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PIONEERS AND PERKENIERS: THE BANDA ISLANDS IN THE 17TH CENTURY

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Introduction

The year 1621 marks a watershed in the history of the Banda Islands. In that year, the Dutch United East India Company (*Vereenigde Oost-indische Compagnie*, VOC) completed its conquest of the main islands, a campaign in which the greater part of the population of Banda perished. From then on, the Dutch controlled virtually the whole of this little archipelago. The VOC colonized it, and from the settlers, slaves, and other migrants grew a wholly new society, with unique features. This contribution deals with the early history of this new society.

One would expect Banda to be a much-studied subject. As an early example of total colonization by a western power, it would be expected to provoke curiosity, the more so because the conquest and colonization of these islands was documented extensively, in fact, on an unprecedented scale. The wealth of source material enables us to reconstruct a story that may clarify important structural features, such as colonial modes of exploitation, interregional and global trade patterns, as well as the political, social, and cultural developments of a newly created society. On top of this, the sources paint a vivid, sometimes dramatic, and realistic picture of human effort and struggle in seemingly paradisiacal surroundings.

Yet, Banda has been curiously neglected. It would not be true to say that the history of these islands has been completely ignored, or that it remains unknown to this day, but a comprehensive history based on a detailed analysis of the sources from a modern viewpoint has yet to be written. Most of the works that mention Banda deal only superficially with the islands, or treat them in the margin of other, broader historical problems. Nearly all historiography that focuses on Banda is either ob-

solescent,¹ or apologetic;² other works are too biased,³ or too limited thematically⁴ and chronologically.⁵ The one work that does treat the whole of Bandanese history on a general level is not based on a structural analysis of the main sources, or at least does not mention them.⁶ The rest of what is written about Banda contains personal,⁷ sometimes very superficial,⁸ or propagandistic,⁹ views, based on traditional histori-

¹See, for instance, P. A. Tiele and J. E. Heeres, *Bouwstoffen voor de geschiedenis der Nederlanders in den maleisischen Archipel*, 3 vols. ('s-Gravenhage, 1886–1895); J. F. R. S. Crawford, *History of the Indian Archipelago: Containing an account of the manners, arts, languages, religions, institutions, and commerce of its inhabitants*, 3 vols. (Edinburg, 1820); C. J. Temminck, *Coup d'oeul général sur les possessions Néerlandaises dans l'Inde Archipelagique*, 3 vols. (Leiden, 1846–1849).

²See R. de Klerk, J. E. van Mijlendonk, W. A. Alting, *Rapport over's compagnies regt op de Groote Oost* (Batavia, 1868); L. Kiers, *Coen op Banda: De conqueste getoetst aan het regt van den tijd* (Utrecht, 1943); C. Gerretson, Coens eerherstel, in *De Gids* 107 (1943), pp. 1–20, 55–83, 105–147.

³See the introductory parts in J. K. J. de Jonge, *De opkomst van het Nederlandsch gezag in Oost-Indië: Verzameling van onuitgegeven stukken uit het oud-koloniaal archief*, 13 vols. ('s-Gravenhage, 1862–1909), otherwise (like Tiele and Heeres, *Bouwstoffen*) a very useful source.

⁴See, for instance, J. Mooij, *Geschiedenis der protestantsche kerk in Nederlandsch-Indië* (Weltevreden, 1923); or V. I. van de Wall, *De Nederlandsche oudheden in de Molukken* ('s-Gravenhage, 1928).

⁵See the excellent articles of N. P. van den Berg, “Vijf jaren op Banda, 1633–1638,” *Tijdschrift voor de Indische Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde (TBG)* 18 (1872): 332–366; and V. I. van de Wall, “Bijdrage tot de geschiedenis der perkeniers 1621–1671,” *TBG* 74 (1934).

⁶W. A. Hanna, *Indonesian Banda: Colonialism and its aftermath in the Nutmeg Islands* (Philadelphia, 1978).

⁷See P. C. van der Wolk, “Tropen-romantiek: Geschiedenis van onze nootmuskaat-cultuur (uit de geschiedenis der Oost-Indische Compagnie op de Banda-eilanden),” *Cultura* 32 (1920): 100–113, 157–168, 190–201, 259–269, 307–314, 344–354, 376–385, and 33 (1921): 60–85; or H. Breitenstein, “Twee jaar op Banda,” in *De aarde en haar volken* (n.p., 1916), pp. 73–86.

⁸See, for instance, A. S. Bickmore, “A description of the Banda Islands,” *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society* 12 (1868): 324–334; J. Finn, “Beschrijving van de Bandasche eilanden, en de gesteldheid van derzelver bewoners,” *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch-Indië* 3 (1840): 385–396; or H. O. van der Linden, *Banda en zijne bewoners* (Dordrecht, 1873).

ographical opinions,¹⁰ or on Bandanese folklore.¹¹ Such works also regularly appear in the form of—admittedly—quite readable and informative travel stories,¹² which however are not very penetrating when it comes to historical explanation.

All this criticism certainly does not aim to depreciate the existing literature, but simply to point out its limitations, and the resulting difficulties for a more complete historical reconstruction from a modern—postcolonial, or at least less biased—perspective. For a fresh attempt at historical explanation we must first return to the sources.

In my Ph.D. thesis¹³ I certainly do not intend to write a general history of Banda through the centuries. I merely propose to contribute to that effort, hopefully in a fundamental way. The thesis covers a vital period of Bandanese history. It will be written on the basis of extensive research of all available archival sources in the *Algemeen Rijksarchief* (General State Archives) in The Hague, Netherlands, as well as relevant documents elsewhere that complement or correct this information. To keep the project feasible in the face of such a wealth of material, I have

⁹Since the end of the 19th century, a whole range of often personally involved authors have published pleas for investment in, and development of the then waning Banda Islands. See, for instance, P. C. Lans, *Rozengain, een der eilanden van de Bandagroep, een goudmijn in de toekomst: Plan tot ontginning en ontwikkeling van dat eiland* (Rotterdam, 1872); O. Kamerlingh Onnes, *Banda nutmeg and mace: Being an account of their history, cultivation, trade and use* (Amsterdam, 1900); P. C. van der Wolk, Een eereschuld jegens Banda, *De Indische Gids* 43 (1921): 718–725.

