CHAPTER SIX

AUTHORITY (1950S–1970S)

Important officials always sat in the front seats at church. Some helped out as “elders,” who arranged the Sunday service and circulated the black collection bag. Everyone wore the very best and newest clothes they owned. Officials who made gifts sometimes did it anonymously but more often by name. One of the elders read out the amount collected over the previous week, complete with names.

(Lay 2014:164–5)

In the four and a half decades between 1930 and 1975 the population of Kupang grew ten times. A small, quiet colonial outpost in a feudal agrarian setting expanded into a bustling, bureaucratic, and above all Indonesian town, yet one that remained as determined as ever to set its stamp on what it tended to see as a benighted hinterland. The town grew primarily because the central state needed to exert its authority in a part of the country that Jakarta regarded as remote. But, as previous chapters have shown, power cannot be ‘projected’ seamlessly from one place to another far away. It must be generated locally, through face-to-face interaction, making use of the resources that are available.

This chapter begins with the spatiality of the resources made possible by the new state. It focuses on the new office buildings, churches, roads, and sports facilities springing up around the town and into the interior, and on the rituals that came to be associated with them. The money the central state invested in Kupang was insignificant on the national scale, but to the locals it was extravagant. People still today recall the construction of the new sports stadium in 1962/63 by Lt. Col. Paikun and the large Protestant GMIT church at Oeba around the same time. All that new concrete added functionality to the town. More importantly, it framed a new spatiality of power. The facilities were imbued with new rituals and manners that changed the lives of people already living in the town, and attracted many from beyond its boundaries. Roger Barker found that behavioural codes were, as it were, written into the walls of the store in Oskaloosa, the small Kansas village that he observed intensively in the early 1950s (Schoggen 1989). In the same way the large churches that were
being refurbished or built anew in the 1950s became novel ‘behavioural settings’ for Kupang’s youth and its elders alike, as the quote heading up this chapter illustrates. The new urban space, in other words, facilitated fresh modalities of power. These ranged from coercion and authority to the more attractive modalities of inducement and even seduction.

Having explored the construction of new urban spaces in the period to the early 1970s, the chapter then asks how middle class members of two urban institutions deployed those resources to build particular types of authority, in the town but especially in the countryside beyond it. It chooses two that were rather top-down, namely the military and the church. To be effective, Max Weber showed, power must be legitimate, and this involves building relations of trust. Authority differs from domination in that it has obtained the assent of those to whom it is directed. Even the most coercive of institutions could only develop power by deploying its resources in a network of relationships. The town was one of the most important places where such relationships could grow in the provinces.

Both the military and the church adopted bureaucratic organizational techniques to reach large populations. Both promoted new ideas of corporeal and social order that rose above loyalty to feudal lords. Both preached obedience to a higher authority – one a bit higher than the other. Both spoke at first mainly to an urban audience, but then also tried to reach an overwhelmingly rural population from their urban base. State administration expanded rapidly in the 1950s and particularly the 1960s, starting from a low base, and these two institutions lent authority to that expansion. Rather than focusing on the details of their organizations, this chapter looks at the way these institutions built associational power through face-to-face interaction.

Maps

The map Allied pilots had on their knees as they repeatedly dropped bombs on Kupang from 1943 onwards (Figure 16) shows a small town that could be crossed on foot in a quarter of an hour. All the buildings one expects in a colonial outpost of this size were there, on paper still pristine: Chinese shops and godowns along the shore, the large Chinese cemetery up the slope behind them, their community hall and, up the slope behind that, offices and the Resident’s villa. Schools, the jail, two hospitals, churches and a mosque, and, out along the coastal road towards the northeast, the military barracks completed the picture. Native houses that
occupied most of the town area were invisible on this map. Set among such tall trees that from the sea Kupang looked like a forest, these wooden houses filled the colonial interstices and spread into the countryside where the town’s edges merged into the raja’s domains.

One native who recalled the town’s layout as it had been in the 1940s highlighted the indigenous features that were to him most authentic (Figure 22): just east of the Chinese shops, a teak plantation; on the hills to the south at Bakunase, a coconut plantation; in between, a recreational nature reserve, with large trees whose names were signposted in several languages, and concrete picnic benches set underneath them – in the wet season the town’s aspect was green; and set among the greenery, three houses of rajas known as sonaf. The resident’s house did not even deserve a mention on this map. The sonaf belonged to the Tabenu, Nisnoni and Funay families – aristocrats who upheld the social order. Kupang town was carved out of the much larger Kupang kingdom ruled by Raja Nisnoni. At one time grandiosely called an ‘empire,’ the Dutch put the Kupang kingdom together out of a series of smaller principalities. Each of these smaller entities retained its identity and was run by a fetor, a position inferior to the raja that was also hereditary. The heads of the Tabenu and Funay families were fetor.¹

A map from 1973 illustrates the scale of the transformation (Figure 23). This is just the central portion of a 35-page street directory. Whereas in colonial times the streets had been named after natural features, places, fruits, or even social classes,² after 1949 they were named after political heroes. At first these tended to be local nationalist heroes such as I.H. Doko, later extended to Indonesian heroes such as Sukarno and Imam Bonjol. After 1966 several were renamed for military heroes such as Ahmad Yani. Thus successive central governments imposed their ideology upon the urban streetscape. Army and police facilities are now located in the heart of town, no longer simply on the margins. The number and type of government offices has proliferated. We see a livestock inspectorate, an immigration office, a government pawn shop, a provincial ‘logistics depot’ (Dolog, holding subsidized rice). Restaurants and apothecaries seem to be everywhere, and there is a second movie theatre, the Kupang Theatre.

