

RELIGION, CUSTOM AND IDENTITY Conflict Transformation in Banda Neira Islands

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Abstract: This article deals with the transformation of conflict and the formation of identity of the Bandanese people in the Banda Islands after Maluku conflict through an analysis of *kabata*, folk songs that record the historical narratives of the colonial era. This research employs a grounded theory approach to collect field data from the Banda Islands and Ambon Island, as well as literature related to the Banda Eli community in Kei Island. The finding indicates that the Maluku conflict had an effect on the diversity of religion, custom and social relation among the Banda people, and led to the fragmentation of identity—the communities of Banda Neira Islands, Banda Eli in Kei and Banda Suli in Ambon—on the basis of religious aspects and their bond to Banda lands. The transformation of conflict created a consolidation of identity of Banda Islands community, which became religiously more exclusive, especially after the rise of conservative Islam in Indonesia. This article fills the gap in the study of *kabata* by positioning it as a key to understanding how the identity of the Bandanese people has developed and adapted within the context of the long history of colonialism and contemporary conflicts.

Keywords: Bandanese, Maluku conflict, folk song, identity formations, conflict transformation.

Introduction

The aggression of the Banda Neira Islands in 1621 by Dutch East India Company (VOC) under leadership of Jan Pieterzoon Coen almost resulted in the extinction of the indigenous population, and

various incoming ethnic groups later migrated to the islands.¹ The diverse communities lived peacefully, bound by shared values that maintained social cohesion in Banda Neira. Collective responsibility for the land of Banda became a way to maintain the stability of social relations among the different religious and ethnic groups.² The ritualization of the landscape by the people transcended religious affiliations, thus uniting Islam and Christianity³. The formation of the Banda identity differs from the phenomenon in Mojokuto, which shows a primordial religious connection among *santri*, *priyayi* and *abangan*, making them a closed category⁴. The integration of these three Geertzian categories occurred solely within the economic relations in the geographical space of Mojokuto⁵. Therefore, the Banda Islands represent a highly interesting location for exploring social identity⁶. Banda, as a space, shows the characterization of social categories based on religion or other primordial ties that is open. However, does this condition still persist after the bloody conflict that occurred in Maluku in 1999? As part of the Maluku Islands community, this article attempts to explain 1) how the dynamics of religious life in the Banda Islands after the 1999 conflict influenced the formation of identity, and 2) how these dynamics affected the transformation of the conflict there.

To answer these research questions, this article uses *kabata*, folk songs containing historical stories, as an entry point. The treatment and interpretation of the content of *kabata* by the Bandanese people reveal the roles of exclusion and integration of religious and customary

¹ Jalu Lintang YA, "Jalur Rempah Banda, antara Perdagangan, Penaklukan, dan Percampuran: Dinamika Masyarakat Banda Neira dilihat dari Sosio-Historis Ekonomi Rempah," *Jurnal Masyarakat dan Budaya*, 23, 1 (2021).

² Phillip Winn, "Everyone Searches, Everyone Finds: Moral Discourse and Resource Use in an Indonesian Muslim community," *Oceania*, 72, 4 (2002): 275–292.

³ Phillip Winn, "Slavery and cultural creativity in the Banda Islands," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 41, 3 (2010): 365-389; Phillip Winn, "Tanah Berkah (Blessed Land): The Source of the Local in the Banda Islands, Central Maluku," Thomas Reuteur (ed), *Sharing the Earth, Dividing the Land: Land and territory in the Austronesian world* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 2006).

⁴ Phillip Winn, "Banda is the Blessed Land': Sacred Practice and Identity in the Banda Islands, Maluku," *Antropologi Indonesia*, 57 (1998): 71-79.

⁵ Clifford Geertz, *Agama Jawa: Abangan. Santri, Priyayi dalam Kebudayaan Jawa* (Depok: Komunitas Bambu, 2014).

⁶ Winn, "Banda is the Blessed Land, 71-79

elements in the formation of their identity. Discussions about the identity of the Bandanese people are still dominated by a postcolonial perspective and have not yet taken into account the impact of contemporary conflicts affecting the Bandanese community today. This article fills this historical gap with an anthropological account of the three Bandanese communities in the Banda Neira Islands, in Eli Village on Kei Island and in Suli Village on Ambon Island, which are tied to the issues of religious authenticity in the identity of the Banda people and the authority over customs and *kabata*. The existence of these three communities also means the existence of three perspectives on the Bandanese people. The formation of identity shows that there is an ongoing process of creation, where the identity of the Bandanese people is not limited to the colonial era.

This article is written on the basis of field research data from the Banda Neira Islands conducted in 2021 and 2022. The research in 2021 was exploratory in nature, focusing on the social life of the Bandanese community. In 2022, the research shifted to focus on exploring *kabata* through a series of interviews with selected informants. In 2022, the writer also visited Suli Village in Central Maluku Regency, Ambon Island, to meet the conflict refugees from the Banda Islands living there and held an informal focus group discussion at the porch of one of the refugee's homes. Data on the Banda Eli community was obtained by utilizing literature and documentary films. Data collection was carried out by adopting the methods practiced by oral history researchers who use a grounded theory approach, relying on a series of theories as the basis.⁷ To explain the formation of the Bandanese people's identity, this article analyzes the narrative of identity development as recounted by individuals who describe personal identity conflicts emerging within the broader context of socio-cultural conflict.

