

Chapter 5. *Tanah Berkat* (Blessed Land): The Source of the Local in the Banda Islands, Central Maluku

Phillip Winn

Within this archipelagic area a variety of ethnic groups meet which originate from a range of regions in Indonesia alongside those whose origins are in Maluku alone ... Of course they arrived with their own cultural backgrounds ... Nevertheless if the customs and traditions that take place are examined closely, it is clear that indigenous cultural elements are certainly dominant. So that here outside cultural features have dissipated in the context of indigenous culture.¹ Uneputty et al (1985:27-8)

Introduction

The Banda Islands in central Maluku have long been a site of historical transformations. As a consequence, human relationships to land and place in the Bandas need to be understood in terms of dynamic processes of culture and history. In the pre-colonial period, the islands formed a key part of extensive trading networks reaching across the archipelago to link Maluku with the northern seaports of Java, the cosmopolitan city-state of Malacca in peninsular Malaysia, and ultimately to the Middle East, China and Europe. By the arrival of the first Europeans, the population of the islands included numbers of resident Malay and Javanese merchants, with significant socio-cultural changes in progress. In particular, autochthonous structures of authority had been transformed through the acceptance of Muslim practices and the burgeoning importance of local trade functionaries.

Military conquest of the Banda Islands in 1621 by the Dutch East India Company or VOC (*Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*) resulted in more radical change: the destruction or displacement of much of the existing population of the islands followed by the imposition of the *perkerniersstelsel* or 'nutmeg-planter system'. Among the world's earliest plantation enterprises, this venture relied on several centuries of importing captive labour—in particular, slaves—from regional and extra-regional sources. The VOC's decimation of indigenous-language speakers, in combination with the diverse origins of the colonial-era population, can certainly be linked to the emergence of a shared and distinctive Malay language that has been referred to as Banda Malay.² It still forms the main contemporary vernacular spoken in the Banda Islands.

It is against this background that representations of the land (*tanah*) itself is prominent in shaping an ontological topography within which the contemporary significance of locality and the legitimacy of local identification take shape.³ The current population acknowledge descent from immigrants of diverse origins and generally engage in what Carsten (1997) characterises as a ‘future orientation’, where genealogical reckoning is relatively shallow in historical depth but extremely broad in contemporary reach. Unlike the island Malay population Carsten describes, contemporary Bandanese valorise traditions of knowledge concerning the past, in particular, those that relate to the Banda Islands. This knowledge (known as *adat Banda*) represents the islands as possessing profound religious significance—in fact, as a blessed land or *tanah berkat*.

By engaging in collective ritual practice (known as *kerja adat*), local residents enact obligations to social collectivities that derive their meaningfulness from narratives of place, rather than genealogically based visions of ancient shared relatedness. Participation in collective ritual occasions was understood as communicating and reinforcing the moral commitments and goals of religion alongside idealised visions of sociality. Ritual practices additionally confer legitimacy to contemporary assertions of authentically local identity.

The Blessed Land

The small archipelago of the Banda Islands is envisaged by its local inhabitants as a unified landscape in a sense that exceeds the administrative standing of the island group as a *kecamatan* or sub-regency. The islands are often referred to collectively as *tanah Banda*, ‘the land of Banda’, an expression that simultaneously marks the Bandas as a distinct locale and emphasises the earth that physically constitutes the islands. *Tanah Banda* was popularly understood as possessing a singular significance, that of being a ‘blessed land’ or *tanah berkat*. The source of this special status was envisaged in terms of the islands having played an important historical role in significant religious events.

An example of this perspective appears in a document dated 1922. Purportedly the transcription of an ancient origin narrative obtained in the settlement of Lonthoir on Banda Besar Island, it begins with Noah and the flooding of the Earth:

At the end of the flood the lands all rose above the water, in the West, in the South and in the East. The land Andare in the East, that is Banda, was raised first, after that Tidore and Ternate, and Java and Bali, followed by the other lands. (Van Ronkel 1945: 124)

A similar account, also attributed to Lonthoir but dated 1924, contains additional details.⁴ Noah’s craft is described running aground on Mount Ararak, after which he releases a dove in order to ascertain whether the flood has truly ended. The dove journeys to another mountain where it alights on a pomegranate

tree and pecks off the terminal sprout, carrying it to the ark. Convinced, Noah releases animals back into the world. The dove, for its part, is depicted as returning to the pomegranate tree, which the text then reveals as growing on the peak of Mount Lewerang—a still-active volcano in the Banda Group.

In the late 1990s, this volcano-island was generally known by the more ubiquitous title Gunung Api (literally, ‘volcano’).⁵ The peak, and the Banda Islands as a whole, were no longer given such a prominent part in tales of the flood, but a motif of religious significance continued. The islands’ special status was attributed widely to the actions of several male siblings in the archaic past (*jaman dulu*), who journeyed from the islands seeking religion. They are said to have returned with Islam, obtained from its source in Mecca. Both the historical texts cited previously provide descriptions of the siblings’ journey that closely parallel contemporary accounts.⁶ Crucially, among local Muslims (who formed the bulk of the population) there is a common assertion that the Bandas were in fact the first location in Indonesia to receive Islam. The rest of the archipelago—and in some local accounts, the rest of the non-Arab world—encountered Islam after this.

Such narratives clearly evoke powerful claims for the islands: the first dry land after the flood, the first place visited by Noah’s dove, the first Indonesian location to receive Islam. It is notable too that the repetitive theme, in addition to being religious, involves an assertion of precedence. This cultural motif has been highlighted throughout Austronesian populations, often associated with claims to ritual authority or other status (Fox 1995). In this case, there is a vision of peculiar potency attached to the islands in a physical sense—to the very land or earth itself.