¹ Kupang kingdom was instituted by the Dutch in 1919 to reduce the bother of dealing with the previously existing village-sized principalities of: Semau, Tabenu, Ambi, Funay, Little Sonbait and Amabi Oefetto (Farram 2004:115).
² Some examples: Pantjoeranstraat – Spring Street; Boomstraat – Tree Street; Zeestraat – Sea Street; Voorstraatbrug – Front Street Bridge; Kasteelstraatbrug – Castle Street Bridge; Heerenstraat – Gentlemen Street.
Most scars of the Allied bombing have been built over. A bus terminal occupies a bombed-out area near the harbour that was never rebuilt. Hundreds of minibuses swarm in and out of it each day – noise levels rise as once deserted streets become positively dangerous. The Chinese cemetery still appears on this map, but the dead in this piece of prime real estate are about to be evicted in favour of a state bank (Doko 1982:30–1). The rajas have disappeared from the map altogether.

The town has expanded south beyond its colonial municipal boundaries (see Footnote 3 in Chapter 4). A swathe of new government buildings arose in the 1970s on the rice fields and the jail food gardens at Oebobo, above the former Chinese cemetery. A new university, education department offices, governor’s office, and a gigantic church had been built even further up the hill at Oepura, previously a peri-urban village. The aristocratic Funay family who claimed to own this land grew rich out of the transformation. The city got its first town plan (Samiarsa et al. 1969). Public transport used to consist of a single wheezing and dusty bus. After a couple of false starts with government, and then police-owned public buses that ended in bankruptcy, Governor El Tari licensed Chinese entrepreneurs to run private services. Soon numerous Mitsubishi Colt minibuses plied the newly asphalted streets. Urban growth produced severe shortages of drinking water. The old spring at Oeba near the coast was busier than ever with bathers and men filling drums to sell to the Chinese, but the new suburb of Oepura had found its own spring in the hills. Where in the 1930s Tjong Koen Siong’s generator had lit up the town for a few hours in the evening on a government contract, since 1974 a state-owned electricity plant in the kampong west of town had been keeping lights burning all night. Other state-run enterprises stood as monuments to bad planning or worse. Both the sandalwood factories built by Governor El Tari on Raja Nisnoni’s peri-urban lands in 1973 and 1974 were idle. Timor had almost no sandalwood trees left – a fact that was known when they were built. The meat canning factory built by Raja Nisnoni in 1952 had already closed in 1963 because, equally predictably, it could not compete with Balinese and foreign canned meat.

The map has blown out because the urban population has more than quintupled since 1945 (Figure 24) (some of this increase is due to incorporation of populations by expanding urban boundaries). Most of the increase came in the late 1960s, as New Order development money began to flow. In 1959 Kupang became capital of the new province of East Nusa Tenggara (the region had previously been run from Bali). Many observers have noted the crucial role of the state to Kupang’s rapid growth (Rutz
1987:148, Samiarsa et al 1969), but we still do not have good insight into the demographics of the migrants who flooded into town. The bureaucracy is a mobile zone and recruited so many educated people from all over the province and indeed Indonesia that they no longer constituted a tiny elite in Kupang, as they had done in the 1930s, but a new class. But many poor people also came to town, to escape poverty and boredom in the village and to seek new opportunities in petty trade or unskilled labour. The removal of colonial travel restrictions was one factor in this growth. People must have been driven to move by the misery in the countryside, where hunger was normal and preventable malaria and respiratory ailments headed the list of reported diseases (36% and 23% respectively, Pemda NTT 1973:92). Class differences between this semi-literate ‘urban proletariat... only a step away in terms of sophistication and skills and non-labour resources from the countryside in which most of them were not long ago born’ (H. Geertz 1963:34) and the new middle class of Chinese traders and indigenous civil servants were growing.

Most provincial towns in Indonesia passed through many troubles in the immediate post-war years. Evidence of a ‘soft’ state was everywhere. This was true of towns in the heartlands affected by the revolution, but also of those in the periphery not directly affected by it. A survey of newspaper reports concerning eight towns throughout the 1950s shows

Figure 22. Kupang, 1946 (Parera 1969).
Figure 23. Kupang, 1973 (Sidik 1973).
that, contrary to the image of friendly torpitude that clings to them, all experienced severe disruption.\(^3\) The number of trained civil servants was too low to do all that needed doing; the communications, transport and housing infrastructure to support them was broken. Local tax revenues and national subsidies were just enough to reconstruct the worst of the war damage, but not to house the influx of new civil servants, to repair the leaking school roofs, or to lay on piped water for the slum dwellers who were now also citizens with rights. Rampant smuggling exacerbated the budgetary problems by robbing the state of import tariffs and export duties. Young men in the heartlands who fought as irregular guerrillas in the revolutionary war against the Dutch threatened to join criminal bands unless they were given a job. Under the guise of ‘national integration’ many were sent to the outer islands as state-sponsored transmigrants or teachers, despite poor qualifications. For years after the Pacific War and the revolution had ended, violence remained close to the surface in these provincial towns. Criminality exploded repeatedly into local revolts, which invited military intervention in many towns. As in the days of the

\(^3\) The following notes are drawn from a survey by my research assistant Basilius Triharyanto of news items concerning eight provincial towns in the national daily *Merdeka* throughout the 1950s. The towns were Ambon, Banjarmasin, Bengkulu, Kupang, Makassar, Malang, Palembang, and Pontianak.
Dutch pacification decades earlier, the town once more became a military base for forays into a countryside that the soldiers regarded as inhospitable, ignorant and impoverished. But this time the military were themselves wracked with factionalism and intrigue, making their interventions less effective than they might have been.