On one hand, there is no article discussing *kabata* of the Banda Neira people, especially in relation to conflict and the trauma of conflict in the contemporary context. The practice of *kabata* is still talked over only as part of tradition related to sacred places and the

⁷ Jennifer Clary-Lemon, "We're not ethnic, we're Irish!: Oral histories and the discursive construction of immigrant identity," *Discourse & Society*, 21, 1 (2010): 5-25

cakalele dance.⁸ On the other hand, while there are already quite a few writings on the history of the Banda Neira conflict since the colonial era⁹, there is little discussion linking the conflict in Banda Neira to *kabata*.

From Segregated City to Religious Divided Islands

The Conflict of Maluku from 1999 till 2000 was a complex tragedy of communal violence involving Muslim and Christian groups. This conflict was driven not only by religious issues, but also by socio-economic disparities, local political dynamics and the legacy of colonialism, all of which shaped inter-community relations in Maluku.¹⁰ The violence began in January 1999 in Ambon city and quickly spread to other areas, such as Seram Island, Halmahera and Ternate. The involvement of external actors, such as *Laskar Jihad*, exacerbated the conflict, which resulted in thousands of deaths and caused hundreds of thousands of refugees¹¹ as the conflict was framed as a religious war.¹² Efforts for resolution through the Malino II Agreement in 2002 helped stop the violence.¹³

⁸ Joëlla van Donkersgoed and Muhammad Farid, "Belang and Kabata Banda; The significance of nature in the "adat" practices in the Banda Islands," *Wacana, Journal of the Humanities of Indonesia* 23, 2 (2022).

⁹ P.R. Abdurrachman, R.Z. Leirissa, and C.P.F. Luhulima, *Bunga Rampai Sejarah Maluku* (Jakarta: Lembaga Penelitian Sejarah Maluku, 1973); W.A. Hanna, *Kepulauan Banda: Kolonialisme dan Akibatnya di Kepulauan Pala* (Obor: Jakarta, 1983); P.V. Lape, "Contact and Conflict in The Banda Islands, Eastern Indonesia 11th-17th Centuries" (Dissertation, Department of Anthropology, Brown University, 2000); Des Alwi, *Sejarah Maluku: Banda Neira, Ternate, Tidore, dan Ambon* (Jakarta: Dian Rakyat, 2005); U. Thalib and L. Raman, *Banda dalam sejarah perbudakan di Nusantara; Swastanisasi dan Praktik Kerja Paksa di Perkebunan Pala Kepulauan Banda tahun 1770-1860* (Yogyakarta: Penerbit Ombak, 2015); N.I. Lailiyah, A. Khairunnisaa, E.D. Ekaristingrum, "Merawat Ingatan Peristiwa Genosida dan Dominasi VOC di Banda tahun 1621 dalam Perspektif Sosial-Ekonomi," *Historiography: Journal of Indonesian History and Education* 1, no. 4 (2021): 506-513.

¹⁰ Jacques Bertrand, *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict in Indonesia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); John Thayer Sidel, *Riots, Pogroms, Jihad: Religious Violence in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

¹¹ Noorhaidi Hasan, "Faith and Politics: The Rise of the Laskar Jihad in the Post-Suharto Era," *Indonesia*, 73 (2002): 145-169

¹² Muhamad Ali, "Confrontation and Reconciliation: Muslim Voices of Maluku Conflict (1999-2002)," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 1, no. 2 (2007): 379-402.

¹³ Birgit Bräuchler, *Reconciling Indonesia: Grassroots Agency for Peace* (London: Routledge, 2009).

Amidst this conflict, the Bandanese people occupy a unique position due to their presence in both Muslim and Christian communities. Their history and social structure are rooted in cross-community relations in Maluku.¹⁴ Their socio-religiously fragmented identity reflects a historical integration with the broader Maluku society.¹⁵ However, the conflict made them vulnerable to violence and displacement. The mass expulsion in the 17th century by the Dutch is also part of the long history of the Bandanese people's challenging dynamics.¹⁶

The Conflict of Maluku resulted in a flow of refugees to and from the Banda Islands. The Christian community in the Banda Neira Islands fled to Ambon Island¹⁷, while the Muslim community from Ambon sought refuge to the Banda Islands. The Muslim population in the city of Ambon comes from Buton, Bugis, Makassar, Java, Arabia, China, Seram, Kei, Ternate, Banda and other regions of Indonesia. The Ambon conflict is referred to as an inter-religious conflict not only because of the religious components inherent in the conflicting parties, but also due to the rise of conservative Islam in Indonesia in the 1990s.¹⁸ It happened during democratic transition, represents the macro context of the conflicts during the early period after President Soeharto's fall in 1998.¹⁹

Many scholars have noted that the most visible impact of the Maluku conflict was the spatial division of Ambon City: the Muslim and Christian residential areas.²⁰ The identification of these areas often

¹⁴ Gerry van Klinken, *Communal Violence and Democratisation: Small Town Wars* (London: Routledge, 2007); Dieter Bartels, *Di Bawah Naungan Gunung Nunusaku: Muslim-Kristen Hidup Berdampingan di Maluku Tengah* (Jakarta: Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia, 2017).

¹⁵ Richard Chauvel, *Nationalists, Soldiers, and Separatists: The Ambonese Islands from Colonialism to Revolt, 1880-1950* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1990).

¹⁶ W.A. Hanna and Des Alwi, *Turbulent Times Past in Ternate and Tidore* (Yayasan Warisan dan Budaya Banda, 1990).

¹⁷ Gerry van Klinken, "The Maluku Wars: Bringing Society Back," *Indonesia* 71 (2001): 1-26

¹⁸ Muhammad Najib Azca, "A 'Maverick Salafi Political Jihadist' in a Turbulent Period: A Biographical Study of Dr Fauzi," *Politics and Governance* (2024), 12.

