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Spice War: Ternate, Makassar, the Dutch East India Company and the struggle for the Ambon Islands (c. 1600-1656)

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Citation

Mostert, T. (2023, March 28). *Spice War: Ternate, Makassar, the Dutch East India Company and the struggle for the Ambon Islands (c. 1600-1656)*.

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

INTRODUCTION

In October 1651, Commissioner Arnold de Vlaming van Oudshoorn was in the thick of one of the biggest crises yet faced by his employer, the Dutch East India Company (*Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, henceforth the VOC). Ten months previously, he had been sent to the small volcanic island of Ternate in what is now eastern Indonesia. His purpose was to reinstate its Sultan, who nominally ruled many of the clove-producing regions of the eastern archipelago. The Sultan's cooperation with the VOC was crucial for the Company's control over these areas and its efforts towards exclusive access to clove production and trade. The Company's policies, however, had also generated discontent and opposition among Ternaten ranks, as had become painfully clear in recent months. The Ternaten nobility had revolted against the Sultan, whom they deemed too amenable to the Company, and proclaimed his brother Sultan instead.

Despite leading a sizeable military force, de Vlaming's initial attempts to restore the old Sultan met with little success. Just as his campaign was getting underway, news reached him of a connected, but even bigger crisis in the Ambon Islands, some 500 kilometres to the south. Eight of the Company's fortified outposts in the region, nominally part of the domains of the Ternaten Sultan, had been overrun in a massive and well-organised surprise attack. Their garrisons had been mostly killed and the few survivors taken prisoner. With his well-armed fleet already in the area, De Vlaming was now confronted with the task of restoring Company control in the region. Given that his forces were not intended nor prepared to handle a full-blown war in the Ambon Islands, he could only do so much, however.

Now it was October and de Vlaming was sailing back to Batavia in October to report to his superiors. The region was still in turmoil and the twin crises far from resolved, yet De Vlaming was startlingly upbeat. As he wrote in his report to the Governor-General and Council in Batavia, these crises, in spite of being an existential threat to the Company's interests in the region, also provided a golden opportunity 'to do what could otherwise never have been legally done.'¹ He was talking about destroying clove trees. The way he saw it, there was an excess of those, leading to overproduction. What is more, some clove trees were growing in areas over which the Company had never been able to exert much control. The revolt therefore had a silver lining. De Vlaming's subsequent efforts to regain

1 Report De Vlaming, 25 October 1651, VOC 1186, fol. 7v.

the Company's ascendancy in the region and destroy 'excess' clove trees would ultimately last five years, and are now known as the Great Hoamoal (or Ambon) War (1651-1656).²

The fact that a high official of the VOC was happy about a massive revolt against his employer because it presented an opportunity to eradicate clove trees might be taken to suggest that some things had gone badly wrong in the lead-up to these events. Indeed, half a century earlier the VOC had been welcomed into these regions. Representatives of both the Ternaten leadership and the state of Hitu in the Ambon area had actively sought out the VOC's assistance against the Spanish and Portuguese. The Dutch had genuinely considered themselves allies to these states against their mutual enemies – albeit also opportunistically.³ The Company's military assistance had come with a price tag: both the Sultan of Ternate and Hitu's political leaders signed treaties promising to deliver cloves from their domain exclusively to the Company. To put it mildly, these treaties gave rise to a range of conflicting interests and divergent expectations that sent relations into a destructive downward spiral over the subsequent decades. They ultimately led to a series of bitter and bloody wars in the region. By 1656, when the dust of the Great Hoamoal War had settled, little was left of the constellation of states and thriving trade networks that had characterised the region when the Dutch first arrived, and a particularly restrictive colonial order was imposed on both the Ambon region and Ternate.

In this dissertation I tell the story of how that happened. Earlier studies have addressed aspects and episodes of these conflicts, most prominently those by Gerrit Knaap, but also Jennifer Gaynor, Adam Clulow, Arend de Roever, Chris van Fraassen, Leonard Andaya and others. Nevertheless, as of yet there has been no sustained study of this period as a whole.⁴ In addition, although these were

2 In this dissertation I will refer to the conflict as the Great Hoamoal War, as the peninsula of Hoamoal was the main (though crucially, far from the only) theatre of conflict. As to its demarcation, I here employ the dating of the conflict from Georgius Rumphius. 'De Ambonsche Historie.' *Bijdragen tot de taal-, land- en volkenkunde* 64 (1910): II, 99-100, who has the conflict end when news of a peace agreement with Makassar reached the Ambon region, although this is arguably arbitrary: fighting in Hoamoal itself had ceased the year before, and conflict elsewhere in the Ambon region would continue for another two years.

