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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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IV. ESCALATION IN AMBON (1616-1625)

As established in the last chapter, the VOC's alliance with Ternate, in which it provided military aid in exchange for exclusive clove deliveries from the sultan's domains, and subsequent attempts to enforce these and other monopoly provisions throughout the eastern archipelago, significantly contributed to the outbreak of hostilities with Gowa in 1615. This chapter shifts the focus to the Ambon Islands, where the Hituese had hailed the VOC as a friend and ally when it took the Portuguese fort there and replaced the Portuguese as de facto rulers of the islands' Christian regions in 1605. The Company had made itself less popular with the leaders of the Hoamoal Peninsula, which was formally part of the domains of the Ternaten sultan, for enforcing its treaty with Ternate there, with its exclusive deliveries and relatively low prices.

Within the ranks of the VOC itself, the same period saw the emergence of a difference of opinion as to Company strategy in the eastern archipelago. The main protagonists in the controversy were Laurens Reael, who favoured fostering good relations with the sultan of Ternate and other local leaders, and Jan Pietersz. Coen, who had less faith in local rulers' good intentions and wanted the VOC to be able to enforce its will in the eastern archipelago as elsewhere. This conflict has been the topic of a great amount of earlier scholarship: many colonial historians gratefully seized upon the early high-profile clash over the Company's approach, which they took as dramatic material for compelling character-driven histories and biographies. Antoinette Meilink-Roelofsz, for instance, depicted Reael and some of his likeminded colleagues as humane, culturally sensitive, and religiously tolerant, with Coen cast in the role of the stern, calculating, and hawkish Calvinist, with insidious 'Italian wiles'.¹⁹⁰ More recently, Martine van Ittersum has argued that we should not overemphasise the importance of this controversy: Coen and Reael, with their respective supporters, had very similar ideas about the course the Company should pursue in, for instance, the Banda islands.¹⁹¹ By reviewing the controversy in the context of wider developments in the eastern archipelago over this period, I aim to show that, character and reli-

190 Meilink-Roelofsz, M.A.P., 'Steven van der Haghen.' In Akveld, L.M. *Vier eeuwen varen : kapiteins, kapers, kooplieden en geleerden*. Bussum: De Boer, 1973. Id, 'The Private Papers of Artus Gijsels as Source for the History of East Asia', *Journal of Southeast Asian history* 10 (1969): 540–559, esp. 543–547. Also see Jur van Goor, *Jan Pieterszoon Coen: koopman-koning in Azië*. Amsterdam: Boom, 2015, esp. pp. 345–359.

191 Martine van Ittersum, 'Debating Natural Law in the Banda Islands', esp. p.484.





gious beliefs aside, there was a real issue at the core of the controversy. What is more, the dispute's outcome was a key contributing factor in the deterioration of the Company's relationships with the various polities in the eastern archipelago.

A major factor in this deterioration was the impact of the conflict in Banda, culminating in the islands' wholesale depopulation. In his recent work *Amboina, 1623: Fear and Conspiracy at the Edge of Empire*, Adam Clulow reconstructs the circumstances under which the Dutch tried and executed a number of their own Japanese mercenaries, as well as the majority of the English merchants residing at Ambon. He argues that the atmosphere of anxiety and panic that led to the trial and so-called Amboina Massacre was due in no small part to the events in the Banda Islands two years previously.¹⁹² This chapter will take up Clulow's argument, showing how Banda not only contributed to the Amboina Massacre but, in combination with the VOC's wider policies in this period, escalated the tensions around Ambon into full-blown military conflict by 1625.

INTERNAL DISCORD: THE COEN-REael CONTROVERSY

In June 1616, after the death of governor-general Gerard Reynst, the High Government provisionally elected Laurens Reael as his successor, pending approval from the directors in the Netherlands. Reael had been the governor of Maluku, Ambon, and Banda, and remained stationed in Ternate.

Just two years previously, however, the VOC directors had created another powerful VOC position: that of director-general. On the assumption that the governor-general should remain stationed in Maluku and that his function would mostly go on being a military one for the foreseeable future, they envisioned a powerful official, of almost equal stature as the governor-general him-

192 Clulow, *Amboina 1623*, esp. Ch. 1.

Fig 4.1 (Previous pages) Map of the western Ambon Islands. Buru, which was ruled by a kimelaha of its own, is the large island on the left. Ambon proper is the island to the lower right consisting of two parts connected by an isthmus. The southern part, Leitimor, stood under direct VOC rule. The northern part, Hitu, was an independent state. North of that we see Hoamoal, which is a peninsula of Seram (and is sometimes also called Western or Small Seram.) Tensions between its kimelaha and the VOC escalated in this period. The inset, which also shows Hoamoal, traces a later campaign on these islands. Map from Valentijn, *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indiën*.



Fig 4.2. The island of Ambon and surroundings as depicted on an anonymous painting made c. 1617 in the Netherlands. The painting shows a much inflated Fort Victoria and surrounding town. In the surrounding region the various settlements, most of them on hilltops, are depicted and named. The painting was commissioned by former governor of Ambon Frederik de Houtman for the East India House in Amsterdam, where it was to be a testimony to the VOC's accomplishments on the island, just as its relations there started deteriorating as a consequence of the Company's increasingly heavy-handed policies. Collection Rijksmuseum, inv. nr. SK-A-4482.

self, to be stationed more centrally, in Bantam. His task would be more administrative: overseeing trade and the VOC's bookkeeping. Although such a function had already been conceived in 1609, the first person to fill it was Jan Pieterszoon Coen, who thus became the second most powerful VOC official in 1614.

Jan Pieterszoon Coen had his own ideas about the policy that the VOC should pursue. As he had made clear in his *Discoers*, a document outlining his own vision of the Company which he had sent to the directors in the Netherlands, he had little faith in Southeast Asian rulers, not least the sultan of Ternate. He believed that a spice monopoly would never be achieved when it depended on cooperation with them, unless the VOC had sufficient military power to enforce its will if need be.¹⁹³ Mindful of the fact that the VOC was first and foremost a trading company and that he was responsible for trade and accounting, Coen agreed with Hans de Hase's suggestions to close unprofitable posts, reinforce key forts in Maluku, and use naval power to stop junks trading there, even if this involved sacrificing the relationships with the rulers of Gresik and Gowa. Secure in his powerful position in Bantam, he felt no inclination to cooperate with Reael's attempts to restore the Company's relationship with Gowa. 'Coming to a lifeless friendship with Makassar would not be so bad,' he wrote in a letter to the directors, 'but all the same it would not at all be advisable to once again open a lodge there.'¹⁹⁴

Of course, Reael did not share this perspective. He believed that too strict a monopoly policy would be counterproductive, for it would antagonise the sultan of Ternate, with whom he had been careful to cultivate a good relationship, and make it more difficult for the sultan to control the kimelaha in the Ambon Islands. In addition, Reael had his doubts as to whether the VOC was justified in pursuing such a policy vis-à-vis its European competitors and strong enough militarily to do so.¹⁹⁵ By implication, he also queried the wisdom of the VOC's retreat from Makassar and Gresik, if for no other reason than that they really needed more rice in Maluku 'if we mean to have sole possession of the trade.'¹⁹⁶ In August 1616, therefore, he sent a letter by ship to Makassar, 'on the initiative

193 The *Discoers*, dated 1 January 1614, is published in Colenbrander, *Bescheiden Coen* VI, 451-474, esp. 462-464. For analysis, see Jur van Goor, *Jan Pietersz Coen*, esp. 174-180.

194 Coen to directors, 10 October 1616, in Colenbrander, *Bescheiden Coen*, I, 226.

195 For an overview of the conflict between Coen and Reael, see Van Goor, *Jan Pietersz Coen*, esp. 349-359.

196 Colenbrander, *Bescheiden Coen*, VII, 175.

of the Hon. [Governor-General Reael], but in the name of the king of Ternate,¹⁹⁷ In an attempt to restore the relationship, he meanwhile ordered Coen to send an appropriate gift to the Gowan sultan, should any opportunity for rapprochement present itself. The sultan, being in no mood for such rapprochement at the time, did not accept the letter.

