to prevent smuggling (Huysers, 1789, p. 30). Two ships sailed yearly to Banda from Batavia to pick up the spices and bring in rice. They left in December or January to return in June (Anonymous, 1780, p. 48). However, as the profits of the nutmeg trade decreased over time, the settler and other inhabitants of Banda began to face impoverishment.

Plantation owners had been contractually obliged to continue the production of nutmeg and mace and to supply these products to the Dutch East India Company at set prices; smuggling was punishable by death. However, this system eventually started to break down. The sale of the nutmeg and mace continued to bring in major yearly profits for the company, but an increasing amount of rice and other products had to be imported—in some cases, even more than in Ambon, the Headquarters of the Dutch East India Company in the centre of the Moluccas (Huysers, 1789, p. 32). The plantation owners and their slaves did not benefit much from this system, and over the decades they fell on hard times (Huysers, 1789, pp. 33–34). To prevent overproduction, around 1633 the Dutch began to prohibit production on other islands as they concentrated on the major islands of Ai, Neira, and Lonthoir (Warburg, 1897, p. 124). The three islands on which they had built major fortifications.

By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, most of the nutmeg production had moved to Lonthoir—the archipelago's largest and most important island, as well as the one with the best sources of freshwater (Warburg, 1897, p. 149). Its mountain ridge rose from 100 to 200 meters, with the highest peaks reaching 450 meters (Warburg, 1897, p. 147). The area was completely covered with nutmeg plants, except for the hilltops, as these were insufficiently irrigated for growing large crops (Warburg, 1897, p. 148). Neira island was another important island, being home to the Dutch headquarters in the Banda Archipelago. About 75 to 80 Dutch houses had been constructed, and another 200 stone houses with various other constructions, by the 19<sup>th</sup> century; as such, there was little room for nutmeg production (Warburg, 1897, p. 146). In 1857, Neira became a free trading port on the route between the Aru Islands (to the Southeast) and Macassar (the major port of the Island of Sulawesi) which involved Buginese traders as well as Chinese and Arab merchants (Schuiling, 1889, p. 494). The island of Ai (the inhabitants of which had infuriated the Dutch by selling nutmeg to the English) was only 100 meters high, and by the 19<sup>th</sup> century, only a few small plantations remained in operation (Warburg, 1897, pp. 151-152). Locations like Penang and Singapore (in the Malay straits) had begun to

compete with Banda for nutmeg production, and the former even occasionally outproduced Banda (Hermans, 1926, p. 12).

Oxley, who at the time worked as a surgeon in the British-ruled Straits Settlements on the Malaya Peninsula, visited Banda in 1856. He mentioned how, after the earthquake of 1852, almost all of the houses had collapsed (1856, p. 128). He noted that there were 34 plantations with 319,804 nutmeg trees (p. 129). The hills were steep and stairs had been constructed to climb them (p. 132). While, in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Banda Islands were home to an estimated 15,000 people (Andaya & Andaya, 2015, p. 210), only 6,000 people lived in Banda during the monopoly era; this number had increased to 8,500 by 1874 (Warburg, 1897, p. 207). This population growth, however, had its limitations. Present-day statistical data shows that, in 2017, the Banda Archipelago housed no more than 19,816 people (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2018, p. 71). This means that, after the islands experienced some population growth, they never regained the importance they had enjoyed in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Indigenous Pride Restored**

Nutmeg had been a tremendous source of wealth for the Bandanese before the conquests by the Europeans. The islands were home to 15,000 Bandanese, being a free trade port that also sold nutmeg and mace as the islands' unique resources. An 18<sup>th</sup>-century report made by Huysers for the employees of the Dutch East India Company advised that the reality of Banda was different. The land was described as devoid of resources except for the nutmeg and mace, and was deemed unhealthy because of the nearby volcanic island of Gunung Api. Many had questioned the quality of the freshwater supply of the region (Huysers, 1789, pp. 26–27). The fortresses on the islands had been useful in the past, when the Bandanese tried to reclaim their territory and pirates were abundant, however, they had become dilapidated by the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Vaynes Van Brakell, 1863, p. 172). After independence, Fort Belgica was restored by the Indonesian government.

