CHAPTER ELEVEN

CONSOLIDATING MIDDLE INDONESIA (1966–1986)

In the process of political emancipation – especially if this is not accompanied by armed struggle – representatives of the lower-middle-class rise in a way naturally to power.

(Kalecki 1972:162)

By the mid-1970s the New Order was well established in Jakarta. The commander of the armed forces was simultaneously the president. The first toll road was being built out of Jakarta. The chunky locally designed Toyota Kijang motorcar appeared in 1977 and quickly came to symbolize middle class prosperity, also in provincial towns like Kupang. This chapter describes first the consolidation phase in the provinces, still using the broad class-brush of previous chapters. It then reviews once more the main lines of the argument this book has been making about the process by which Middle Indonesia was made. Put baldly, the argument is that Middle Indonesia was a political project for townsfolk who were not necessarily rich and powerful on a national level, but whose disproportionate power to assert their will arose from their indispensable mediating role for the central state in the provinces, and hence from their exclusionary access to rents from the local state.

Consolidation in the first place entailed neutering collective antagonists. Most to be feared for their numbers and their unpredictability were the rural and urban poor. The previous chapter described how terror tactics reversed lower-class political mobilization. Terror had to remain an option, but permanent neutering also required longer term techniques of monitoring and social engineering. Instrumental modalities of power were at the forefront here. The ‘security approach’ introduced a new fragility into Middle Indonesia, as New Order cynicism replaced the naïve trust and optimism of the 1950s. The central government attempted to assuage the anguish by investing in rural development schemes (Henley 2012).

Dealing with those who threatened the provincial middle classes from a higher position on the social scale presented a much more delicate problem. They ranged from local aristocrats and wealthy Chinese
entrepreneurs to the generals in Jakarta and to global capital. The means here were primarily political. Provincial middle classes were mobilized on the basis of the petit bourgeois values of nationalism, indigeneity, a horror of atheism, and an aversion to what in Indonesia was called ‘free-fight capitalism.’ One of these superior antagonists had already been dealt with by 1965. The native aristocracy who had once stood above them had lost their autonomy by 1962 (although they remained socially influential) (see Chapter 7). Far far above them, there was Jakarta, the hand that fed them but that also threatened to overrule them. The administrative province of Nusa Tenggara Timur, Jakarta’s gift of the means of primitive accumulation, had been won following the anti-Javanese protests at the time of Permesta in 1957 (see Chapter 6). The one remaining locally dominant group in Kupang not yet domesticated were the rich Chinese. Their capacity for independent economic networking represented a threat to Kupang’s political class. Finally, consolidation also required strengthening internal ranks by rewarding loyalists. All these political programmes, fought intermittently but more or less consciously, were energized by limited forms of associational power – limited because they lacked the cross-class character of the vision of the 1950s; associational because they appealed to the ‘green’ conservative values that had become common among provincial middle classes by the 1960s (Alers 1956). This chapter therefore deals with external action against the poor and against the Chinese, and internal action in favour of loyalists.

**The Poor**

These always remained the most numerous of antagonists. Months after the killings had stopped, but with the horror still fresh in people’s minds, a new fear arose in military minds. They now worried that the horror might turn into cross-class sympathy for the victims and then into an anti-government reaction. The special security command Kopkamtib established propaganda teams to travel around Kupang and out into the districts. Their mission was to ‘coach’ people on the correct way to view the killings. In Timor the teams were led by Captain J.W. Manafe, intelligence chief for the regional military command (Kasi I Rem 161), and also a Parkindo activist. South Central Timor district had seen the strongest BTI presence and now became a special focus for propaganda (Tari 1972:1, 305). The teams were known as Team Kempen Pembantu Pelaksana Kopkamtibda. Military reports reveal they were still at work in late 1968.
and early 1969, nearly two years later. Team members had learned by heart a gruesome if prolix catechism of state-sanctioned murder. One item in the manual they read (which was not a secret document) confronted likely criticism head-on:

Question: The Indonesian people are known abroad as a civilized nation because they have Pancasila. Yet in reality the Indonesian nation has committed mass murder against the Communists. Is that not a betrayal of Pancasila itself?

Answer: We must look at this problem through the law of cause and effect. The Indonesian people only began to move spontaneously after the treachery and the cruelty committed by PKI members at Lubang Buaya [the place in Jakarta where army generals were murdered on 1 October 1965] and in other areas in Indonesia. Acts to destroy PKI agents were precisely aimed at saving Pancasila from an Atheist movement, and this cannot be classified as a barbaric act because on the contrary it is based on humanitarian considerations, especially after seeing the reality that according to seized PKI documents there was a plan for G30S/PKI to carry out mass killings should they succeed (Kopkamtib 1968:II, 18).1

Figure 32. Governor Brig.-Gen. El Tari, at a banquet for National Sports Week, approximately 1971 (photo courtesy Mr. Leopold Nisnoni).

1 Pancasila was the main pillar in military anti-communist ideology. The original ran: ‘Pertanyaan: Bangsa Indonesia diluar negeri terkenal sebagai Bangsa yang berkeadaban tinggi karena memiliki PANTJASILA. Tetapi dalam kenjataan Bangsa Indonesia telah melakukan pembunuhan masal terhadap orang Komunis. Apakah itu bukanlah suatu
A more daunting task for Governor Maj.-Gen. El Tari than keeping up the threat of state terror was to extend state control into the interior. This was in fact a matter of introducing modern government there for the first time. Till then, the state in the districts had amounted to little more than the crumbling remnants of the Dutch indirect-rule system. A few provincial officials had tried to cajole the traditional rulers to look up from their nepotistic micro-politics, but they had been even less resourced than the Dutch controleurs had been, and achieved little success. Most education and health services were provided by the church. El Tari’s task was doubly difficult because it had to start with dismantling the little that already existed. He was under instructions to prioritize ‘cleansing’ the apparatus of those with doubtful loyalties to the new military order. His predecessor had already replaced the rajas with modern district administrators in 1962, but had still appointed people with local roots – something the military now wished to review. El Tari’s American-educated advisor Hendrik Ataupah travelled into the interior on inspection tours. Dispensing with the idea that local administrators should have local roots, he saw only incompetency and illiteracy. Lui Babis, calling himself Aba Soleh after his conversion to Islam, had kept up a rivalry with the Nope clan from his home base in southern central Timor, in the process permitting the communist BTI to flourish. He had been made subdistrict head of Noemuke. But Ataupah now found a horse tethered inside his office. Cow manure on the typewriter indicated that the precious equipment had rarely been used. Instead of typing reports, Aba Soleh was fond of singing traditional Timorese poems (pantun) of an evening, alternating in friendly competition with the local BTI leader. Under the guise of rejuvenating an ageing corps, El Tari replaced Babis and six other district chiefs – more than half the total of 12 (Nahak et al 2009:39, Tari 1972:1, 98–9, 138f). Military screeners sacked many other bureaucrats further down the ladder for ideological contamination. The many vacancies were filled by pro-military loyalists from town.