That national and local governments achieved anything at all in these chaotic circumstances was not due to the successful rolling out of machine-like centralized institutions, but to the local social forces that emerged in and through these new institutions. It is the socially embedded nature of these institutions that gave them their power, as the following sections will demonstrate.

_Bureaucracy_

How large was the bureaucracy that was to bring forth Kupang's new indigenous middle class? Figures for the size of the civil service in Kupang in this period are imprecise but when placed in a province-wide context they reveal an astonishing growth. Few could have predicted in 1950 that government employment would come to sustain a substantial proportion of Kupang's population. Timor was at first part of the province of Lesser Sunda Islands, which stretched from Bali to Timor. Modern government at this end of the archipelago was thin on the ground. The total number of Lesser Sunda Islands provincial government officials in the late colonial period was a mere 300, and this declined to 50 under the State of East Indonesia NIT immediately after the Pacific War. A good many of these were posted in the provincial capital in Singaraja, Bali. After the transfer of sovereignty in late 1949 Dutch officials were at first replaced by older Indonesians with experience but who were really ready to retire. By the end of 1953 the total provincial corps had gone up to 329, many of them young and without experience. Three years later it had crept up to 438. The governor had only asked for 400, and he was of the opinion that few had any real work to do (Reksodihardjo 1960 [1957]:I, 59–61). But in late 1958 Kupang became the capital of its own province called East Nusa Tenggara, much smaller than Nusa Tenggara. The provincial corps rose to about 1500, the biggest concentration of them based in Kupang. The governor alone had a staff of 260, each of the 12 districts had 65, and every government service had another 20–45 (Sumarto 1962:168–175, Tari 1972:I, 96).

The state indirectly sustained many more people than this, though clear figures are hard to find. The rajas each received money to pay their own staff (up to a couple of dozen – though these were about to be
transferred to the local government payroll). Catholic and Protestant missions who ran virtually the entire education system in the Christian part of Lesser Sundas received state money to pay some of their teachers, particularly in the towns. Teachers became more visible in the civil service statistics as time went on, but statistics remained speculative. Until well into the New Order even the government did not know exactly how many people were on its payroll. One 1967 estimate had 33,112 civil servants in NTT, of whom just under half (15,819) were paid by the central state (‘pegawai negeri,’ including teachers), and the rest by provincial and district governments (17,293, ‘pegawai otonoom’). NTT had 8,513 primary school teachers in 1967 – 1,172 in Kupang.4 In addition there were 2,746 retired civil servants and military officers, some of whom had gone into business (Sidik et al 1968:51, 55).5

Even these higher numbers are by no means complete. Not listed were the hundreds of parliamentarians on good salaries at the provincial and district levels, and their staff; the thousands of village and subdistrict officials who received payments not amounting to salaries; the hundreds or thousands of private sector workers, such as construction workers, dependent on government building contracts. Thousands more worked for state-owned commercial entities, such as the post office, banks, the shipping line, two airlines, the pawn shop, the electricity company, the state oil company, construction companies, etc. (a list without numbers is in Chalik 1971:187–8). The biggest uncounted government labour pool was the military. The army, air force, navy and police all had headquarters and other bases in Kupang. Any reasonable estimate will run into thousands here as well. The army also maintained thousands of poorly paid auxiliaries, such as civil guards (hansip) posted in small towns all over the province.

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4 Ende, NTT’s other major town, had 1,253; rural districts had 400–800 teachers each; almost all taught at religious schools.
5 There are other estimates. Governor El Tari in 1969 reported a smaller number of civil servants in NTT: 24,082. Of these 12,132 were paid centrally through the province – most of them primary school teachers (9,010), and another large group (2,119) seconded to the districts. The districts employed another 7,062 (including 549 in Kupang) – this is much lower than the Sidik estimate and accounts for the difference. Then there were 4,193 casual workers, and about a thousand more in state-owned corporations and central government offices (direktorat) (Tari 1969:8).

Another estimate the next year put the number of centrally funded civil servants at ‘about’ 13,000. Five thousand of these had been recently employed, many in the education, justice, and religion departments, where they replaced sacked Sukarno loyalists. The great bulk of these civil servants were poorly educated people on a low salary scale. The better educated ones, particularly teachers, tended to be young. This report did not mention district-level civil servants (BPS 1970:9–15).
There was no motorized fishing in Lesser Sunda. A single venture with a motorboat called Majang I in 1952 failed (Reksodihardjo 1960 [1957]:1, 115). An attempt to reduce food shortages by introducing mechanical tillage on 2,500 hectares near Kefamenanu in West Timor – the Sekon project – failed as well (Ormeling 1956:218–20). There were just three tractors in all of Sumba in the mid-1950s (Sidik et al. 1968: appendix).

From these vague estimates, often lacking geographical specifics, it is difficult to hazard a guess at the proportion of Kupang’s working population partly or wholly employed by the state. If half the town’s population of 51,000 in 1971 was of working age, then it would be surprising to me if the number of those dependent mainly on the state for their income (many would have needed second jobs as well) was less than 5,000 or 20% of these.