The killing of the *Eendracht*'s crew in December 1616, described in the last chapter, settled the matter in favour of Coen's point of view for the time being. Coen was the first to mention the incident to the directors, in a letter dated August 1617, sending them a copy of the ship's journal. Aside from writing that sixteen crew members had been 'most brutally massacred,' Coen characterised the event somewhat drily as an accident, arising from the crew's ignorance of recent developments in Makassar. Interestingly, Coen directed most of his wrath surrounding the incident at the English, suspecting their assistance to the crew to have been nothing short of a 'Judas kiss.' The suspicion seems to have been informed by his developing dislike and distrust of the EIC rather than the first-hand accounts of the incident.¹⁹⁸ In Coen's eyes, however, the attack on the *Eendracht* did provide a rationale for instructing every fleet departing from Bantam to do all possible damage to any Makasar ships they might run into.¹⁹⁹

Just a couple of months later, Coen learned that he was to become the new governor-general. Word had arrived from the directors in the Netherlands that they preferred him over Laurens Reael, and had accepted the latter's resignation. Although it would take some time before Coen could be officially sworn in by his predecessor, from May 1618 onwards he was aware that he would become the governor-general and increasingly started plotting his own course.

Meanwhile, the conflict between the EIC and VOC was escalating. The EIC had continued trading in Ambon and Banda, and thus continued running into the VOC there. Soon, various confrontations in Maluku and Bantam devolved into a full-blown war in the archipelago. An EIC fleet of eleven ships from Europe led by Thomas Dale arrived in front of Bantam in late 1618 and dealt the

197 Colenbrander, *Bescheiden Coen*, I, 225. It is worth pointing out that this was an additional attempt at diplomacy by proxy, making use of the higher diplomatic standing of the sultan of Ternate.

198 Coen to directors, 22 August 1617, in: Colenbrander, *Bescheiden Coen*, I, 261. He repeats the accusation in Coen to A. Soury in Jambi, 2 December 1617, where he states: 'Daer wort tot Bantam gesseyt, dat den coninck van Macassar door d'Engelssen tot soo een enorme moort gebracht wesen soude.' Colenbrander, *Bescheiden Coen*, II, 308.

199 Stapel, *Bongaais verdrag*, 19n2.

first blow by taking a VOC vessel. Dale then continued to Jayakarta, where the *pangeran* and the English were laying siege to the VOC lodge. The Dutch had started fortifying the lodge earlier that year, in contravention of earlier agreements, and the situation had devolved into a siege of the warehouse-turned-fort. Coen was in Jayakarta commanding the defence when the English fleet appeared. He boarded one of the seven VOC vessels present to engage the English, but, finding himself outgunned, ultimately retreated to Ternate, where he began assembling a fleet to mount a counterattack against both the EIC and *pangeran* of Jayakarta. While in Ternate, he met with Reael and the office of governor-general was officially transferred from one to the other.

TIGHTENING THE NOOSE

As argued in the last chapter, an important driving force behind the emerging conflict between the VOC and Gowa-Tallo was the VOC's treaty and alliance with Ternate. This treaty was necessary for both parties: the Dutch and Ternate had a shared interest in waging war against Spain and its allies in the region. For the Dutch, the alliance was also a crucial asset in its attempts to establish a spice monopoly. However, the alliance also had unexpected side effects for the Company: as Ternate and Gowa-Tallo were increasingly coming into conflict in this period, the VOC was implicated in the rivalry. In addition, the VOC antagonised many of the inhabitants of the Ambon Islands by using its treaty with the Ternaten sultan to strengthen its grip over clove production there.

As described in chapter II, the two positions of *kimelaha* in the Ambon Islands were given to members of the noble Ternaten Tomagola family, as a means for the Ternaten court to control its burgeoning overseas possessions. However, such positions in regions far removed from Ternate itself also came with risks. In order to maintain their power and legitimacy, successive *kimelaha* were sometimes tempted or forced to consider local interests rather than those of the sultan of Ternate. This was especially true in the early seventeenth century. First, the Spanish invasion of Ternate led to a complete severance of contact with and support from the sultan. Then, the VOC tried to enforce its spice monopoly through its treaty with Sultan Muzaffar, who was generally considered a rather weak ruler. Cooperating with this policy was not at all in the *kimelaha*'s interests, as he relied on the goodwill of his vassals, needed their tribute for his income, and made money through his own involvement in clove trade. The VOC's attempts to become the sole buyer of cloves, and at fixed prices at that, had the potential to drive a wedge between the sultan of Ternate and the *kimelaha* of Hoamoal,

with the latter becoming entrenched local leaders to an even bigger degree than before.²⁰⁰

In the early years, the monopoly was merely intended to prevent European competitors from buying spices and introducing them into the European market. However, following de Hase's advice, and with the backing of the directors in the Netherlands, Coen began instituting a much more far-reaching monopoly policy, even before he became governor-general. Even when Asian traders were not buying spices, they were undercutting VOC trade in Maluku by selling textiles, which were paid for in money, draining cash out of the region. Coen's policy was therefore to discourage Asian trade in Maluku altogether. Given that the VOC still depended on rice being shipped there and did not have the vessels to ensure a sufficient flow of goods to and fro, the Company turned its eyes to European private traders. These traders, Company officials imagined, might become a kind of glorified shuttling service between VOC-posts in Maluku and its newly founded *rendezvous* on Java. Meanwhile, VOC ships were to patrol Malukan waters to both pursue the war with the Spanish and hunt for Asian traders.²⁰¹

To those tasked with implementing such policies, it was abundantly clear that they were stirring up bad feelings among the inhabitants of the region, particularly on Hoamoal. Steven van der Hagen, who was governor of Ambon in 1617 and early 1618, had been a declared opponent of such a strict monopoly policy even before he took up the position. Relaying the sentiments of the local inhabitants, he wrote that 'the junks have to arrive here as they have always done; we cannot go without them, as they bring rice, salt and many things we need.' The people of Hoamoal, he added, would ten times sooner be rid of the Dutch than go without the junk trade.²⁰² Ultimately, however, he had no choice but to execute his orders.

A year later, he reported on how the policy worked out in practice. He had had a ship patrol the waters off the coast of Hitu to hunt for Makasar and other Asian junks. Soon enough, the people of Luhu and Kambelo got wind of this

200 Knaap, *Kruidnagelen en Christenen*, 10-11; Andaya, *The World of Maluku*, 157-159; Knaap, 'Twee mogendheden', 51-54.

201 The blueprint for the new policy is found in the instructions for Governor-General and council 27 August 1617 in: J. A. van der Chijs, *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakaatboek*, 1602-1811, I. Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1885, 28 pp, especially 45-50 (articles 55 through 75). With thanks to Victor Xu who first pointed this out to me.

202 Steven van der Hagen to directors, 26 May 1617, in: Tiele-Heeres, *Bouwstoffen*, I, 206pp, quote at 215-216.

and went to the Dutch merchant at Luhu to seek redress. The merchant pretended that the ship was only there to guard against English ships, but they were not fooled, warning the merchant that they would burn the Dutch lodges down if the ship dared board any junks seeking to trade in the Ambon Islands. To further illustrate the point, Van der Hagen sent along two translated letters from the sultan of Ternate to his various kimelaha, in which he had asked them not to allow anyone but the Dutch to buy any cloves in their respective regions. He also emphasised, though, that the treaty he had made with Matelieff concerned cloves only and that Matelieff had promised him that Muslim traders shipping other goods would be left unharmed.²⁰³ The new policy, Van der Hagen was trying to hammer home, fell outside the bounds of the agreement and was damaging the VOC's relationship with both Ternate and the inhabitants of the Ambon region.

