Kupang and the five loyal allies, 1658-1700s

THE FORMATION OF THE FIVE ALLIES

The Dutch post in Kupang was typical of the fortified trading offices that dotted the map of maritime Southeast Asia. It was a coastal stronghold situated by a river, which had an inter-dependent relationship with the local inhabitants populating the hinterland. A fortress strong enough to deter local adversaries housed a rudimentary administration staff that attempted to follow the statutes and orders from Batavia as well as it could, considering the limited resources available. The commander, or opperhoofd, headed a council consisting of four trusted Dutchmen, and managed both the administrative and purely commercial affairs. The commercial side of his duties was accentuated by the fact that along with his position as opperhoofd, he was also onderkoopman (under-merchant). The opperhoofden were normally appointed by Batavia, and for the most part were people with no previous experience of Timor. However, mortality rates were high at this distant post as there were illnesses from which the Dutchmen were unable to protect themselves. Many opperhoofden died in office after a few years or even months, and were succeeded by a locally residing Dutchman, the second in command, on a temporary basis. All this did little to foster continuity in Fort Concordia, whose soldiers could usually be counted in numbers of two digits. Rather, such continuity would be found among the allied princes on Timor and Solor.

In line with the usual lines of development for VOC offices, a small settlement slowly evolved around Fort Concordia, which hardly seemed to merit the name ‘town’ until late in the eighteenth century. The settlement was not predominantly a European affair, or at least, not a ‘white’ one. In the early decades of the Kupang post there were small congregations from the allied islands of Rote and Solor. European soldiers and
sailors who had ended their service would sometimes obtain a permit allowing them to settle as free burghers and make use of the limited trading opportunities. Timorese were occasionally included as free people or slaves. The ethnic picture will be discussed more fully in the next chapter. Interestingly, there was some minor trading activity by Timorese aristocrats from the allied princedoms. A few princes even owned ships and plied the waters for trade between Kupang and Pulau Semau, Rote, and the Solor and Alor groups. They used mixed Solorese and Timorese crews, the former having a reputation as good seamen, something which evidently does not endorse the commonly received notion that the Timorese always avoided the sea.¹

From Batavia’s viewpoint, Kupang was definitely not a place that was financially viable. The financial accounts for the Company, which are noted year by year in the documents, almost always indicate a loss in the course of the VOC period. The sums involved, however, were very modest in relation to other eastern posts like Banda and Ambon, the deficit usually being several thousand guilders, but sometimes more than 10,000. In spite of the interest in sandalwood, the actual volume of trade was hardly sufficient to hold the attention of Batavia and Amsterdam and thus make them maintain the small and unprofitable post; neither were the doubtful ersatz commodities, beeswax and slaves. Rather, there were strategic aspects at play. As argued by Governor General Joan Maetsuyker in 1659, Kupang must be kept because of its proximity to the more valuable islands of Banda and Ambon. Another professed reason was that only a Dutch stronghold could prevent the Portuguese from overrunning the VOC allies in the area (Coolhaas 1968:255; Van Dam 1931:258).

Dutch outposts usually depended upon agreements and contracts forged with local polities in the hinterland. These could be comparatively strong sultanates like Palembang on Sumatra or Banjarmasin on Kalimantan, or perhaps a system of medium- or small-sized kingdoms like those in South Sulawesi, close to the Makassar trading post. Yet another possibility was that the inhabitants of the hinterland had formed tribal communities or chiefdoms, which would normally mean a low-technology and illiterate society. Examples of this were the Minahasa in

¹ VOC 1375 (1681-82), Dagregister, sub 26-9-1681; VOC 2133 (1729), Resolutions, sub 2-11-1728. A ship owned by the Sonbai regent Nai Sau in 1728 was manned by eight Timorese and six Solorese. Small-scale shipping is also mentioned in relation to the Helong people of Kupang.
North Sulawesi, and part of Taiwan. The Timor example lies somewhere between these two types: a system of polities exhibiting certain features of early states, but lacking the characteristics of the more sophisticated Muslim and Hindu states elsewhere in the archipelago.

For the allies around Kupang, ‘the Company’ was a concept that remained long after the VOC was formally dissolved in 1799-1800. Up until the early twentieth century, Timorese stories would refer to the Dutch colonizers as Mother and Father Company. The idea that the VOC was the mother and father of its allies, is found in documents that were written as early as the seventeenth century. While the contracts themselves were quickly forgotten, the acknowledgement of the polities as subordinate allies was keenly remembered up to the twentieth century in words that at least vaguely referred to historical events. Individual opperhoofden were also forgotten by posterity with just a few exceptions, and the VOC was referred to in just the same way as any other dynastic polity – Sonbai, Kono, Takaip, et cetera. In other words, the VOC was set in a vague, de-historicized past, where the concept of the Company included the totality of the successive opperhoofden and their followers, who in turn represented a Batavian kingship of sorts. The allies used the Dawan term usif when referring to the VOC. Documents from the VOC period reveal that the Governor General and his council in Batavia were a main point of reference, and seemingly above criticism, in contrast with the individual opperhoofden. In their relations with the Timorese, the local Dutch officials sometimes referred to the Prince of Orange as the ultimate symbol of authority, but the latter remained a vague figure, nothing remotely comparable to His Catholic Majesty in the Portuguese sphere. Nevertheless, a stranger king was precisely what the Company was – an arbiter of power whose foreignness was an asset rather than a problem in its efforts to mediate between the local princedoms.

By 1658, there were three allies inhabiting the modest Dutch coastal strip: Kupang (the Helong princedom), Lesser Sonbai and Amabi, whose populations lived a far from affluent existence based on animal husbandry and slash-and-burn agriculture. Showing perhaps conscious disregard to traditional concepts of hierarchy, they were ranked after the date upon which they concluded an alliance with the Company. In that way Kupang held the first place. On the other hand, the king of Kupang

* VOC 1414 (1685), f. 157.
was the original lord of the land (*Touwang Tana* off 'heer van 't land), with some parallels to the Kune lord of the original Sonbai lands.\(^3\) He had freely received first the Company and then the other allies, and even gave a princess in marriage to two Dutch employees in succession.\(^4\) Sonbai and Amabi allied simultaneously, but Sonbai was seen as more important, probably since it enjoyed the greatest resources of the two. In general, Amabi does not appear as a particularly active political protagonist; it tended to follow Sonbai in most issues and seldom created any problems for the Dutch administration.\(^5\)

The Helong princedom, on the other hand, often caused headaches for the *opperhoofden*. Like most Timorese domains it had an immobile king and an active regent at the top, but the two positions were constantly wracked by succession disputes up until the early twentieth century. The old Ama Pono dynasty was mostly headed by minors after 1660, and died out in 1731. New branches ascended the throne in 1733, 1760, the early nineteenth century, 1858, with regular intervals in the late nineteenth century, and finally in 1908, before the Dutch authorities abolished kingship in 1917. Every dynastic change was accompanied by squabbling between rival branches and attempts to convince the Dutch arbiter of their rights. In the late colonial period the colonial officials would compile extensive pedigrees and check local *adat* before making judicious decisions on such inflammatory issues. During the VOC period, however, such information was only acquired piecemeal by the authorities, and the data contained all the traps of oral tradition. The records show the difficulties the Dutch had in grasping the dynastic picture, and how they sometimes accepted patently incorrect versions of history.\(^6\) Nevertheless, the Dutch almost always managed to stop the conflicts from turning violent.

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\(^3\) VOC 2991 (1760), Resolutions, sub 26-1-1760.

\(^4\) This was Pieterenella (d. after 1714), a daughter of King Ama Pono II (d.1660), the king who first received the newcomers. She was married first to Thomas Jacobsz, and later to Floris Jansz.

\(^5\) Part of the Amabi population remained in the Portuguese sphere, around the negeri Oefeto, and were considered to fall under the king of Amarasi. They had occasional contact with their compatriots in Kupang (VOC 1437 [1687], f. 313). An oral tradition recorded in 1948 says that Amabi originally consisted of two tribes under two brothers. After being defeated by the Oemat clan and Amanuban, they moved from Mollo to the west. One group headed by chief Loe Mananu settled south of the Siki River and founded the Amabi-Oefeto domain, while the other proceeded to Kupang where they received land (*Nota van toelichting* 1948, H 1025, KITLV). In this tradition the Portuguese impact has been phased out of the story.

\(^6\) See especially VOC 2991 (1760), Resolutions, sub 9-4-1760, where an incorrect version was brought forward by the rival Pulau Semau branch in order to dispute the legitimacy of the then king Karel Buni.
The reputation of the Helong was not the best among the Dutch officials, and they were perceived as quarrelsome people. When the refugees from Sonbai and Amabi arrived in 1658 they appear to have settled down unopposed, and the Helong very likely understood that this new source of manpower could guard the area from the Portuguese clients in a way that they could not do themselves. During the VOC period, both the Dutch and the Portuguese acknowledged that the Kingdom of Kupang fell under Dutch jurisdiction. No formal usurpation of territory had therefore taken place, but rather, a functional relationship developed between an original insider lord and a new stranger lord, the latter of which had supervised the settlement of immigrant groups. The Timorese tradition of usufruct was decisive here: the Helong were few in numbers, while the Sonbai and Amabi groups numbered many thousands. The newcomers started cultivating the available plots of land, as the size of the land was sufficient, although not too fertile. Although they did occur, land rights were seldom an issue in the VOC documents; wielding power over the people was more important. That relations were far from friendly between the Helong and the newcomers is nevertheless apparent from time to time, with the Helong believing that they should have earned privileges as the original residents. In the early years of Fort Concordia they were unwilling to contribute to the construction work, which they considered to be the responsibility of the new Atoni immigrants. One of the main duties of the Helong themselves vis-à-vis the Dutch was to deliver pigs to the fort at a fixed price. In the early nineteenth century, it was the duty of the Helong king to check that every household kept at least three pigs and 30 hens to be sold to the Dutch if needed. For the same reason, every household had to plant 25 coconut trees.

For years, the Kupang princedom had a relationship with Amabesi which seems to have been centred on Kreba to the south of the settlement. In the mid-seventeenth century, relations vacillated between friendship and enmity, but this changed in 1653, when the entire Amabesi population moved to Kupang and relations became more friendly. Members of

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7 In the late colonial period, B.A.G. Vroklage (1953, I:21-2) did an anthropological study in Belu, which was less influenced by European administration. He found that land was attributed to those who cultivated it, or more precisely, to the ancestors of these cultivators. Similar concepts prevailed in Portuguese Timor before the onset of true colonial rule (Davidson 1994:127). Land issues in Kupang occur in the documents in the second half of the eighteenth century, but more in connection with European demands than between the various princes.

8 Timor 1824, Collection Schneither, Nationaal Archief.
this group settled partly on mainland Timor, and partly in a village on Pulau Semau, an island that was mostly used by the Dutch as a source for wood. The ethnic mix was not entirely happy, at least at the level of the elites. The Amabesi leader, known as Ama Manis or just Ama Besi, had pretensions to power that were incompatible with those of the Helong king and his executive regent, which soon made for serious conflict.

Sonbai was regarded as the most important VOC ally, although it was only the second in rank, since it had allied with the VOC after the Helong princedom of Kupang. Sonbai was, however, strongest in terms of manpower and was considered to be the most warlike congregation in Kupang. The Sonbai settled down at a number of places outside Fort Concordia.9 A later enumeration of settlements from 1832 listed ten temukung who lorded over places that were named ‘Miomaffo’, ‘Mollo’ or ‘Nai Bait’ (Manubait) – actually names of parts of the Greater Sonbai realm.10 That probably means that the settlement structure of the immigrants followed their areas of origin inland. The rulers’ residence was initially situated on a peak to the east of Kupang, close to Oeba, which was known as the Rock of Sonbai. Much later, around 1740, the Sonbai ruler moved his sonaf to Bakunase on the top of the hill south of Kupang, where his descendants still reside. The polity was in effect led by Ama Tomananu from its establishment in 1658 until Tomananu’s death in 1685, and then by his kinsmen in the Oematan family. After his death there were usually two regents, one senior and one junior, in accordance with the structural principles of the Atoni domains. At the beginning, the individual regents could shift their position from junior to senior, but during the late colonial period the two positions were fixed to two branches of the family, Saubaki and Loewis.11 To complicate matters further, the regents were sometimes considered as mere caretakers for the adolescent

9 A note from 1736 included the Sonbai district of Fatuleu, east of Kupang Bay, as part of the sphere falling under the Company’s control (VOC 2883 [1736], f. 141). This was probably no more than a weak claim. The true area of the Lesser Sonbai settlement was limited to scattered places within the sespalen gebied.

10 Francis 1832, H 548, KITLV. The ten temukung lorded over seven settlements, of which four were Mollo, two Miomaffo, and one Manubait. The preponderance of Mollo settlements is not surprising since the Oematan, the family to which the executive regents of Lesser Sonbai belonged, were associated with Mollo. The Manubait settlement might have arisen as a consequence of the coming of the Manubait lord and his followers to Kupang in 1711.

11 The Saubaki family today claims to belong to another family than Oematan, but VOC records are quite explicit on this point (interview, Marthen Saubaki, Kupang, 6-2-2005). The Loewis family appears to have lapsed into complete obscurity, and I was unable to trace its whereabouts during my visits to Kupang.
heirs of a former regent. For example, Ama Tomananu’s son Ama Babu governed as second regent until his death in 1700, when he was in turn succeeded by a brother called Nai Sau. When the senior regent, Ama Baki, died in 1708, Nai Sau took over his position, and left the junior post to a kinsman called Domingo. The two regents were then in charge until 1739, when they both passed away. In their place, a senior regent called Sau Baki, who had actually been the right heir during the long tenure of the predecessor, was appointed. In spite of this intricate system of governance, there is very little evidence of serious internal divisions among the Oematan. Relations between these regents and the Dutch authorities were usually constructive, if not always cordial. Long-serving figures like Ama Tomananu and Nai Sau governed for several decades and served as trusted advisors to the opperhoofden, inducing a sense of continuity when it came to handling affairs in colonial Kupang, where the white man usually did not live until old age.

There would be no Sonbai without Sonbai royalty. As symbolic ammunition, Ama Tomananu brought members of the Sonbai dynasty to Kupang in 1658. Foremost among them was the junior king, who was obviously the son of the old captive emperor, Ama Tuan. In the economic system that the Company tried to cultivate, the Sonbai and Amabi were expected to collect and deliver sandalwood in spite of the unstable conditions outside Kupang. The Dutch appetite for the precious wood soon cost the life of the prince: when he led a party to the area east of the fort to collect the sandalwood in 1659, his party was attacked by the Amarasi and he was violently killed.