¹⁰Usually based on the not always reliable F. Valentijn, *Oud- en nieuw Oost-Indien*, 8 vols. (Dordrecht, 1724–1726).

¹¹See anon., “Prinses Adeka: Een Bandanesche legende,” *Eigen haard: Geïllustreerd volkstijdschrift* 44 (1918): 560–562.

¹²See, for instance, Q. M. R. VerHuell, *Herinneringen van eene reis naar de Oost-Indien*, 2 vols. (Haarlem, 1835–1836); J. Olivier Jz., *Reizen in den Molukschen Archipel, naar Makassar, ..., in het gevolg van den gouverneur-generaal van Nederlandsch-Indië, in 1824 gedaan ...*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam, 1834–1837); H. W. Ponder, *In Javanese waters: Some sidelights on a few of the countless, lovely, little known islands scattered over the Banda Sea and some glimpses of their strange and stormy history* (London, 1944); J. E. Elmberg, *Islands of tomorrow* (London, 1956).

¹³To be published in 1996, under the title *Pioneers and Perkeniers. The population and exploitation of the Banda Islands, ca. 1620–1670*.

confined my research to some five decades following 1620. This covers the formative period just after the conquest, as well as the next two or three generations of settlers, during which production grew to surpass the pre-1621 level, and a new society materialized.

In this article, I will first go into the events preceding the conquest of 1621 to put the new Banda in historical perspective. Then I will roughly sketch the fundamentals of the new society after the conquest, based on both the existing literature and on some of the results of my own archival research. In doing so I will also try to shed some light on my assumptions and explain my intentions in writing a history of Banda during this period, as well as the way in which I intend to achieve this. Finally, I will try to look at this case from a wider angle, by comparing it with a preliminary theoretical model of—in my view—striking similarity. This will put Banda in an entirely different light.

Dutch conquest

In 1599 the Dutch first reached the ten small islands of Banda,¹⁴ at that time the sole source of nutmeg and mace.¹⁵ They were received cordially by the Bandanese, who were trying to get rid of the Portuguese. Since the arrival of Antonio d’Abréu in 1511, the Bandanese had cautiously but stubbornly resisted Portuguese initiatives to gain a foothold on the islands and spread the Catholic faith.¹⁶ Now they had finally found powerful allies, who were all too willing to help them. The VOC did indeed chase out the Portuguese, but when they also built a fort and a trading post on Neira the Bandanese soon found out that now they were

¹⁴For the sake of clarity I will use the names mentioned in the Dutch sources (with the present names added in parentheses): Neira (Naira), Lonthoir (Lontar or Bandar Besar), Goenoeng Api (Gunung Api), Rosengain (Pulau Hatta), Ay (Ai), Roen (Run), Vrouweneiland or Kraka (Pulau Karaka), Kapal (Manukang), Pisang (Pulau Syahrir), and Neilaka (Naialaka). The more distant uninhabited Swangi (Suwangi) is not always reckoned to be part of the Banda Islands.

¹⁵An extensive, informative account of Dutch presence and activities until 1621 is J. A. van der Chijs, *De vestiging van het Nederlandsch gezag over de Banda-eilanden (1599–1621)* (Batavia, 1886). The following narrative leading up to the conquest is mainly based on this work.

¹⁶An excellent account of Portuguese activities in the islands is J. Villiers, “Trade and society in the Banda Islands in the sixteenth century,” *Modern Asian Studies* 15 (1981): 723–750.

worse off with the Dutch than with their former adversaries. The Dutch had specific ideas about the trade in nutmeg and mace, and they possessed the military power to impose their demands. They wanted the Bandanese to commit themselves to trade the spices exclusively with them. This monopoly was to be effectuated by contracts between the VOC and the Bandanese authorities. Whether the *orangkaya* did not understand these Western-style documents, or remained uncommitted to them because they had been forced to sign away their economic freedom under threat of the awesome maritime and military presence of the Dutch, the fact remains that the contracts were breached as soon as the ink was dry. Being dependent on overseas trade for the purchase of food and other vital commodities, the Bandanese continued to barter their nutmeg and mace with other nations, just as they had always done. They thereby earned themselves a reputation as unreliable “allies” in the eyes of the indignant Dutch.

Several attempts to settle the matter only resulted in disturbed relations with the indigenous population, culminating in an attack on a diplomatic delegation in 1609. Forty-six Dutch, including the leading officer Pieter Verhoeven and his staff, were massacred. Growing English competition for the Bandanese spice monopoly meanwhile tilted the balance even more strongly in favor of military options. By 1614, the Company’s directors in the Netherlands, *Heeren XVII*, were willing to realize the long contemplated conquest of the islands, even if that meant destroying the people and suffering great financial outlay. Violence toward the Bandanese, which had until then merely taken the form of relatively small-scale punitive expeditions (as in 1610 when the Dutch had vainly attacked Ay), now came to be used as a strategy. In 1615 the Dutch for the first time tried to conquer Ay, but they were repulsed just as they had been before. However, strong suspicion of English meddling in “their” affairs, and regional competition from Makassarese and Javanese traders convinced the Dutch to persevere. So, in the following year, 240 Dutch and 23 Japanese invaded and conquered Ay, despite fierce resistance. Many defenders were killed and another 400 (many women and children among them) drowned while trying to flee to the nearby island of Run.