The tiny uninhabited outlier of the Banda Group is called Suanggi Island, a title that is described as marking it as the boundary of *tanah Banda*. The *suanggi*—a malevolent witch-figure—is a common image throughout Maluku; in the Bandas its range of powers are said to include invisibility and the ability to fly. Suanggi Islands name is said to stem from the fact that any flying *suanggi* who passes the island would be robbed of its powers as a result of crossing into the Banda Groups zone of influence, plummeting to earth on the island or into the sea.⁷ Similarly, soil or sand from the Bandas was frequently incorporated into amulets by Banda residents that were designed to provide safety against the influence of *suanggi* (and all evil intent) while one was travelling outside the islands. Many residents even suggested that the mere fact of their personal association with the Bandas could be sufficient to ward off the machinations of *suanggi* encountered elsewhere.

Other more tangible evidence of the blessed nature of *tanah Banda* existed in the form of sites known as *keramat* that dot the landscape of the islands. *Keramat* were viewed as ancient locations associated with the journeying male

siblings and other early autochthonous figures in the islands. Sometimes the sites are described as *tempat sakti*, i.e. 'places which are *sakti*', a term generally translated into English as 'sacred' or 'supernaturally powerful' (Grimes 1996).⁸ They may also be referred to as *tempat suci*, 'holy places'. *Suci* generally refers to matters more specifically religious, much as the term 'holy' does in English—partaking of God/godliness.

These sites then are regarded as both powerful and holy, a significance connected directly to the early Muslim founder-figures with which they are associated. Most are viewed as graves and have this appearance (with single or double markers, sometimes of decoratively carved coral-stone blocks); others comprise enduring physical features such as springs, large boulders or caves associated with specific activities of these individuals in the distant past. Many of the sites are linked to placenames, establishing a close connection between the landscape and local origin narratives. The Banda *keramat* form a continuous mnemonic suggestion to island residents of a dense inscribing of hidden significances in the land, particularly of important historical events and religious figures, and of their coexistence in the Bandas with these figures who continue to exist in spirit form (see Winn 2000). The figures themselves (which include, but are not limited to, the journeying siblings) are often referred to collectively as *datu-datu*.

In standard Indonesian, the term *datuk* can be translated as ancestor or forebear, but the expression has cognates in local languages across Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei and the Philippines that also form titles of respect or recognition linked to Islamic religious scholars, shamans and/or high-ranking officials attached to a local rulers court (Federspiel 1995: 47). Such was the emphasis in the Banda Islands, where they were also sometimes referred to variously as *wali* and *imam besar*—Islamic saints and holy figures, as Islamic or religious teachers (*guru Islam; guru agama*) and as religious experts or scholars (*tokoh agama; ahli agama; kiai*).

The Banda *datu* figures were seen as possessing immense religious knowledge, particularly of the esoteric and mystical elements of Islam, a realm viewed by local Muslims as enormously powerful but difficult to access for the ordinary person in the contemporary world. In the words of one informant: '[Their] Islamic knowledge is far greater [than ours]' (*'pengetahuan agama Islam jauh lebih tinggi'* [Hatta]). This was a result of the *datu* being close to God (*dekat Allah*). Informants also described them as the beloved (*habib*) or grandchildren (*cucu*) of the prophet Mohammed, who were elevated or glorified by God. Their special status is manifest in their association with *keramat*: 'people who give rise to *keramat* have received honour from the All-Powerful' (*'orang yang terjadi keramat dapat mulia dari yang Maha Besar'* [Lonthoir]). It is this closeness to God and to

Mohammed that is popularly considered as providing them with the capacity to intercede on behalf of those who visit a *keramat* site.

It is important to note that a repetitive emphasis in *adat* narratives is on the status of *tanah Banda*, rather than the agency of the *datu*. Narratives stress the prominence of the islands in God's view as giving rise to the siblings and their journey to Mecca. The actions of the siblings do not create the island's prominence—they are vehicles for the operation of God's intent. In this respect, the origin of the siblings is popularly linked to a miraculous emergence from a pomegranate fruit, through God's will. In the 1924 text, this fruit emerged on the same tree encountered by Noah's dove, later inhabited by Gabriel (Jibrail), the archangel Mohammed met in a cave while meditating and who carried the Qur'an for recitation. In the 1922 text, the pomegranate tree arose through the prayer of a holy woman who desired to eat that particular fruit, and as a result became pregnant.⁹ Some informants even maintained that the Banda Islands were considered by God as the birthplace for the prophet Mohammed himself. As evidence, one *adat* specialist repeated part of a ritual verse that explicitly brings Banda into relation with Mecca: 'the land of Mecca is heavy, the land of Banda is light; therefore the Prophet was born over there' ('*tanah Mecca berat, tanah Banda ringan; padahal Nabi melahirkan di sana*' [Selamon]). He illustrated this using his hands to mimic a set of scales, tipping down in Meccas favour.

The *datu* and their immense religious knowledge in a sense personify the islands and ultimately remain attached to them. A widespread view suggested that *keramat* sites were not constructed by human effort but rather appeared miraculously on the death of the holy figure linked to the site. This would occur even if the *datu* died away from the islands: 'in speaking of *keramat*, he dies in a different place, afterwards a *keramat* appears here by itself' ('*dikatakan keramat, dia mati di tempat lain, nanti keramat jadi di sini sendiri*' [Lonthoir]).

