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## Rebellions or factionalism?

### Timorese forms of resistance in an early colonial context, 1650-1769

#### *Introduction*

The history of Timor in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is interspersed with conflicts where indigenous groups opposed polities with a partly European background.<sup>1</sup> In Western historiography such conflicts are usually portrayed as rebellions against a given European colonial apparatus (Morais 1934; Leitão 1952; Boxer 1968). A closer look, however, reveals these events to be quite complex affairs, which raises questions about the nature of acts of rebellion and colonial rule. Are we dealing with a one-sided anti-colonial resistance, or is there more to the picture?

Sartono Kartodirdjo (1991:290) has identified a number of concepts to serve as an analytical framework for understanding the dynamics of peasant rebellions in low-technology societies. These concepts include 1. mythologies, religious beliefs and ideologies, 2. leadership and the kind of authority it possesses, 3. the mobilization system including the type of leader-follower relationship, 4. organizational structure, and 5. the rationale behind the action. Kartodirdjo emphasizes the segmented, largely autonomous nature of Indonesian rural societies, horizontally as well as vertically. The social order was perceived as fixed, and changes were seen as a menace to that order. In times of change, peasant communities looked for a point of orientation that could restore the traditional order. By implication, peasant reactions were usually traditionalistic, conservative and restorative. Religiously oriented leadership was often decisive in rebel movements.

Kartodirdjo draws his observations primarily from nineteenth and twentieth-century Java, with a tradition of state hierarchy and considerable Dutch

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<sup>1</sup> The completion of this article was made possible by funding from the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet) and an affiliated fellowship at the International Institute for Asian Studies, Leiden. I would also like to thank two anonymous referees who gave valuable advice and criticism on an earlier version.

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resources for colonial supervision and exploitation. His analytical questions are relevant for Timor, but at the same time it must be stressed that we are dealing here with a politically fragmented society with a much lower level of technological sophistication than the peoples that came to visit it.

The picture is complicated by three further circumstances. First, Timor's attraction to foreign groups was initially focused on one single trading item, the sandalwood that brought the island in contact with the currents of world trade. Second, the colonial presence started at a comparatively early stage – Portuguese commercial interests are documented from the 1520s, while colonial representatives resided on the island from the mid-seventeenth century. Colonialism thus existed uninterruptedly, although the forms varied, for more than three (in a sense, four) centuries – in spite of the relative inaccessibility that followed from geographical and climatic factors. Third, there were, from the start, not one but two colonial powers, the Netherlands and Portugal, vying for power and influence on Timor. To make matters even more complicated, the Portuguese were divided into a highly localized faction, the Topasses (or 'Black Portuguese', or Larantuqueiros) and a royalist faction, the 'White Portuguese'.<sup>2</sup> There is no other example in Southeast Asian history of two colonial powers acting as rival neighbours for such a long time. This circumstance makes Timor very interesting for a historical case study, not least when we look at the response of local Timorese groups to foreign domination.

The aim of this article is to study the forms of conflict on Timor conventionally termed rebellions – acts of warfare directed against the Dutch and Portuguese establishments. I thereby scrutinize factors of discontent and cooperation in Timorese relations with the respective colonial groups, and identify indigenous ideologies, leadership and organization underpinning the movements. It is argued here that the conflicts cannot be seen as simply 'anti-colonial', but that they must be regarded in a broader perspective of interaction between indigenous groups and outsiders. The circumstances prompt questions of how Timorese groups were able to use the strong rivalries between foreign powers in order to advance their own aims and ambitions. Also, the activities of colonial (external) groups must be assessed in light of local preconditions as well as their colonial organizations in Asia as a whole.

The article roughly covers the years 1650-1769, though I discuss certain features before and after these dates. It covers the time span from the establishment of a Dutch and Portuguese colonial apparatus to the founding of Dili as a Portuguese administrative centre. With the latter event, a rough division of colonial influence was achieved, after 120 years of often intense rivalries between the *Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (VOC, Dutch East India

<sup>2</sup> In this article I use the terms Black Portuguese and Topasses as synonyms. The word Topass was also used in India, Malacca and Batavia for Eurasians and native Christians with a Portuguese cultural background (Boxer 1947:1).

Company), the White Portuguese, and the Topasses. A Dutch-Portuguese rivalry persisted later, but was usually (though not always) handled by diplomatic means. A thorough implementation of colonial rule on Timor only commenced in the early twentieth century. However, bureaucratic, technological and infrastructural developments in the nineteenth century left room for less localism on the part of colonial outposts, at the same time making them less vulnerable.<sup>3</sup> The period up to the late eighteenth century may therefore with some justification be termed 'early colonial'.

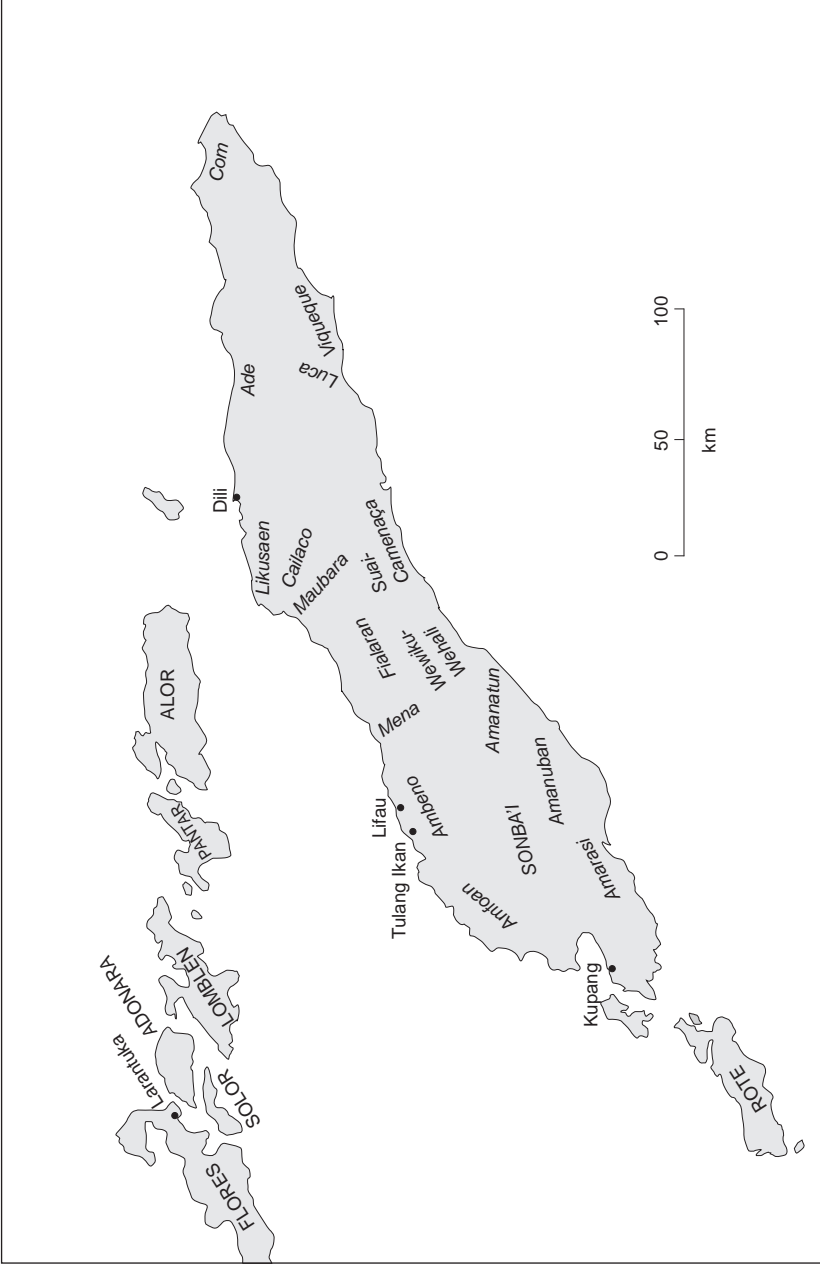
### *Colonial interests in the Timor area*

Timor is characterized by relative cultural isolation. The island is difficult to reach for sailing craft during most of the year, and it has few if any good harbours (De Roever 2002:80-96). During the easterly monsoon it could hardly be reached at all from the west, and trade had to be conducted within limited periods of time – VOC records often mention Chinese traders arriving from Batavia to Kupang in March and going back in April. Being geographically off-limits from the main cultural currents of the archipelago, Timor was not noticeably influenced by either Indian culture or Islam. Although Christian missionaries were at work as early as about 1556, the islanders largely continued to practise animist beliefs up to the twentieth century.

In spite of its inaccessible location, aggravated by a dry and hot climate, Timor was high on the list of places coveted by early European seafarers. The keyword here is sandalwood (in Malay, *cendana*), which was legendary for its pleasant smell and its suitability for the production of handicrafts (Ormeling 1956:92-103; De Roever 2002). This commodity had been known in the West since antiquity, but the best kind was found to grow in large quantities on Timor; alternative sources of this wood, such as Sulawesi and Sumba, turned out to be disappointing. For the Chinese, Timorese sandalwood had a religious value because of being used for incense in temples. It was known in China since at least the Song dynasty (960-1279), and the prices of this commodity were high in the late Ming dynasty (1368-1644), at a time when European rivalries in maritime Southeast Asia intensified. Early enthusiastic travel reports had it that Timor was completely covered with sandalwood forests. Though these reports were wildly exaggerated, they did not diminish the lure of this potentially lucrative source of wealth.

Since the early sixteenth century the Portuguese in Asia were formally organized in the Estado da Índia, headed by the Viceroy of Goa. This was, however, by no means an 'empire' but rather a decentralized cooperation

<sup>3</sup> The rebellions against Portuguese rule in the period 1847-1913 are extensively treated in a well-researched monograph, Pelissier 1996. For the same period, see also Schlicher 1996.