2 Interview, Hendrikus Ataupah, Kupang, 31 July 2011.
Most invasive was the modernization of village administration. NTT had known over four and a half thousand village units. These had by no means been primordial entities – they were the result of the Dutch pacification campaign, which involved concentrating agrarian populations in settlements and appointing leaders to coordinate with the authorities. But the late colonial village administration had retained some connection with local custom, being structured into a genealogical rather than a territorial hierarchy and carrying a variety of local customary names for its institutions (Cunningham 1962, Warren 1993). Now these villages were reorganized into less than 1,700 units known as ‘New Style Villages’ (Desa Gaya Baru), all on a standard model laid down in Jakarta (and still building on colonial practices).³ Village officials remained without a salary but they now received grants and bonuses for good performance that increasingly tied them to the bureaucracy (Tari 1972:1, 84–5). Many physically new villages were built as well, also on a uniform pattern. A bureaucratic manual issued in Kupang in 1973 explaining how officials should design these villages is reminiscent of the sterile Soviet village plans James Scott so memorably described in Seeing like a State (1998:215). The layout was to be functional, with designated areas for government offices, market and commercial buildings, school, church and mosque, and neat residences all distributed along a grid of straight roads for the motor vehicle (Figure 33, Figure 34). Walter Christaller’s central place theory was quoted, not as an explanation for existing village distribution but as a prescriptive ideal for efficient ‘service delivery’ (Direktorat Pemerintahan 1973). The manual was as silent on consultation as it was on respecting existing arrangements such as land rights, sacred places or natural flows. Most of the New Style Villages were constructed in the former kingdom of Amarasi, where Raja Koroh had become the subdistrict head. Villagers in Buraen told me they were built without any consideration of existing rights. Vicky Koroh told villagers communal land rights no longer existed. He himself claimed vast lands on the basis of his traditional rights while paying no land tax on it.

It seems Governor El Tari did commit to some land reform in the early years of the New Order (Tari 1972:1, 435–7). He claimed to have redistributed 35,995 hectares of aristocratic hunting lands to 33,404 families in various parts of Flores.⁴ He also bought small ‘excess’ parcels from some

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³ Colonial resettlement schemes had never been off the agenda. A detailed village reorganization plan ready for Nusa Tenggara in 1955 failed only because there was no money to implement it (Bentara, 1 April 1955).

⁴ I have corrected an apparent misprint in the original that, if true, would have meant 35 million hectares were redistributed. Kupang historian Munandjar Widiyatmika told me
he had seen farmers living on these redistributed lands with his own eyes; they were located in Mbai (Ngada), Lembor and Paka (both in Manggarai) and Mautenda (Ende) (interview, Kupang, 18 June 2009). Curiously, El Tari’s Florinese successor, Ben Mboi, denied that any land was redistributed under Governor El Tari (interview, Kupang, 19 June 2009).

Alfons Nisnoni was the only significant aristocrat in Timor to have lost all his official connections. He apparently also lost a couple of hundred hectares above Bakunase in a

Figure 33. Traditional spread-out village (Direktorat Pemerintahan 1973).

aristocrats near Kupang – Alfons Nisnoni lost 22 hectares of wet-rice land to the farmers working the fields,5 Koesa Nope lost a remarkably extensive 591 hectares of dry gardens to 724 farming families. Other noble

5 Alfons Nisnoni was the only significant aristocrat in Timor to have lost all his official connections. He apparently also lost a couple of hundred hectares above Bakunase in a
families had their land holdings investigated too – the Amtiran, Oematan, and Funay were mentioned. Whatever the truth of these claims, the programme was clearly not sustained and not consultative. Where a government-sponsored seminar on land reform in 1961 had been attended mainly by rural land owners (Sidik et al. 1968), the next land-title seminar in Kupang demanded rights for the city. The 1972 symposium was attended by ‘city people,’ and the message was that traditional rights no longer existed, since all customary land belonged to the state (Direktorat Agraria NTT 1973:43, Panitya 1972). The urban fringe was expanding and the city administrators wanted to reduce trouble from aristocrats demanding extortionate payments for peri-urban land.

Kalecki had already described the fascination with religion in the ‘intermediate regime.’ Religion played a central role in the efforts by the quintessentially petty bourgeois provincial New Order to subjugate the rural poor in NTT as well. Chapter 9 described how government officials had shocked villagers in late 1965 by suddenly demanding they

court case around 1960. However, the family retains large lands even now (interview Munandjar Widiatmika, Kupang, 18 June 2009).
change their religion. This involved abandoning local names and adopting new ones. Now they went on to insist on a complete civilizational makeover for the rural poor – how to dress, eat, talk, and build their houses. The ubiquitous knot of hair (*konde*) traditionally worn by rural men (Figure 35) was now seen as a heathen symbol of the *khalaiik*. The only village in which the *konde* survives today is Boti, in the southern hills of South Central Timor district. In October 1967 the gospel was brought to Boti by a Rotenese military officer named Pello (Kolimon and Wetangterah 2012:283–5). His unit gathered all the men and the raja at the village office. When their demands for conversions met reluctance they brought out a brass-tipped cane. Men were beaten and told to stand shirtless in the sun for hours. Fearing the raja would be killed, enough men then pledged conversion to satisfy the soldiers. Those who converted moved away from the ritual sites of the village, but a small core of traditionalists remained behind. Their elders later argued successfully that they should be exempt from the policy to abandon their way of life, since there had in fact been no communist organization in their village. Moreover, they added defiantly, they had seen enough suffering caused elsewhere by people named Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John not to wish to adopt these names themselves. Today the village is an exotic tourist attraction. Brochures describe its proud long-haired pagan inhabitants as ‘Indonesian Amish,’ but do not mention the reason that they are alone in Timor.

Officials began requiring rural people to wear shoes, shirts, and (for the women) bras. The church readily cooperated. Wife and husband reverends Len and Robert Tahun had been local missionaries to Oinlasi in southern South Central Timor since 1964, and they still lived there when I visited them in 2010 and 2011. Healthy bodies and modesty were good things, they told me. Women accustomed to preparing tubers had to learn to cook rice for visiting dignitaries, whose numbers increased as the state established a presence even in small subdistricts. Subdistrict capital Oinlasi had till then possessed only a police station, but soon government buildings appeared up and down the main street and there was even a government high school.

