CHAPTER SEVEN

THE SEDUCTRESS (1955–1965)

This new anti-feudal law offers a special leap, a leap up for one group, a leap down for another.

(Timor assembly chairperson E.R. Herewila, speaking at the opening of the new session, held on the front veranda of the Kupang government offices, 5 August 1950 - Kana 1969:218)

The mere symbolic act of raising a flag in an elite Jakarta suburb on 17 August 1945 had meant nothing to most people in Kupang, let alone in its hinterland. Yet today the event is ritually re-enacted in Kupang's schools and offices with the same militaristic precision as it is everywhere in Indonesia. The ritual is bureaucratically enforced from the centre, yet at some point the republican ideals that inspired the flag also came to have meaning in Kupang. How did this happen? Meaning arises in interpersonal relations; it requires proximity. Visualizing national power as an essence or a flow does not explain how a set of meanings in one socio-spatial setting can be actualized thousands of kilometres away. The present chapter investigates the process by which emancipatory republican meanings in revolutionary Java – where they in turn formed part of a much older global history of communication – travelled across time and distance. Years after 17 August 1945, Timorese subsistence farmers put them to work, transformed yet recognisably republican, as resources in their own mini French revolution in the hills behind Kupang. In Java republicanism implied many things, from cultural 'anti-feudalism' to anti-colonial agitation and (for many) some kind of state socialism. But in Timor it mainly came to signify an end to real feudal privileges in the countryside.

A highly mobilizational Japanese military regime in Java had created intense social dislocation there. In the power vacuum that followed the surrender, a chaos of local revolutionary movements sprang up. By contrast, Timor had been spared the worst excesses of war despite the bombing of the towns, and afterwards it was brought quickly back under colonial control. Where Java was being united under a new revolutionary regime, Timor after the Pacific War integrated with the rest of this part of the archipelago on the basis of a developed form of the pre-war neo-traditionalism.

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The Dutch under Lieutenant Governor General van Mook were working towards a federal construction in the area that they controlled, which covered most of the former Netherlands Indies including Timor. The construct was by 1948 being negotiated through the Federal Consultative Assembly (Bijeenkomst voor Federaal Overleg, BFO). BFO territories were constituted by layer upon layer of semi-autonomous entities, each practising a conservative politics of the soil. At the most local level were the little kingdoms led by 'traditional' rulers that, to most people living in them, represented the natural units of political community.

When the Dutch colonial project finally collapsed and Republican troops landed in Timor in 1950, they were hardly received enthusiastically (Chapter 5). Yet in the years that followed, republican mobilization was seen all over Indonesia, even in places that had experienced no national revolution in the late 1940s. Associational power of the kind that Hannah Arendt recognized as true power began to taken on new forms also in Timor. Among the newly literate young bureaucrats and teachers in town, the invitation from the church to participate in its Sunday spectacles of word, hymn and sacrament excited tremendous energy (Chapter 6). Among the poor, however, much more explicitly political ideas now proved their seductive power, even in rural areas far from the main arenas of nationalist agitation. This chapter considers the role Kupang played in mediating that seductive power. At first, anarchic peasant revolts took place in the surprisingly polarized and weakly policed rural islands of the Lesser Sunda Islands. In this respect the periphery did share some of the political instability of the heartlands, except that in the periphery it did not escalate into a revolution (Kahin 1985). Later, some political parties led by educated townspeople mobilized similar sentiments in a more orderly, and more effective, fashion, starting with the 1955 national elections.

Insurrection

During the two decades that followed 17 August 1945, the myths of the revolution, of freedom, prosperity, education and progress, penetrated places far from Java at a rate out of proportion to any organized propaganda. Sometimes it took just a single individual who had seen the new republican state with their own eyes to trigger a 'me too' uprising. In February 1955 a demobilized soldier named Arsad (or Arsyad) returned to the sleepy little town of Kalabahi, district capital of Alor Island, next to Timor. He had been away a long time as sergeant in the Indonesian armed forces TNI. What he saw incensed him: 'Alor is still the same Alor I left

30 years before.' The youths he gathered around him tied red cloth around their waists for magical invulnerability, and then attacked the local police barracks, radio station, government buildings and shops with knives and arrows. Two days later security assistance arrived by slow boat from Kupang, and Arsad, who had promoted himself to captain, surrendered unconditionally with 125 of his followers. While the rebels' exact motivation remains a puzzle, the quoted explanation at least suggests the myth of progress had struck root even among these young people in Kalabahi.¹ And it suggests that when myths of modernity detonate in a poor, unequal rural and small-town society whose institutions are moreover in flux, they can produce severe governability problems.

We have already seen (Chapter 4) that rural dissatisfaction with some of the more regressive rajas grew in step with the awareness that higher authorities were no longer prepared to back the rajas to the hilt. But rural protests were unlikely to be effective without urban partners. The peri-urban tax revolts inspired by the intellectual Chris Pandie in the mid-1920s collapsed once Pandie was arrested, and no one took his place. After the war another such outbreak of protest, this time more rural, occurred in Adonara, an island off the eastern tip of Flores marked for its poverty-driven out-migration.² Some of Pandie's followers had started a group in Lamahala, on the south coast of Adonara, in 1927. Although it too was quickly suppressed, its memory survived the war (Farram 2004:131). Like Chris Pandie, Buang Duran, once a Catholic school teacher, had been politicized by meetings with a PKI activist in Java. He had travelled to Java to trade during the Japanese occupation and met him in Semarang. Upon his return to his home village on the east coast of Adonara, soon after the Japanese capitulation, he started a revolt against the Dutch colonial administration over taxes (Barnes 2003). The Dutch arrested him twice, the second time sentencing him to four years labour. But the association he had named Indonesian Farmers Union (Persatuan Kaum Tani Indonesia, PKTI) grew even while he was in jail, spreading also to the PKI villages on the south coast. Upon the transfer of sovereignty to Indonesia in 1949 he was released and subsequently had good relations with the local military commander. His ideology was an eclectic mix of Marxism, nationalism, and messianism, like many other 'home-grown' communist movements around Indonesia in the late 1940s (e.g. Lucas 1991). Everyone should be equal – rajas were no exception, everyone should work for the

¹ *Bentara*, 15 March 1955, 15 April 1955; Farram 2004:75, 296.

² Reports on Adonara poverty and inequality, and out-migration, are in *Bentara*, 1 July 1957, 1 October 1948.

government and would become wealthy, and a ship would bring the first instalments soon. But they also propagated hygiene and practised deliberate cleanliness. They built bridges and roads (Reksodihardjo 1957:II, 205–7, 1960 [1957]:35).

However, things soon turned nasty. Allied movements led by Buang Duran's relatives began to question his anti-clericalism, and then turned into rivals. In January 1951 clashes between these groups drew the attention of the police and military. This had the effect of uniting the factions against the government in October that year. Several people died in the ensuing fracas, and thousands were detained by the nervous and poorly equipped new government. More died during an attempted jail break in nearby Larantuka, on the eastern extremity of Flores Island. It was led by Buang Duran's lieutenant. In March 1954 Duran was convicted of sedition and sentenced to 18 years jail in Madura (off Java). He continued to correspond by letter with his followers, some of whom were drawn to the PKI (Reksodihardjo 1960 [1957]:35). In late 1965 he was released from prison and returned to Adonara a broken man, only to be caught up in the military anti-communist pogrom that followed the events of 1 October in Jakarta. Although he himself had never been a PKI member, the military had him murdered in Larantuka in March 1966. In Buang Duran's home village in Adonara, surviving followers still proudly called themselves 'communist' in 2000, and showed a visitor the CCP-like uniform of blue trousers and shirt and red scarf that they wore (Barnes 2003:1). Buang Duran's movement has entirely disappeared from today's local historical textbooks.