By some counts, the number of bureaucrats had outstripped the number of private traders. In 1967 the provincial government knew of just 5,082 traders in all of NTT. Eighty percent of them were petty traders. Forty percent, even at the petty end, were Chinese (Sidik et al. 1968:52). These numbers should probably be taken as an indication of the number of fairly established traders; the number of fishers and farmers who sold their own produce at market more casually must have been far larger than this. Kupang lay not only in the most feudal part of the province (see Chapter 4) but the most backward, in every economic sense, as well. Of the 36 registered companies (CV and NV) in the province of Lesser Sunda Islands in 1956, 30 were based in Bali, six in Lombok, while none was to be found further east. Of the 43 indigenous (non-Chinese) businesses that had received credit from a state bank only two were located in Timor. One was Raja Nisnoni’s ICAFF meat canning factory (see Chapter 8). A list of industries that had received help with mechanization included not one in Timor. Bali had 38 small hotels in 1956 (the tourist boom was yet to come!), but that was luxury compared with Timor, which had just five, all in Kupang and all apparently Chinese-owned. A government survey of small industries, such as shoemaking, weaving or ice lollies, found 233 establishments in Bali, 147 in Lombok, 32 in Sumbawa, and only 25 in Timor. Only Flores and Sumba had fewer (Reksodihardjo 1957:II, 120–184). The region was simply left behind by the modern world. Agriculture and fisheries remained entirely unmechanized, and hesitant attempts to introduce motorized machinery failed repeatedly.6 The road into Timor’s interior remained an unsurfaced single lane until it was sealed after the military invaded neighbouring Portuguese Timor in late 1975. Its bridges, repaired since the Pacific War, were continually washed away again in the

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monsoons; people mainly used the network of bridle tracks that covered the island.

Economic statistics reinforce the picture of government as easily the fastest growing sector in these years. In 1971 NTT was still overwhelmingly agrarian, making up 71% of provincial Regional Gross Domestic Product (RGDP). But in the four preceding years the government share of RGDP had doubled from 3.7% to 6.3% (Pemda NTT 1973: x-xii). Although this still looked smaller than trade at 17.7%, much of the latter also came from the state through state-owned corporations. In any case, in the decade 1975–86 the government's share of RGDP nearly doubled from 10.1% to 19.5%, exceeding trade. The state sector was growing at the expense of agriculture, which had declined to 53.9% by 1986 (Barlow et al 1991:243). The bureaucratic town was rapidly displacing the agrarian countryside. As far as the indigenous population was concerned, Kupang had become the heart of an alternative economy, funded by the central state and run by an educated middle class.

Feeding this growing number of town dwellers from a dry landscape was a major problem. The subsistence agriculture in the hinterland hardly produced enough to feed its peasant population, let alone cities full of civil servants. All of Nusa Tenggara in the 1960s was regarded as a malnutrition area, since the population relied to a large extent on the poorly nutritious cassava root; it was the only region so categorized outside Java (which also suffered malnutrition) (Napitupulu 1968). Peasants ate rice only on ceremonial occasions, but townsfolk ate it routinely. NTT produced small surpluses in maize and tubers, but for rice the shortfall had long been chronic, and this shortfall grew larger as the towns grew bigger. Almost all the rice, petrol and kerosine imported into NTT was for the use of civil servants and soldiers. Chinese traders have been keeping Kupang alive with their rice-importing skills since 1731 (Ormeling 1956:130). In 1953 Kupang was importing 150 tons of rice a month from Java (Kementerian Penerangan Sunda Ketjil 1953:226), but it was not enough. Kupang was essentially a rice-eating parasite weighing heavily on the delicate tissue of the rocky eastern archipelago's subsistence economy. On two occasions, in 1953 and 1955, Kupang's streets saw demonstrations demanding cheaper rice. Since there was no free market in rice, all rice distribution being

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7 This report uses constant prices. Another uses prevailing prices to reach slightly different figures for the same period: agriculture declines from 72% to 67%, government more than doubles from 2.5% to 5.8% (Tim Penyusun Repelita ke II NTT 1972:11–4).

8 NTT exports did shoot up after 1966 – from approximately US$ 200,000 in the early 1960s to around US$ 2.3 million ten years later (Pemda NTT 1973:62).
organized by the government, these became politically laden events (see Chapter 7). In 1966, NTT’s rice production was 57,000 tons, but the shortfall amounted to 123,000 tons. This led the author of the report that noted this disturbing statistic to suggest that NTT should look seriously at limiting the number of its civil servants (Sidik et al 1968:54).

These somewhat confusing figures broadly confirm a picture we have discussed earlier in the book (see Chapter 2), which is that of an urban employment market dominated by rising government investment and by trade, in sharp contrast with a surrounding subsistence agrarian economy in decline. By itself this occupational breakdown does not tell us much about social relations within the town, since both government service and trade cover a wide range of incomes. But when combined with political action it does become meaningful. The educated personalities who people this book make up a political class that, after independence, is almost entirely drawn from the upper levels of the bureaucracy. As late as 1973, education remained the privilege of a tiny few in NTT. Just 1.5% of both men and women had completed secondary school, and 0.2% had a tertiary qualification (Pemda NTT 1973:83). Comparable national figures about this time were 13.1% and 0.8% respectively – multiples of the NTT figures. By contrast, 61% of men and 80% of women in NTT aged ten or over had either never gone to school or not completed primary school, compared with 16% of men and 31.8% of women nationally (Kawuryan 1998:33, quoting 1976 Sakernas data). This tiny middle class with secondary schooling or higher, amounting to just 1.7% of the population, was concentrated mainly in the towns dotted around the agrarian landscape where it made up a larger proportion of the population. But it did not become a political force by acting alone. Its members were tied together with all civil servants through the manifold bureaucratic and political organizations that they led. All civil servants and their families, no matter how poorly paid, were rapidly turning themselves into a class apart from both the subsistence peasants and the traders by their regular salaries, and by their access to perks, such as cheap loans and employment for their relatives. They all shared an emerging common culture of religion and bodily discipline symbolized by the uniform. The top levels of the trade occupations, meanwhile, were almost entirely Chinese (with some ethnic Arabs), and they had no or only tenuous patrimonial links with indigenous petty traders. Thus we have the following ethnicized class division: a predominantly bureaucratic indigenous lower-middle and middle class with political clout, a commercial Chinese middle class with little (and diminishing) direct political clout, and an indigenous lower class
predominantly involved in the agrarian sector and petty trade and for most of our period almost entirely without access to the state (Evers and Gerke 1994).