Governor Brig. Gen. El Tari tried at first to stimulate the rural economy mainly by slogans. Lacking both a land reform programme and serious money, he addressed the island’s notorious soil erosion by simply calling on peasants to ‘plant, plant, plant, and plant again!’ Several statues in Dili and Soë still show him holding up a coconut shoot to symbolize this

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exhortatory mode of government. It was reminiscent of the forced coconut plantation programme carried out by the Raja of Amarasi in the 1930s. But (as was noted in Chapter 3) he did not match it with financial incentives to busy subsistence farmers, and it all came to nothing. Once real New Order oil money began to flow, rural development programmes became more sophisticated. Technical specialists built roads and telephone lines, introduced new fertilizers, and enhanced the skills of local officials. Although the Green Revolution worked better on Java’s irrigated rice fields than Timor’s maize, agricultural productivity did appear to rise and absolute poverty certainly declined. As it did everywhere in Indonesia, the New Order brought technical inclusiveness without empowerment.

Nevertheless success was modest. Health indicators for NTT have stayed among the worst in Southeast Asia. Infant mortality, child malnutrition, malaria, and sexually transmitted diseases remain major problems. In the most recent World Food Programme nutritional map for Indonesia, the number of underweight infants in the province NTT rates as by far the nation’s worst. All of Timor is shown in the worst category, ‘very bad to critical,’ with more than 30% of infants aged less than five underweight (WFP 2009). The latest WFP map of food insecurity for Indonesia maps all of Indonesian Timor to the two worst levels of food insecurity, along with all of Sumba and large parts of Papua. The WFP links these poor health indicators to the large proportion of the population in these districts living below the national poverty line, the large number of households without access to electricity, the large number of children under five years who are underweight, the number of villages not accessible to four-wheeled vehicles, and the fact that many households have no access to clean water.7 Part of the reason was certainly that the local government regarded expenditure on health, education and other welfare as ‘a residual item of public consumption’ (Barlow et al 1991:46). When a group of scholars in the 1980s returned to ‘the Timor problem,’ they discovered that soil erosion had grown ever worse. ‘The contemporary surface of Timor can only be described as a degraded landscape,’ one of them concluded (Barlow et al 1991:35). Ormeling had estimated that the Indonesian part of Timor had 280,000 hectares available for subsistence food crops; the rest was only suitable for cattle grazing or enclosing for forestry. Subsistence requires most of the land to lie fallow most of the time. Ormeling thought a 12-year cycle was sustainable. But even in the

In between the studies by Barlow and Ormeling comes the useful study of the cattle industry by Soedarma (1968). At this time the Timor cattle population was 333,278, with the biggest concentration in South Central Timor, where they were regarded as the greatest obstacle to re-vegetation. One visible expression of the clashing interests between cattle owners and peasants was their different attitudes to the lantana invasion. Peasants liked lantana because it stopped the cattle and meant they had fewer fences to build, but owners hated it and persuaded the government to launch an expensive and ultimately successful eradication campaign. But the researchers concluded that degradation of land due to overexploitation was widespread, in Timor and all over NTT (Barlow et al 1991:246, 249, 121–44, 15).

The reason why the New Order failed to solve the Timor problem was as political as it had been under the Dutch. A marginal landscape like this can feed everyone only if access to scarce resources is shared equally. But precisely the assumption of equal rights was unpalatable to Kupang’s policymakers. Control over farming land has remained unequal. In the mid-1980s, 41% of farm land in NTT was controlled by 15% of households. Where the average holding was 1.23 hectares, this upper group held an average of 4.42 hectares (Barlow et al 1991:255–7). After El Tari’s initial gesture the land reform programme was abandoned. Unequal cattle ownership was an even bigger contributor to the Timor problem, but this too remained unaddressed for the same reason. Ormeling had identified cattle as both an ecological scourge and a source of inequality, but 30 years later their population had increased nearly five-fold to 520,000 (though Ormeling did acknowledge under-reporting had been a problem in his day) (Barlow et al 1991:246–8). The tracks they left on hillsides, and the tendency for cattle owners to burn grass in order to produce ‘green pick,’ were exacerbating soil erosion and causing landslides. Cattle, agreed the editors of the volume, had produced ‘widespread environmental destruction, while there has further been a marked shift to a more uneven

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Figure 35. Rural Timorese male and female hairstyles and clothing, respectively in Belu and Kolbano, circa 1909 (KITLV image nrs. resp. 26829, 26823).
distribution of income’ (Barlow et al 1991:232). Two others warned that growing livestock numbers were putting such pressure on land that food supply problems were occurring during the already normally lean period from June to November (Barlow et al 1991:87–8, 140). It proved politically impossible to regulate the maximum number of cattle per unit area. Cattle ownership had become even more concentrated in wealthy hands than it had been in Ormeling’s day. The 4.5% of farmers with herds of more than 25 owned 48.4% of all cattle and buffalo, whereas 55% of farmer households had just one or two beasts (Barlow et al 1991:92, 20, 257).

Hendrikus Ataupah, another of the researchers in this collection, wrote that ‘[t]he effect of the conflict between land cultivators and animal breeders has been the disappearance of grasslands in the NTT.’ He called it the ‘tragedy of common access to property.’ The ‘traditional leaders,’ who exercised authority in the villages, also tended to be owners of large animal farms. They resisted any attempt to regulate cattle numbers. Formal regional government bureaucrats, as well as merchants and other influential figures, often owned large animals as well. ‘Therefore,’ Ataupah concluded sombrely, ‘the rivalry and conflict of interests between the land cultivators and owners of animals has further intensified as the numbers in each group grow’ (Barlow et al 1991:226). No doubt this was also the reason that cattle were not part of the planning that, according to the researchers, was so sorely necessary (Barlow et al 1991:85–104). Ataupah had put his finger on the reason for the inaction – it was what Wertheim had called ‘betting on the strong.’ The problem had not been a lack of technical capacity or funding, but a middle class that had hijacked the development agenda. Communist-led Kerala has the highest Human Development Index in India. If Indonesia’s embryonic politics of rural empowerment of the 1950s had been sustained, instead of being abruptly reversed in the mid-1960s, Timor might have had better social statistics too.9

The Chinese

Back in town the new political class and its middle class dependents also had to deal with a threat from above. Most of the private money in town

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9 Another government report concluded that soil erosion in NTT was the worst in South Central Timor and in Kupang district (Pemda NTT 1972:33) – these had been the areas of greatest BTI mobilization over land.
was held by the small but vibrant Chinese commercial middle class. Anti-Chinese measures had been intermittent and largely driven by national politics in the 1950s (Coppel 1983), but they gradually assumed a local dimension as well, and the combination produced a highly public campaign to humiliate the Chinese during the events around 1965.