3 For the latter see Martine J. van Ittersum. *Profit and Principle : Hugo Grotius, Natural Rights Theories and the Rise of Dutch Power in the East Indies, 1595-1615*. Leiden: Brill, 2006: Ch. 2.

4 The conflicts on Ambon, and the connections between Ambon and Ternate, have

some of the largest and most consequential conflicts in the early history of the VOC, there is comparatively little awareness of them among either historians or the wider public.

This relative lack of awareness presents a particularly stark contrast in relation

been researched most prominently by Gerrit Knaap. After his dissertation Gerrit Knaap. *Kruidnagelen en christenen : de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie en de bevolking van Ambon 1656-1696*. Dordrecht: Foris, 1987, an investigation of the society in the Ambon Islands in the wake of these conflicts, he dedicated a number of subsequent publications to the nature of warfare in the region in general, and some specific crises. Id., ‘Crisis and Failure: War and Revolt in the Ambon Islands, 1636–1637.’ *Cakalele* 3 (1992): 1–26. Id., ‘De Ambonse eilanden tussen twee mogendheden; De VOC en Ternate, 1605–1656.’ In *Hof en Handel; Aziatische vorsten en de VOC 1620–1720*, red. Elsbeth Locher-Scholten en Peter Rietbergen, 35–58. Leiden: KITLV, 2004. Id., ‘The Governor-General and the Sultan: An Attempt to Restructure a Divided Amboina in 1638.’ *Itinerario* 29, no. 1 (2005): 79–100. Id., ‘Headhunting, Carnage and Armed Peace in Amboina, 1500–1700.’ *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 46, no. 2 (2003): 165–92. Id., ‘Kora-kora en kruiddamp; De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie in oorlog en vrede in Ambon.’ In *De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie tussen Oorlog and diplomatie*, red. Gerrit Knaap en Ger Teitler, 257–80. Leiden: KITLV, 2002. Id., ‘Robbers and Traders: Papuan Piracy in the Seventeenth Century.’ *Pirates, Ports, and Coasts in Asia*. Singapore: ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute Singapore, 2018. 147–177. Id., Knaap, Gerrit J. ‘The Saniri Tiga Air (Seram); An Account of Its ‘discovery’ and Interpretation Between About 1675 and 1950.’ *Bijdragen tot de taal-, land- en volkenkunde* 149.2 (1993): 250–273. Knaap, Gerrit, Henk den Heijer and Michiel de Jong. *Oorlogen overzee. Militair optreden door compagnie en staat buiten Europa, 1595–1814*. Amsterdam: Boom, 2015 places these conflicts within the wider context of warfare by the VOC.

Jennifer Gaynor. *Intertidal History in Island Southeast Asia: Submerged Genealogies and the Legacy of Coastal Capture*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016. Clulow, Adam. *Amboina, 1623 : Fear and Conspiracy on the Edge of Empire*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2016, esp. the final chapter and the epilogue. Arend de Roever. *De jacht op sandelhout : de VOC en de tweedeling van Timor in de zeventiende eeuw*. Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2002. Fraassen, Ch.F. van. ‘Ternate, de Molukken en de Indonesische archipel : van soa-organisatie en vierdeling: een studie van traditionele samenleving en cultuur in Indonesië’ PhD. Diss, Leiden University, 1987 remains an invaluable resource, as do some of his later publications, most prominently the article Id. ‘Ternate and its dependencies.’ In L.E. Visser ed. *Halmahera and Beyond : Social Science Research in the Moluccas*. Leiden: KITLV Press, 1994: 23-34. Leonard Andaya, esp. *The World of Maluku : Eastern Indonesia in the Early Modern Period*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1993. Even though Van Fraassen and Andaya disagreed substantially on the nature of Maluku society and its early modern history, I have found both books extremely valuable. I gratefully build on all this material in this dissertation. Note that some of these authors have also been instrumental in providing an unusual and underutilized wealth of source publications, to be discussed separately below.

to the war over the Banda Islands and their nutmeg. In the public debate about the legacy of colonialism which has flared up in recent years in the Netherlands and worldwide, Governor-General Coen's conquest and subsequent depopulation of the island of Banda Lontor in 1621 has become a major focal point. It is perhaps not surprising that this episode of early Dutch colonial history is often presented as an illustration of the ruthlessness of the VOC's endeavour to establish a spice monopoly, due to its gruesome and relatively straightforward nature. The episode can be found in school books and popular histories, but is also a favourite example in works on capitalism, genocide, or the links between the two.⁵ The acclaimed author Amitav Ghosh, a prominent voice in public debate on climate change, has recently used the depopulation of the Banda Islands as a parable for the present western worldview and how it wreaks havoc on the planet.⁶ It also continues to bring its architect, Coen, to the forefront of public debate about the Dutch colonial past.⁷ The bloody conquest of Banda, however, was only one early episode in the complicated and drawn-out conflicts over access to the spices