The Sonbai mourned him by tearing their clothes and cropping their hair. Since the body of the junior king was kept by the enemy, they had to bury a piece of wood instead, dressing it in his own clothes and adorning it with valuables.\(^1\) In his place, a younger son of Ama Tuan I was made the symbolic head of the Lesser Sonbai community. He was likewise known by the name or title Ama Tuan II, but was an anonymous figure who passed away in 1672, leaving few traces in the official records.\(^2\) The VOC records are more detailed regarding his successor, who was actually a female ruler, an empress (keizerin) in Dutch parlance. Ama Tuan II had three daughters, the eldest of which, Usi Tetu Utang or Bi

\(^{12}\) VOC 1229 (1659), ff. 862a-863b.  
\(^{13}\) VOC 1294 (1673), f. 307a. In later tradition he was called Nai Utang, Baki, or Nisnoni – possibly due to confusion with a later royal refugee called Nisnoni, mentioned in 1748 (VOC 8341 [1748], f. 8).
Sonbai, would head the kingdom-in-exile until her death in 1717 at the age of 51. Female rulers are not uncommon in Timorese history, either as widows or as monarchs in their own right. They were probably not acceptable as executive ‘male’ regents (there is in any case no evidence for this in the sources), but as inactive, notional ‘female’ rulers they could be appointed when there were no male relatives (Pelon 2002:36; Castro 1862:478). Bi Sonbai normally adhered to the passive role assigned to her by Timorese adat and Dutch policy, but on a few occasions she acted as a peace broker and a stern critic of Dutch abuses – in both capacities with some success. Her exalted position apparently made her unfit for marriage, which was otherwise a universal institution in the social world of Timor. Her death therefore necessitated an exchange with the Greater Sonbai group in the Portuguese sphere in order to find suitable princes, a gesture that seemed to be in complete opposition to the colonial division.

The VOC gained a fourth ally in 1683. This was a minor part of the Amfoan group that inhabited the land of Sorbian-Servião on the north coast. Some sources suggest that ‘Amfoan’ and ‘Sorbian’ are interchangeable concepts, but in fact it appears that the former is originally a dynastic term, while the latter is a geographical term. Amfoan had a close relationship to Sonbai, and its king was described as the brother of the Sonbai lord in a document from 1665, perhaps meaning no more than a perceived relative. Later oral stories mention a conflict between two royal brothers over a woman. When the elder brother went to visit Kupang, the younger brother seized his prospective bride. A battle ensued in which the younger brother was victorious; he then went on to rule most of the land, known as Timau. The elder brother had to be content with a small settlement on the coast called Naikliu (H.G. Schulte Nordholt 1971:315). The story can be checked against VOC records, which confirm that the division arose because of fraternal strife. On 16 August 1683, Prince Nai Toas appeared in Kupang with 154 followers and requested asylum, explaining that he was the brother and regent of the king of Amfoan. Thanks to his good and fortuitous governance he came to be held in higher esteem among the subjects than the king himself. When the king became aware of this, he tried to capture Nai Toas in order to put an end to his career, and the prince was forced to flee for his life. At a general meeting, the Dutch opperhoofd noted that Nai

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14 VOC 1252 (1665), f. 677.
Toas was accorded great honours by the allied regents, in particular by Ama Tomananu of Sonbai. In this period the Company was not averse to strengthening the manpower of the allied Timorese by accepting refugees from the Portuguese sphere. They therefore let Nai Toas and his people stay. Nai Toas speculated that his other subjects, some 1,000 people, would follow when they heard about the positive reception given to him.\(^{15}\) This did not happen, and the VOC-allied Amfoan community remained relatively small, settling at Oesapa, east of Kupang – there is no mention of Naikliu in the early sources.\(^{16}\) To the Dutch understanding, this ‘nation’ was also a kind of Sonbai, but with their own ruler.

As in the case of Sonbai and Amabi, there was therefore a division between a Portuguese-affiliated group that remained in the old homeland, and a splinter group that migrated to Kupang. In a Timor-wide context, such splinter movements were common, due to internal conflicts, colonial pressure, collisions between means of livelihood, et cetera. The relationship between the two Amfoan groups was rather ambiguous. The junior line in Oesapa sometimes referred to the old Amfoan land as its property, but this was little more than a pretension. The Dutch, for their part, anxious not to antagonize the Portuguese, made no forays in this direction until much later in the 1740s.

The fifth and last of the five loyal allies was Taebenu, which is sometimes confused with Ambeno. Like Amfoan, this group originally settled in Sorbian. The leaders held the status of *siko*, ‘executive regents’, in their land. In an interview with the Dutch *opperhoofd* Willem Moerman in 1693, the aristocrats of Taebenu explained aspects of their own history. Half a century before, in the 1640s, their land was conquered by Sonbai, and they moved to the land of Amarasi. Around 1660, the Sonbai again abandoned Sorbian, clearly as a consequence of the Portuguese onslaught. Subsequently, the Taebenu regained possession of the territory they had once lost. They were still dependent on Amarasi, however, and spent much time there. One of the Taebenu princes married a relative of the Amarasi ruler, who also made the aristocracy swear a blood oath to the Portuguese. They also had to agree to make periodic sandalwood deliveries to the Portuguese.\(^{17}\) As early as the 1670s, they made overtures

\(^{15}\) VOC 1385 (1683), f. 439.

\(^{16}\) In nineteenth-century sources, the king stayed for much of his time in a residence in Maniki, also situated some distance to the east of Kupang.

\(^{17}\) VOC 1535 (1693), n.p.
to the Company, and some Taebenu aristocrats visited Kupang along with a large retinue.\textsuperscript{18}

Tradition holds that the Taebenu moved to Kupang after a conflict with neighbours over a cattle theft. Interestingly, this detail is confirmed by VOC records. In 1686, a party of Taebenu was hunting buffaloes when they encountered some Topasses and their Timorese clients. A fight ensued, probably over the ownership of the buffalo, and some Taebenu were killed. King António II of Amarasi and the Portuguese leader António Hornay tried to settle the conflict by offering golden discs as compensation, but the attempt at mediation failed.\textsuperscript{19} The Taebenu royalty had already maintained close but clandestine contacts with the VOC for some years, and part of the domain now opted for migration to Kupang. In 1688, hundreds of Taebenu under the regent Tanof arrived in the Dutch area of influence, where they were allowed to stay. Meanwhile, another part of the congregation, under Tanof’s nephew Manaflo, moved to his in-laws in Amarasi. These two exoduses virtually depopulated the land of Sorbian. Tanof and his temukung officially declared Sorbian to henceforth belong to the Company.

There were indeed reasons for the VOC to desire Sorbian. The eastern side of Kupang Bay lay close to this territory, where the most usable sandalwood was to be found. If the area could be secured, the wood could easily be brought down to the bay and loaded onto Company ships during the west monsoon. Nevertheless, this gesture was as empty as that of Amfoan: the small VOC post had no means to penetrate the rather inaccessible lands to the north-east of Kupang Bay, and the allies proved unwilling to take the risk.

As it was, the Taebenu were officially confirmed as ‘friends’ of the Company in 1694. They mostly resided at Baumata outside Kupang, but also restored ravaged crop fields in the Faffome area. Together with other VOC allies, some Taebenu settled at the Maniki River, where they built settlements and gardens, which, however, were destroyed by Portuguese incursions. The Taebenu royalty was considered to have Sonbai origins, but in spite of that, an atmosphere of bitterness existed

\textsuperscript{18} VOC1346 (1678-79), Dagregister, sub 28-10-1678.
\textsuperscript{19} Müller 1857, II:203-4; VOC 8310 (1686-87), Dagregister, sub 13-9-1686.
between Taebenu and Sonbai. The king of Taebenu was expected to perform ritual submission before the Sonbai ruler but bluntly refused to do so, in contrast with the more complaisant king of Amfoan, who saw the Helong kingdom of Kupang as a friend and ally, possibly for historical reasons. The Dutch perceptively noted this latent conflict, which served a *divide et impera* purpose: Kupang and Taebenu were a counter-weight to the two stronger princedoms of Sonbai and Amabi.

Therefore, by the late 1680s, a system had evolved whereby Fort Concordia was surrounded by five allies who functioned as a loyal *cordon sanitaire* against the Portuguese clients. The allies’ land was surrounded by hostile Portuguese clients, in particular Amarasi, and a low-scale state of warfare prevailed from the 1650s until the demise of the Topass system in the mid-eighteenth century. The weak Dutch garrison did not engage in the hostilities, and the Portuguese clients for their part claimed to live in peace with the Company, in spite of the latter being the suzerain of the five allies. It was a contradictory and fragile situation, especially since the peace between the United Provinces and Portugal was not to be disturbed. For the five allies, the tiny Dutch fort was nevertheless a guarantee for their survival, and their basic loyalty to the Mother and Father Company would last as long as the period of colonialism.

**THE PATTERN OF WARFARE**

The pattern of Timorese warfare, which was typically a low-scale affair, is clearly set out by the *Dagregisters*. At the end of the seventeenth century, the five allies could muster as many as 8,000-10,000 able-bodied men with more than 200 muskets and pistols for defence, but such large gatherings of people only occurred in times of the utmost danger. Led by their *meo*, parties of warriors from one or several of the five allies would set out in the direction of Amarasi, with or without the approval of the

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20 The idea of a Sonbai connection is also found in certain later traditions. According to a story rendered in a Dutch memorandum from 1912, the Taebenu group originated from the Oematan of Gunung Mollo and was later established in Lelogama in Amfoan. Due to disputes the group moved to Kupang, and its old territory was occupied by the Anpupu Po U tribe from Pitai (*Memorie van het eiland Timor* 1912:46, KIT 1272, Nationaal Archief).

21 One is reminded that the grandfather of Tanof had allied himself with Kupang against Amabi, and subsequently ceded the area east of Kupang Bay to the king of Kupang as a reward for his assistance (VOC 1535 [1693], n.p.).

22 VOC 1579, ff. 3-4.
If they were lucky, they would trap a small group of adversaries and take as many heads as possible. If they were less fortunate, they would encounter determined resistance and would have to flee the field with losses of their own. If they managed to bring a number of heads to Kupang they would be cheerfully received, and the heads would be made the centre-pieces of a ritual feast. An early account of victorious head-hunting champions was penned by the VOC commissioner Paravicini in 1756. A party of VOC allies came back from the inland in triumph,

all cheering and jumping, carrying two severed enemy heads of so-called *orang berani* [meo] on long pikes, which were brought to the dwelling of His Excellency. There [the regent] Don Bastian picked the aforementioned heads and offered them to the commissioner with deep reverence and a dignified speech, as proof of the bravery and valiant character [of his men]. However, the heads were a grisly sight and His Excellency refused to receive them. They were therefore impaled again. A ring [of people] was formed around them, and they sang and danced and made several fearsome and threatening gestures with their bodies and swords against [the heads]. All these warriors were very beautifully adorned in their way. On their head they had a white linen cloth instead of a handkerchief, adorned at the top with peacock feathers, and on their feet they had bound small silver bells which [...] caused a not unpleasant sound.23

Thus the Company was part of the ritual of headhunting, whether it wanted to be or not. After a raid, the allied regents invariably occurred at the *opperhoofd*’s residence and reported back details about the enterprise, stating how many heads had been taken or lost. If successful, they would ask the Dutch for arrack, a highly appreciated drink among the Timorese. There is almost no evidence that the Dutch officials tried to prevent the custom, which is stoically reported in the *Dagregisters* without sign of either approval or disapproval. At the most they tried to stop the worst excesses, since women and children were often targeted in the raids. In a letter to Batavia dictated by the regents in 1682, we read: ‘Meanwhile, Your Excellencies [the Governor General and his council] have [ordered] that henceforth neither children nor women are to be killed when the fury of war happens, which is the Dutch manner; that,

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23 VOC 2941 (1756), f. 533. Paravicini wrote about himself in the third person.
too, shall be complied with.\textsuperscript{24} In this context, the Dutch concern was probably less about the civilians living in the Portuguese sphere than about the population of Rote, where the Company used Timorese auxiliaries to subdue the rebellious domains.

A detailed case from January 1679 indicates the degree of violence that accompanied the pursuit of headhunting even among acquaintances. A Helong called Ratty Sassy worked as a messenger during the negotiations between Kupang and Amarasi, and when the negotiations broke down he became a target for revenge. Together with his wife he worked the fields outside of Kupang where he built a hut in the trees for reasons of security. Three men approached the field, and asked Ratty Sassy for maize to eat. Ratty’s wife provided them with some food which she tied to a rope that was lowered from the tree hut. The three men ate it together with some buffalo meat they had brought with them. They then asked Ratty Sassy to come down and bring them a piece of tobacco. His wife begged him not to climb down, but Ratty Sassy knew the three men, who were defectors from Kupang, and descended from the tree. Hardly had he joined the men when they attacked their defenceless host and cut off his head. They grabbed the severed head and rushed off so hurriedly that they forgot the buffalo meat and their assegais. Watching the horrendous scene the wife screamed loudly, thereby causing the three murderers to hurry away even faster. No Helong people were in the neighbourhood, but she finally descended from the tree and ran to the main negeri by the fort, still screaming in grief.\textsuperscript{25}

These skirmishes and attacks alternated with some larger battles, but they were few and far between; such battles were not the Timorese style of warfare. In small-scale societies like the Timorese domains, the aim was not to take a calculated risk of losing many warriors in a single large encounter, and what the Europeans condemned as cowardice, was completely logical from a Timorese point of view. In a polity where manpower might be counted in the hundreds rather than thousands it was essential to avoid losses or serious risks, especially if the adversary possessed firearms.