A similar incident occurred around the same time on Buru, the westernmost of the Ambon Islands. In 1618, the VOC ship *Neptunus* spotted a Makasar junk just south of the island and, in line with its instructions, went in pursuit. In an attempt to get away, the Makasar junk sailed to the shore. The *Neptunus* deployed boats and finally captured it on the beach, confiscating the rice and the textiles it was transporting. Several of the Makasar crew managed to escape to Luhu, however. Soon enough, armed men started massing in front of the Dutch lodge there, demanding restitution of the textiles and threatening to burn the lodge.²⁰⁴

Some of the inhabitants of Hoamoal were growing disaffected with the sultan of Ternate as a result of these policies and seemed to be casting around for alternative sources of political protection. For instance, several Hoamoal towns, including Kambelo and Lesidi, were apparently plotting to switch their allegiance to Tidore, which was allied with Spain at the time. For its part, Luhu sent a delegate to Makassar to invite the Makasar traders back to the region.²⁰⁵ The new VOC policies met with so much resistance that they threatened to unravel the entire political foundations on which the VOC's control over the clove-producing regions was built.

'GOD DOES NOT BLESS SUCH USURY'

Meanwhile, the major detractors of these policies were all returning to Europe.

203 Ibid., 229-232.

204 Van Speult to Coen, 4th of June 1618 in Colenbrander, *Coen*, VII, 326pp; Coen to directors in Ibid., I, 365-366.

205 Colenbrander, *Bescheiden Coen*, I, 365-366; Ridjali, *Historie van Hitu*, introduction, p. 48.

Reael left in 1619. Van der Hagen was relieved as governor of Ambon that same year and returned to Europe a few months later. The last outspoken opponent of Coen's policies to remain in Asia was Artus Gijssels, who stayed on until 1620 as second-in-command to the governor of Ambon – but then likewise repatriated. Subsequently *en route* to the Netherlands, Gijssels wrote two extensive reports on the Ambon region, which remain important sources on its culture and society, but also provide us with some of the sharpest criticism of Coen's policies that have been preserved in writing:

This measure of keeping out the junks might be good and serviceable for the Company... but that does not make it proper, and it is cause for much hatred... When I first arrived in Ambon, a *last* [about 1250 kilograms] of rice could be bought for 20 reals or less from the foreign traders, whereas we now ask 50 or 60 reals for it... The textiles that people used to pay 10 reals for, are now sold for 30 or 40, etcetera. The inhabitants can also make the reckoning that the absence of junks is harmful for them. All in all, we are not as justified as we might like to pretend.²⁰⁶

The VOC's policy, Gijssels pointed out, also put pressure on the Company's alliance with Ternate because it was unwarranted by the treaties concluded between them. Had the Company built up good relationships with the rice-producing regions in the archipelago, it could have easily competed with local traders, using its larger and less labour-intensive ships to push them out of the market. Instead, it had opted to use force, which would encourage illicit trade wherever and whenever the Dutch were not looking. 'One thing is certain,' he concluded, 'God does not bless such usury.'²⁰⁷

Gijssels' words, however, had little practical effect on Company policy. His Amboina writings were not meant as official reports for the Company directors and there is no indication that they took any notice of them. His descriptions of the region were not published at the time and seem to have circulated in hand-

206 Artus Gijssels. 'Verhael van enige oorlogen in Indië' in: *Kroniek van het Historisch Genootschap gevestigd te Utrecht* 27 (1871): 497-535, p. 507.

207 Ibid, p. 509. On the other hand, we are warned against seeing Gijssels as a champion of indigenous interests more generally, as right on the next page, he, like Reael, considered the Bandanese in particular a 'heap of scoundrels', impossible to work with, and therefore considered the war against them 'necessary'. Ibid., 510pp.

written copies among the elite in the Netherlands.²⁰⁸ The practices he denounced would remain at the core of Company policy in Maluku.

When Coen subsequently decided to mount a massive military campaign in the Banda Islands to secure the nutmeg monopoly, none of Coen's detractors remained in Asia. Back in Europe, however, some of them would be appalled when they heard how things unfolded, even when they themselves had also considered a military campaign in the islands unavoidable.²⁰⁹ In addition, and more immediately relevant to our topic, Coen's policies would serve to further destabilise the region at large.

REVERBERATIONS FROM BANDA

As briefly described in the previous chapter, hostilities had broken out in the Banda islands twelve years earlier, after the Dutch had started building a fort on the island of Neira without the local orangkaya's permission. The orangkaya had retaliated by ambushing and killing the Dutch commander and his escort. The subsequent conflicts, alternated with rounds of negotiation, had resulted in the Company conquering the islands of Neira and Ai, as well as a series of ever more extortionate treaties, under which the population of much of the region was obliged to sell its nutmeg only to the Company. The English had meanwhile settled at Run, one of the smaller outlying islands. In practice, the VOC had no say on the largest island, Lontor, nor on smaller and more remote Rosengain. In fact, many of the inhabitants of these islands had also entered into treaties with the English and nutmeg continued to find its way to both English and Asian traders. Coen decided to settle the matter by subjugating the group of islands with overwhelming military force. He left Batavia for the Banda islands in the final days of 1620, bringing the largest military force the VOC had thus far ever assembled: fifteen large ships carrying 1655 men, and thirty-nine small *tingan*

208 His writings have partially been preserved as part of the archive of Anthony van Hiltten, secretary to the *Staten van Utrecht*. The archive contains a somewhat bewildering mix of documents related to his official capacity and others. Through inheritance it ended up in the private collection J.C. Martens van Sevenhoven, whose heirs largely bequeathed it to the Utrechts Archief. See A.C.F. Koch e.a. eds, *Nederlandse historische bronnen 1*. Den Haag 1979, Martinus Nijhoff, 51pp.

209 One of the anonymous pamphlets circulating in the Netherlands in the wake of Coen's campaign, decrying the depopulation of the islands and the gruesome execution of their leaders, is also generally ascribed to Artus Gijssels: see P.A. Leupe ed. 'Beschrijvinge van de Eijlanden Banda' etc. *Bijdragen tot de taal-, land- en volkenkunde van Nederlandsch-Indië* 3.1 (1855): 73-141.

sailing vessels.

The escalating conflict between the VOC and Bandanese had wider repercussions for the political constellation of the eastern archipelago. This is best illustrated by the difficult position in which it put Hitu. The Hituese, it bears repeating, were the VOC's oldest ally in the region and had actively invited the VOC to Ambon to drive out the Portuguese.²¹⁰ However, they also had old political ties to Banda. In 1590, for instance, many Bandanese communities had come to Hitu's aid in a concerted campaign against the Portuguese. Two of Hitu's allies, then, were now embroiled in a fierce conflict with one another.

Coen's fleet made a stopover at Ambon. Arriving in early 1621, he convened a general assembly (*landdag*) of the various rulers of Ambon to be held later that year, after his return from Banda. The assembly was meant to reaffirm the various rulers' allegiance to the VOC and Ternate and to resolve the tensions arising from the VOC's monopolistic policies. As it became clear to the region's inhabitants that the massive fleet would be heading out to subjugate Banda, the dilemma facing the Hituese became acute:

The Kapitan Hitu spoke: 'What can we do for the land of Banda? For they came to our aid when we were at war with the Franks [i.e. the Portuguese]. We cannot help them now by force of arms. We have helped them with food, but that is not enough.'²¹¹

The Hituese orangkaya then decided to make a last-ditch attempt at mediation. Tepil, the Kapitan Hitu, presented himself to Coen with his three sons, offering to go along on the expedition and aid in negotiations. Coen replied that he had enough experience of the 'treacherous agreements' the Bandanese made

210 In fact, the alliance even predated the VOC. In 1600, two years before the VOC would even be founded, the *Oude Compagnie*, one of its predecessors, concluded what was the first agreement explicitly offering military support in exchange for clove deliveries. While no written version of the agreement survives and the expedition journal and the *Hikayat Tanah Hitu* give different accounts of its exact provisions (the journal speaks of exclusive delivery at a fixed price, the *Hikayat* of a set amount of cloves for every ship or fortification the Dutch took), they both agree that it concerned a deal in which the Dutch would provide military assistance which would be reimbursed with cloves. Not much, however, came of their military cooperation, as a Portuguese expedition drove the Dutch from the island soon after. *Corpus Diplomaticum*, treaty V (Ambon, treaty of September 1600), 13; Ridjali, *Historie van Hitu*, 131.