5 Popular histories: Giles Milton. *Nathaniel's Nutmeg : How One Man's Resolve Changed the World*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1999 (many subsequent reprints). Willem Oosterbeek. *Nootmuskaat: de geschiedenis van een wonderbaarlijk nootje*. Amsterdam: Athenaeum-Polak & Van Gennep, 2017. Books about capitalism: Daron Acemoglu, and James A. Robinson. *Why Nations Fail : the Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty*. London: Profile Books, 2013: 249pp. Books about genocide: Mark Levine. *Genocide in the age of the nation-state*, II, *The rise of the west and the coming of genocide*. London: Tauris & Co 2005, 243; Michael J. Kelly, *Prosecuting corporations for genocide*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016: 18, citing it as the earliest documented case of corporate genocide.

6 Amitav Ghosh. *The nutmeg's curse: parables for a planet in crisis*. John Murray, 2021.

7 While calls to rename, for instance, the Coentunnel in Amsterdam have been made for years, and the last school named after J.P. Coen changed its name in 2018, Coen and his legacy were recently brought to the forefront of Dutch public debate again in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement. It focused particularly on a statue of Coen still standing in the historic centre of his birthplace, the town of Hoorn. The statue and town were the site of demonstrations over the summer of 2020, and the discussion about the statue, Coen and his legacy continued into 2021, when the Banda massacre, 400 years ago that year, was remembered in various exhibitions and events both in the Netherlands and in Banda itself. At the time of writing, debate about what to do with the statue is ongoing. For one news article on the matter: Tonny van der Mee, 'Voor de Molukse gemeenschap staat Coen voor geweld' in: *AD*, 22 June 2020, available online through <https://www.ad.nl/binnenland/beelden-onder-vuur-voor-molukse-gemeenschap-staat-j-p-coen-voor-geweld~a4f94c1c/?cb=49cf01d36b66d465dd731716ae920567>.

from the region. As the Company was imposing a new colonial order over the depopulated Banda islands, the conflicts over cloves were only just beginning.

TERNATE, MAKASSAR, AND THE STRUGGLE FOR THE EASTERN ARCHIPELAGO

Although these conflicts warrant further attention in their own right, investigating them also sheds light on aspects of early colonial conflicts more generally, from the kinds of warfare they entailed to their political dynamics. To start with the latter: existing scholarship about the conflicts in the eastern archipelago in this period has tended to have a very local focus, which has left underexplored both the geographical breadth and intricate political dynamics of the struggle for access to spices, which extended throughout the eastern archipelago.

Over the course of the seventeenth century, the relationship between the VOC and the Ternaten sultan became strained and fractious, as did the relationship between the sultan and his dependencies on other islands. The sultan's policies alienated local leaders in his extensive domains, causing them to cast around for other political affiliations. These could be European, the clearest and best-studied example being the English. The role of Southeast Asian political centres, however, was of far more consequence. In the period covered by this study, the new rising power in the region was Makassar.

Makassar was the name of a city and trading port, but in European sources is often conflated with the state of which it was the seat of government: the Gowa-Tallo state.⁸ During the seventeenth century, in tandem with the tightening

8 What I here call 'the Gowa-Tallo state' consisted at its core of the Sultanate of Gowa and the state of Tallo located just to its north, which enjoyed a very close relationship at the time (sources from Gowa and Tallo often used the phrase 'only one people but two rulers'). Large swaths of South Sulawesi were affiliated with this state, of which Gowa and Tallo formed the centre. Although one must be careful not to overstate the scope and time of their political integration (see e.g. William Cummings. 'Only One People but Two Rulers.' *Bijdragen tot de taal-, land- en volkenkunde* 155.1 (1999): 97-120), this integration did reach its apex in our period of study. Whereas I seek to be more specific where possible, I feel that in some cases it is justified to refer to them jointly as the Gowa-Tallo state. The spelling I employ follows standard practice among South Sulawesi specialists: the city of Makassar, the Makasar and Bugis people, the Makasars, the Bugis. I thank Campbell Macknight for many valuable suggestions, including but not limited to the terminology and spelling employed here. For a brief history of Gowa, Tallo, and Makassar, see William Cummings. *A Chain of Kings: the Makassarese Chronicles of Gowa and Talloq*. Leiden: KITLV Press, 2007: 1-8; Anthony Reid. 'The Rise of Makassar.' *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian affairs* Vol. 17 (1983): 100-125; Leonard Y. Andaya. *The Heritage of Arung Palakka : a History of South*

of the VOC's grip on Maluku, Makassar became a key site for European and Asian traders seeking to purchase spices and trade in other high-value goods. The VOC proved unable to prevent Makassar-based traders from accessing the Maluku spices and to impose its will on Gowa-Tallo itself, which became a formidable state over the course of the seventeenth century.