The fall of Ay did not fail to make a strong impression on the Lonthoiese. Despite this, they soon resumed trading with their former partners, including the English who had nestled in Run and on Nailaka, a tiny, clifflike, easily defended stronghold to the north of that island. The

contract policy of the Dutch thus never had the desired effect. For this reason, Governor-General Jan Pieterszoon Coen decided to settle the matter once and for all. At the end of 1620, shortly after the consolidation of the Dutch in Jacatra, which safeguarded their food supplies, he led an expeditionary force of 19 VOC ships manned by 1,655 European and 286 Asian troops. In Banda a local contingent of troops and 36 indigenous vessels were added to this formidable force.

What followed in the next few weeks is certainly one of the blackest pages in the history of Dutch overseas expansion. In a ruthless and bloody campaign Coen and his commanders tried to bring the main island of Lonthoir under Dutch occupation. After initial swift success by the Dutch, the *orangkaya* turned to Coen to try to bargain for a new contract that would have given in completely to Dutch demands. Instead, the main leaders were captured and tried, and 48 of them were beheaded by the able Japanese executioners who had joined the Dutch as mercenaries. The families of the *orangkaya* (some 789 old men, women and children) were shipped off to Batavia; some of them were put to work as slaves and ended up as far away as Ceylon (present Sri Lanka). On seeing the destruction that the Dutch caused to the coastal villages, and the impossibility of coming to terms with them, the Lonthoireses who had survived the invasion fled into the mountains. Over the following months their strongholds were besieged by the Dutch, who had great trouble conquering them. In the end, large groups of despairing men, women, and children jumped to their death off the cliffs near Selamma or chose to starve, rather than surrender. Only a few managed to build boats and escape by night to the Kai Islands, Seramlaut, Kisar, and other small islands of the Goram Islands. The small, terrified population of the outer island Rosingain was deported to the main islands and subsequently spread over the nutmeg plantations as forced laborers. After the conquest, only about 1000 of the estimated 15,000 inhabitants of the Banda Islands remained, among them a few hundred unaffected on Run. Solely because of the English presence, this island was not involved in the fighting. Lacking effective protection, however, the inhabitants were forced by Coen to enter into new contractual obligations.

After this, VOC authority over the Banda Islands was virtually complete. Intermittent English presence on Nailaka and claims to Run did not seriously bother the Dutch, even though they did evacuate the island for security reasons and extirpated all the nutmeg trees. Subsequently the

island was left to grow wild, and cattle were allowed to roam free to provide food for the other islands. In 1638, the English were denied access to Run because the Dutch feared that they would use it as a base to smuggle nutmeg from Banda to Makassar, then a free haven of trade opposition to the Dutch in Indonesian waters. To prevent this, VOC officials visited Run annually thereafter. English exploitation subsequently remained a dead letter. The matter was not settled until the 1667 Peace of Breda, when the English finally gave up their claims, and the Dutch formally gained complete possession of the Banda Islands.¹⁷

All this serves to prove the determination with which the Dutch executed their monopolist strategy. However, they confronted huge problems when they took possession of the islands in 1621. The whole of Bandanese society was destroyed. The islands were almost devoid of inhabitants, and the people of Rosingain—and later Run as well—were rooted from their villages and spread over Neira, Lonthoir, and Ay. The stubborn resistance on Lonthoir posed an extra problem that lasted for months after the conquest. Prior to effective occupation, some 2,000 defenders¹⁸ had to be driven from the mountains, for they threatened the exploitation of economic resources. With the exception of Ay, economic activities in most islands had come to an almost complete standstill by then. In such a state, the islands could only generate costs, without any benefits, for the Company. To reap any fruit from its military success, the VOC would have to harness all its organizational skills and resume production of the highly profitable nutmeg and mace as soon as possible. To this end, Governor-General Coen left his commander Martinus Sonck with specific instructions.

¹⁷At that time, the Dutch considered it a good bargain to gain possession over Run as well as part of the Guyana Coast, nowadays called Surinam, while in return they handed over their North American settlement called Nieuw Amsterdam to the English, who subsequently baptized it New York.

¹⁸Among them 600 men; estimate by Coen in his letter to *Heeren XVII*, 6 May 1621. See, for this and other letters of Coen mentioned, H. T. Colenbrander and W. Ph. Coolhaas, eds., *Jan Pieterszoon Coen: Bescheiden omtrent zijn verblijf in Indië*, 7 vols. ('s-Gravenhage, 1919–1943), notably vol. 1 (containing letters from Coen to his superiors), in this case p. 631.

Coen had never made it a secret that he intended to plant colonies of Dutch and other Europeans in Asia.¹⁹ They would provide the VOC with basic needs, as well as maintain an inter-Asian trade network—though not in the Company’s monopoly goods, of course—that would provide a foundation for Company operations. In Coen’s view, permanent settlers would greatly reduce the Company’s payroll and increase the revenues from tolls and taxes. Business in Asia was thus expected to be self-supporting, leaving the profits of the spice trade entirely to the motherland. In this manner, the expensive and risky transfer of minted money to Asia could be reduced to a necessary minimum as well. Another advantage of permanent settlement was that in times of war the colonists could quickly be mobilized to defend the Company, on whose well-being they singularly depended.²⁰ In Coen’s view, a policy of permanent settlement would be the cheapest, safest, and most stable way to do business in Asia. Banda provided a chance to carry out this plan.