Map 1. Timor, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries

which actually allowed authority to be divided among commanders, committees and clerics, who headed the various possessions (Winius 2002:106). Their early establishment in the fabled Spice Islands from 1513 gave rise to a category of entrepreneurs who acted independently of the Estado. By 1523 individual Portuguese are known to have traded in Timorese sandalwood, and by the 1550s the traders were established on Solor, due to the difficulties of reaching Timor itself from the outside (Newitt 2005:122; Leitão 1948:55-7). Dominican priests arrived from Malacca in 1562, and led the construction of a fort four years later (De Matos 1974a:42-4). Thus, missionary activities were not just a matter of religion, but served as an organizational force for political and economic ventures as well. After Solor had fallen to the Dutch enemy in 1613, the community found a stronghold in Larantuka in easternmost Flores, still under the strong influence of the Dominicans.

In this environment a mixed population with a Portuguese-Catholic identity emerged in the late sixteenth century. Since very few Portuguese women ventured to travel the Asian route – mortality was quite high on the lengthy sea voyages – intermarriage with local women was essential to breeding a viable and loyal Catholic community in the Asian possessions of Portugal (Van Veen 2000:14-7). Such mestizo populations were an essential and ubiquitous part of Portuguese Asia. At the same time they were looked down upon by European-born Portuguese, something that may help to explain later conflicts (Subrahmanyam 1993:220). To this group were added people from other Portuguese possessions around the Indian Ocean, with no European ancestry, and later on deserters from the VOC. The community is variously known as Topasses, Black Portuguese, or Larantuqueiros. The culture that they developed was a warlike one, and their success in expanding their influence was facilitated by their knowledge of firearms (Boxer 1947).

This community was initially dependent on contacts with the Portuguese posts in Malacca and Maluku. However, in 1605-1641 these posts were lost to the VOC, who would seriously cripple the Estado da Índia up to 1663. In an interesting paradox of history, the localized Portuguese group in Larantuka was able to expand and prosper at precisely the same time. By 1623, according to the Dutch, they dominated the ports on Timor's north coast. Ships from Macao, Manila and Malacca, using Makassar as a stop-over, arrived on the shores of Timor. Apart from sandalwood, they purchased commodities such as beeswax and slaves (*Generale missiven* 1960:142, 226). In 1641-1642 the Portuguese intervened in the affairs of West and Central Timor, and from the 1650s the main colonial officer, the *capitão mor*, began to reside part of the time in Lifau on the north coast. By this time, large areas of Timor had been drawn into the Portuguese network. The localization of the Topass community on Timorese soil is indicated in a Dutch letter from 1659:

All the Portuguese are about to come over from Larantuka to Timor with their families, to settle there and conduct their trade [...]. First, the *capitão mor* at Lifau has got 200 people with 20 of our Dutch [renegades] who are still alive. In Amakono there is a company of 30 men; in the *negry* [settlement or land] of Amanuban, two companies each with 20, making 40 men; in Amarasi 30 in one company; in Amfo'an (alias Snick-Snack) there is only a cleric. Together, that makes 300 men. Among these are few whites and mestizos, but mostly blacks with shotguns.<sup>4</sup>

Several factors underpinned this expansion. One was the lack of a clear Dutch strategy for Timor affairs. After 1613 the Dutch had the chance to make a definite end to the Portuguese influence, but the chance was missed due to Dutch commitments in other parts of the archipelago. The Portuguese were thus given an opportunity to recover and establish themselves in Timorese waters. It was not until 1653 that the VOC belatedly took the step of establishing a settlement at Kupang in the far west of Timor. But by then it was too late. The Portuguese could not be dislodged as elements of Catholic culture, and Portuguese forms of trade had been firmly established (De Roever 2002:289-91). Another factor was the role of Macao in South China, which remained in Portuguese hands and served as an important lifeline for the Larantuka-Timor community. When the important Japanese market was closed to Macao merchants in 1639, interest in the Timorese sandalwood trade increased sharply (De Matos 1974a:176). Ships from Macao would pick up loads of sandalwood logs and sell them to their eager Chinese customers at a good profit. In 1613, sandalwood purchased for 5 reals per *pikul* (62.5 kg) on Timor would eventually go for 40 reals per *pikul* in China (Subrahmanyam 1993:209; De Roever 2002:155).

A further factor, and a decisive one, is the ability of the localized 'Portuguese' group to approach Timorese society, a question I return to below. The relations between the localized community and the Estado da Índia were not visibly strained up to the 1660s, and the Viceroy in Goa had few means to direct the developments in the Larantuka-Timor area. However, in the 1660s-1680s the Estado da Índia underwent a series of reforms – political, economic, military and religious – which contributed to a gradual stabilization of their reduced possessions in Asia (Ames 2000:14). The immediate military threat from the Dutch ended with a peace agreement concluded in 1661 and made public in 1663. Diplomatic overtures to England, culminating in the Methuen treaties of 1703, ensured the official benevolence of the leading Western sea power. In line with this stabilization, Goa made attempts to install its own colonial officials in Larantuka and Timor in 1669-1670, 1690 and 1696-1697. These attempts were however resisted by part of the local community, and each ended in a fiasco. From 1664 the lay leadership of the Topasses was appropriated by two families, Hornay and Da Costa, who would not tolerate being directed from

<sup>4</sup> VOC 1229 (1659), f. 865a, in: Nationaal Archief (NA, National Archives), The Hague, De archieven van de Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie (1602-1795), nummer toegang 1.04.02.

the outside. It was only in 1702 that a Goa-appointed governor was able to gain a somewhat precarious foothold in Lifau (Boxer 1968:183-4).

From 1602, the VOC systematically explored virtually all possibilities of trade east of the Cape. Basically a trading company, the VOC was led by the circumstances to expand its political powers in the course of the seventeenth century. It goes without saying that the Dutch were attracted by the good prices that sandalwood fetched on the Chinese market. The sandalwood trade also attracted Chinese merchants to Batavia. For these reasons the VOC cast their eyes on Timor from the early seventeenth century. The conquest of Solor in 1613 left the road open to Timor's riches (De Roever 2002:121-6). The Dutchmen quickly made a few contracts with native rajas and even provided the rajas with axes with which their subjects were to fell the valuable trees. The undertaking turned out to be half-hearted, however, and the Dutch fort on Solor was deserted for long periods. On political-defensive grounds it was reoccupied in 1646, since the Dutch feared that the Portuguese might establish a 'second Malacca' there. Renewed Portuguese military activity on Timor starting in 1649 led the Company to finally establish a post in Kupang, in the far west of the island, in 1653 (De Roever 2002:243-55).

The Dutch were warmly welcomed by the local raja of Kupang, and they soon made contracts with rajas of the Atoni people, who had turned against the Portuguese. Attempts to expand the Dutch area of influence ended in a series of defeats, however, in 1655, 1656 and 1658. Dutch influence up to 1749 was mainly restricted to the area around Kupang Bay, from where moreover the coveted sandalwood was almost inaccessible. Kupang remained a small settlement, initially settled by Company soldiers and employees; in 1667 their number was 157.<sup>5</sup> Later the town had a mixed population including Chinese merchants, *mardijkers* (Christian subjects of colour), and white and mestizo *burgers*. Preserved local *Dagregisters* show that VOC ships in times of peace frequented Lifau, the Topass stronghold Tulang Ikan, Rote in eastern Flores, and the Solor and Alor groups. Around Kupang a number of subordinate Timorese allies resided as a cordon sanitaire. Together with Rote, Sawu, eastern Solor, and parts of Adonara, they formed a Company-led network of alliances set down in contracts. The Dutch dependencies were threatened several times by incursions of Portuguese clients, but the fort and town were never actually attacked.

From Batavia's point of view Kupang was hardly profitable.<sup>6</sup> Still, the town was considered to have strategic importance. Governor-General Joan Maetsuyker argued in 1659 that Kupang must be maintained because of Timor's

<sup>5</sup> VOC 1264 (1667), f. 72b, in: NA, 1.04.02.

<sup>6</sup> The various published *Generale missieven*, issued by Batavia and sent to the Seventeen Gentlemen (the VOC board of directors) in the Netherlands, give the costs and benefits of the VOC strongholds year by year. Kupang almost always shows a loss, financially, in the second half of the seventeenth century (*Generale missieven* 1968, 1971, 1975).



proximity to the valuable Ambon and Banda posts. Around 1700, several decades after the conclusion of the 1661-1663 peace, Pieter van Dam (1931:258) wrote that another reason for keeping Kupang was to prevent the Portuguese from overcoming Dutch allies in the area (see also *Generale missiven* 1968:255).

### *The meeting with native polities*

Looking at the capabilities of the local Timorese societies, let us first consider their strongly local character. In early European sources the polities are usually called 'kingdoms' (*reinos, rijken*), although they might fit better into the structural model of 'chiefdoms'.<sup>7</sup> In the Atoni area of western Timor (Servião) these kingdoms were somewhat larger, being about sixteen in number, while those of eastern Timor (Belu), with its remarkable ethnic and linguistic variety, numbered close to fifty.<sup>8</sup> A typical 'kingdom' would have a hereditary ruler (known as *usif, liurai, atupas*) who was often only accorded a symbolic, deliberately inactive role. At his side was usually an actively governing regent family. Under these central lords were found chiefs of sub-units and settlements. Dutch documents term these chiefs *temukung* and distinguish between grander and lesser ones.

There was also a ritual hierarchy among the Timorese domains, in which the Maromak O'an (son of God) of Wehali near the southern coast of Timor was the highest in rank. Under this Maromak O'an were three paramount rulers who ideally headed the Atoni area of West Timor (Sonba'i), the Belunese area in Central Timor (the Liurai of Wehali), and the eastern areas (Likusaen) (Fobia 1984:10-8). In spite of their symbolic or ritual role, these paramount rulers could not muster any great conventional forces, although their prestige was often used by the Portuguese and the Dutch, or was used against these two by Timorese groups. Moreover, the minor kingdoms frequently joined forces in alliances, which shifted steadily in terms of composition and relation to foreign groups (Schulte Nordholt 1971).