One of the few major confrontations on Timor took place in August 1664. At this time 400 refugees from the old Sonbai land journeyed towards Kupang; in their way lay the territory of Amarasi, which consid-

\textsuperscript{24} VOC 1376 (1682), f. 406b.
\textsuperscript{25} VOC 1346 (1678-79), Dagregister, sub 29-1-1679.
ered these people a free-for-all target. When he heard that the refugees were approaching, Ama Tomananu’s son, Ama Pot, went out with as many people as he could gather in order to protect them. His men encountered the Amarasi army and after engaging in heavy fighting with them, they managed to drive them off the field while the refugees took another route to safety. The Sonbai pursued the fleeing Amarasi into their own territory and captured no less than 73 heads. Their joy did not last long, however, as they suddenly noticed some detachments approaching. The troops were marching under red flags with white crosses, and some Portuguese were among their ranks. The psychological effect of this scene was devastating. As bullets started to whistle past their ears, the Sonbai took flight. In the end they lost 63 men in addition to 34 of the refugees they had tried to protect. It was clear that traditional Timorese troops could not stand up to organized and well-equipped detachments.26

In 1678, a reconciliation seemed to be underway. The king of Amarasi claimed via envoys that certain incidents in the recent past impeded the conclusion of a peace treaty: a Sonbai called Ama Thoos had slapped the face of the king seven years before, a truly terrible insult. Moreover, the Dutch allies had taken away sandalwood that actually belonged to the Amarasi. Nevertheless, the conflict could be settled if Ama Thoos lay his shield and assegai before the feet of the opperhoofd as an admission of his guilt, and the allies paid 200 golden discs and 1,800 buffaloes in compensation—an expensive fine indeed.27 It was in some respects fortunate that one of the Amabi regent’s sons had recently been killed by the Amarasi, a hideous act that nonetheless meant that counterclaims could be lodged.

Ama Besi, the most active prince in the Helong kingdom, was chosen as the main peace broker. The Dutch were not entirely happy about this, as they perceived Ama Besi as a troublemaker, but Ama Besi maintained that he alone would be able to bring about a peace deal. After some diplomatic trafficking, a sizeable troop of Amarasi approached Kupang in October 1678, headed by a prince. The Dutch account of what subsequently happened sketches a lively picture of ceremonial interaction between Timorese domains at this time. A meeting was arranged on open ground outside Bakunase, which at this time was the residence of Ama

26 VOC 1252 (1665), ff. 1250-1.
27 VOC 1346 (1678-79), Dagregister, sub 14-10-1678; Coolhaas 1971:275.
The Amarasi troop was met by the Helong, Sonbai and Amabi, who stood with their weapons in their hands, within firing range. There was resentment and discontentment among the Helong that Sonbai took the foremost position in the negotiations, since Helong royalty took pride in their role as lords of the land, a notion reinforced by the official Dutch ranking. The Sonbai, however, pointed out that this was the fairest arrangement, since the Amarasi War had come about because of them. Now, the leaders from Amarasi and Sonbai went towards each other and greeted their counterparts with loud shouts and hugs. After standing there for a quarter of an hour, a dog and a buffalo were brought forward, slaughtered and cut into pieces. The Sonbai aristocrats then withdrew and made place for the Amabi and finally the Helong, who also performed their ceremonies. The Dutch found it remarkable that not a word was uttered during the procedure; the only sounds they heard were shouts. After the ceremonial part of the affair, all the aristocrats parleyed inside Bakunase, and it was agreed that the Amarasi troop would come to Kupang the following day.

At the appointed time the Amarasi arrived at the fortified settlement of Pono Koi, the young king of Kupang. There was no sign, however, of the peace broker, Ama Besi, which made the Dutchmen suspicious. The garrison of Fort Concordia was on alert, their fingers on the trigger, and backed up by reinforcements of sailors. The Helong troops welcomed the visitors with flying banners and the beating of drums. A Helong man walked forward, drew his cutlass and cut one ear from a pig that was stood there, tied up. The blood was collected in a young coconut. The man then broke off a branch of wild fig and walked among the rows of Amarasi, sprinkling the mixture of blood and juice over them – not unlike the holy water sprinkled over believers by Catholic padres, as the Dutch later remarked. When this was done, the principal Amarasi went to a balai (assembly hall), while the Helong fired musket salvos in the air. The hosts brought the indispensable sirih and pinang (betel and areca) and some chairs to sit on – like muskets, drums and banners, a European import for a privileged few – and negotiations followed. Towards the evening the king of Kupang sent his ceremonial staff to the opperhoofd as a sign of authority, with a request for arrack: alcohol, too, was a standard ingredient in such congresses.

28 VOC 1346 (1678-79), Dagregister, sub 11-10-1678.
29 VOC 1346 (1678-79), Dagregister, sub 12-10-1678.
Over the following days the situation looked promising as the amicable Amarasi roamed around the settlements of their VOC allies, consuming many pigs and buffaloes during the course of grand feasts. Then something went awry, for the Amarasi prince suddenly stole away without bidding farewell to either the opperhoofd or the regents, an insult in both European and Timorese eyes. Shortly after this, Ama Besi secretly left his sonaf at Bakunase during the night. He took with him not only his own men, but also some of Pono Koi’s subjects, a total of 250 men plus women and children, cattle and provisions. This number may look small but in a local Kupang context it was a very considerable loss of manpower; as a result, Pono Koi had no more than one hundred fit men left under his authority. Ama Besi now openly took the side of Amarasi and henceforth supported his new suzerain against the VOC allies. The only explanation that the Dutch opperhoofd Jacob van Wijckersloot could find for the conduct of Amarasi and Ama Besi was pure ambition. Amarasi entertained great hopes of making Ama Besi the paramount king of Kupang, Sonbai and Amabi, an utterly unacceptable idea considering the strict aristocratic hierarchy. A partial explanation for the defection might be found in the person of Jacob van Wijckersloot himself: his high-handed conduct had engendered much dissatisfaction among the allied regents a few years before, and Van Wijckersloot displayed a hostile attitude towards Ama Besi.

The usual state of hostility between Amarasi and the VOC allies was therefore resumed. By August 1679, it was clear that a comprehensive army of Portuguese clients had gathered under the leadership of the king of Amarasi, at a time when the VOC and their allies were crippled by sickness and death. The role played by António Hornay in all this is unclear; while the Dutch were visiting Lifau, his brother and stand-in, Francisco Hornay, at the same time received the VOC servants, displaying an attitude of ‘business as usual’. At times António Hornay complained to the Dutch that the Amarasi were slow to follow his decrees; indeed, the very structure of the Timorese domains must have made it difficult to take full control of everything that happened there. Nevertheless, the circumstances indicate prior knowledge on Hornay’s part. The Amarasi army also consisted of men from Taebenu, Amanuban, Batumean, Amabesi and other princedoms, and also in-

VOC 1346 (1678-79), Dagregister, sub 21-11-1678, 28-11-1678.

Compare Dag-Register 1887-1931, the year 1674:224-6.
cluded a number of Topasses. Hornay may well have adopted a wait-and-see policy at his base in Larantuka; he could always plead ignorance of the affair, and besides, the conflict was with the VOC allies rather than with the VOC itself. If the allies were crushed, the position of Fort Concordia would be untenable or, at least, it would be at the mercy of the Topasses.

On 30 October, the army approached Kupang, split into two divisions, one of which was headed by the king of Amarasi and his literate Topass brothers António da Veiga and Luís. The tiny weak Dutch garrison hid behind the walls of the fort, which was well equipped with artillery. They had received no orders from Batavia to engage in Timorese wars unless they were directly attacked, but Jacob van Wijckersloot nevertheless felt that he must do something for his allies. He therefore sent a mounted trumpeter into the forest where the Timorese forces were gathering, to play the Wilhelmus and a Dutch military marching song. To an outsider the scene may seem ridiculous, but the allied leaders were probably familiar with the rousing tones of the Dutch anthem, an authoritative symbol for the white stranger kings upon whom they could count for moral support.

Smaller in number, the allied forces first searched out an enemy detachment that was encamped on the lowland, near to the sea. From the surrounding heights they rushed down and managed to kill and behead seven Topasses, dealing a psychological blow to the mixed Amarasi army, as the Topasses were considered to be the elite soldiers of the island. A second attack took place, targeting the core troops of the enemy, and this time António da Veiga was killed. The headhunting ritual was grotesquely complemented by one of arm-hunting; the arms of the slain Amarasi prince were severed and made into pipes. The left flank of the attacking army mostly consisted of subjugated Taebenu and Amabi, who were reluctant to participate in the campaign, especially since the Taebenu ruler had undergone the all-important ritual of mixing and drinking blood with Ama Tomananu of Sonbai. Before a shot could be fired, the king of Taebenu suddenly opened his arms in full sight of his troops, holding his shield in one hand and an assegai he had received from Ama Tomananu in the other. This was a sign to his men to flee as fast as they could, which

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32 A note from 1680 mentions that António Hornay ordered 30 Topasses to act as personal bodyguards for the king of Amarasi (VOC 1367 [1680-81], Dagregister, sub 16-9-1680), illustrating that he probably had a degree of insight into the affairs of this principedom.
they did, leaving only the half-beaten core troops to the right, who tried to defend themselves behind the fence of the burnt-out settlement. The allies had few shotguns but repeatedly attacked with their assegais; in time, their adversaries ran out of musket ammunition and resorted to using their firearms as clubs. When the king of Amarasi was shot through the legs and carried off the field, the remaining troops finally fled. The victors took 103 heads and 53 shotguns by way of trophies, and joyfully marched to the seashore by the fort, brandishing their spoils.\footnote{VOC 1358 (1679-80), \textit{Dagregister}, sub 30-10-1679; VOC 1359 (1680).}

The battle showed that the VOC allies were better in combat than had previously been presumed, and that they were even able to conquer Topasses in moments of danger. It also highlighted the problems created by gathering soldiers from many domains for extended campaigns, something which ran counter to the Timorese way of warfare. The defeat inspired fear in the Amarasi ruler and in Ama Besi.\footnote{VOC 1367 (1680-81), \textit{Dagregister}, sub 20-12-1680. According to a Timorese witness, 500 Amanuban arrived in Amarasi in November 1680, commanded by some Portuguese from Lifau. The general intention was to storm the enclave of the VOC allies together with Ama Besi. However, as the Amanuban became aware of Ama Besi’s self-doubt, they promptly returned to their own land.} No direct attack of this kind would be undertaken against Kupang for a third of a century, and the low-scale enmity with Amarasi became permanent. The moral consequences were soon obvious, since the defection of Ama Besi was more than compensated for by the arrival of new refugee groups from the Portuguese sphere. By the end of the seventeenth century, this resulted in the completion of the association of the five loyal allies.

\section*{KINGSHIP IN THE SHADOW OF THE COMPANY}

Chapter three illustrated the general structure of Timorese kingship. It now remains to be seen how this kingship was perceived by the Dutch and how it was altered by the early colonial presence. Although the opperhoofden interacted with the Timorese kings and regents on almost a daily basis, there are very few straightforward descriptions of their prerogatives and functions. Information has to be gleaned from a broad range of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century sources and carefully compared with later ethnological literature. In general, the Dutch sources present
two images of local kingship: either despotism or a lack of executive power and state. According to Jean-Baptiste Pelon, writing in 1778,

The one who carries the name of king would have too much power over his subjects to be called despotic, and not enough to be called monarchical. He is surely the only one with an arbitrary will, but his powers are so restricted that he never dares to encroach on the liberties, goods or lives of his subjects, at least in instances where he is not able to conceal his conduct from direct or indirect accusations. (Pelon 2002:33.)

He also noted that all matters rotated around one or two ‘ministers’ (usif, ‘regent’) who were likened to the major domus of late Merovingian France.

In 1756, the VOC commissioner Johannes Andreas Paravicini considered it a bonus for the Company that the executive regents were hereditary and in some aspects like kings; he believed they were viewed like fathers by their subjects. In strained situations the people would not take up arms against the regents or temukung, but rather against the king. According to Paravicini, the best way to therefore keep the allied kings in check, was to maintain good communications with their regent. A case in point was the then king of Kupang, Karel Buni (reign 1749-1760). Karel explained to Paravicini that when he was a minor, his regent sold a piece of land to the corrupt opperhoofd. This was plainly against the old adat; neither the king nor the regent or temukung had the right to dispose of land or the heirlooms of the realm. Paravicini replied that the regent in that case had to be arrested and sent to Batavia to be sentenced. Karel shuddered and spoke in a different tone, ‘Milord, do not do that. Otherwise my people will rebel because of that and maybe take my life.’

The outward appearance of the allied kings and regents is seldom mentioned in the VOC reports and there are almost no illustrations preserved. The Spanish missionary Juan de la Camara wrote in 1670 that the aristocrats of the island wore a large, round golden plate around their neck. In their hair they fastened a bamboo comb with cock’s feathers and flower adornments. On their forehead they wore a golden crescent. From top to toe the aristocrats would wear wooden bangles, and below

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35 VOC 2941 (1756), ff. 259-62.
36 See, however, the two aquarelle paintings illustrating the formal meeting between Paravicini and the princes in 1756. The Timorese lords seem to be dressed in European-style clothes (Leeuwerik 1992).
the knees they tied goat’s beards that fell to below the shin. De la Camara also noted their appreciation for coral collars, *muti salak*, which were even more valued than gold (Teixeira 1957:452). The discs, crescents and *muti salak* are occasionally mentioned in Dutch texts as well, and the account shows that the well-to-do attire was not dissimilar to that which was documented in nineteenth-century ethnographic literature and illustrations. Many visitors also commented on the frugal conditions in which the allied kings lived, and it would perhaps be prudent to quote the best known of them, Captain William Bligh of the Bounty mutiny.37 During his stay in Kupang, in 1789, Bligh paid a visit to the *sonaf* of Lesser Sonbai where he met the ruler, Bernardus Nisnoni (reign 1776-1795).

The chief of the natives, or king of the island, is by the Dutch stiled Keyser (Emperor). This prince lives at a place called Backenassy [Bakunase], about four miles distant from Coupang. […] His dwelling was a large house which was divided into only three apartments, and surrounded by a piazza: agreeably situated, but very dirty, as well as the furniture. The king, who is an elderly man, received me with much civility, and ordered refreshments to be set before me, which were tea, rice cakes, roasted Indian corn, and dried buffalo flesh, with about a pint of arrack, which I believe was all he had. His dress was, a cheque wrapper girded round his waist with a silk and gold belt, a loose linen jacket, and a coarse handkerchief about his head. (Miller 1996:65.)

