Navigating Polyvocal Heritage in a Postcolonial Cultural Landscape

Banda Islands, Indonesia

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Fort Nassau and its ties to landscape

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8 Fort Nassau and its ties to landscape

The significance of Fort Nassau is influenced not only by its historical importance but also by the sensorial, social, and natural ties that connect the site to its surrounding landscape. Building upon Part 2 of this book, this chapter situates Fort Nassau within the complex tapestry of the larger cultural landscape of the Banda Islands. As Robert Melnick wrote: "What we have yet to do is to fully engage with the complexity of our landscape world, the great variety of meanings and the multiple landscape constituencies – especially in ways that get beyond the visual and historical narrative" (Melnick, 2008, p. 208). In the last decade or so, scholarship has been exploring the more transient aspects of cultural landscapes, and heritage in general, by exploring the sensory notions that influence our experience through sound and smell as well as the visual senses (Boswell, 2008; Davis & Thys-Şenocak, 2017; Kang et al., 2016; Kato, 2009; Leus & Herssens, 2015; Yelmi, 2016). These sensory elements of the cultural landscape contribute to what is termed the *sense of place*, which is a phenomenological factor in describing a cultural landscape in its complexity (Feld & Basso, 1996; Taylor, 2015). In this chapter, I will discuss how the significance of Fort Nassau is influenced by its materiality and the visual representations of the fort, as well as the sensorial, natural, and cultural links that make up its cultural landscape.

Tangible heritage

Despite recent trends, the materiality and visual importance of heritage sites are still at the forefront of how we interpret and engage with places. Thus, this chapter starts with the description of Fort Nassau as a tangible site, with a focus on its architectural history. Fort Nassau is an example of a square fort with four bastions (Jayasena & Floore, 2010, pp. 244–246). This was the most common type of fortification used in siege wars within the Dutch Republic, often constructed as (temporary) defense works that could be erected within a short period of time. Moreover, this type of fort could be easily adjusted to local circumstances, making it ideal for the first colonizers in foreign lands. The bastions are shaped according to the Italian School, which was adopted by the Dutch during the Eighty Years' War (1566–1648) against the Spanish Crown (Duffy, 2006, pp. 10–11 + 227; Müller, 1892, pp. 17–18). The Italian School worked according

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to straight lines, exchanging the round towers of previous medieval castles for the angular, four-sided bastions. This eliminated the dead area upon which the canons on top of the bastion could not fire.

Rather than building these fortifications with masonry like the Italians, the Dutch adopted a more economical and faster approach by constructing their fortifications out of earth (Jayasena & Floore, 2010, p. 237; Müller, 1892, pp. 17–18). Moreover, such earthen walls were better able to withstand cannon fire, as the earth absorbs the impact better than masonry walls. This Dutch style, called *Oud-Nederlandse Stelsel,* was exported and implemented across the globe by both the Dutch East and West India Companies (VOC and WIC) (Jayasena & Floore, 2010, pp. 237–238). The system encompassed the design of the square fort, consisting of curtain walls connecting the four bastions on the corners, allowing the defense of the structure from all sides. The length of the curtain walls was based on the maximum effective range of a musket. When the outline of the wall was measured, the moat was

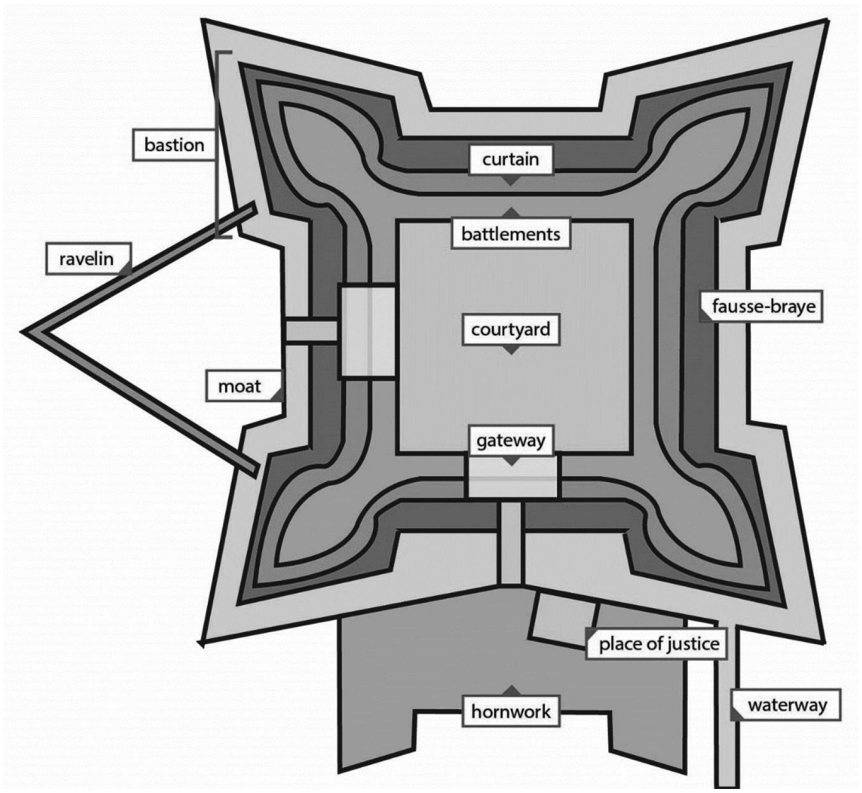

Figure 8.1 Sketch of the various architectural elements present at Fort Nassau at various times. Created by J. van Donkersgoed.

dug, and the excavated soil was used to erect the ramparts. Valentijn measured the length and width of the fort and described it as 17 ½ by 13 *roeden*.[1] Between the curtain wall and moat, a low outer rampart was erected, called the *fausse-braye* (Figure 8.1) (Duffy, 2006, p. 223).

The first detailed engraving of Fort Nassau from 1646 suggests that this fort was constructed according to the *Oud-Nederlandse Stelsel*, as the depicted earthen walls are supported by a wooden palisade (Figure 8.2). Moreover, that the Dutch opted for the cheaper and faster option is confirmed by Verhoeven's choice to construct the fort on the level terrain, as building the fort on this location would have cost less resources and time, and it provided access to the shore (Van der Chijs, 1886, p. 41). At the moment of construction, the fort consisted of four bastions, one gate facing the sea in the south, and several buildings within the walls, including the residence of the *Landvoogd* at the south side of the inner wall. Besides these buildings, each bastion was equipped with a sentry box, and along the western rampart, several trees were planted, including banana and lemon trees.[2] In the inner square, a water well is depicted, as well as several tall coconut trees and some other larger, unidentified trees.