Clearly, these sporadic insurrectionary movements lacking allies were easily suppressed, even by the poorly resourced state apparatus in the eastern archipelago. But the rapid and complex processes of state formation that swirled through the archipelago and through Kupang in the years after independence created many new opportunities to build more resilient movements through alliances between the rural poor and the emerging urban middle class.

Political Parties

Parties were central to the new democracy, but it took years for them to penetrate from their elite bases in town to the broader rural society. The Dutch did not try hard to introduce democracy over the heads of the rajas during the few years they were back in charge after World War II (Netti and Itta 1997). They did persuade the rajas to accept governing

councils (Dewan Pemerintahan Daerah, DPD) to rule alongside them, but in practice the rajas themselves appointed their own DPD, so little changed. At the island level, that is the residency, one level above the rajas, executive power was held by an island head (*kepala daerah*), also assisted by a DPD, and legislative power was held by a regional parliament (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah, DPRD). These two institutions survived the transition to independence and were constantly sniping at each other in the early years, even though their personnel swapped frequently and the separation of powers was fuzzy, to say the least. When the DPRD Timor was first constituted in October 1946, the rajas considered it a mere formality, and they simply appointed its members themselves. But the new DPRD Timor in October-November 1949 was elected. Candidates did not represent a political party but a district or (for the Dutch and Chinese not bound to the soil) an ethnicity. Michael Marcus, for example (see Chapter 3), was chosen to represent Amanuban, and Herewila Sabu island.

Political parties only became interesting to local elites once the talk of national elections began to firm up in 1954. After those elections they continued to grow in importance for a decade. The elections failed to create a stable national government. Indonesia drifted into increasingly authoritarian politics in which, strangely enough, party mobilization grew more and more urgent (Lev 1966). Mobilization for the 1955 election campaign in Timor was far less intense than that which swept Java (Feith 1957), but it did pass along the most vital social connections then linking town and countryside. Occupying the central points in these networks were two rivalling elites, the declining rajas and the rising bureaucrats. The rajas had been central to the Dutch practice of 'betting on the strong.' In 1955 they simply commanded their subjects to vote their way. Church leaders continued the colonial policy of co-opting rajas. Flores turned out a near-unanimous Catholic Party vote in this way in 1955. The Protestant church in Timor was a little less wedded to the rajas. Some rajas went with the Protestant party Parkindo, while others struck out on their own with various home-grown secular parties loosely affiliated with the highly factionalized national PNI, tied to the bureaucracy. The modern administrators and teachers in town, meanwhile, mainly joined Parkindo, which was fast becoming the new establishment. The fascination with religion was nearly universal outside Java.³

³ Religious and localist or ethnic parties dominated outside Java. They achieved over 50% of the vote everywhere there except in some plantation areas such as Deli Serdang.

Parties in Timor lacked even the basics of institutionalization in 1955 – branch organizations were not established until the early 1960s. They were an arena for local prominents to test their popularity. They offered educated young people a chance to show the rajas it was time to move over. Young civil servants, church ministers and teachers – idealistic and ambitious for a bigger role – formed left wings within both Parkindo and PNI. Membership of national parties like PNI gave them access to networks stretching to Jakarta that largely bypassed the Protestant and aristocratic local establishments in town and countryside. Sukarnoist ideals inspired people in the lower levels of the church and its associated network of schools, and in parts of the state including the military, the public prosecutor's office, and the state schools. The PNI and later the PKI gave them organizing resources to reach out to the masses. Of course, their reaching out to the countryside had paternalistic elements. In turn, peasants saw in these initiatives an opportunity to steal a march on their petty local oppressors, to organize in their own way, and to discover new patrons in town. The first cross-class alliances were born out of the republican anti-feudal campaign of the early 1950s. The communist campaign for peasant and land rights built on these a decade later. We look at each in turn.

Anti-Feudal Movements

The central ideologue for modernity in Kupang in the 1950s was the charismatic nationalist E.R. Herewila (1906–1969) (Figure 27). He was another of the new politicians who found his true calling upon independence after rising from peasant origins into the lower levels of the colonial bureaucracy. Herewila was part of the republican surge in towns all over the archipelago in the 1950s (Amal 1992, Asnan 2007, Magenda 1991, Zed 1991). As an official with the republican Information Department it was his job to promote national institutions at the expense of local ones. The department gave him certain central resources to do that in Kupang – propaganda films, national legislation, some influence over

Religious and ethnic voting was stronger outside the towns than within them. Such voting probably reflects clientelistic relations in rural and small-town economies little penetrated by capital. Class-based politics, on the contrary, were seen in plantation/ mining areas, and in a Java disturbed by the revolution – as seen in higher votes for the PKI in those areas.

The electoral results also demonstrate that eastern Indonesia was poorly integrated with the rest of Indonesia at this time. The Big Four parties (PNI, PKI, Masyumi, and Nahdatul Ulama) that dominated the national result in fact drew most of their votes from Java and parts of Sumatra. Particularly in eastern Indonesia they had little impact. Thanks to Dwight King for letting me have a digitized version of the 1955 election results in *Alfian* (1971). Similar conclusions were drawn by Feith (1957, 2007 [1962]).

appointments – but most of his resources were local. The fire in his speeches derived from an experience of dispossession by the rajas that he knew was common all over this region. Educated commoners everywhere were challenging feudalists to get their hands on the new levers of power and on the rents these could yield. Their struggles were local, negotiated affairs. National legislation could be ignored for years where it did not suit local power-holders. The transition from colonial indirect rule to the modern government promised by the republican revolution of 1945 therefore took longer in Timor than anywhere else in Indonesia.

In his twenties before the war, Herewila had combined a clerical job in forestry in Makassar with organizing for the Timorsch Verbond.⁴ This was a self-improvement association for teachers, policemen and other low-ranking officials from Sabu, Rote and Kupang who lived scattered throughout the Netherlands Indies. Herewila belonged to a small radical nationalist wing that had felt inspired by Sukarno just before his incarceration in the early 1930s. Their activism began to turn from the 'spiritual' objectives of their moderate founders to exposing abuses by colonial officials in Timor through their own newspapers. Some of these efforts were successful (Ardhana 2005, Farram 2004). Herewila only finished primary school, but he became a cosmopolitan from travelling the world. In the early 1920s a French geologist working in the Kupang area invited him to be his assistant in Morocco. Back in Makassar he amazed an old aunt with his stories of having seen Jerusalem. 'I thought the Holy City was in heaven,' she said. Like so many gifted young men he imitated the oratory of Sukarno, dropping French-accented loanwords into his speeches. During the Japanese occupation he rose to head of the traffic department, and was then invited to sit on a board advising the local Imperial Japanese Navy government. After the war his oratorical talent led him to the NIT Ministry of Information in Makassar, where he worked under fellow-Sabunese I.H. Doko, younger but better educated than him and also a Timor activist since before the war. In 1950 his office was incorporated into the republican Ministry of Information. Promoting Jakarta's views on the antiquated raja system in Eastern Indonesia was the most exciting part of his job. He had written in the 1930s of his contempt for the rajas after one of them had robbed him of his hereditary land in Sabu.⁵ Besides

⁴ 'Riwayat hidup singkat almarhum R.E. Here Wila', anonymous, unpublished document dated 1969, in the private archive of Herewila's son Dami Herewila (Kupang, 15 July 2011).

⁵ 'Keterangan E.R. Here memang benar?,' *Tjinta Kebenaran*, 20 March 1936, quoting Soeara Timoer, January 1936; 'Toean E.R. Here contra beberapa bangsawan Savoe,' *Tjinta Kebenaran*, 20 May 1936.