Traditionally, much has been made of the continuous rivalry between Ternate and neighbouring Tidore. Leonard Andaya, for instance, interprets their rivalry as a perennial dualism essential to Maluku culture.⁹ At the beginning of the seventeenth century, however, an emerging rivalry between Gowa-Tallo and Ternate was becoming increasingly clear and consequential. In my view, the interplay between the spice wars and the VOC's conflicts with Gowa-Tallo is crucial for our understanding of these conflicts. Although existing scholarship has largely treated them as distinct struggles, these wars were so intertwined that one can hardly separate them from one another.¹⁰

Sulawesi (Celebes) in the Seventeenth Century. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981, esp. Ch. 1. A good introduction to the forts along its coast is David Bulbeck. 'Construction history and significance of the Makassar fortifications', in: Kathryn Robinson and Mukhlis Paeni (eds.) *Living Through Histories: Culture, History and Social Life in South Sulawesi* Canberra: Australian National University, Jakarta: National Archives of Indonesia, 1996: 67-106.

9 Andaya, *World of Maluku*, Ch. 3 and 4.

10 The study of the eastern archipelago has for a good part been the domain of area studies specialists with an often strongly anthropological outlook. One consequence has been that studies tend to be highly regionalized, focusing on a specific island or small region. There is a strong tradition of South Sulawesi regional specialists, and an equally strong regional specialization within the study of the Maluku. Works on Maluku: Andaya, *The World of Maluku*; Des Alwi. *Sejarah Maluku : Banda Naira, Ternate, Tidore dan Ambon*. Jakarta: Dian Rakyat, 2005. Ternate and Tidore: Willard Hanna and Des Alwi. *Turbulent Times Past in Ternate and Tidore*. Banda Naira: Yayasan Warisan dan Budaya Banda Naira, 1990. Chris van Fraassen, 'Ternate, de Molukken en de Indonesische Archipel.' There is a particularly strong Dutch historiographical tradition on Ambon from the late 1970s onwards, which partly developed in the wake of increasing tensions between the Dutch government and the Dutch Malukan community. The subsequent emancipation movement saw the founding of the Steunpunt Educatie Molukkers, which published a treasure trove of publications, including: Ridjali., Hans Straver e.a. ed. *Historie van Hitu : een Ambonse geschiedenis uit de zeventiende eeuw*. Utrecht: Landelijk Steunpunt Educatie Molukkers, 2004. Georg Rumphius, Chris van Fraassen e.a. eds., *De Ambonse eilanden onder de VOC : zoals opgetekend in De Ambonse landbeschrijving*. Utrecht: Landelijk Steunpunt Educatie Molukkers, 2002. Historically, much work on Makassar came from Leiden University and the KITLV, including authors such as Ligetvoet, Noorduyn, Cense, Matthes, Tol, and, more

The work of Leonard Andaya presents a particularly insightful example of the tendency among historians to attempt to disentangle these conflicts. His study *The Heritage of Arung Palakka* was dedicated largely to the interaction between the VOC, the Gowa-Tallo state, and the Bugis. Andaya mentions Gowa-Tallo's overseas power, remarking that it exerted political influence outside Sulawesi proper, including in the islands of Maluku. However, this power subsequently hardly features in his analysis, which leads his study to present the power dynamics of Gowa-Tallo as a largely internal South Sulawesi affair.¹¹ Andaya's tendency to differentiate the overlapping political spheres of the eastern archipelago can be seen from the other direction in another of his major works: *The World of Maluku*, an extensive analysis of the politics and culture of the Maluku region. In this work, Andaya occasionally pays lip service to the fact that non-European external actors had political, economic, and cultural influence in Maluku and that Makassar was prominent among them. Nevertheless, his general thesis in the book emphasises the specificities and uniqueness of the cultural sphere that he calls the 'world of Maluku.'¹² Interestingly, the former work inspired him to write the latter, for '[o]ne couldn't fully understand what was happening in Makassar without knowing the situation in Maluku.'¹³ Although I fully agree with that proposition, I feel that Andaya has opted not to showcase this interconnectedness in these two works. Instead of taking an integrated political and cultural view of the eastern archipelago as a whole, they emphasise Makassar's and Maluku's distinct situations and cultural dynamics.

'EVEN-HANDED FREEDOM FOR ALL' OR 'CONSIDERATIONS OF STATE'?

To be sure, there is also a wealth of work demonstrating the interconnectedness of Southeast Asia in general and the eastern archipelago in particular. For example, Roy Ellen's *On the edge of the Banda Zone*, which reconstructs the cultural and economic networks connecting eastern Seram to the region at large, is particularly relevant to this study. So is the seminal work Anthony Reid, who takes

recently, Wellen and Sutherland. In addition, there is a strong Australian tradition of research into South Sulawesi, mostly based at Australian National University, with authors such as Macknight, Bulbeck, and Anthony Reid, who developed many of his ideas and wrote his seminal work *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce* there.

