

1. Description

1.1 Name(s) of society, language, and language family: The language Bonerate is also known as Karompa and is spoken in the following regions: South Sulawesi, Bonerate, Madu, Kalaotoa, and Karompa islands. It's language family classification from broad to most specific is: Austronesian, Malayo-Polynesian, Western Malayo-Polynesian, Sulawesi, Muna-Buton, and most specifically Tukangbesi-Bonerate.¹ Westerners have grouped them with both Bugis and Selayar people.²

1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com): bna¹

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude): Approximately 7° S and 121° E latitudes.²

1.4 Brief history: Bonerate history and traditional culture has very few accounts, but it is known that in the past, the basis of the Bonerate economy was a combination of trading, slaving, and piracy. Exports of deer antlers and hides have been reported for the nineteenth and early twentieth century. About 30 years ago dogs were introduced for hunting and deer in the area went extinct. Another economic enterprise that has ceased is the growing of cotton for spinning and weaving. Bonerate exported textiles as late as the beginning of this century. Orang Bonerate have a long-standing tradition and reputation for being skilled builders of the local type of sailship. In the past, Bonerate had a stratified society with sharply defined classes: kings, queens, and their descendants; nobility; commoners; and slaves. Nowadays, this social division is little to no importance in everyday interaction.² Bonerate are regarded as descendants of early Butungese immigrants.³

1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors: Slavery was a powerful influence and sea trade among neighbors also had a very strong influence. The Bonerate language itself was shaped by its neighbors. Islam was introduced into the traditionally spirit-worship style of religion that had been practiced historically in Bonerate culture.⁴

1.6 Ecology (natural environment): The area belongs to the moist deciduous monsoon forest zone. Bonerate means "flat sands," and it has two minor hills. The higher of the two hills reaches less than 200 meters above sea level. Corals are what the island is formed from and it is almost circular in shape, extensive reefs surround its edges, and it covers about 70 square kilometers. The quality of the soil is poor. In the areas where fields are cleared, seeds are sown between coral-limestones. Water is a scarce resource during the dry season, as there are no rivers or creeks.² Bonerate is a coral island that is about 70 square kilometers in size. Despite their poor soils, the islanders view themselves as agriculturalists.⁴

1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density: Orang Bonerate occupy ten villages with populations ranging from about 20 to 1000 people. Seven of these are seashore communities and the other three are on the interior of the island. An eleventh village emerged in 1978 at an inland location. In a census in 1978, the population was reported as 5500.²

2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s): Corn is the staple crop and this is backed by cassava. Pumpkins, watermelons, peas, and beans are also grown. Some fruits are also grown for local consumption.² The cassava is grown in slash-and-burn gardens. Coconuts are also an important cultivation.⁴

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources: Fish and other sea products are the main protein sources.² The only sources of land animal protein are poultry and goats.³ Worms, mollusks, and bivalves are gathered along the shores when the tides are low, and this is another important source of protein.⁴

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns,² daggers, wooden pistols.⁴ Technological level is low.³

2.4 Food storage:

2.5 Sexual division of production: With the exception of boat building and a few fishing activities, sexual division of labor is not very developed at Bonerate. Traditional home tasks are generally assigned to women, but men also are involved in cooking, tending to babies, fetching water, and washing clothes.² Women and men are generally equals when it comes to food production.⁴

2.6 Land tenure: The island has no primary forest, but secondary forest and bush land are cleared for agricultural purposes. Due to the lack of water, only one crop is possible each year. The agricultural land is collectively owned by the villagers.² Slash-and-burn agriculture is practiced.³

2.7 Ceramics: Very few artisans reside on the island.²

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:

2.9 Food taboos: Pork is never eaten.⁴

2.10 Canoes/watercraft? Water is scarce inland, but Orang Bonerate have a reputation for being exceptional builders of the local type of sailship called “prahu”.² Shipbuilding is the major economic activity in Bonerate and the twin settlement Baranka. They also build modernized versions of boats that are equipped with motors.³ Dugout canoes were described as being used in a possession-trance ritual.⁴

3. Anthropometry

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f): *Not reported.*

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f): *Not reported.*

4. Life History, mating, marriage

4.1 Age at menarche (f): On average, females get their period around age 14, as can be inferred from the fact that the given age range for females that are able to reproduce, but are not yet married is 14-17.³