How did the bureaucratic lower-middle and middle classes act together to exert their influence in this provincial town? Subsequent chapters will examine the material advantages they had over others, which gave them resources of patronage and the power of sabotage. In this chapter we focus on the cultural influences that radiated from the prestigious buildings they occupied – government buildings, but also churches and military headquarters.

The Military

The military’s task at this time was less to defend the country against foreign aggressors than to put down the armed Darul Islam rebellion mainly in West Java, and to extend central government authority to regions that had lived quietly under Dutch rule after World War II instead of participating in revolution. Their first challenge in those formerly Dutch-ruled regions was simply to get boots on the ground. We saw in Chapter 5 that they moved into the colonial military barracks on the eastern outskirts of the old town in 1950. Each major island in the Lesser Sundas now had a ‘territorial’ Military Area Officer (Perwira Daerah Militer, PDM) occupying former colonial barracks in the biggest town. Each had some garrison troops under his command. They lacked the resources to spread beyond the towns. Not till after General Suharto’s New Order came to power in 1966 were troops stationed permanently in small towns and villages everywhere.

From the moment those boots stepped on land their wearers had to start communicating. Talking was their main resource. That is why the army appointed locals to territorial positions as much as possible. The 24-year old Lieutenant El Tari, who grew up in Kupang, got his first posting as PDM in Ende in 1950. The main objective in 1950 was defensive and inward-looking. It was to stop the revolt of former Netherlands Indies troops in Ambon (the Republik Maluku Selatan, RMS) from spreading to the equally Christian islands towards the southwest. The outskirts of town were not a good place from which to launch a ‘charm offensive,’ but they did offer some protection against the anti-Javanese sentiments that

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9 Bentara, 28 June 1950.
caused considerable unrest in Kupang in the first year (Doko 1981a:61). The senior territorial officer in Kupang was Lt. Col. R.A. Kosasih, a Muslim from West Java who had first brought republican troops to Timor. When he did address Kupang’s elite in May 1951 it was not at his barracks, but in what was still called Kampong Belanda. Rather than inspiring new legitimacy, his speech was one of puzzled incomprehension. He admonished his audience of local government leaders for allowing their people to live in houses ‘like chicken coops,’ to eat salted maize (instead of rice), and to sleep under trees (instead of in a bed). They were weakening their bodies with home-brewed liquor known as sopi. ‘Don’t you feel ashamed when outsiders see you?,’ he thundered ineffectually. ‘Rajas, please bury this outdated drinking habit, which only holds up progress!’ He also berated the elite for being ‘drunk with luxury’ and warned them not merely to ‘represent the wealthy few.’

When other Javanese officers tried to take their urge to discipline the population beyond a speech they found themselves humiliated. Major Sukrendo, officer in charge of the Kupang garrison, ordered everyone in town and its surrounding kampongs, including schoolboys and -girls, to take part in a five-day war exercise, beginning at 5 a.m. on 15 November 1950. ‘The enemy’ had landed and occupied all the city’s strategic points. The next day Sukrendo expressed disappointment that people had switched their lights and radios on before the end of curfew and were going about their business, not taking the exercise seriously. He sagely declared general success and abandoned the rest of the exercise. We hear little more of the military after this until the eruption of the Permesta and PRRI revolts in Sumatra and Sulawesi in 1957 and 1958. As in Maluku in 1950, troops in the eastern archipelago, most of them locals in accordance with national policy, threatened to go along with the rebels. These rebels had more success than any before them by actually mobilizing the anti-Javanese sentiment their elders had feared (see Chapter 8). But it lasted only a moment. Martial law was declared all over the archipelago, rebellious officers were gradually side-lined, and officers loyal to Jakarta took over many of the functions of civilian administrators (Harvey 1977).


11 Bentara, 1 December 1950.
Talking was still not their strong point, however. In the province of Nusa Tenggara (the name for the Lesser Sunda Islands since June 1954), culturally alien military officers once again tried to build power by inflicting humiliating disciplinary measures on their hapless populations. As soon as Captain Boediman, the Javanese PDM and martial law administrator in Ende in 1958–59, arrived he began to push through an energetic list of measures to bring order to the town. He removed hordes of goats running wild on the streets, organized neighbourhood work parties to clear drains while he drove around town in his jeep, forced youth into village security details known as OKD (organisasi keamanan desa), made everyone turn up to flag-raising ceremonies on the 17th of every month, restricted the sale of cigarettes, forced the Chinese to attach name plates to their front doors, closed down a nascent arts faculty for unclear reasons after its opening just two weeks earlier, and shut down two local Catholic newspapers. All this without consulting anyone else, civilian administrator Manteiro said with mock admiration in his farewell speech for the officer a few months later.12