211 Ridjali, *Historie van Hitu*, 149.

and was not interested in making another. Yet Tepil insisted until Coen finally 'agreed that he could sail along on his own behalf, but certainly not on ours.'²¹² Hence, a Hituese delegation of twenty-five people went along on the ships.

As the Company's imposing war fleet lay at anchor in the Banda Islands, making final preparations for the attack, the Kapitan Hitu went to Lontor several times to meet with the orangkaya. Coen only briefly remarks that the latter were unwilling to submit to the Company's demand that they allow the Company to establish a fort on the island and that peace could therefore not be reached. The *Hikayat Tanah Hitu* is rather more elaborate. It relates how the Kapitan Hitu first emphasised to the orangkaya that the Bandanese were justified in their resistance, but pleaded with them to go to war only if they were absolutely ready for it in terms of their defences, arms, and provisions. After due deliberation, the orangkaya ultimately sent word that they saw no other option but to go to war and that they were prepared. Seeing that both the Company and orangkaya were set on war, the Kapitan Hitu threw his hands up. Coen started preparing for the attack.²¹³

When Company troops, after some days of intense fighting, were able to take the southwestern half of Lontor, most of the Bandanese communities opted to surrender to the VOC. It soon turned out, however, that many of the Bandanese had actually retreated into Lontor's mountainous interior and fortified themselves there. Additionally, suspicions arose that the Bandanese leaders were conspiring to kill the Dutch in a surprise attack. Coen used the continued resistance and rumours as a justification for rounding up all orangkaya he could lay his hands on, forty-seven in total. They were tortured into confessing the plot. The remaining forty-four (three had died during the interrogations) were then brutally executed by the VOC's Japanese mercenaries. The VOC proceeded to depopulate the island, deporting those that it could. A major part of the population was still holed up in fortifications in the mountains, however, and the rainy season began making campaigning difficult. Rather than launching forays into the heart of the island, Company officials simply decided to wait out the rains, isolating Lontor's interior as best they could. When soldiers ultimately did

212 Coen to directors, 6 May 1621, excerpted in Tiele-Heeres, *Bouwstoffen*, I, 272.

213 Ridjali, *Historie van Hitu*, 149-151. Rumphius, in his *Ambonsche Historie*, disdainfully remarks that, judging by the description of those negotiations in the *Hikayat Tanah Hitu*, 'we should be warned to bring guests like that on our campaigns.' (Rumphius, 'De Ambonsche Historie', I, 44-45). It does seem, however, that the Kapitan Hitu was genuinely trying to avert the military confrontation.

move in after the rains had abated, it turned out that thousands of Bandanese had died of starvation and disease in their mountain hideouts. As the Company would learn only later, another sizeable portion of the population had been able to escape from the islands, finding new homes in places from Makassar to the Aru Islands. On the virtually depopulated islands, the Company implemented the so-called *perkenier* system, in which free citizens cultivated nutmeg with the help of slave labour.²¹⁴

Coen witnessed some of the first effects of his actions at Banda immediately upon his return to Ambon with the better part of his fleet. On the one hand, he noted with some satisfaction that ‘the fortunate victory at Banda has caused great fear in all the lands of Amboina and many more, and has rather increased the respect we enjoy.’²¹⁵ Many communities rushed to Coen’s *landdag* to reaffirm their vassalage or friendship. On the other hand, though, Coen also noted that it had not exactly fostered trust. ‘Apparently afraid to get the same treatment as the orangkaya of Banda,’ the kimelaha, as well as the orangkaya of Luhu, Kambelo, and Lesidi, did not come to the *landdag* at all.²¹⁶ These were the most crucial local leaders involved in clove sales to foreign traders. If Coen’s own assessment is correct, his actions in Banda inhibited further dialogue on this matter.

Once Coen had left the Ambon islands, along with his powerful and intimidating fleet, fear progressively gave way to suspicion and hostility. The atmosphere between the VOC and various leaders of the region turned positively gloomy over the course of 1622 and 1623. Part of the wave of refugees from the Banda islands washed up on the south coast of Seram. Van Speult witnessed its destabilising effects first-hand when he took a large hongî past Seram’s south coast only to be confronted and surrounded by a fierce and well-organised combined Seramese-Bandanese fleet. The vessels under Van Speult’s command eventually managed to break free, but he was forced to turn the fleet around and break off the expedition.²¹⁷ Closer to home, the VOC was driven from Manipa

214 The events on Banda are of great consequence to the wider developments in the region, but as they are relatively well-known and a huge topic in themselves, will be glossed over here. For my own brief assessments of these events see Tristan Mostert and Wim Manuhutu, ‘1621: violence and depopulation on and around Banda’ (2021), *Pala*, online: <https://pala.wfm.nl/1621-2/1621-article/?lang=en>.

215 Coen to directors, 16 Nov 1621, excerpted in Tiele Heeres, *Bounstoften*, I, esp. 297.

216 Coen (in Amboina) to Sonck and Van Gorcum (in Banda), 23 June 1621, in Colenbrander, *Bescheiden Coen*, III, 61.

217 This expedition is described in Tiele Heeres, *Bounstoften*, I, 312-316 and, in almost identical terms, in Van Speult’s ‘Ware afbeeldinge van ’t Eylant Amboyne’, printed

by Luhu and the Company evacuated the fortified lodge in Luhu itself, which was then burned to the ground by armed men. A Dutch carpenter who had gone out for lumber near Kambelo was found decapitated and mutilated.²¹⁸

The events on Banda also affected the Company's relations with Gowa-Tallo. As outlined in the last chapter, the sultanate was involved in the Banda Islands economically and politically. Karaeng Matoaya, the chancellor of Gowa, for instance, had an agent permanently stationed there and the sizeable trade of nutmeg and cloves between the Banda Islands and Makassar was a principal reason for both the hostilities between the VOC and Makassar and the VOC's actions in the Banda Islands. The sultan of Gowa therefore took a personal interest in the events in Banda and sent vessels to pick up Bandanese refugees, relocating them to Makassar. In September 1624, Giovanni Maria Moretti, a Venetian freeburgher living in Batavia who also seems to have been a welcome guest at the Gowan court, informed the High Government in Batavia that some five hundred refugees from Banda were now living in Makassar.²¹⁹ In a letter written around the same time, Van Speult informed the directors that another thousand refugees had recently been picked up by Makasar ships from Ihamahu (on Saparua, one of the Lease Islands to Ambon's direct east).²²⁰ The *memorie* that the governor-general and his council wrote for the new governor of Ambon, Jan van Gorcum, speaks of 1500 Bandanese being picked up off the coast of Seram by the Makasars. The Council members believed there was more to this Bandanese exodus to Makassar than charity alone.²²¹

These impressions had their roots in information from Moretti, the Italian go-between. While describing the Bandanese refugees as poor people, welcomed and provided with rice by a magnanimous sultan, Moretti also mentioned that the Bandanese tried to move the Gowan sultan to join them in an attempt to

in Pieter van Dam, F.W. Stapel e.a. eds. *Beschryvinge van de Oostindische Compagnie*. The Hague: Nijhoff, 1927-1955, vol 2.1, 136-160, esp. 159-160.

218 Clulow, *Amboina 1623*, 46-49.

219 J.A. van der Chijs, H. T. Colenbrander and J. de Hullu eds. *Dagh-register gehouden int Casteel Batavia vant passerende daer ter plaetse als over geheel Nederlandts-India*. Batavia: Landsdrukkerij; The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1887-1931, I (1624-1629), p. 79. (16 September 1624).

220 Van Speult to Pieter de Carpentier, 16 September 1624, in: Heeres, *Bouwstoffen*, II, pp. 28-29.

221 *Memorie* from the High Government for Jan van Gorcum, 3 March 1625. In: VOC 852, fol 14v. .

reconquer the Bandanese island of Ai from the Dutch.²²² In subsequent years, Company employees periodically heard rumours of Makasar plans to throw them out of Banda with help of both the Bandanese and Portuguese.²²³ Gowa's hospitality to the Bandanese, it would seem, was not only an act of kindness but also part of its efforts to retain access to the spice trade and expand its influence.

