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

(Lay 2014:164–5)

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

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

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

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

Maps

The map Allied pilots had on their knees as they repeatedly dropped bombs on Kupang from 1943 onwards (Figure 16) shows a small town that could be crossed on foot in a quarter of an hour. All the buildings one expects in a colonial outpost of this size were there, on paper still pristine: Chinese shops and godowns along the shore, the large Chinese cemetery up the slope behind them, their community hall and, up the slope behind that, offices and the Resident’s villa. Schools, the jail, two hospitals, churches and a mosque, and, out along the coastal road towards the northeast, the military barracks completed the picture. Native houses that