¹⁹ Gerry van Klinken, *Communal Violence and Democratisation: Small Town Wars* (London: Routledge, 2007).

²⁰ Birgit Bräuchler, "Cyberidentities at War: Religion, Identity, and the Internet in the Moluccan Conflict," *Indonesia* 75 (2003): 123-151; Sumanto Al Qurtuby, *Religious Violence and Conciliation in Indonesia Christians and Muslims in the Moluccas* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016); Jana Krause, "(Non-)Violence and Civilian Agency in

triggered small-scale conflicts, such as in 2011 when rumors spread that a Muslim motorcycle taxi driver was killed in a Christian area, causing tensions to rise.²¹ The local government has always maintained peace in Ambon Island by reminding the public of the bloody conflict to prevent its recurrence. The flow of information, rumors and refugees moving to the surrounding islands led to the further spread of religious segregation.²² In the early years after the conflict, the Banda Islands were left with only a small Christian minority living on Ai Island. The rest fled and rebuilt their lives in Negeri Suli. These refugees survived by working as construction laborers, farming, and engaging in other jobs unrelated to the sea, which contrasted with their previous livelihoods in the Banda Islands.

The Bandanese people of Suli fled with nothing but valuable documents such as house and land certificates, as well as the clothes on their backs. Empty houses, which are easily found on Neira Island, are examples of their abandoned property. These refugees had no intention of selling their houses or nutmeg plantation lands. The plantation lands were generally leased or entrusted to Muslim relatives who still lived in Banda. On one hand, the ownership of land and houses maintained a real relationship to their homeland. On the other hand, they also had no intention of returning to live in the Banda Islands, unless all the refugees in Suli Village returned and formed a settlement based on shared religion. The solidarity among conflict victims, which had a religious nuance, provided a sense of safety and comfort in the changing Banda Islands. What the Banda Suli community experienced is in the same configuration as the general experience of Ambonese society, which felt a stronger bond with their

Ambon, Indonesia,” *Resilient Communities: Non-Violence and Civilian Agency in Communal War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 129-169; Patricia Spyer, *Orphaned Landscapes: Violence, Visuality, and Appearance in Indonesia* (USA: Fordham University Press, 2022).

²¹ Sumanto Al Qurtuby, “Peacebuilding in Indonesia: Christian–Muslim Alliances in Ambon Island,” *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 24, no. 3 (2013): 349-367.

²² Gerry van Klinken, “The Maluku Wars: Bringing Society Back,” *Indonesia* 71 (2001): 1-26; Nils Bubandt. Rumors, “Pamphlets, and the Politics of Paranoia in Indonesia,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 67 (2008): 789-817; Sumanto Al Qurtuby, “Ambonese Muslim Jihadists, Islamic Identity, and The History of Christian–Muslim Rivalry in The Moluccas, Eastern Indonesia,” *International Journal of Asian Studies* 12, no. 1 (2015).

religious community after the conflict²³. Conversely, ethnic gatherings and practices did not appear in daily life.

The Banda Islands are now diverse again. The largest grocery store on Neira Island, the main island of this archipelago, is owned by a Christian Chinese. The ethnic group that arrived after the Maluku conflict is different from the Banda Chinese category, who have lived there for generations since the colonial era. There are some Banda Chinese who are Muslim and have become prominent traders in the Neira Island market or run guesthouse businesses. During the field research conducted on Neira Island in October 2022, the old temple there was preparing large tents for religious activities. The meeting of different ethnic groups in the Banda Islands since the spice trade era is reflected in the form of churches, mosques and ancient temples.

Kabata and Collective Memory of Bandanese People

In the life of Bandanese people, there is a tradition known as *kabata*. This tradition, referred to as *kapata* in other parts of Maluku, consists of verses that are sung.²⁴ These sung verses contain stories about historical events in Banda Neira, conveyed in the Tana language or old Maluku language. *Kabata* is then passed down from one generation to the next. The transmission is done by telling the stories to the next generation before bedtime, during traditional ceremonies, or while socializing. Although there is no formal institutionalized mechanism for this, several *kabata* are still ingrained in the memory of the Bandanese people. This phenomenon points out that *kabata* has become a living memory continuously transmitted across generations. The memory of *kabata* also generates knowledge and influences how the community views certain aspects of society. One example is a *kabata* about the genealogy of the traditional villages in the Banda Neira Islands. One of the *kabata* tells the story of a traditional village called Viat. This village was established after a younger sibling of a ruler from Lonthoir moved to Neira Island and was given a plot of land to develop Islam religion. The Bandanese people still believe that these two villages have a fraternal bond, as narrated in the *kabata*.

²³ Jessica Soedirgo, "Quotidian institutions and identity formation: Explaining patterns of identity salience in Maluku, Indonesia," *Asian Politics & Policy* 13 (2021): 56–71.

²⁴ Prihe Slamatin Letlora, "Symbol and Meaning of Kapata Oral Tradition Texts in Central Maluku," *ELS Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities* 1, no. 2 (2018): 153-161.