European assessment of the fighting value of the Timorese varied. A Portuguese letter from the 1640s asserted that

the people are not, like those of Ceylon, courageous with arms or treacherous, but open-hearted and without weapons of any kind, and they are very weak. With a hundred musketeers one may turn them all into vassals.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> The small populations, the hereditary rather than bureaucratic nature of functionaries, and the apparent difficulties of the rulers to wield executive powers outside the centre of their realms, resemble chiefdoms rather than kingdoms (see Diamond 1997).

<sup>8</sup> For an eighteenth-century discussion and enumeration of the various kingdoms, see Morais 1934: Appendix 21-30.

<sup>9</sup> Hermann Fiedler, 'Zur Geschichte Solors und Timors', 1931, in: Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde (KITLV), Leiden, H 475.



This is obviously a rhetorical hyperbole, but the Dutch likewise had grave doubts about their allies in the Kupang area. On the other hand, the polities of the highlands of West Timor were able to repel Dutch incursions in 1655, 1656 and 1658 with the help of small Portuguese detachments. Possession of and proficiency in firearms often seems to have been decisive in armed confrontations between Timorese and Europeans or Topasses. The main weapon of the Timorese was initially the assegai, although the use of firearms slowly spread from the late seventeenth century.

In spite of the obvious technological gap, Western penetration of the island was not very thorough. Up to the nineteenth century the colonial powers preferred to stay at a handful of coastal settlements. The rugged terrain and the poor or nonexistent infrastructure made travels in the interior troublesome and dangerous.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the resources in men and material that colonial regimes allocated to Timor were small. By the 1680s there were only fifty Europeans in the Portuguese sphere, who were reputedly 'no more than broke people and runaways'.<sup>11</sup> The initiative lay rather with the Topasses, and even they had to resort to indirect governance. The internal Timorese structure of the domains was left much as it was, though the Portuguese presence had an impact in various ways.<sup>12</sup> To quote a VOC report from 1689:

The *capitão mor* [...] sometimes hands out some cloths etcetera to the important kings. When a rebellion pops up here and there, he uses the soldiers in the war, mixed with other Timorese, since this island consists of many kings, who each possess their own districts. Thus he can use them the better when there are uprisings by those or others, to once again bring them to obedience without incurring excessive costs, other than that he shares the small and large spoils with the aforementioned warriors, so that all those who have enjoyed these provisions follow his summons to take up arms and march against the rebels. By these means (if he is not attacked by foreign enemies) they [the Topasses] can keep the districts around here, and especially the Island of Timor, in strict loyalty without needing any help from the White Portuguese.<sup>13</sup>

To conclude, the small scale of the polities, their non-bureaucratic structure, the ritual rather than bureaucratic nature of the larger hierarchies, and the shifting and unsteady alliances, offered ample opportunities for organized

<sup>10</sup> Compare VOC 1233 (1660), f. 722, in: NA, 1.04.02.

<sup>11</sup> W. Tange, 'Consideration tot speculatie van de Hooge en Respectieve Regeering van India ten dienste en interest der E. Comp. op het reguard van het eylandt Timor', 10-1-1689, deel v, f. 7, in: KITLV, 'Verscheijde brieven en andere geschriften; Soo in orginalia als copia', 1613-1691, H 49.

<sup>12</sup> Dutch and Portuguese policies on trade and taxes clearly had a direct and an indirect impact. Military titles, drums, ceremonial sticks, and other such objects apparently strengthened the traditional domains in certain respects. Elizabeth Traube (1981:29-30) has pointed out how the Mambai of East Timor appropriated Portuguese colonial rule in a mythical model of a necessary hierarchy. In this model, the ruler from the outside was viewed as holding the social order in place.

<sup>13</sup> VOC 1461 (1689), f. 553-4, in: NA, 1.04.02.

and well-provided foreign groups to establish themselves on Timor. This is, however, only half the story, since the numerically weak Portuguese and Dutch consistently performed their early inroads in alliance with indigenous polities. From that point of view the early stages of their presence might seem to be a component in a highly factionalized political landscape rather than a truly 'colonial' rule.

*The Topass phase: an ambivalent response to a semi-foreign polity*

After early forays in 1641-1642, colonial officers began residing in Lifau from the mid-seventeenth century, and several kingdoms in the west were drawn into their power network. Further gains were made around 1668-1670, when the coastal areas of Belu (the Tetun-speaking central parts, but often vaguely including the eastern parts of the island as well) were subjugated by the Topass leader Mateus da Costa.<sup>14</sup> Some of the more inaccessible eastern domains were attracted to the Portuguese sphere around 1700 through the missionary efforts of the Dominican Bishop of Malacca (Leitão 1952:9-10).

This first period of Portuguese authority, up to 1702, can be termed the Topass phase. While the exact racial background of some of the leading figures is unclear, it is at any rate certain that the strongly mixed population centred on Larantuka and later Lifau upheld the Portuguese positions in these years, autonomously of the Estado da Índia. The record of the leading Topass families of Hornay and Da Costa, who usually headed the community, is ambivalent. Although they were routinely characterized by their Dutch rivals as brutal and oppressive, they were also able to attract many members of the local elites. Certain Atoni domains, like Amarasi and Amanuban, acted as bulwarks against the Dutch positions in the west of the island; especially Amarasi waged almost constant low-scale warfare against the kingdoms allied to the VOC in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. For early Dutch visitors in the seventeenth century this Portuguese ability to secure bonds of loyalty was rightfully perceived as a problem. The administrative centre in Batavia issued explicit orders to the squadrons destined for Solor-Timor to attempt to win the confidence of the local populations and dissociate them from the Portuguese 'with sweet and soft ways' – a policy that differed quite markedly from the brutal treatment of, for example, the inhabitants of the Maluku Islands in the same period.<sup>15</sup>

What factors gave the Portuguese an early lead before the Dutch? The highly localized nature of the Topass community is in itself part of the

<sup>14</sup> VOC 1294 (1673), f. 306, in: NA, 1.04.02; *Generale missiven* 1968:739, 757.

<sup>15</sup> Hermann Fiedler, 'Die Gründung und ersten Jahre des Fortes Concordia zu Kupang auf Timor 1648-1660', 1931, pp. 1-2, in: KITLV, H 475.

answer. Like their counterparts in Brazil, Africa and India, they adopted or rather inherited local customs, and thereby found ways of dealing with local populations which were, at least initially, less understood by Company personnel.<sup>16</sup> The lay community of the Topasses readily intermarried with princely families, both as wife-taker and wife-giver, which had important consequences for alliance and dependency. As seen above, they also placed small communities of soldiers in the kingdoms under their influence. Dutch reports often emphasize the importance of such communities in offensive operations against hostile kingdoms in the second half of the seventeenth century. Throughout the period under scrutiny, the Topass group retained a Portuguese-Catholic identity, though it was mixed with indigenous customs and beliefs. A bastardized form of Portuguese was reportedly spoken as late as the 1730s (Dampier 1939:164; Salmon 1733:213-9).

Catholicism is a further decisive factor. 'As it seems', wrote a Dutch Governor General in 1626, '[they] are able to win more inhabitants with spiritual weapons than we do with our soldiers, to which many places in India, occupied by the Portuguese or the Spanish, bear witness' (*Generale missiven* 1960:226). Dominican padres undertook extensive missionary work in western Timor in the first half of the seventeenth century.<sup>17</sup> Although their claims to have converted large numbers of people are rhetorically exaggerated, and although the depth of the conversions is debatable, the acceptance of Catholicism undoubtedly bound local aristocracies to Portuguese interests.<sup>18</sup>

While the localized Portuguese community was able to exert influence on the Timorese, they also encountered forms of resistance from the start among the kingdoms in their sphere of influence. Such resistance could be launched either by entire kingdoms or by smaller groups of people. Let us first consider a conflict that arose with Sonba'i in 1655. In 1649 the ruler of this prestigious kingdom emerged as an aggressive warlord who allied himself with the Portuguese. In Dutch eyes he seemed destined to take over the island. The friendship was cut short, however, when Sonba'i suddenly rose against its protectors, as related in a VOC missive:

Between the Portuguese and us, nothing in particular has happened in these quarters in this year. However, they themselves experienced a great loss last April due to the defection of [Lord] Sonba'i on Timor with his adherents, who was for-

<sup>16</sup> The mentality of the Timorese themselves may have facilitated the adaptation of Portuguese elements; a recent anthropological study by Laura Yoder (2005:111) has pointed out traits in Timorese culture that facilitate the successful integration of foreign influences.

<sup>17</sup> Biermann 1924 is the most convenient source on early missionary activities. The Dutch rivals contemptuously spoke of 'rice Christians', of whom there were maybe 10,000 by the late seventeenth century. See VOC 1461 (1689), f. 553, in: NA, 1.04.02.

<sup>18</sup> The efforts to convert large Timorese groups were at variance with the cautiousness of the Dutch. The VOC in general made only limited efforts to convert Asian peoples, as conversion attempts could be detrimental to the activities of the Company (Boxer 1965:155-72).

merly one of their most loyal and able allies. He has killed all the Portuguese who were found in his land, robbed their possessions, and torched and exterminated the churches and houses, whereby he has asked us for assistance and protection, which will be rendered him as far as can be done [...]. (*Generale missiven* 1968:3.)

Soon afterwards Sonba'i made an alliance with the VOC, who launched an expedition of relief in the same year. It was soundly beaten, however, and Sonba'i was decisively defeated by the Portuguese and their allies in 1658. Some of the Sonba'i subsequently settled close to Kupang under Dutch auspices.

