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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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EPILOGUE

The Spice Wars cannot meaningfully be said to have ended in September 1655. Elsewhere in the archipelago, there would be more bloody encounters with Makasar ships and troops in subsequent months, until on 28 December of that year, a delegation sent by Governor-General Maatsuyker concluded a treaty with Gowa. Rumphius has the Great Hoamoal War end in early 1656, when news of this treaty reached the Ambon region. The treaty was much to the chagrin of De Vlaming, who found it too premature. The way he saw it, only a total submission of Gowa would ever durably secure the exclusive trade and production of cloves for the Company. De Vlaming was not alone in considering the resulting treaty too lenient.⁹⁷⁰ Indeed, it did not stop Makasar spice traders from once again trying their luck in the region in subsequent years, or from supporting those still opposed to Company control.

The latter were numerous. The various communities of Buru, Ambelau and Eastern Seram only made peace with the Company over the course of 1656 and 1657.⁹⁷¹ Those of Eastern Seram, unhappy with the peace provisions, were back at war with the Company almost as soon as the peace had been made. Meanwhile, apparent attempts from these regions to once again ask for Makasar aid and protection, and Gowa's insistence that the Company would agree to a treaty forbidding them to militarily intervene in these regions, were among the causes of renewed war between Gowa and the Company.⁹⁷² In January and February 1660, the bay of Ambon was the staging area for a massive Company fleet which then proceeded to attack Makassar, forcing Gowa to sign a new treaty in

970 Feddersen, 'Principled Pragmatism', 324-380, provides an elaborate analysis of the circumstances under which the treaty was concluded, and the disagreements between De Vlaming and Maatsuyker over it. An additional factor in De Vlaming's chagrin was apparently more personal, as the treaty had been concluded by Willem van der Beeck, the former Ambon governor who had asked to be recalled from Ambon during the Great Hoamoal War. De Vlaming did not think highly of Van der Beeck and also wondered why someone else had been sent to conclude the peace if he was the superintendent of the Eastern Quarters.

971 This does not include all of Buru: kimelaha Hassi, for instance, was ensconced in the Burunese interior with his followers. He only came out to make terms with the Company in October 1658, after a Company campaign into the Burunese interior. Rumphius, 'De Ambonsche Historie', II, 116-118.

972 Rumphius, 'De Ambonsche Historie', II, 127. For an elaborate analysis of the treaties with Gowa of 1655 and 1660, see Feddersen, 'Principled Pragmatism', 324-482.

which, among other things, the sultan agreed to stay out of Buton, the Ambon region and North Sulawesi.⁹⁷³ Makassar would ultimately disappear from the picture altogether when the backbone of Gowan power was broken in the wake of the Makassar War (1666-1669), and Makassar effectively became a VOC colony.⁹⁷⁴ Even without this strong outside sultanate to turn to, however, resentment against the monopoly regime and the effects of the extirpation in Maluku itself would continue to occasionally burst into armed revolt.⁹⁷⁵

For Hoamoal and the adjacent islands, the end of the war did see the establishment of a new colonial order which would define the region for more than a century to come.⁹⁷⁶ This new colonial order entailed the dissolution of Hoamoal not only as a political power, but as a society, as its population was resettled and the fabric of its society deliberately erased. This epilogue will briefly touch upon the two main aspects of this new colonial order: this dissolution of Hoamoal's society and the maintenance of the clove monopoly.

973 For this attack see Tristan Mostert. 'Suppliers, knowledge brokers and brothers in arms: Portuguese aspects of military innovation in Makassar.' In Andre Murteira, Helder Carvalhal, and Roger Lee de Jesus eds. *The First World Empire: Portugal, War and Military Revolution*. London: Routledge, 2021, pp. 186-205, esp. 196-200.

974 In the Bungaya Treaty (1667), concluded during the conflict, Gowa was forced to cede all the regions that Ternate historically considered to be part of its domains. In making this demand, the Company based itself, among other things, on a document listing these, drawn up by the Ternaten Sultan Mandarsyah in April 1665, (VOC 1254, fol. 1199). Andaya takes these 'historical claims' by the Ternaten Sultan at face value at several points in *The World of Maluku*, e.g. p. 136, but we would be wise to also consider them within the context of the power dynamics in the region and the Company's self interest in this matter. Cf. Van Fraassen, 'Ternate and its dependencies'.

975 For some examples see Andaya, *The World of Maluku*, 182-239; Widjojo, Muridan. *The Revolt of Prince Nuku: Cross-Cultural Alliance-Making in Maluku, c.1780-1810*. Leiden: Brill, 2008.