This illustration indicates that *kabata* exists within two cultural dimensions of the Banda people, namely routine-mechanical daily practices and sacred rituals. The daily dimension indicates that *kabata* is present during the most profane social occasions. On one hand, the significance of *kabata* is formed through routine face-to-face interactions. On the other hand, *kabata* becomes part of a sacred ritual that educates the community to experience it with a sense of solemn grandeur²⁵ providing the spiritual basis for the formation of identity. These two dimensions of *kabata* offer a high frequency of exposure and depth of experience. These two bases are sufficient to make *kabata* a source of history for the local community. The use of the Tana language has two opposing effects. The practicality of memorizing it for all the Bandanese people is certainly reduced in efficiency because it is different from the everyday spoken Banda Malay. On the other hand, the Tana language adds a sense of sacrality because it creates a closer connection to the authenticity of the ancestors. This ancestral connection is important to highlight because it gives authority to the rituals performed²⁶ and influences the existence of the community itself in relation to other communities, such as how the Butonese ethnic group living in Central Maluku, on the island of Seram, is subordinated because they are considered "newcomers".²⁷

The discussion of *kabata* allows us to view the history of the archipelago from a local perspective, rather than the general colonial viewpoint, especially since *kabata* is still practiced in contemporary culture.²⁸ *Kabata* connects the past to the present of the local community. It reveals a particular episode in the history of the Banda Neira Islands. The most prominent episodes are those marking the origins of the villages and the early colonial era. These two episodes remain unclear within the framework of specific years. The events described in *kabata* can only be reconstructed by interpreting them based on other texts and community stories. In this study, we have

²⁵ Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magic, Science, and Religion: and Other Essays* (New York: A Doubleday Anchor Book, 1984).

²⁶ Andrew Strathern and Pamela J. Stewart Strathern, "Comment: Thinking about Rituals, Thinking about Ancestor," *Journal of Ritual Studies* 26, no. 1(2012): 47-49.

²⁷ Geger Riyanto, "Suspicion and Overlapping Orders of Precedence: Imagining Secret History in Founder-Focused Societies of Eastern Indonesia," *Oceania*, 92 (2022): 213-228.

²⁸ Van Donkersgoed and Farid, "Belang and Kabata Banda.

uncovered a rarely discussed history of Banda Neira. Through *kabata*, we can see a conflictual history within the Banda Neira community itself. The narrative that has been written in historical texts suggests that the conflict was between the Banda people and the Europeans. However, *kabata* contains a history of conflict among the Banda Neira communities themselves. This can provide a trajectory of how the history of conflict becomes understandable in the islands. One *kabata* telling a conflict among villages can be found in a fragment of the *kabata* from Lonthoir village. This *kabata* of war narrates the dispute between the villages of Orsia and Orlima. The dispute is also connected to the conflict between the European powers in Banda Neira, namely the Dutch and the Portuguese. The fragment of this *kabata* is as follows:

Table 1. The *Kabata* of the War of *Lonthoir* Traditional Village

Original Version	English Version
<i>Ibarimau bisi jo besi ibarimau, Djakarian boleh jo boleh ibarimau.</i>	On the land, we would like to fight, On the sea, we would like to fight as well.
<i>Lewetarimean kami soparanie, Illab wailondor bismillab.</i>	Laose people have bathed in swords today, but God has other plans; today we will finish this.
<i>Utisake sianggo utisa, Tasik nama sanggeran nija komamang.</i>	The house of Urlima has been burned down, This was done by people from Ursia.
<i>Ruma ringgi rangga, Ruma kayu arrange.</i>	The houses are in ruins, All the wooden houses have been burned down.
<i>Ik palmata Ursia oleh ori eow dabrero, Ibelebele lantasik or ei eow dabrero.</i>	We're all fortunate, all five of us have Lantaka.
<i>Nirabatij Combanwana minom sumpah deng Belanda, Pukul tanah Lewetaka ambil kapalla eij adororo</i>	Then the Dutch and the people of Ursia (The Nine People) returned to the land of Lonthoir.
<i>Nambila balla nambila bala, Bala kompania nambila bala.</i>	Now we, the people of Lonthoir, Have become the troops of the Dutch.

Original Version	English Version
<i>Mangwesi mang malateku wesimang, Prabisaban kompania malateku wesimang.</i>	Now, we as people of Lonthoir, are no longer afraid when facing anyone other than the Dutch.

At that time, some Lonthoیره people went to Neira Island to guard the Dutch government. They were given wages and food, and houses were built for them who were loyal to the Dutch. Everyone believes the version of the story that is told as the most truthful; because the stories in *kabata* not only contain sentimental feelings, but are also often embellished with tales of heroism or the superior qualities of certain regions to instill group pride. The main goal is to provide a specific identity for the group and individuals, and legitimize their ritual and political positions.²⁹

Table 2. More part the *Kabata* of the War of *Lonthoir* Traditional Village

Original Version	English Version
<i>Bismilah kau bilang kaite Jadi barakate Nirbati Watro</i>	In the nama of Allah, you say Fiat as a blessing for Nirabati Watro
<i>Tanda Penghulu Kita Tanda Penghulu PENGHULU lima jadi berkaté</i>	The leader's symbol is our sign to them Leader is a blessing
<i>Kakatuæ manung Kakæe Kasaturie manung leko rane</i>	Kakatua is kakatua Kasturi is a kind of bird
<i>Imam imame juru hatibe Lébi baca surat ayat Qur'anne</i>	Imam (prayer leader) and khatib (sermon deliverer) It is better to recite the verses of Al-Qur'an
<i>Sarui esarui manu ikang essarui Sarui geteng-geteng manu kang essarui Dua e kapitang mari nai kora-kora Sailuna risipali kora-kora limare</i>	Sarui is a sarui fish Small sarui is sarui fish Two captains get on the (traditional wooden) boat Sailuna risipali, let's get on the boat
<i>Sarui esarui manu ikang essarui</i>	Sarui is a fish

²⁹ Bartels, *Di Bawah Naungan Gunung Numusaku*.