THE RISE OF THE MAKASAR SPICE HUNTERS

Whereas the events on Banda might have secured the nutmeg trade for the VOC, their destabilising effect on the wider region contributed to its slipping control over clove production and trade. The various Dutch governors in Ambon noticed an increasing number of junks visiting the Ambon Islands, with much of the spices finding their way to Makassar. In May 1624, for example, a worried Van Speult described to the directors how the Makasars were at Lesidi with some twenty junks and more than five hundred men, who were armed 'not only with their blow darts but also with small cannon and muskets.' They had sworn on the Quran that they would come to the aid of Lesidi should the VOC attack it. All of the cloves from Luhu were brought there and sold to the Makasars. The kimelaha, of course, denied everything.²²⁴ The Makasars were not the only ones: the region was brimming with the vessels of 'Papouwers',²²⁵ too swift to be overtaken, as well as ships from Tidore. Van Speult did not have the resources to effectively control the region's long and complicated coastlines. In an attempt to catch these cloves *en route* to Makassar, their most important market, the VOC started patrolling for returning junks at the Buton Strait and what they called the Boquerones, the straight between Selayar and Southern Sulawesi. This only had a limited effect.

Adding to the VOC's difficulties was the fact that the Ternaten sultan, Mu-zaffar, had concluded truces with Tidore and the Spanish in 1623 without consulting the VOC, to its great chagrin. At the time, the High Government in

222 *Dagh-register Batavia*, I, p. 80 (16 september 1624).

223 Crijn van Raemsburgh (governor of Banda) to governor-general, 10 june 1630, in: Tiele-Heeres, *Bouwstoffen*, II, 165-166.

224 Tiele-Heeres, *Bouwstoffen*, II, 15.

225 At the time, this term referred to the pirates in the region in general, including the inhabitants of the islands of what is today West Papua, although Papouwers were also living on the northern and eastern coasts of Seram itself. See Anthonie Haga. *Nederlandsch Nieuw Guinea en de Papoesche eilanden : historische bijdrage, ±1500-1883*. Batavia : Bruining ; The Hague: Nijhoff, 1884, Ch. 1-2; Knaap, 'Robbers and traders: Papuan piracy in the seventeenth century'.

Batavia, involved in a campaign on the Chinese coast, could not spare any ships for the war in Maluku. Coen had even ordered the demolition of various VOC forts throughout Maluku so as to remedy the overstretch of the Company's military forces. This would have left many areas under Ternaten control defenceless and the Ternatan governor, De Houtman, deemed the order so unwise that he decided to ignore it for the time being. In any case, less than satisfied by the VOC's willingness and ability to assist them in fighting Tidore and Spain, the Ternaten sultan and his Chancellor Kaicili Ali made truces with both parties, ignoring the wishes of their European ally. This would also open yet another hole in the purported spice monopoly: in January 1624, Governor-General Pieter de Carpentier (who had succeeded Coen) informed the directors in the Netherlands that traders from Tidore were secretly buying Ternaten cloves and subsequently selling them to Melakans, Makasars, Javanese, and others.²²⁶

To top it all off, there were the other Europeans. As we have seen, tensions between the Dutch and English companies had escalated into open warfare in the archipelago in 1618. Back in Europe, the governments of both England and the Dutch Republic, who were at peace, rushed to end this conflict in 1619, forcing their respective companies to abide by the Treaty of Defence, which forced the companies to share in the spice trade. The English would pay a third of the cost of maintaining the forts and garrisons in Maluku; in return, they were allowed to buy a third of the annual crop of spices. Coen was extremely unhappy with the arrangement and did everything possible to hinder English trade short of actually breaching the treaty.

Under these generally precarious circumstances, Company personnel in the Ambon region became extremely suspicious of the English there. One of the VOC's own Japanese mercenaries asking some suspicious questions while on the walls of the castle, quickly led Company officials to be convinced that the English and the Japanese mercenaries were conspiring to eradicate the Dutch and take over the castle. It resulted in a panicked and swift trial, leading to the summary execution of ten Englishmen, as well as ten of the VOC's own Japanese mercenaries. This incident, which would be remembered as the Amboina Massacre, was the final nail in the coffin of the arrangements under the treaty: by this time, the English were already withdrawing from the Company's posts and had given up attempting to buy spices directly in Maluku.²²⁷ Instead, they focused

226 Heeres, *Bouwstoffen*, I, 347pp, esp. 355.

227 Clulow, *Amboina 1623*, 96-114; D.K. Bassett, 'The 'Amboyna Massacre' of 1623,' *Journal*

on procuring them in Makassar, to which end they entered into an official agreement with the Gowa sultan in 1624.²²⁸ The Danish East India Company also made its appearance at the Makassar roads, sending its first ships to Makassar in 1623 and opening a lodge in 1625.²²⁹ Given that the Portuguese also remained steady customers, European demand for spices was rising sharply in Makassar.

As a result, the fleets leaving Makassar for the east became larger and ever more organised. During his audience with the governor-general in 1624, Moretti gave this very detailed description of the preparations for the next fleet, which was probably harrowing to VOC officials:

All the Malay and other foreign merchants, six hundred strong in all, are preparing to sail to Amboyna and surrounding regions again with the onset of the western monsoon, mostly with small craft. They will bring as much capital as they can gather, in rice but mostly in cash, their appetites whetted by last year's profits, and filled with hope that they can do even better this year. With this, the king would send two chiefs along who would preside over all of them, with express orders that if the inhabitants of Amboyna or surrounding area require any help or assistance, they will give it to the best of their ability, trying to set up the communities in the area against us... They mostly go armed with blowpipes and poisoned darts, with which they claim they will do us great damage.²³⁰

In this description, the best one we have of what would become known as spice hunting fleets in subsequent years, it is interesting to note the active role of the sultan of Gowa, who sent people to preside over the fleet and join forces with the local population against the VOC. Clearly, this went beyond what we would consider 'smuggling' in a narrow sense: the rulers of Gowa were already a party to the struggle for control of the Ambon islands.

All in all, things were looking bleak by 1625. Relations between the VOC and Ternate were deteriorating. Ternaten control over the kimelaha of Hoamoal was slipping and Hoamoal's inhabitants were selling their spices to anyone but

of Southeast Asian history 1.2 (1960): 1–19.

228 John Villiers. 'One of the Especiallest Flowers in our Garden: The English Factory at Makassar, 1613-1667'. In: *Archipel*. 39 (1990): 159-178, esp. 164.

229 Stephan Diller. *Die Dänen in Indien, Südostasien und China (1620-1845)*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1999, p. 248.

230 *Dagh-register Batavia*, I, pp. 78-79 (16 September 1624).

the VOC. In particular, Makasar fleets were becoming ever greater in size and ever more organised, as well as openly professing their willingness to use force, if necessary, to protect their trade and their friends on Hoamoal. The result was that cloves poured out of areas that were supposed to be under Company control, finding their way towards a booming market in Makassar. Far from enjoying a monopoly, the VOC received too few cloves even for its intra-Asian trade, with shipments to the Netherlands drying up altogether.²³¹ It was clear that the VOC had significantly overplayed its hand in Maluku.

Faced with this mess, and seeing that their alliance with Ternate was not going to get them out of it, the governor-general and his council in Batavia gave the go-ahead for more drastic measures. They allowed Van Speult and his successor, Jan van Gorcum, to undertake 'something great against this faithless bunch, if a noteworthy force could be brought together in Amboina.'²³² Of course, there was no such force in the eastern archipelago at the time, as VOC forces were already spread too thin as things stood. However, just as the High Government was committing these words to paper, a major military force was sailing into Maluku from unexpected quarters.