The VOC formed the outward “shell” of the colony’s life. It took care of maritime and military protection (ships and forts) and infrastructure (transport, buildings, water basins and wells, and facilities for home industries). It also imported the basic requirements necessary to run the new settlement, for—apart from some fruits, vegetables, and livestock—Banda lacked nearly everything to support a community. The VOC committed itself to supply slaves, and to keep a stock of rice sufficient for about one year, selling this at fixed prices to the settlers.²¹

¹⁹His ideas can be traced back to suggestions made by earlier influential VOC officials such as Cornelis Matelieff de Jonge in 1608, Pieter Both and Jacques l’Hermite de Jonge in 1612. On Coen’s ideas, see for instance his letter to Heeren XVII, 10 November 1614 (Colenbrander and Coolhaas, *Jan Pieterszoon Coen*, vol. 1, pp. 52–92, esp. 56–57, 88–89). Years later, his opinions about the best way to control Asian trade had not yet changed significantly. See his *Advijns aen den gouverneur generael Pieter de Carpentier* (a “memorandum of transfer” upon his return to the Republic, 31 January 1623) and his *Vertoogh van de staet der Vereenichde Nederlanden in de quartierien van Oost-Indien*, 20 June 1623, both published in *Kronijk van het Historisch Genootschap gevestigd te Utrecht (KHG)* 9 (1853): 67–95 and 95–129, esp. 118–119.

²⁰For that matter, all Europeans, whether or not they were Dutch had to pledge allegiance to the United Provinces. (Many were fortune-seekers from all over the continent.)

²¹Slaves (aged between 15 and 30 years), usually recorded as movables, not as inhabitants, were sold at 40 rials. Rice cost 40 rials per *last*. (A *reaal* or *real*

In a manner similar to the partition of Ay after 1616, the arable land was divided into lots, called *perken*,²² and handed out to European immigrants, henceforth called *perkeniers*. Actually this was done on a tenancy basis, although colonists who received a *perk* soon looked upon themselves as private owners.²³ Along with the higher ranks of VOC officials, they considered themselves the upper crust of the new society. The initial division of the total area was only completed in 1628, although this did not mean that everything was settled and unchanged from then on. In the subsequent years, *perken* were quite often enlarged through the acquisition of part or all of neighboring plots, or diminished when the *perken* of deceased planters were divided among sons or debtors. It is thus very hard to give a quick survey of how many *perken* there were at this stage, or who the proprietors were.

Scope of inquiry

At this point, I would like to interrupt the brief description of the new society, to say a little more about the assumptions and procedures of my research. Studying a past society, I think it is impossible to separate the different fields of human activity without endangering the total view, or at least reducing its validity. Fortunately, Banda is a tiny geographical region, with a population of only about 4,000 in the mid 1620s, and the sources are not so abundant that I have to limit myself chronologically in a way that would detract from the project as a whole. These geographic and demographic limitations enable me to study the political, economic, social, and religious activities of the Bandanese population during a period of some fifty years, keeping an eye open for demographic, cultural, and psychological developments or incidents as well. Information on *any* field of human activity will contribute to the reconstruction of the story

van achten, roughly equivalent to a *rijksdaalder* or 2½ guilders, was at that time valued at 55 *stuivers*. A *last* weighed about 3,000 *Hollandsche ponden* [Dutch pounds], a little less than 1,500 kilograms).

²²Literally “parks,” meaning orchards.

²³There are no contracts or title deeds left, nor even references to any, so it has to be assumed that these were never drawn up. The fact that the alienation of a *perk* was to be registered and taxed at a quarter of the selling price, indicates that the Company kept regarding the *perkeniers* as tenants, instead of legal proprietors.

of this colonial society. This wide range of interest is exemplified by some of the questions that I have formulated:

- What was the policy of the VOC towards Banda? Was it restrictive, stimulating, tolerant, indifferent?
- How did the partition of *perken* and subsequent tenure take place? When did the *perkeniers* begin to look upon their lot as private property?
- Who were the *perkeniers*? What was their country of origin, their background? Where did they settle? Did they bring their wives and families, or did they start a family in Asia, with Asian wives or concubines?
- What was the role of the slaves? How many were there, where did they come from, how were they treated? Did creolization, marooning, or manumission occur?
- What was the position of other inhabitants, for instance, the European or Asian free-traders?
- What was the extent of the economic activities? What was the production, the proceeds, the quality of spices?
- What form did the local economic structure take? How was economic ownership divided? Was there any stratification based on wealth, other than the division between European planters and Asian slaves?
- What sorts of lives did the new Bandanese live? What were their religions, (sub)cultural activities, and occupations? To what degree was all this determined by the structure of the economic activities?
- Did this settlement really develop toward a society in any way comparable to any other in the VOC's chartered area?

These are all questions that can be answered, at least partially, by systematically screening the sources, paying special attention to material not yet—or only crudely—analyzed. This includes statistical data on demographic aspects of the colony, as well as production and transportation figures that might indicate how much nutmeg and mace left the islands, and how much actually arrived in Batavia. Coupled with the figures for the quantities aboard the fleets bound for home, this would indicate what the volume of production was, and the effect it might have had on inter-Asian trade, whether legal or illegal.

There is indeed a lot of source material on the Dutch activities in Banda. The presence of the VOC during the 17th and 18th century generated a steady, ever-increasing flow of letters, reports, and other documents sent either to Batavia or to the directors in the Netherlands. Scru-

tiny of such documents offers the possibility of finding answers to questions that have not yet been posed. But they cannot tell us the whole story, unfortunately. They push us in the direction of a Europeanized, or at least Company-centered, story of the kind we have so often seen in the past. That would not do justice to the other inhabitants of Banda, nor would it meet my goal of describing Bandanese society as a whole, instead of only the best-documented part of it. I hope to be able to offer insights into the lives of the colonists and the other inhabitants of the new Banda as well, including the slaves and freeholders. Of these last categories we know barely anything. It should at least be possible to document the quantitative aspects of this part of the population, even if it remains difficult to develop a sufficiently clear view of their actual lives and occupations.

For this, it is necessary to consult sources other than the VOC's. Unfortunately, there are not many left. Only a few officials, for different reasons, kept personal diaries or took notes.²⁴ Many private records and documents of this kind are missing. The *perkeniers* themselves certainly were not very literate; that much is clear about their cultural background. Thus, the careful, imaginative scrutiny of Company sources for circumstantial evidence is all that is left when scarce private documents or other letters and reports fail to provide a clear picture. It remains to be seen whether this will prove a flaw in the project.