It was nevertheless in the interests of the Company to provide a certain amount of royal luxuries, not least in the face of visitors to Kupang. The kings and regents received cloths, weapons and other valuable items as annual gifts, besides tokens of dignity such as drums, ceremonial staffs and flags. The Dutch also respected the Timorese concerns about the right of succession, where a ruler had to be of princely blood on his father’s as well as on his mother’s side. Both the Dutch and the Portuguese recognized the importance of keeping control over the Sonbai royalty as

37 A note from 1680 gives some insight into the frugal standards of Timorese royal households in the Portuguese sphere as well. The wife of the Taebenu lord, who still resided in the north-west, quarrelled with the co-wives of the lord. A few ceramic objects, saucers and plates (*piring*) were broken in pieces during the tumult. The lord threatened his wife, saying she must acquire similar objects or else she would pay with her life. Since she could not obtain the saucers and plates, she ran away out of desperation. After four days of roaming the wilderness, she arrived in Kupang and sought refuge among the Sonbai elite (VOC1367 [1680-81], Dagregister, sub 17-8-1680).
instruments of prestige. A purported envoy from Portuguese-controlled Greater Sonbai appeared in Fort Concordia in October 1680. He asked to take the little empress, Bi Sonbai, and her sisters to their grandfather who resided inland, since he wished to see them before he died. Since António Hornay had approved of the idea, the Dutch had good reason to think that the Topass leader wished to capture the valuable girls, and angrily snubbed the envoy. What followed, however, suggests that the envoy was sincere in his deference to the name of Sonbai:

When [the envoy] Ama Naki asked to see the empress (being a girl of 14 years with her two under-age sisters), I asked her to come to the great hall (as she was already in the fort with the widow of the late Mr. Wijckersloot). They came accompanied by the baptized daughters of the field commander [veltoverste] Ama Tomananu, Anna Maria and Susanna, all adorned in their best attire according to their fashion, with silk patolas\(^\text{38}\) around the waist and with golden crescents and discs on their head. They were politely received by all of us, and seated at the ordained place. Then

\(^{38}\) A patola is a double ikat from Gujarat in India, a fine garment that is mostly made of silk (VOC-Glossarium 2000:88).
Ama Naki came, half creeping, towards the girls. With great humility he kissed the feet and hands of them, which was imitated by his entourage of seven or eight men.³⁹

Feasts and ceremonies on a princedom-wide level were recurring events that broke the monotony of life and involved the participation of Company servants. In particular, the Dutch stranger lords were strongly expected to participate in funerals, where great store was set by the salutes of the fort’s cannon and by the military detachments. Arrack was a favourite Timorese drink that was not made locally, and every funeral of a person of standing would be preceded by allied demands for this costly spirit. The first detailed account of a Timorese funeral comes from June 1740, when the Sonbai regent Nai Sau was buried. According to custom, the corpse was laid out for an extended period of time, while the Timorese mourners waited for the best moment for the funeral. After eleven months, the day of the funeral finally arrived and the opperhoofd and council went there with other friends of the deceased, escorted by 16 Sonbai soldiers. They strolled between two rows of indigenous soldiers into the yard of the sonaf. Once they had arrived they sat down for about half an hour, at which point the corpse was brought out from the sonaf in a heavy wooden coffin. It was carried three times around the grave, which was situated within the encircling wall of the dalem (residence complex). While this took place, young and old wailed loudly. Eventually the coffin was lowered into the ground, accompanied by three musket salutes by the European soldiers, and a cannon shot from Fort Concordia. The soldiers returned to the fort and the tables were laid. The emperor and the allied regents now asked the opperhoofd to have supper with them, and the Dutch stayed at the feast until ten o’clock; when they left, both parties exchanged mutual thanks.⁴⁰ The details correspond closely to nineteenth- and twentieth-century studies on mortuary rites, but what makes the account intriguing is the way in which Dutch paraphernalia and participation were integrated in the ceremonial framework. It shows how an external entity was successfully localized in order to support the flow of life of the local Timorese polities.

³⁹ VOC 1367 (1680-81), Dagregister, sub 26-10-1680.
⁴⁰ VOC 2501 (1740), Dagregister, sub 16-6-1740.
ROTE

To fully understand the early colonial system forged by the Company, it is necessary to take a look at the other geographical components: Rote, Sawu and Solor. Of these, Rote, alias Lesser Sawu, exhibits many similarities with the Helong and Atoni in terms of language, culture, social structure, political traditions, religious organization, ceremonial life and legends about the island’s origin. Nevertheless, its early colonial experience was quite dissimilar to that of the five loyal allies of Kupang. In actual fact, Rote was the place that cost the Dutch the most effort to maintain. There was not a trace of unity among the many small nusak on the island, which were often engaged in warfare, with the Company siding with one or the other of them. Nine different dialects of Rotenese can be identified, each displaying considerable differences. The first available enumeration of nusak, from 1660, contains nineteen names but the number of domains acknowledged varied over the centuries. Like the Timorese domains, the nusak had a dual structure: there was a raja at its head, known as manek, with an executive regent (called fettor in late colonial texts) at his side. VOC texts often refer to these two functions as ‘regent’ and ‘second regent’. The manek, however, had a more active role than his counterpart on Timor. In social terms as well, the distance between ruler and ruled was less pronounced here than among the Timorese, with weak or obnoxious lords wielding little authority over their subjects. Apart from all the inter-nusak conflicts that afflicted Rote, the VOC period presents an unending succession of divisions within the petty domains.

All this was closely interconnected to the ecological situation of the island. According to opperhoofd Cuylenburgh, writing in 1662, the Rotenese lords were generally related to each other through blood and marriage

41 Fox 1977:56. The Portuguese knew the island as Lesser Sawu (Sabo Pequeno), while the Dutch referred to it as Rote (Rotti). Neither name was traditionally used by the locals.
42 See the language map appended to Hull 1998.
43 VOC 1233 (1660), f. 725a. This report, by the commissioner Johan Truytman, lists Ringgou, Bautusi (alias Oepau), Bilha, Thie, Bokai, Landu, Korballo, Termanu, Oenale, Lole, Dengka and Baä, which occur in the later enumerations; and Bondale, Dauckeya, Mede, Dekedale, Bohaydale and Horadaly, which subsequently disappear as domains in their own right. The list of acknowledged nusak subsequently included Ossipoka (alias Lelain), Diu and Ndao, the latter being a small island off the west coast of Rote. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a number of nusak split off, leading to the creation of Kea, Lelenuk, Talae and Dehla as nusak. By 1900, the number of nusak was therefore nineteen. For a map of the various nusak, see Fox 1977:41.
ties, ‘whereas the reason why these people could not live in peace, even if they had forgotten it, is that some years ago almost all their cattle, lontar palms and crops of the fields, were destroyed by the hard winds, so that many people died from starvation’.\textsuperscript{44} The hard wind referred to here was a cyclone, which still hits the island from time to time with devastating consequences. Natural calamities led to intensive rivalry for scarce resources. As can be seen, the lontar palm was a cornerstone in the local economy together with agriculture and livestock; a note from 1694 specifies that the lontar palms formed their principal means of livelihood.\textsuperscript{45} The palm was tapped of its sugar juice, known as \textit{gula}, which constituted a principal form of nutrition and which also led to the semi-jocular characterization of the Rotenese as the ‘non-eating’ people (Pelon 2002:56; Fox 1977:1). The \textit{gula} was preserved in jars that were exported to Timor in times of food surplus. The \textit{Dagregisters} contain regular records of boats arriving from Rote, stocked with \textit{gula}, which was then sold to the locals and especially to the VOC establishment. In exchange the Rotenese received textiles, which for external traders was by far the most important import product in the eastern part of the archipelago. In the late seventeenth century, this trade was worth around 100 rijksdaalders per annum, so it was a rather modest affair.\textsuperscript{46} In addition, the boats were frequently captained by the rulers of the domains, who took advantage of the economic opportunities that were on offer, something which differed from the Timorese rulers who seldom engaged in trade. The Dutch used the \textit{gula} for brewing sugar beer (\textit{goelabier}), but also for feeding their slaves. Small-scale trade in \textit{air gula} is still carried out today by the Rotenese.

In order to keep check of their Rotenese allies, the Company, like elsewhere in their far-flung Asian realm, drew up contracts with the various \textit{manek}. Four of the more important \textit{nusak} were approached by Hendrick ter Horst; contacts were facilitated by the bonds that already existed between the western Rotenese and the Helong, thanks to dynastic marriages between the islands (De Roever 2002:257). Unlike the Timorese in general, the Helong used boats, and sometimes sailed to Rote to acquire foodstuff. Some of the eastern \textit{nusak} maintained ties with the Portuguese clients on Timor, and were temporarily suppressed

\textsuperscript{44} VOC 1210 (1662), f. 876.
\textsuperscript{45} VOC 1553 (1693-94), \textit{Dagregister}, sub 1-5-1694.
\textsuperscript{46} Tange 1688, H 49:u, KITLV, f. 3.
through violent Dutch interventions in 1654 and 1660. This was followed by a contract two years later. In line with general monopolistic VOC policy, the Rotenese were forbidden to receive Solorese, Bimanese, Makassarese or Portuguese traders without a permit, or to sail to the lands of enemies of the Company. In particular it was made clear that no slaves were to be sold to unlicensed foreigners – slaves were a commodity that was available on the densely populated island.\footnote{Heeres 1931:212-4. New contracts were concluded in 1690-91 and 1700.}

The Dutch never placed a permanent garrison on Rote in spite of their early plans to do so. Instead, they acquired hostages from the various petty domains in order to keep control over them, hostages who were kept in Fort Concordia and were often baptized. Furthermore, they used to keep a European interpreter stationed there, accompanied at times by a few more soldiers. The place chosen for this tiny Dutch presence was Termanu, a \textit{nusak} on the north-western coast. The close Dutch-Termanu relationship went back to the first years of VOC influence, when the ruler Kiu Lusi formed an alliance with the Company to defeat the Portuguese-orientated \textit{nusak} Korbaffo in 1654. Although Kiu himself was killed in the battle, his kinsmen henceforth upheld a precarious precedence with Dutch help.\footnote{VOC 1826 (1712), f. 31.} This was a precedence that was not rooted in any traditional Rotenese concepts that we know of, and the other \textit{nusak} eagerly looked for the means to rid themselves of what they regarded as Termanu tyranny. As a matter of fact there were repeated VOC campaigns on Rote in the late seventeenth century, when the small garrison of Kupang offered far from sufficient defence. On a few occasions, hundreds of European and Indonesian Company soldiers were brought in from other parts of the archipelago in order to deal with the situation. In spite of its small size, Rote was a difficult island to master, and it could take years to suppress a recalcitrant \textit{nusak}. The settlements tended to lie on lofty rocks that were hard to climb, and due to the bushy vegetation interspersed with high trees, access to the settlements was restricted to narrow and slippery paths (Olivier 1833:261). Batavia issued orders in 1692 and 1693, stating that the \textit{opperhoofden} should visit the island in person once or twice a year, and act as ‘the law’ there.\footnote{VOC 1301 (1673), f. 915b-916a; De Roever 2002:257. After Kiu Lusi, the lordship was inherited by a cousin, Kila Seni (r.1654?-1673). All the later \textit{manek} were descendants of him and his brother Edon Seni, while Kiu Lusi’s descendants henceforth enjoyed the position of executive regents or \textit{fettor}. For more on the way in which this genealogy is reflected in later oral historiography, see Fox 1971.}
In fact, by 1700 Rote was provisionally pacified by the Company and its Termanu ally, but the entire eighteenth century was interspersed with recurring political crises that could turn into bloody affairs.

Late colonial texts often display a marked Dutch preference for the Rotenese as compared to the Timorese and other groups in the region. Johannes Olivier, who briefly visited the island in the 1820s, alleged that ‘the inhabitants are handsomer than the Timorese. Also, their women are prettier and whiter, and their local language is much more pleasingly sounding than those of Timor and the other neighbouring islands […] Also, the inhabitants of this island are much more steadfast, valiant and clever than the Timorese.’\(^{50}\) Other nineteenth-century Westerners also characterized the Rotenese as intellectually agile and good soldiers in contrast with their neighbours, a view that was not least dependent on their openness to Christianity. In the early colonial era this positive image was largely absent from the records; not least, their courage and military qualities were drawn into question: ‘very timid people whom one could not lean on’.\(^{51}\) The Topass leader, Domingos da Costa, characterized them as ‘devilish and wild people’, mutinous and rapacious.\(^{52}\) Whenever there was a major crisis on Rote the Dutch would prefer to use Timorese auxiliaries, especially the Sonbai, who were regarded as the most formidable of allies. On the other hand the eastern \textit{nusak}, which were generally adverse to any VOC involvement, tended to call in warriors from Amarasi and even Topasses, who spearheaded the anti-Dutch and anti-Termanu movements. Besides successive intra-Rotenese conflicts, the island was thus also plagued by two wars by proxy: Topass versus VOC and Amarasi versus Sonbai.

The Dutch did not always have the best of it. In 1688, the Dutch lieutenant Jan Franssen led an expedition that consisted of 221 Europeans – a large number in these quarters – and a few thousand Balinese, Makassarese, Rotenese and Timorese. Expecting the VOC troops, the men from the recalcitrant \textit{nusak} Bilba, Ringgou and Korbaffo were

\(^{50}\) Olivier 1833:261. They also, however, had a reputation for being voluptuous and shameless, and were considered to outdo the population of Maluku in that respect. It needs to be stressed that this characterization only appears in the nineteenth century, when the emergence of ethnographic categorization was combined with greater European awareness (or imaginations) of racial features. Some of Olivier’s information on Rote is taken from Pelon’s 1778 account, via Hogendorp, but his positive judgment of the Rotenese is not from that source.

\(^{51}\) VOC 8310 (1686-87), \textit{Dagregister}, sub 28-9-1686.