The Church

More effective at developing face-to-face power was the church. Its membership expanded dramatically in this period, just as the Indonesian state was expanding into many new areas of life (Figure 26). If we take seriously an insight from Talal Asad (1993), these two phenomena are connected. According to Asad, the Islamic religious experience is authentic not when it reaches heights of private spirituality, as in a secular democracy, but only when it is communitarian and sanctioned in state ritual. In the same way the booming church membership in Timor should be seen as the cultural correlate of the simultaneous blooming of government. The church was populated by civil servants, and the civil service by church members. The white shirts and shoes that they wore to church were only affordable to those on a salary – this simple fact overshadows all intricacies of text, cognition, or meaning. Church membership was voluntary, yet when people joined the church, political power was being generated. This will become obvious in subsequent chapters when we come to consider the 1955 election, the 1959 formation of the province of East Nusa Tenggara, and particularly the dreadful anti-communist denouement of 1965/66. Church growth is a good example of the ‘soft’ modalities of seduction and

inducement. To examine the link between church and state power in Timor we first look briefly at the institutional history of the church, then at the elaboration of a new hierarchy of prestige elaborated in its buildings, and finally at the lifestyles and norms the church promoted.

The church in Kupang has always been a ‘civil servants church,’ wrote the Australian missionary Gordon Dicker, who worked there from 1955 to 1962 (1959:52). The ecclesiastical rapprochement with bureaucracy went back a century and a half (Fox 1980). The autocratic King William I ordered all Protestants in the Indies to gather in one church, the Indies Church (Indische Kerk), which fell under the Department of Trade and Colonies. Later it seemed more practical to place it under the Department of Education, Worship and Industry. All ministers were paid out of the state treasury. Their sense of mission in Kupang was largely confined to the small number of (Indo-)Europeans who worshipped in the stately building that still stands in the heart of town. But this did not prevent some native elites from realizing very early that religion was important to good relations with the foreigners. Rotenese rajas converted to Christianity early in the eighteenth century with practically no outside help. Batavia was impressed, and the Rotenese shrewdly turned this warmth of feeling to their advantage by requesting free schooling. This prescient long-term strategy led to the Rotenese being the most educated indigenes in this part of the archipelago, and they continue to dominate the local bureaucracy to the present day.

From the early nineteenth century onwards, quite outside the Indische Kerk, zealous Protestant missionaries began to evangelize indigenous societies in this part of the archipelago. But even in 1900 only a sixth of the most intensely evangelized island of Rote was Christian. Religion was an elite affair. Language was one obstacle: ordinary Rotenese did not speak Malay, which was the language of the state and of the church (Fox 1977). In Timor proper, serious work outside Kupang only began with the arrival of the Dutch missionary Piet Middelkoop and his wife Jet in 1922 (Jong 2006). They settled at Kapan, the military base in the newly pacified Amanuban kingdom in South Central Timor. He pioneered the study of the local Dawan language, and spent years translating the Christian gospels into it. They later moved a short distance to Soë, which subsequently became the symbolic heart of the church in Timor. The Middelkoop’s motivations were purely spiritual, but the conservative Resident in Kupang at the time, A.J.L Couvreur, attached strategic importance to the mission, which would create wedges of loyalty to the Dutch in regions otherwise threatened by Islam (Kwantes 1975–82:II, 115). State funding for
ministers and teachers at mission schools was the practical side of this strategy. When Indonesia became independent, the church in Timor was caught unprepared. Whereas other ethnic Protestant churches around the archipelago had been arranging their independence from the colonial Netherlands Indies Church since the 1930s, in Timor this did not happen until 1947. It renamed itself the Timor Evangelical Church (Gereja Masehi Injil Timor, GMIT).

Neither missionary exertions nor official strategizing produced mass conversions before the Second World War. Not even in Rote, where an elite had long been Christianized, did ordinary people begin to enter the church until the 1950s (Figure 26). When they did, it was as part of a transformational movement that was much larger than the church. Unexpectedly, urban young people began flooding into GMIT during the 1950s. They saw it as their way of becoming Indonesian, of expressing the optimism that shone in the eyes of everyone associated with the new state. The state that promised emancipation and prosperity was embodied for them in their own brightly coloured skirts and new shirts. Australian ex-missionary Colville Crowe showed me two photos taken outside the still-bombed out church in Soë in about 1961. One was taken after the Dawan-language service, still run the way the Reverend Middelkoop had written it. A few illiterate peasants dressed in sarongs stood around, the shame of backwardness evident in their body postures. The other was taken just after the Indonesian-language service. A crowd of confident, educated young people in floral dresses or white shirts and trousers were happily streaming onto the street. Gordon Dicker (1959:52) made a special note of the fascination for politics among these young worshippers.

Key to their postures was the glad adoption of new bodily rituals. The clothes they wore to church were in fact the same ones they wore to the office (Figure 25). Indeed the church required all male worshippers to wear a uniform of white shirt and dark trousers to church festivals, such as Easter and Ascension Day (Dicker 1959:52). There was little singing: attending to the sermon was the central ritual element. Like the speeches at political rallies, these were long, formulaic, and delivered in Indonesian. An indispensable skill was to be able to recite long passages out of the large Indonesian Bible one carried to the new concrete building on Sunday mornings. Rote memorization was required for the baptism and confirmation rituals that opened the door to church membership, even for barely literate people. It was the only book most of them read (Lay 2014:167). During the apocalyptic days of famine and military purges at the end of 1965, the recitation of long bible passages from memory was a
marked feature of the frenzied evangelistic meetings (Brookes 1977:29) (see also Chapter 9). But even in normal times, the Christian practice of praying before meals became a class marker noticed by the poor (see Box ‘How the big people eat’ below). These cultural markers of belonging had little ethical content. Dicker observed despairingly that the well-thumbed Bibles and full Sunday services failed to make everyday Christian behaviour any different from heathen (Dicker 1959:64).