Life in the new Banda

How then did Company officials, *perkeniers*, slaves and other inhabitants create a new Banda after 1621? Although at least on Lonthoir most villages and buildings had been destroyed, the greater part of the nutmeg trees were undamaged. Even so, it took some time to clear the grounds of debris and to weed the severely neglected orchards in order to allow proper harvesting. But due to a continuous cycle of three harvests per year, production could basically be resumed as soon as the required workforce had been brought in.²⁵ In this effort, the remaining members

²⁴See notably the Gijssels Collection in the *Baadische Landesbibliothek* in Karlsruhe, Germany (also on film in the *Algemeen Rijksarchief* in The Hague), as well as the personal diary of Rev. Wouter Melchiorisz. Vitriarius in the *Gemeente Archief* in Amsterdam.

²⁵Even so, it took years before the Dutch found out about the best way to grow, harvest, and pack the spices. Most of their horticultural and agricultural

of the indigenous population were used,²⁶ although the Company preferred to deport them and replace them with slaves of overseas origin, since the Bandanese were regarded as untrustworthy and generally reluctant to contribute to production. Besides, there were not enough Bandanese left. So the Company brought in shiploads of slaves, who were usually acquired from regional slave markets on the coasts where the VOC traded, if they were not prisoners. On Ay there was a substantial group from Siauw, taken there after 1616. After the final subjugation of Banda in 1621, slaves were imported from Gujerat, Malabar, Coromandel, the Malay peninsula, Java, Borneo, coastal China, Bouton, several parts of Maluku, Kai, and Aru. Spanish, Javanese, and Makassarese prisoners were added. During the first decades the Company had to ensure a continuous stream of slaves because many of them died—due to poor treatment, harsh conditions, illness (especially beriberi), and sheer misery—or tried to flee overseas. During these formative years there was hardly any creolization, but later the population appears to have stabilized, since the import of slaves on a grand scale (hundreds at a time) diminished.

The *perkeniers* were entitled to a specified number of slaves,²⁷ necessary to work the land, maintain the trees, weed, and to harvest and process the nutmeg and mace. Of course, these forced laborers had to be fed, clothed, housed, and controlled in their daily work as well as for security reasons. All this was the task of the *perkeniers*, who received full material and military support and protection from the Company officials and soldiers stationed in the forts and strongholds. But neither these soldiers nor their civilian masters could prevent the escape of slaves from the islands, especially during the first years. Although the

knowledge appears to have come from the former owners and workers of the land, the enslaved Bandanese.

²⁶Some of the women and children who had been transported to Batavia were returned to Banda as well, to work as slaves in their own country. This was done because they were judged to be a security risk to the Batavia population, as they were all living together in a designated quarter of the new city.

²⁷Actually the size of a perk was expressed in *zielen* (souls), that is to say, the number of laborers necessary to work the area. This could differ substantially according to differences in terrain. For instance, Ay is very flat and easily manageable, while a great part of Lonthoir is quite mountainous and difficult to tend.

escapees usually stole away in small groups, the frequency of escapes became a steady trickle that greatly worried the planters and Company officers. Escapes combined with sickness, death, and the general negative attitude of the slaves caused labor shortages that endangered the harvesting and processing. Even more disturbing was the fact that the enslaved Bandanese, especially those deported from Run, usually escaped with the help of their compatriots who had previously fled to Seram and neighboring islands, and had settled there after 1621. During moonlit nights these maroons came in with *kora-kora* to the outer coasts of Lonthoir or to Rosingain, sometimes even into the passages between Neira and Lonthoir, and as far as Run. When caught, they were away before the Dutch could get them, swiftly making for their hideouts in their small craft. This even forced the Dutch to acquire and man *orembai* and *kora-kora* in order to patrol the seas around Banda at night, occupying a home guard of colonists, supplemented with whatever soldiers and sailors the garrisons could spare. Also, extra fortified strongholds had to be built on the outer coasts of Lonthoir, controlling comparatively deserted bays or anchoring places such as Wayer and Denner, to prevent these Bandanese maroons from landing. Not only did the returning Bandanese assist their compatriots, they also abducted other (unwilling) slaves, stole cattle, and even attacked the European population. In short, during these first years they posed a serious threat to the new society on Banda.²⁸

The *perkeniers* committed to sell the entire harvest of nutmeg and mace to the Company, again at fixed prices.²⁹ This money enabled them to buy the products available in the Company's stores, as well as slaves. It is not exactly clear what European commodities were actually imported, but it seems mainly to have been limited to the bare necessities of life, such as food, clothes (including such out-of-place garments as gabardine stockings and black felt hats), tools (for craftsmen as well as for private use), paper and pencils, weapons, building materials (bricks, lead, timber), stores of anything from lamp oil to medicines, not forgetting many barrels of beer, wine, and arak. But less basic utensils, such as

²⁸In the sources, a real fear of invasion by these Bandanese, with local, Makasarese or even Spanish or Portuguese support, is repeatedly expressed.

²⁹For the period I am concerned with, the VOC obliged itself to pay one ryal per *cati banda* nuts, and ten per *cati banda* mace (one *cati banda* weighed 5½ *Hollandsche ponden*, about 2½ kilograms).

books (for church and school use), pewter, or porcelain crockery (for the table of the governor) were also brought in from Batavia. The prime trading article imported to deal with other peoples in the region was cloth.