\(^{52}\) Matos 1974a:309. Da Costa called them \textit{sabos}, Rote being Sawu Minor in Portuguese parlance.
Rotenese characters in 1829. Illustration from the expedition of Salomon Müller, published by C.J. Temminck, *Verhandelingen over de natuurlijke geschiedenis der Nederlandsche Overzeesche Bezittingen* (1839-44)
encamped on the Lagai rock where Franssen’s troops attacked them in March 1688. The defenders were thought to be a mixture of white as well as coloured Portuguese (although António Hornay later pleaded ignorance of this matter to keep good relations with the Company), and the VOC attack turned into a costly fiasco. Jan Franssen and the Timorese allies provided different versions of what had happened, and blamed each other for the failure of the expedition. According to the Timorese version, the lieutenant had no head for logistics: he did not consult the allies, he did not provide them with provisions and he started the attack before the chiefs had had time to gather their forces. Franssen, moreover, over-estimated the ability of the European troops to defend alone against the adversaries, and subsequently lost 56 dead and wounded in a short while, while the auxiliaries attacked on the other side of the fortification. At dusk the Timorese found it best to retreat, and the humiliated Franssen saw no other way than to conclude the expedition and return to Kupang.53

The Timorese auxiliaries were much feared by the locals, and not without reason. Service on Rote promised the opportunity of gaining booty among relatively weak enemies, and the VOC expeditions were therefore popular among the Timorese allies. On one occasion, in 1681, the allied Timorese were asked to contribute 500 soldiers for a campaign against the nusak Dengka and Oenale. When it was time to embark at the roadstead of Kupang, the volunteers crowded onto the beach so that the Company servants and Ama Tomananu had to drive them back. Part of the volunteers had to be left in Kupang, otherwise the overloaded ship would have run aground.54 On Rote, a VOC force of 2,300 men went out to search for the enemy, some of whom hid in caves in a mountainous part of the island. They were told to surrender, and three Rotenese came out. The others refused to give themselves up, and the Sonbai and Amabi proceeded to throw in burning torches, which suffocated another eighteen. The survivors shouted from inside the cave: ‘You Sonbai hounds of hell, make any mischief you want. If you remain here for a year we will still not yield to the Noble Company.’ In the end the VOC troops secured another 42 enemies, dead or alive, but were unable to clear all the caves of enemies.55 When the resistance was finally suppressed, the manek of

54 VOC 1367 (1680-81), Dagregister, sub 18-4-1681.
55 VOC 1367 (1680-81), Dagregister, sub 19-5-1681.
Oenale had to comply with the VOC’s request for a certain number of slaves, to be delivered to the Company. Later in the same year the manek reported that he was unable to fulfil this task, since his subjects had been massacred in their settlements or murdered in the caves by the Sonbai. One third of the houses in his nusak were now deserted due to a lack of people.\textsuperscript{56} It might be added that the Dutch commander of the expedition, Blanckelaar, appears to have set a bad example; he was accused by the Timorese of gross misconduct, including, among other things, the beheading of an old woman for no particular reason.\textsuperscript{57}

In the small world of Rote, neutrality was not an option, and the various struggles involved the minor nusak whether they wished it or not. In 1685, a chief in the important nusak Ringgou rebelled against the VOC and brought over his men from his hiding-place on Pulau Semau, intending to attack the Dutch clients with Amarasi help. Together with men from Bilba and Korbaffo he arrived at Batuisi, a minor domain that usually kept to the VOC system. ‘Come’, he said to the villagers, ‘go with us! We will set our course and invite the Amarasi in order to fight the Noble Company’. The Batuisi reportedly replied, ‘Why should we rise against our father and mother? For the Noble Company is our father and mother.’\textsuperscript{58} When the others heard this defiant answer, they attacked the Batuisi and killed six men. Half of the population then chose to follow the pro-Amarasi forces, while the other half was forced to resettle in the VOC-friendly nusak Landu.\textsuperscript{59} This state of unrest dragged on until circa 1690, and cost the tiny nusak dearly.

Rote, in sum, was a place that was richly equipped in terms of foodstuffs and that was of strategically vital importance. However, of all the VOC dependencies in the Solor-Timor region, it suffered most in terms of colonial intervention, which sometimes resulted in very severe massacres of the local population. One cannot escape the impression that some of the conflicts were deliberately fueled by the Company and its supporters in order to acquire slaves, a commodity to which we will return later. The methods of some of the Company servants connected with Rote were such that even the Supreme Government in Batavia

\textsuperscript{56} VOC 1375 (1681-82), Dagregister, sub 24-10-1681.  
\textsuperscript{57} VOC 1368 (1681), f. 468. On the misconduct of Blanckelaar, see also VOC 1376 (1682), ff. 406a-406b.  
\textsuperscript{58} VOC 1414 (1685), f. 157.  
\textsuperscript{59} VOC 1414 (1685), f. 157.
found that they had overstepped the boundaries. Thus the trouble that flared up in 1685-1690 was considered to be a consequence of the behaviour of the notorious temporary opperhoofd Willem Tange, whom Batavia thought it necessary to sack from his position. The government decreed that no unnecessary blood should be spilled, and that the conquered nusak should not be subjected to unbearable fines (Coolhaas 1975:166). These were admonitions that were more easily issued than implemented, but indeed the worst of the violence had receded by the end of the seventeenth century.

SAWU

In the middle of the unruly Sawu Sea lies a small island, known by its inhabitants as Rai Hawu, or by the outer world as Sawu, Savo or Sabo. While Sawu is often mentioned as a counterpart of Rote, it differs from the latter island in many respects. While Rote is culturally and linguistically related to western Timor, Sawu has more in common with Sumba and the small island of Ndao, west of Rote (Fox 1977:56). The consequences of this affiliation are seen throughout its history during the period in question. In linguistic terms, it is also more coherent than Rote, where there are no less than nine dialects; on Sawu and the adjacent island Raijua there is only one language. The Sawunese believed that their island was basically uniform in nature, while the Rotenese prefer to emphasize the differences between their various nusak (Fox 1977:81). What is similar between the two islands, however, is the ecological adaptation that the Rotenese and Sawunese managed to achieve on their deforested lands.

In contrast with Rote, Sawu could not, and indeed still cannot, be easily reached from Kupang, and military interventions were consequently rarer since they demanded extensive logistical planning. The VOC records show that the Dutch kept a regular check on what was going on and visited Sawu at regular intervals after the inception of friendly relations in 1648. Other than that, the island was largely left to tend to its own affairs, and it was only in the 1750s that a Dutch interpreter was permanently placed there. It has been argued that the Company only had to intervene very rarely because the Sawunese had little reason for rebellious conduct. Moreover, the island was of limited strategic value.
due to its location – ‘a lump of stone in an immense sea’, according to one Dutch visitor (Fox 1977:126).

Like Rote, Sawu was divided into a number of small domains. A study of oral tradition, which displays an amazing degree of reliability as far back as comparisons can be made, suggests that hereditary rulers were only appointed after the arrival of the Portuguese at some point in the sixteenth century (Duggan 2008:70, 206, 225, 287, 326). On the main island there were five domains (Timu, Seba, Menia, Mesara and Liae), while the tiny island of Raijua off the western cape was a domain of its own. Unlike Rote, however, there was a political hierarchy among the domains. The easternmost domain of Timu was considered the highest in status, and its ruler was known to the Company as ‘the regent of Sawu’. In the central part of the island lay Seba, which at times was engaged in political rivalry with Timu. In the late colonial period it was Seba that held most of the political power, and in 1915 its ruler, or duae, was eventually appointed Raja of Sawu by the Dutch. In the early decades of VOC suzerainty it was not always clear who was the actual ‘raja’ of a particular domain. Confused Dutch officials might mention two people, both of whom had ruling prerogatives, without being certain who was the highest in command. As a matter of fact, a domain would have its own hierarchy with various ritual functionaries, the highest being the deo rai (lord of the earth) and apu lodo (descendant of the sun). They were associated with the agricultural cycle of the year. Since the ritual obligations of the deo rai made them unfit for conventional lordship, the VOC acknowledged the apu lodo as their counterparts in political affairs, or in other words ‘rajas’; in the VOC records they are also variously known as kings, penghulu or regents. Since the apu lodo-ship, too, was incompatible with political rule, separate raja branches of the respective families gradually emerged.

Early Dutch opinions of the Sawunese were far from positive. They were described as savages, and their rulers were characterized as stub-

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60 Pelon 2002: 61. Curiously, there is no trace in modern tradition of the precedence of Timu (Geneviève Duggan, National University of Singapore, personal communication).
61 Penghulu is an old Malay princely title, later used for village chiefs or the leaders of mosques (VOC-Glossarium 2000:89).
62 Fox 1977:85-7. The various clans (udu) that provide rajas are extensively traced in Duggan 2008. Judging from her investigation, shifts of ruling clans occurred among some of the domains in the seventeenth century.
born and untrustworthy. Later on, the image of the islanders improved considerably. Both James Cook (writing in 1770) and Jean-Baptiste Pelon (writing in 1778) lauded them as industrious and courageous people with comparatively high morals; for example, they took no more than one wife. In Pelon’s view, they were an improvement on the Rotenese (Fox 1977:115-26; Pelon 2002:61-4). It is hard to say if something in particular changed between the seventeenth and the late eighteenth century; most likely, the variations in description depend on the attitude of the European observer rather than the behaviour of the locals. Nevertheless, there were certainly events in the early decades of the Kupang post that made the Dutch distrustful of the Sawunese – and vice versa.

The Company post in West Sumatra needed slaves to work in the gold-mines of Salida, since the locals were considered ‘too lazy’ to work for a wage. This was a rare opportunity to make the Kupang post pay for itself, and Batavia requested slaves from the Timor area. On Sawu, the Timu domain promised to deliver this commodity to the Dutch, if they, in exchange, would then mediate between the Timu and Mesara. In July 1672, the Company servant Reynout Wagenburgh therefore went to Sawu to settle the affair. After some preliminaries, the Mesara attacked the Dutch and their companions, but were driven back by the musket fire of the Europeans. Wagenburgh proceeded to set the negeri of Mesara on fire, and then returned, after Timu had promised him 100-150 slaves, who would be available on the occasion of the next VOC visit (Coolhaas 1968:845-6).

In early 1674, the same Reynout Wagenburgh accepted the delicate mission to sail from Kupang to Batumean on Timor with a delegation of allies. The idea was to engage in diplomatic talks with the Amarasi ruler and António Hornay. When they arrived at the outer coast of Timor, the Dutch encountered a hornet’s nest of intrigue. At precisely this time certain Atoni were conspiring with the malcontent Portuguese to murder Hornay. Adherents of Hornay warned him about what was going on, and the stern Topass leader proceeded to take the plotters into custody. Under these circumstances Hornay had no time to travel the long way to Batumean, so there was nothing more to do for Wagenburgh, who turned back again. On the return trip his vessel encountered a storm and was driven off course. The crew was forced to seek shelter in Timu, but Wagenburgh found out too late that he was not welcome there. When the

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63 VOC 1428 (1686), ff. 274b-275a.
Dutch and their Timorese allies came ashore they were butchered by the Sawunese, who were led by two persons, Talo and Lifkone. The reason, according to what was later said, was the excessive number of slaves that Wagenburgh had demanded on his first visit, an act which had enraged people in this small community.

When the news reached Kupang, the reaction among the Timorese allies was one of fury since several aristocrats were among the victims. It was not until 1676, however, that Batavia was able to provide the men for an expedition forceful enough to punish Timu. With 220 Dutchmen at hand, the VOC demanded 700 warriors from Kupang, Sonbai and Amabi. The desire to take revenge for the massacre, and the opportunities for a good booty, ensured that there was no lack of recruits, and in the end 1,100 Timorese crowded onto the Company ships. After having subdued four refractory nusak on Rote on the way, the armada proceeded to Sawu. It is significant that the Dutch brought Minggu, the manek of the small island of Ndao, with them. The language and culture of Ndao is close to that of Sawu, and Minggu was useful as an interpreter in the negotiations that were to follow. Arriving on Sawu, the expedition was welcomed by the leaders of the domain of Seba, who saw an opportunity to ingratiate themselves with the Dutch to the detriment of their rivals in Timu. The allied army thereupon marched against Timu. At first it seemed that Ama Rohi, the duae of Timu, wanted to negotiate with the Dutch, but it soon became apparent that this was but a common stalling tactic. The population withdrew from the main negeri to a fortification strengthened with no less than three walls, one outside of the other. They announced that they did not want peace, but would instead wait for the Dutch to come. The Company forces attempted to storm the first wall but were halted by the furious resistance put up by the defenders. On the next day they fared better, but only by applying the latest in European military technology. While two Dutch companies charged the fortification at one point, a group of VOC sailors, using grenades, fire jars and fire pikes, scaled the first wall. The second wall soon fell too, but the defenders of the innermost wall still fought back desperately. An officer spoke to the Sawunese, and Ama Rohi appeared on the parapet with a peace flag, shouting ‘Sudah berkelahi’ (Enough fighting).

64 VOC 1311 (1675), f. 246.
65 VOC 1319 (1675-76), Dagregister, sub 15-5-1676.
66 Coolhaas 1968:108; VOC 1319 (1675-76), Dagregister, sub 9-5-1676.
Under the cover of negotiations, a new power game now ensued. Ama Rohi promised to deliver 300 slaves – men, women and children – as a fine for the massacre, and to extradite the instigators, Talo and Lifkone. Moreover, Timu would have to pay 150 taëls (5.6 kg) of gold and 150 taëls of *muti lawati* or coral beads to the Timorese auxiliaries – as we have seen, coral was greatly valued by the populations in the region.\(^\text{67}\) Once again, however, the deliveries were delayed, following tactics employed by the Sawunese. Ama Rohi knew fully well that the Dutch were in a miserable position and could not stay much longer on the island; fever rapidly spread among the troops and the majority of the Europeans were too ill to march long distances. At last a captain was sent to the negeri with 20 soldiers and a lieutenant to settle the matter once and for all. He rapidly collected the people there, forcibly disarmed every man, and gathered them all on a plain outside the settlement, where they found themselves surrounded by the majority of the Company troops. The captain requested that the chiefs select who would become VOC slaves, and turn them over. The fateful selection lasted far into the evening, until 240 poor souls had been picked out. Then the chiefs told the Dutch officer that there were no more slaves in the crowd, but only free-born men. Considering what had happened to Wagenburgh, the Dutch found it unwise to aggravate the situation further and so allowed the rest of the population to go back to the negeri. The remaining number seemed content with the outcome since the best they had hoped for was to be brought to Batavia as slaves. Hostages were given to ensure the good conduct of Timu, and the fleet hastily left Sawu without having caught the actual murderers.\(^\text{68}\)

Never again would the Company return in full force to Sawu. In stark contrast with Rote, this remained the only major expedition to the area; given the circumstances, one can understand why. In order to give credence to what they had threatened to do, considerable European forces had to be allocated, which in this case took no less than two years to implement. Plagued by poor health and facing a spirited resistance, it was hazardous for foreign troops to stay long on Sawu (Fox 1977:113). For the next few hundred years the island was very much left to its own devices and the political problems that arose from time to time were solved by Dutch mediation as far as possible. The continuity of Dutch-Sawunese

\(^{67}\) For more on these *muti lawati* or *muti salak*, see Rumphius 1999:279-81.

\(^{68}\) Coolhaas 1968:108-9; VOC 1319 (1675-76), *Dagregister*, sub 9-3-1676, 15-5-1676, 16-5-1676.
relations was also sustained by two exceedingly long reigns in the leading Timu princedom. Ama Rohi was followed by his son Rohi Rano (reign1678-1731), who in turn was succeeded by his grandson Hili Haba (reign1731-1798), who apparently has the longest documented reign in Indonesian history. None of them escaped the perennial problem of domestic struggles, but throughout their amazing 120 years in power they were referred to as upper regents of Sawu and generally maintained amicable contacts with the VOC. In the course of the eighteenth century, moreover, the Sawununese would provide a great service: they saved the skin of the Dutch in Kupang, and subsequently raised their status.