This emphasis on the mystical providence of *keramat* sites works against their representation as 'shrines', a term applied to similar sites elsewhere in the Muslim world.¹⁰ The expression tends to carry suggestions of a formally bounded or enclosed sacred precinct, relying overmuch on the salience of a profane-sacred opposition. Rather than marking a boundary separating the realms of the sacred and the profane, the Banda *keramat* bear witness to the generalised significance of the islands to Islam. Where humanly sponsored elements appear at Banda *keramat* such as tiles, concrete borders, roofs or fences, these were understood as respectful gifts or additions to the site, enhancing its visibility, not as somehow containing sacred substance. Neither were *keramat* used as repositories for relics or iconic symbols. Many Banda *keramat* are certainly isolated—located on promontories, cliff-sides and mountaintops relatively remote from homes or human activity. But others are situated within areas of settlement, or adjacent to gardens and well-used paths.

Rather than enclosures, the *keramat* constitute foci for the potency that imbues the islands more generally. As obvious centres of this force, they attract human attention, but there is no local vision of a sacred precinct, absolutely demarcated or contained by physical boundaries of some form. Though the entire landscape could be regarded as sacred (*tanah berkat*), in a practical everyday sense some places will of necessity be more revered than others. As Hubert has suggested, 'not every stone or plot of earth can be treated with the same degree of respect' (1994: 18). The *keramat* thus can be understood as complex ontological toponyms, specific places that act as potent signifiers of a larger whole. The key perspective in the islands is that *adat* is fundamentally emplaced: 'it belongs to the earth/ground, not to people' (*'tanah punya, bukan orang punya'* [Lonthoir]).

Linked to the *keramat* sites and essentially grounded in the islands, the *datu* spirits were unable to leave *tanah Banda* with the fleeing population after the Dutch conquest in 1621 but continued to exert a watchful presence and active influence over their original territory. The *datu* were not considered the ancestors or biological founders (i.e. apical ancestors) of existing populations in the islands.¹¹ The *datu-datu* of the Bandas were associated with place rather than personal origins. They were the figures who founded human community in the islands (*'mulai membuka kampung ini'*). It is through their ritually based engagements with these figures and their sites that a population acknowledging its immigrant status is also able to argue that it has become demonstrably local. This identification is grounded literally in their presence on the *tanah berkat*. In the local view, populations elsewhere that continue to trace origins to the pre-conquest Banda Islands and who might even declare a form of contemporary identification as Bandanese must also recognise that the inability of themselves and their displaced ancestors to continue an intimate connection to the Banda *keramat* over several centuries has compromised any claims they may wish to assert regarding prior rights in the islands. The legitimacy of the 'newer' residents is evident in the relations they have successfully maintained with *keramat* and *datu*, a relation intrinsic to the influence that the founder-figures are understood as exerting over general wellbeing in the islands, including the fecundity and accessibility of resources.

A narrative concerning the origins of Hatta Island illustrates this close connection, but also the agency of Allah working through the land, to which the founder-figures are themselves subject. The island was said to have come into existence as the result of a catastrophic event linked to the flooding of another nearby island named Skaru, whose people were *bikin kotor* (behaving immorally).¹² Only two people were *orang bersih* (righteous, good, literally 'clean'), a conjugal couple. Their deliverance and the punishment of the others coincides with Hatta Island's creation:

There was a large celebration ... an elderly person asked for water, wanted to drink. All the households refused ... those in one home, husband-wife, they provided it. The person told them: 'Do not go to sleep before twelve o'clock midnight. Shortly, a white chicken will come; climb onto it, shut your eyes; the chicken will fly. Don't open your eyes until the chicken's feet bump dry ground.' The chicken carried the couple to Hatta, on top of Fleeing Mountain. Hatta was newly risen from the sea. Skaru was drowned, the evil population all died. Therefore on Hatta Island, everyone is unsullied.¹³

The place where the righteous spouses landed in Hatta, Gunung Lari (Fleeing Mountain), has a *keramat* near the peak, said to mark the spot where they first touched the earth. Another less widespread version involved two chickens (male and female) who worked together to save husband and wife respectively. In this case, they did not land on the top of Gunung Lari, but rather at two other important local *keramat*—*keramat tanjung kenari* and *keramat tanjung buton*. These sites were about one kilometre apart on the northern coastline immediately in front of the site of the original *negeri* (ie the current *Kampung Lama*). The male landed first at that *keramat* closest to Skaru because the man was heavier, and the chicken became tired. Those who adhere to the first version tended to see the coastal sites as the two graves of the couple. Conversely, those embracing the second pointed to the mountain-top as their grave.

In any case, the role of the coastal *keramat* illustrates the close relation between these morally exemplary founder-figures and the land itself. They were linked to the erection of two *sasi* poles (*tiang sasi*) in the tidal zone (*maiti*) at either end of the same northern beach and tidal flats stretching for about one kilometre inbetween. Widespread in Maluku, *sasi* refers to periodic restrictions on the harvesting of a local resource – in this case, focused on trochus-shell—controlled by ritual action that is linked in turn to the sanction of ancestors and/or spirit figures.¹⁴ The placement of these poles effectively closes community access to the resource while their removal permits it. Both actions were simultaneous with the fundamental ritual activity associated with *adat* practice throughout the islands—the collective construction of *sirih* containers (*tempat sirih*) by men and women, which were then carried to several *keramat* for placement on their surface, along with Muslim prayer.¹⁵ On the island of Banda Besar, the placement of *tempat sirih* on *keramat* was sometimes associated with ensuring the supply of water in wells, the abundant fruiting of nutmeg and kenari trees, the successful growth of gardens and their protection from the depredations of wild pigs.