Several things are worthy of note here. First, no particular cause is given for the outbreak; it rather appears to be the culmination of an aversion to following Portuguese command, already noticeable in 1653. Second, the rebellion clearly took on a symbolic aspect as Sonba'i went on to destroy the manifestations of Catholicism, the spiritual identity of the foreigners. Third, the recent Dutch establishment in Kupang was used as a counterweight to the Portuguese. Incidentally, the differences in outlook between the Portuguese and the Dutch are visible here; the latter had no qualms about allying themselves with this violently anti-Christian entity.

Minor groups, too, occasionally defected, as seen in a Dutch report from 1664:

The Portuguese brutes were roaming through the territory with their shotguns day and night [...] so that the people were in a thousand fears, never knowing what menace was hanging over their heads. Furthermore, the Portuguese bested them all by abducting their wives and children, killing their cattle, confiscating rice, paddy, *jagung* [maize] and other things.

In the face of this oppression, 76 men, women and children from Amakono decided to flee to Kupang and the Dutch.

However, on the way they had to endure a hard encounter with the Amarasians who, by order of [the Portuguese commander] Simão Luis, were holding the roads. They approached this troop including women and children and attacked them like starved wolves, trying to drag them away as their booty to gain great honour. However, these refugees defended themselves so valiantly that they put the Amarasians to flight, fighting so bravely for their wives and children, who, if they had lost, would have become the prey of the enemy. Not fearing death in this moment of danger, they acted so bravely that they finally snatched the glory of victory, and took three heads and many assegais and shields from the enemy.<sup>19</sup>

The report illustrates the Portuguese policy of combating defiant Timorese groups by using loyal Timorese levies, a pattern visible in Portuguese colonial policy up to the twentieth century, and shows how the conflicts under-

<sup>19</sup> VOC 1246 (1664), in: NA, 1.04.02.

pinned the practice of headhunting. It also illustrates the relative ease by which Timorese groups migrated from one area to another. In contrast with the previous quotation, concrete causes of discontent are given; it appears that the impositions or requisitions made by the Portuguese were heavily felt by locals even at this early stage, in the 1660s. Several early Black Portuguese leaders were known to act in a ruthless fashion when they encountered defiance from local populations. Thus the roughshod *capitão mor* António Hornay (died 1693), the son of a defector from the VOC and a Timorese woman, had such a dismal reputation that his Dutch rivals in Kupang seriously hoped that it would aid their own cause: discontent in the areas under Portuguese rule might inspire widespread defections.<sup>20</sup>

For our purposes, it is of course not enough to refer to the alleged brutality. Rather, we must identify the structures of Topass hegemony that caused dissatisfaction in Timorese society and led to resistance on a kingdom-wide (or lower) level.

First, let us consider the arbitrary revenue system. A description of Timor from 1697 states that Portuguese officers received no other provisions from the *capitão mor* than a licence to appropriate sandalwood, and to levy an annual fee from the kings in whose territories they resided. This fee, the *tuthais*, consisted of a certain number of baskets of rice, pigs, and other items for the sustenance of the officers (De Matos 1974a:216). Not so much a type of colonial rule, this may be better characterized as a tribute system in a pre-colonial society.

Second, there appears to have been tension in Topass-Timorese relations between alliance and dependency. Nominal conversion to Catholicism was clearly associated with the acceptance of Portuguese precedence or alliance, and many local kings included Hornay or Da Costa in their Christian names as a matter of prestige. At the same time, oaths of alliance were made in the ritual Timorese fashion, with the drinking of the mixed blood of the participants. The various interpretations of such an oath are seen by comparing Dutch and Portuguese documents. The regents of the Taebenu group that partly fled to Kupang in 1688 asserted to the VOC that they swore the oath as 'good neighbours and allies but not as subjects', while the *capitão mor* of Lifau maintained that their land had been 'conquered by our arms'.<sup>21</sup> The traditional ritual hierarchies, where Sonba'i had an important role, were frequently violated by Portuguese policies, which may explain some of the

<sup>20</sup> W. Tange, 'Consideratien tot speculatie van de Hooge en Respectieve Regeering van India ten dienste en interest der E. Comp. op het reguard van het eylandt Timor', 10-1-1689, deel v, f. 7, in: KITLV, 'Verscheijde brieven en andere geschriften; Soo in originalia als copia', 1613-1691, H 49. This manuscript characterizes António Hornay as the son of a Danish native ('*een deens inboorling*'), Scandinavians often being employed in VOC service. Other documents indicate he is the son or grandson of Jan de Hornay, the commander of the Dutch fort on Solor who defected in 1629.

<sup>21</sup> VOC 1535 (1693), n.p., VOC 1577 (1695), n.p., in: NA, 1.04.02.

confrontations. The violently anti-Christian reaction of 1655 may thus also be seen as the symbolical repudiation of an alliance.

Third, the Portuguese tried to implement monopolies that ran counter to the interests of the local kingdoms. On the initiative of Goa, the Christian Timorese were impeded from trading with anyone besides Portuguese in 1650, and in 1665-1669 a number of East Timorese domains were attacked because they had commercial or political relations with the Dutch or with Makassarese.<sup>22</sup>

Fourth, and related to the preceding point, the Dutch and to a certain extent the Makassarese offered alternative political and economic ties. Although the Company made no further inroads after their defeats in 1655-1658 and the peace of 1661-1663, exoduses of major Timorese groups to the Kupang area took place in 1658, 1683 and 1688, and smaller groups arrived at several other times. The Makassarese exercised influence in the eastern domains of Ade and Manatuto until 1668-1669, and the central kingdom of Wehali tried to secure their support in 1665 by offering them crises and assegais as tokens of deference.<sup>23</sup> The existence of alternative foreign sources of authority threatened the Portuguese network.

It must be emphasized that these points do not imply a sharp social dichotomy between 'Timorese' and 'Portuguese' groups. The differences in culture and outward appearance between the Topasses and other locals were not obvious. Generally speaking, peoples of the Southeast Asian archipelago were able to move from one cultural identity to another in this era (Ricklefs 2002:362). To quote the English visitor William Dampier in 1699,

tho' they are ambitious to be called Portugueze, and value themselves on their religion, yet most of the Men and all the Women that live here, are Indians [Southeast Asians]; and there are very few right Portugueze in any part of the Island. However, of those that call themselves Portugueze, I was told there are some thousands; and I think their Strength consists more in their Numbers than in good Arms or Discipline. (Dampier 1939:164.)

### *The White Portuguese phase*

Topass supremacy stabilized under the leadership of António Hornay, 1673-1693. The course of events after his death, however, demonstrates the fragile nature of his hegemony, which was upheld by means of force. Domingos da Costa gained control over Lifau in 1697, but this new leader was challenged by several contenders. When a regular governor appointed by the Estado da Índia arrived in 1702, he was accepted by part of the population defined as

<sup>22</sup> Hermann Fiedler, 'Die Gründung und ersten Jahre des Fortes Concordia zu Kupang auf Timor 1648-1660', 1931, in: KITLV, H 475; VOC 2285 (1733), f. 181, 200, 214-5, 218-9, in: NA, 1.04.02.

<sup>23</sup> VOC 1257 (1666), f. 710, in NA, 1.04.02.

Portuguese, and by several client kingdoms.<sup>24</sup> The reaction of the majority of the Topasses, however, was profoundly hostile (Leitão 1952). They saw their political and economic role, built up during the preceding century, seriously threatened by the new regime. During much of the period up to the 1780s there was a state of open hostility between the Estado and the Topasses who resided in Larantuka and at Tulang Ikan and Animata on Timor, and were led in turn by members of the Hornay and Da Costa families. In the Portuguese documents the Topasses are termed rebels; strictly speaking, though, the Topasses did not rise against an established order, but rather strove to preserve their traditional position. It may be better to see the conflict as a clash between informal and formal representatives of the Portuguese complex.

A preliminary listing of cases of resistance and aggression against the Portuguese order from 1702 to 1769 hints at the turbulence resulting from the new situation.

- 1702           The first regular governor of Lifau, António Coelho Guerreiro, is opposed by the Topasses, who are assisted by several Timorese domains. These disturbances go on until 1708, when the Bishop of Malacca arranges a truce.
- 1711-1713    The Sonba'i and Manubait lords from Amakono rebel and flee to Kupang after the Sonba'i lord is insulted by the Bishop of Malacca.
- 1719           A number of petty kings swear a blood-oath in Camenaça with the purported aim of expelling the Portuguese and their Christian religion.
- 1722           The Bishop of Malacca, acting as governor, clashes with the Topass leader and sends native auxiliaries (*arraiais*) to fight him, mostly from Amakono. Amakono is defeated with great slaughter. In the meantime other auxiliaries fight rebels in Belu.
- 1722           The domain of Luca rebels against the brutal methods of tax collection.
- 1725-1727    A large number of domains rebel, foremost among them Cailaco.
- 1729-1732    Chaotic state of warfare involving the Topasses and a number of Timorese domains against the governors of Lifau. The rebellion peters out after the submission of the most important rebel leaders.
- 1732-1734    The main rulers of Belu try unsuccessfully to place themselves under Dutch suzerainty.

<sup>24</sup> Carneiro de Sousa (2001:181) has discerned interesting parallels between the colonial governance of Timor and eastern Africa, in terms of ideologies, experiences, and missionary activities, an idea that deserves to be followed up.



- 1736-1738 Amanuban briefly submits to the VOC ally Amabi, in defiance of the Portuguese.
- 1739 The main ruler of Belu rebels against the Portuguese.
- 1748-1749 The Amfo'an-Sorbian kingdom attacks the Topasses, who subsequently act brutally towards Amanuban and Amakono, leading to their defection. Topass power is crushed by the VOC at the battle of Penefui. Large parts of West Timor switch allegiance to the Dutch.
- 1760-1761 Internal fighting between three caretakers of the government of Lifau, involving the Topasses, the Dutch, and various Timorese groups.
- 1768-1769 The Topasses force the White Portuguese governor to leave Lifau for Dili. The Dili government and the Topasses are politically separated until 1785.