11 Andaya, *The Heritage of Arung Palakka*, esp.45-48.

12 Andaya, *World of Maluku*, esp. introduction, Ch. 3

13 Kathryn Wellen and Ariel C. Lopez. 'Traversing the Malay-Indonesian World: an interview with Leonard Andaya.' *Itinerario* 38.1 (2014): 7-12, esp. 10.

a keen interest in Makassar but also integrates it into a view of the entire region.

What such works have in common, though, is an emphasis on cultural practices and economic ties, often over very long time scales, which leads them to present a largely apolitical, Braudelian view of the region.¹⁴ This is apparent, for instance, in Reid's assessment of the character of trade in Makassar, which he features as a prime example of the kind of cosmopolitan trading port that defined the late stage of what he terms the 'Age of Commerce' in Southeast Asia. According to Reid, this period came to an end over the course of the seventeenth century, in no small part because VOC policy destroyed the open, cosmopolitan system on which it rested. In his monumental work *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce*, as well as much of his subsequent scholarship, Reid tends to present Makassar as a *bandar*, a free port town. For Reid, it was Makassar's *bandar* character that put it at odds with the controlling and monopolising VOC: 'Makassar's prosperity depended on being a spice port open to all comers, at a time when the VOC was asserting every means to assert a monopoly over both clove and nutmeg... To the VOC's demand for monopoly Makassar insisted on even-handed freedom for all.'¹⁵

Although these works and approaches have been invaluable to our understanding of the region and narrating its history on its own terms, they obscure aspects of the issue of power.¹⁶ Whereas Reid mostly focuses on the VOC's power to impose a restrictive system over archipelagic Southeast Asia, the region had its

14 For an inventory, with some well-placed critical remarks, of the influence of Braudel on writing the history of Southeast Asia, see Heather Sutherland, 'Southeast Asian History and the Mediterranean Analogy' *Journal of Southeast Asian studies (Singapore)* 34.1 (2003): 1–20.

15 Quote from Anthony Reid. *A History of Southeast Asia : Critical Crossroads*. Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2015, p. 136. also see Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce*, II, passim, and, most recently, Anthony Reid. 'Early Modernity as Cosmopolis: Some suggestions from Southeast Asia', in Sven Trakulhun and Ralph Weber (eds.), *Delimiting modernities: conceptual challenges and regional responses*. London: Lexington Books, 2015, pp. 123-142. Some of his articles specifically on Makasar do spare some attention to Makasar politics, both 'domestic' and 'foreign', e.g.; Reid, 'The rise of Makassar' and id., 'A great seventeenth century Indonesian family: Matoaya and Patingalloang of Makasar' in Reid (ed.) *Charting the shape of early modern Southeast Asia*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2000, pp. 126-154.

16 Sebastian Conrad. *What Is Global History?* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016, p. 224, in analysing some of global history's pitfalls, remarks specifically and perhaps somewhat maliciously, that fetishizing connectedness brings with it the risk of neglecting the issue of power.

fair share of expanding powers as well, which played a crucial role in the dynamics of the Spice Wars.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, many seventeenth-century VOC officials were, by contrast, very preoccupied with matters of power; they were therefore also absorbed in the political and military ambitions of states such as Ternate and Gowa-Tallo, and their interaction. Older works of history, many of which take cues more directly from colonial sources and adhere to a more military and political perspective, remark on the political rivalry between Ternate and Gowa, these states' expansionism, and the implications of this for the VOC.¹⁷ Although it is to be welcomed that historical analysis in this area has moved beyond the traditional approach of such VOC-centred studies, it may be that in jettisoning earlier scholars' concern with the political dynamics of the region's history, recent work might have thrown the baby out with the bathwater.

Makassar and Ternate were both political centres of states forged by military expansion. The clashes between their overlapping areas of influence, which resulted in rivalry over subjects and access to trade, supplies, and sea routes, are crucial to understanding how the region developed in the seventeenth century. As I aim to show in this dissertation, the category of 'spice traders' from Makassar often overlapped with the war fleets that Gowa sent to make vassals, demand tribute, and provide military assistance throughout the eastern archipelago. This was powerfully and succinctly encapsulated in an observation made by an employee of the English East India Company (henceforth the EIC), who wrote in January 1636 that 'the clove traders of Macassar have on the Island of Amboyna given the Dutch a great overthrow, where they say were slayne 400 Dutch soldiers, with whose arms and buffcoats Macasser seemes to glitter.'¹⁸ Early modern trade went hand in hand with violence, existing political affiliations, and consid-