Banda *adat* practice is revealed here as (re-)inscribing an intimate connection between place, locality and ideas of community and their moral state. Not only was an entire population erased in the past because of the scale of impure action,

but the land itself descended under the waves. At the same time, the salience of such forces remained vivid in the contemporary period through the control they exercised over the fruitfulness of the local environment. Indeed, ritual procedures are deemed necessary not only to make particular sought-after resources available, but to ensure their abundance and the safety of those who gather them. The ultimate cause of local catastrophes throughout the *Bandas* (for example, the 1988 eruption of Gunung Api) were widely interpreted in terms of moral explanations, particularly the conduct of the communities most affected. The practice of *adat* rituals provides collective opportunities to acknowledge the character of locality and reaffirm and enact the ideals of moral community. A key point is that this concern with local founder figures and locally derived *adat* was not simply portrayed as an end in itself (i.e. obtaining some direct benefit) but represented as an engagement with the principal terms of locality itself. In a general sense, informants explicitly affirmed a shared perspective of the islands' importance and their now-obscured pre-colonial history. The *datu-datu* are not simply magically powerful or religiously potent figures—their autochthonous origins exemplify their closeness to the *tanah berkat*. They represent a compelling ontological source of localness, a relationship with the cultural terms of belonging to the Banda Islands as place.

The *Negeri Adat*

If the *keramat* themselves testify to the claim that the islands are blessed ground, then the practices occurring at these sites actively enact this perspective and provide a concrete expression of connection to place. *Keramat* played a central part in the context of regular (though infrequent) collective ritual action involving the residents of particular settlements. Concentrations of important local *keramat* offer legitimation and focus within such collective practice, providing evidence of the existence of a pre-colonial polity known as *negeri adat* occupying the same location as contemporary settlements. These *negeri adat* in turn provide the social boundaries of ritual participation, in addition to providing a source of more specific communal identification within the embracing notion of *orang Banda* (being *orang Lonthoir* or *orang Hatta*, for example).

The expression *negeri* is likely an archaic one. The *Hikayat Tanah Hitu*, an indigenous narrative chronicle concerning the Muslim polity of *Tanah Hitu* on the north coast of Ambon, uses the terms *negeri* and *tanah* interchangeably in referring to the Banda Islands—'*Tanah Bandan*' and '*Negeri Bandan*' (Manusama 1977: 193). Geertz (1980: 4) posits the term *negeri* as a variation of *negara*, a loan word derived from the Sanskrit *nagara*, originally meaning 'town' or 'city'. The Indonesian terms *negara*, *nagari* and *negeri* developed to encompass such diverse ideas as 'palace', 'capital', 'state' and 'realm' in addition to 'town' (Wisseman-Christie 1986: 67). Reflecting on the Malay use of *negeri*, Milner

(1982: 123) suggests: '[It] denotes a fairly large community ... an entrepot for foreign merchants, with some political influence over the surrounding territory.'

Certainly the Banda Islands were an important trading entrepot in Central Maluku, perhaps the most important in a local network of trade that included the island groups of Aru and Kei and the small archipelagic chain off eastern Seram (Ellen 1987). Early European traders recorded dealing with several distinct polities located throughout the islands, many of which directly paralleled the locations of named *negeri adat* in the contemporary Bandas. Geertz (1980: 121) also notes, however, that *negara* 'catches up a various field of meanings, but a different field than *state*, leading to the usual misconnections of intercultural translation when it is thus rendered'. As a case in point, Geertz notes the existence in Bali of a 'custom community' or '*negara adat*', which he depicts in part as

a stretch of sacred space ... all those living within its bounds, and therefore benefiting from its energies, were collectively responsible for meeting the ritual and moral obligations those energies entailed. (Geertz 1980: 128-9)

Traube (1986: 13) makes the Durkheimian-inspired observation that ritual obligations may be viewed as synonymous with social obligations—not simply an adjunct to relationships but rather constituting them as meaningful social forms. There are areas of important congruence here with local perspectives in the Banda Islands concerning *adat* obligations to the *negeri adat* and its *datu-datu*. These obligations were rarely expressed in the idiom of 'life' itself or couched in the idioms of derivation involving biological substance, as is widespread in eastern Indonesia.¹⁶ As noted, the *datu-datu* were not envisaged as ancestors, and neither did social groupings (such as 'houses') defined by systems of marriage exchange have a presence in the contemporary Banda Islands. But ancestry and marriage exchange are far from being the only form ideas of relatedness might take. In the Bandas, concerns of social derivation tended to emphasise instead the source of productive social relations, the physical and moral conditions understood as underpinning and enabling community existence.

In this respect, informants regularly interpreted the cooperation and mutual assistance inherent in *adat* practice as providing a model for contemporary life: 'following the example of the *negeri* people from the past' ('*mengikuti jejak daripada orang negeri dari dulu*' [Waer]) or 'similar to the way people behaved in the distant past, doing what is good, what is right' ('*semacam orang dulu-dulu punya cara, bikin baik, bikin bersih*' [Lonthoir]).¹⁷ Despite the absence of social groups defined in relation to apical ancestors, the Banda *negeri adat* can nevertheless be viewed as constituting origin groups of a kind, but one that emphasises concerns with the origins of community itself and the sustaining characters of communal life rather than personal derivation. This is reflected

vividly in the greater local salience of moral metaphors linked to religious ideals—particularly *bersih* and *kotor* (clean-pure vs. soiled-impure)—rather than biological or botanical idioms of (e.g. blood or roots-tips).

My research showed that the depth of an individual's personal genealogical knowledge usually comprised two or, more rarely, three prior generations. Very few individuals could recall genealogical detail of any kind beyond this. The origin of ancestors who came to the Bandas from elsewhere tended to be conceived in extremely general terms, such as 'Java', rather than involving specific locations.¹⁸ Many people simply stated that they did not know the geographic origins of personal forebears, and little systematic attempt was made to maintain the memories of distant ancestors. Carsten (1997: 271) describes a similar situation among an island-coastal community of Malay immigrants and stresses that this should not be interpreted solely in terms of the loss of important knowledge, as implied, for example, in descriptions such as 'structural amnesia'.