It started with growing irritation over Chinese middle-class cosmopolitanism. Young musicians jammed every Saturday evening at the clubhouse of the association Chung Hua Chung Hui in downtown Kupang. Hawaiian guitarist Sjors Lie told me his father, agent for the state shipping line KPM, started the Chung Hua Hawaiian Band in 1940. It played at all the town’s most important weddings, including the week-long celebration for that of Raja Alfons Nisnoni. He also played the clarinet and had an enormous gramophone collection ranging from Beethoven to Batak songs. The old (1920s) Chinese school offered the best sports in town – including ping pong and basketball – and put on open air theatre performances in the playground. In the 1930s little indigenous Kupang newspapers like Tjermin Timoer and Tjinta Kebenaran had openly expressed their admiration for successful Chinese entrepreneurs in town. But after independence the ascendant indigenous lower-middle class more and more gave voice to xenophobic sentiments. It became increasingly fashionable to regard Chinese cosmopolitanism with wary eyes and give vent to feelings that native Indonesians had been kept down economically by the Chinese ‘foreigner,’ just as they had been kept down politically by the Dutch and their aristocratic allies. Whatever Cold War geostrategic calculations may have lain behind Jakarta’s anti-Chinese measures, to Kupang’s emerging lower-middle class they were meaningful primarily in terms of protecting their own new-found political dominance. As early as 1950, the news that some remarkably aware Chinese youths in the small Florinese mountain-town of Ruteng had sent a telegram to congratulate Mao Zedong on his new government triggered an anxious reaction in the Florinese Catholic magazine Bentara. Such a dangerous sign of communism among a people who were growing rich on Flores, a reader warned, should stimulate fresh efforts to build indigenous cooperatives that might slow them down. Illogically suggesting the Chinese were both communist and capitalist, he wrote: ‘We will fight this capitalism whose materialism is so damaging to us.’

The military’s social base lay among these small-town parochials. Populist anti-Chinese measures had been part of its policy of ‘uniting with the people’ (manunggal dengan rakyat) for years before 1965 (Mackie et al 1976), and it was to remain so for many years after it (Purdey 2006). Whenever the military took potentially unpopular measures against political rivals, it knew race was a sure-fire button to push with the small-town petit bourgeoisie to short-circuit a backlash. Just when it had successfully struck down a series of regional rebellions, instituted local martial law regimes, and won the dissolution of parliament in the period 1957–1959, the military had energetically implemented a regulation to remove Chinese from the rural and small-town economy. Presidential Instruction No.10/1959 ordered the Chinese out of the interior and into district and provincial capitals, and ‘repatriated’ those Chinese who refused to adopt Indonesian nationality. In NTT the government ordered all small trade to cease for a time, in order to force reluctant Chinese traders to leave the villages for the towns (Sekda TTS [1978]:82f). Villagers could not be blamed for interpreting this measure as a withdrawal of protection from the Chinese. I heard, for example, that a Chinese shopkeeper in the small village of Oihana (between Soë and Oinlasi) had his shop raided and burned by opportunistic villagers before he fled. El Tari, then still a captain, headed the screening committee tasked by his military commander with drawing up lists of Chinese in NTT. According to the local government report quoted above there were, for example, 743 ethnic Chinese in South Central Timor, of whom 199 ‘returned’ to China (they would all have gone – they had already sold their property – were it not for the chronic shortage of shipping).

After the military takeover at the end of 1965 the government was anxious to regain popularity among an indigenous lower-middle class that had seen many of its sons and daughters arbitrarily fired from the bureaucracy. It once more withdrew its protection from the Chinese. The emerging Suharto regime held China responsible for the communist putsch in Jakarta of 1 October 1965 and regarded all ethnic Chinese Indonesians as a disloyal potential fifth column. On 12 January 1966 the military mobilized a large anti-communist student rally in Jakarta that demanded a ban on the PKI, a new cabinet, and lower prices. The latter was a dig at the Chinese shopkeepers, who were popularly thought to be both communists and economic hoarders. Similar rallies were later organized all over the archipelago, also in Kupang in May (Tari 1972:I, 287–90). The

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11 These were the Three People’s Demands, Tri Tuntut Rakyat, abbreviated Tritura.
distinctive characteristic of the ‘intermediate regime’ identified by Kalecki (see Chapter 1) is that it earns its income through political manipulation rather than on the free market. Protecting its interests often involves putting political considerations above those of economic efficiency. Many of Governor El Tari’s early New Order policies should be seen in this light. He sacked many well-trained teachers and other civil servants, but most directly damaging were his anti-Chinese measures. El Tari’s personal involvement in anti-Chinese attacks went back to his membership in the revolutionary Laskar Sunda Kecil, which participated in the so-called Bandung Sea of Fire incident of May 1946 mainly by burning Chinese businesses.\textsuperscript{12} The gravest attacks on Kupang’s Chinese middle class occurred after October 1965. Chinese became targets for humiliation, intimidation and fleecing.

Lt. Col. Abdul Djalal, the Pepelrada commander in Kupang, for a time ordered the shopkeepers to attend daily roll calls in front of the district chief’s office, where he harangued them about Pancasila and told them to lower their prices by 50\%. One Timorese man told me that as a newly married young civil servant these enforced discounts permitted him to furnish his government house comfortably despite the economic crisis. Personal friendships with several Chinese shopkeepers’ sons did not prevent him from taking advantage of the opportunity. Later that year the new Suharto cabinet suggested that all Chinese Indonesians should adopt Indonesian-sounding names. The following year the president banned the public display of Chinese characters, and his cabinet officially replaced the polite designation ‘Tionghoa’ for Chinese with the (in Indonesian derogatory-sounding) term ‘Chinese’ (Cina). The last insult was again the occasion for looting of Chinese shops in Kupang. No one came to their defence. The shops were already nearly empty due to the economic crisis, and in the past the provincial government had begged the Chinese to do what they could to keep up supplies, but not this time. The Dutch priest Boumans wrote in his autobiography that anti-Chinese intimidation had caused economic crisis in Flores, and Kupang would have been the same (Boumans 2005:78–83).