The depiction of the entry gate in the southern wall indicates that it was constructed with masonry, which may have been *ijselsteentjes*[3] that were brought over as ballast by ships from the Netherlands (Jayasena & Floore, 2010, p. 240). The design of the first gate seems to differ from the contemporary decorative masonry work of the southern gate, suggesting that this initial gateway may have been replaced when the earthen walls were replaced with stone walls. Although the Dutch-style earthen ramparts were superior to the Italian School-style masonry walls for defensive purposes; the earthen walls required more maintenance (Duffy, 2006, p. 11). Replacing the earthen walls for stone walls is therefore an indication that they meant the fort to last. This replacement probably occurred in 1617, which is the date indicated by letters on the southern wall "Anno 1617" (Valentijn, 1858; Van de Wall, 1928, p. 22).

Furthermore, Duffy notes that it was a general practice to place the main gateway of Dutch fortification in the middle of one of the curtains, just as is the case at Fort Nassau (Duffy, 2006, pp. 84–86). He explains that the benefits of this placement were to shelter the gate from enemy fire, as it could be easily defended from the adjoining bastions. Moreover, this location enhanced the symmetry and beauty of the fort. The gateway offered a creative opportunity for the architect, and the current masonry of the southern gate of Fort Nassau seems to have been built with a decorative purpose (Figure 8.3). There are two colors of *ijselsteentjes* used for the southern gate, mainly yellow bricks, with red bricks used to accentuate decorative features. The use of *ijselsteentjes* is not only interestingly because it connects the materiality of the fort to the trade ships, but also to the transportation of soil from the Netherlands to the Banda Islands in their efforts to claim the land there.

The bastions were equipped with seven to nine cannons each, and according to the initial depiction of Fort Nassau, there were 34 cannons in total (Figure 7.2).

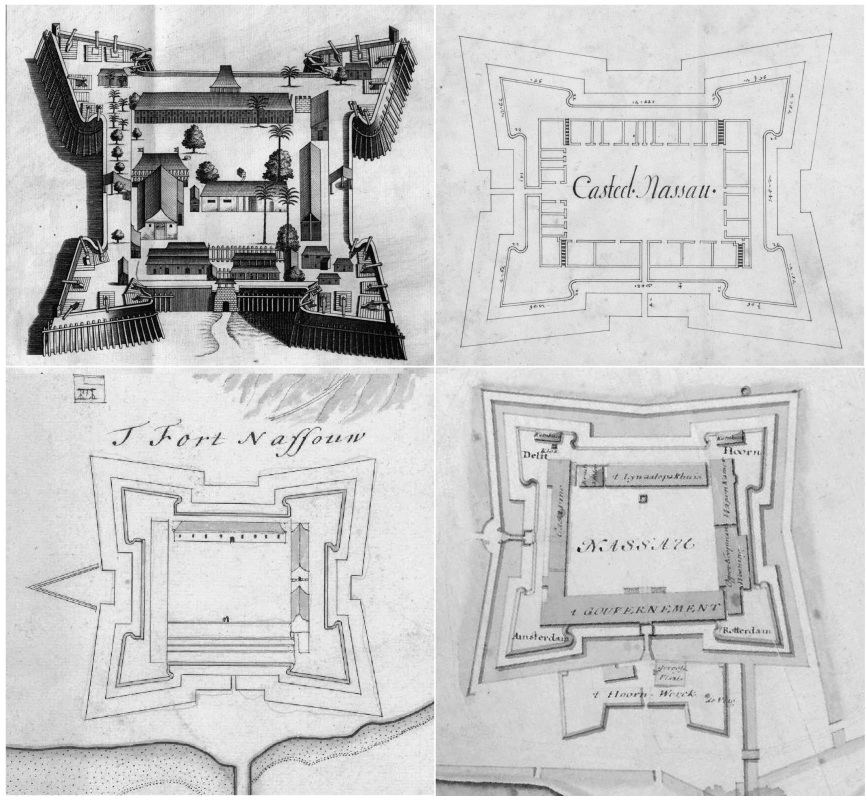

Figure 8.2 (Top left) After print from I. Commelin, *Begin ende Voortgangh II*, Amsterdam 1646. Fort Nassau te Banda, Jacob van der Schley (1735–1747), own collection. (Top right) Map of Fort Nassau, with a surrounding moat, a western and southern gate and bridge crossing the moat. Anonymous, *Plan van t' Casteel Nassau*, c. 1651, drawing on paper, 13 x 16.34 inch (33 x 41.5 cm), Nationaal Archief, object number VEL1358. (Bottom left) Detail from a larger map depicting the southern tip of Banda Neira. Fort Nassau is surrounded by a moat with a bridge at the southern gate, but the western gate is not depicted. On that side of the fort, a defensive ravelin has been constructed, and in the northwestern vicinity the gallows are depicted. Isaac de Graaff, *t' Eyland Neira*, 1690–1734, colored drawing, 20.83 x 29.13 inch (53 x 74 cm), Nationaal Archief, object number VEL1359. (Bottom right) Detail from a larger map depicting the southern tip of Banda Neira. The four bastions are labeled with the names of the Dutch cities Delft, Hoorn, Amsterdam, and Rotterdam. In front of the southern gate, a hornwork is added, labeled as *hoornwerck*, upon which a square indicates the location of the place of justice, labeled *gerechtsplaats*. Carl Friedrich Reimer, *Plan van het Zuydelykste deel des Eylands Neira, vertoonende de situatie der forten Nassau en Belgica, met de stad en naastgeleegene bevestigde Posten, Batterien, Paggers enz.,* 1791, colored drawing on paper, 50.19 x 57.87 inch (127.5 x 147 cm), Nationaal Archief, object number VEL1361.

Figure 8.3 Southern gate, also known as the "Waterpoort" with original decorative masonary of red and yellow ijselsteentjes. *On the right, the two new information signs are prominently positioned next to the closed doors.* Photograph by J. van Donkersgoed, taken on January 31, 2019 *and* October 10, 2024.