Instead, the absence of genealogical knowledge may play a critical positive role in the production of sociality among populations comprising a high level of impoverished immigrants. In this reading, analytical focus is given to the downward or forward-looking kinship practices that do exist as a productive orientation to social relations which work to integrate and cohere an otherwise diverse group: 'it may be more important to create kinship out of new ties than to remember ancestors whose identity has become largely irrelevant' (Carsten 1997: 270). It is unsurprising then that traditions associated with multiple points of ancestral origin should disappear over time, particularly as low-status groups or commoners regularly form the most mobile segments of a population. Under such conditions, 'kinship—or a sense of connectedness to place and people—is not derived from past ties but must be created in the future' (Carsten 1997: 272).

This kind of kinship orientation appears likely to have arisen also in the Bandas, where the bulk of colonial era immigrants were slaves, convicts and indentured labourers. As with Carsten's Malay-based study, Bandanese kinship is cognatic and tends to be 'wide' rather than 'deep': 'it stretches outwards, following degrees of siblingship, rather than backwards into the past' (Carsten 1997: 272).¹⁹ She notes also that the long-term process of creating relatedness under such circumstances might rely on strongly asserted elisions of difference: 'the emphasis is on absorbing and blending, rather than maintaining regional and cultural difference' (Carsten 1997: 270). In the Bandas, this insight also appears applicable. Social differentiation based on issues of origin within *negeri adat* was considered impossible because the entire population was described as the descendants of immigrants, a perspective often put with some insistence: 'we are [all] immigrants, there are no truly autochthonous [people] left ... where can you find them? They are gone ... [people of] truly autochthonous origins – there are none' ('*katorang pendatang, asli betul su tarada lai ... mo dapat orang*

asli di mana? Su habis ... asal asli betul—tarada' [Lonthoir]). A general principle of equality of origin appears almost axiomatic: all are *pendatang* (immigrants) and *campur* (mixed).

For the bulk of contemporary Bandanese, this overt rejection of social differentiation based on personal derivation has not eliminated the possibility of valorising the past. In emphasising the narratives of Banda as *tanah berkat*, the theme of incorporation and inclusion is given greater productive possibilities than the mere absence of ancestral detail. It facilitated a resiling from the kind of ethnic, religious and status differentiations that characterised colonial social life in the Banda plantations. In the post-colonial era, earlier distinctions that are still part of living memory between longer-term residents residing in hamlets outside the walled plantation compounds and more recent immigrants (many of whom were indentured labourers) who formed the bulk of the plantation workforce have fallen away, as a legacy of revolutionary-era nationalist sentiment and intermarriage.²⁰ In this context, the *negeri adat* emerged as an embracing ritual entity and a moral community, capable of cutting across religion and providing a vehicle of commonality rather than differentiation.

At the same time, informants suggested that their immigrant ancestors were obligated to become members of the *negeri* where they took up residence (*'musti masuk warga negeri'* [Lonthoir]), an act that involved adapting themselves to the *adat tanah* (*'sesuai diri dengan adat tanah'* [Lonthoir]) and, in so doing, joined the ritual activities associated with the existence of the *negeri* (*'ikut keadaan, kerja negeri'* [Selamon]). This principle remained predominant in thinking about *negeri* membership and identification. Local birth and local residence were the primary factors in allowing participation in the important ritual practices of the *negeri adat*, which in turn conferred and substantiated claims of local identification, being of the *negeri*—a *negeri* person (*orang negeri*).

An important enabling factor was undoubtedly an absence of social stratification based upon landownership. *Negeri adat* in the Banda Islands clearly express a mode of territorial ordering in the existence of the frontiers seen as separating different *negeri*. The significance of *negeri* membership for access to local resources was considerable, in particular for tree crops such as nutmeg and kenari nut, and also in some instances to marine biota (see, for example, Winn 2002). But the relation of the *negeri* to landownership was slight. A general recognition existed that much of the land was officially owned by the Government (*tanah negara*), a consequence of being formerly part of colonial plantation holdings. Nonetheless, a perspective I encountered frequently among ritual specialists suggested that no formal agreement existed between the Bandanese and the Dutch that involved passing ownership of the land to the latter, rather the use of the land only. In this view, the Indonesian Government has misconstrued what occurred historically and therefore, in taking possession

of Dutch property in the 1950s, erroneously included areas of extant traditional holdings within its general declaration of the plantation areas as *tanah negara*. There was a persistent hope that former plantation land currently used for individual residences, garden cultivation and tree-planting would at some future point be converted officially into individual *hak paki* (exclusive right of use), if not *hak milik* (exclusive right of property).

Nonetheless, state law did not determine local practices of landholding. While taking account of the regulatory regimes of the State (or, at least, local conceptions of what these might involve), landholding practices were less involved with normative concepts of property consisting of 'jural typification' and much more concerned with constellations of social relationships and the distribution of property among living people (von Benda-Beckmann and Taale 1996: 39-40). A general area of emphasis involved the recognition of effort, in particular clearing and planting. These acts set in motion a constellation of local views akin to those described as '*perusah*' (von Benda-Beckmann and Taale 1996: 45) and customary 'pioneer's rights' (White 1999: 244), established in the first instance by a person's efforts in clearing and cultivating or house-building. Ownership of trees and use-rights to gardens was viewed locally as constituting part of an individual's estate (*warisan* or *pusaka*), passed on to their heirs after death. This was in turn shaped by varied interpretations of Islamic inheritance law, the most prevalent being that sons should receive twice the portion of daughters. People often noted that in practice the land had been used and passed on to descendants over many years without interference from the Government, a situation they hoped would continue.