Figure 27. E.R. Herewila in the mid-1950s (courtesy private collection of Ruth Heny A. Nitbani-Markus).

the Ministry of Information he had a speaking platform in the island-wide parliament (DPR), which he chaired until 1956. Doubling up positions in the executive and legislative branches was not considered improper at that time. All the new rulers in Kupang led busy lives. In this slow-moving town, his constant travel by air and sea gave him an aura of prestige.⁶

⁶ Herewila revealed a month's schedule in a note to a Dutch missionary in 1954 to explain why he could not help check the latter's bible translation (Onvlee 1953–55): 6 September: leave for Jakarta; 21 September: arrive back in Kupang from Jakarta; 23 September: to Singaraja (provincial capital in Bali); 26 September: return to Kupang to

Eastern Indonesia formally joined the independent Republic of Indonesia to form the Republic of the United States of Indonesia (Republik Indonesia Serikat, RIS) on 27 December 1949. Its system of local government based on autocratic *rajas* was not immediately replaced with a republican one. Indeed, the power of the *rajas* initially grew. In September 1949 the Dutch Resident officially transferred his authority to the *Rajas Council* in Timor (Dewan Radja-Radja). The revolutionary Republic of Indonesia, which was to dominate the RIS, was against this construction because it stood in the way of central control. Republicans within the former BFO (federal) territories did support the system's continuation, but only out of the pragmatic consideration that it worked and would take time to democratize. But they also realized the *rajas'* legitimacy was in decline. Herewila told the council in his speech on behalf of the ministry (Kana 1969:App 5, 16of) that from now on the struggle lay within Timor, between 'the people' and the *rajas*. Some of the latter continued to think they had come down from heaven like 'gods.' The root of Timor's problem was that the Dutch had betted on the strong instead of on the people, and even Indonesian independence might not be up to the task of displacing them:

Of course this transfer merely hands power from the Dutch bureaucrats to the *Rajas Council*; it does not return the people's human rights, yet surely *this* has been the purpose of all this struggle and sacrifice.... Those rights were stolen by greed and avarice long ago; some of them are in Dutch hands, some in the hands of our own brothers who turned themselves into aristocrats, and some are with the Tribal Heads, and all of this is permitted by the rubbery colonial laws.⁷

Main spokesperson for the *rajas* in the Timor assembly was the school teacher Benjamin Sahetapy Engel (1916–2008), curiously enough of Ambonese origin. When the outgoing NIT Interior Minister Lanto Daeng Pasewang visited the government offices in Kupang in mid-1950 to gauge

prepare visit of Vice President; 9 October: to Sabu (missing out on Protestant church synod 10–17 October); 24 October: arrive back in Kupang to prepare Timor parliamentary session which will start on 15 November and run for about 20 days.

⁷ 'Memang segala penjerahan itu hanya penjerahan kuasa dari Pamongpradja Belanda sadja kepada Dewan Radja-Radja, tetapi belum pengembalian hak azasi manusiaja rakjat dan sesungguhnya inilah ada tudjuan segala perdjuaan dan pengorbanan.... Hak asasi itu telah dirampok oleh loba dan tamak sepanjang perkembangan masa sebahagian ada dalam tangan Belanda, sebahagian dalam tangan orang-orang saudara sendiri jang telah menjadikannya bangsawan, dan sebahagian ada pada Kepala-Kepala Suku, dan semuanya itu dibenarkan oleh Undang-Undang karet dari Kolonial.'

reactions to a mildly reformist law on the structure of government (Law No.44 of June 1950), he ran into a storm of conservative reaction. Sahetapy Engel spoke for the rajas when he said he was all in favour of democracy but 'it should not be implemented in a way that – I am sorry to say it a bit harshly – is revolutionary.' It might 'muddy the waters' in those places where customary law (*adatrecht*) remained strong. Political parties would bring demagoguery. What was the point of caving in to the 'political atmosphere' if the wind might change again at any time? The minister responded that nothing would ever improve if 'people just want to leave things as they are.' Herewila, on the contrary, had already before this meeting condemned Law 44 as too little too late. In a speech to the NIT parliament in Makassar he said that the people still saw the same unaccountable officials and the same 'rajas who are once again fully sovereign in their domains.'⁸ Why was the government unable to democratize these domains but insisted instead on protecting their 'historical rights'? 'Our state is democratic at its head, dualistic in its chest, and its hands and feet are feudal-monarchistic.' He hammered at his theme again in August 1950 in an address to the first Timor parliamentary meeting after the adoption of the unitary state. It was held on the veranda of the government office in Kupang (later parliament moved into a nearby temporary building in the ruined town). He thanked the progressives among the rajas for thinking ahead in step with the times and not upping the ante with parliament. Law 44, he said not without humour (Kana 1969:App 12, 220), 'offers a special leap, a leap up for one group, a leap down for another.'⁹ He moved the Timor parliament to make its first motion a symbolic one – a law banning the raja's corvee tax.

At the same time Herewila was quick to see new dangers lurking in Kupang's democracy. People had been conditioned with authoritarianism: 'They are not only 75% illiterate, but their souls are immobilized, from birth they live and breathe and are educated in aristocracy and fascism; for them it is not easy to make this special leap' (Kana 1969:218). The new elites, too, were thus far failing to live up to their high calling, he told the NIT parliament on 22 March 1950:

The lower layers of our people are illiterate and politically blind, their souls have been anaesthetized under an aristocratic and fascist education and they are incapable of practising their democratic rights, the human rights

⁸ Speech to NIT parliament, 29 March 1950 (Kana 1969: App 7, 169).

⁹ 'Undang-undang ini jang memberikan lontjatan istimewa, lontjatan naik bagi satu golongan dan lontjat turun bagi lain golongan.'

that they have obtained. The upper layers and the intellectuals received those rights in the first place as a material benefit, and very few of them are able to marry that feeling for material things with a sense of responsibility or a feeling of obligation to the people and the nation.¹⁰

Inexperienced politicians, he said, were like passengers suddenly thrust into the driver's seat of a car hurtling along a rocky road with bad bridges. Herewila loved his red government Chevrolet (its wreck still stands in the family yard today). More to the point, he went on, many politicians were as corrupt and nepotistic as the rajas had been. Ethnic and family cliques were seizing government money for themselves, and civil society was too weak to stop them. The intellectuals were out of touch with the broader society from the town to the village, he said, and hijacking government programmes for their own interests. Having been thrown into politics from an apolitical background, they were now good at 'sabotage' but not at 'captivating the soul of their people.' He warned in another speech of 'neo-colonialism of us against ourselves... provincialism and the family system... neo-colonialism of the intellectuals.'¹¹ The danger of ethnic factionalism – 'calling the Rotenese and Sabunese little rajas in Timor, and the Javanese the new colonizers of Indonesia' – was real. Its results could be even worse than the feudalism of the rajas. The Indonesian ideal was to rise above all this:

I am convinced that in five or ten years' time our people will be so advanced, intermarrying and overcoming every kind of provincialism, that the question of federalism or unitarism will no longer be one of provincialism but simply one of profit or loss for the state (Kana 1969:220).

Herewila kept up the preaching throughout his remaining career, which ended with aggravated diabetes in the early 1960s. Eager young men loved to frequent his house by the beach in Kampong Tode, just east of Kupang's China town, for irreverent political talk. But such was his reputation for iconoclasm outside Kupang that Herewila was rarely welcomed in the little raja-run towns of the interior. Over 50 years later a man who had been the young administrator in Atambua in the 1950s could still recall to me how shocked he had been when, during a visit to Kupang, he heard Herewila make razor-sharp jokes about the rajas.

¹⁰ 'Kaum kita didaerah ini jang bukan sadja buta huruf 75%, tapi jang djiwanja sudah lumpuh, sedjak dilahirkan hidup dan menghirup serta pendidikan aristokrat dan fascis, baginja tidak mudah melaksanakan lontjatan istimewa itu.'

¹¹ Speech to mark the dissolution of the Ruler's Council (Dewan Radja-Radja), 2 November 1950, at the government office in Kupang, attended by 50 civilian and military elites (*Bentara*, 1 December 1950).