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f): Females typically start reproducing for the first time between the ages of 18 and 22, as inferred from the reading.³

4.3 Completed family size (m and f):

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f): Inferring from the fact that fertile females from ages 14 to 17 are typically considered “unmarried,” the age at first marriage is most likely age 18.³

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce: Marriages are typically stable and divorce is rare.²

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously: polygyny is possible but rare in Bonerate society.² It is described as being “virtually absent” from Bonerate society.⁴

4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?: It’s natural for wealthy parents of a bride to donate money to the family of the groom in order to enable the payment of a large bride-price.²

4.9 Inheritance patterns: Bonerate sons and daughters inherit equal shares of the estate and belongings of their parents. The exception to this is that the youngest daughter receives the parental house (this is actually the mother’s house) and all the equipment of the household. In the case that there are no daughters, the youngest son inherits the house.²

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict: Fathers and mothers both play a role in the socialization of their children. Young caretakers also take part in child care as part of an institutionalized custom. Emphasis is placed upon emotional control, so Orang Bonerate rarely praise their children nor use physical punishment. Children direct aggression toward themselves typically (or towards culturally accepted targets like animals and strangers).²

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals: *Not reported.*

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy): As long as the marital partner is not in one's direct lineage, it does not matter whether one practices endogamy or exogamy, but it seems to be a trend that people marry others within their own culture, but they can marry across villages.⁴

4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these "other fathers" recognized? No. Paternity is not partible, and other fathers are not recognized, nor do "other fathers" typically exist since marriage is primarily monogamous, and therefore only one father is present and sexually active with his wife.⁴

4.14 What is the belief of the mother's role in procreation exactly? (e.g., "receptacle in which fetus grows"): Mother plays a very important role in procreation, and when a woman is pregnant and/or has reproduced, she is given higher social esteem. Motherhood is deemed a very important and prestigious thing.⁴

4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)? No. There is just one father typically, and conception is viewed in the same way that our western culture views it.⁴

4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape: No reports of sexual coercion or rape that have come up in various sources I've come across.

4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin): Social prestige is at risk for men, but not women. Men try to move up socially by marrying socially important women, but women don't lose rank by marrying a man who is less socially prestigious than themselves.²

4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms? No.⁴

4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring: No, polygyny is virtually absent, and divorce is almost as equally rare, therefore there are not typically extramarital partners or offspring. Extramarital relations are punished.⁴

4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children? It is dependent on the circumstances, whether it be the grandma, the mother's sister, or the husband.⁴

4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females: There is a close to 1 to 1 ratio.⁴

4.22 Evidence for couvades: No.⁴

4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older) : Typically just one father.⁴

4.24 Kin avoidance and respect? High social esteem is granted to women in Bonerate society, therefore lots of respect is given to female members of one's lineage, especially older women and women who are in reproductive stages.⁴

4.24 Joking relationships? Yes.⁴

4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations: The culture itself is matrifocal, but patterns of descent are typically bilateral.⁴

4.26 Incest avoidance rules: One does not typically marry siblings or cousins.³

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony? Yes.⁴

4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name? *Not specified.*

4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?)

4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)? Typically the parents of the bride and groom arrange marriages.²

4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who: No.³

Warfare/homicide

4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare: Raiding foreigners used to be a cause for death, and women were sometimes left to protect themselves from hostile strangers since men were off at sea.⁴ No warfare to report of, especially in current times. However, piracy used to be prevalent.²

4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death: Bonerate men in the past have been known pirates. Any serious conflict in the present day is carried out by police or military personnel. Gossip, ridicule, and reference to respect towards elders are methods used to solve minor conflicts at the village level.²

4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing: In the past, piracy was a cause.²

4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations): The Bajau people (aka sea nomads) are known to have close, lasting relations with the Orang Bonerate that are ancient. The relationship used to be more along the lines of a symbiotic relationship and in current times the relationship can more accurately be classified as an “ecologically based cooperation” in which the Bajau fetch water at Bonerate and bater fish and other sea products in exchange for cultivars grown on Bonerate. Residents that live in an inland village purchase marine foods at the coastal villages or at the island capital.² The Bonerate men engage in sea trade with the Moluccas and ports in Java⁴ for items such as fresh fish, dried fish, and coconut oil.³