THE NASSAU FLEET AND THE BEGINNING OF THE AMBON WARS

In the early hours of the 6th of March, the twelve ships of the so-called *Nassause Vloot*, the Nassau Fleet, dropped anchor within sight of Fort Oranje in Ternate.²³³ As part of a joint operation by the VOC and States-General, the heavily armed fleet had left the Dutch Republic some two years earlier with instructions to do all possible harm to the Spanish in the Pacific. The fleet had crossed the Atlantic and sailed into the Pacific by going south of Tierra del Fuego, where it was supposed to mount surprise attacks on Spanish settlements and ships, particularly silver transports, making alliances with the indigenous population in

231 E.g. Pieter de Carpentier to directors, 3 January 1624, in *Bouwstoffen*, I, 355pp. For the general flow of cloves in these years, and the shortages from 1625 onwards, see Kristof Glamann. *Dutch-Asiatic Trade 1620 - 1740*. The Hague: Nijhoff, 1981, 91pp.

232 High Government to Herman van Speult, 4 March, 1625 in: VOC 1085, fol. 40-43, quote at fol. 40.

233 The 6th according to the VOC officials, but the crew itself had reckoned it to be the 5th. Time difference due to intercontinental travel was already an issue in the seventeenth century – the Nassau Fleet had lost a day sailing west, whereas the VOC sailed east. The discrepancy was discovered and resolved at the Ternate roads. W. Voorbeijtel Cannenburg. *De reis om de wereld van de Nassause vloot, 1623-1626*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964, p. 100.



Fig 4.3 Detail of the map from Valentijn, *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indiën*, (fig 4.1) showing the various places visited by the campaign. Hitu (Hitoe) and Leitimor, together forming the island of Ambon, can be seen at the lower right. Above, we see Hoamoal. Halfway on its east coast, we see Lusiala (Liciela) and Luhu (Loehoe), the area where the kimelaha family resided. On the west side of Hoamoal, we see Lesidi (Lessidi) and Kambelo (Cambelo), the centre of power on the west coast, which traded intensively with Makasar fleets. To the northwest, there is the island of Kelang, where these traders made a stand against VOC forces.

the process. Arriving in Asia after crossing the Pacific, the force was to try and disrupt the Chinese junk trade to Manila and then continue to Maluku, where it was to put itself at the service of VOC officials and see what further action could be taken against the Spanish presence there.²³⁴

The fleet had been successful in capturing or destroying several Spanish ships, arriving before Melayu on Ternate twelve ships strong, one more than it

234 Ibid., 105-115.

had left the Republic with.²³⁵ All the same, its exploits along the South American coast had not lived up to its organisers' great expectations. The admiral, Jacques l'Hermite, had died of dysentery off South America. What is more, the crossing of the Pacific had been blighted by rampant disease and had all but exhausted the fleet's supplies. The fleet council had therefore abandoned the plan to sail to the Philippines, heading straight for Maluku instead. The fleet arrived with some 1200 of its original 1600 crew members still alive.²³⁶

Jacques Lefebvre, governor of Ternate, attempted to use this sudden windfall of military power to convince the Ternaten sultan and his advisors to resume their war with Spain and Tidore. They responded rather warily, first trying to find out more about the VOC's intentions. Although they appeared unwilling to break their truce with Tidore, they were interested in conquering those parts of Ternate occupied by the Spanish.

The governor and admiral of the fleet soon decided that it could be put to better use elsewhere. Not only was the Ternaten sultan's attitude to the proposed campaign rather lukewarm, but dislodging the Spanish from Ternate would require a great effort and the island would have trouble resupplying and maintaining this large fleet. Ultimately, the fleet assisted in executing earlier plans to demolish two of the VOC's forts: Fort Kalimata on the southeast coast of Ternate and Fort Nassau on Motir. The Ternaten sultan was dismayed by the demolition of the latter fort in particular, complaining that the Company 'was clipping the wings under which they could hide... and the night or the morning when the enemy would come for them, they would be forced to flee.'²³⁷ All the same, the fort was demolished, after which the fleet continued to Ambon, arriving before Castle Victoria on the 4th of April. Once there, Van Speult and his designated successor Van Gorcum knew what to do with the military force that had recently arrived. They immediately started making plans to use the fleet in a large campaign against the kimelaha of Hoamoal.

235 Gheen Huygen Schapenham (who had succeeded L'Hermite as admiral) to High Government, April 1625, in Tiele-Heeres, *Bouwstoffen*, II, 34-38. For an assessment of the fleet's successes and failures, see A. Doedens, Henk Looijesteijn, and Willem van Brederode. *Op jacht naar Spaans zilver: het scheepsjournaal van Willem van Brederode, kapitein der mariniers in de Nassause vloot (1623-1626)*. Hilversum: Verloren, 2008, pp. 87-94.

236 Gheen Huygen Schapenham to High Government, April 1625, in Tiele-Heeres, *Bouwstoffen*, II, 34-38, esp. 37.

237 Lefebvre to Governor-General De Carpentier, 26 March 1625, in: *Bouwstoffen* II, 38-44, esp. 43.



Fig 4.4 A kora-kora as depicted by Johannes Vingboons in the Atlas Blaeu – Van der Hem (c. 1665). The outrigger is a particularly distinctive feature of the kora-kora. Larger examples of these vessels, such as that depicted here, had sails and an elevated platform. Atlas Blaeu-Van der Hem, collection Austrian National Library, Van der Hem 40:16.

By the 14th of May, the part of the fleet assembled for the campaign was ready to set sail. It consisted of three large ships from the Nassau Fleet and three sloops, manned by 700 of the fleet's crew, supplemented by 150 soldiers lifted from Fort Victoria's garrison. Several other ships had already sailed ahead to Kambelo and Luhuh. Pretending to be there to trade, they would join the main force later. Both Van Speult, Van Gorcum, and the new admiral of the Nassau Fleet, Gheen Huygen Schapenham, went along to lead the force.

In addition, there were some twenty kora-kora, manned with the VOC's Ambonese vassals. Kora-kora had long prows and outriggers. A typical specimen of the early seventeenth century would be between twenty-four and thirty meters long and manned by some fifty to ninety men. Although most would have been armed with a shield and sword or pike, there was usually also a handful of men armed with muskets on board. Each kora-kora would typically have two or three swivel guns.

Kora-kora had been the staple of Ambonese warfare before European involvement in the region, and were used for headhunting raids on neighbouring coastal villages. As state formation processes aggregated political power in the islands into ever-larger units, various villages' kora-kora joined together into fleets, or *hongi*. We might consider these the Ambonese version of the kinds of fleets of state that were so typical of the eastern archipelago as a whole. Under the leadership of the orangkaya or village headmen, hongi would periodically patrol the coast to reinforce a village federation's control of the area and raid opposing villages. Accordingly, they were an instrument of power. The Portuguese incorporated the practice when they arrived in the region, presiding over a hongi of their own made up of their vassals in the area around their fort in Ambon. The VOC continued the practice after it had taken Ambon from the Portuguese: Steven van der Hagen, the conqueror of Ambon, reported that the VOC's vassals and allies could muster some thirty or forty kora-kora. Its first hongi set out in 1607.²³⁸

Other rulers in the Ambon islands similarly used hongi to maintain and extend their control. In 1620, for example, governor Van Speult went out to Kam-belo to confront kimelaha Sabaddin, who had amassed a hongi of some thirty kora-kora and fifty lighter vessels there in preparation for a tour. Van Speult admonished the kimelaha that he should not do anything that would be contrary to the wishes of, and treaties with, the Ternaten sultan, of whom he was, after all, supposed to be a loyal subject. After this exchange, Van Speult returned to Ambon to amass his own hongi. In his report about all this to the governor-general, he chided his predecessors for not having done this more often, for in neglecting this matter they had allowed the kimelaha to extend his power in the first place. What is more, on his subsequent tour, Van Speult would discover that several of the kora-kora that used to answer the VOC's call had now joined the kimelaha's hongi. These fleets were thus both a yardstick and instrument of power for the various rival political powers in the islands.²³⁹

In some ways, the fleet assembled in the Bay of Ambon was therefore a continuation of existing practices of warfare in the Ambon islands. This time, however, Van Speult and his successor also had a massive European force at their disposal and could set their ambitions accordingly. This expedition was to attack the kimelaha's residence, Luhu, burn the villages under his control throughout

238 Knaap, 'Kora-kora en kruitdamp', 259-262.

239 Herman van Speult to Governor-General Coen, 4 mei 1620, in *Bouwstoffen* I, 255-266.

the region and kill every last clove tree in Hoamoal. For the most part, the latter was achieved by what the Dutch called '*schillen*' (literally peeling): ringbarking the tree, that is, cutting the bark all around its trunk, which would kill it. This military muscle-flexing was intended to 'punish' the inhabitants of Hoamoal for their 'insolence,' and restore the Company's reputation. The killing of the clove trees was to simply remove the economic incentive for Makasar, Javanese, and other traders to visit the region.