Original Version	English Version
<i>Sarui nusukaru manu ikang esarui</i>	Sarui sarui sailed across the sea
<i>Saiketiran belag saiketiran</i>	Saikiteran is saikiteran
<i>Belag raja-raja belang saiketiran</i>	Saikiteran is the kings' insignia

The lyrics of *kabata* were originally sung during every traditional ceremony, such as the *Rofaer War* (the cleansing of the village wells), *Buka Puang Negeri* (the tradition of opening a new village) and *Papaito* (sea thanksgiving). However, to forget the fraternal conflict in the past, they "hid the lyrics of *kabata* related to the fraternal conflict" in order to maintain a sense of unity as the Bandanese people. The description of *kabata* above points out how an event during a certain period in the spice trade brought about a tragedy. The interpretation of this event holds different meanings, although fundamentally it is understood that this period was a tragedy for all parties in Banda. For some members of the community, this period is remembered as a genocide. From the perspective of other local communities, this period is seen as a tragedy caused by their lack of consideration, which led them to cooperate with the Dutch. They were ultimately deceived, resulting in suffering for the Bandanese people. Another interpretation of this period is as a tragedy of defeat and displacement, where they had to surrender their land and live in a new place. Finally, historians' narratives refer to this period as the Spice War, which brought about the first humanitarian tragedy in the history of colonization in the archipelago.

The historiography of Banda is always closely tied to nutmeg. Nutmeg has made the struggle for control over it paid with death. Lawataka Latar, a descendant of Banda Eli in a documentary film, mentions that "This nutmeg is always connected to death. In the past, our people died because of nutmeg."³⁰ The Dutch control over the nutmeg trade began with the genocide of the people and the killing of 40 wealthy Banda individuals. The history of alliances with the perpetrators of the genocide has caused *kabata* to carry an image of betrayal. No other *kabata* has been found that tells the story of the broken alliance between the Lhontoir village and the Dutch. However, today, the historical discussions in the Lhontoir traditional village are

³⁰ M. Fadli and MF. Fatris, "Song from Another Land - 1621 Banda Islands Genocide Short Documentary" <https://historibersama.com/song-from-another-land-the-banda-journal/> accessed on 21 October 2024.

colored by stories of the Dutch betrayal of the agreement at *Batu Darah* (Blood Stone). This Dutch betrayal led the Lhontoir village to take a stance to fight against them. The label of betrayal in Lhontoir was directed to two groups simultaneously: those who fled from Banda Land and those who shared the same religion as the colonizers, since they could not fight against those who brought the religion they adhered to. The struggle to defend Banda during the colonial era is described as a mixture of primordial spirit for the land and customs grounded in Islam.

These various developing narratives have ultimately shaped the memory of the Banda Neira community about a tragedy that changed their lives. This era also marked the beginning of a new period in the social structure of Banda Neira. This depiction clearly indicates the presence of cultural trauma within the community. As Alexander et al. (2004) state, cultural trauma occurs when members of a collective feel they have experienced a horrific event that leaves an indelible mark on the group's consciousness, permanently marking their memory and fundamentally and irreversibly altering their future identity.³¹

The emergence of identity of Bandanese people in Banda Islands and the indigenous Bandanese people, often referred to Banda Eli, illustrates how this cultural trauma can have influence on the formation of a new identity. This identity carries paradoxes. Amidst the cultural changes in Banda, the community continues to regard the people of Banda Eli as the legitimate heirs of Bandanese culture. This high regard is often displayed in traditional ceremonies and narratives within the Banda Islands community, even though they also hold disappointment against the Banda Eli people, who are seen as having distanced themselves from the Dutch. The lives of both the Banda Eli people and the Banda Islands community, which have been ongoing for hundreds of years, have created established communities in their respective places. These communities have developed their own norms of life. These two communities are only connected by their shared memory of their common origin, the land of Banda.

This fragmentation of identity resurfaced during the Maluku conflict. The migration of the Christian Bandanese people to Suli created a new community. The narrative of the Muslim Bandanese people became increasingly established as the mainstream in the

³¹ J.C. Alexander et al., *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University California Press, 2004).

secondary roles in the customary processions, such as becoming traditional leaders (*bulu balang*) or captains (*kapitan*). To understand the formation of identity embedded in the issues of Bandanese customs, one must take a look at two historical fractures. The first fracture is the genocide that left only 1,000 people out of 15,000 Bandanese people. Immigrants, including Dutch slaves, adopted the local history and culture. After the genocide, Bandanese people became a collection of ethnic groups that formed a single community based on their bond to the land of Banda. The second fracture is the Ambon conflict in Maluku which forced the Christian Bandanese people to flee and form a new community: Banda Suli on Ambon Island. The first fracture raised the debate over the authenticity of the Bandanese people, which had implications for the customs and culture that were developed. The second fracture led to the dominance, or even monopoly, of an Islamic perspective in understanding Bandanese customs and culture, including *kabata*.