But what Banda basically needed was food. Apart from the rice acquired via the Company (which was mostly of Javanese, sometimes Siamese or Japanese, origin), the inhabitants tried to obtain other types of food, mainly sago, but also smaller quantities of salt, coconuts, peas, and *kacang hijau*. They also tried to acquire Asian commodities to barter with, such as coarse cloth, gongs, or weapons. For this they would turn to the free traders who called at Banda, either Dutch or Asian. The first were for the greater part former Company personnel whose contract had expired, fortune-seekers who had decided to stay in Asia and make a living through interisland trade. Some of them, known as *vrijburgers* (free burgers), had their base in the roadstead of Neira. They traded in anything profitable outside the Company's monopoly (and probably within it, as well), but mostly foodstuffs. There might also have been Asian free-traders who had established themselves in Banda (we know there were quite a few before 1621), but the sources for the first years make no mention of them. The Asian traders who called at Banda were (eastern) Javanese as well as some Makassarese, but mostly sailors from Kai and Aru; somewhat later, Seramese traders also appeared in Banda. They exemplify the continuation—on a smaller scale, and of different content, for spices were no longer marketable—of the traditional, varied trade flow to and from Banda, for centuries a center of interregional importance before this economy was disrupted by the conquest of 1621. Insofar as Asian traders had a passport, or permission from the VOC, they as well, like the European free traders, were allowed to trade anything except goods under VOC monopoly. Apart from the foodstuffs mentioned, this consisted of home products like tortoise shell, bird of paradise feathers, or sandalwood, but also the much appreciated prefabricated *orembai* and *kora-kora* from Kai. These products were generally bartered for a variety of cloth, imported by the Company mainly from the Coromandel coast. A toll had to be paid to the Company over the value of traded goods.

The Company also levied a tax of ten percent on home-made arak. The *perkeniers* preferred arak distilled from rice, but when this was prohibited because excessive amounts of dear Javanese rice were used

for that purpose, they turned to tuak. Mace and nutmeg itself were taxed as well, to the same level. The Company farmed out fishing rights, fruit production, and the right to distill arak. Enterprising settlers could thus try to earn some additional money by selling the yield of these rights to their fellow inhabitants. But to the Company, this did not mean a substantial income, because especially during these first years, the tax-farmers could not pay their dues, as there existed severe shortages of minted money, and a great many indebted settlers.

Matters of administration were entirely dealt with by the Company's officials based on the islands, as a rule living in, or close to the forts or strongholds. The centers of Company administration were based in Fort Nassau on Neira, and Fort Revenge on Ay. Jurisdiction, and the implementation of the judicial system—analogous to the laws and jurisprudence customary in the Dutch Republic—initially belonged exclusively to the VOC as well, but soon afterwards a court of law (*raad van justitie*), made up of Company as well as civilian members, was installed both in Neira and Ay. Even so, in case of corporal or capital punishment, execution of the sentence required confirmation of the governor and his council, and as before, major offenses continued to be treated by this body.

There was one other factor that played a significant role in the new society: the church. The official religion of the VOC was the Dutch version of Calvinism, and hence the Dutch Reformed Church was the sole denomination tolerated in Banda (for Europeans). Catholicism, introduced during the sixteenth century by Portuguese Jesuits, was forbidden and stamped out. The slaves could retain their Islamic or animistic belief but had to be converted to Protestantism if possible. Female slaves adopted as a wife by colonists had to be baptized first. Any convert had to prove his or her (limited) knowledge of the principles of the Christian faith and be able to at least phonetically recite the Our Father and some prayers or psalms, and answer correctly when questioned on the Catechism. Even as the Christian standards of such converts (as well as that of the Europeans, for that matter) were often mocked, and the Church council complained about the unruly and ignorant flock, the church and its servants (ministers, schoolteachers, and visitors or the sick) still managed to influence and control the spiritual life of the inhabitants, as well as the implementation of formalized education and the greater part of health care (for what it was worth) and welfare. These men represented

an authority other than the Company's. Depending on their own moral quality, they had some influence over the population of the islands, in fact quite substantial compared to the real administrative powers and the means the church possessed. For these means were few: the Company, though it had by its charter committed itself to the upholding and spread of the true Christian faith, did this in a way that can at many times only be described as minimalist. Contrary to what was customary in the Republic, and much to the indignation of the clergy, the Company also demanded a seat in the Church councils, in order to have full inside information on what was decided, and under which considerations. Apart from this cooperative, but rather authoritarian and stingy Company attitude, the church and its officials, like everyone else in Banda, remained totally dependent on the Company for their own maintenance, as well as for books, paper, pencils, transportation and anything else needed for the fulfillment of their tasks. Nevertheless, churches and schools existed in Neira, Ay and Fort Hollandia on Lonthoir (and later in other settlements, too). The two, sometimes three reverends toured the islands in order to uphold the moral quality of the inhabitants, by organizing services and Bible readings; caretakers of the sick watched over the spiritual health of the population. There is no doubt that the church in this way formed an important means of social cohesion (although admittedly the Christian layer of this society remained rather thin), accomplished in spite of a critical Company attitude and quite moderate means.

This sketch of the new society is sufficient to emphasize the almost total dependency of the colonists on the VOC. There was not a single aspect of life in Banda that was not—actively or passively—controlled by the Company, from the fundamental conditions of life in Banda down to the more common, or less urgent requirements. Even structural aspects such as social stratification, or the character of economic exploitation were a priori, or in the end determined by Company influence, consciously. Nothing in Banda during this period can be seen outside this framework of VOC dominance, not even activities that for the greater part took place outside its perception, such as interregional trade by indigenous peddlers. Yet, as I will try to show, in Banda there developed a society which had specific characteristics of its own, peculiar and even unique when compared to other contemporary cases of colonial exploitation.

For a start, the case of Banda greatly differs from the usual mode of colonial dominance the Company exercised in Maluku or elsewhere in Asia. When we take a broad look at Dutch expansion in Asia during the early 17th century, we can see that, as a rule, the VOC worked its way into a market by opening a trading post or factory on the coast and doing business with local traders or governmental officials. They submitted themselves at least nominally to the authority of the ruler in situ, stuck to local rules and taxation, and agreed to do business on an equal footing. Thus they presented themselves primarily as traders or merchants, not as colonizers or rulers. And in effect, it seems that the VOC superiors were at that stage not so much interested in territorial power per se, but basically in making money by albeit warlike and aggressive trade. Anything that unbalanced the profits, such as the great cost of conquest, occupation, and administration, had in principle to be avoided.