17 To pick a few examples F.W. Stapel, *Het Bongaais Verdrag*. Groningen: Wolters, 1922 often mentions Gowan expansion and specific conflicts with Ternate in the 70 pages he dedicates to the years up to the Makassar War. D.K. Bassett, 'English trade in Celebes, 1613-1667.' *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (181) (May, 1958): 1-39 also dedicates substantial attention to Gowa's expansion into Maluku, although not giving any explicit attention to the role of Ternate. Works based on extensive source publications, such as H.T. Colenbrander (ed.) *Jan Pietersz. Coen: Bescheiden Omtrent Zijn Bedrijf in Indie*. VI, *Levensbeschrijving*. The Hague: Nijhoff, 1934, and the introductions to P.A. Tiele, and J.E. Heeres. *Bounstoffen voor de geschiedenis der Nederlanders in den Maleischen Archipel*. 's Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1886 similarly occasionally remark upon the expansion of Makassar and its conflicts with Ternate.

18 Bantam presidency to court of directors, 31 Jan 1636, in: IOR E/3/15, fol. 153.

erations of state and power. This applied not only to European trade, but that of their Asian competitors too.¹⁹

In exploring this history, I aim to strike a balance between two imperatives. On the one hand, I want to show something of the eastern archipelago's vibrant existing state system and trade networks on their own terms. On the other, I mean to recognise how European's rivalries and interests were deeply entangled with this these during the seventeenth century. Insights from scholars such as Jennifer Gaynor, who astutely observes that the Spice Wars were driven not only by European interests, but also by the rivalry between Makassar and Ternate, which 'competed for coastal dominance, maritime superiority and influence in the central and eastern archipelago,' are important.²⁰ Nevertheless, historians should not push such insights so far as to end up overstating distinctions between local and European political considerations and military ambitions. The fact that a lot went on that Company officials did not see or understand should not be taken to suggest that there was some fundamental dichotomy between the Europeans in the region and the indigenous population in terms of their interests,

19 What we are missing by limiting ourselves to such a-political approaches is well-illustrated if we look at, for example, James J. Fox. 'Re-Considering Eastern Indonesia.' *Asian Journal of Social Science* 39.2 (2011): 131–149, which traces the historical roots of the current coherence and administrative divisions of eastern Indonesia, through the colonial period, back to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Although starting with a quote from Pigafetta, dating from the very first years of European involvement in the region, he then proceeds to skip the intervening century-and-a-half. I would contend that it is precisely that period that would shape the eastern archipelago for centuries to come.

Looking at this particular period might also create fresh insight into whether the eastern archipelago is a coherent region at all. Fox, op. cit., 131, for instance, has not been the only one remarking that 'the diversity of its island environments, its importance in the course of human migration, its linguistic and demographic diversity, its involvement in the organisation of world trade and the historical development of its many diverse social traditions all pose a challenge to any general characterisation of Eastern Indonesia as a distinctive region.' Other students of the region have voiced similar concerns, such as the Andayas, who in a recent handbook also noted historians' difficulty to 'approach the eastern archipelago as a coherent region' for similar reasons, and offered up looking at the connecting function of the sea throughout the region as a partial solution to this methodological problem. Barbara Andaya and Leoard Andaya. *A History of Early Modern Southeast Asia, 1400-1830*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, p. 112. Another partial solution would be to explore its political dynamics in the early seventeenth century, which form a clear and distinct integrated whole.

20 Gaynor, *Intertidal History*, 65.

worldviews, and ways of operating.²¹ I join Martine van Ittersum in noting the aptness for the eastern archipelago of what Tamar Herzog wrote about the early modern Americas: ‘It is a mistake to portray imperial rivalry between European powers as somehow separate from confrontations between European powers and natives, and from conflicts among different native groups. These processes influenced each other and have to be studied in tandem.’²²

As I aim to demonstrate in what follows, for all their differences, Ternate, Gowa, the VOC, and other European powers in the region were largely involved in the same struggle, in which commerce, politics, and war were intertwined for all participants. Agency and initiative were rather evenly distributed in this conflict. Particularly as time wore on, the various players also learned to understand each other’s motives, tactics, and goals to a considerable degree.

‘DOUBTS AND A THOUSAND FEARS’: VOC POLICY IN THE SPICE WARS

This is not to say that the Dutch always fully grasped what was going on around them. Faced with resistance to their monopoly policies, their incomplete grasp of what was unfolding in the polities surrounding them, and what they perceived as a hostile and forbidding environment, Company officials felt constantly threatened and anxious.