Democracy in this settler town with a mission on the edge of Timor may have been corrupt, nepotistic and ideologically naïve, but it did involve more people in public affairs than ever before. Herewila's anti-feudal talk struck a chord among educated young people in town. It only took a shout of 'feudalism' uttered in the midst of the ever-shifting factional politics of the Kampong Belanda offices to rouse a crowd of student protestors. Two episodes will illustrate – the unseating of J.S. Amalo, the head of the Timor island government, in 1954, and the resignation of Alfons Nisoni as raja of Kupang in 1956. J.S. (Jaap) Amalo was an aristocratic Rotenese, trained in the colonial bureaucracy, who sat in the Timor assembly. When the incumbent Timor head, Raja H.A. Koroh, fell ill and died in March 1951, the Indonesian minister of the interior chose Amalo out of three candidates (one of them Doko) to replace him. Amalo was a poor administrator. He much preferred fishing all night off the Kupang pier. Complaints started immediately. He tried resigning in November, but the provincial governor would not let him. In March 1952 the Timor parliament under Herewila passed a censure motion condemning his chaotic budgeting and (the Herewila touch) his pandering to the most regressive of the rajas, namely those of Amanuban, Amanatun, and Mollo. In November of that year Herewila forced Amalo to sit through a parliamentary interrogation that lasted all night. Herewila's view that Amalo was 'feudal' got plenty of exposure in the local paper *Timor Sedar* (which has not survived), while Amalo's angry retorts that Herewila was an uneducated demagogue only made things worse.

In November and December 1953 big demonstrations turned out in the streets of Kupang. Young people banged metal dinner plates and shouted 'We want rice! We want rice!' It was the time of year when subsistence food stocks run low, and some now recall there was real hunger in the town, but others say the 'hunger' was exaggerated for political effect. In the midst of these demos Amalo lost his last friend when the moderate Sahetapy Engel announced he was no longer able to support a man who was 'lazy and neglectful of his duties.' Amalo resigned in May 1954. Unable to decide who among the quarrelling local elite should replace him – Herewila wanted the job but Sahetapy Engel blocked him – Amalo was replaced by an acting head, a Javanese bureaucrat. This man thought Kupang was such a hole that he never turned up in the office either and soon absented himself to Java on 'sick leave.'¹² Democracy had come to Kupang.

¹² *Bentara*, 15 October 1954, 15 November 1954.

Townsfolk were discomfited by these rowdy protests against distinguished men in high office. But Herewila said demonstrations were now normal in Jakarta; they belonged to the creation of 'a new society.' Just like China had united against the Japanese colonizer only to fall into an internal struggle between the elite led by Chiang Kai-shek and the 'impoverished masses' led by Mao Zedong, so Timor was engaged in a conflict against those 'whose soul still bears the signs of colonialism,' he said, somewhat tendentiously.¹³ Rowdy demonstrations by school students, hungry or not, soon became commonplace in the mid-sized towns of Nusa Tenggara province. In February 1955 high school and even primary school students joined a 1500-strong mass meeting in Kupang's Royal movie theatre (the new name for Tjiong Koen Siong's Sunlie, later called Raya). Afterwards they walked to the Timor government office in Kupang because, once more, they were hungry. Not a grain of rice, corn or beans could be bought anywhere in town. Civil servants with insufficient time to work their own gardens were the worst affected. But the demonstrators blamed corrupt officials rather than the weather for their hunger. The rally was organized by labour unions in town demanding more say in the government-run food distribution system. The Catholic newspaper *Bentara* that reported it worried that demonstrations were 'impolite' and could plant rebellion in the hearts of young students.¹⁴ But the church organized demonstrations as well. 'Ten thousand' Catholic high school students protested in Ende in November 1954, because a Jakarta newspaper had insulted 'Christ the Messiah' in a story about President Sukarno's polygamous marriage to Hartini the previous year.¹⁵

Herewila's mobilizational tactics also eventually pushed Alfons Nisoni to resign as Raja of Kupang district. For a while it looked as if the Nisoni family fortunes had improved rather than declined. Alfons had taken over from his ageing father Nicolaas late in the Imperial Japanese Navy administration, and the Indonesian interior minister had accepted his arguments for the historical primacy of his family in the Kupang district in 1951 (there were, of course, other claimants with impressive lineages...) (Anon 1956). He lived with his family in the small but comfortable stone 'palace' the Dutch had built for his father in Bakunase, in the hills behind Kupang

¹³ *Bentara*, 1 July 1954.

¹⁴ *Bentara*, 15 November 1954.

¹⁵ Both 'impolite' and 'ten thousand' in *Bentara*, 15 November 1954. See also Kana 1969: App.20, 237–8, Netti and Itta 1997:88–9, 101–2; *Bentara*, 1 July 1954; interviews with Hendrik Ataupah, Kupang, 20 July 2010, and Blasius Manek, Atambua, 2 August 2010; B. Sahetapy Engel, 'Surat terbuka,' Djakarta, 1 December 1953, in private archive of Leopold Nisoni.

town. The town's elite used to gather at his home for dances. Under the Dutch, the directly ruled town had been closed to him politically, but this changed during the Second World War. To keep things simple, the conservative Japanese Navy regime gave the raja control over the town as well. The NIT had kept the arrangement, and when the bombed-out town became a municipality in September 1949 it was up to Raja Nisnoni to select the mayor.¹⁶ When that man succumbed to ethnicized fights over how the ravaged town should be rebuilt, Alfons briefly took over as mayor himself.¹⁷

He was not a bad planner, but the town had never been enamoured of rajas and after 1950 its republicanism grew more vociferous. Herewila in particular was the bane of his life. Alfons Nisnoni never recognized him as the legitimate speaker of the Timor assembly. 'Herewila has no following,' he used to say. The 1955 election result was to prove that Herewila did indeed have little following in most of rural Timor, but Kupang was different.¹⁸ The Timor assembly under Herewila gradually legislated away Nisnoni's powers. It began by outlawing tribute as its first act in late 1949 (compensating the rajas with a bigger salary - Ormeling 1956:81–2). It then took away his judicial powers in September 1954 (taking over three years to implement national Emergency Law no.1 of 1951 on this issue). In any case, Alfons Nisnoni was a poor magistrate. He was deciding only one in three or four cases, and had already built up an enormous backlog by 1952 (Anon 1956). Finance was the most sensitive pressure point. The paternalistic Dutch had managed all the Timor rajas' funds from Kupang, but after the war the impoverished government let rajas manage their own money, while giving them no central state funds. Raja Nisnoni's budget in the mid-1950s stood at a substantial half a million rupiah,¹⁹ collected from local taxes such as the slaughter tax. He spent it on around 600 staff (many of them still Dutch), and on his meat-canning business ICAFF. But the Timor assembly gradually throttled his income by, for example, outlawing a schools tax and a road tax. Above all it refused to condemn tax

¹⁶ *Bentara*, 1 January 1950.

¹⁷ There were complaints about too many Florinese migrants getting labouring work, of privileged officials seizing undamaged houses for themselves, of elite suburbs like Fatufeto and Fontein being prioritized over the impoverished suburbs of Kampung Solor and Merdeka, not to mention over Airmata with its brothel and its mosque. Chinese shop owners, meanwhile, who had been worst hit by the bombs, were left to rebuild the commercial district with their own means. Interview Hendrik Ataupah, Kupang, 20 July 2010.

¹⁸ Interview, Blasius Manek, Atambua, 1 August 2010; 'Alfons Nisnoni Radja Kupang 1945–1955', undated, anonymous document, in the private archive of Leopold Nisnoni (June 2009).