SOLOR

Considering its status as the original Dutch stronghold in the region, it is striking how the eastern half of Solor was left almost defenceless after the transfer to Kupang in 1657. Fort Henricus was allowed to fall into disrepair for the simple reason that too little manpower was allocated to Timor to allow even a very small garrison to be stationed there. The only European presence on Solor to Kupang consisted of two artillerists (boschieters), who stayed there to mark the presence of the Company. Their task was not entirely without danger, since the periodically recurring disturbances sometimes put the life of the Europeans at risk. Later on, in the eighteenth century, the Dutch interests were represented by an interpreter. The main lifeline between the Company and Solor were the visits that the opperhoofd occasionally undertook to Rote, Sawu and Solor, where all kinds of local issues would be vented.

Governance was therefore basically in the hands of the Lamaholot population. Among the Watan Lema princedoms, the rulers of Lohayong held the highest rank as lords and dames of Solor, at least up until 1700. The ambitions of Lohayong were strengthened by the Dutch policy. It is difficult to comprehend the exact prerogatives of these lords before the onset of early colonial dominance, but in later tradition, the seventeenth century was remembered as the age of a veritable sultanate. The historical Kaicili Pertawi (reign before 1613-1645) was known as Sultan Sili.

His accession is noted in VOC 2192 (1730-31), Dagregister, sub 11-3-1731, 7-6-1731. His son and successor Jara Hili asked the VOC for investiture in 1798, in a letter preserved in LOr 2238, UB Leiden. Oral traditions about these personages are discussed in Duggan 2008:227-32.
Pertawati and was said to have miraculous local origins; he was the alleged brother of the founder-sultans of Solo, Malacca, Gowa, Buton, Ambon and Bima.\textsuperscript{70} His widow and successor, Nyai Cili (reign 1646-1664), was legitimized by an oral tradition that closely followed the stranger king theme which is so common in this part of Indonesia. The story is interesting since it was recorded by the Dutch as early as 1706, and was used as an argument in a succession issue in Lohayong.

The story has it that the ancestor of one of the claimants once ruled over Lohayong and all of Solor. At this time Nyai Cili, a woman from Keeda (Kedah, or possibly Kedang on Lembata), was expelled from her birthplace and subsequently sailed to Solor with a number of retainers. Arriving in Lohayong she met the lord of the land who received his guests politely. Firstly, he gave the upper part of his residence to the foreigners to sleep in. Nyai Cili felt embarrassed and pointed out that he was the chief and regent, and that this was not proper behaviour regarding newcomers. The lord insisted, however. When it was time to eat, the lord of the land served the lady a buck’s head. Again Nyai Cili remarked that the host, as a headman, should have the right to eat the head. Again the lord insisted that she keep the buck’s head. Nyai Cili then commented, ‘If you want things that way [then so be it]. Once the upper place, once the head, then always the head.’ From that point onwards, she was given the reins of power over Solor. Adherents of the old lord of the land proposed to have her killed, but the lord impeded their intent with the words ‘Why would we want to have that blood upon our hands?’ It was decided that she and her bloodline were to govern Solor henceforth. Only if it became extinct, could the descent of the lord of the land again stake a claim.\textsuperscript{71}

The legend points towards a ritual division between an original owner of the land, and a newcomer who gains executive powers by certain abilities, a theme that closely parallels the relationship between, for example, the Kune lord and the Sonbai ancestor. Historical documents clearly depict Nyai Cili as the wife rather than honoured guest of the old Kaicili Pertawati, meaning perhaps that history may have been altered to suit the stranger king theme. The semi-detailed Dutch records also show that the historical Nyai Cili was resolute in her defence of the lands that the Dutch neglected, at the same time as being good-hearted by nature.

\textsuperscript{70} Dietrich 1984:320-1, 324. Ambon, of course, was in fact no sultanate.
\textsuperscript{71} VOC 1728 (1706), ff. 138-40.
and someone who strove to avoid the spilling of blood when possible. Even if she did not exactly match the criteria of the legend, she would be, in a way, worthy of the legend.

The closeness of East Solor to the Portuguese-dominated Demon territories made for continuous trouble. Like on Timor, Rote and Sawu, low-scale violence and regional factionalism was endemic, underpinned but not solely conditioned by the early colonial rivalries. Already in 1659, two years after the Dutch sortie, the Dutch renegade Jan van Adrichem led a Larantuqueiro raid to Solor with seven *perahu*. He burnt the Solorese ships and, performing the ultimate blasphemy, torched the mosque of Lohayong. Maintaining a state of hostilities was clearly not in the interest of local society, and the elderly but enterprising Nyai Cili proceeded to make peace with the Larantuqueiros of her own accord, without discussing the matter with Kupang. She promptly forced the other *sengaji* to sail with her to Larantuka in March 1661. Although the visit was marred by a bloody incident with a Catholic priest, the enterprise seems to have borne fruit. While the Dutch may have perceived this as a suspicious act, as the visit involved contact with a Portuguese client, to the Solorese it was seen as the most practical thing to do at that point in time.\(^72\)

Local and Dutch understandings of Solorese kingship were at odds with each other, as indicated by the events surrounding Nyai Cili’s death in March 1664. When she felt her end approaching Nyai Cili wrote to the Governor General in Batavia and asked for five picul of white cloth for her funerary shroud, and an elephant tusk to use as her ‘pillow’ when she was dead, all in accordance with Solorese *adat*. Since she stood alone in the world, she said, she bequeathed her land to the Company. The visibly moved Governor General Joan Maetsuyker replied with a glowing letter in which he proposed that Dasi, the *sengaji* of the whaling village Lamakera on easternmost Solor, should be made the new lord of the league. At that moment, Dasi was visiting Batavia where he made a very good impression on Maetsuyker, who judged him to be a loyal and capable man. On Solor, however, something completely different happened when the queen passed away. After two months the Dutch *opperhoofd* Hugo Cuylenburgh – a man who did not get along well with either his fellow countrymen or the locals – arrived at Fort Henricus to take stock of affairs. To his astonishment, he heard from the gathered

\(^{72}\) *Dagh-Register* 1887-1931, the year 1661:218-9.
Solorese grandees that not Dasi but rather a young granddaughter of Nyai Cili had been appointed as ruler of the land, ostensibly according to the last wish of the deceased queen. When Cuylenburgh asked Dasi about the matter, he first kept quiet. When the irritated opperhoofd repeated the question, Dasi craftily replied, ‘Why do you ask me?’ Upon closer enquiry, Cuylenburgh found that the Dutch had gravely misunderstood issues of precedence and that Dasi certainly was appreciated among the Lamaholot, but held no high status. If indeed Dasi had been appointed, the only result would have been a general tumult.\(^73\)

The Solorese kingship was upheld by the new female ruler Nyai Cili Muda (reign 1664-1686), and then by her nephew, sengaji Cili (reign 1687-1700). Neither of them had the authority of their illustrious forebear, and in particular Nyai Cili Muda had problems keeping internal peace among the individual members of the Watan Lema league.\(^74\)

When sengaji Cili succumbed to an epidemic that ravaged the islands in 1700, the idea of having one paramount power weakened. Two families competed for governance and attempted to draw in the Company as arbiter. In the end, this led to a split where one faction governed Lohayong and were recognized as sengaji by the VOC, while the other faction governed the nearby village of Menanga. The sengaji of Lohayong kept the first rank in the political hierarchy, but they were no longer referred to as ‘lords of Solor’.

The other four princedoms included in the Watan Lema league (Lamakera, Lamahala, Terong and Adonara) were often at each other’s throats. For long periods, they constituted a graver danger for each other than the Demon territories under Portuguese influence did. Lamakera warred with Lamahala directly across the strait, and Lamahala in turn lived in periodical hostility with the neighbouring village of Terong. Adonara, on the north coast of the island with the same name, usually took no part in these troubles but was occasionally drawn into them. When the Dutch officials made their regular visits they summoned the various sengaji to Fort Henricus (although Adonara usually failed to appear) and

\(^73\) VOC 1246 (1664), ff. 1585-6. The sengaji dynasty of Dasi might have been recent at the time; at least, modern tradition points out Dasi as the ancestor of the later sengaji (interview, Haji Muhammad Hasan, Lamakera, 16-6-2006). The first sengaji of Lamakera, according to tradition, was Juang Meto, an immigrant from Sikka on Flores, whose family was subsequently replaced by that of Dasi. Possibly this Juang Meto refers to Dom João, known to have governed Lamakera in 1598. Compare with Abdul Kadir Sika, n.y.

\(^74\) VOC 1367 (1680-81), Dagregister, sub 18-11-1680.
admonished the aristocrats to obey the lord or dame of Lohayong.

From a Dutch point of view, Lamakera was the most reliable of these domains to prop up VOC authority on Solor. However, looking at it from a different point of view, sengaji Dasi and his descendants pursued a consistent policy of leaning towards the Dutch side in order to strengthen their regional network. Dasi himself enjoyed a long reign from circa 1655 to 1701, and therefore became a symbol of continuity during the first formative half-century of VOC influence. While he was not always popular with the individual opperhoofden, he knew how to make himself indispensable. He repeatedly travelled to Batavia on Dutch keels, something that very few other rulers in the region did. In later oral tradition this was even given a mythologized slant, as the sengaji was alleged to have walked across the water to Java where he exchanged ceremonial tongkat with a sultan. Since the Solorese were considered to be the only truly skilful seamen in this part of the archipelago, they were useful to the Company in a number of ways. In the early years of the Kupang post, it was agreed that a community of Lamakera could stay in the area henceforth known as Kampung Solor, a few hundred meters east of Fort Concordia; there they caught fish at the behest of the Company. The sengaji of Lamakera sometimes stayed in the kampung too, to the irritation of the Dutch, who believed that the sengaji were more useful back home. The Solorese were able to sail great distances with their small boats: when the Dutch opperhoofden suddenly passed away in 1714 and 1740 respectively, at times when it was not possible to send Dutch vessels to Batavia, the sengaji in person undertook the demanding (but creditable) trip to communicate the news to the Governor General.

Lamakera’s relations with its neighbour Lohayong were not always positive, as they both competed for the overlord-ship of Solor (Coolhaas 1976:73). The Lamakera nevertheless carefully avoided direct confrontations – after all, Lohayong was home to Fort Henricus and the two Dutch artillerists. In 1682, Dasi made a rash attempt to persuade the Dutch to make Lamakera their new Solorese centre. In a letter to Governor General Cornelis Speelman, he tried to cast Nyai Cili Muda in a dubious

75 Interview, Haji Muhammad Hasan, Lamakera, 16-6-2006. Oral tradition refers to him as Nene Dasi. That this must be the same figure as the historical Dasi is shown by the enumeration of his five sons, four of which are also found in VOC documents: Kana Puis, Karaeng Barang (d. after 1693), Abu Bakar (reign 1701-21), Subang Pulo (Jacob alias Pulo, d. after 1694), and Bajoamang (Jan Rotterdam alias Rayama, d. after 1688).
76 VOC 1853 (1714), ff. 9-12; Van Goor 2004:645.
light, and declared that he had built a new fortification in Lamakera that he had given the glorious name ‘Groot Hollandia’. He was only waiting for the Company to come and live there, he said, and he strongly suggested that Speelman should allocate a scribe, four soldiers and some merchants.\textsuperscript{77} The Company was obviously not taken with the idea, but Groot Hollandia is occasionally mentioned in the documents from this time. The fortress was presumably made of wood, for unlike Fort Henricus, nothing remains of it today.

Dasi forged a comprehensive network in the region. With his seaborne villagers he assisted the Dutch in their dealings with Alor and Pantar, where he had economic interests. He was also given an official trading pass that enabled his ships to frequent Rote, Sawu, Bima and Wetar – in other words, a rather extensive area. The condition that was imposed, was that the trade should not be harmful to Company interests. After some years, the Dutch authorities changed their minds and forbade Dasi to go to Wetar, which lay within another VOC residency.\textsuperscript{78} Nevertheless, the \textit{Dagregisters} of Kupang frequently mention Lamakeran trading expeditions that went to Rote via Kupang. These expeditions were fully approved by the authorities, and were usually headed by members of the \textit{sengaji} family. They offered Rotenese items such as coconuts, beans and trai oil, and sold it for \textit{gula} and salt.\textsuperscript{79} Among Dasi’s several wives was an aristocratic Rotenese lady, possibly from Ringgou, and indeed, Dasi was used by the Dutch in their complicated dealings with the Rotenese. Due to his personal network of contacts, Dasi could speak with recalcitrant princes on behalf of the Company, and he took an active part in the expedition to Rote and Sawu in 1676. His dynastic network even extended to Timor, since his son Jacob was married to the daughter of the Helong regent, Ama Susang.\textsuperscript{80} How these marriages with non-Muslim spouses were compatible with the Muslim creed of the Solorese is not specified, but it is likely that religious differences were still of limited importance in a context like this; Dasi himself moreover gave two of his sons the Christian Dutch names Jacob and Jan Rotterdam. It is significant that oral tradition was not content to retell his prosaic death in March 1701

\textsuperscript{77} \textit{Dagh-Register} 1887-1931, the year 1682:1188-90.
\textsuperscript{78} VOC 1609 (1698), f. 62.
\textsuperscript{79} VOC 1481 (1689-90), \textit{Dagregister}, sub 24-9-1689.
\textsuperscript{80} Coolhaas 1971:105-10; VOC 8310 (1686-87), \textit{Dagregister}, sub 27-5-1687, 20-8-1687; VOC 1553 (1693-94), \textit{Dagregister}, sub 26-11-1693; VOC 1663 (1702), f. 72-3.
at a ripe old age, but instead gave it a supernatural aspect connected to his frequent travels overseas. After visiting his Dutch allies in Kupang, his craft returned to Solor, but had an accident at sea, just off Lamakera. The ship capsized, but Dasi was a good swimmer and managed to reach the shore. Meanwhile, the Lamakera assumed that their lord had drowned and prepared a mortuary feast. When Dasi approached Lamakera, alive and well, he perceived that something unusual was going on. He asked a fisherman why they were organizing a feast, and got the answer that it was for him. On hearing this, the *sengaji* was overcome by shame and disappeared in a moment without leaving a trace (*hilang*).