In *Amboina 1623: Fear and Conspiracy on the Edge of Empire*, Adam Clulow delves into the almost four-centuries-old cold case known as the Amboina Massacre or Amboina trial. In the events in question, which took place in Amboina in 1623, the Dutch hastily tried and beheaded twenty-one supposed conspirators (some English, some Japanese). Adam Clulow puts fear and anxiety at the centre

21 Gaynor writes, for instance, that the Dutch were ‘not aware, it seems, that [Makassar and its allies] had their own motives for waging war, regardless of European rivalries’ in the mid-seventeenth century, and that VOC officials were wrong in believing that the Makasars were also ‘egged on by the Portuguese’. (p. 77-78.) Perhaps the clearest example, however, is when she speculates that the fortification efforts underway in 1660 at Makassar, in the wake of the surprise attack described above, might be due to fear of a Bugis-Buton-Ternate invasion, rather than fear of the Dutch, (p. 84) which is an unsustainable assertion. Similar considerations could be made with regard to Andaya, *The World of Maluku*, which also rests on a premise of the encounter of two separate and to some degree incommensurable cultural spheres.

22 Here quoted from Martine van Ittersum. ‘Debating Natural Law in the Banda Islands: A Case Study in Anglo-Dutch Imperial Competition in the East Indies, 1609–1621.’ *History of European Ideas* 42, no. 4 (2016): 459–501, 463, who applied the same quote to her study of the dynamics there.

of his analysis, showing how these emotions shaped how Van Speult and his subordinates handled the case. This early example of Dutch colonial anxiety was not an outlier, he claims; rather, fear, rumour, and paranoia were crucial factors in the events that played out subsequently in the Ambon region and early Dutch colonialism more generally. Although this constitutes neither a defence of the Company's often brutal policies nor an invitation to pity Company officials as victims of colonialism in their own way, Clulow suggests that constant feelings of anxiety fed into Company officials' decisions. Accordingly, they help explain the remarkable violence and brutality of the interactions between the Company and indigenous inhabitants of the eastern archipelago.²³

To be sure, Van Speult was not the last governor of Ambon to exhibit signs of anxiety and paranoia during his tenure. These emotions permeate his successors' correspondence. As I go on to show, some of them felt 'blind [...] and unable to come to a sound judgement' in the face of the intricate tangle of politics around them. Indeed, many were plagued by 'a thousand torments' and thought the Ambon region 'the most difficult governorate in all of the Indies.' Their lack of grip on developments in the region often convinced them that Maluku's various Muslim polities were all conspiring to drive the Dutch from the region, regardless of whether they were officially VOC allies, and 'that we should surely assume that they have numerous secret schemes.'²⁴

At times, this seems to have paralysed Company officials. In many cases, though, their anxiety, distrust, and frustration appear to have been crucial in shaping their increasingly extreme ideas about how to deal with the situation. As early as 1626, Company officials called for 'extreme measures,' including the depopulation of entire regions in the same way that the Dutch had depopulated Banda. From the 1630s onwards, these ideas increasingly translated into extreme policies.

LANDSCAPE, ENVIRONMENT, AND THE CONDUCT OF WAR

The anxiety that the VOC felt when looking out across the sea- and landscape of the eastern archipelago was not just caused by its limited grasp of the region's political dynamics. The region also presented outside powers seeking to impose

23 Clulow, *Amboina 1623*, esp. 1-26, 174-200.

24 First two quotes from governor Philip Lucasz: see chapter V, paragraph 'Kaicili Ali's long stay in the Ambon Islands'. Last two quotes from governor Artus Gijssels, see chapter VII, paragraph 'A war enthusiast in Batavia'.

their will with particularly forbidding terrain. Intense geological and volcanic activity in the area created a landscape of islands which tended to be extremely inaccessible directly beyond the coast. Coral platforms, elevated from the seabed by the tectonic forces that have shaped the region, constituted daunting natural fortifications. Wooden villages were easily abandoned and easily rebuilt, their population able to disappear quickly into a given island's interior.

All this meant that the population of the region was remarkably resilient to the VOC's strategies of control and warfare. I aim to demonstrate how this led the VOC to rely increasingly on local allies and their tactics. Ultimately, though, they resorted to targeting the very environment that made the region so forbidding for them. Having begun by destroying clove trees, they progressively extended this tactic to all trees and other plants that could sustain human populations.