The list suggests that political crises were a regularly recurring phenomenon in the Portuguese sphere. But there is more than anti-colonial resistance involved here. While native polities meddled in all the events referred to, I see this as evidence of a complicated political rivalry among the White Portuguese, the Topasses, and the VOC, involving Timorese groups in various combinations. From this point of view, 'factionalism' may cover the situation better than 'rebellion'.

The propensity of local polities to make use of the rivalries between the three centres of external authority (heavily localized in the Topass case) is actually the most singular characteristic of the Timorese forms of resistance during the eighteenth century. The kingdoms made their strategic choice, which often involved a considerable risk. For example, in 1702 when the kingdom of Amanuban chose to support the White Portuguese side, it was badly ravaged by a detachment headed by the Topass leader Domingos da Costa – and soon after that it was devastated anew by the troops of the White governor for failing to meet its commitments.<sup>25</sup>

Accords made between the White and the Black Portuguese were sometimes greeted with little enthusiasm among the Timorese. Thus, the treaty made in 1732 was met with strong discontent and fear among the Belunese.<sup>26</sup> The state of contention between external powers was often in the interest of the kingdoms, something that the Dutch would also experience when they waged their own expeditions against the Topasses in the 1750s and 1760s.

The question of which external power to ally with was dependent on several factors. First, geography: the eastern part of the island appears to have

<sup>25</sup> VOC 1663 (1702), f. 6, VOC 1676 (1703), f. 6, in: NA, 1.04.02.

<sup>26</sup> VOC 2239 (1732), f. 219, in: NA, 1.04.02.

been more amenable to White Portuguese influence than the Atoni lands (Servião). When the governor finally had to abandon Lifau in 1769 due to Topass aggression, he was invited by the East Timorese kings of Vemasse and Motael to found a new stronghold; he opted for the latter and thus settled at Dili close to Motael, from where the Estado managed to maintain a degree of influence over the eastern principalities (De Matos 1974a:98-9). It has been argued that this phenomenon is related to differences in political structure between east and west. The eastern principalities were smaller than the purportedly despotic Atoni domains; they were less influenced by the early colonial establishment, but also less rebellious against the Estado da Índia (De Sá 1949:10-2). There may be other factors at play here, too; the early Topass network in the west, with detachments of soldiers placed in the main Atoni kingdoms, contrasts with the situation in the east. There the subjugation had been carried out later and with brute force, as well as through Dominican efforts, and there was little attachment to the Topasses, who were based in Larantuka and northwestern Timor.<sup>27</sup>

The revenues and impositions levied by the Estado da Índia were another factor of vital importance. Instead of the old *tutai*, the governor introduced a tax known as the *finta*. It was calculated in monetary terms (*pardaus*) and collected in the various kingdoms according to a table stipulated by the governor. This *finta* was mostly paid in kind, in sandalwood, gold and beeswax (De Matos 1974a:125-8). Apparently these *fintas* were perceived as a heavy burden, since they are sometimes explicitly cited as the direct cause of armed resistance. As long as the governor resided in Lifau, the Atoni lands may have had the worst of it, since they were more accessible than the lands further to the east.

Economic trends in Macao and the Estado in general is a third factor. Early eighteenth-century instructions from Goa take a mercantilist approach, with ambitions of protectionist control over Timor's resources. Sandalwood should be reserved for the Macao trade, and resources such as gold, silver, and sulphur should be investigated (Carneiro de Sousa 2001). These measures were soon frustrated by conflicts between the White and the Black Portuguese and their respective clients. Portuguese texts refer to Dutch plots as a further embarrassment, though this is not substantiated by the VOC documents up to 1748. The accord of 1732 curtailed the governor's room for manoeuvre, and the turbulent conditions on Portuguese Timor soon began to damage the trade with Macao.<sup>28</sup> Macao merchants were losing interest by the 1740s, and the trend was aggravated by the political crises of the two following decades. Besides, the stands of sandalwood had dwindled consid-

<sup>27</sup> Compare VOC 5829 (1717), f. 21, in: NA, 1.04.02, where the Dutch observed that the eastern domains were attached to the White Portuguese rather than to the Topass leader Domingos da Costa, to the great irritation of the latter, who by this time filled the post of temporary governor in Lifau.

<sup>28</sup> VOC 2239 (1732), f. 178, 219, in: NA, 1.04.02.

erably, and Chinese merchants began to trade directly on Timor (De Matos 1974b:334-5). All this affected the ability of the Estado to construct a smoothly running administration and an efficient network on Timor, especially when Portuguese positions were pushed back by the Dutch after 1749.

*Symbolism and ritual as agents of loyalty and catalysts of conflict*

When studying the course of conflicts on Timor in the period under scrutiny, it is apparent that the use of symbols, myths, and ritual practices often plays a considerable role. Portuguese and Catholic categories were involved, as well as Timorese ones, and these categories could be used to forge loyalties with Portuguese centres of authority, as well as to oppose external domination. There are several important aspects to this.

First, traditional sources of authority were sometimes co-opted by Portuguese groups. A case in point is Sonba'i, the most prestigious dynastic group among the Atoni. The myths of origin emphasize its great supernatural powers, genealogical precedence, and ability to return to authority after every dynastic eclipse. It was therefore essential to keep a degree of control over Sonba'i (Carneiro de Sousa 2001:186). However, Sonba'i switched their allegiance from Portugal to the VOC in 1655. The Company hoped to vanquish the Portuguese with the help of Sonba'i, which could allegedly muster ten or twelve thousand armed men (*Generale missieven* 1968:14). These ambitions were soon frustrated because Sonba'i turned out to lack the means to wage effective warfare – apparently the Company gravely misunderstood the nature of the prestige that the kingdom enjoyed among the West Timorese, which was ritual rather than based on military power.

During the complicated political disputes that followed, the Sonba'i lord was captured by his erstwhile Portuguese patrons, in 1658, and was allowed to keep his prerogatives under their watchful eyes until his death around 1680. Meanwhile one of his sons was installed as ruler under Dutch auspices in the vicinity of Kupang, where many Sonba'i refugees arrived after 1658.<sup>29</sup> Thus both colonial factions attempted to secure the symbolic capital of the Sonba'i ruler by splitting Sonba'i into two domains. To emphasize this, the Portuguese and the Dutch both translated the title of the lord of Sonba'i as 'emperor' (*emperador, keizer*).

A second aspect is the use of dynastic myths by indigenous Timorese groups to counter the ambitions of the Crown of Portugal. From a sociological point of view, myths may carry the memory of the past, the experience of the

<sup>29</sup> Hermann Fiedler, 'Die Gründung und ersten Jahre des Fortes Concordia zu Kupang auf Timor 1648-1660', 1931, p. 33, in: KITLV, H 475. The inland realm was later known as Greater Sonba'i (until 1906), the enclave in the Kupang area as Lesser Sonba'i (1658-1917).

present, and expectations for the future at the same time. In a 'traditional' society like the Timorese, the future will usually mean a return to the past (Locher 1978:83). This is seen in the revivalism that was inspired by the three traditional paramount lordships of the island. A 1734 report by the governor of Lifau refers to preparations made some years earlier by discontented elements.

They were clandestinely in secret communication with Francisco Fernandes Varella and with Francisco Hornay, second head of the Larantuqueiro party [that is, the Topasses], the resolution being to expel the White government; and as they knew his ambitions to govern, they presented him with a promise to subjugate themselves to him, coming to help him; and it is supposed that his treacherous genius was not hidden to them; and the adverse intent, driven by ambition, was to make truth of the feigned deception that the Timorese offered him in the idea of expelling [the White governor] and enthroning their three kings Sonba'i, Likusaen and Wehale [...] (De Castro 1867:242-3).

In the end nothing came of this ambition to restore the three realms to their supposed former glory. Still, it is interesting that the discontent with the *fintas* prompted locals to take a wider view of strategy, even a Timor-wide outlook. The revivalism was, judging from the report cited, inspiring enough for the Topass faction to try to use it for their own purposes.

A third aspect is an element of anti-foreignism that is occasionally found in the early colonial era. In the Timorese religious complex, ritualized forms of oaths and alliances have great prominence. Blood oaths are frequently mentioned in the early sources, whereby smaller domains allied with each other in order to undertake a degree of concerted political action. Alliances could at times be rather extensive, with a dozen or more domains sticking together for brief periods. It was such a bond that was formed in the residence of the King of Camenaça in 1719. A 1727 report gives an impression of this event from a strongly biased Portuguese point of view. Lords from the two main 'provinces' of Timor, Belu and Servião, planned 'to exclude the Christian name from this island'. A black-and-white dog called Lebo was killed, and the lords present mixed their own blood with that of the dog. After having smeared the 'mystical blood' on a sacred sword kept in the residence of Camenaça, everyone drank it. The oath supposedly swore loyalty to the death. This was the agreed-upon signal to expel the Whites as well as the Larantuqueiros (Topasses) of Servião. Furthermore, 'they killed buffaloes and made sacrifices, killing Christians and [performing] other diabolic rites according to their custom' (De Morais 1934:136).

It is impossible to say how much of all this is hearsay, though some details are confirmed by other early sources. Interestingly, by the early eighteenth century the so-called rebellions anchored their anti-Portuguese sentiment in highly ritualized alliances, whereas White and Black Portuguese enemies

were strongly associated with Catholicism. In this respect religion became closely tied up with ethnicity.

A fourth aspect, and an important one, is the degree to which Timorese groups were actually affected by Portuguese symbols of authority and by Catholic clerics. From later ethnographic studies it is known that Portuguese insignia of authority such as flags and drums were revered in the Timorese tradition of relic cult. Titles were a part of this. When the Goa-appointed White governor settled in Lifau in 1702, he attempted to anchor the legitimacy of his cause by granting military ranks (*mayor*, *capitão*, and others) to the native chiefs (De Matos 1974a:125-8). In spite of the limited impact of Christianity, Portuguese priests often stand out as influential in local kingdoms, thus strengthening ties to the Crown of Portugal.