¹⁹ US\$ 44,000 at the official exchange rate of Rp 11.4/ US\$, or US\$ 16,000 at the black market rate of Rp 31/ US\$ reported for 1956 (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indonesian_rupiah).

avoidance, which rose alarmingly from an estimated 27% in 1954 to a massive 62% in 1955 (Anon 1956). The raja had lost his subjects. The erosion of respect dispirited this large, slow-moving gentleman with thick glasses, and in early 1956 he asked the Indonesian interior minister to relieve him of his post. To save face, he claimed his allowance of 1300 rupiah a month was 'not commensurate with his position' (actually it was a large income for those days) (Anon 1956). The government let him take leave, and in February he handed over to an elected official, H. Oematan (of mixed Timorese aristocratic and Chinese descent). Alfons Nisnoni received a government pension to the end of his life (Liliweri et al 1984:106).²⁰

The Herewila message of 'human rights now spreading unstopably from town to village' (as he put it in a 1951 speech to parliament - Kana 1969:230) also triggered republican movements in the interior.²¹ They sought links with urban organizations that would help them in their search for more independence. If peasants in the interior of Timor had ever believed their raja was the centre of the universe, they now became aware that powerful people above the rajas were openly disparaging the rajas. They knew about Herewila, speaker of Timor's parliament. He himself was rarely invited to speak in the interior, but his messages were repeated by disaffected *fetor* and idealistic school teachers who learned them during visits to Kupang. All politics in the interior in the period 1949 to 1965 challenged the rajas. Their language of tradition and kinship was questioned in the hills, far from their palaces, by dissidents who did their best to attract allies in Kupang by deploying a language of popular sovereignty. The modern and the traditional interwove ambiguously in the framing of this contention. By the early 1960s, political party organizers were building district and village committees that were held together by

²⁰ Elsewhere in Timor the kingdoms finally came to an end only in 1962. The rajas usually became subdistrict heads (*camat*). The 'pre-existing rights' of the rajas have become the subject of discussion again in decentralized Indonesia after 1998 (Banunaek 2007).

²¹ The events described in the next few paragraphs were reconstructed from interviews with old participants conducted in Amanuban and Amanatun, South Central Timor district, in July 2011. My most valuable informants were Daniel Teneo, Johan Christian Sapai, Melianus Babis, Salmon Neonloni, and Yunus Tafuli; thanks to Yanni Tahun for facilitating most of these interviews in July 2011. Memories five or six decades old are never flawless, and when cross-checked these memories too often proved most inaccurate, even those most confidently stated. They also came from village elites, who preferred to highlight their roles in intra-elite fights rather than to discuss broader social change. Several ordinary farmers told me apologetically they were still too afraid to speak about the anti-feudal politics of the period, which ended in such horrible blood-letting in this area. Nevertheless in their main lines the various versions concurred in the story presented here. Other informants' names are given in this book's acknowledgements.

kinship alliances and fuelled by memories of betrayals generations old. Peasants participated in political rallies and cooperatives while dreaming of utopias couched in Timorese messianic terms. This ambiguity has subsequently been poorly understood. Elite New Order writers have preferred to see only the tradition, while ignoring the modern institutions that awakened the dreams.²²

The district of South Central Timor was created in 1958 out of the three kingdoms of Amanuban, Amanatun, and Mollo (Figure 12). Amanuban was easily the largest of the three. By 1949 it was in the hands of Koesa Nope (1924–1980), second son of the ageing lord Pa'e Nope whom the Dutch had appointed in 1923. Koesa Nope had been educated as a modern bureaucrat in Makassar just after World War II. He was not first in line to the throne, but Herewila and the new political elite in Kupang thought his good education would make him a modernizer. Herewila agreed to help him up, provided he drop his ambition to be chair of the Timor Rajas Council (Dewan Radja-Radja Timor), which should go to the older raja of Amarasi, H.A. Koroh, also a modernizer. But once appointed raja he began to behave like his father had done in order to maintain his power. That included appointing his relatives to positions of *fetor* and *temukung*. He did not have to wait long for the first challenge on precisely this point. Pa'e Nope had had about 70 children by his dozens of wives. The struggle between them over his succession inevitably spilled out of the family to the new institutions in Kupang, and to the villages ruled by lesser nobles. Nepotism was not merely an affront to Timorese norms, in which the nobles carry the raja, it was also a sin against the new republicanism.

In 1950 the Fa'ot family based in Noemeto, just west of the 'palace' in Niki Niki, mobilized demonstrations by thousands of villagers demanding that the *fetor*, a Nope, be replaced by a Fa'ot family member. The raja was continuing to levy the traditional tributes known as *abeat* and *etu* despite the ban on them by the Timor parliament the previous year. Four truckloads of peasants – a huge convoy in those days – travelled to Kupang to voice their complaints to parliamentary speaker Herewila. It had all been

²² Several western scholars have echoed post-1965 public opinion in Kupang that those who took part in PKI activities had no understanding of communist doctrine and were easily duped by offers of untold wealth. The opinion recalls the paternalism of the Dutch Resident who wrote in 1927 that many of the people 'associated with [Pandie's] Sarekat Ra'jat called themselves communist without there being any appearance of communism and they having no understanding of the term' (Farrah 2004:132). More perspicacious was Barnes' conclusion about Buang Duran's PKTI, whose ideology of modernity with social harmony, he wrote, was 'very much within the mainstream of Indonesian political thought until October 1965' (Barnes 2003:25).

organized by an ex-soldier named Yakobus Hitarihun, who had married into the Fa'ot family but had seen something of the world. The dispute had escalated by means of non-traditional techniques, but at core it was a traditional problem, and Koesa Nope solved it in the traditional way. He took one of the Fa'ot women as a wife, thus tying the Fa'ot clan to him with kinship ties. A Hitarihun son grew up in the Nope *sonafor* palace (actually a modest house, which still stands²³). The *fetor's* domain (*kefetoran*) remained in Nope hands. The modern state was as yet absent in the interior of Timor.

The first institution to make an impact there was the political party. The next challenge to Koesa Nope came towards the mid-1950s from a group of junior high school teachers from prominent local families who made good use of this new instrument. Lui Babis and Gabriel Isu had been at senior high school in Makassar together with Koesa Nope in the late 1940s. But now they turned against him, and they used the political party as their weapon. Talked about for years, national elections were finally held in September 1955. The family of Lui Babis had roots in the rugged hills of Noemuke, south of Niki Niki, where several of them were known as *meo*, warriors (Figure 28). The Isu family was based in Noebunu, also near Timor's rather fertile south coast, where an older brother of Gabriel was *fetor*. Democratic competition was the perfect outlet for factional rivalry.

Many places in Timor saw no campaigning. Rajas in rural Catholic areas told farmers to vote Catholic Party. Catholic Party votes in Catholic areas averaged around 90%. 'We just voted as we were told,' one old farmer recalled to me with a smile, and the uniform results in many rural areas bear him out (Alfian 1971, Pemda NTT 1966). Protestant ministers expected the same result when they told parishioners from their pulpits to vote Parkindo. But the Protestant church was still growing in rural Timor at this time, and it only captured a third to two-thirds of the votes in its home areas, mostly in the towns. Many rural rajas in Protestant areas looked to various secular parties to feed them. Some followed the advice of Sahetapy Engel, Kupang-based advisor and spokesperson for many of them, to choose the Partai Rakyat Nasional, National People's Party PRN, a party that cultivated outer island votes. But others went their own way. Alfons Nisoni had his own local party with the equally grand name National Front (Front Nasional, not to be confused with other parties of the same name in the early 1960s).

²³ A photograph is at 'Menyapa yang datang (1),' *Pos Kupang*, 24 September 2012 (<http://kupang.tribunnews.com/2012/09/24/menyapa-yang-datang-1>) (accessed 17 August 2013).

Figure 28. Recent funeral monument for a meo (warrior) member of the Babis clan, just north of Kuanfatu, Amanuban, South Central Timor (photo: Gerry van Klinken).