“...From the time of the genocide until 1999, that was a plural phase for us. A very interesting phase. So there was a clear boundary. In those phases, I myself experienced it. But after 1999, because of the exodus, the Ambon riots, they came here. They (the Muslim refugees from Ambon) brought their culture, they brought their dignity, they blended with the local people, they met everyone... Many things in Banda, after the 21st century, they tried to erase whatever in Banda.” (interview with a local historian, 2021)

Islam has brought many interpretations to the narratives of *kabata*. Islam is positioned as the opposing force to the colonizers. On one hand, the migration of the Banda Eli people is a narrative about the reluctance of the indigenous Banda Neira people to submit and embrace the religion of the colonizers. This interpretation is frequently found in daily stories among the general community. The notion that the Banda Eli people are traitors is more commonly found among traditional elite interpretations. For the Banda Eli people, their move to the Kei Islands is not seen as departure, but as a journey. This journey has been legitimized through *kabata*, where the voices of their ancestors are interpreted as a prophecy of departure and collective destiny.³³

³³ Timo Kaartinen, *Lagu-lagu Perjalanan Cerita-Cerita Tempat: Puisi-Puisi Ketidakhadiran dalam Masyarakat Indonesia Timur* (Yogyakarta: Penerbit Media Pustaka, 2019).

On the other hand, Kampung Ratu, which was once a village predominantly inhabited by Christian Bandanese people, is considered part of the colonizer group. In the traditional boat (*koru-koru*) race, Kampung Ratu only participates by cheering at the coastal edge and does not take part in the competition. For the people of Kampung Ratu, this is interpreted as part of the original identity of their leaders, who were women, giving the village a feminine character. The interpretation of this gender trait in the village implies that they are morally not permitted to participate in the competition. Their *cakalele* dance movements are also softer and gentler than those of other villages, as women do not go to war. During the *Buka Puang* ritual, the processions are more restrained, following the proper behavior of a woman who cannot be too open or become a spectacle. For some elites, this interpretation is seen as an excuse to label the village as part of the colonizer community, which is Christian. The absence of this community in joint traditional events is considered exclusive, marking them as part of the colonizing society.

Now, the Christian Bandanese people living in Suli can no longer perform their traditional rituals. For them, rituals, including *kabata*, are sacred and deeply attached to the land of Banda. This attachment, eventually, cannot be formed outside of Banda, even if in terms of knowledge and capacity, they are capable of doing so. The people in Suli instead teach those Bandanese people still living in Kampung Ratu to continue the existing rituals. The people of Kampung Ratu and Suli are unable to perform the rituals because, after all, Bandanese customs are based on Islam. Therefore, when the rituals are carried out, the Christian community is inevitably always involved with the Muslim people of Kampung Ratu as part of the ritual.

Conflict Transformation: Centralization of Custom and *Kabata* Authorities

The concept of conflict resolution needs to be distinguished from that of conflict transformation. Conflict resolution seeks to end hostilities through a series of actions involving the participation of various parties involved in the conflict.³⁴ Meanwhile, conflict transformation is a more complex approach because it requires changes in personal, interpersonal, social and cultural dimensions. This

³⁴ Badrun et al., "Pancasila, Islam, and Harmonising Socio-Cultural Conflict in Indonesia," *Al-Jami'ab: Journal of Islamic Studies* 61, no. 1 (2023), 137-156.

transformation is considered important because conflict, by nature, cannot be fully eradicated.³⁵

Conflict transformation lenses suggest we look beyond the dishes to see the context of the relationship that is involved, and then look back again at the pile. Not satisfied with a quick solution that may seem to solve the immediate problem, transformation seeks to create a framework to address the content, the context, and the structure of the relationship. Transformation as an approach aspires to create constructive change processes through conflict.³⁶

The conflict paradigm proposed by Lederach is suitable for understanding the Maluku conflict. The presence of recurring patterns shows that we cannot view conflicts merely on a case-by-case basis. We must examine conflicts holistically, both from the current situation and from past cases stored in the collective memory of society, and shift the focus towards peace building. Peace building is based on the recognition that conflict cannot truly disappear, but it has impacts on the formation of society after the conflict and may become the root of future conflicts. It is necessary therefore to change the nature of relationships among the competing groups and replace the socio-psychological repertoires among community members, building a new culture of peace.³⁷ A mechanism of conflict resolution should be in place to prevent future conflict.³⁸ This conflict transformation framework is used to evaluate the role of the Christian church in Maluku, particularly the Maluku Protestant Church (GPM), which played an important role as a mediator in interfaith dialogue and in promoting tolerance and reconciliation among previously conflicting communities.³⁹ Through church-based activities (CBA), they succeeded

³⁵ John Paul Lederach, *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2003).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

³⁷ Soli Vered and Daniel Bar-Tal, "Intractable Conflict and Peacemaking from a Socio-Psychological Approach," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).

³⁸ Anwar Sadat Harahap et al., "Dalihan Na Tolu as a Model for Resolving Religious Conflicts in North Sumatera: An Anthropological and Sociological Perspective," *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga dan Hukum Islam* 7, no. 3 (2023), 1422-1446.

³⁹ Jürgen Rüländ, Christian von Lübke, and Marcel M. Baumann, *Religious Actors and Conflict Transformation in Southeast Asia: Indonesia and the Philippines* (London and New York: Routledge, 2019).

in fostering attitudes of tolerance and pluralism, as well as improving interfaith relations, especially between Christian and Muslim communities. The church also integrated a multidimensional approach by supporting education and economic development to address the root causes of structural conflicts, such as social discrimination and injustice.