Adat and Being Muslim

The accessibility of the founder-figures through ritual practice, and through them, *tanah Banda*, existed as the centre and focus of the *Banda negeri*, acting in ontological terms as the personification and source of the link between land and territory, place and people. Participation in collective ritual practice not only constituted the *negeri* as a social-territorial unit—a ritual polity—but provided the basis for a population of predominantly diverse immigrant ancestry to claim a legitimate sense of Bandanese identification. *Adat* fundamentally offers the legitimate terms of access to and engagement with local place and identification. In this instance, this is achieved not through articulating lines of precedence and their outcomes in social organisation but by stressing the continuity of *adat* and the enduring and active presence of the *datu*, depicted not only as the source of autochthonous *adat*, but importantly also as Muslims. As Muslims, residents can construct a direct identifying link with the founders that is able to transcend questions of personal derivation and origins, particularly in the absence of local claims of autochthony.

The key mark of ‘deeper understanding’ in local terms was to speak about the religious meanings of *adat*. Among *adat* specialists (*orang adat*), *adat* practice was often represented as incorporating symbolic elements (*lambang*) relating to religion or, as one informant suggested, ‘reminders of religious matters’ (*peringatan hal-hal agama* [Hatta]). After completion of one significant, involved and lengthy *adat* ritual I spoke with the Lonthoir ritual leader about his approach to *adat* practice and its relation to *agama*. He stressed that they were in essence the same; the motivation and method followed the same indistinguishable path (*‘jalan bersama, bersatu’* [Lonthoir]). He stated that *adat* must not be understood as the forerunner to religion but rather as the *pembawa*, the ‘carrier’ or ‘bearer’ of religion. *Adat* practices contained and communicated religion and religious thought. He locked the index fingers of each hand around the other and pulled fruitlessly—there was no separating the two. A local healer (*dukun*) in *Negeri Selamon* offered the same image, saying that *adat* ‘carries religion’ (*‘membawa agama’*), and stated firmly that it was not possible to speak of them as distinct or different (*‘tarbisa bilang beda atau lai’*).

The substance of these kinds of interpretations was not confined to *adat* experts. A doxic, taken-for-granted quality existed in the broader community with respect to the fundamental commonality of Islam and *adat*. On the day of an important *adat* event in Lonthoir I woke early to hear the mosque playing Muslim songs through loudspeakers as it did on Islamic feast days such as *Maulud*, *Hari Korban* (*Hari Raya Haji*), *Lebaran* (*Idul Fitri/Hari Raya*) and *Isra Mi’Raj*.²¹ I asked a neighbour why the mosque was playing music. He answered: ‘because there’s a celebration in the *negeri* ... to make our place lively ... aren’t you aware of the festivities?’ (*‘Karna ada ramai di negeri ... supaya bikin katorang pung kampung ramai ... tarlihat ada ramai?’*). When I suggested the celebration was an *adat* occasion rather than a *hari raya*, he replied: ‘*Adat*, religion—it’s the same thing. When practising *adat* you have to use incense, don’t you?’ (*‘Adat, agama—sama. Kalau kerja adat musti paki kamanyan ka?’*). In pointing to the use of incense, he was identifying one of the defining elements of sacred action which applies equally to occasions of house-based gatherings for the recitation of Muslim prayers and various contexts of *adat* practice. This was true also of numerous other features, such as men and women wearing articles of attire locally defining of Muslim affiliation while engaging in *adat* ritual practice. The participation of the local imam was viewed as necessary, as was Muslim prayer involving Qur’anic readings.

Wherever it occurs in Indonesia (or Malaysia) the notion of *adat* rarely possesses a determinate meaning—its significance is highly contingent and potentially broadly embracing. *Adat* often signifies far more than ‘conduct’ or ‘custom’ (both of which are common glosses), frequently emphasising local ideas of a sacral code that provides a focus for the identity of a particular community (Milner 1982: 95). Indeed, early dichotomised representations of local *adat* versus

global Islam have been effectively undermined, for example, by Peletz (1981: 151) who characterises *adat* as 'a unitary, all-embracing concept encompassing an expansive set of institutions governing the conduct of all personal, kin, and local affairs'. Interpretations of *adat* as 'rules that constitute a way of life' (Bowen 1991: 25) or 'socio-culturally regulated behaviour' (Rousseau 1998: 7) far more clearly open the way for religious thinking to occur within the rubric of *adat*, in that rules or regulations operate in a moral universe that draws its legitimacy from some source. Warren (1993: 3), for example, agrees that *adat* must be understood as incorporating the moral idea of social consonance and the behavioural imperative of propriety (viz. Geertz 1983: 207-14). She maintains this involves an underlying religious-social vision involving the necessary correspondence of cosmic and human relationships towards which it is directed.

This view effectively serves to evoke the potential of *adat* as itself constituting a source of governance, in the sense that Government can be understood as heterogeneous and pervasive rather than emanating from a single controlling source such as the State. This perspective is akin to Foucault's 'Governmentality' neologism, which places stress on aspects of the relationship of the self to the self (Foucault 1988: 19) and the modes through which the individual establishes their relation to a rule and recognises themselves as obliged to put it into practice (Rabinow 1997: xvii). Though stopping short of a detailed elaboration of a generalised link between religion and Governmentality, Foucault does trace the power of religious subjectivity in the shaping of human life. Such analysis is developed throughout Foucault's explorations of the nature of power, religion and the subject, where Carrette (2000: 150) suggests religion emerges as a politics of self; for example, in describing processes of subjectification 'the way in which people are invited or incited to recognise their moral obligations' whether divine law revealed in a text, rational rule, natural law, a cosmological order (Foucault 1997: 264). The religious self is always a part of the historical technology that produces and maintains the self. Indeed, religion can be viewed as a politics of self, revealing the truth of what we are by the practices we perform. To paraphrase Ricoeur (1995: 70), sacred practice is a continuing interpretation of the substance regarded as grounding the community—for the community to address itself to a substantially different notion of the sacred would be to make a decision concerning its social identity.