Sahetapy's nemesis Herewila was the first Kupang politician not to look to the politics of the soil in which the church and the rajas were rooted. His Indonesian National Party (Partai Nasional Indonesia, PNI) was the one that civil servants were expected to join. But the party was wracked with factionalism in Jakarta, and he had few civil servants in Timor to work with. In 1955 he found himself leading a local breakaway grandiosely

called the People's Front (Front Rakjat), with a rooster as its symbol. Of the four biggest parties active in Timor, only Herewila's PNI-affiliated Front Rakjat lacked authoritative patrons in the interior. This led it to mobilize on popular discontent with the rajas, which was already rumbling in South Central Timor. The Indonesian republic, mediated to the countryside by the town, provided locally marginal groups with an attractive emancipatory agenda. Here it won nearly a third of the votes by portraying itself as a party of 'popular sovereignty' (*kedaulatan rakyat*). All its leading lights in TTS were either *temukung* or *fetor* themselves, or related to them. They included the well-connected teachers Lui Babis and Gabriel Isu, already mentioned; others were Neno Boimau, Sofian Un and Key Nabuasa. Vague memories survive of a youth organization called Indonesian Youth Generation (Angkatan Pemuda Indonesia, API), suggestive of the 1945 revolution. Lui Babis was a persuasive orator. He called the raja a leech (*a'susu* in Dawan, *lintah darat* in Indonesian) for constantly demanding cattle, goats, and women. He invited one of the best educated Timorese teachers in Kupang, Alexander Z. Nomleni, to make speeches in villages off the main road. Nomleni had connections in Soë, which he visited often to see his mother. He later went into politics full-time.

At around this time Raja Koesa Nope struck back at Lui Babis with a court case. Rumours that Babis had beaten someone to death are denied by others who say the case was purely political, and I do not know the truth of it. Babis spent about two years in jail shortly after the election, first in Soë then in Kupang. However, his older brother Leno continued to agitate against the raja. It seems that eventually the ruling *fetor*, A.F.H. Nope, retreated to Soë, leaving the field to Leno Babis as *de facto fetor*. The latter cemented his position at a public meeting in 1959, after which Koesa Nope was forced to formalize the appointment. In less dramatic ways several other locally powerful families in southern Amanuban also increased their autonomy. Despite his conviction, Lui Babis's career took off upon his release. He became a member of parliament in Jakarta, married a Muslim, and converted to Islam (an easy-going version that did not prevent him eating pork). The mosque he built still stands at Kuanfatu.

PKI

By the early 1960s the genie of popular participation in politics was out of the bottle. Peasants no longer moved automatically on the command

of their patrons. Raja Koesa Nope survived the final dissolution of his kingdom in 1961 when he was appointed district head of South Central Timor (Tari 1972:I, 98–9). He reportedly declared ‘the kingdom never ends!’ Opposition never ended either. Powerful families side-lined by the raja continued to protect farmers who wanted rights. The PNI had declined, but an energetically expanding communist party had taken its place. Teachers in the towns facilitated new networks that produced organizational innovations such as cooperatives. In this section we examine the role of urban brokers in the expansion of social capital that took place in South Central Timor, which by 1963 had NTT’s largest concentration of BTI farmers union membership. Facilitated by educated teachers in the towns, they enthusiastically built cooperatives and learned new skills – the villages of Kusi and Tuapakas in southern Amanuban had strong cooperatives (Sekda TTS [1978]:68f).

The occasion for this mobilizational activity in Kupang in the early 1960s was created by crisis in Jakarta. The abolition of parliamentary democracy in the late 1950s did not so much weaken the political parties as tie them more closely to the interests of the two great executive powers in Jakarta, President Sukarno and the armed forces. Indonesia’s authoritarian turn is usually dated from the abandonment of the democratic 1950 constitution in July 1959, though this followed upon the declaration of martial law a little earlier (March 1957), and was in turn followed by the suspension of parliament a little later (March 1960). But Guided Democracy had even more populist politics than the liberal period that preceded it. Unable to negotiate compromise solutions to their differences in parliament, rivals took their followers onto the streets. The effect was highly polarizing, as the political middle disappeared. All parties began to form new mass organizations in 1960, except Masyumi and the Indonesian Socialist Party PSI, which were banned that year.

PNI had lost the 1955 election in Timor to parties with links to rajas and churches. It had lost its direction nationally after this as well, and soon became a classic patronage party, weakened by factionalism and rent-seeking, in which the membership system lapsed (Rocamora 1974:252, 315–6). Its conservative bureaucratic and business leadership confusingly tried to stay close to the increasingly leftist-sounding President Sukarno. At the same time it adopted an anti-communist ideology echoing that of the religious parties Masyumi and NU, in order to resist encroachment from the more radical PKI. But out in the districts this anti-communism made little sense and PNI and PKI sympathizers often worked together. When BTI began mobilizing nationally from 1961 onwards, it found the

ground prepared in southern Amanuban and Amanatun. The local families in the southern coastal regions, who had used PNI to keep the Raja of Amanuban at a distance in the 1950s, saw little reason to stop now. Herewila was not part of this – the PNI fraction he supported was anti-communist – though some of his protégés were. Again, power was generated in Timor as ideas and organizational forms from Jakarta became resources for embryonic alliances that linked urban workers and rural peasants with rising middle class elites. Teachers excited by the promise of a new world played the central role in these cross-class alliances.

The Communist Party PKI had by far the best mobilizational skills, and Sukarno was keen to make use of them. The armed forces began cultivating links with more conservative groups, mainly religious ones. Under Sukarno's protective umbrella, the PKI organized faster and better than any of the others. With its affiliated organizations for farmers (BTI), youth (Pemuda Rakjat, PR), women (Gerwani), labour (Sobsi), artists, journalists, government workers and intellectuals, it rapidly built up a hierarchy of committees and conferences from provincial to village level – also outside Java where PKI had till then been weak. By 1964 PKI general secretary D.N. Aidit could claim there were PKI committees in 100% of Indonesia's provinces or major islands, in 93% of districts and large towns, in 83% of subdistricts and small towns, and in 62% of villages or institutions at an equivalent level (Pauker 1964:37).²⁴ The PKI had won few votes in this part of Indonesia in the 1955 election – just 4,500 in the whole region that was soon to become East Nusa Tenggara – most of them in East Flores (Alfian 1971). But from 1960 the party and its affiliates began mobilizing aggressively all over Indonesia, engaged in a high-stakes national gamble for territory.

For its middle class members, the PKI offered access to jobs just like any other party. Educated people moved easily from one party to another, and sometimes combined membership in several. Agustinus Roboth, a teacher in Soë, was active in both the PKI and Parkindo (Sekda TTS [1978]). Michael Marcus, ex-teacher and now finance manager in the Soë government offices, moved to the PKI in mid-1960 after years of service in Timor-level political offices in the PNI under Herewila's wing (Tari 1972:I, 253). Urban communist activism focused on the demand for communist representation in the local government and parliament. As part of his agenda

²⁴ The highest regional level was the Komite Daerah Besar CDB, Komite Pulau Besar CPB, and Komite Djakarta Raya CRD, totalling 27 units. Komite Seksi, or CS, operated at the level of district of city (kabupaten, kota); Komite Sub-Seksi, CSS, operated at the sub-district level (kecamatan); Resort Komite, RC, at village (desa) and factory level.

of balancing the politically hostile military, President Sukarno had been pressing the doctrine of Nasakom since 1960. This envisaged all state institutions having representatives from each of the three ideological persuasions – nationalist, religious and communist. Sukarno's rivals hated this idea, but all parties were pushing for 'proportional' appointments to the increasingly politicized bureaucracy. 'Democracy' meant that official appointments should be made through a party and not on the basis of bureaucratic merit. When in 1965 Nasakom eventually became policy, local governments in NTT reluctantly agreed to allocate a nominal one extra seat to the PKI in the provincial parliament (it went to H.H. Motu), one in the provincial advisory body BPH,²⁵ and one in to the district-level representative assemblies in Kupang (Abraham Neno) and in West Sumba (Pura Tanja Pandjang) (Tari 1972:I, 277).