976 Surprisingly, the abandonment of the policy of keeping Hoamoal empty seems to have escaped academic attention thusfar, but a cursory survey of published primary sources seems to show that the policy was gradually abandoned towards the end of the 18th century, when a settlement once again developed around the VOC fort at Luhu, and then collapsed altogether during the turbulent period between 1795 and 1815. See e.g. Expedition journal and description of Ambon and Banda by W.C. Lennon, 20 August 1796, appendix B, in: Chris van Fraassen, van, F.G Hoekstra and Jelle Gerbrandy. *Bronnen betreffende de Midden-Molukken 1796-1902*. Huygens ING, 2016, which documents the existence of a small but growing settlement at Luhu. Cf. Knaap ed., *Memories van overgave*, passim., which shows that as late as 1785, one still needed Company licenses to undertake a sago-gathering voyage to Luhu.

‘AN ETERNAL WASTELAND’: THE DEPOPULATION OF HOAMOAL

In the wake of the war, the Company declared Hoamoal, the island of Kelang, and the better part of the island of Boano, an ‘eternal wasteland’ [*eeuwige woestijne*], evicting its communities from their homelands. We should, however, not imagine a kind of forced mass exodus, for a very simple reason: in the wake of the war, the Hoamoal Peninsula was effectively already depopulated.

The records of both the war itself and its immediate aftermath do not readily provide any details of either flows of refugees or the number of people resettled. What is clear, however, is that very few people remained on the peninsula by the end of the war. Those who had surrendered to the Company by 1652, some 1500 people, had first been resettled at Luhu, and what remained of the population there after Majira’s attack had already been moved off Hoamoal and resettled at Ambon.⁹⁷⁷ The vast majority of those in opposition to the Company aggregated in Asaudi and, to a lesser degree, Laala, towards the end of the war, and as far as can be told from Dutch sources, the majority of them was ultimately killed or captured (and, more often than not, enslaved) by the end of the conflict. It is to be expected that part of the population had been able to flee elsewhere in the course of the conflict, but if they did so the Company failed to notice, so it does not readily emerge from the sources. The only such groups the Company was able to keep tabs on were leaders adrift with part of their following. Kalamata was most prominent among them, and we might note that he, at least, found nowhere to go, pursued as he was by the Company and Ternate, and ultimately retreated from the region altogether to Makassar.

Accordingly, the execution of the resettlement seems to have been a relatively minor affair – Rumphius notes how the operation was performed with a number of Hituese kora-kora and other smaller craft, started 3 March and was completed by the 30th.⁹⁷⁸ The logistics and the number of people involved do not appear to have been recorded, but it is abundantly clear that little was left of the estimated population of more than 10.000 that the peninsula had housed only two decades previously.⁹⁷⁹

977 See above, chapter XIV, paragraph ‘the struggle for sago’.

978 Rumphius, ‘De Ambonsche Historie’, II, 103-105. Interestingly, Rumphius is more elaborate on the point than any of the surviving source material from De Vlaming.

979 This number from Gerrit Knaap, *Kruidnagelen* II, 100, who extrapolates an estimated total population of 11183 from Gijssels’ reports on the number of men capable of bearing arms that the various communities of the peninsula could muster. The same, it might be added, applied to the islands of Boano, Kelang and Manipa: whereas they

Once the operation was complete, the political landscape of the region had been drastically changed. Hoamoal was entirely empty of people: what had been left of the population had been resettled on Ambon – the Muslims in Hitu, and any animists and Christians in Leitimor. Care had been taken to unravel the structure of the communities into the tiniest possible pieces: the Hoamoalese were distributed among Ambonese households, and, as Rumphius phrased it, ‘were scattered such that no two brothers came to be living together, so that they would not have the opportunity to ever secretly hold meetings with each other.’⁹⁸⁰ De Vlaming himself put it even more grimly: the redistribution was meant to have them ‘lose their own name all the further.’⁹⁸¹ For the same purpose, the orangkaya, both those from the peninsula and most of those from the adjacent islands, were all housed separately, right beneath the guns of Castle Victoria, at Batu Merah, the Red Rock, still a neighbourhood of Kota Ambon today. De Vlaming insisted, however, that it would be even safer to move them off the island altogether, to Batavia or Formosa. His advice was acted upon the next year, when the vast majority of the orangkaya and their families, 282 people in all, were shipped to Batavia.⁹⁸²

As to the communities of the adjacent islands, as well as the original community of Asaudi: these were to be resettled in a different location, on Manipa’s south side, around the old location of the Company redoubt there.⁹⁸³ De Vlaming considered it prudent to keep the area occupied as the island was extremely

had housed an estimated 9765 people in 1634, the total number on Manipa and Boano (Kelang had also been declared an eternal wasteland) was only 3865 in 1671.