Sjors Lie’s Hawaiian band had accepted an invitation from a leftist organization to perform at an Independence Day celebration in the sports stadium on 17 August 1965. They had played the saccharine ‘Lovely Hula Hands’ and got the audience dancing. Soon after 1 October 1965 this performance led to trouble. Sjors was told to report to the Timor military headquarters (Kodim), just above the old town, at 10 p.m. A lot of other Chinese were there too. Representatives from the anti-communist religious parties Parkindo and Partai Katolik sat on the other side of the table. The Chinese were given a meal, then ordered onto a truck under military guard. They drove all night along the winding road into the interior. Everyone was sure they would be executed, and no doubt they were meant to feel this way. By midday the next day they pulled in to Soë, where they saw Muslim youths trampling on the Chinese flags that the military had years ago required all Chinese to put up in front of their shop-houses. The Chinese were told to get down from the truck and clean up. After that they were driven back to Kupang and released. Seah Liang Sie, the young ethnic Chinese man who had organized the patriotic 17 August Independence Day event, was executed on the same day as PKI organizer Paulus Kanuru.

In April 1966 the new military regime in Kupang seized the two Chinese schools and the clubhouse. This happened all over Indonesia, in retaliation for mainland Chinese condemnation of the killings committed by the military (Tari 1972:I, 289). The clubhouse eventually became the Golkar headquarters, the schools went to the state education department. A number of Chinese were murdered. One of them was Fu Tjien, a keen young basketballer who had operated the stencil machine for the communist broadsheet Pelopor and had sold the broadsheet on the streets.

Chinese religion had to disappear as well. Abdul Djalal might also have been the ‘military officer’ who according to James Fox told the Chinese in Kupang they had two weeks to choose a new religion (Fox 1980:243). Until then there had been only one Chinese Protestant in town, a shopkeeper named Tjoe Tek Giok, who converted in 1955.¹³ Now they flocked to comply. Of the four clan houses in Kupang, only one survives today, empty of worshippers (Figure 36).

¹³ Tjoe Tek Giok (1893–1963) owned Toko Semarang. The Japanese appointed him leader of the Chinese community in Kupang, a position the Dutch confirmed. He was the only Chinese permitted to attend the Dutch sociëtijt (interview with Gordon Dicker, Sydney, 16 December 2009).
Once the social hierarchy had been firmly established, the same ‘Ali Baba’ arrangements simply continued to enrich both Chinese entrepreneurs and indigenous operators alike at the expense of the state budget. Niti Susanto came to Kupang from Soë with his father Pieter Nerius (Ong Teo Piet) as a small child in 1952 (Adam et al 1997:108) (see Chapter 8). Their Toko Piet soon became as essential to the local economy as Tjong Koen Siong’s had been before the war. It sold bicycles to the general public, and imported fuel, rice, and building materials for the government through inflated Ali Baba arrangements. In January 1966 the military encouraged looters to clean out the shop completely. Niti Susanto had just taken it over, merely 15 years old. The threat of violence was so serious that the Florinese Catholic Party activist Anton Langoday offered the family protective shelter. But the business survived. It supplied Governor El Tari and then Governor Ben Mboi with fuel and other essentials. Today it retails motorcycles and marine equipment, runs a small airline, has built an airport, and still sells petrol. Niti Susanto still sits in his poorly lit back office with a calculator and no computer, but takes his annual holidays in Europe.
Kupang became a more indigenous, less ethnically Chinese town. In 1930 ethnic Chinese made up 13% of the town’s 7,000 inhabitants (see Chapter 4). Immediately after the war Chinese shops had expanded up the hill along the new shopping street of Kuanino. An aerial photograph taken in the mid-1950s shows that the vast Chinese cemetery on the southern side of town was actually inhibiting the growth of the town.14 But once Kupang became the provincial capital in 1959 the huge influx of indigenous people from elsewhere in NTT overwhelmed any increase in the ethnic Chinese population. By 1971 they made up only 3% of Kupang city’s population of 44,800 (Kantor Sensus NTT 1971:55). Chinese symbols began to retreat from Kupang’s town centre in the early 1960s. The first great post-war builder in Kupang, Lt. Col. Paikun, moved the Chinese cemetery in 1963. A few years later the town’s tallest building arose in the same space, a four-storey state bank. Across the road stood the official residence of Governor El Tari. It had beautiful views over the ocean, and El Tari loved it there, but disturbed Chinese ghosts made the place for the average Kupang inhabitant ‘a sacred place with powerful forces. Most people did not dare to go there.’ Doko (1982:30–1), who described this evocative scene as part of an imagined drive around the town with a foreign visitor, saw more new than old along the way. The bombed-out Dutch government buildings near the harbour had been replaced in the 1950s and ‘60s. In the old part of town the Chinese-owned Bioskop Raya movie theatre still screened Kung Fu movies for its traditional clientele. But a brand-new Kupang Theatre further up the hill, owned by Umar Baktir of Arab descent, now catered for much larger Indonesian audiences. They sat in air-conditioned comfort and preferred Indonesian movies, especially on religion.

Internal Consolidation

Action against outsiders – the poor, the Chinese – had helped unify the indigenous middle class, but more was necessary to create the long-lasting support the new regime in Jakarta saw as essential. Even under the New Order, associational modalities of power were always more important than instrumental ones in holding Indonesia together. An ideological newspeak to control dissidence within the middle class was one requirement. It could only be established by deploying locally legitimate

14 It is shown on Parera’s sketch map for 1946 (see Figure 22), and Ormeling (1956:30–41) has an aerial photograph.
authority. More tangible inducements for people to act like loyalists, even if they felt like rebels, were money and jobs.

Enforcing a newspeak was not difficult, given the complicity of most of its spiritual and political leaders in the pogroms. If Captain Manafe’s Team Kempen Pembantu Pelaksana Kopkamtibda had adopted a defensive tone among the poor, his message enjoyed a warm reception among their fellows in Kupang’s middle class. Its stock phrases soon became commonplaces in all out-loud discourse from urban opinion makers – the PKI death lists, the PKI’s negativity towards God and government, indeed towards all humanity. It soon became possible to proclaim in one breath both that the PKI had been historically insignificant in NTT thanks to the population’s religiosity, and that those who had resisted this apparently insignificant force were heroes (Liliweri et al 1984:86f). The murders became a taboo, even at the closed history seminar within Kupang’s state university, as we saw in Chapter 3.