4.18 Cannibalism? N/A

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size: Of the 11 villages, group size ranges from 20 to 1000 individuals.²

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality): Bonerate men spend extended periods of time at sea, but wives and children typically remain in the villages.⁴

5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes): There is a hierarchical system that is organized by locally recruited headmen for the island, settlements, and neighborhood. The policy of the civil servants are carried out by the headmen. The neighborhood level is the only level at which the local headmen and even the islanders in general have any influence on political issues.²

5.4 Post marital residence: Marriage is mostly uxorilocal so the newly married couple moves in with the parents of the bride or into a house nearby.²

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex): Solidarity is stressed among the sexes.⁴

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:

5.8 Village and house organization: Most houses have walls made of bamboo or rough wood and roofs made of thatched coconut palm leaves and are built on poles. Sizes vary from small, one-room all-thatch huts to houses that contain a veranda, bedrooms and even a separate kitchen.² The local capital is the administrative center, and civil servants, police, and military personnel reside there.⁴

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses): Mosques.⁵

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere? Sleep in houses, as can be inferred by the fact that they have special house structures. However, I have not seen any mention of beds or other structures, so I would infer that they sleep on mats or on the ground.

5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc: In the past, social organization played a significant role, but today social hierarchies are almost nonexistent and even kin groups beyond the immediate nuclear family do not play a role of any significance. Social organization is only really expressed during occasions of ritualized dances. It also appears that a new elite based on economic success seems to be seen among the islanders.² There used to be an operating class structure "not too long ago" and slaves occupied the lowest position.⁴

5.12 Trade: Since the Bonerate are known for specializing in the craft of building ships, they build ships on contracts for clients all over South Sulawesi and other parts of Indonesia. They are engaged in the copra and spices trade between the Moluccas and Java.²

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies? In the past, Bonerate had a stratified society with sharply defined classes: kings, queens, and their descendants; nobility; commoners; and slaves. Nowadays, this social division is little to no importance in everyday interaction.²

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6.0 Time allocation to RCR: It is variable, and religious faith as well as religious knowledge is unevenly distributed among villagers.⁴ The mosques are rarely frequented except during Ramadan.³

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine): There are ritual leaders, sometimes called *juragans*.⁴ There are local healers to resort to in times of severe illness, but only a few local remedies are used. Illness is thought to have been caused by the loss of a soul.²

6.2 Stimulants: People in rituals sometimes get possessed, by being "blessed" with smoke.⁴

6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal): Men between the ages of 19 and 30 are gone from the island anywhere between six and ten months each year to sail as part of crew members on Bonerate boats that are involved in the spice trade. Puberty rites are staged for male and female children.² There are traditional rituals for the first haircutting, circumcision, marriage, and "color village life." There are female "circumcision" rituals (pseudo-circumcision, obviously).⁴

6.4 Other rituals: Islamic rituals such as Ramadan. Bonerate women have a possession-trance ritual that they do in which they smother glowing embers with their bare feet. The women are possessed and the fact that they do not get burned is seen as proof of the fact that they are authentic mediums to communicate with the spirits. This ritual traditionally had more cultural implications, but now the islanders seem to have lost knowledge or forgotten about many of the original implications culturally and seem to view it as mostly just a form of exciting entertainment. The described ritual is pagan, and is not of the Islam faith that is said to belong to the people of Bonerate. Offerings are given for good crops, good health, and thanksgiving are all presented in a manner that is traditional and this is done on small alters that are either under a large tree, on the beach, or on the island's few black phallic stones. Offerings are made up of some boiled rice that is wrapped in a banana leaf, a few cigarettes, and water placed in a bamboo tube. *Pakande* is the term for such an offering. The ritual was traditionally staged when there were times of intense stress. Droughts, typhoons, insect invasions, and other disasters prompted these rituals.⁴

6.5 Myths (Creation): Some Bonerate insist that there are no existent deities, but other Bonerate tell of offerings being directed to *Seta*, or spirits and ghosts of Indonesia. There is a blurred connection between the traditional religion of spirit worship and Islam.⁴

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games): In the possession trance ritual, drums, flute, and a gong are played.⁴

6.7 Sex differences in RCR: Egalitarianism is a striking feature of this culture, so there is not much difference between the sexes in RCR. However, possessed women, and not men, are the ones who perform a possession-trance ritual. Men assist though. Solidarity is stressed among the sexes.⁴