The ambiguous role of Catholicism is exemplified by Frei Manuel de Santo António, the titular Bishop of Malacca, who stayed in Timor for long periods in the early eighteenth century. He was deeply revered by Timorese aristocracies and undertook extensive missionary work in the outlying domains in the southeast of the island. Local kings turned into fervent Catholics, ended their mutual hostilities, and devoted themselves to the church and the Crown of Portugal – at least this is what the European reports allege (Leitão 1952:9-10). It was also the bishop who persuaded the mixed population of Lifau to accept the first governor sent by Portugal in 1702.

What the Portuguese authorities seem to have forgotten was that this loyalty was directed to the charismatic figure of the Bishop of Malacca rather than to the authorities in Lifau. The governor, Jácome de Morais Sarmiento (1706-1710), was considered a brave but imprudent man who nearly ruined the authority of the *Estado da Índia*. On a military expedition to the rebellious Kingdom of Motaél, he forced the revered bishop to march along with the soldiers against his will. Morais Sarmiento furthermore arrested a ruler converted by the bishop, when the ruler expressed doubts on a point of strategy. All this turned a considerable part of the Timorese domains against the governor. This was utilized by the Topass leader Domingos da Costa and his native allies, who laid siege to Lifau in 1708. At this moment, when White Portuguese power seemed on the verge of total collapse, Frei Manuel de Santo António miraculously saved the situation. He bravely went out of Lifau to the camp of Domingos da Costa, and by a show of glowing rhetoric persuaded the Topass rival to submit to the Crown; the Timorese groups followed suit (Leitão 1952:93-112).

Domingos da Costa died as the bitter enemy of the bishop in 1722. Rumours immediately spread about his last illness; a cross entered his throat, which was actually the cross of the Bishop of Malacca. It was also alleged that Da Costa's widow could hear voices of souls being tormented in hell, when she sat in grief by his coffin. The new governor who arrived in Lifau shortly after these events found the bishop such a troublesome character that he promptly deported him

from Timor. This in turn created a problem, since many Timorese were not interested in fighting for a person who had expelled their revered bishop.<sup>30</sup>

Frei Manuel de Santo António was able to use traditional Timorese mentalities to strengthen what contemporary texts thought was the prestige of the Catholic church and the Portuguese Crown. In fact, however, he may have been seen in another way by the people he converted; as a *dato-lulik* (a priestly mediator with the spiritual world) who was able to call down misfortune on his enemies. The belief that a curse lodged by an individual person may cause the death of other people is common on Timor, and persists even among groups converted to Christianity (Middelkoop 1960).

The political changes of 1748-1752 underscore the role of Catholicism and its ties with the authority of Portugal. The White and Black Portuguese were at peace after 1732, and the Tetun and Atoni principalities increasingly regarded the Dutch in Kupang as a potential external ally. Several Atoni groups fled to Kupang in 1748-1749 with the tacit approval of the local Dutch. This, however, provoked a major invasion involving tens of thousands of Topasses and Timorese allies.<sup>31</sup> This invasion was met by a small Company troop (very few of whom were whites) at Penefui east of Kupang, on 9 November 1749. In the following showdown the 'Portuguese' army was heavily defeated and large areas of the western and central parts of the island switched allegiance to the Dutch.<sup>32</sup> This included Amarasi, traditionally the most faithful client of Portugal.

However, less than three years after the Penefui battle, the Dutch authorities noted that the loyalty of their new allies was wavering. The Topass *tenente general* and the White Portuguese governor of Lifau both tempted their ex-clients Amakono and Amarasi with grand promises, circulating secret letters. Meanwhile, Catholic priests were at work, mixing 'the most beautiful promises' with 'the blackest threats', as the VOC reports have it. In March 1752 the 'emperor' of Amakono (Greater Sonba'i) was arrested and exiled to Batavia since he obviously planned to defect. Shortly after this incident the king of Amarasi was attacked by the VOC and their allies. When the enemies closed in on the royal stronghold, the old ruler ordered his retainers to kill himself and all the women and children staying at the place, whereby more than a hundred persons perished.<sup>33</sup>

An interesting point in this account is that the Amakono chiefs, who in 1749 had provided lively descriptions of Portuguese atrocities in their letters to the Company authorities, were prepared to take the risk to rebel against or withdraw from the VOC after a very short time. Once again, the localization

<sup>30</sup> De Matos 1974a:91-2; Leitão 1952:268-70, 283-4; VOC 1979 (1722), f. 17, in: NA, 1.04.02.

<sup>31</sup> VOC 2718 (1748); VOC 2741 (1749), f. 37-9, in: NA, 1.04.02.

<sup>32</sup> Boxer 1968:250-1; VOC 2761 (1750), f. 8-27, 69-71, 120, in: NA, 1.04.02.

<sup>33</sup> VOC 2780 (1752), f. 108, VOC 2799 (1753), f. 27-8, 87, in: NA, 1.04.02. De Matos 1974a:416-20.



of the Portuguese in a Timorese context, and the significance of the Catholic religious culture, appear to have been decisive. To quote a Portuguese admonition to an Amarasi chief, 'by going over to the Dutch, he had gone from a child of the true God to a child of the Devil'.<sup>34</sup>

*Rebellions in the Dutch sphere of power*

Remarkably, although the best source material for the pre-modern period is Dutch, it does not have much to say about rebellions against the authority of the Dutch East India Company up to 1752. This is less a testimony to Dutch benevolence than a result of the rather peculiar circumstances in which the Company outpost in Kupang found itself.

In essence, the VOC in Asia was an economic enterprise; due to the costs involved, the leadership in Europe discouraged territorial acquisitions and intervention in local wars. Nevertheless, circumstances often pushed the Company to precisely these activities. Weakly staffed outposts had to be protected. While its military forces had a technological lead, the wars fought by the VOC in the archipelago were often waged with the support of indigenous allied or subject troops (Andaya 2002:283-4).

All this applies to the Timorese situation. Fear of the Portuguese and their clients established lasting bonds of loyalty between the Dutch and the local Kupang kingdom. In 1655 the domains of Sonba'i and Amabi joined the Dutch camp, followed by a part of Amfo'an in 1683 and Taebenu in 1688. The signing of contracts was an important part of this (*Corpus diplomaticum* 1907-55, II:75-7). The VOC network in the archipelago was upheld by a system of contracts with local princes, which provided the basis for economic interchange and regulations. In accordance with this, the five principalities were counted as allies rather than as direct subjects of the VOC. They were expected to deliver certain amounts of valuable woods, honey, beeswax and so on to the Company, and in return the elite received an assortment of products not found on Timor (Van der Chijs 1872). The harvesting of sandalwood, which was to be felled by the allies, turned out to be a great source of disappointment.<sup>35</sup> On several occasions, rebellious refugee groups from the Portuguese sphere applied for asylum in the VOC sphere, which seems to indicate that it was seen as an attractive alternative – there was no tax similar to the Portuguese *finsta*. With regard to the internecine troubles between Black and White Portuguese, Kupang was instructed by the VOC authorities in Batavia not to fish in troubled waters but rather 'let both of them jump into the bay'.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> VOC 2799 (1752), f. 92, in: NA, 1.04.02.

<sup>35</sup> VOC 1595 (1697), f. 9, in: NA, 1.04.02.

<sup>36</sup> VOC 1676 (1703), f. 4, in: NA, 1.04.02.



This is no doubt to be seen in the context of the general VOC policy; after a period of political expansion during the seventeenth century, the eighteenth century saw the retention of the positions that had been attained.

The five original allies, whose territories covered only part of West Timor, remained steadfastly loyal to the authorities of the Netherlands East Indies until the 1940s. In this respect they contrasted with the other cornerstones of Dutch authority in the area, Rote, Sawu and Solor, where Rote in particular frequently caused trouble for the Company. The only open revolts during these three centuries occurred in 1678, when King Ama Besi of Kupang defected to the pro-Portuguese kingdom of Amarasi and launched an attack on his successor to the throne, and in 1744, when a vassal chief under the Kupang ruler rebelled.<sup>37</sup> In both cases it was an internal Timorese affair as much as a Dutch-Timorese one. In 1819 an eyewitness was intrigued about the meeting of a visiting Dutch commissioner with the rajas of the Kupang area, shortly after the return of West Timor to the Netherlands after the British occupation (1811-1816). The lords appeared clad in costumes from the VOC period, and 'it was noticed with what deep reverence the name of the East India Company was still pronounced by them'.<sup>38</sup>

At the same time, however, there was a degree of non-cooperation among the allies on Timor and the islands nearby, when the Dutch attempted to enforce a policy perceived as disadvantageous to local interests. Traders from Sulawesi without permits were a headache for the Kupang authorities throughout this period, and admonitions to the allies not to associate with them had limited effect. There were also cases where local chiefs refused to carry on works requested by the VOC via the allied rulers, for example the felling of trees. In the mid-eighteenth century the Company hub in Batavia had advanced plans to require their Timorese allies to grow commercial crops, but soon had to admit failure, due to what they perceived as the profound inertia of indigenous farmers. Curses of Dutch residents over the attitude of the locals echo throughout eighteenth-century documents.<sup>39</sup>

Two explanations may be offered for the lasting political attachment to the Dutch colonial rulers, which contrasts markedly with the turbulent conditions in the Portuguese sphere. First, there was a very real threat of aggression from Portuguese clients like Amarasi, Amanuban, Amakono. The second half of the seventeenth century, in particular, is a dreadful story of clashes between the allies of the respective powers, clashes in which the practice of headhunting was rife. In this situation the five domains had little choice but to retain their contracts with the Company, staying close to the cannons of Fort Concordia in Kupang. The Company, on the other hand, had

<sup>37</sup> VOC 1338 (1678), f. 318, VOC 2628 (1744), f. 9-15, in: NA, 1.04.02.