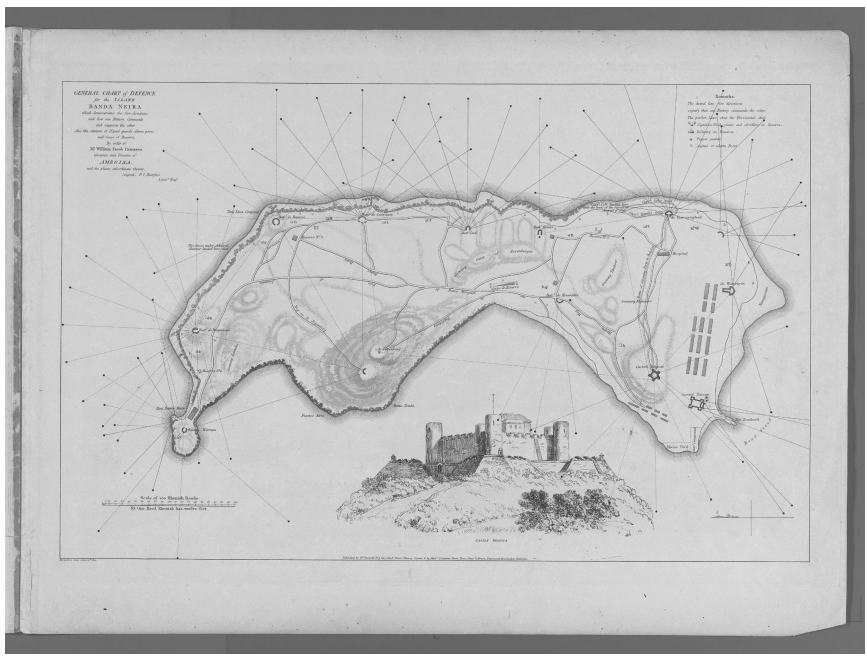

Figure 8.4 Map of Banda Neira, marking all the fortifications and the range of their cannons. Verovering van Banda door de Engelsen op 9 augustus 1810, M. Graham, 1811. Print, 421mm/574mm. Rijksmuseum, collection number NG-486.

In the previous chapter, I noted that the cannons were aimed primarily inland, positioned to defend against Bandanese resistance rather than foreign maritime forces (Figure 7.2). However, the emphasis on defending against a seabound enemy increased in the 19th century, as a series of fortifications had been constructed all around Banda Neira island. In Figure 8.4, you can see how the trajectories of the canons from each stronghold were mapped in order to plan for the English invasion in 1810. The reach of Fort Nassau is depicted as quite limited, with four lines targeting the bay and port in front of it. The tactical advantage of Fort Belgica is clear, with 13 cannon lines, including two in the direction of Fort Nassau (which were captured in 1810 and used to destroy the northern walls (Hanna, 1978, pp. 95–97).). The figure thus provides insight to the military landscape of Banda Neira, with all its fortifications and how each defense mechanism complemented each other. It also highlights the importance Banda Neira continued to have for the Dutch and their investment needed to maintain their control.

Based on my visual analysis, I have identified four construction phases of Fort Nassau, which are illustrated by four architectural drawings showing a aerial view of Fort Nassau (Figure 8.2). These depictions indicate when certain (military) enhancements may have been made to the fort. The first construction phase is depicted in the drawing from 1646, which shows a wooden palisade around the walls, indicating a support system for the earthen walls. This drawing does not feature a gate in the western wall, nor does it indicate a moat around the fort. It is likely, however, that the wall was surrounded by a ditch, created when the ground was dug up to construct the earthen ramparts (Duffy, 2006, pp. 49–51).

The second phase is shown in the 1651 drawing, which features a moat around the wall, measurements of the fort's outer walls, a western and southern gate, and accompanying bridges over the surrounding moat. Furthermore, this is the only drawing that depicts the staircases that lead from the inner courtyard to the upper ramparts, one at each bastion. A third (possibly temporary) phase is depicted on a larger map of southern tip Banda Neira, created between 1690 and 1743. This drawing shows the addition of a ravelin[4] on the western side. This may have been a temporary structure to secure this area from an inland threat, as this ravelin is not depicted on any later maps. The fourth and final phase is depicted on Reimer's map from 1791, which shows that the structure of Fort Nassau was elaborated with a hornwork[5] at the south entrance. Reimer's drawing also illustrates the waterway that connected the moat with the sea and the drainage system.

Rather than referring to their orientation, each of the four bastions of Fort Nassau was given a name: the eastern bastions were called after two Dutch cities, the northeast one after *Delft* and the southeast one after *Rotterdam* (Valentijn, 1858, p. 2; Van de Wall, 1928, p. 21). The southwest bastion was called *Admiraals punt* (literally translates as Admirals point), possibly indicating a particular strategic viewpoint for military purposes. The northwest bastion was initially named after

the Dutch southern province Zeeland, *Zeelandia*, and it housed the weapon chamber. However, these names fluctuated over time, as a map created by land surveyor Carl Friedrich Reimer in 1791 indicates the bastions as follows: *Admiraals punt* is renamed after the Dutch city *Amsterdam*, the southeast bastion kept its name *Rotterdam*, and the northeast bastion is named after the city *Hoorn*, possibly in honor of Jan Pieterszoon Coen's hometown (Figure 8.2). On this map, this bastion housed the weapon chamber, rather than the northeast bastion as was mentioned by Francois Valentijn in 1724. Moreover, on Reimer's map, the northwest bastion is called *Delft*, rather than the northeast as described by Valentijn and Van de Wall (Valentijn, 1858, p. 2; Van de Wall, 1928, p. 21). The only bastion which seems to have retained its name is the southeast bastion *Rotterdam*, which hints at some connection between Fort Nassau and this city, as is also demonstrated by Van de Wall's mention of the shield of Rotterdam that once adorned the southern gate (Van de Wall, 1928, p. 23).

Currently, all of the inner structures have either been destroyed or taken down, except for a few remaining walls and some outlines of buildings that can still be perceived. However, more insight into the inner structures of Fort Nassau can be gathered from an anonymous drawing from 1651 and Reimer's detailed 1791 map, providing valuable insights for ongoing restoration efforts. For example, the southeast staircase was recently rediscovered and restored by the BPCB office. In the summer of 2018, excavations were conducted to locate the remains of the northeast staircase as well. However, they were unable to find its footprint. Regarding the other inner structures, Figure 8.2 shows that these were built alongside the inner curtain walls, and the overall configuration does not seem to have changed much between 1651 and 1791. Reimer's map of Fort Nassau indicates that the building attached to the southern wall was divided by the corridor of the southern gate. This building is identified by Francois Valentijn as the residence of the *Landvoogd*.[6] He describes that it contained a big hall, which featured a half-body portrait of Jan Pieterszoons Coen dressed in a yellow *wambuis*[7] and large pants. The description of this portrait is similar to the portrait of Jan Pieterszoon Coen assigned to Jacob Waben, dated between 1623 and 1699, which is currently on display in the Westfries Museum in the Dutch city Hoorn.[8] The fort was thus used to uphold a prominent image of Jan Pieterszoon Coen amongst the colonial officers. Besides the *Landvoogd*, he recorded that the fort housed 150 man, including the Lieutenant and *Vaandrig*.[9]

The old information sign at Fort Nassau briefly described the architectural history as a square-shaped fort with heart-shaped bastions at each corner and surrounded by a moat.[10] Furthermore, it stated that the fort was used as a prison for exiles from Batavia after Fort Belgica was strengthened between 1672 and 1673. It described the physical state of the fort as having "only 2 remaining bastions and 2 gates, and couple of meters walls". The extent of the damage to the northern bastions and wall is explained as a result of the British attack in 1810 from Fort Belgica. However, as discussed in the previous chapter, the damaged northern walls must have been rebuilt by the English, as a photograph taken between 1860 and

1890 shows the fort to be in an excellent condition.[11] The current sign mentions the conservation efforts from 2014 to 2019, which I will further discuss in the next chapter as part of the meaning-making activities at Fort Nassau.