Outreach to non-elites was a unique PKI skill. If other parties existed mainly for their executives, the PKI had members who paid dues and ran neighbourhood branches, almost like a liberal democratic party. Government officials, who also wished to reach out to the wider public, at first regarded the PKI as an ally. Lesser Sunda Islands Governor Sarimin Reksodihardjo, a man hardly enamoured of local political parties that in his view contributed little beyond 'continual opposition,' thought highly of civil society organizations mobilizing people for development work. He wrote in 1957: 'The efforts of the farmer's organizations (BTI, Petani, Gerakan Tani Indonesia), the women's organizations, the youth organizations, and others, are truly constructive' (Reksodihardjo 1960 [1957]:I, 36–7). BTI referred to the Barisan Tani Indonesia, the Indonesian Farmers Union, easily the most successful of the communist organizations in Indonesia. The party knew the importance of cross-class alliances to build associational power. The 1959 PKI National Peasants Conference urged organizers to 'go down' (*turun ke bawah, turba*) among the peasants. They had to combine the promotion of structural solutions with 'small but successful' actions alongside the peasants, such as the provision of cheap seeds and tools, and building bridges together. The idea was to wean peasants off their dependence on patrons within the aristocracy, the bureaucracy or the major religions (Huizer 1974:100–1). For farmers in Timor it was a stunning new experience to belong to an organization that set them on a footing of equality with the government. It was led by white-shirted office-bearers who distributed aid to them in times of hunger and who spoke to officials whenever the raja grabbed their land.

²⁵ Badan Pemerintah Harian.

The PKI agrarian programme did not diverge greatly from the modernization paradigm of the 1950s, as western technocrats envisaged it. Mechanization would produce economies of scale, and land reform was widely thought to be essential. The problem in Timor was (and remains today) how to produce enough food for a growing population on dry, marginal land without washing the soil away through over-production. The absence of individual land rights left peasants with a 'loose' connection with the land that, it was thought, gave them little motivation to deal seriously with Timor's serious soil erosion problem. The 'evolution' therefore, according to Ormeling (1956:84), was towards individual land tenure for peasants. The United States through the World Bank was actively promoting this solution in the 1950s, partly for ecological reasons and partly to deflect communist influence in developing countries (White 2005).

Under the energetic BTI organizer Asmu in Jakarta, land reform became the union's key programme in 1960. This was the year the national land reform legislation was passed (UU 56/ Prp/1960 about land reform and the Basic Agrarian Law UUPA of 1960). An implementing bureaucracy (agraria) was established all over the country and also in Kupang. A land reform seminar held under government auspices in Kupang on 27–30 April 1961, at which experts and activists shared their knowledge of the issues involved, underlined the mainstream nature of the campaign (Sidik et al 1968:49).²⁶ Land reform faced a serious shortage of statistics on land-owning practices throughout the vast archipelago, which was only partially relieved by the agricultural census of 1963. Nevertheless, the government went ahead with a hierarchy of Land Reform Committees at every level of government. The district (*kabupaten*) was the key level. The committees were drawn from various elements of government and civil society, including the local BTI secretary. Timor was not first in line for land reform. Phase I was implemented in the second half of 1964 and covered Java, Bali, and West Nusa Tenggara. Kalimantan was scheduled for Phase II (Utrecht 1969). This means little was achieved in Timor until the rise of the New Order put an end to the BTI and eventually to the idea of land reform itself.

It was never very clear what precisely land reform would mean for Timor's communally held rural land, but it *was* clear that it involved confronting the rajas, hitherto the main partners for government development programmes. Land ownership problems were becoming urgent for another reason too – Kupang town was expanding rapidly into rural land

²⁶ They were A.A. Bere Tallo (Belu); OE.A. Kapita (Sumba) and Jan Djong (Flores).

claimed by the rajas. Real or imagined land title grievances became hot issues, even before the formal process had started in NTT. In Seba, the largest little town on the island of Sabu, teachers affiliated with the PKI mobilized demonstrations urging the raja named Ludji to socialize his land. They reminded listeners that Sabu had known no rajas until the colonial Dutch had imposed them less than a lifetime earlier. The subdistrict chief, a PNI man, tried to protect Ludji from harm but urged him privately to return land he had acquired under the cover of aristocratic privilege. The extended drought of 1964–1965 caused tempers to fray. The PKI handed out assistance, provoking PNI rage. When some houses were burned down in Seba in July 1965 – probably accidentally as farmers routinely burned grass – it became politicized into a PKI vs. PNI issue. The opportunity for PNI revenge came only with the new regime (see next chapter). Similar mobilization over land also produced tensions in Babao, east of Kupang (Kolimon and Wetangterah 2012:125–38, 227–8).

Heading up NTT's first BTI branch in Soë, the capital of South Central Timor district – two months *before* the provincial branch was established in September 1960 – was Michael Marcus (Tari 1972:I, 253). He became known in Kupang as an expert on land reform.²⁷ Marcus was from Rote and belonged to the new political class that emerged after independence (see Chapter 3). By 1960 this former school teacher, politician and now government administrator was nearing retirement. He worked in the local government finance office, having left his family for their schooling in the Fontein house in Kupang. Politics was a spare-time activity. Survivors of the anti-communist purges of 1965/66 recall that they thought his move to the PKI was unusual for an established bureaucrat. Had he been pushed against his will? Patronage available to progressives from Herewila had declined after the PNI's thrashing in the 1955 elections in Timor and the leadership splits that followed. Perhaps Simon Bubu, the wealthy PKI labour union boss in Kupang on whose land Marcus owned a house, had press-ganged him into service for a rapidly expanding communist party in search of cadre? More likely, however, he was less driven by necessity than that. Michael Marcus was a gregarious man who had been all over the interior of Timor as a teacher for a decade. Teachers were at the coalface

²⁷ One report quotes a paper by him on 'the role of adat' in Timor and Sumba presented at a symposium on the economic and financial development of East Nusa Tenggara on 17–25 November 1966 (Sidik et al 1968:49). His paper was presented together with one by the former editor of *Bentara* magazine, the priest A.A. Conterius SVD representing Flores. However, Marcus had already been executed by then. Was the paper presented posthumously, perhaps implying a veiled protest against his execution?

of every social renewal project in rural NTT. They taught about the world at church schools, taught the gospel in church, and served on local committees for all the political parties (Kolimon and Wetangterah 2012:131–2). Marcus's network with equally eager middle class modernizers was wide; they all believed in the salvific potential of politics. When PKI leader Njoto said in 1965, 'we are the men who are modernizing life in the villages; we are the men introducing the twentieth century' (Mortimer 1974:409), he might have been overstating his case, but for people like Marcus it was the literal truth. In Soë he was introduced to the PKI by the radical PKI activist B. Paulus Kanuru, with whom he shared an office (Netti and Itta 1997:110–1, Sekda TTS [1978]:63–7). Kanuru had been a primary school teacher in Kefamenanu in the early 1950s. When he moved to Soë in 1955 just after the elections he set up a PKI secretariat there. Kanuru's wife was uneducated but had family connections in the region, and she started a Gerwani group (Kolimon and Wetangterah 2012:256). Four of Marcus' oldest sons and daughters also joined leftist organizations in those innocent days. Although his wife had a withdrawn personality, she came from a relatively influential clan in the Soë area. For Marcus, the very act of marrying her – most educated Rotenese regarded the Timorese as backwards – was a bit of cross-class alliance. The Nenobais came from western Amanuban, and some of its members had joined in the widespread dissatisfaction with the ruling Nope clan. The merging of historical inter-clan grievances with modern party activism was a characteristic feature of the highly-embedded politics of rural Timor at this time (McWilliam 1999).