We know of only one place in NTT where guilty finger-pointing of the kind Kopkamtib had feared actually did take place within the urban establishment, albeit muted. The killings in the Sikka district of Flores had been largely rural and ethnic rather than anti-communist. One priest in this intensely Catholic society spoke out against them at the time, and some active laymen had timorously lobbied Jakarta to stop them. That seemed to be the end of it, but in 1974 one of the local elites who had approved the killing lists committed an account to paper of the lead-up to the murders that did not fit the propaganda clichés (Anonymous 1974). After circulating in photocopied form for decades, it is now about to be published. This remarkable document, written in the third person, exculpates no one and culminates in the confession that at the crucial moment the participants had ‘abandoned Catholic principles’ (p75–6). It uses archival sources to build a detailed history of elite factionalism in the little town of Maumere from the early 1950s to the early 1970s. Were it not for rare gems such as this, even the worst events in human history can be forgotten within the span of a lifetime.

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15 Personal communication, John Prior, Maumere, June 2010.
16 Too complicated to unravel here (but see Van Klinken 2013b), it starts with families from old local kingdoms battling over the rents extracted from various branches of the local state, and ends with two broad coalitional factions aligned with opposing power centres in Jakarta. The local establishment (including the church) lines up with the military, while the ethnic challengers line up with the secular political parties PNI and PKI. At least 800 rural clients on the latter side are thought to have died in 1965/66. Careers opened up for the former, who hid their twinges of guilt.
Money and jobs as the price put upon the loyalty of those who had been on the right side of the Suharto coup were the final indispensable element. The dominance of Kupang’s new indigenous middle class had been due to state intervention in the market (see Chapter 8). Post-colonial anti-capitalist ideology had bought Jakarta chunks of influence in the provinces. Economists call the deliberate creation of rents to ensure political stability ‘political transfer rents’ (Khan and Jomo K.S. 2000). When taken to the extremes as in the early 1960s, they paralyzed the economy and fuelled discord. In December 1965 the value of the hugely inflated rupiah was adjusted by making a Rp 1,000 note worth just one rupiah. The creeping military coup of those same months quickly ended mass politics, but not the need to continue lubricating the machinery. On the contrary, the only way the men known mainly for their ruthlessness could ensure middle class support in far-flung regions was to offer more attractive incentives than their predecessors had done. Their own soldiers were part of that middle class – they all belonged to local families. The price tag on their loyalty had risen quickly. Soldiers now rapidly took over existing channels of state finance. The story of Major Is Tibuludji and his state-funded Fajar Ternak cattle-cum-fuel-cum-sandalwood business was told in Chapter 8. Nearly every subdistrict in NTT had a branch of the Livestock Cooperative, where it was accompanied with the usual muffled complaints about cheating and factional politicization. (The Rote administration, for example, refused to deal with them because of their secretive book-keeping practices – Heo 1972:71). Numerous other cooperatives graced local economies, supplying subsidized goods to various collectivities of civil servants and regulating markets for important export products. Thanks to government subsidies, Kupang was only about 25% more expensive to live in than the average city in Indonesia (Perdagangan 1971).

Jakarta initially had to scrape the bottom of its coffers for funds, but after 1973 the oil boom made it much easier (Booth 1992). The so-called Presidential Instruction disbursement (Instruksi Presiden, Inpres) was the major instrument to relieve poverty by stimulating development. Eastern Indonesia received proportionately more central government subsidies than provinces in core areas (Ravallion 1988). But the biggest grants did not go to the poorest provinces, and it seems political loyalty was at least as important a consideration. The biggest grants were going to places whose urban middle classes were dominated by civil servants, including NTT.17

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17 By my calculation there exists a high correlation (0.64) between the per capita Inpres grant by province for 1985 and the proportion of the urban (rather, non-agricultural) working population that were civil servants in 1990 (derived from BPS 1990).
These were frontier provinces with little industry, and where the state had put down a strong footprint only in the previous 50 years or so. Local state elites were able to pressure Jakarta into giving them preferential treatment even if that made little economic sense.\footnote{Provinces with a very high ‘preference weight’ were Bengkulu, Central Kalimantan, East Kalimantan (not particularly poor), Maluku and Irian Jaya. In the second rank were Aceh, Riau, Jambi, West and East Nusa Tenggara, West Kalimantan, North Sulawesi, and Central Sulawesi. Southeast Sulawesi, West Sumatra and South Kalimantan were almost in the same category. Regionalist activism – including more or less veiled threats of secession – was strong in these state-dependent provinces in the 1950s and also around 1998. At the bottom were the Javanese provinces and Jakarta, and Lampung (Ravallion 1988: Table I).}

State resources from Jakarta were spent disproportionately on the small urban middle class. Of the NTT provincial government’s income of Rp 20.5 billion in 1979/80, 89% came as transfers from Jakarta (Barlow et al 1991:262–3). By 1986 government accounted for 19.5% of the gross regional domestic product (GRDP), nearly double what it had been a decade earlier and now second only to agriculture. The trend of rapid growth in government had been noted since early in the New Order (Tim Penyusun Repelita ke II NTT 1972:4). The government share in GRDP had doubled from 2.5% to 5.8% in the four years between 1967 and 1971, while agriculture declined from 72% to 67%. (Trade stayed the same at 17–18%.) This would be good if the money benefitted the whole population equally, but at least 68% and more likely 86% of the government budget was spent on salaries and pensions for civil servants. Estimated at 4.5% of the provincial working population in 1990 and less before that (BPS 1990), civil servants therefore received more than three times their fair share of government expenditure (Barlow et al 1991:243–4). The share of agriculture in the provincial GRDP, meanwhile, had declined further from 69.1% in 1975 to 53.9% by 1986, even though 81.5% of the population still said in 1990 that their main income came from that sector (BPS 1990). The lion’s share of the agricultural GRDP came not from food crops but from livestock and smallholder tree crops for export, such as coffee and cocoa, both controlled by better-off farmers and townsfolk.