It is worth mentioning that Valentijn's report on the forts at Banda Neira notes the flawed military potential of Fort Belgica, located on top of the hill on the northern side of Fort Nassau. Valentijn describes that the prime purpose of Fort Belgica was its potential use for the defense of the *waterpas* and Fort Nassau (Valentijn, 1858, p. 3). However, if Fort Belgica would be captured, Valentijn surmised that the enemy could use its cannons to attack the fort which it is meant to protect. For this reason, Fort Belgica was intended to be demolished in 1657, and engineer Georgius Rumphius was tasked with building a *reduit* to replace it. However, he left without accomplishing this task, leaving Fort Nassau at the mercy of the cannons of Fort Belgica. As described in the previous chapter, the cannons of Fort Belgica were indeed used by the English to attack Fort Nassau in their conquest. These forts were connected with an underground tunnel, which was still intact in 1929 when Van de Wall visited the islands (Van de Wall, 1928, p. 24+29). Regretfully, the location of the entrance to this tunnel is currently unknown and remains an object of interest for the conservation team of BPCB from Ternate.

Since the 21st century, the Banda Islands are often represented by the image of the imposing fort Belgica or the active volcano Gunung Api surrounded by the blue sea. This is probably due to the ruined state in which Fort Nassau was, compared to its fully restored neighbor Belgica. However, in the past Fort Nassau had been a popular subject and its likeness was captured through maps, drawings, and paintings. Especially, these maps and sketches of the Banda Islands were collected and distributed by the VOC as a source of information to enforce their claim on its key spice commodities (Gosselink, 2007, p. 32). The first-hand sketches by sailors were the inspiration for mapmakers and artists in Amsterdam, who were allowed to study these sketches to create more accurate maps or esthetically pleasing sights of the colonial possessions. Most notable among them was Johannes Vingbooms, who created hundreds of maps and watercolors during his lifetime (Gosselink, 2007, p. 48). His view of the Banda Islands has been reproduced and collected throughout Europe, and his paintings informed a large international (merchant) audience of what Fort Nassau and the Banda Islands looked like (Figure 7.5).

These watercolors were inspired by sketches made by people who actually traveled to these sites. For example, the view of Banda Neira was likely inspired by a sketch by Johannes van Nessel, a drawing that accompanied the report of Arnold de Vlamingh van Outshoorn (Figure 7.4). In this sketch, Fort Nassau is depicted as larger than Fort Belgica on the higher elevation, and a smaller *reduit*[12] is depicted overlooking Fort Belgica. The gallows alongside Fort Nassau are also depicted as a focal point.[13] Moreover, Fort Belgica is provided with rooftops over the square bastions, and the front-facing southern wall of Fort Nassau is tentatively depicted with an Amsterdam-style façade. This colored sketch from 1660 and the

finished product from 1665 show that the artist took some liberties in depicting the settlement on Banda Neira, presenting the strongholds more prominently and prestigious than reality.

One of the most well-known recent depictions of Fort Nassau is the painting of the Bandanese Massacre that is displayed in the cultural and historical museum Rumah Budaya in Banda Neira. Figure 8.5 shows this painting, which depicts the scene of the violent massacre of the *orang kaya* by Japanese mercenaries and a Dutch overseer within a bamboo enclosure in front of Fort Nassau. At first glance, the central figure, a kneeling *orang kaya,* has a likeness that resembles the fierce martial artist and actor Bruce Lee. This resemblance might have been intentional to incite instant respect and admiration for the courage and the Bandanese martyr by the viewer. Regretfully, little is known about the origins of the painting, except the artist's name, Sofri Rino Hasan Basri. He came from Jogjakarta to fulfill the commission by Des Alwi to create several paintings in the museum. The details of the painting reveal that this scene is largely inspired by imagination the fort is depicted with four instead of two gates, its name is plastered on the northern wall, and an incorrect date is written on the wall, 1607 instead of 1617. Other details, though, seem to be deliberately specific, such as the five bamboo poles on top of which the heads, and some other body parts, of the *orang kaya* are displayed on the right upper corner. More about the significance of these poles will be discussed in the section on intangible heritage.

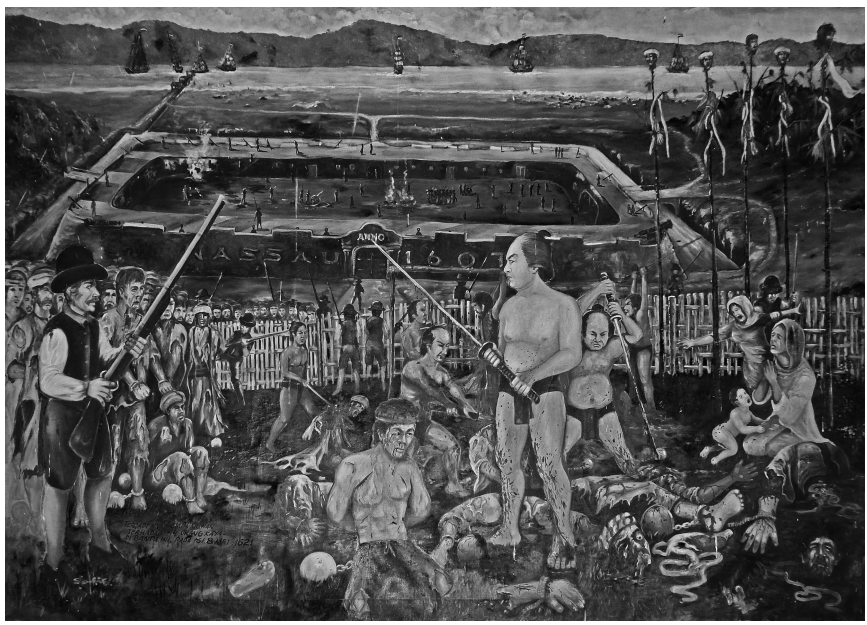

Figure 8.5 Sofri Rino Hasan Basri, *Bandanese Massacre*, paint on canvas, Rumah Budaya in Banda Neira.