6.8 Missionary effect: Islam was introduced. Also, even further back, the practices of the Bugis *bissu* institution has most likely had a powerful influence on Bonerate rituals.⁴

6.9 RCR revival: Even though Islam was introduced, some paganistic and traditional practices of spirit worship still occur in addition to the practice of Islam.⁴

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs: Islamic view of afterlife, with some interspersed traditional views.⁴ It is thought that the soul sets out on a voyage through the dark before it reaches the "site of final rest."²

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people? No.⁴

6.12 Is there teknonymy? Parents are referred to with teknonymic terms by the name of their eldest son.²

6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.): According to official records, they are Sunni Muslim.² Another source describes the Bonerate people as being "folk Islam" which basically means that they practice Islam differently than traditional Islam, and religious beliefs vary from individual to individual.⁴ Some Bonerate find it to have no inconsistency if they go to the mosque for prayer and then bring offerings to different altars in the same day, while others condemn the traditional practice of spirit worship.⁵

7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint: Body paint is not used in everyday life, and has not been mentioned in any sort of ritualistic practice.

7.2 Piercings: It has not been specified one way or the other regarding piercings, but if piercings do occur, it is not excessive.

7.3 Haircut: There is a ceremony for the first haircut, although the haircut is not described. It is described by one source as women wearing their hair in a knot.⁴

7.4 Scarification: No, as can be inferred by the fact that this culture is not dominated by warfare, and the fact that they are Muslim.

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.): T-shirts and shorts or pants are typical items of adornment. No lip plates, beads, or feathers are normally seen in day-to-day life. Some women wear cloth/wraps around their heads.³ Ornamental arts are not developed.²

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment: Cloth bandoliers, headdresses for women, bright-colored sarongs, and more.⁴

7.7 Sex differences in adornment: Women and men both dress somewhat casually day-to-day, but women tend to wear long skirts with decorative patterns on them while men tend to wear shorts, or shorter skirt-like cloths, as can be inferred from photos found from one source that show people of the closely related culture of Selayar.⁶

7.8 Missionary effect:

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment: None to speak of.

8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system: The Bonerate kinship system is bilateral and kin terms are the same whether the relative is linked through one's mother or father. Relative age and the distinction between siblings and cousins are emphasized. Elder siblings are called *ikaka* and younger siblings are called *yaisu*. Gender is acknowledged by the suffix *moane* for male and *vovine* for female. Parallel and cross cousins are termed *sapisa*. *Ina* refers to the mother and *ama* refers to father. All other members of the parental generation are called *tuha* except for the in-laws who are called *davo*. Grandparents as well as grandchildren are called *ompu*. One's own children are called *anak*.² The culture of the island can be considered matrifocal.⁴

8.2 Sororate, levirate: N/A

8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.): Formerly, kin groups were closely related to a rigid system of social rank, but today kin groups that go beyond the household units that are based on core families have very little significance. Bilateral relatives are recruited for occasional communal tasks like ritual activities and agricultural work.²

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

Bonerate individuals are often bi- and even trilingual. A large number of the islanders have some knowledge of

Bahasa Indonesia which is the national language that is also the language of the schools. Bonerate people say that their language shares many similarities with Butonese.²

"For centuries and up to the present men from the South Sulawesi mainland, especially of Bugis affiliation, Butung, and Flores have settled and married at Bonerate. Immigrant men far outnumber immigrant women."²

Since the technological level is low, long-bladed bush knives and digging/weeding iron rods are only agricultural tools that are in use.²

War dances are popular entertainments in the largest village.³

Modern forms of entertainment like TV, movies, etc. have not yet reached the islands, and even radios are scarce in smaller villages.⁴

Egalitarianism between the sexes is an interesting feature of Bonerate social organization. This organization can be considered matrifocal.²

Numbered references

¹ Bonerate: A Language of Indonesia. <http://www.ethnologue.com/14/show_language.asp?code=BNA>.

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⁵ Broch, Harald Beyer. Cultural Variation on the Islands in the Sea of Flores. *Persee*. Vol. 22, Issue 22 (1981), pp. 43-53.

⁶ The Indonesian Island of Selayar. <<http://www.galenfrysinger.com/selayar.htm>>