But when, for whatever reason, this policy was judged to fall short of the desired objective, they did not hesitate to use their very powerful means to set the situation to their liking. This usually meant the effective removal of the local superiors, by coercion or by sheer force, after which the VOC officials took over the leading administrative positions. The merchant thus became governor, taking into possession a territorial unity, and ruling an indigenous society with traditions and laws of its own.

On Banda, neither the first nor the second pattern was followed, as we have seen above. By sheer violence, the population, and consequently societal and economic structures, were (almost) totally destroyed, leaving a near-empty land to be recreated from literally the bottom up. This is a feature that makes Banda a case that can hardly be compared with others, at least not with somewhat more familiar examples like Amboyna, the north coast of Java, or the settlements in India and Ceylon.

For reason of its economic value, for the sheer profitability of nutmeg and mace, Banda was conquered and transformed into a new society. In a deliberate manner the VOC created an agricultural production colony, using an exploitative system that was uncommon to the experience of VOC officials, and unheard of in Asia. As such, Banda was different from any other settlement founded within the boundaries of the chartered area of the VOC at any stage between 1602 when the Company was founded, and 1795 when it collapsed under its own weight. Even Batavia, designed to be a rendezvous and a governmental center, was not meant to be a production settlement, certainly not for agricultural

production. And in fact it never became one, at least not beyond the point of self-sufficiency.³⁰ Another seemingly comparable settlement, Cape of Good Hope, was originally meant as a fruit and vegetable garden for the VOC ships that touched at this southernmost point of Africa, before they started their way on the long and risky stretch to the passage between Sumatra and Java, where there was no possibility to take in provisions until the ships reached Batavia. Thus the Cape's agricultural production was instrumental to the VOC infrastructure, important enough from a strategic viewpoint, but never an economic target in itself, as an area that yielded substantial profits as a result of export production.

This makes Banda an atypical case of VOC colonialism, a unique example of European expansion in Indonesia, or even Asia, during the Early Modern period. In itself this is sufficiently interesting to provoke further investigation, to shed light on this exception that contrasts with the regular VOC mode of colonization. Thus the study of this particular colony will also enhance our understanding of the way the VOC in general operated in Asia.

But the case of Banda can be treated on a different, more abstract level as well. Where did the exploitational model that was implemented in Banda originate? It certainly is not an Asian phenomenon, even if certain aspects of it, such as slavery, were in fact indigenous in Asia and indeed in the region itself.³¹ However, the economic model was introduced by Europeans, in a way that points to European habits or intellectual origin. The implementation was effective enough to show that Coen and his subordinates knew exactly what they were up to. It has to be considered that the measures introduced to exploit Banda were not just as opportunistic addition of essentially separate economic and social features, but that a new settlement was created on the basis of a coherent system, a priori envisaged by *Heeren XVII* and their officers in Asia. Whether this is the case remains of course open to discussion, but in my

³⁰We might consider the export production of sugar in Batavia during the 17th century to be comparable. But then again, this was only a tentative, rather small-scale undertaking that never really yielded great profits.

³¹See, for instance, B. Lasker: *Human bondage in Southeast Asia* (Chapel Hill, 1950); and, more importantly, A. Reid, ed., *Slavery, bondage and dependency in Southeast Asia* (St. Lucia/London/New York, 1983).

view it can hardly be a coincidence that the basic features were introduced in such a deliberate way.

Taking the uniqueness of Banda in Asia as a fact, it seems useful to try to analyze some of its structural characteristics. This will permit us to look at this case from another angle, to be able to compare it in a global context.

It is easy to discern certain peculiarities that are typical of a so-called plantation society. These includes the economic aspects of plantation modes of production, on which an extensive literature exists, either on the level of case studies or in the theoretical field. To limit ourselves to the last—which seems to be a more fruitful approach, for one can spend a lifetime of research in studying all the different plantation societies—it is still not easy to survey the range of publications that have seen the light, generating almost as many interpretations. That in itself is understandable, for the subject can be approached from different angles: on the one hand Banda can be regarded as a curiosity which is entirely historical, set apart from the present day, like a world which once existed but is no more; or, on the other hand, when looking backwards from the late twentieth century, as an example of colonialism in its earliest form, containing still active conditions that are sufficient for the phenomenon which is nowadays usually called “underdevelopment.” Analysis is also complicated by the fact that different authors use different criteria of definition, focusing on land-concentration (the ratio between size and number of workers), or labor-force status (free v. unfree or enslaved; skilled v. unskilled), the share of the plantation crop in the total export, the crops grown, the division of labor, the ratio between capital value and labor (which also includes the level of technical development), and the distribution of political and administrative power in such a society.³²

In order to distill a workable, though in the eyes of experts possibly rather superficial theoretical model of a plantation economy on a general

³²For an overview of these problems, see the excellent review article by F. L. Pryor, “The plantation economy as an economic system,” *Journal of Comparative Economics* 6 (1982): 288–317. In his concluding note (p. 314), Pryor remarks, “the subject has evoked considerable differences of opinion about what a plantation is and how a plantation economy functions. The literature is confusing. We have many questions but very few solid answers. We have a number of case studies about how specific plantation economies work, but no general theory about their functioning.”

level, in the following lines I will for the sake of brevity allow myself to accept certain inherent qualities as essential. For a start, it is an economy for the greater part³³ based on large-scale crop production for export purposes, organized in agricultural production units, the plantations, that in its essence and manifestation deeply and severely determine society, as well as the personal lives of its inhabitants. The plantation units form the main building stones of this kind of society.

I intend to look at the plantation itself as an historical phenomenon, transported from one geographical area into another, as an example of physical, as well as intellectual colonialism.³⁴ Basically, it can be seen as an “industrialized” form of agriculture, combining capital, land, labor, and technology in a rationalized mix, with the purpose of achieving large-scale, profitable agricultural production.