Connections to the natural landscape

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the proximity of Fort Nassau to the port is connected to its primary function as an administrative center. The access to the sea was not yet made physical with a moat or waterway around 1635; however, the shoreline would have been quite near the shoreline at that time. A dock, called *waterpas*, was built on the shore in front of Fort Nassau (Valentijn, 1858, p. 73). This *waterpas* had two half-moon shapes attached to the sides, and Van de Wall mentioned that two cannons were used as bollards (Van de Wall, 1928, p. 21). These are still present at a dock in front of Fort Nassau, as observed during my survey on October 10, 2024.

The location of Fort Nassau thus led to two alternative names: *Beneden kasteel*,[14] referring to the fort as a castle on a lower elevation, and *Waterkasteel,*[15] referring to its proximity to water (Van de Wall, 1928, p. 21). This latter name may have also been given during a later phase of Fort Nassau, when the surrounding moat was filled with water through a connecting waterway (Figures 7.5 and 8.1). The waterway provided direct access to the southern gate, which therefore gained the nickname *Waterpoort*, meaning water gate. Van de Wall claims that the last moment when the moat was operational was the mid-19th century, when the fort was still used and well maintained (Van de Wall, 1928, p. 23).

The connection between the sea and Fort Nassau is not only clear from its nickname *Waterkasteel*, but it continues to live on in the memories of the Bandanese residents. Despite the moat being dry for decades, stories are passed on that describe how boats would enter the waterway from the sea to the *Waterpoort*.[16] The remnants of this waterway are still present in the form of an opening in the southeastern part of the moat and a waterway leading to the direction of the sea. However, over the years, the shoreline has been extended through impoldering,[17] and the waterway ends now where the main street intersects. Beyond the main road, there are no visible traces of where the waterway may have run, as the area till the shore is completely covered with residential buildings. However, the past physical connection between the architecture of Fort Nassau and the seashore illuminates how these cultural and natural aspects were entwined.

Moreover, the sea itself should be regarded as an extension of territory, rather than a border that separates the land from the sea. The bay and the surrounding Banda Sea function as the primary routes for travel and conducting trade. As Van Linschoten notes, in the earlier days, the Dutch were advised to stay onboard their ships to conduct trade, rather than expose themselves to the "treacherous" Bandanese people on land (Linschoten, 1885, p. 115). Other activities conducted on the ships were treaty negotiations, foreign affairs with other European traders, and the torturing of informants regarding the perceived conspiracy against Jan Pieterszoon Coen. Figure 7.5 is one example of the plethora of illustrations made of Banda Neira, which shows how ships harbored in the bay in close proximity of Fort Nassau, using the provided protection of its cannons, as well as the access to the land by means of the *waterpas* in front of the fort. Fort Nassau's connection to the sea is clear through the names offered to the site (*Waterkasteel*) as well as its direct link through the moat and seaway (*Waterpoort* and *waterpas*).

Fort Nassau served as a strategic point of control over the sea, as ships were required to harbor nearby and obtain obligatory travel passes. Additionally, the fort asserted authority over the land by regulating the production and supply of nutmeg through storage and by enforcing destructive punitive measures to eradicate trees (Wright, 1958, p. 12; Gosh 2021). This intentional destruction limited the supply to the European markets, resulting in higher prices. It also ensured that all nutmeg went through the hands of VOC employees, as illegal nutmeg trees, and those of native varieties such as the elongated nutmeg,[18] were destroyed. Another strategy of the Dutch merchants to retain the monopoly, which may have been inspired by the Bandanese, is the myth that nutmeg seedlings would only thrive if planted after the digestion and excretion of the nutmeg by a nutmeg pigeon (Rumphius, 1741, p. 20).[19] Around 1662, however, the *perkeniers* learnt the right timing to plant the nutmeg and were able to defy this myth by planting and transplanting nutmeg seedlings without the help of these birds. Prior to colonization, the nutmeg trees belonged to no-one but to the people in common, and the trees grew in abundance without anyone planting them or other modes of agriculture (Crawfurd, 1856, p. 35).

The natural environment was also used as a source for chalk for the walls of Fort Nassau, as the Dutch removed coral stones from the sea and burned them repeatedly to produce white chalk. This chalk was not only used to plaster the walls, but also to cover the nutmeg to prevent nuts from rotting (Rumphius, 1741, pp. 19–20). The mace was processed separately, and transported in bags made of *rottang* and *cocoja* leaves, plants native to the Banda Islands. The larger leaves were harvested and trampled by enslaved people at the site of harvest, a process believed to promote the growth of new plants. Afterward, the leaves were used to line the bags. During the bag-filling process, the mace was sprinkled with salt water. This processing took place in open areas within the *perkeniers* complex, after which the processed nuts and mace were transported and stored at Fort Nassau and Fort Belgica.

The buildings within the walls were built with coral stones, and both the structures and the walls were plastered with chalk, which was made locally by repeatedly burning coral stones (Valentijn, 1858, p. 4). The chalk was used to strengthen and whiten the buildings, and their roofs were covered with *atap*. Because of the fear to be buried alive by an earthquake, local houses and outbuildings were only one story high and often constructed from bamboo, as this material dampened the vibrations of earthquakes. The practice of plastering the buildings with chalk continued for many decades, as Coenraad Leendertz wrote that there were "[…] little white houses in the capital beneath the green hill on which Fort Belgica is perched halfway, more like a German chateau than an Indonesian stronghold" after his visit to Banda Neira in 1890 (Leendertz, 1890, p. 201).

However, this type of plaster required regular maintenance, and by the time that the conservation team of BPCB arrived in 2014, most of the original plaster had completely crumbled from the outer walls. This exposed the lava and coral stones with which the walls had been erected. The ongoing renovation efforts included a renewal of a protective layer on the walls, which would prevent vegetation from taking root and further damaging the integrity of the walls. Since it is no longer

allowed to use coral stones for construction, authentic materials cannot be used for the restoration. This approach was earlier condemned in a report by the Dutch RDMZ as "over"-restoration; however, it could be considered a correct approach for the sake of long-term preservation (Wieringa & Attema, 1997, pp. 32–33).

Intangible heritage

When asked about the value of Fort Nassau to the local Bandanese community, the answer is invariably linked to the Bandanese Massacre and how this is commemorated through their *Cakalele* warrior dance. The *Cakalele* dance is a cultural manifestation that symbolizes the warrior prowess of each *desa adat* (Wrangham et al., 1996, p. 38). Therefore, the movements of the dance, the colors of the costumes, and the number of dancers differ in each village. The symbolism of the number of dancers refers back to the precolonial time when the islands were divided into the *Orlima* and the *Orsia*, meaning the group of five and the group of nine (van Donkersgoed & Farid, 2022; Aveling, 1965, p. 37). Because Fort Nassau also lies within the district of Namasawar, I discuss the *Cakalele* performance as performed by this *desa adat*.