Note that some earlier authors (Collins, ‘language death in Maluku’, 251, who based himself on Keuning, ‘Ambonnezen, Portugezen in Nederlanders’, who in turn appears to have based himself on Bokemeyer, *Die Molukken*) state that the 1656 depopulation involved 12.000 people. While that would have been roughly the population of the peninsula two decades previously, the relocation of 1656 involved no more than a fraction of that number.

980 Rumphius, ‘De Ambonsche Historie’, II, 103-104.

981 Memorie by Arnold de Vlaming, 24 May 1656, in: Knaap e.a. eds., *Memories van overgave*, 192.

982 Rumphius, ‘De Ambonsche Historie’, II, 111-112.

983 The fact that Asaudi got this different treatment does not seem to have been related to its prominent role in the Great Hoamoal War. While I have not found the reasoning behind the exact division explained in the sources, the decision would probably have been related to the fact that Asaudi had strong ties to Boano and Kelang, for instance equipping a kora-kora together with the negerij of Hatuputih on Kelang in the 1640s. Rumphius, *Ambonse eilanden*, 117-121.



Fig 15.1 The abandoned and overgrown remains of Fort Wantrouw in 2007. Reproduced by kind permission of photographer Syahrudin Mansyur.

fertile and could once again become an important source of foodstuffs. It was also historically a staging area of foreign traders, so that maintaining some presence there to keep an eye out seemed prudent.⁹⁸⁴ Of course this was not left to what the Company considered to be the former rebels and smugglers themselves. Not only were their orangkaya likewise relocated separately, beneath the walls of Castle Victoria; at Manipa, a makeshift wooden fortification was quickly erected in the location of the old Company redoubt, which was soon replaced by a full blockhouse, guarding over these communities. It was given the rather telling name of Fort Distrust [*Wantrouw*].

As to Boano, one small exception was made to the general depopulation policy: the followers of orangkaya Tahalele, who had been a reliable ally to the Company since 1652, when he had approached de Vlaming to intervene in a power struggle over Boano, were allowed to stay, not only as a reward for their

984 Memorie by Arnold de Vlaming, 24 May 1656, in: Knaap e.a. eds., *Memories van overgave*, 192.

loyalty, but also because the Company could use someone keeping a watchful eye out on the somewhat secluded island.⁹⁸⁵

The Company hoped that the inhabitants of Manipa in particular would once again become producers of foodstuffs for the region at large. De Vlaming made the specific suggestion that, with some of the Company's other suppliers of rice being far from reliable for the future, the Manipese might try their hand at that, as this remained an important trade good in the Ambon region and they would always find a ready buyer in the Company.⁹⁸⁶ They might not be used to cultivating rice, but they needed a new source of income anyway, as they, like the people at Boano, would certainly not be allowed to once again cultivate cloves.

A PRECARIOUS MONOPOLY

De Vlaming had now been able to effectuate his proposed policy of limiting clove cultivation to the areas under direct Company control. Cloves had been largely eradicated from Hoamoal and the adjacent islands, as well as from those areas in North Maluku under Company control, and their cultivation was henceforth forbidden in these regions. Clove cultivation would be limited to the Lease Islands and Ambon proper. In fact, the war had limited the amount of clove trees so drastically that the Company, unprecedentedly, saw itself confronted with a clove shortage. During and immediately after conflict, total clove production averaged slightly over 350.000 pounds, i.e. some 640 bahar – less than half of what the Company estimated the ideal world supply to be.⁹⁸⁷

It is interesting to note that, now that the Company finally seemed to have achieved what so many Company officials had argued and strived for over the previous decades, high Company officials had serious anxieties about whether the policy would work, and whether it actually made any sense at all. One important reason for their concerns was that, as De Vlaming had widened the scope of the war over the previous years, Company fleets had kept on running into clusters of

985 Memorie by Arnold de Vlaming, 24 May 1656, in: Knaap e.a. eds., *Memories van overgave*, 192. The conflict over Boano is briefly mentioned above in chapter XIV, paragraph 'Stand-off at Asaudi'; for a slightly more elaborate description, see Rumphius, 'De Ambonsche Historie', II, 40-47.

986 De Vlaming to Governor-General and Council, 24 April 1656, in: VOC 1216, fol. 181v-182r. The letter as a whole makes numerous references to possible future problems with securing enough rice from Makassar, Java and other regions in the archipelago.