A skewed distribution of household income was the result. In town the biggest group – 53.8% – earned over Rp 200,000 a month, whereas in the country the biggest group – 41.6% – earned just Rp 50–100,000 (Barlow et al 1991:258). Compared with urban-rural inequalities around the more industrialized cities of Java this was not dramatic, but the gap was widening and it was enough to underscore the class differences that underlay the town’s growth.
Relations with the less fortunate were idealized in philanthropic images. Benedictus Mboi, NTT governor in 1978–1988, visualized society as a series of concentric circles, like a medieval cosmos kept in motion by higher powers. In the inner circle were ‘the people,’ shaded and passive. Surrounding this, another circle was marked ‘government and elite who empathize with the suffering people.’ Beyond that were higher circles marked ‘resources such as law, technology, natural and human resources,’ and finally the deity – ‘resource management’ (Mboi and edited by Basri K. 2009:82). The next governor built the gigantic bronze Social Responsibility Statue (Patung Kepedulian) that still stands at a major intersection in Kupang. A ‘rich man,’ tie and business suit fluttering energetically, is lifting up a ‘poor man’ whose limbs flail like a paralytic (Soh and Indrayana 2008:146). Locals joke the bronze Good Samaritan is actually the governor moving the peasant out of his way (Campbell-Nelson 1993). Elitism has deep roots in Kupang's postcolonial middle class psyche. But in the late colonial years they at least thought of themselves as vanguard intellectuals when one of them wrote: 'The intellectuals give leadership to the impoverished people or the masses. Meanwhile the masses with the strength of their bodies, with their work, give sustenance to the intellectuals' (see Chapter 5). Now the masses had lost all their agency and understood only force. A 1973 provincial government forward planning document breezily dismissed the bulk of its citizens as 'feudalistic, followers, apathetic, and irrational.' The hope of the future lay with 'leadership cadres who are honest, capable, rational, programme-oriented and who understand the region.' Their task was to bring about 'a change of mental attitude by means of persuasion, stimulation, and if necessary by force' (Pemda NTT 1973:81, 108, 110).

**Middle Indonesia Today**

The introduction to this book promised to investigate what holds Indonesia together. This led it to develop a fresh curiosity about the spatial dimension to the study of power in Indonesia, which opened new perspectives on the apparently constitutive role that middle classes in provincial towns play in the nation as a whole. The book then set out to investigate this claim by examining the history of state formation within and around one particular town over the five decades in which Indonesia was most vigorously under construction. Associational modalities of power (to use John Allen's phrase) played a more significant role in this
history than did the more conventional instrumental ones. The book then went on to reconstruct a process of what might be called mutual constitution, of Kupang’s urban community and in particular its middle classes on the one hand, and the Indonesian state in this region on the other, roughly between 1930 and 1986. Now is the time to take stock of the project. What difference does this history make to the way we think about Indonesia today? What have we learned about the way power operates in this social zone Middle Indonesia?

At first glance the history makes little difference today. The story of poverty and unrest in the immediate post-war years at the heart of this book appears to be of historical interest only. Kupang’s population has continued to grow, reaching around 340,000 in 2010 (BPS Kota Kupang 2011:47). Healthy, well-dressed young men and women zigzag their new motorcycles-on-credit through clogged streets lined with well-stocked stores (which are however still owned by Chinese entrepreneurs). More people come and go by air from Penfui airport than by passenger ship from the 1960s-era harbour at Tenau. Teenagers who live in villages three hours’ drive into the hills of Timor check Facebook accounts on their smartphones (even if the road remains bad). Once Suharto resigned in 1998, soldiers disappeared from Kupang’s formal politics as well. Numerous elections since then have allowed the people to choose who will be their local and national representatives, their successive presidents and governors.

Kupang’s prosperity is part of a worldwide trend, in which local politics do not appear to be particularly constitutive. Whether a nation’s politics are centralist or federalist, socialist or capitalist, democratic or authoritarian, the twentieth century has seen poverty decline all over the world. Only the most rabidly isolationist regimes and those struck by HIV/AIDS have not shared in it.19 For Indonesia too, it would have been possible to tell this story of growing welfare by describing, not the unevenness of space but its uniform shrinkage as one new technology after another washed across the globe. The increased mobility as mass transport costs plummeted, the long-distance coordination facilitated by the adoption of clocks and watches, the rush of new communication and information technologies, the promiscuous power of new techniques of planning and organization greedily appropriated by armies, political parties and the

religious alike. Apparently without the need for local politics, they brought increased welfare levels to all parts of Indonesia, especially after the end of the period that this book describes.

Yet unevenness persists in the social landscape of Kupang and environs. Only a few years ago the national *Tempo* magazine began its report on malnutrition in the country with this story:

The girl was lying frail with an empty gaze. Her abdomen was bloated and her ribs protruded. Despite her pre-adolescent age, she weighed only 10 kilograms. The physician in charge diagnosed Kristin Lubalu, the girl, with *busung lapar*. The affliction was worsened by tuberculosis, which also consumed her. ‘I’m the second of three siblings,’ she said as *Tempo* saw her at the Bhayangkara Hospital, Kupang, East Nusa Tenggara (NTT). Kristin’s dwelling is always inundated in the wet season and scorched in the dry season. ‘Our house has an earth floor and an iron-sheet roof,’ she added. Suddenly Kristin gagged. She wept and endured pain before vomiting. A yellow liquid poured from her mouth. She tried to stand from time to time but failed. Her skinny legs were unable to support her distended stomach.20

NTT accounted for more than a third of the nation’s deaths due to malnutrition in that year. All of NTT’s districts except the city of Kupang are officially classified as regions of extreme poverty (*daerah tertinggal*), the highest proportion among all the provinces of Indonesia.21 Intra-rural, intra-urban, and between urban-rural inequalities remained relatively high in NTT considering it has no industry (Akita and Lukman 1999). Inequality has a strong spatial component – as urbanization increases, so does inequality. It will continue to increase at least for a time, if the Kuznets Curve is correct, which predicts inequality will rise while the economy develops and will only decline once a certain average income has been reached. While the curve remains a controversial expectation (Cameron 2002), Akita and Lukman used it to estimate that Indonesia as a whole will not reach that peak until 53.2% of its households are urban. If now, as feared by some economists who think the New Order at least got its economic policy right, the revival of democracy results in more 1960s style rent-seeking behaviour and less growth (Timmer 2004), the revenge of the nation’s spatiality will be complete.

Inequality drives the social motor of a society. Subnational politics are still being produced by the same spatialized social divisions that first

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20 ‘We only eat porridge and salt,’ *Tempo*, 21–27 June 2005.