Namasawar is part of *Orlima*, and thus the main performance of the *Cakalele* is performed by five male dancers. The current interpretation refers to the Bandanese Massacre in 1621, when 44 *orang kaya* were captured and decapitated at Fort Nassau (see Chapter 2). The stage for the performance includes the erection of five bamboo poles for the dancers to dance around, representing the stakes on which the heads of the Bandanese *orang kaya* were displayed. An important element of the performance is the encouragement of local people attending the event, who chant and rhythmically yell to encourage the dancers. Pieces of cloth are tied on top of the poles represent the remains of the *orang kaya* that were displayed as such after they were decapitated and quartered. During the dance, it is possible for the dancers to become possessed by the spirits, in which case the dancer needs to drink some of the sacred water that is kept within the *rumah adat*.[20] The impaled heads are a direct reference to the continuing practice of the *Cakalele* dance on the Banda Islands. Through the references of the *Cakalele* dance to the Bandanese Massacre that occurred at Fort Nassau, this memory is kept alive and is enforced as a part of the local identity.

Historically, this dance might have been performed without these poles, as is suggested by a print of the *Cakalele* performance prior to the Bandanese Massacre (De Bry, 1601).[21] An accompanying text states that this type of gathering and the performance of the *Cakalele* occurred prior to attacking an enemy village. It states that the village Neira was aligned with Ay and Rhun, which are also part of *Orlima*, against their enemies Lautaka, Wayer, and Kombir. The etching shows a group of people sitting cross-legged in facing rows, with a plate of food in front of each, while two men walk past the rows handing out more food. In between the rows there are two fully-adorned warriors, taking certain dancing stances to the sound of the drums and cymbals. There is a second smaller grouping of men, sitting in a tight circle away from the dance and music, who are served by two men. Behind this seated group there is a wall with structures behind it, and the composition is divided by a tree under which the musicians are performing.

In 1646, Commelin published a similar print, but according to his accompanying text, it depicts a guest banquet during which the young are taught how to handle weapons through "play" (Commelin, 1646, pp. 22–23).[22] He also mentioned how a paradise bird would be featured on some of the helmets, a practice that still continues in modern-day attire of the *Cakalele* dancers. The description of his image shows that the Dutchmen might have been unaware of any deeper meaning behind the dance. However, the creation of this print does indicate that it must have been an impressive sight for the colonists and served to provide a visual memento of the Bandanese otherness. Moreover, in the version printed by Commelin, the composition was altered with the addition of a group of Dutch spectators on the right. Their distinctly separate standing position from the seated group of Bandanese might indicate that the Dutch would not have been official onlookers, as they were not invited to sit down and share in the food.

In both these prints, the bamboo poles are absent, while these are currently an essential part of the choreography of the *Cakalele* dance. This suggests that these were added after the Bandanese Massacre, and it shows how this cultural tradition has evolved through time in an effort to commemorate past events and the sacrifice of the Bandanese *orang kaya.* This is especially important considering the fact that the original Bandanese population was decimated on the Banda Islands, and a large influx of (enslaved) laborers from different regions were the ones who would have mixed with the remaining Bandanese to continue the cultural practices. This indicates the strong ties of the Bandanese to their land and its history, rather than ties through ancestry. Recalling the spirit of resistance of the *orang kaya* may have fueled resilience of the Bandanese cultural traditions, and the rebellion against enslavement.

Sensorial landscape

Although Fort Nassau has become a silent and (mostly) scentless place, it would have broadcasted sounds and scents in the past. These sounds and scents can be (partially) deduced from maps and texts that describe the events and activities at the site. In order to reconstruct its soundscape, we can look at what kind of soundmarks would have existed while Fort Nassau was an active site (Schafer, 1977). These soundmarks would have been amplified by the surrounding landscape. For example, the immediate area in front of Fort Nassau features the open space of the bay between the southern shore of Banda Neira and the eastern coast of Banda Besar. The bay creates both an open viewshed and an open plain for sound to reverberate. That sounds carried well between these shores is evidenced by the perceived attack on Sonck in 1621, as the shots that were fired in the village Selamon on the eastern shore of Banda Besar were heard at Fort Nassau in Banda Neira (Van der Chijs, 1886, pp. 139–141). This sound initiated the response of Jan Pieterszoon Coen to send his troops to Banda Besar, where the village was violently seized and put to the torch.

However, the soundscape on the bay was also used prior to the construction of Fort Nassau, when trade was still mostly carried out onboard the ships. For example, a musketeer and cannon salvo would have sounded after the signage

of a treaty or when a ship would arrive or depart the bay (Van der Chijs, 1886, pp. 26–28). Moreover, the salvos were used to mark important occasions, including celebratory events and funerals (de Moelre, 1645, p. 52). As the area of dominion and commerce expanded, the distances between defensive outposts increased as well. Although the direct line of vision between Banda Besar and Banda Neira made communication rather easy, contact with the farther lying islands faced more delay and a loss of accuracy. Therefore, sound was an effective and quick way to communicate.

Another hint to a historic soundmark at Fort Nassau is the presence of a *klok* on the northwest bastion Delft, as depicted in Figure 8.2. The nomenclature of the Dutch word *klok* is interesting, as it not only refers to the physical object of a large metal bell but also to any type of tool that marks the time. Presumably, the bell on Fort Nassau could have been used to sound the hour, a sound that may have been echoed and repeated on each plantation, which were equally equipped with bells to alert the (enslaved) laborers when their work started and ended. Besides indicating time, the *klok* may have been used to sound the alarm during enemy attacks or to warn about an impending natural disaster. No other map or illustration is known to feature this bell, nor is there a bell known in the museum collection that is associated with Fort Nassau. The local museum, however, does house a collection of bells that were taken from former *perken*. Moreover, it is possible that the bell of Fort Nassau was reused to function in the bell tower of the nearby church, which does feature a clock tower and bell to draw people to church and sound the hour.

Besides the use of sound, the views from Fort Nassau would have played an important role in its function to supervise movements and activities on the Banda Islands. Its location was chosen due to its proximity to the sea, as well as determined by the geological formation of the island Banda Neira. As previously discussed, the site initially selected for the construction of Fort Nassau was on top of the hill behind its current location. This higher elevation would have been chosen for strategic purposes, as it would have provided a better view over the bay and sheltered the fort from direct cannon fire from foreign ships. Fort Belgica was therefore created as a second military structure to supply this visual information. In addition to the direct line of vision between Fort Nassau and Fort Belgica, these forts were connected through sightlines with the extended fortification system of the Banda Islands. This system included similar sized forts, like Fort Hollandia on Banda Besar and Fort Revenge on Ay, but also smaller outposts such as Kijk in de Pot on Gunung Api and Voorzichtigheid on Banda Neira.