One might expect the Dutch-Portuguese peace of 1663 to have ensured that there would be no more aggression from the Larantuqueiros against the Watan Lema. As it turned out, this was not quite the case. There were in fact continuous raids and counter-raids between the coastal Paji and land-oriented Demon territories, which were carried out with varying degrees of success. In the 1670s, a vendetta arose when the Larantuqueiros attacked and burnt the negeri Adonara, abducting two women in the process. It appeared that António Hornay had no hand in this raid, yet nor did he care to punish the perpetrators. However, the princes of Lamakera and Terong decided to exact vengeance of their own accord without asking for permission from the *opperhoofd* in distant Kupang. In 1679, they set forth with five *perahu* and sailed over to Kawela on the nearby island of Lembata, which was under Portuguese control. Kawela probably had nothing whatsoever to do with the raid, but for the *sengaji* this was less important. The Solorese were fiercely resisted and the *sengaji* of Terong and his son were killed on the shore, while the Lamakera commander only barely escaped, thanks to his loyal retainers (Coolhaas 1971:407). Years later, Dasi of Lamakera reportedly created trouble on Ataúro, an island north of Dili that belonged to the Portuguese sphere. In 1689, Hornay complained bitterly about the Solorese when he met the Dutch *opperhoofd* Willem Moerman in Lifau, and demanded Dutch consent to take revenge on the troublemakers of Lamahala and Terong. Moerman replied ‘that His Excellency was more than well acquainted with the character of these people, and their thievish nature and inborn villainy’. This villainy, he pointed out, pertained not only to theirs but also to Hornay’s clients. Hornay made no further

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81 Interview, Haji Muhammad Hasan, Lamakera, 16-6-2006.
82 VOC 1481 (1689-90), *Dagregister*, sub 14-6-1689.
comments but switched subjects to discuss trade, and the conversation indicates the very negative generalizations that were made about non-Christian populations. Although they were long-time allies, the Solorese were little more than an innate problem in the eyes of even an able official like Willem Moerman.

As for the obnoxious Lamahala and Terong, they were dealt with six years later when António’s brother Francisco Hornay was in charge of the Topass community. Forty-eight perahu, manned with Timorese, Dutch deserters and other Topass clients, departed from Larantuka in September 1695. They stormed the two coastal villages after facing only weak resistance, and returned to Larantuka with a booty consisting of ships and artillery. The Dutch did nothing about this apart from issuing mild requests to cease the hostilities and extradite the Dutch renegades. As in the case of the Amarasi invasion of 1679, it was implicitly understood that the acting combatants were the Larantuqueiros and Lamahala-Terong, not Hornay and the VOC.

Dutch anxiousness also extended to other areas. From a VOC point of view at least, there were distant threats against the balance they were trying to achieve in the Lamaholot world. Although the double kingdom of Gowa and Tallo’ had been ruined through the campaigns of 1667 and 1669, the defeated populations of South Sulawesi were far from cowed. Makassarese and Bugis refugee groups went overseas in all directions, from Sumatra to Maluku, and were even able to found new kingdoms and dynasties. There were also a large number of traders from Sulawesi, collectively known as Makassarese, who plied the waters of the archipelago to seek their fortune with or, especially, without, Company passes. Trade without passes was of course considered highly detrimental to Company interests, and one professed aim of the Timor post was precisely to stop the Makassarese network from expanding into this part of the archipelago. The matter was complicated by the weakness of the garrison of Fort Concordia. The local Company authorities had very few ships to hand, and were consequently unable to perform the type of policing expeditions that the posts in Makassar and Maluku undertook. The result was that they had to trust the more loyal Solorese allies, in particular Lohayong and Lamakera, to keep watch against suspect seafarers. The arrangement was not always successful, however,
for unauthorized ships did arrive from time to time.

The sultan of Buton, a VOC ally since many years, had a stake in the conquest of Solor back in 1613, and still cultivated interests in the Lamaholot area in the second half of the seventeenth century. In 1681, Sultan Zainuddin dispatched a fleet that carried letters to António Hornay, Lamahala and the sengaji of Belagar on Pantar. The Solorese allies used the Buton connection to complain to the sultan about the hostile Portuguese attitude.\footnote{VOC 1375 (1681-82), \textit{Dagregister}, sub 11-11-1681; VOC 1400 (1683-84), \textit{Dagregister}, sub 10-10-1683. On Sultan Zainuddin, see also \textit{Sejarah dan adat}, II, 1977:67-9. Indigenous Butonese sources say nothing in particular about the sultan’s interest in Solor.} The protection granted by the VOC and laid down in the various contracts and agreements apparently did not suffice. Solemn assertions that the land of Solor was the land of the Company turned out to be worth very little when the Larantuqueiros and their clients on Adonara and Lembata staged violent forays. The shared identity of Islam was a factor in these contacts. Curiously, in the letters that Sultan Zainuddin sent to António Hornay, he appears to have conferred the Solorese lands to Hornay. On receiving these letters, Hornay employed his usual policy of ambiguity: he announced their existence to the Kupang authorities, who were naturally incensed about the impertinent declaration of the sultan, but then declined to show one of them to the Dutch officials under the pretext that he had lost it.\footnote{VOC 1400 (1683-84), \textit{Dagregister}, sub 7-3-1684; Coolhaas 1971:612.} From other sources we know that Buton competed for influence over various spots in the archipelago with the sultan of Ternate. As the defiant Ternatean ruler Sibori Amsterdam was apprehended by the Dutch in 1681, the Butonese attempted to strengthen their positions. In 1683, Sibori Amsterdam had to sign a contract that turned Ternate into a VOC fief, where it was specified that the old and ostensibly unfounded claims on ‘Solor and so on’ were nullified.\footnote{Stapel 1934:310-1. In the same contract it is specified that the Butonese were officially forbidden to frequent Solor from the beginning of 1683. Limited possibilities to police the seas made the prohibition ineffective.} As a matter of fact, the Butonese did occasionally support the Solorese over the next decades, much to the resentment of the VOC authorities but with very limited consequences for the political status of the area.\footnote{Sultan Liauddin Ismail of Buton was deposed in 1697 as a consequence of his poor conduct during a relief expedition against Lifau and Larantuka (Coolhaas 1975:786). Butonese sources allege that he stepped down due to old age (\textit{Sejarah dan adat}, II, 1977:74).}

From an economic point of view, Solor and the adjacent VOC allies had little to offer the colonial apparatus. The merchandise brought to
Kupang was mainly intended for local consumption, and only a limited number of slaves were acquired by the Solorese on the coast of Flores and on Lembata and the Alor group, either through trade or petty warfare. When the customary gifts of the allies were collected to be transported from Kupang to Batavia, the contribution from Lohayong and Lamakera would consist only of a few slaves. The internal Solorese economy is only patchily documented in the VOC records, since it was of little interest for the Dutch. What we can tell, however, is that this seafaring people had an area of activity that stretched from mid-Flores to Wetar in Maluku, where fishing, whaling and petty trade played an important part. The relations between the Paji and the Demon and Portuguese were not just marked by constant hostility, but also by amicable commercial intercourse – what the Dutch *opperhoofden* would frequently castigate as ‘smuggling’.

**THE ALOR GROUP**

A letter from the queen of Solor in 1682 presented her claims in the following words:

> The headman, Johannes van den Broeck, in your fortress in Kupang is my witness that Nyai Cili Muda reigns with honour and respect over the land of Solor from the mountains, to the shores of Alor and through to Ende; and that all this stands under the government of Nyai Cili Muda, with any good or bad, right or wrong that Nyai Cili Muda commits. But all this is under the control of the Company, since the land and waters of Solor are Company land. (De Roever 2002:284.)

The idea that the queen ‘reigned’ over the Alor group, let alone Ende, was exaggerated, but not entirely plucked out of thin air. Other records show that there were indeed forms of exchange between the Solorese and Alorese, epitomized in the twentieth-century tradition that the two leagues of Watan Lema and Galiyao, with five members each, were like two open hands with their ten digits. The complicated nomenclature is indicated by the reference in a VOC source to ‘Pantar, otherwise called Alor’.\(^8\) Alor re-

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\(^8\) VOC 1252 (1665), f. 667.
ferred to a domain in the north-western part of the island that today bears the same name, but it was also understood as a general name for Pantar and Alor, the latter of which was usually known as Malua or Ombai.

That the Solorese actively intervened there is first stated in a VOC report from 1665. The enterprising Dasi of Lamakera promised the Company he would deliver sapanwood, a wood used for dyeing and as a ballast on European ships. Solor did not have any sapan forests, so Dasi led an expedition to Pantar, where he stayed for three months, and enjoyed good relations with one of the Galiyao rajas whom he offered armed assistance. The sapanwood only grew far up in the highlands, and when the Solorese marched uphill with some local pathfinders they were met by stout mountain people – Alphoeren in the Dutch terminology. The mountain people proved hostile to foreign visitors and attacked Dasi’s men, causing some of the pathfinders to be injured and the expedition to retreat to the coast. Dasi later commented that the valuable sapanwood could be readily acquired if only the Solorese were accompanied by a few Company soldiers carrying muskets. The opperhoofd was not taken by this idea, however.89

Apart from a brief visit by a free burgher in 1675, the first foray undertaken by the Kupang post occurred in 1677. It had all the characteristics of a voyage of discovery to the islands over which the VOC claimed indirect suzerainty. The official Johannes van den Broeck – born in Taiwan and thus probably a Eurasian – sailed to Solor where he joined forces with Dasi, who wanted to purchase warships (backaleys-prauwen, perahu berkelahi) at Alor. After a few days travel the expedition arrived at Pandai on north-eastern Pantar. Its ruler was characterized as the overlord of the surrounding negeri, and also of the negeri Alor on the opposite coast. The local ruler, Sako Mede, appeared overjoyed at the Dutch visit, which he had long been waiting for.90 He said he would be happy to sell

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89 VOC 1252 (1665), ff. 667-8. The term ‘Alphoeren’, Alfurs, was used for various low-technology groups in eastern Indonesia, especially in Central Maluku.

90 There was already a history of diplomacy concerning the Alorese leaders. The Dutch opperhoofd Jacob van Wijckersloot met a certain Nae Saku ‘of Alor’, who visited Kupang in 1673. This is a different figure than Sako Mede; he governed as Kapitan of Dulolong close to Alor Besar and is a legendary figure on Alor to this day. Nae Saku asserted that the negeri Alor, Pandai, Belagar and Barnusa had stood under the authority and protection of the Company for years, and even kept Dutch flags. For some reason Kui, in modern accounts described as the fifth component of Galiyao, is not mentioned here. Later in history, Kui sometimes claimed to be an adherent of the Portuguese. The composition of the Galiyao bond may have fluctuated over time. Reynout Wagenburgh later met Nae Saku on Solor and noted his enthusiasm at receiving a Dutch delegation (VOC 1301 [1673-74], Dagregister, sub 2-10-1673, 15-10-1673).
beeswax and slaves in return for cloths; upon closer inspection, however, the goods he could offer turned out to be rather modest: three picul of beeswax and three slave girls. Van den Broeck handed over a Dutch flag as a token of vassal-ship and sailed over the strait to the negeri Alor. The merchandise there turned out to be just as frugal, but the chief explained this was due to the fact that the mountain people preferred to ignore the coastal rajas in the west. Instead they brought the beeswax to the eastern coast, where the Portuguese bought it. The chief suggested the Dutch bring 5,000-6,000 cutlasses and axes to Alor next time to use as objects of exchange. In this way, the coastal dwellers could perhaps attract the mountain people and persuade them to deliver the beeswax to them.\textsuperscript{91}

In the seventeenth century, there was no more peace between the Galiyao domains than between the Watan Lema components. At the time of Van den Broeck’s visit, Alor had been at war with Belagar in south-eastern Pantar for five years. The circumstances shed an interesting light on the role of the ruler of Lohayong in relation to Galiyao. Alor declared that it would not make peace with Belagar unless Nyai Cili Muda herself came there and mediated. The queen had already sent a peace flag (a symbol of peacemaking) to the chief of Belagar, but this was not deemed sufficient.\textsuperscript{92} Thus, while the queen of Solor had no governing authority in these quarters, her position was still very significant when it came to the resolution of conflicts. Her functions thereby partly parallel those of the maromak oan of Wehali on Timor, and certain other ritually revered, but politically weak, paramount lords in the archipelago.

The Alorese maintained sporadic contact with the Company during the following generations. Enterprising rajas sailed to Kupang in person in order to sell coconuts, areca nuts and other items of little consequence.\textsuperscript{93} During certain periods in the first half of the eighteenth century, Pantar and Alor were often visited by merchants from Kupang, a trade that only seems to have taken off when Chinese people began

\textsuperscript{91} VOC 1335 (1677-78), Dagregister, sub 11-8-1677, 15-8-1677, 18-8-1677. The famous moko (drums) of Alor, which were essential objects in marital exchanges, are not explicitly mentioned in the VOC sources. In the late colonial period they were imported by Makassarese traders together with gongs. There is a reference in VOC 1663 (1702), f. 7, to the Makassarese import of gongs to Alor, and the Dutch term gommen may loosely include both gong and moko.

\textsuperscript{92} VOC 1335 (1677-78), Dagregister, sub 18-8-1677.

\textsuperscript{93} VOC 1358 (1679-80), Dagregister, sub 6-7-1680, 17-7-1680. It was noted that the Alorese princes extended their trading activities to Wetar and Atuário to obtain slaves and beeswax for the Company.
to settle there. On the other hand, the Alorese had no real intention of sustaining the monopoly policy of the distant Company whose flags they had received; Dutchmen who visited the Portuguese ports of Lifau and Tulang Ikan in the eighteenth century sometimes found Alorese boats at the roadstead. The authorities of Kupang had an interest in keeping Makassarese and Portuguese visitors away from the island group, but otherwise had no intention of intervening. From the mid-eighteenth century there is very little information available on Alor, but what little there is suggests that the Company no longer had any insight into local affairs there. In 1785 the governor of the Banda Islands complained to Batavia that the people of Wetar were harassed by marauders from Galiyao. The complaint was forwarded to Kupang, whose opperhoofd came to the conclusion that ‘this place […] does not belong to the island of Great Timor, but is situated on the island of Alor on [read: opposite] the north coast of Timor, and has no connection with the Company; for that reason it is outside our capabilities to impede these people from going to Wetar or elsewhere.’

PROBLEMS OF SURVEILLANCE — A CASE STUDY

For a garrison consisting of far fewer than a hundred Europeans, it was a demanding task to monitor the various dependencies or semi-dependencies, especially considering the rough and tricky sea roads. A detailed case from 1686-1687 may illustrate how matters could easily slip out of control for the Company, and how the problems of surveillance were aggravated by the failure of the European staff to adhere to the rules and regulations.