As the era of colonial rule drew to an end, Indonesians retook ownership of the Banda Archipelago. The land was still there but it was completely different. Although the Dutch had ended up imitating the way the Bandanese had run their land in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, their two-century monopoly on spice production and cultivation changed the landscape of the islands and the world market. As the production of nutmeg and mace was attempted elsewhere, the Banda Archipelago lost its unique position as the sole supplier of nutmeg and mace for the entire world. The fact that today Banda's population is only 25% higher than four centuries ago is very significant. Nutmeg cultivation has returned (to an extent) but again it is a mere shadow of its former self. It has been impossible to rebuild the free trade commercial center, as the spice is grown elsewhere

and its profitability has declined. Banda offers little else in terms of natural resources (other than the sea) and continues to suffer from a lack of accessibility. However, it seems obvious that, had Banda been able to grow as a free market where people came to trade, a whole different situation would have arisen.

Nevertheless, the Bandanese continued to see themselves as Bandanese, and their culture endured in exile. Consequently, some researchers have argued that they won the spice war by simply surviving longer than their Dutch occupiers (Karttinen, 2012, p. 237). Winn has shown the importance of maintaining an authentic Bandanese identity by continuing the ritual practices and *negeri adat* of the Bandanese (Winn, 2006, p. 127). Despite genocide, destruction and slavery, the Bandanese culture prevailed (Winn, 2010). Memorials and narratives (see Ghosh, 2021) tell the story of the destruction and challenges overcome by the Bandanese. That the Indonesian government has proposed making the Bandanese landscape and culture a UNESCO World Heritage site shows its sincere attempt to restore Bandanese civilization to its former importance.

Culturally, the fact that the Bandanese identity allows people to join the community is particularly important. Like the original Bandanese ancestors who in ancient times came from elsewhere to form a civilization that drew its identity from the land it inhabited and its cultural practices, gradually becoming a singular nation, the Bandanese who remained or returned have united with the descendants of persons transported by the Dutch as slaves or labourers, to create a Bandanese nation and uphold particular cultural practices and traditions. In that sense, Bandanese identity is inclusive and malleable, as it welcomes both the old and the new.

The Indonesian government has restored the Dutch fortresses and put in place efforts to maintain and revitalize Bandanese culture and identity—as seen, for example, when it promoted the Banda Archipelago as a UNESCO Heritage Site in 2015. Dark episodes also occurred during the independence era, around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when riots broke out in the Moluccas and reshaped the culture again—albeit not to the same extent as the events of 1621. Banda's bloody history bears testimony to the resilience of its people and their ability to persevere in the face of problems, no matter how severe. The fortresses that the Dutch built to control Banda have now become assets for Indonesia and the local Bandanese community. This interest in the local society and landscape has taken on a solemn aspect of authenticity, even as nutmeg has continued to be exported as an important source of revenue for the region.

## **Conclusion: Cultural and Natural Legacy**

This paper began with nutmeg and mace, both derived from a plant endemic solely to the Banda Archipelago, and Indonesia's proposal for the Banda Archipelago to be included

as a natural and cultural heritage site under UNESCO World Heritage. This paper's historical analysis clearly shows how the Bandanese developed their own culture and nation, as well as how the Dutch conquered and nearly destroyed that civilization. This paper also demonstrates that the Bandanese developed their identity by developing a particular way of life connected to free trade and nutmeg. This meant that their society was open and accepting of new members, and this was exactly the trait that helped the Bandanese survive genocide and centuries of exile and slavery. The Bandanese connection to the land, as well as their flexible identity, allowed them to ensure their continued survival.

The treasures of Banda, thus, carry a meaning that has shifted over time but nonetheless continues to revolve around the islands' central crop: the nutmeg tree. The paper also argues that due to its unique landscape which gave rise to endemic nutmeg trees, the Banda civilization was almost destroyed. Although it had built a civilization on trade, the wealth of nutmeg led to colonial encroachment. Despite their attempts to resist colonization, the Bandanese fell victim to a genocidal takeover. The paper then showed how the Dutch built several fortresses to protect their new gains and proceeded to completely transform the landscape of the islands with plantation production of nutmeg and mace. Yet, by the 19th century, the Dutch had ironically adopted the same form of free trade that had previously been used by the Bandanese. After Dutch colonialism and the spice monopoly ended, the Bandanese society was able to somewhat recover, however, the changing international landscape of nutmeg production and trade meant that it never regained the same position in the trade of its endemic spice as it had enjoyed in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Finally, this paper has shown that Bandanese culture survived because their identity has remained inclusive. New members were able to adopt Bandanese cultural practices and become Bandanese themselves.

To conclude, this paper reveals that the cultural and natural legacy of the spice trade has influenced Bandanese society. The natural beauty of Banda, combined with the successful reclaiming of the Bandanese homeland, can be said to have restored indigenous pride to Banda: an historical site of international importance with a unique civilization.

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