GMIT became the normative institution *par excellence* in Timor. Its rapid growth in the 1950s produced an equally rapid shift in the Timorese status system. Values that had once been exclusively urban spread to the countryside. Where once the rajas clothed in traditional ikat sarong had defined status simply by who they were, now ministers and evangelists, the town-educated children of fetor or even of peasants, told people status could be achieved through learning. They created new values by exhorting their flocks from pulpits each week in modern Indonesian while wearing conservative western black trousers. Displacing the rajas was an important part of the church’s seductive appeal in Timor. Some reverends provoked spectacular clashes with the local ruler. Camplong was one of the strongholds of the mission not far from Soë in South Central Timor. In the run-up to the national election campaign of 1955 W.H.M. (Hans) Nisnoni, the raja of Fatuleo and younger brother to Kupang’s Alfons Nisnoni, supported a secular party. But the reverend urged his flock to vote for the Protestant party Parkindo. Realizing the church was fast becoming an alternative arena of power, Nisnoni even went as far as forming his own breakaway church. But the reverend got the numbers for Parkindo, and the breakaway church collapsed.13 In Central Rote the reverends continually criticized the aristocracy for ‘wasteful’ funeral ceremonies and polygamy (Cooley 1976:349). Whenever indigenous church ministers served in an area not their own, they tended to be harsh on local customs, whereas ministers who served in their own cultural area were regarded as paternal figures (Brookes 1977:79).

Hans Nisnoni’s ageing father Nicolaas had worked out even before the 1950s that the status of aristocrats was declining in favour of that of church ministers. He became a patron of the church during World War II. His considerable wealth was later said to have been ‘central’ to church financing during the Japanese occupation. He became an interlocutor for many local affairs of state to the Japanese masters and, with the missionaries in detention, these also came to include the church (Noach 1972:15). Three of

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13 Dicker 1959:49. District-level election results are available in Alfian (1971).
the four top church leaders, known as moderators, in the period 1951–1975 were from feudal families. Other aristocrats saw the light only later. Koesa Nope, the Raja of Amanuban who became district chief of South Central Timor in 1961 and who was famous for his polygamy, affluence and autocracy, decided only after the turning point of 1 October 1965 to throw in his lot with the church. He is said to have joined the evangelistic teams whose miraculous healings were putting Satan on the defensive out in the villages. He bade farewell to the secular PNI-affiliated political party that he had supported hitherto, and embraced Parkindo together with about 150,000 of his subjects. Later he would become an equally fervent Golkar supporter.\(^\text{14}\)

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**How the Big People Eat**

Born into a poor family in Sabu, Cornelis Lay’s father came to Kupang as a young man and eventually became an itinerant petty trader known as a papalele. His mother saved enough from her stall at the market to send one son to senior high school. It was there, in the mid-1970s, that he first went into the homes of children whose parents worked for the state. One of these was Ge, from an Indo-European family whose father had been a Dutch military officer. (GvK).

Both Ge’s parents knew me well, and my parents knew very well that Ge belonged to the “big people” (anak orang besar) who were prepared to be friends with “little people” (orang kecil). These terms were very common social classifiers. “Big people” was a general category for all bureaucrats (pejabat). I suspect it reflects the Sabunese custom of addressing officials as “Mone Ae” – “big person.” The term “boss” was also used, or even repeated for emphasis as “boss boss.” We often said “he’s a boss boss kid” (itu bos bos pung ana), sometimes adding the word “big” so it became “big boss.” It was used for officials and for anyone with money, including big Chinese traders. In the market, traders with strong capital were called “big papalele” (papalele besar). The term “businessman” (pengusaha) was hardly ever used. “Rich person” (orang kaya) was only used when gossiping about a friend or neighbour who “didn’t want to mix.” Occasionally the phrase was “now he’s really become someone” (sujadi orang na), indicating social mobility for the whole family of someone who had become a civil servant. Lower class people were generally called “people with woes” (orang susah) or “little people” (orang kecil). This was the general term for the lower classes, among families like our own and those of officials or businesspeople alike. Ge was called a “big people's kid” because his

father, a full-blood Dutchman, was a police lieutenant colonel, a former Dutch policeman who had decided to become an Indonesian citizen. As I recall he was one of the most senior policemen in Kupang, besides the Ully family. Going in and out of the houses of friends whose parents were mainly officials like this gave me an opportunity to see how the “big people” lived. There was little noticeable difference, except that my friends did not have to do any chores. They had a servant to do everything for them – cook, clean, wash dishes and clothes, and even make drinks. This was so different to the world I lived in every day, where we had to do everything ourselves. I also saw that their daily needs were never something to be discussed, unlike the houses of most lower class people that were kept busy every day with the problem of “eating.” Children and parents always talked about the rice or the salt being finished. Parents in wealthy families routinely discussed “appetite” instead: “what do you feel like eating?” (*bosong mau makan apa*?). Whereas in most of our homes the commonest expression was “Hey go and borrow some rice from neighbour so-and-so” (*we lu pi pinjam beras do di ...*).

I also noticed their lives were much neater and more hygienic. The water they drank had to be boiled first. They washed their hands before eating, and some even started the meal with prayer. That was something we never did at home, except at Christmas and New Year (*kunci taon*). Their lives were so organized that they had a fixed time for their meals; and the same for drinks. Whereas in our world eating time was set by how hungry the stomach was, and you might say drinking time had no place in our agenda at all. Whenever they ate they sat down at the table, at a plate with a spoon and fork neatly laid on either side. Every type of food had its own dish and even spoon. We never had such order in our home. We usually just took our food straight out of the rice pot or out of the frying pan (*tacu*) whenever we felt hungry. We sat anywhere as we ate. There was no dining table, no dining room. In short, the main difference between our world and that of the ”big people” was that for them eating was a cultural event, whereas for us it was simply a matter of survival, of filling the stomach.