In the case of the *Bandas*, local interpretations of *Banda adat* in terms of idealised discourses concerning morality and religion involves thinking about *negeri* communities as (in ideal terms) moral communities. This perspective incorporates local concern with issues of correct practices, Islam itself and identification as Muslims—indeed, it is through 'Islamic' discourse that the particular moral community regarding itself as 'Muslim' appears:

We should not assume that religion and culture make up any a priori system of meaning, and we should not look for what is essential in Islam; rather than that we should look for historical social formations within which Muslims themselves engage in discourse on what should be central to Islam. (Manger 1999: 9)

In the *Bandas*, ideas of the moral governance of Islam drew on a local vision involving the spirits of place—the Muslim *datu* who carried Islam to the islands, and the islands themselves as *tanah berkat*. The *negeri adat* find their *raison d'être* in these representations, so that *adat* (and ritual practice in particular) becomes a way of collectively preserving, transmitting and renewing the morality seen as inherent to Islam. In this sense *adat* practice in the *Banda negeri adat* could be said to act 'on behalf of the source' (viz. Lewis 1996: 167) with the notion of 'source' combining three dimensions that together effectively constitute a local moral community: the source of land, the source of sociality, the source of legitimacy (Lewis 1996: 167). In the *Banda* case, the source of the local was also the local source of Islam. This is the full significance of thinking about the idiom of *tanah berkat*.

Conclusion

The contemporary population of the *Banda* Islands ultimately embraces its status of being non-autochthonous (*bukan orang asli Banda*) while affirming the veracity of its claim to be truly local—authentically of the islands (*orang Banda asli*). This claim is rooted in their presence and engagement with the blessed land of *Banda* (*tanah Banda tanah berkat*) through membership of a *negeri adat* and participation in its defining ritual activities, a participation that for the bulk of residents is enhanced and deepened through their identification also as Muslims.

In *Banda*, representations of the islands as *tanah berkat* draw on understanding the islands as physically embodying the religious foundations of moral order that inform the locally cogent terms of moral community. As such, they appear as capable as nationalism in 'linking fraternity, power and time meaningfully together' (Anderson 1991: 36), and of doing so with considerable ontological potency with respect to locality and community. The implications for identification are summarised cogently by Battaglia (1999: 119): 'The struggle for identity reveals itself as based in claiming a *distinctive moral order*, rather than in maintaining national, ethnic or any other sort of mappable boundaries.'

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ENDNOTES

¹ 'Di daerah kepulauan ini ditemukan berbagai jenis golongan etnis yang berasal dari berbagai daerah di Indonesia disamping mereka yang berasal kepulauan Maluku sendiri ... Sudah barang tentu mereka datang dengan latar belakang budaya sendiri-sendiri ... Walaupun demikian kalau diamati dengan teliti adat istiadat yang berlaku, maka nampaknya unsur budaya asli tetap dominan. Jadi di sini anasir-anasir budaya pendatang telah terlebur dalam konteks kebudayaan asli.' (Uneputty et al. 1985: 27-8)

² Non-English words appearing in italics, particularly those appearing in direct quotes, reflect this form of Malay as spoken in the Banda Islands. Worthy of study, it varies in numerous respects from Indonesia's standard national Malay (known as Bahasa Indonesia) and also from Ambon Malay, which forms something of a lingua franca throughout central and increasingly also south-east Maluku (see Grimes 1991).

³ This paper is based on 20 months of field research in the Banda Islands conducted between 1996 and 1997 and in 1999 under the auspices of the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI) Jakarta, in cooperation with Pattimura University Ambon and with support from the Department of Anthropology, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, The Australian National University, Canberra.

Direct quotes from local informants in the Bandas can be dated to this period (i.e. between 1997-99). The location of each interlocutor concerned is provided in square parenthesis immediately after the quote.

⁴ I am indebted to Tom Goodman for bringing this text to my attention, located among the papers of the late Swedish anthropologist John-Erik Elmberg at the National Museum of Ethnography in Stockholm.

⁵ Based on fieldwork in 1996-97 and in 1999. Knowledge of the name Lewerang was restricted to ritual specialists who described it as the original or authentic name (*nama asli*) and reserved it for use on ritual occasions.

⁶ Kaartinen (2001) notes a version of this narrative occurring within a group in the Kei Islands tracing descent from refugees that fled the Banda Islands during the Dutch conquest in 1621.

⁷ As a result, some informants claim that the Bandas are entirely free of *suanggi*. Others suggest they are able to arrive by more conventional means such as inter-island shipping.

⁸ Geertz (1980: 106) defines *sakti* in its original Sanskrit as 'the energy or active part of a deity' and notes of the cognate *sekti* in Bali that it is a term used for "the sort of transordinary phenomenon that elsewhere is called *mana*, *baraka*, *orenda*, *kramat* ... a divinely inspired gift or power, such as the ability to perform miracles'. The terms *sakti* and *keramat* were not equivalent in the way that they were used in the Bandas. In daily use in Lonthoir, *keramat* was a noun, not an adjective. It referred to a particular kind of site, but not to descriptions of the qualities of that site (as the term often did elsewhere, particularly in the Malay Peninsula). Common statements such as 'I am going to a *keramat*' ('*mo pi keramat*') are not possible using *sakti*—one can go to a *sakti* place (*tempat sakti*) but not to a *sakti*. Objects could be *sakti* (such as the heirloom objects of the community) but are never described as *keramat*. Nevertheless, *keramat* were referred to occasionally as '*tempat keramat*', suggesting this might once have been the common usage.