Before heading to the east coast of Hoamoal, the fleet first stopped at Hitu. Much like it had in trying to mediate in Banda in 1621, Hitu once again found itself forced to perform a precarious balancing act between VOC-ruled Ambon and Hoamoal, the two rival powers to its north and south.²⁴⁰ For this reason, Kapitan Hitu had little interest in participating in the expedition and was relieved when Van Speult excused him from getting involved, for he already had a sufficient force.

On the 17th of May, the fleet arrived before Luhu, where it met up with the ship *Hoop*. Having gone ahead under the pretext of buying cloves, it had managed to take four 'Ternatens' captive through subterfuge. Upon arrival, these four were interrogated about the state of various strongholds in Hoamoal. One of the captives, a confidant of the kimelaha named Manta, was waterboarded. He disclosed information about the defences of the stronghold of Lusiela just northeast of Luhu, which he estimated possessed some 100 muskets and some four large guns. Furthermore, he confessed that a member of the Ternaten ruling elite, in cooperation with the Papouwers mentioned earlier, had captured six Dutch soldiers and twelve slaves when these had been patrolling the west coast of Hoamoal in a small vessel, to check for Makasar junks.²⁴¹

After revealing the purpose of the expedition to the crews and Ambonese allies on the 18th and having the latter's orangkaya swear an oath to faithfully participate in the coming campaign, the attack on Luhu commenced in the morning of the 19th. First, the ships fired a barrage of some 100 shots at the strongholds. Under the cover of this artillery fire, twelve companies of around seventy European soldiers each rowed to shore, followed by the kora-kora, which landed about 1000 Ambonese warriors. The troops conquered the various villages near the coast and started ascending the mountain towards the main strong-

240 Knaap, 'Tussen twee mogendheden'.46-51.

241 Unless otherwise stated, this paragraph relies entirely on the report of this campaign as printed in Tiele-Heeres, *Bouwstoffen*, II, 48-74.

hold. The kimelaha's troops offered only light resistance before retreating into the fort itself.

Unfortunately, no image of the fort is known to exist, but the report of the campaign described it as 'exceedingly strong' and the inhabitants of Luhu as 'feared due to their bravery.' The town and its surroundings could muster some 2500 men.²⁴² The expedition leaders were all the more surprised, then, to find the fort abandoned when the VOC forces and their allies first charged it. The Ambonese hunted around fifteen heads during and after the attack, and only four or five Company soldiers had been wounded. In the following days, the entire surrounding area was scoured, with villages burned and clove trees ringbarked, as was the area around Lusiela, slightly further up the coast. Smaller forces were detached from the main force to the area around Wae Puteh to the south, as well as Laala and Loki to the northeast, where they meted out similar treatment. Laala, which had had a better relationship with the VOC than the surrounding areas, was not destroyed. Instead, its inhabitants were given to understand that the conflict was with their overlord, the kimelaha, and that they were to move outside his area of control to either Kaibobo on the opposite coast or around Castle Victoria on Ambon. They opted for the former destination and the empty village was set alight a few days later. Here we see an early example of the VOC's policy of seeking to simply depopulate areas under the kimelaha's control, thus undermining his power, which would become a central part of their strategy in subsequent conflicts. Loki, for its part, did not wait for the VOC troops to arrive: when they turned up, the village was already ablaze and the population had gone.

Meanwhile, the expedition leaders considered how to proceed. On the 25th they first arrived at Lusiela, which had a stronghold in which the kimelaha turned out to reside at the time, rather than at Luhu. Although it had initially been bombarded by their ships, the commanders had been hesitant to attempt to conquer it and had first scoured its surroundings. They were still deliberating on whether to take the fort on the 4th of June. Their considerations are revealing, offering glimpses into their strategy and concerns about where they might expect the most resistance. As their waterboarded captive had informed them, the fort was well defended. In attempting to take it, the VOC would likely incur significant casualties. In addition, at some point the defenders would most likely abandon the fort and make their way to the west side of Hoamoal, where

242 Van Speult's 1625 report in Pieter van Dam, *Beschryvinge*, 2.1, p., 151-152.

the VOC still had to deal with the area around Lesidi and Kambelo, the former of which, it is worth recalling, the Makasars had sworn to defend. Van Speult therefore considered it prudent to leave the fort be; all the clove trees in the area had been destroyed anyway. The other two commanders, however, felt that not conquering the fort, which was defended by heavy guns that had been captured from the VOC, would be to their 'disreputation.' The matter came to a vote and it was decided to attack the fort anyway.

Kapitan Hitu had apparently also gotten wind of this plan and tried to intervene. He begged the VOC to conclude its campaign without trying to conquer Lusiela and to leave the settlements on the west coast unharmed. The poor people of Hoamoal, he argued, had already suffered enough, now that many of their clove trees and villages had been destroyed. His pleas were ignored.

The attack was to take place the next day, on the 5th of June. A reconnaissance mission that morning, however, made clear that storming the fort would be difficult. The reconnaissance party, which came under heavy fire, estimated that it would take two or three days just to get the necessary cannon ashore and that it would be difficult for a large force even to approach the fort, now that the rainy season had started. Any attempt to do so might hazard the larger plan of destroying all the clove trees in Hoamoal. Van Gorcum and Huygen Schapenham changed their minds. Instead of taking the fort, it was decided to burn the settlement along the shore, including the many vessels beached there. The plan was put into effect the next day: some seventy to eighty vessels were burned, including one small Makasar junk that happened to be on the coast. The Ambonese in the fort continually fired on the Dutch and their allies, but 'invariably shot wide or short, although it was clear that they did not have a lack of lead and powder.'

The next morning, the fleet, now four large ships strong, set sail to the west coast. Along the way, a detachment stopped to destroy the remaining clove trees at Wae Puteh and one of the ships made a detour past Hitu to get rice. Two days later, the fleet lay reconvened before Kambelo, now also reinforced by the ship *Arend*, which had already been waiting there.

Although the VOC had been forced to abandon its small fortifications in Luhu and Manipa over the last two precarious years, it still maintained a fortified outpost in Kambelo. It had been an unnerving period for the garrison there, however. It was here that the carpenter had been headhunted two years previously. They were significantly outnumbered: whereas the garrison had consisted of fifty men in September 1624, the area around Kambelo and Lesidi could muster

some 1000 armed men.²⁴³ In addition, five or six hundred Makasars had reportedly sworn to defend Lesidi against the Dutch the year before. It was not without reason, then, that the expedition leaders had expected fierce fighting here. To their surprise, however, resistance was rather light and over the subsequent five days the VOC forces and their allies put Lesidi, Kambelo, Erang, and the surrounding villages to the torch and ringbarked clove trees without significant opposition.