<sup>38</sup> 'Iets over het eiland Timor en onderhoorigheden', circa 1819, in: KITLV, H 245a.

<sup>39</sup> VOC 1663 (1702), f. 8, 18, VOC 3024 (1761), f. 106-8, in: NA, 1.04.02.

to ensure the loyalty of the rather few lords taking their side. These lords were provided with firearms by the Dutch, who were however anxious about spreading them to groups in the interior. The VOC were furious when in 1739 their allies forwarded muskets to their 'blood relatives' in Belu in Central Timor, who rebelled against the Portuguese.<sup>40</sup>

Second, the Company set up institutions with which to communicate with the rajas of the five allied domains. A Kupang council was regularly summoned to discuss important matters, a council in which the five rajas or their regents met once a month. On some occasions conflicts threatened to disturb the cooperation between the allies, but Company officials were almost always able to prevent actual bloodshed. Propaganda was a part of all this. Like the Portuguese, the Dutch handed out special insignia of power to the various lords, in particular *tongkat* (a stick with a metal knob). When the diplomat Johannes Andreas Paravicini concluded a contract with a large number of rajas in the Solor-Timor region in 1756, he included a glowing piece of rhetoric in the text of the contract that echoed the ideas of the Enlightenment. Paravicini praised the Dutch as a liberal and fortunate people; only among them were the great virtues of mankind to be fully found. They 'made no distinctions between the black and white nations, on the contrary regarding all human beings as their brothers and, in accordance with their basic laws, treating humans as humans'. One could compare the wretched and impoverished Portuguese stronghold of Lifau with the blessed state of Kupang. This was even more remarkable as Lifau was situated in the best part of the island while Kupang was in the least fertile part – an obvious demonstration of what Dutch industriousness could achieve! (*Corpus diplomaticum* 1907-55, VI:93-4).

But rebellions there were. As we have seen, some of the former Portuguese allies switched sides in 1748-1749, leading to the disastrous Portuguese defeat of Penefui. After Penefui large parts of Timor allied with the Company, but some of the domains were quick to rebel when approached by Portuguese *padres*. Though the rebellions in 1752 were quickly suppressed, there were obvious problems in the intercourse between the Company and the Timorese. Incidents soon occurred; in 1765 and 1767 Dutch officers and *mardijkers* were cut down by rebels in the highlands and their heads were taken. Disturbing for the Dutch was that Lord Sonba'i himself, son of the lord who was exiled in 1752, was suspected of being involved in the plot (Müller 1857, I:138-9). After 1783 the son of this ruler openly defied the Company, and skilfully played out the Portuguese and Dutch against each other.<sup>41</sup>

In the Dutch missives these eighteenth-century rebellions – or rather changes of alliance – are presented as largely dynastic affairs, where the

<sup>40</sup> VOC 2467 (1739), in: NA, 1.04.02.

<sup>41</sup> VOC 3779 (1785-88), f. 5692, 5705, in: NA, 1.04.02.

discontent of individual princes with Company policies led to the outbreak of conflicts. Individual decisions should not be underestimated; the modest size of the population of the domains meant that an enterprising lord could conceivably supervise his people effectively within the limits of the traditional power structure. However, it seems from the chronology of events that part of the explanation lay with the Dutch themselves. Their intercourse with the original five allies had been successful due partly to the development of efficient means of cooperation. But the revolts in the 1750s and 1780s, and the minor troubles in between, indicate that the VOC were unable to integrate the new allies into their apparatus – for the small post in Kupang it was a case of ‘imperial overstretch’.

In spite of Paravicini’s rhetoric, there were several sources of discontent among the allies. Apart from contributing to the militia forces, the rajas were to send 200 men each year, when the season allowed, to pan gold in the highland rivers.<sup>42</sup> None of these measures turned out to be successful. Native participation in Dutch expeditions against the Black Portuguese proved ineffective, and the panning for gold aroused considerable discontent among the Timorese groups. The *mardijkers* were perceived as an arrogant group who achieved undue influence in some domains (Haga 1882:227-42). According to Paravicini himself, the quality of Company personnel was poor, and dishonesty, greed, cruelty and insubordination were rampant. The *burgers* forced local chiefs to buy goods at extortionate prices, and the *opperhoofd* (*resident*) fleeced the impoverished rajas (Van der Chijs 1872).

Some of these problems are related to the changing fortunes of the VOC itself. It is now known that the severe malarial conditions in Batavia led to a shortage of manpower after 1733; the Asian hub of the Company saw its ability to allocate people to the outposts, and to undertake major military expeditions, seriously eroded. Although the eighteenth century up to 1780 was not an era of steady economic decline for the Company, corruption was a real and serious problem (Van der Brug 1994:155; Gaastra 2003:164). Problems of staffing the Kupang post must have been further aggravated by the high mortality through malarial fever among the European population of the area.

### *Social characteristics of the movements of resistance*

Finally, let us look at features of social structure among Timorese groups which were significant for the fomenting of warfare and resistance against external powers. To begin with, the small scale and mobility of the polities should be noted. The distinction between ‘popular’ and ‘dynastic’ forms of resistance is often blurred in the sources, for the leaders of such movements

<sup>42</sup> VOC 2991 (1760), f. 151, in: NA, 1.04.02.

were usually aristocrats, either rajas or *temukung* (local lords), and a conflict was frequently triggered off by a personal insult or grievance suffered by a particular lord. In Timorese oral traditions there is often an underlying unity between a lord and the subjects of a domain or a sub-unit. Names of aristocratic lineages like Kono and Oematan often occur in an ahistorical context in these traditions, which mention a lineage as a collective 'he', referring to the totality of the successive lords and their followers.<sup>43</sup> In fact, although there were aristocratic lineages and elaborate rules for succession to the kingship, Timorese princes were not too different from their retainers in material living standard. European visitors commented on the simple, paltry attire and dwellings of the rajas, which contrasted greatly with conditions in Java and mainland Southeast Asia (Miller 1996:65).

The modest scale implied that a lord must take care how he utilized his manpower. Chiefs who followed colonial orders too zealously might live dangerously, as pointed out by the Dutch resident B.W. Fockens in 1777. Five times the Dutch goldmines in the Sonba'i area collapsed, and

due to that, the regents would not endanger their lives by urging their subjects to dig for gold, since the relatives of those who unfortunately are killed in search of this mineral would try to avenge the death of their friends on the regents and further chiefs, who had given the orders for that.<sup>44</sup>

Dissension within Timorese groups was common. It was often a case of choosing sides in a dynastic conflict and adhering to or defecting from an external power. In 1683, for example, a certain Nai Toas arrived at Kupang with 154 people. He said that he was the military commander in the pro-Portuguese Kingdom of Amfo'an, but that his brother the king was suspicious and envious because of his great popularity. Afraid of being murdered, he sought the protection of Fort Concordia. This was granted, and the following year groups of refugees from Amfo'an joined the new settlement at Oesape, close to Kupang.<sup>45</sup>

This points up an important feature of Timorese rebellions, namely the tendency for people to vote with their feet. Especially in the western part of the island – the sources for the easternmost regions are not very explicit – there were a great number of migrations of Timorese groups in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This is also seen in oral traditions, where particular toponyms in the landscape are associated with the various stages of the progress of a group.<sup>46</sup> This propensity to migrate was linked to the existence of multiple centres of foreign authority, and also to the economic structure of

<sup>43</sup> For good examples of such traditional texts on 'historical' matters, see Middelkoop 1938.

<sup>44</sup> Memorandum by Fockens, VOC 3473 (1777), f. 516a, in: NA, 1.04.02.

<sup>45</sup> VOC 1385 (1683), f. 439, VOC 1535 (1693), in: NA, 1.04.02.

<sup>46</sup> Numerous examples are given in Fobia 1984.

Timorese society. The cultivation of maize had major importance since at least the mid-seventeenth century, while labour-intensive *sawah* cultivation was limited. Population numbers also fluctuated with access to sandalwood and honeycombs, which were the two major sources of wealth for the aristocracy of a domain (Ormeling 1956:115-6). Timorese groups may therefore have been more flexible than densely populated communities of Southeast Asia, where peasants were 'married' to the hard and complicated work on the rice fields.<sup>47</sup>

A second concern is the relations between the various Timorese polities. By speaking of Timor in this period as 'colonial', and conflict with external powers as 'rebellion', one fails to take into consideration the network of alliances and hierarchical precedence that was maintained by indigenous groups. This network was not the same as the network of alliances laid down by the Dutch and the White and Black Portuguese; it was instrumental in fomenting resistance and defections, but sometimes also agreements and bona fide peace treaties. In 1701 the domain of Amarasi got tired of the petty warfare between the Portuguese and Dutch allies and concluded a peace with the latter without paying any heed to what the Portuguese in Lifau might think about it. Amarasi even warned Kupang of an attack that the Topasses and Amakono planned in that year.<sup>48</sup> In 1707 the allies concluded a similar 'informal' peace with the Amakonos in the Portuguese sphere, whom they characterized as 'our blood relatives with whom we meet every day'.<sup>49</sup> The pro-Portuguese Kingdom of Amanuban entertained friendly relations with the faithful Company ally Amabi in the 1730s and even acknowledged the Raja of Amabi for a few years, in obvious defiance of their supposed suzerains in Lifau and Tulang Ikan.<sup>50</sup>

One aspect of this is the open attitude to receiving refugee groups. The Dutch allies readily allowed newcomers to settle in the vicinity of Fort Concordia. For example, in 1701 when the VOC wanted the allies to send back a party of discontents who had fled from pro-Portuguese Amarasi, the allies refused, replying that 'their land is open, and that they cannot expel some friends who have come over here due to oppression'.<sup>51</sup> When in 1711-1713 thousands of defecting Sonba'i subjects from the Portuguese sphere approached Kupang, the Dutch likewise forbade their allies to receive the refugees in order not to provoke their Lusitanian adversaries. The allies answered that they stood in a blood relationship with the newcomers and could not refuse to help them, out of compassion. Against the Company's will, they were then allowed to stay. This generosity paid off badly, since

<sup>47</sup> It should be noted, however, that there were also migrations of peasant populations in the *sawah*-dependent Javanese society in the eighteenth century (Hall 1981:509).