One focal point within this visual network was the flagpost on top of Papenberg, the highest elevation on the island Banda Neira. The view from this point, however, did not always result in accurate information, as is testified in a report from 1796, which states that the foreign ship *Orembaai* was misperceived to be the ship of the Commander (Van Boeckholtz, 1849, p. 445). Access to the top of the Papenberg has become difficult due to the rapid growth of vegetation, the steep and poorly maintained path, and the infestation of mosquitoes. The remnants of a stone construction on the utmost top of the mountain are all that remain of the previous outlook. Even the view is currently obscured by a plentitude of trees. However, an

impression of what the view must have encompassed is described by Des Alwi's memoirs, in which he wrote:

> Looking to the southeast I could see the deep blue harbor of Neira and Gunung Api, the district of Kampong China and Negreh, the wharf, Fort Belgica with its five huge towers, and the western part of Banda Besar and its bay.
>
> (Alwi, 2010, p. 126)

He also recounts that his grandfather, Said Baädilla, re-erected a flagpole at this location when he returned from his European trip in 1909 (Alwi, 2010, p. 129). He paid a flagman to hoist a white flag every time a ship from the north, northwest, or northeast was sighted, and thus the site regained its function to alert the residents in Neira of maritime traffic.

However, current residents seem unconcerned with the old post on top of the mountain. Their interest lies with a nearby site on a slightly lower elevation that remains a revered *keramat*. These are places that hold spiritual power, which can be visited and offerings can be placed. This *keramat* in particular is powerful, as it is the location where an important holy man is buried.[23] As certain Islamic norms have become more prevalent in the Bandanese community during the last decade,[24] this *keramat* is no longer visited as frequently as before, when offering such as chickens or goats were made to obtain favors (Alwi, 2010, pp. 123–124).

The use of flag signaling as an effective method of communication was not only used on the land, but incoming ships would make their intentions known using this visual method. In the report of 1796, it is mentioned that an English ship was spotted with a red flag on its *gaffel,*[25] which inspired the Dutch to take defensive actions (Greenwood, 1715, p. 31; Van Boeckholtz, 1849, pp. 422–424). A day later, a smaller ship was spotted with Dutch sails and flying a peace flag, carrying letters of surrender to the English. Notably, this sign of peaceful conduct was the reason why the sailors were received and heard, as the Dutch had already taken a defensive position and could have fired at any sight of misconduct or threat. At night, it would have been impossible to signal between the fortifications using flags, and therefore they used signaling fire and the soundscape to alert the other fortifications.[26] These signaling fires connected the outer-lying islands Rhun and Ay with a small outpost on the Gunung Api, Kijk in de Pot, which was visible from Banda Besar and the fortifications on Banda Neira.

Although the sight, sounds and smells of the place might have changed over time, it is possible to deduct its effects. For example, you can nowadays still smell in which buildings nutmeg is stored when you walk down the street. Likewise, Fort Nassau as a storage place must have emanated the scent of spices. In addition to this favorable scent, the weapon chamber and gun power must have given off a scent of foreboding.

Spiritual landscape

On top of all these layers of values (material, natural, cultural, and sensorial), Fort Nassau also has ties to the spiritual landscape of the Banda Islands. As mentioned previously, *keramats* are sacred places where spirits reside, often tied to people or

events of import. Due to the important sacrifice that was made by the *orang kaya* at the fort for resisting colonial rule, it is not surprising that this site also hosts several spiritual forces. Neglecting or denying their presence is not only dangerous, but it would be in direct opposition to how this site continues to have agency and meaning to the Bandanese residents.

Belief in the supernatural is part of everyday life for both young and old across Southeast Asia. In his research, Denis Byrne warns academics, and heritage scholars in particular, to disregard these beliefs as mere superstition, as it can enact colonial paternalism (Byrne, 2014, p. 6). By characterizing these beliefs as primitive, the people that adhere to these beliefs are placed in a different time, rendered Other, and therefore an authorization is justified for academic scrutiny, subjugation, and exploitation.[27] Even without his warnings, any scholar who has worked on the Banda Islands will confirm that the supernatural cannot be ignored if an understanding and acceptance of the community is sought. Nevertheless, it was only after my repeated returns to the Banda Islands that people opened up about the supernatural presence that resides at various (colonial) sites. These insights were only shared after my confirmation that I believe in these spirits and respect the validity of stories that were going to be shared with me.

The presence of supernatural powers is an integral part of intangible practices as well as the interpretation of historical and sacred sites on the Banda Islands. These sites exude power through the presence of spirits, and therefore, in the experience of the Bandanese, these sites have agency. Anthropologist Phillip Winn explains this as:

> In the Bandas, experience of place is not marked by envisaging agency in terms of an essential 'interiority'' but more as 'agent-plus', residing not only in the actor but in a region outside the actor to which they must accede.
>
> (Winn, 2001, p. 26)

Therefore, the Bandanese experience of their surroundings is not solely an internal process; it is also shaped by the agency of their environment. In his research, Winn describes the Banda Islands as *tanah berkat*, meaning that the Bandanese believe these islands are blessed (Winn, 2005). This belief is still alive, as the Bandanese believe God had given them nutmeg as a rich source of income, and when the prices for nutmeg dropped, God gave them tuna.[28] The sacredness of the Banda Islands is also evidenced by the treatment of the land by the *Banda asli,* as they still take off their shoes when they arrive on the island.[29]

Des Alwi explained that the Banda Islands are habituated by *orang halus*, who have their headquarters in the *rumah kampung,* and meeting places or "guard posts" at several spots in the islands, such as at the old forts, several big rocks near the beach, in the woods, or even under an old tamarind tree (Alwi, 2010, p. 122). According to Des Alwi, many of the *keramat* derive their power from deceased Bandanese leaders or warriors who died or are buried there. Following Des Alwi' logic, it would seem that Fort Nassau would be a location where these spirits dwell as well. Not only is this location closely tied to the narrative of the Bandanese Massacre, but it was a site of capital punishment for many decades that followed.

When I asked the residents in the direct vicinity of Fort Nassau about whether the site was haunted, they responded rather matter-of-factly that it is.[30] One informed me that the cries of people are heard every night from the "Portuguese" well, where the body parts of the *orang kaya* were deposited. Moreover, the sounds of the clinking of the irons that bound the prisoners can be heard. This sound was also described by another Bandanese resident as *anji ruti,* the sounds of the chains of bound people, which was heard at the site by their father and grandfather.[31] Besides these native spirits, one resident mentioned that there is a ghost of a Dutch lady who sits under the big old tree in front of their house, on the north side of Fort Nassau.[32] She does not have a name, and she does not make a sound, many Bandanese have seen her and ask *permissi* before walking underneath the tree at night. During my last visit in 2024, this tree was no longer there after an unfortunate incident.