The invested **capital** needed to start a plantation is relatively high. In order to assure a return, the use of land, labor, and technology is focused on bulk production, allowing maximum efficiency and utilization. Capital is usually supplied by outside, or foreign investors whose main purpose is, of course, to maximize profits. Land, labor, and equipment are rationalized in a “modern” way, that is, they are regarded solely as commodities.

The relatively large-scale production plantation is dependent on a large-scale **market**, located in the country where the financier originates. Production is closely connected to the capacity of this market. It is highly specialized, usually limited to one crop only, thereby connecting the fate of the total economy to that of the metropolis market.

The planter must have enough **land** to enable him to produce sufficient quantities of the cash crop. Otherwise, he either tends to expand his area or to sink into debt and eventual bankruptcy. The resulting occupa-

³³As a rule, at least 60 percent is taken as the minimum.

³⁴The following on the theory of plantations is based mainly on E. Wolf and S. Mintz, *Haciendas and plantations*, in *Haciendas and plantations in Latin American history*, ed. by R. G. Keith (New York/London, 1977), pp. 36–62, esp. 48–62; also on Pryor, “The plantation economy”; L. A. Best, “Outlines of a model of pure plantation economy,” *Social and Economic Studies* 17 (1968): 283–326; H. Bernstein and M. Pitt, “Plantations and modes of exploitation,” *Journal of Peasant Studies* 1 (1974): 514–526; and V. Rubin, A. Tuden, eds., *Comparative perspectives on slavery in New World plantation societies* (New York, 1977).

tion of land in such an area is also a socioeconomic determinant: it undermines subsistence production, or other forms of agricultural enterprise, swallowing the greater part of land and agricultural labor. Being the major production type over a large area, the plantation sector dominates the region physically as well as socially. Infrastructure, for example, is determined by the needs of the plantations; other agricultural initiatives are literally driven to the fringes of such a society. Consequently there is not much room left for an agricultural middle class of independent landowners, either physically or economically. The capacity of such an agricultural society to produce economic alternatives to the production of only one or two crops is very small. As a result, the whole economy remains extremely vulnerable to influences and developments of the outside markets to which it is linked, notably in the selling area (the metropolis market), but also in neighboring economic units.

For reasons of profitability, there must be a large reserve of cheap **labor**. If not available in the region itself, laborers often need to be imported from other areas. The usually unskilled worker has no relationship with the enterprise other than through his labor power. His individual position is very weak. Because of this, workers imported from different regions may develop transcultural ties that break down ethnic or cultural differences, a process that eventually can result in total acculturation.

Technology can play a relevant role in a plantation. The processing and transportation of a bulk crop can be facilitated and the cost reduced by using technical knowledge and skills. Technical knowledge rests with the owner or his representative; the teaching of certain technical skills to some laborers may result in more specific labor division and stratification.

All this means that production is organized by a planter—not necessarily the owner of the land, for absenteeism is quite common—who, sometimes with a small staff, controls the estate and the production, and supervises the laborers and nearly all their activities. The purpose is to produce a crop that is meant for export, not for an internal market, or for subsistence use. The planter brings in the agricultural and entrepreneurial knowhow, and the financial and administrative means necessary to run the business. It is he who possesses the technology and the power to apply it; it is he who decides what work must be done and how it will be

divided. His workers are usually unskilled, or barely trained, laborers.³⁵ Whether they are slaves, or (poorly paid) wage-workers, they are always dependent on the planter. His power over the workers is extensive; there is hardly anything that escapes his attention or influence, and in many cases he literally rules their lives. As a matter of fact, almost all activities in a plantation consist of tilling the land, harvesting, and preparing the crop for export. The latter may take the form of a more or less industrialized process, as in the case of sugar production.

Whatever the value of this (rather conservative) description, it concentrates on the crop production for export purpose, and the resulting dependency on the country, or region where it is marketed, as well as on the specific mix of capital investment, technology use, and labor organization. The construction of this theoretical model seems to have led us off to Latin America or, more interesting still—for here we are concerned with small-island economies as well—to the Caribbean. However, this model seems to apply fully to the situation on Banda as well. The outlines of the new Bandanese colony I have drawn above are congruent to this model distilled from general theoretical literature. On Banda, too, there was a large-scale market production of a single crop (nutmeg, of which mace is a by-product) that was exported to another economic sphere, realized by the typical combination of capital supplied by overseas investors, knowhow supplied by the planters, and labor provided by the mass of unskilled workers. The relation with the metropolis appears to have been all-important as well: it was there that the enterprise was financed, its contents defined, and its produce marketed.

As I stated before, I am not yet fully convinced that the initiating and operational conditions that determined the new Banda economy were all part of one coherent system, even though they were introduced in such a deliberate way. Can we, incidentally, really speak of the implementation of a *system* in the meaning of a series of measures that are linked to each other by their own internal logic?

Whatever the answer to this question might be, the hypothesis that Banda was indeed a plantation colony, ostensibly sustained by the indications that I described above, plays a central part in my study. Of course, historical analysis and reconstruction are all-important, and that

³⁵“Unskilled” is here used in the meaning of not (properly) trained to do the job to which they are assigned.

laborious but fascinating task certainly has to precede the attempt to answer theoretical questions of this kind. But if this question can be answered in the affirmative it would indeed make Banda an even more exceptional case, for not only would it confirm once again that the situation in Banda was unique and incomparable from a VOC administrative point of view, but also that the socioeconomic system that was introduced here, in this remote little Asian archipelago, was rooted in the same European concepts, or set of ideas, that lay at the basis of Central American island economies. This would lift Banda above the status of a mere historic peculiarity—which it undoubtedly is—to an outstanding example within a general theory of economic and social development. In my opinion, that would mean nothing less than a Caribbean cuckoo in an Asian nest.