21 [http://www.kemenegpdt.go.id/hal/300027/i83-kab-daerah-tertinggal](http://www.kemenegpdt.go.id/hal/300027/i83-kab-daerah-tertinggal) (accessed 10 August 2013). Figures for Papua are also very high.
produced those politics in the 1950s and ‘60s. Examples abound in Sylvia Tidey’s (2012) recent ethnographic dissertation on the bureaucracy in Kupang. Corruption scandals are almost as loud today as they were when Subronto K. Atmodjo composed his mocking ‘Three Town Devils’ song in 1965, while the amounts involved are far larger. Bureaucratic jobbery still dominates the promises on local electoral hustings, but the socially embedded ethnic favouritism that appears to everyone to rule the actual distribution of jobs (Dagang 2004) inevitably fuels discontent after the elections, as it has done since the formation of the Timorsch Verbond in the 1930s. Both the promises and the discontent arise from a middle class that still works largely for the state, and still by the same loose rules that favour the strong. The localism that led Christian youths to trash Muslim fishers’ houses in the clashes of November 1998 resembled the riotous behaviour towards Javanese at the time of the 1957 Permesta movement, and it still arises from a feeling that turf needs to be defended against outsiders. The talk of new districts and provinces remains as interesting to the urban political class in NTT today as it was when NTT was carved out of Nusa Tenggara in 1958. The middle class, which today sets tastes, rules of prestige, and agendas for social change, was born in that period. The one difference is that the battle for dominance that it fought so bloodily in the mid-1960s has never had to be fought again. In short, social, economic and political graininess, always with a spatial dimension, continues to defy the homogenizing effects of technical innovations. Nor should we assume that graininess is slowly disappearing. Much globalization talk today suggests that it is, but then so did much modernization talk in the 1950s and ‘60s. The complex reality can only be understood by means of spatially-sensitive historical and ethnographic fieldwork.

Ultimately the question of the persistence or otherwise of social unevenness is one of power, and not of naturalized processes of differentiation or homogenization arising from topography or technical innovation. What is the nature of that power? Much has been made in this book of notions of associational power. It brings large numbers of people spread over wide areas into the picture in a way that more elitist ideas of instrumental power focusing on central players cannot. At first, brokerage was a key mechanism for bringing different groups of people together around a common national project even where their historical experiences had very little in common. The total amount of social capital in a society is increased by cosmopolitan individuals like I.H. Doko, E.R. Herewila and Sam Piry who travelled between one place and another. The town and its small educated middle class functioned as a node in the spread of
innovative new ideas. Particularly the progressive political parties of the late 1950s and early 1960s bridged divides – between town and country, rich and poor and notably between peasants and the middle class. Their emancipatory agendas spoke to oppressive hierarchies created in the late colonial process of state formation, and thus generated substantial new forms of power. Even the inherently authoritarian armed forces, churches and bureaucrats deployed ‘soft’ modalities of power to win influence. This part of the story shows that the image of the ‘generative’ town that inspired John Mellor (1976) and Michael Lipton (1977) to propose alternatives to urban bias was not some unattainable Gandhian idealism. Even today it still has the power to inspire young citizens in and around Indonesia’s provincial towns to recover that role for their town. They can be encouraged by the suggestion that, as towns grow in size, their civil societies similarly grow in maturity. Perhaps the savagery that marked Kupang’s conflicts, particularly in the mid-1960s, partly reflected the destructive explosions of violence that typically take place in societies with rather closed social structures (Coser 1956).

Any more than the poverty of the 1950s and ’60s, however, the episode of immense violence that stands at the heart of this book cannot be dismissed as a relic of a now-relevant past. It was in part produced by the social divisions that had grown sharper before it, and helped make them even sharper afterwards. In the second half of the book, the storyline of associational power that was developed in the first half experiences considerable erosion. Instead of crossing social divides, the urban social movements of the second half of the book widened them. Key actors in Jakarta abandoned soft modalities of power and adopted instrumental ones that increased conflict and reduced social capital. The colonial policy of ‘betting on the strong’ was back, this time focused on the bureaucratic middle class in town rather than on the feudal rajas in their rural domains. The story of nationally constitutive power became less integrative than it had initially appeared to be. Mechanisms that increased social ‘graininess’ rather than reduce it through political means gained strength. Sharpened local divisions were caused by factionalism in Jakarta, and by the rapidity with which new state institutions were introduced into an almost feudal rurality. But at the local level – and this is the level that for local people is the most real – the most divisive mechanism was class exploitation. The sharpest division was between the urban indigenous bureaucratic middle class and the rest. The other salient social divisions – especially the ethnic and religious ones so characteristic of provincial society – rarely challenged the overarching class divide.
At the top stood the political class that defined the agenda for action. It was they who were to gain the most from the ‘white collar crime’ in which they were engaged. But this elite had a large constituency, a political public (as Herbert Feith called them, 2007 [1962]:109–13) of ordinary civil servants of many kinds. Seen from a national level they belonged to a lower-middle class, but their access to the resources of the state differed in degree rather than in kind from that of their superiors. They were ‘bound’ (terikat) to the state in ways the ‘free people’ (orang bebas) or the ‘mountain people’ (orang gunung) were not. By deliberately informalizing state rules they created a Gramscian civil society in which state and middle class society were embedded in each other (Hedman 2006).

They ‘held Indonesia together’ on their own terms. Towards the poor, these have been partly the terms of terror – which is a kind of abject integration of the kind produced by domestic violence, slavery, or racism. Like other state resources, terror too is more effective when it is socially embedded. But largely they are the terms of clientelism, which respects authority and terror. The patronage democracy that characterizes provincial politics (Van Klinken 2009b, Simandjuntak 2010) is their invention. Patronage helps temper inequalities, but does not empower. Towards the powerful in Jakarta, they are the terms of rent-seeking and economic stagnation. From that side, Middle Indonesia experiences neoliberal reform and globalization as a threat.

That so many features of the social landscape in a provincial town today can be traced to the process of state formation over half a century ago suggests Middle Indonesia has some underlying reality. Yet the historical inelasticity of Middle Indonesia should not be exaggerated either. Economic and cultural globalization, or at least a regional variant on it centred in East Asia, is gradually undermining the conservative bastions of Middle Indonesia. Nor need we exaggerate the oppressive aspects of Middle Indonesia. Despite the unexhumed mass graves that surround the towns, Middle Indonesia offers a homeliness of familiar places and faces, and even some kind of emancipatory potential rooted in narratives of ‘local wisdom’ that resists bossy outsiders. Its residents are proud to belong. The challenge for them now is to rediscover the larger emancipatory potential that lies hidden in the history of Middle Indonesia’s younger years, when Hannah Arendt’s ‘power to’ get things done together had a tangible reality. The current phase of democracy and economic growth is their best opportunity in decades. Reformasi has made possible a different coalition of interests from that of the New Order. The extent to which that can improve life for all and reduce the legacy of social polarization
left by the New Order in Kupang and its hinterland remains as yet an open question. The possibilities certainly do extend to reaching once again across class boundaries to those who, as Herewila put it, ‘from birth [...] live and breathe and are educated in aristocracy and fascism,’ so together they can make ‘a special leap up.’