Floris Jansz was a sailor from Katwijk who was established in Kupang by the 1670s and later on served as an artillerist at Fort Henricus.
his service for the VOC had ended, he remained in Kupang as a free
burgher. One set of circumstances made him a person of note in the
small port community that evolved around Fort Concordia: in 1679 he
married the widow Pieterella, who was nothing less than a Helong prin-
cess, and the daughter of King Ama Pono II. Marriages between local
aristocrats and Europeans were not uncommon in seventeenth-century
Kupang, and similar marriages were conducted by the Portuguese. It was
clearly a strategic choice made by the royal and regent families to secure
matrimonial ties with the stranger lords, thereby improving their bar-
gaining position. The European husbands were important channels of
interaction, even if they were roughshod characters as was the case here.
In the extant documents, Floris Jansz usually appears as a troublemaker
who regularly violated the rules set up by the Company administration,
and who could behave quite rudely towards his Timorese in-laws. In
1693 or 1694 he asked the Helong regent Ama Susang to let his horse
graze on Pulau Semau for a while. After a while Jansz ordered the horse
to be shipped back to Kupang, but since it was found to be quite emaci-
ated, he claimed that this was not his mount. He led the horse to the door
of Ama Susang’s sonaf, and the king appeared. The Dutchman drew his
cutlass and struck the animal dead with a furious blow, yelling to the re-
gent: ‘Now, eat the horse with hide and hair!’ Brandishing his cutlass he
rushed into the sonaf with the apparent intention of killing Ama Susang,
who hastily escaped with his wife and child. His son-in-law Jacob, the son
of sengaji Dasi of Lamakera, was injured, and deep scores in the pillars of
the sonaf henceforth reminded its inhabitants of the incident. Only after
a few days had elapsed, did Ama Susang dare to return to his residence.
That such a matter could go unpunished indicates, of course, the liber-
ties that certain Europeans could afford to take, even towards the local
aristocracy – although in this case it is important to note that Jansz’s wife
was of higher birth than Ama Susang.96

Several years before this incident, in late August 1686, three Dutch

96 VOC 1623 (1699), ff. 72-3. The story was written down by Paulus van Coupang, a local Christian
who served as a krankbezoeker (visitor of the sick, a low clerical position), and was one of the few literate
Timorese in early colonial Kupang. Ama Susang was the uncle of Pieterella, and thus a (classificatory)
brother of the deceased ruler Ama Pono II. He was the regent of the Helong kingdom from before 1673
to 1698, and was known to the VOC authorities as the ‘king’. Nevertheless, he was probably of low birth
on his mother’s side, and had no real claim to the actual kingship. As for Floris Jansz, he also traded
alcohol in his own house in Kupang to the detriment of the Dutch leaseholder of such a business (VOC
1460 [1688-89], Dagregister, sub 2-10-1688).

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ships left Kupang for Solor. After six days the sailors arrived before Fort Henricus and the Dutch leaders arranged a routine meeting with the Solorese senga. When this had taken place, two of the vessels departed from Solor again, leaving the sloop De Steenbocq with assistant Hendrick Tilingh as captain. Tilingh brought along his wife, the Christian Kupang-born woman Dina Cornelisz. Dina viewed the journey as a pleasure trip, an opinion she would soon have reason to alter. Floris Jansz was also on board, and as De Steenbocq lay at anchor off Lohayong he ordered some valuables belonging to him to be taken on board: nine slaves (eight male and one female) and a few picul of beeswax. In this period many slaves were acquired from Flores, while some originated from Lembata and the Alor group. Back in Kupang they could either be used in domestic work or sent on to Batavia for a modest profit. The artillerist Jacob Cevelaar questioned the arrangement, but Jansz asserted that this had been permitted by the council in Kupang. Hendrick Tilingh agreed with Jansz, and Cevelaar did not dare to make any further protests. The sloop eventually set out for the return trip to Kupang on 10 September.⁹⁷

At first the slaves were kept in cages, but once the ship had reached the middle of the Sawu Sea they were allowed to stay on the deck. The sailors hid any potential weapons like axes. At daybreak on 15 September, Tilingh and his wife lay asleep in a tent on the deck, where the weapons were also kept. The cook Barent Pietersz was already awake and in the process of washing some rice to cook for breakfast, and at the helm stood his mate Isaaq Barents. Suddenly they became aware of a violent tumult. One way or another, the slaves had located the chest in the tent. Helping themselves to the cutlasses and axes, they made a concerted attack on the baffled Europeans. Barent Pietersz ran towards the tent but found nothing to defend himself with, and jumped overboard with a gash in his side. Isaaq Barents grabbed the rudder-pole, but realizing the poor odds he, too, decided to jump overboard. The entire crew, seven people in total, managed to reach the barge that was tied to the sloop. Tilingh shouted to Dina to jump overboard, but to no avail: either she was afraid of the sea or else the slaves had taken her.⁹⁸

The set-upon Dutchmen managed to steer the barge towards Solor. En route, two of them died of their wounds and were cast into the sea, and when they finally reached the coast and waded ashore, Tilingh

⁹⁷ VOC 8310 (1686-87), Dagregister, sub 9-10-1686.
⁹⁸ VOC 8310 (1686-87), ff. 4-5.
drowned in the breakers while his exhausted shipmates were unable to save him. Floris Jansz and the three others were helped by a boy and brought to the settlers in the hills, and thence back to Fort Henricus. It was now disclosed that the transport of the slaves had not been permitted by Kupang at all. In his daily recordings, the Dutch opperhoofd Willem Moerman later cursed the careless conduct of Hendrick Tilingh and the deception of Floris Jansz, which had cost the Company dearly. 99 As for the slaves, they brought *De Steenbocq* to Leva on a part of the coast of Flores that belonged to the Portuguese sphere. The boat was burnt by the locals, probably to avoid trouble, and the slaves headed for the highlands where no VOC force would be able to reach them. They took Dina Cornelisz with them and ended up in a village called Wolowea. 100

Weak as they were, the Dutch in Kupang were not willing to let an act of defiance of such magnitude go unpunished. Given the circumstances, the only option was to send the two artillerists of Solor to Larantuka and ask their less than reliable friend António Hornay for assistance. Hornay promised to send any perpetrators that his people might catch to Kupang. Not long afterwards, the artillerist Cevelaar heard from the capitão mor that one of the slaves had actually been caught by Jumat, an orangkaya from Barai in the Ende area, which had a nominal connection with the Watan Lema and the Company.

So far, things looked hopeful for the Dutch authorities, but then something went awry. Jumat sailed from Ende to Lohayong, carrying a letter written by the *dominee* (priest) of Barai to inform the Dutch about the capture. 101 Arriving at Lohayong he was confronted by a grandee called Tulitamma, who took the letter and forbade the Ende to deliver the message to the artillerists on pain of death, reportedly saying: ‘What concern is it to the Dutch dogs? If they are dead, then let them remain dead. The slaves have made a quest for their freedom.’ 102 Jumat was scared and hastily returned to Ende. The issue nevertheless came to the attention of the Dutch, and they called the man back to Lohayong, where he told them about Tulitamma’s threatening behaviour. On the following day the grandees of Lohayong were summoned by the artillerists, who

99 VOC 8310 (1686-87), *Dagregister*, sub 9-10-1686.
100 VOC 8310 (1686-87), *Dagregister*, sub 2-1-1687.
101 *Dominee* is a Dutch term, which in this case might refer to a Muslim imam or shaykh. If so, then the letter was probably written in the Arabic-derived Jawi script, which was also used on Solor.
102 VOC 8310 (1686-87), *Dagregister*, sub 24-3-1687.
questioned Tulitamma over the matter. The latter could give no satisfactory explanation, and the two Dutchmen declared that they would have to send him to Kupang for further investigation. Tulitamma now wished to leave since it was time to eat. ‘You shall remain here’, replied Jacob Cevelaar, ‘Your boys may bring you food.’ Tulitamma then rushed away, with Cevelaar pursuing, hot on his heels. Just when Cevelaar was about to grab the Solorese grandee, another man attacked the Dutchman with a knife and cut his throat. It turned out to be Tulitamma’s son-in-law, Sabon, who was the son of a sengaji from Lamahala. The other artillerist, Lieve Cornelisz, hastily ran to the palisade where he spent an anxious evening. The slaves of Tulitamma crept outside the palisade and threatened to treat Cornelisz in the same way as his compatriot. In the middle of the night, Cornelisz mounted a horse and galloped to the loyal Lamakera.103

That same night a party arrived across the strait from Lamahala. Their leader was kapitan Assam, a chief who was well known to the Dutch authorities. Little love was lost between him and the Company, which had burnt Lamahala to the ground back in 1676 when the negeri did not appear submissive enough in Dutch eyes.104 Kapitan Assam had previously quarrelled with the Company representatives, who insulted him with rudely-worded reproaches. Similar to Dutchmen like Floris Jansz, Assam cared very little about contractual stipulations when it came to economic transactions. He went so far as to declare that he would have nothing to do with the Company, but was instead his own man. Among other things, he had brought Makassarese and Malay merchants from the roadstead of Larantuka to Lamahala in front of the very noses of the Dutch, and sold slaves to them.105 All this was done in the name of the prevailing spirit of the independent-minded Lamahala princedom, which was averse to the VOC-minded Lamakera and rather sought contacts with the Makassarese. Now, the Lamahala threatened to burn the Company buildings in Lohayong. The situation did not escalate

103 VOC 8310 (1686-87), Dagregister, sub 17-4-1687.
104 VOC 1319 (1675-76), Dagregister, sub 28-5-1676. The destruction of Lamahala was carried out by the same squadron that intervened in Rote and Sawu between March and May 1676, in conjunction with allied forces from Lohayong, Lamakera, Terong and Adonara. The scattered Lamahalans fled to Labala and Kedang on Lembata, and Belagar, Barnusa and Pandai on Pantar. (VOC 1327 [1676-77], Dagregister, sub 16-7-1676). The negeri was subsequently rebuilt and re-incorporated in the VOC-allied league, but subsequent relations with the VOC were far from positive.
105 VOC 1426 (1684-85), Dagregister, sub 24-9-1684.
that far, however, for the rest of the Lohayong chiefs stayed loyal to the VOC. However, the new opperhoofd Arend Verhoeven found it necessary to allocate four sailors, all skilled in the use of firearms, to Fort Henricus in order to protect the sorely tried Lieve Cornelisz.¹⁰⁶

The incident introduced a brief spate of turbulence among the Watan Lema princedoms. A Chinese immigrant called Ziko encountered kapitan Assam in a Solorese kampung and shot him dead. When Sabon’s father, the sengaji of Lamahala, tried to save Assam he received a serious bullet wound to the foot. Meanwhile the sengaji of Adonara delivered Tulitamma to the hands of sengaji Dasi, who in turn presented him to the VOC representatives for due punishment.¹⁰⁷ All this appears to have been an eruption of simmering local contradictions among the Solorese grandees, combined with the wish of certain protagonists to curry favour with the Company.

The fate of the runaway slaves remains somewhat unclear. A letter from 1692 claims that they were still at large under the authority of Hornay and Amarasi, and had thus been brought over to Timor.¹⁰⁸ However, papers from 1689 indicate that four surviving ‘murderers’ who had escaped in 1686 were arrested in Amarasi on Hornay’s orders and turned over to the Dutch. If these were the slaves from the Steenhooq incident, as seems likely, they came to a harsh end in Kupang in December in the same year. The Timorese priest Paulus van Coupang tried to effect their last-minute conversion to Christianity, and while two of them proved willing, the two others declared their wish to live and die following the beliefs of their ancestors. Two days later they were brought out to the place of execution. The Company did its utmost to state an example in the European tradition of ‘complicated death penalty’, lest other slaves might get similar ideas. Their right hands were chopped off, and their bones were broken with an iron from the ground upwards. Finally, they were beheaded and left on the wheel for the birds. Incidentally a comet appeared the same morning in the form of a cutlass, causing

¹⁰⁶ VOC 8310 (1686-87), Dagregister, sub 18-4-1687.
¹⁰⁷ VOC 1437 (1687), ff. 321-2. One may ask if kapitan Assam (alternatively Asan or Assan), who can be described as gallant or villainous depending on one’s point of view, is the historical prototype of La Asan (alternatively La Asang). This character figures prominently in Solorese legend and lore. In one version, he left Lamahala when he was accused of witchcraft or corpse eating, and migrated to the negeri Adonara on the north coast, where he gained a strong political foothold (Barnes 2001:299). There are numerous variants of this story.
¹⁰⁸ VOC 1531 (1692-93), Letter, Batavia to Kupang, 19-2-1692.
opperhoofd Willem Moerman to make this sombre comment: ‘God have mercy in the face of the well-deserved punishment that threatens the human race.’

Although the affair ended in a moderately satisfactory way for Kupang, it indicated the weaknesses of the network that the Company had constructed. Individual Europeans on Timor built up a position of authority that sometimes ran counter to official VOC policy. An incident caused by their fraudulence, and only marginally connected to Solor, was subsequently blown out of all proportion. It quickly transformed into a Dutch-Solorese, and then into an internal Solorese affair, with connections to Flores and Hornay’s Topass complex. As it happened, the murderer Sabon remained at large for many years to come, and so did some of the slaves, without the Company being able to deal with them; moreover, a local Florenese chief kept Tilingh’s widow as his slave or mistress and refused to return her to the Dutch authorities until years later. Despite all this, however, the VOC network did not break down. This and similar incidents always ended with the Company managing to strike a delicate balance in spite of its lack of force. The foreign suzerains, with their lack of insight in the local adat or conflict patterns, remained an entity that could engender, but also solve, conflicts among the local and deeply divided populations. In that respect, the Dutch East India Company was more than functional.

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109 VOC 1481 (1689-90), Dagregister, sub 5-8-1689, 5 to 7-12-1689. As such the executions were not exceptional by the standards of the day. The same punishment was meted out for serious crimes committed by black slaves in the British colonies in North America (Hunt 2007:78).

110 As pointed out by the Solorese sengaji in a somewhat later letter (VOC 1497 [1691], ff. 699b-700b), they simply lacked the power to carry out the arrest of Sabon, who apparently resided in or around Lamahala in defiance of the Company. In the late 1690s, Sabon was finally extradited and brought to Batavia. From there he was sent into exile in South Africa like many perceived troublemakers of the East Indies (VOC 1609 [1698], f. 12). As for Tilingh’s widow, she was eventually returned to Kupang through Hornay’s assistance, by 1693 (Coolhaas 1975:624). Although a native Timorese, she would by virtue of her marriage and religion still have been counted as Dutch. Her life after her release has not been documented.