Under Marcus' leadership, the southern part of South Central Timor became one of the strongest BTI areas in NTT. The first provincial governor after the military takeover in 1966, El Tari, published a table showing BTI membership by district in NTT in 1963 (Tari 1972:I, 263) (Table 1). South Central Timor ranked first with over 25,000 members, with high concentrations also in Belu (in Timor) and Manggarai (in Flores). 'Membership' may have meant no more than just registration for free agricultural tools, yet the numbers suggest a significant level of mobilization. Local elites had their own troubles with Koesa Nope's transformation from raja to district head, but their clients had a bigger agenda. The farmers who ran the village branches, and the teachers in Soë who gave mid-level leadership,²⁸ thought less about opposing the Nope family than

²⁸ Three Soë teachers active in the BTI were Yohanes Mauboy, Daniel Sonlae, and Simon Petrus Kase.

Table 1. BTI 'membership' in East Nusa Tenggara province by district in 1963 (Tari 1972:I, 263). Shaded: the three largest BTI districts. (NB: original document incorrectly reports bottom right cell as 77,026.)

Nr.	District branch (DPT BTI)	Sub- branches	Neighbourhood groups	Members
1	Kupang	5	82	4,000
2	South Central Timur	14	302	25,073
3	North Central Timur	3	9	189
4	Belu	8	0	16,166
5	East Flores	13	14	1,470
6	Ngada	0	8	800
7	Ende	0	11	6,106
8	Sikka	8	26	1,987
9	East Sumba	2	22	1,755
10	Manggarai	13	80	12,000
11	West Sumba	3	10	2,261
12	Alor/ Pantar	4	17	5,000
13	Rote/ Kupang district	3	8	444
14	Sabu/ Kupang district	0	11	775
Totals		76	600	78,026

about gaining access to the state. It was a marvel that subsistence farmers wearing sarongs without shirts could talk as equals with their own city people in white shirts. They had been the object of election campaigns and government development plans, but now BTI officials talked back to arrogant officials on their behalf. When drought struck in 1964, BTI was the only organization handing out food aid to distressed farmers. The farmers who headed up the BTI branch in Kusi village would walk to Kupang for a political meeting, 150 km away along foot trails. They brought along their members' contributions in kind for the BTI Cooperative – cloths, and even cattle – hoping to get it back in the future with interest. The BTI and PKI were unique among Indonesian political organizations in being largely financed by ordinary members (Feith 1957:27). Upon their return, sometimes bearing gifts of agricultural tools, the delegates called the village together for a report; this was also an occasion for shouting party slogans. In villages as widely spaced as Oinlasi in southern Timor and Lamboya in central Sumba I heard how the BTI was known for its cooperative farming. Peasants had a long tradition of working together on

preparing subsistence gardens, but these reports suggest the BTI helped solve some of the collective action problems that normally bedevil these collaborative efforts in rural Timor.

This did not mean that peasant BTI organizers suddenly became twentieth century apparatchiks. The deference its leaders enjoyed did not always derive from modern performativity. The Kupang agricultural economist Hendrik Ataupah saw the popularity of BTI in southern Amanuban as little more than traditional messianism. He advised the provincial government to combat it by building a road through the rugged hills into Tuapakas and thus reduce its isolation. The BTI leader in Tuapakas was Susanamanu, a ladies man who also chaired the communist women's movement Gerwani. Many women were camped with their children in temporary huts around his house; apparently they believed having sex with him would bring them great benefits.²⁹ Balthasar Klau, the BTI leader in Belu, was a marginalized but ambitious aristocrat who mobilized peasant support through the BTI by producing piles of cloths apparently out of nowhere. He promised to deliver more if they supported him. Belu was another strong BTI basis (Farram 2002).

Peasant suspicion frequently overrode good judgment. At the height of the Irian Jaya confrontation in 1962, an aeroplane passed over the little town of Kefamenanu just as an explosion was heard. A policeman rang the district chief, Piet Salasa, to say a bomb had been dropped. Salasa went to the place of the incident and found a drunken policeman who had fallen into the fire with his shotgun, which set off the ammunition. However, the local BTI leader insisted it had been a bomb attack called in by a foreign priest. A month later military commander Paikun came from Kupang and asked about 'the bomb.' He had heard about it from the BTI. In March 1965 a German priest called Hans Smit was counting the collection in front of his congregation in Belu district. He held up each note before dropping it on the table; the total came to the price of half an egg. Somehow a rural Catholic teacher had the idea this was an insult to the President of the Republic of Indonesia, and the story spread that the pastor had burnt the notes with his image. He was charged with subversion by a local judge who was afraid of the PKI and the story went national. Finally the Supreme Court allowed him to leave the country for 'medical treatment.'³⁰

²⁹ Interview, Hendrikus Ataupah, Kupang, 31 July 2011.

³⁰ Interview Piet Salasa, Kupang, 19 July 2010; 'Kegiatan subversi di Nustengtini,' *Harian Rakjat*, 24 April 1965; interview Centis da Costa, Jakarta, 11 June 2010.

Such tales of peasant dreams and suspicions awakened by the BTI are legion in Timor's history as told today. Modern emancipatory repertoires produced unexpected effects in closed, hierarchical peasant societies where the modern state had hardly penetrated. But just how illegitimate or destructive they were is no easy question to answer. They do not differ in principle from the invigorating impact that the modern political language had on the equally primordial status conflicts between rival elite families in Timor. If the BTI goal was to wean peasants off dependence on their traditional patrons, its work in Timor appears not to have been so far wide of this mark. The seductive modality of power highlighted in this chapter generated new forms of associational power among the poor majority. Urban middle class intellectuals – particularly teachers – facilitated the process by bending the resources of political parties and other state institutions to the greater public good. More importantly, the (semi) educated town dwellers had 'set a climate of opinion' (as Gerald Maryanov put it - 1959:63) in which the poor were no longer passive subjects but active citizens. The new republican sentiment in town made politics a matter for a whole class of people previously excluded from it. Kupang was here playing the generative role of agrarian modernizer that towns ought to play, in the vision of John Mellor (1976) and others.

However, associational modalities of generating power tend to run into trouble when social inequalities are structurally entrenched. Hannah Arendt paid insufficient attention to this reality in her work. In Timor such inequalities were sharp. Mobilization among the poor soon began to provoke reactions among privileged members of the community. Particularly in the countryside, the very act of encouraging peasants to think they had friends in high places challenged the existing hierarchy. Hendrikus Ataupah explained to me the risks that this entailed:

Every aristocratic family has a 'pillar.' For example in Sumba they are known as *Umbu*. He holds up a place where others can sit. He never speaks out, but he can order his shadow bodyguard to speak. This is probably a former slave, even if he wears nice clothes. He has lots of rights. If he kills, he will be a hero in the family. Now the BTI wanted to displace the pillar! But this is very difficult to do.³¹

In Soë that 'pillar' was Koesa Nope, the Raja of Amanuban and district chief of South Central Timor. He lived in his palace (*sonaf*) in Niki-Niki just outside Soë and was the province's largest cattle owner. Photographs show him literally towering over the peasant-born men of the same age

³¹ Interview with Hendrikus Ataupah, Kupang, 30 June 2009.

(see Chapter 8) (Alfons Nisnoni was tall too - perhaps suggestive of the better nutrition raja's children had enjoyed). The state's struggles had become, at this provincial level, a class struggle. How this confrontation reached its denouement here and in other parts of Timor that had its own pillars, is the subject of the next chapter.

Emancipatory Connections

In the face of widespread perceptions that democracy in developing countries inevitably equates to a feast of elite patronage interspersed with communitarian xenophobia and ethnic violence, doing little for the ordinary citizen, the stories in this chapter paint a more complex picture. Previous chapters have demonstrated that top-down, instrumental forms of power are not very effective at achieving their goals. This one goes on to illustrate that new cross-class, bottom-up associational forms of power can develop even in situations with low institutional maturity. Emancipatory political agendas have their own appeal wherever people feel oppressed. Superior centralized organization was certainly a condition for facilitating this kind of mobilization, but ultimately the energy came from local people who found each other around ideals of improvement through political action. Middle class townsfolk, particularly teachers, were the vital mediatory link in this generation of new social capital.