⁹ The idea of conception through partaking of a certain food is a widespread motif throughout the Austronesian-speaking world. In a Malay context, a pomegranate-related conception story occurs in

the *Hakiyat Salindong Lima*, recorded by Overbeck (1924: 280-1). Carved pomegranates adorn the wooden *mimbar* or sermon-platform of one Banda mosque; another has a carved pomegranate at a central point in the internal ceiling immediately below the central external minaret.

¹⁰ *Keramat* in peninsular Malaysia are described regularly as shrines (e.g. Linehan 1951: 151; bin Mohd. Yatim 1985: 20; Peletz 1988: 113). The Javanese *kramatan*, as among the better-documented sites of this kind in Indonesia, has also been described as a shrine (Woodward 1989: 170). The expression 'tomb-shrines' has been used to refer in general terms to holy places associated with holy people that attract building, renovation or financial support from ruling figures—a practice described as widespread from Morocco to Indonesia (Renard 1996: 179). In Bangladesh, Gardener provides an account of *pir* (Sufi saint) cults whose graves are 'venerated as shrines' (1999: 40). Chambert-Loir and Reid (2002: xxii) note that 'the worship of saints is so common that it can be regarded as a characteristic of Islamic praxis'. Given disputes among Muslims concerning the practice (Wahabists are particularly vehement in their opposition to this practice, which they view as a near-definitive feature of the Sufist traditions they reject), the term 'veneration' is probably less potentially pejorative than 'worship'. Even among Indonesian Sunni Muslims, the issue of the ability of Muslim holy figures to intercede directly on behalf of a petitioner either with Mohammed or God is frequently controversial.

¹¹ In discussing the latter, Banda interlocutors would speak of *nenek moyang*, *moyang-moyang* or *nenek-nenek*.

¹² Skaru becomes quite accessible at neap tides, and attracts Hatta residents as a site for gathering marine biota.

¹³ 'Ada pesta besar ... jadi satu orang tertua minta air, mo minum. Semua rumah tarkasih ... dorang satu rumah, laki-bini, dorang kasih. Dia bilang: "tarboleh tidur sampai jam duabelas malam. Nanti, ayam putih datang; naik di atas, tutup mata; nanti ayam terbang. Tarboleh buka mata sampai ayam pung kaki tonka di tanah kerin." Ayam bawah orang ke Hatta, di atas Gunung Lari. Hatta baru tumbu di laut ... Skaru tinggilam, rakyat jehat semua mati. Jadi di Pulau Hatta, semua bersih.' (Hatta). Some informants suggested the old man was Mohammed in disguise.

¹⁴ Zerner (1994: 81) describes the term *sasi* as originating in 'Makassar Malay'. In the Banda Islands, the term is associated with a notion of Maluku Malay (Bahasa Maluku) and sometimes Ambon Malay (Bahasa Ambon).

¹⁵ *Tempat sirih* are usually circular containers woven from the leaves of immature coconut palm fronds, though on Hatta they are more often fashioned as flat layered 'plates' made from banana leaves. Both contain flower petals, cigarettes, loose tobacco, coins and the ingredients required for betel-nut chewing. In the Bandas, as is common throughout Indonesia, the latter includes powdered lime or *kapur*, betel leaf or *daun sirih* (from the climbing vine *Piper betle*), slivers of areca nut known as *pinang* or *pinang sirih* (the seed of the palm *Areca catechu*) and crumbled *gambir* (an astringent extract obtained from the leaves and shoots of the tropical shrub *Uncaria gambir*). Generally, men obtain the fronds, construct the containers and carry them to the *keramat*, while women prepare the ingredients and fill the containers. All these actions tend to be prefaced with prayer.

¹⁶ In Traube's East Timor context, for example, these obligations are rooted in idioms of indebtedness, reciprocity and balance between groups identified as life- (or wife)-givers and life- (wife)-receivers that parallel and iterate an asymmetric dependency characterising human relations with cosmic beings: 'The debt that is owed to the various social sources of life and well-being is also the debt that is owed by society as a whole to the encompassing cosmos. Social and cosmological obligations intermingle in ritual contexts' (Traube 1986: 14).

¹⁷ For a comparative linguistic discussion of closely related cognates of the Banda causative '*bikin*' (also *biking*, *beking*) in Ambonese, Ternate and Menado Malays, see Litamahuputty (1997).

¹⁸ An exception to this is that component of Banda's population that traces their origins to the Tukang Besi Islands, who are generally able to point to a specific island in this group as their ancestors' point of origin.

¹⁹ The greater breadth and flexibility of affiliation provided by cognatic modes of relatedness offer another positive advantage in small island settings, such as the Bandas. It facilitates emigration as a response to local population pressures through providing abundant ties to kin residing elsewhere. The Banda Islands produce a constant flow of more or less permanent migrants to numerous areas, especially Ambon, Tual (Kei Islands) and Dobo (Aru Islands) in Maluku Province and Fak-Fak in Papua Province.

²⁰ This is not to suggest, of course, that other post-colonial stratifications are not present in the Banda Islands as exist elsewhere in Indonesia.

²¹ *Maulud*: Mohammed's birthday; *Hari (Raya) Korban* (or *Hari Raya Haji* or *Idul Adha*): celebration of the Mecca pilgrimage; *Lebaran* (or *Idul Fitri*): the end of the fasting month of Ramadan; *Isra Mi'Raj*: Mohammed's miraculous night ascension to heaven.