On the 16th of June, however, Van Speult ran into serious opposition where he had not expected it. That day, he took the kora-kora to carry a large contingent of VOC soldiers to the south coast of island of Kelang, just to the northeast of Lesidi and Kambelo. A boatbuilding centre, this island was under Lesidi's political control. Van Speult expected the inhabitants of the coast to have brought their boats to Kelang and two Makasar junks to have fled here. Destroying all the vessels beached on the island, as well as the settlement, he calculated, would therefore seriously cripple the maritime capabilities of the inhabitants of the region.²⁴⁴

Even before his force arrived on shore, the kora-kora were fired at by Makasar arquebusiers hiding 'behind the trees and the cliffs.' Van Speult decided that it was too late in the day to land and the fleet anchored off the settlement, out of the arquebuses' range. The next morning, the soldiers landed and started making their way to the village along two separate routes. Near the village, the road was littered with thousands of caltrops, and the defenders charged one of the companies, led by a captain Carstensz. He managed to repel the attack, but it became clear that 'the going was getting tough' and Van Speult noticed that his Ambonese allies were shrinking from the fight. The troops made their way to the village, where they found a 'little fort' with a stone foundation and earth-filled double palisade. From inside the fort, the VOC forces were steadily shot at with muskets.

The soldiers were unable to charge the little fort because caltrops had been strewn on the ground 'as densely as grass.' Casualties due to fire from the fort and

243 According to the 1625 report by Van Speult, as reproduced in Pieter van Dam, *Beschryvinge*, 2.1, p. 150.

244 For the geography of the island, see Rumphius, *De Ambonse eilanden*, 210-215. Note that although the settlement that the troops attacked is referred to as the 'negrij van Kelang', its location does not seem to correspond with the settlement of Kelang as it is indicated on the map in op. cit., 211. The description of the attack implies that the settlement was slightly inland and close to the river on the south side of the island.

the caltrops were mounting and after about an hour of fighting without having made much progress, Van Speult decided to hack a way through the bush to see if they could approach the fort from the rear, circumventing the caltrops. The constable, however, informed him that they were running out of ammunition. Van Speult saw no other option but to retreat. Back on the beach, the Company soldiers counted their casualties: nine of their number had been killed and thirty wounded by musket fire, spears, arrows, caltrops, and poisonous blow-darts which had 'been falling like snowballs.' The expedition leaders had the impression that the fort had been defended by some 200 men, mostly 'Makasars and Malays.'

Van Speult decided to take his loss and leave the fort be. A group of soldiers was sent to see if any ships were hiding up the nearby river, which was their reason for coming to Kelang in the first place. It seems that their plans had been anticipated, however: other than the occasional bullet whizzing by, fired by invisible gunmen hiding in the undergrowth, there was nothing to find.

By the 24th, the entire fleet had returned to the Bay of Ambon. The Company had suffered ninety dead and 130 wounded; there is no record of the loss of life on the side of the 'Ternatens,' but an estimated 65.000 clove trees had been ring-barked or otherwise destroyed. Staggering though this might be, it was later estimated that this was only about half of the total number of clove trees growing on Hoamoal.²⁴⁵ Despite the unprecedented military force at its disposal, the VOC had been unable to take the kimelaha's stronghold in Lusiela. What is more, it had been stymied by unexpectedly strong resistance on the island of Kelang, where a small fortress manned by 'Makasars and Malays' had forced the VOC forces to retreat. Although the campaign journal does not go into much detail about these 'Makasars and Malays,' it is compelling to link the mention of this force with Moretti's account of the armed fleet sailing from Makassar. According to Moretti, their two Makasar chiefs were instructed to help the villages there to the best of their ability and try to set them up against the VOC.

For all its setbacks, the campaign had made quite the impression, however. In its wake, the sultan of Ternate and his advisors attempted to restore their relationship with the VOC and mediate its conflict with the kimelaha of Hoamoal.

245 The estimate comes from two envoys to Hoamoal from the sultan of Ternate, who had no apparent reason to minimize or exaggerate the destruction, as they were trying to get the kimelaha of Luhu to resume deliveries to the VOC again. Van Gorcum to Pieter de Carpentier, 26 juli 1626, in *Bouwstoffen* II, 110-111

The kimelaha himself was less than amenable to these attempts; the campaign had evidently done little to foster trust between him and the Company. Looking back on the period, Rumphius would later muse that although the clove trees had grown back within some ten years, ‘an unforgiving hatred of this nation towards our own has since remained ... so that one might well consider this 1625th year as the starting point of all subsequent revolts.’²⁴⁶

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this chapter we have seen how the VOC, which had used its alliance with Ternate as a vehicle for controlling the spice trade, embarked upon policies that were commercially overambitious and militarily and politically untenable from 1617 onwards. Backed by the directors in the Netherlands, Jan Pieterszoon Coen was able to execute his ideas about Company policy, as a consequence of which the Company began exceeding the provisions of its treaty with Ternate, not least by trying to force other traders out of the islands, regardless of what they were trading. Not primarily interested in the alliance with Ternate, Coen was also intent on concentrating the VOC’s forces in fewer places and could not always spare the forces necessary for its war against Tidore and Spain, and the enforcement of its policies.

Consequently, Ternate was increasingly alienated from the VOC and the inhabitants of Hoamoal, including their Ternaten kimelaha, became disaffected with both the VOC and the Ternaten sultan. For its part, the VOC did not yet have the military and naval power to enforce its own policies. The structure on which its privileged access to cloves was built started unravelling as a consequence.

In this unravelling, the interwovenness of trade and political affiliation once again becomes apparent. When some of the leaders in Hoamoal decided to switch their loyalty to Tidore, their spices also flowed there. More importantly for our current considerations, Gowa was also in the game. The Makasar fleets visiting Hoamoal in this period became increasingly large and well-organised and were led by high-ranking Makasars appointed by the Gowan sultan. What is more, they proved willing to defend Hoamoalese communities in both word and deed, as the VOC discovered at the island of Kelang in 1625.²⁴⁷ Put differently,

²⁴⁶ Rumphius, ‘De Ambonsche Historie’, I, 52.

²⁴⁷ Note that I use the term Hoamoalese to denote the inhabitants of Hoamoal, and in some cases by extension, those of the islands to its immediate west, i.e. Kelang, Ma-

we might say that Gowa started sending its own hongis of sorts to the Ambon islands in this period, which traded not only in cloves but also in political and military protection.

The Nassau Fleet, appearing as a *deus ex machina* in the eastern archipelago in 1625, seemed to have saved the VOC in the short run. The campaign on Hoamoal appears to have intimidated the sultan of Ternate and, to a lesser degree, kimelaha of Hoamoal, into continued cooperation with the VOC. All the same, it is striking not only that the campaign left the kimelaha's headquarters at the time unharmed, but also that the VOC suffered an unexpected defeat on the island of Kelang. This defeat was inflicted by what has every appearance of being the very Makasar force that Moretti had described as being prepared a few months earlier. Whether the campaign was a good strategy in the long run is debatable: as soon as the Nassau Fleet sailed away, the VOC was once again left with a far more expansive strategy than it had ships and men to enforce, to say nothing of the untold damage the campaign had done to the Company's relations with the inhabitants of Hoamoal.

All in all, the troubles in the eastern archipelago were far from over, as VOC officials were only too aware. Despite a provisional truce being reached between the VOC and kimelaha of Hoamoal in 1626, in December of that year the governor-general wrote to the directors in the Netherlands expressing the view that killing clove trees alone would not be enough to obtain control of the trade. That would require 'extreme measures... those of Luhu, Kambelo, Lusiela, Lesidi, Erang and all their faithless Moorish followers should be utterly eradicated and expelled, all their clove and fruit trees extirpated, the land devastated and turned over to the Alfurs.'²⁴⁸ Although the Company as yet lacked the armed forces to execute such schemes, the plan to depopulate Hoamoal was already on the table.

nipa and Boano. The term is not common in the seventeenth century sources, which tend to use the 'Ambonese' as an umbrella term for the inhabitants of the region at large. As that term begets misunderstanding between the inhabitants of Ambon proper and those of the 'Ambon quarter' at large, I will use 'Hoamoalese' where appropriate to avoid such confusion.

248 General Letter of De Carpentier c.a. 26 dec. 1626, in W.P. Coolhaas, W. P., J. van Goor, J. E. Schooneveld-Oosterling and H. K. s' Jacob eds. *Generale Missiven van Gouverneurs-Generaal en Raden aan Heren XVII der Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960–2007, vol. I, p. 235.