The internal community of the Banda Islands still views the conflict as a memory that is being transformed to have a positive impact on the development of the community itself. This section broadens the identity tied to the land of Banda by connecting two entities outside the Banda region, but historically linked as the Bandanese people: the Banda Suli refugees who fled due to the Maluku conflict, and the Banda Eli people who were formed during the colonial era. Being non-Muslim does not entirely disqualify them from being considered Bandanese people. A statement by a young man from Neira Island, who expressed that "they are still Christians," reflects the situation of the Banda refugees during the Ambon conflict in 1999. Islam is placed as a constitutive element of the Banda people's identity, alongside their attachment and loyalty to the land of Banda. This formation is based on a textual interpretation of *kebatu*, focusing on Islamic terminology such as "*bismillah*." This condition can only be explained by proposing that Islam in pre-Maluku conflict Banda was apolitical, which allowed it to be an open category, enabling non-Muslims to be considered Bandanese people.⁴⁰ After the Maluku conflict and the development of the conservative turn in Indonesia⁴¹ as a historical continuation of the Islamic revival after the fall of Soeharto in 1998⁴² the Islamization of Banda became politicized, in the sense of claiming authority, where one had to be Muslim to be a traditional leader. The emergence of more closed and exclusive interpretations of Banda as a Muslim community has grown stronger. The interpretation

⁴⁰ Winn, *Banda is the Blessed Land*, 71-79; Winn, *Everyone Searches, Everyone Finds*, 275-292; Winn, *Tanah Berkat (Blessed Land)*; Winn, *Slavery and Cultural Creativity* 365-389.

⁴¹ Martin van Bruinessen, *Contemporary Developments in Indonesian Islam: Explaining the 'Conservative Turn'* (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2013); Ahmad Najib Burhani, *Heresy and Politics: How Indonesian Islam Deals with Extremism, Pluralism, and Populism* (Yogyakarta: Suara Muhammadiyah, 2020).

⁴² E. Schulze Kristen, "The 'ethnic' in Indonesia's Communal Conflicts: Violence in Ambon, Poso, and Sambas," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 40, no. 12 (2017): 2096-2114.

of *kabata* that was once open eventually became closed and hardened due to the larger context.

Such claims of Islamization can be compared with the historical account that there was once a traditional leader in Kampung Ratu, Neira Island, who was Christian. This narrative was also shared by the Banda Suli refugees. Among those who fled to Ambon Island, some had been involved in the affair of custom. Bandanese custom can be imagined as similar to the spirituality that divides the classifications into *santri* (pious muslim), *priyayi* (noble man) and *abangan* (secular muslim) in Mojokuto, East Java, which is open to religious identities. Spirituality in Bandanese custom is more inclusive. The Maluku conflict in 1999-2000 and the rise of Islam as a political force in Indonesia after the Reform⁴³ should be considered external factors that influenced the changes in religiosity reforming the identity of the Bandanese people

The community living in the Banda Neira Islands today cannot be separated from the network of national discourse. One of the informants in the 2022 study from Lonthoir Island shared suspicions that there had been a distortion of history that harmed the Muslim community. The figure of Pattimura, a national hero from the Maluku region due to his struggle against foreign colonizers, was mentioned by the informant as being Muslim. It was an extraordinary coincidence that in July 2022, the narrative shared by the informant aligned with the preaching of Ustaz Adi Hidayat, a popular young cleric among the youth, whose lectures were widely distributed through social media networks. Ustaz Adi Hidayat claimed that Pattimura's real name was not Thomas Matulesy, but Ahmad Lussy⁴⁴. This narrative by Ustad Adi Hidayat sparked widespread public discussion and led online media outlets to publish articles about Pattimura. There was a three-month time gap between the narrative shared by Ustaz Adi Hidayat and the interview in October 2022, which could be seen as the time frame for the dissemination of the discourse about Pattimura, originating from Java, reaching the Banda Neira Islands through digital

⁴³ Abellia Anggi Wardani, "Informal Economy and Peacebuilding Efforts Among Muslim and Christian Communities During Communal Conflicts in Ambon," *Islamica: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 16, no. 1 (2021): 1-29.

⁴⁴ <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20220707065804-20-818302/gaduh-uah-soal-kapitan-pattimura-muslim-hingga-penampakan-tanpa-kumis> accessed 4 November 2024

technology. This coincidence further highlights the important role of digital technology in religion, politics and social emotions.⁴⁵

The dynamics of religiosity that have developed within the Banda Neira community today can be discussed within the framework of re-Islamization in Ternate, North Maluku, which took place in the early 1990s⁴⁶. This re-Islamization had already been underway before the Maluku conflict occurred, so what is being discussed provides a gradual background to what is referred to as the Islamic revival as a political force after the fall of the New Order, which also influenced the framing of the Maluku conflict as a religious conflict. The Bandanese people, who had been Muslim since before the colonial era, seemingly experienced a renewal of enlightenment, which had political implications for their religiosity. This re-Islamization has affected the authority over customs and *kabata*.

If the reform of the Bandanese people's identity towards the Banda Suli refugees is based on religious aspects that imply authority over customs and *kabata*, the negotiation with Banda Eli touches on loyalty to the land of Banda. The land of Banda is called "land of blessings" because it is the loyalty and responsibility towards this natural entity that can overcome the segregation of religious and ethnic identities in the formation of the Bandanese people's identity, making it more open than the Geertz's classification. The loyalty and responsibility to the land of Banda have made the Banda Eli people no longer fully legitimate in holding authority over Banda customs. For the elders of Lonthoir Island, the Banda Eli people need to be positioned chronologically to see the legitimacy tied to the 1621 genocide. Before the 1621 genocide, there were already Bandanese people on Kei Island by the order of King Lewetaka to represent and spread Islam. Meanwhile, the second wave of Bandanese people's arrival was only due to fleeing to save themselves during the genocide. Their escape was not to avoid the pursuit of Jan Pieterszoon Coen's forces, but to escape from the pursuit of the Lonthoiresse people who considered them not to have fought to defend the Land of Banda. The community living in the Banda Neira Islands today includes

⁴⁵ Amanah Nurish, "Muslim-Christian Conflict and the Rise of Laskar Jihad: Tracing Islamophobia in Central Sulawesi - Indonesia," *Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies* (QIJIS) 10, no. 2 (2022): 479-516

⁴⁶ Christian Kiem, "Re-Islamization among Muslim Youth in Ternate Town, Eastern Indonesia," *Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 8, no. 1 (1993): 92-127.

descendants of those who defended the land of Banda during the genocide. Therefore, authority over customs should rightfully be held by them, without relying on the genealogical authenticity of Banda Eli, which requires chronological separation.