This is relevant to wider scholarship on warfare between Asian and European powers. Many contributions in this field are still heavily influenced by the paradigm established by Geoffrey Parker's 1988 book *The Military Revolution*, which proposed that Europe had developed a military edge over the rest of the world as early as the sixteenth century, enabling it to project its power overseas. Although Parker's original 'West vs. the rest' dichotomy has steadily given way to a much more detailed picture of various military developments around the world and their reciprocal influences on each other, the factors that he identified as crucial (including military drill, the broadside sailing vessel, gunpowder technology, and developments in fortification such as the *trace italienne*) still feature heavily in recent thinking about the global balance of military power in the early modern period.²⁵ When it comes to assessing the Spice Wars' military dynamics, such factors have some explanatory value, but they do not readily provide a framework for what I consider the crucial factors in the conflict: the prohibitive role of the landscape in employing European tactics, the increasing reliance on local allies and tactics, and the struggle for resources. The Spice Wars, all in all, were first and foremost environmental wars, giving occasion to reconsider the way in

25 E.g. Sun Laichen, 'Military Technology Transfers from Ming China and the Emergence of Northern Mainland Southeast Asia (c. 1390–1527).' *Journal of Southeast Asia Studies* 34:3 (2003): 495–517. Tonio Andrade. *Lost Colony: the untold story of China's first great victory over the West*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011. Id. *The Gunpowder Age: China, Military Innovation, and the Rise of the West in World History*. Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016.

which early modern historians have thought about wars between Europeans and non-Europeans.²⁶

This study, then, aims to show the evolution of the seventeenth century spice wars as they were shaped by the physical land- and seascape of the Ambon islands, and the political dynamics of the region at large, from the arrival of the first Dutch ships in the eastern archipelago until the durable imposition of colonial control over Ambon, Hoamoal and the adjacent islands by 1656. While the Ambon region was the centre of gravity of these conflicts, one of the aspects this study highlights is their wider regional dynamic. The involvement of Makassar and other powers from beyond the region proper, the perennial cat-and-mouse game between Asian traders and the VOC, and the fact that Company troops increasingly targeted enemy staging areas and supply points throughout the region towards the end of the conflict, furthermore expanded the geographical scope of the conflict as it progressed. As a consequence, much of the eastern archipelago, i.e. Sulawesi with its smaller adjacent islands as well as the entire area nowadays known as Maluku, will play a role in this dissertation.

While complicated and wide-ranging, these conflicts also constitute an extremely dramatic story, which has been only partially told. I also certainly hope to bring it to life. The incredibly rich source material makes it possible to occasionally come very close to the harrowing jungle warfare, the burning villages and the appalling amount of bloodshed that characterized the conflict.²⁷ Additional-

26 As I will elaborate on in subsequent chapters, the recent book Emmanuel Kreike. *Scorched Earth : Environmental Warfare as a Crime Against Humanity and Nature*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021, making a case for considering the central role of the environment in such conflicts even within an early modern context, especially resonates with my own research, and I have thankfully integrated his framework and terminology into my dissertation towards its final stages.

27 In addition to the VOC Archives kept in the Nationaal Archief in the Hague and the India Office Records kept in the British Library in London, specific mention must be made of the private papers of Artus Gijsels, now kept in the Badische Landesbibliothek in Karlsruhe and the two manuscript copies of Bor's *Amboinse Oorlogen* kept in the respective Royal Libraries of the Netherlands and Belgium, located in The Hague and Brussels.

In addition, the topic is especially well-provisioned with extensive source publications, through the efforts of Gerrit Knaap, Chris van Fraassen, Hans Straver and others, which in my view remain very much underrecognized and underutilized. The most relevant to the present study are the *Memories van overgave* by the respective governors of Ambon, available online through <http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/vocambon>; Rumphius's 'Ambonse landbeschrijving', published as Rumphius (Chris van Fraassen

ly, it allows us to get to know the protagonists and their motivations in remarkable detail. Due to the constraints of the source material, we are best informed about those employed by the Company, such as governor Gijsels, who turned from the most outspoken opponent of stringent monopoly policies to their most fanatic enforcer yet, or Livinus Bor who wrote an extravagant glorification of the Great Hoamoal War but all the same, appears to have been haunted by what he experienced for the rest of his days. Fortunately, through a combination of both the surviving indigenous sources and European descriptions we do get to know some of the protagonists from Makassar and Maluku as well, such as *Kapitan Hitu* Tepil, who tried to the last to mediate between the Company and various indigenous polities when relations started deteriorating, Imam Rijali, who wrote a history of Hitu in the seventeenth century through which we also get to know his own actions and experiences, or Karaeng Pattingalloang, the chancellor of Gowa who never ceased to surprise European observers by being intimidatingly well-informed on everything from Christian theology to contemporary global political developments.

Before getting around to them, however let us first have a look at the stage where this dramatic conflict took place: the eastern archipelago, which is not only an interesting region for reasons of history, but also for its geological and biological characteristics.

and Hans Straver eds.), *De Ambonse eilanden onder de VOC*, and the wonderful source publication of the *Hikayat Tanah Hitu*. Ridjali (Straver e.a. eds.), *Historie van Hitu*. With respect to Makassar, Cummings, *A Chain of Kings* and Cummings, *The Makassar Annals* have similarly proven invaluable.