The residents near the site informed me that they are not scared of the ghosts and acknowledge that there are many spirits dwelling at Fort Nassau, as much violence and many cannons were present there.[33] One of the residents stated that the fort was truly haunted when it was still overgrown. However, since the restoration team has removed the vegetation, the area has become light and clean, and therefore, the ghosts have left.[34] This is in accordance with the memoirs of another Bandanese resident, who recalled his childhood memories when he and his friends would go fishing for ghosts with a banana on a string.[35] He saw the gigantic spirit of "Papoea", who took his banana, but this spirit is no longer on the Banda Islands. According to him, this is due to the many modern constructions, such as buildings and streetlighting.

However, the spirits not only roam at night, as evidenced by an anecdote from an outdoor lecture at Fort Nassau. During the visit, a female student became possessed by a spirit as they sat down in the southern gate.[36] First, she started crying; then she sat up with one leg crossed like a man and asked for cigarettes. Even though the girl never smoked, during her possession she inhaled the smoke deeply and exhaled it through her nostrils; according to the instructor, just like an old man. She then stated that they had to be respectful of this site, avoid making loud noises, and keep it clean. After this message, she collapsed and woke up, not remembering what had happened. One of the other students remarked that a nearby traditional village had performed *buka kampung*, and this could have caused the stronger presence of the spirit during the day.

Conclusion

Fort Nassau represents a multifaceted element within the cultural landscape of the Banda Islands, connecting material, natural, cultural, and sensory dimensions. Fort Nassau is not just a relic of the past; it is embedded within the intangible cultural heritage and collective memory of the Bandanese people. Practices like the *Cakalele* dance, which symbolically references the Bandanese Massacre, underscore the deep connections between the site and the community's historical

narrative. The natural and spiritual landscapes also interact with the fort, as beliefs in supernatural presences and the physical geography of the islands shape how the fort is perceived today. Together, these dimensions reveal a dynamic cultural landscape where Fort Nassau stands as a testament to the complexities of colonialism, cultural resilience, and the interdependence of built and natural environments. This interplay of elements highlights the need to preserve such sites not only for their architectural and historical value but also for their enduring cultural and emotional resonance within local communities.

Notes

1 *Roede* is a measure of length; the length of a *roede* could range between 7 and 21 feet (2–6.5 m).
2 Valentijn mentioned lemon trees on top of the ramparts. Moreover, it is likely they grew these trees becasue the vitamins in lemons were effective to fight scurvy (Valentijn, 1858, p. 2).
3 Brick stones were baked from clay derived from the Dutch river IJsel. Depending on the way they are baked, they can be red or yellow of color. These stones were brought on board in the Netherlands as weight to heavy the ships for the journey to the East, which were then taken off-board when they arrived at their destination and replaced with trade goods. These stones are therefore to be found in all the former Dutch colonies, as they were used to build gates, bridges, and other buildings.
4 Ravelin is part of a defensive structure, consisting of a triangular wall with the point facing outwards (Duffy, 2006, p. 224) (see also Figure 8.1).
5 Hornwork is an outwork composed of two branches at the sides and a small bastioned front at the head. Also called crownwork (Duffy, 2006, p. 224) (see also Figure 8.1).
6 Valentijn does not remark when this visit was, but he lived in the Moluccas from 1686 to 1694 and 1707 to 1712, so it is likely that his observations date from this time period.
7 *Wambuis* is an old-fashioned clothing piece worn over a shirt by men, covering their upper body until their hips.
8 Jacob Waben, Jan Pieterszoon Coen, 1623–1699, oil paint on panel, Westfries Museum in Hoorn.
9 *Vaandrig* is a young officer in the infantry, often of noble blood whom would carry the flag (*vaandel*) of the compagnie.
10 Benteng ini berbentuk persegi dengan bastion berbentuk hati pada setiap sudutnya dan dikelilingi oleh parit. Ketika Benteng Belgica diperkuat pada tahun 1672–1673, Benteng Nassau ini hanya digunakan sebegai penjara orang-orang buangan dari Batavia. Sekarang benteng ini hanya menyisakan 2 buah bastion dan 2 buah pintu gerbang dan berapa meter dindingnya. Benteng ini mengalami kerusakan parah ketika diserang oleh Inggris pada tahun 1810 yang mengambil alih Benteng Belgica saat itu.
11 Hendrik Veen, Bovenaanzicht van Fort Nassau, Bandainaira, 1860–1890, Collodion wet plate process, digital repository Wereldculturen (https://collectie.wereldculturen.nl/), 7 13/16 x 9 15/16 inch (19.9 x 25.2 cm), object number TM-10021964.
12 *Reduit* is a military construction in the interior to which the defenders could retreat. When constructed in the vicinity of forts, they were built in the shape of a low round tower.
13 In the collection of the British Library, collection number ADD.34.184-33. Digital version can be viewed online at the Atlas of Mutual Heritage: https://www.atlasofmutualheritage.nl/en/page/4231/view-of-banda-nera.
14 *Beneden kasteel* literally translates as Lower Castle.
15 *Waterkasteel* literally translates as Water castle. On the information sign this name is also used in Indonesian: *Benteng Air*.

16 Fieldnotes 2017 + 2018.
17 Acts to reclaim land from a body of water.
18 These varieties still grow in other areas of Indonesia, such as Papua, but are considered to be of inferior quality compared to the round nutmeg from the Banda Islands.
19 These birds are called *Noote-eters in Dutch, Burong Pala* in Malay, and *Falor* on the Banda Islands.
20 Fieldnotes February 1, 2019.
21 Unknown, "VIII. Bantae inhabitatores, qvomodo ad res serias et mangnas tractandas conueniant", 1601, print, published in Qvinta pars Indiæ Orientalis … by Johann Theodor de Bry, accessed at William H. Scheide Library in Princeton, object number 23.13.
22 Unknown, "Afteeckeninge van hare gastmalen", 1646, print, published in Begin ende Voortgangh … by I. Commelin, plate 17, page 22.
23 Fieldnotes February 15, 2019.
24 This observation is based on several accounts of foreign travelers who have frequented Banda throughout the years. Particularly, archaeologist Peter Lape informed me that during his fieldwork in 1997, hardly any women wore a hijab, while nowadays it is rare to see women with uncovered heads (fieldnotes 23 February, 2019).
25 *Gaffel* is a spar to which the mainsail is attached to on sailboats.
26 Fieldnotes November 20, 2015.
27 See also Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object*; Said, *Orientalism*.
28 Fieldnotes June 5, 2016.
29 Fieldnotes July 19, 2017.
30 Fieldnotes May 30, 2017.
31 Fieldnotes June 1, 2017.
32 Fieldnotes May 30, 2017.
33 Fieldnotes May 30, 2017.
34 Fieldnotes October 11, 2017.
35 Fieldnotes February 17, 2019.
36 Fieldnotes February 20, 2019.

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