(Lay 2014:167–8).

The seductive attraction of participating in rituals of modernity was one of the church’s modalities of power. Inducement was another, as the church served increasingly as an informal patronage channel for the benefits of the state. The conversions of the 1950s made the church large enough to be an independent force, but it by no means took its distance from the local state. The ecclesiastical structure mirrored that of the modern state. Each time the state redefined the boundaries of its districts (*kabupaten* in 1956, and *kecamatan* in 1961), the church adapted the boundaries of its own districts known as *classis* (Cooley 1976:343–9).
Finances were one obvious reason for this postcolonial proximity to the state. Even those among the 90% of Timorese subsisting in small villages who felt inclined to donate to the church were unable to produce a surplus. In 1947 the Dutch mission gave the young GMIT a sizeable ‘liquidation fund,’ and said goodbye. When this money ran out in 1955, the problem of maintaining educated ministers in the style to which their class entitled them became pressing – there were 94 by 1971. Freedom from state control was fine in theory, but a vow of poverty was not really an option and the state was the only source of cash. The first Indonesian governor of Lesser Sunda set aside his secularizing instincts and agreed to continue financing the Protestant and Catholic schools in the province. GMIT set up an Economic Foundation (Yayasan Perekonomian) to try to channel more state money its way. It signed a joint development project with the Agriculture Department in 1957, for example, as part of the new five year plan adopted by the government. However, the arrangement apparently helped prominent individuals more than the church as an institution. The foundation joined a long list of project failures caused by mismanagement and corruption (Noach 1972:21, 26). Corrupt practices were as common within the church as they were within government. For example, the Americans had donated a truck in the mid-1950s to help the Kupang church cope with reduced foreign funding, but instead of being used to help transport church members it was rented out commercially (Dicker 1959:80–2).

A more fundamental reason for the rapprochement was that bureaucrats and ministers came from the same urban social milieu. Working together seemed only logical (Brookes 1977:78–9). In Alor, a rugged island off Timor’s north coast, one old reverend had by the mid-1970s been 20 years a member of the local assembly and seven years on the district governing council (Badan Pekerja Harian, to assist the district chief). Conversely NTT’s governor after 1965, the non-aristocratic Maj.-Gen. El Tari, let it be widely known that he was a faithful member of the church. ‘Thus was forged the bond between religion, politics and government in NTT,’ wrote the church historian Frank Cooley (1976:348). Together they shaped the new provincial establishment of which Maryanov (1959:63) had written: ‘The definition of problems takes place within this group, and it sets the climate of opinion in which problems are discussed and solved.’ This also meant that the church remained culturally confined to the new middle class. It did not attempt to deal even caritatively with social problems that afflicted the poor, which Dicker listed as drunkenness, gambling, sexual promiscuity, the neglect of widows and
orphans, and, among the rural majority, seasonal ‘normal hunger’ (*lapar biasa*) (Dicker 1959:71).

*Disconnected*

The resources the new middle class of bureaucrats deployed to expand its authority could only be effective if they had local purchase. Geography was the most basic resource. The major institutions had their key offices in town. The new buildings may have looked like ramshackle blocks of concrete to cosmopolitan visitors, but Timor had never seen such edifices before. Of course buildings alone were not enough. The seductive new rituals associated with them – particularly those of the church – created social capital among the equally new bureaucratic middle class, and among those aspiring to become like them. Networks of church affiliation energized local policy networks, helping them overcome parochial defensiveness and building links between town and countryside. They underpinned a self-conscious cultural establishment that was more open and thus less elitist than the little pre-war clique of educated indigenous clerks and teachers had been. Central state power could expand in this period only because state power became geographically and socially embedded within Middle Indonesia. Social networks, both existing and new, were the key resource, since information could only pass from one person to another if they were already connected.

All this also helps to explain why the military, despite their far superior national resources, were so much less successful at rising to this local hegemonic challenge than the church. Their uninviting barracks on the outskirts of town, their culturally alien repertoire of public action – heavy on humiliation and light on respect – and simply their absence beyond the town boundaries, made it an uphill task for them.

The main problem with the outreach efforts by both the military and the church, however, was that it did not connect with the problems the poor majority in and around Kupang were experiencing. Building alliances across the class divides that increasingly separated the secure from the insecure and the town from the countryside required more than middle class rituals of belonging. In the next chapter we see that the same spaces could also function in more seductive ways to generate liberating forms of political power.
Figure 25. Oeba church, Kupang, mid-1950s (source: Dra. Ruth Heny A. Nitbani-Markus).
GMIT itself claimed much higher membership figures than this in the early 1950s. Where Brookes records only 80,000 in 1957, GMIT claimed 310,000 in 1953 (Anonymous 1956:19). The latter adds a regional breakdown, showing the biggest concentration in Alor (91,000), followed by Soë (69,000); out of a population of 120,000 in the wider district of Kupang, 41% were said to be ‘without religion.’ Presumably the difference arises from loose versus strict notions of membership – ranging from inflated claims of evangelistic success, through nominal adherence, to being listed on the communion roll (with attendant financial obligations). The caution shown by Brookes (who was an Australian missionary in Kupang in the 1970s) seems advisable here.