<sup>48</sup> VOC 1648 (1701), f. 9, 58, in: NA, 1.04.02.

<sup>49</sup> VOC 1743 (1707), f. 13, 52, in: NA, 1.04.02.

<sup>50</sup> VOC 2382 (1736), f. 108; VOC 2438 (1738), f. 83, in: NA, 1.04.02.

<sup>51</sup> VOC 1648 (1701), f. 14, in: NA, 1.04.02.

the Black Portuguese leader Domingos da Costa ravaged the Dutch sphere severely. Da Costa demonstratively took up a post within cannon's reach of Fort Concordia, thus expressing his contempt for the impotent Dutch who were unable to protect their allies – or the rebels.<sup>52</sup>

### *Conclusion*

The concepts of 'colonial' and 'rebellion', as found in the literature, are not adequate to cover the Timorese situation. The Timorese domains were involved, sometimes forcibly, in economic structures engineered by the VOC and the Estado da Índia. From this point of view the position of Timor as 'early colonial' is justified. The precedence of the external powers was based on contracts and alliances, through which local kings saw opportunities to gather power by allying with the newcomers. However, indigenous political networks existed side by side with the colonial ones, and alliances shifted with great rapidity. This is paralleled in other parts of the archipelago in the VOC period, and resembles a pre-colonial system where tributes and levies were imposed from the outside, with little interference in the internal governance of the kingdoms. What from a Dutch or Portuguese point of view was a rebellion was in fact often a complicated game of power in which the external powers were played out against each other. The modest size of the colonial establishments is significant here; in spite of their obvious technological lead, they had no alternative but to form alliances and fight Timorese with Timorese.

The narrow basis of the colonials was balanced by the weakness of indigenous political organization. Ritually anchored alliances could be quite comprehensive but did not launch enduring efforts to fight colonial settlements (though the Topasses kept movements against the Estado going for longer periods). The great movements against Portuguese rule and later Dutch rule during the eighteenth century often had an anticlimactic conclusion, whereby the Lifau or Kupang authorities were able to retain their position by means of mediation, or by issuing an act of pardon in exchange for renewed formal submission. The lack of durability of the movements is hardly surprising, in view of the poor geographical infrastructure of the island.

The rent-seeking practices of the external powers bred discontent. From a few coastal strongholds, they tried to direct Timorese affairs and harvest products. The material benefits they could offer their clients were a precarious protection – which often meant little in face of the frequent petty warfare – and the delivery of a limited amount of imported goods to local aristocracies. Conflicts were often triggered off by relatively small incidents, such as insults given

<sup>52</sup> VOC 1826 (1712), f. 14, VOC 1841 (1713), f. 7, in: NA, 1.04.02.

to local aristocrats. This indicates the fragility of the balance that the external powers tried to maintain. Still, periodical acceptance of the small-scale colonial establishments among indigenous groups indicates that the Portuguese and the Dutch built up a certain amount of prestige, often channelled into religious and secular symbols and expressed in oral traditions. In Amanuban, a kingdom that left the Portuguese sphere for the VOC in 1749, the story still goes that the King of Portugal in days of yore left his country and travelled over the seas to find himself a new land. Via Larantuka and Solor he came to Timor and there became the ancestor of the Amanuban royal line.<sup>53</sup> In this way the prestige of the Crown of Portugal underpinned Timorese kingship – a kingship known to have resisted those very same Portuguese.

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Marthen Nope of the Amanuban royal family, Niki-Niki, 29 January 2005.

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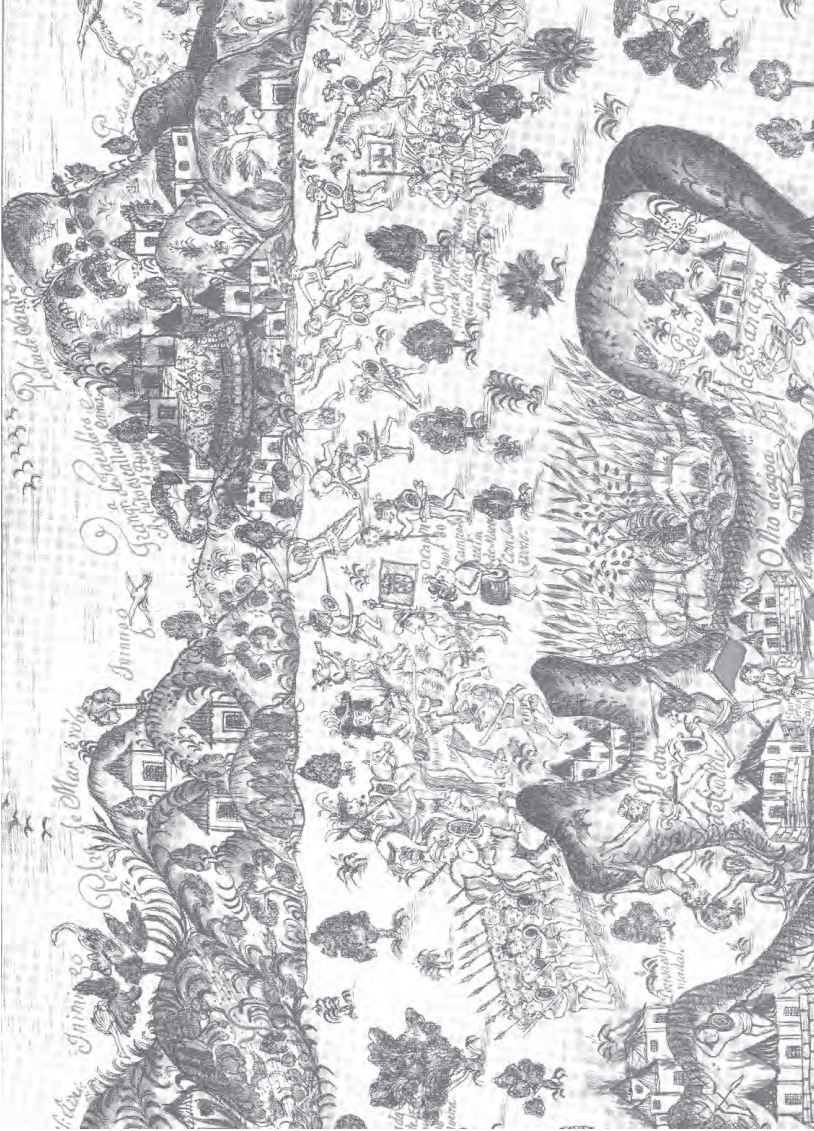
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'Tymorian Souldiers' (Nieuhof 1888: between pages 278 and 279).  
Contemporary missionary accounts suggest a much more elaborate attire, at any rate for the prominent warriors.





The siege of the defiant stronghold Cailaco in central Timor in late 1726, by the forces adhering to the Estado da Índia. Detail from a rare contemporary illustration, reproduced by De Sá 1949.



'A Topas or Mardick with his wife'. In Batavia, where the sketch for the illustration might have been made, Topasses and *mardijkers* were partly overlapping ethnic concepts, but on Timor they denoted two different groups; the former with a Portuguese background and the latter with an affiliation to the VOC. (Nieuhof 1988: between pages 278 and 279.)



V

Consideration tot. negociatione  
Van de Tooge der Koppereinsteging  
Van India) die dielde der Inuust  
oor D. Comp<sup>ij</sup> 1689 de Koning van  
tot Dylant Ouden, door den gema  
Koning Vindrocoapuan de Conde  
ff. gelygwaerd de adaar volkendinge  
in tot hore toe bawenb opgestelt.

Wilt jegden Raad tot opproefte zult de. d.  
Amrit der Toog, de Koppereinsteging van India  
in reeds gelygwaerd, is hore, te al deen de ge  
velge: in den jaare 1608. ter ontfondert opgestelt,  
tas datter ope tot Dylant Oude off gemaent te Lande  
beste ter gerooge tot Landtont waer te comen  
die naar dat tot dylant, con de poudere bawen  
te uenwa, dij de Toog Koppereinsteging gaeoedert nab man  
darmant gelaeret in too tot een de tot ande ter  
comenb boudon. die ind val de waent datter dery  
dog ter uenmy Lande gelyt naar vridighaan ter  
hielde hore bawen waenre gelyt in dylant  
die hore de dylant de portugese ingeliden ope  
Landtont in India, te de naar de dylant te  
dit dylant gelyt te de, die te de dylant van dat  
dylant in dylant die amuntijer, in nu off dat niet  
te dylant de Comite van dylant (die de waer  
dylant van dat gelye lande is) al overzichent  
dylant de dylant, dylant

Soe dat vry voor dylant, dylant van dylant, datter dylant  
dylant gelye dylant dylant gelyt off in dylant gelye  
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dylant tot dylant Oude naar van dylant hore moet  
niet van dylant dylant en dylant voor alle dylant  
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D. Comp<sup>ij</sup> die van dylant dylant, in dylant dylant dylant  
dylant dylant niet als dylant gelye dylant dylant dylant  
dylant van tot Lande dylant dylant dylant dylant dylant

Page from a report on Timor written in 1689 by Willem Tange. Tange was temporary resident in Kupang in 1685, but was soon demoted because the government in Batavia suspected him of creating trouble among the allies for his own advantage. Afterwards, in his own words, he led several years of 'unhappy trudging'. (KITLV, H 49.)