The dynamics of authority over Bandanese customs and the identity of Bandanese people show symptoms similar to the formation of tribalism, which provides contextual behavioral aspects as constitutive elements of identity⁴⁷. Tribal identity can be shaped by the reactions of people to current events and conditions experienced by the community.⁴⁸ The choice to fight to defend Banda land or to flee becomes an important discourse in the formation of the Bandanese people's identity and is not solely based on the genealogy of those people. Such a conceptualization of tribalism plays a role in contemporary politics. The exclusion of authority over customs and the identity of the Bandanese people also occurs among the categories of communities connected to Banda land, which has been fragmented by conflicts from two very distant eras. The transformation of conflict that leads to the centralization of authority over customs and *kabata* among the Bandanese people in the Banda Islands must be seen as a preliminary condition that must be achieved in order to address the stagnation of welfare. This condition is being attempted to be resolved by demanding the expansion of the archipelago into an autonomous region. External interpretations that oppose the contemporary political aspirations are anticipated through this centralization.

The collective memory that the Banda Neira Islands are a land endowed with natural wealth plays a significant role in the emergence of feelings of disappointment and dissatisfaction with bureaucratic work. The memory that Run Island, one of the islands in the archipelago, was once exchanged for Manhattan (New Amsterdam), New York, USA, in the 1667 Treaty of Breda, creates high expectations for prosperity. The Bandanese community should have been as prosperous as the people living in Manhattan. This dissatisfaction has led to the discourse of territorial expansion in the Banda Neira Islands. This discourse was made possible by the political

⁴⁷ Morton H. Fried, "On the Concepts of 'Tribe' and 'Tribal Society,'" *Transactions of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 28 (1966): 527-540.

⁴⁸ I Nengah Punia, "Unveiling Bali's Hidden Facet: The Narrative Identity of the Pegayaman Village Muslim Community in Buleleng," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 18, no. 2 (2024), 403-426.

system in Indonesia after the fall of Soeharto, which had fragmented power to the regions.⁴⁹ In 2015, regional governments responded to this discourse by strongly supporting the expansion of the Banda Neira Islands into a new autonomous region at the district or administrative city level, but it must be done in accordance with legal mechanisms. However, from 2021 to 2023, the discourse of territorial expansion shifted to dividing the Banda Neira Islands into two subdistricts: Banda Subdistrict and Banda Besar Subdistrict.

Kabata plays a role in the internal mechanism that generates a unified discourse for this territorial expansion. The fragmentation of traditional villages and the separation of lands in the island were addressed to face external agents who held greater power. The community recalls the bitter experiences of division, civil war and genocide resulting from alliances with external colonial agents. The fragments of internal conflict in *kabata* were postponed in their existence and interpretation to avoid disturbing the consolidation of this political movement for territorial expansion. The genocide of 1621 became the starting point for rebuilding a society that shares a common history. *Kabata* raises awareness of the political movement. The improvement of collective welfare through political movements was prioritized over contesting the accuracy of *kabata's* version, as regional politics was seen to have neglected the Banda Neira Islands. The stagnation of welfare amidst an abundance of resources is one of the two contemporary triggers for the political movement. Meanwhile, colonial history and *kabata* serve as a past reference of solidarity in facing external agents. They are reminded not to repeat the same mistakes when confronting the exploitation of resources.

Conclusion

The identity of the Bandanese people is formed from a complex blend of religion, customs and the history of conflict. The conflicts experienced by the Bandanese people have led to the fragmentation of their identity. After the Maluku conflict, Islam became a dominant element in Bandanese customs. The treatment and interpretation of *kabata* by the Banda Islands community reveals the roles of both exclusion and integration of religious and customary components in the formation of their identity. In the context of conflict

⁴⁹ Vedi R. Hadiz, *Localising Power in Post-Authoritarian Indonesia: A Southeast Asia Perspective* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010).

transformation, the Banda Islands community uses *kabata* to address potential divisions by developing a collective memory that emphasizes solidarity. The land of Banda is viewed again with a future-oriented perspective. The land of blessings (*Tanah Berkah*) is sought to bring about collective prosperity. The development of the Bandanese people's identity has become more exclusive after the Maluku conflict, particularly in relation to religion. However, the ongoing conflict transformation there continues to prioritize spatial space as a key factor in the formation of the Banda Neira community's identity. The categorization of the Bandanese people into three separate communities has been eliminated to focus on solidarity and reduce internal frictions within the Banda Islands society in facing contemporary political and economic challenges.

Conflict and identity in Banda are processual, meaning that there is no single or fixed factor. The emerging identity is heavily influenced by the context of the conflict process and the peace building efforts, which are interconnected with various internal and external discourses. The land of Banda, as a unifying factor, is just one part of the fragments of Banda's identity, as are religion, ideology and genealogy. An open identity allows for multiple interpretations and dynamics, with the essence of Banda's identity being its transformative nature. []

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