987 Knaap, *Kruidnagelen en christenen*, 234-235.

clove trees in unknown places. Maatsuyker therefore warned against raising prices in Asia and Europe to keep clove profits up in compensation for the shortage, as it might easily undo everything they had worked for:

Considering the trouble our competitors always went through in former times to participate [in the clove trade...], what might they do now, and what stone will they leave unturned, so to say, when they see what great profits can be made from said product? We should therefore consider whether it is wise for the Company to hike the price of cloves to such heights, thus giving such people occasion to go look for them where they were not found before and plant them in places where they never grew. Cloves have even been found on the island of Gapi... Who could believe that the land of Sulawesi, so close by, might not also be fertile for them?⁹⁸⁸

Maatsuyker worried that that might already have happened, as batches of cloves had periodically found their way to the market in Makassar, with the Company being entirely in the dark as to where they had come from. Furthermore, as opposed to De Vlaming, he felt that the commotion the Company was always making to keep others from cultivating cloves might well have an adverse effect, inciting other polities to start cultivating them. And if that happened on too large a scale, it might be the undoing of the Company altogether, because, as Maatsuyker literally underlined in his general letter, '*preventing this everywhere is utterly impossible*.'⁹⁸⁹

Indeed, the monopoly would remain precarious throughout its subsequent existence. Particularly in the 18th century, maintaining it would require the constant employment of *hongi* both in North Maluku and the Ambon region, scouring the region for clusters of trees and hidden stashes of cloves. On the Seramese mainland, the Company's Alfur allies were employed to point out clusters of clove trees, but the island was huge and almost impossible to effectively patrol.⁹⁹⁰

While this is not the place to treat this period in any detail, a nice anecdotal

988 General letter of 24 December 1655, in: *Generale missiven*, III, 4-5.

989 Ibid; for the underlined original see VOC 1209, fol. 15r.

990 See e.g. Knaap, *Kruidnagelen en Christenen*, 147-159; Kreike, *Scorched Earth*, 270-276; Els Jacobs. *Merchant in Asia: the Trade of the Dutch East India Company During the Eighteenth Century*. Leiden: CNWS Publications, 2006, 15-20; Gerrit Knaap. 'Monopolie en monocultuur; Economische geschiedenis van Ambon van 1656 tot 1863.' In: G. Knaap, R. Chauvel & C. van Fraassen eds., *Van Tjengkeh tot kruidnagel*. Amsterdam:



Fig 15.2 The only known portrait of Arnold de Vlaming van Oudshoorn, on the frontispiece of the Brussels manuscript copy of Bor's *Ambonse oorlogen*. The drawing is signed MP(?) towards the right. De Vlaming's age is mentioned as 43 below the portrait, which would date it to around 1661, some years after the conclusion of the Great Hoamoal War. De Vlaming had since also commanded troops in a conflict against Bantam and had become the president of the Batavian Council of Justice. In December 1661, presumably not long after this portrait was made, he would command the return fleet to the Netherlands. He died when the fleet was hit by a bad tropical storm off Ceylon, and four out the seven ships, including his, disappeared beneath the waves. Collection Koninklijke Bibliotheek Brussel, Ms. 17982.

Stichting Werkgroep Inheemse Volken, 1987, pp. 15-27; Muridan Widjojo, *The Revolt of Prince Nuku*, 27-46.

illustration of the challenges of the monopoly is provided by the circumstances under which a rival European power was first able to smuggle saplings out of the region and successfully cultivate them elsewhere: the French botanist Pierre Poivre. Arriving in Maluku with two ships in 1770 to look for saplings of clove and nutmeg, as part of his long-standing efforts to transplant these to Ile de France, Poivre first made for the island of Maju, a good 100 kilometres north-west of Ternate. According to his intelligence, the uninhabited island, while very close to the Company's centre of power in the region, was entirely disregarded and sported large numbers of spice trees. As it turned out, however, the island had just recently been visited by a hongki fleet and the trees there had now been thoroughly eradicated. Undaunted, the two French ships continued on their way. A Dutchman disaffected with the Company, who the French encountered on Seram's north coast, subsequently directed them to the island of Gebe, a local trade hub east of Halmahera which was a subsidiary of Tidore.⁹⁹¹ The inhabitants of Gebe, it turned out, were none too happy with Company rule in the region either, and readily offered to put themselves under the French crown. While they did not have any saplings on the island itself, they knew where to find them, and directed the Frenchmen to the coast of Patani, just towards the west on Halmahera, an island as large as Seram and therefore similarly resilient to Dutch oversight. The local inhabitants there sent parties inland to procure the saplings. Days later, they returned with some 400 nutmeg and 70 clove saplings, which the two French ships were ultimately able to safely take out of Dutch-controlled waters and to Ile de France. From there, Poivre distributed them to botanical gardens throughout the French colonial empire – a first nail in the coffin of the hold that the Dutch still had over the European spice market, even if that hold had been becoming ever less profitable.⁹⁹² Episodes such as these illustrated, to use the words of somewhat later Dutch critics of the spice monopoly, 'the impossibility inherent in trying to eradicate a crop which naturally grows so lavishly in the islands of Maluku, and for the better part in places utterly inaccessible to

991 For a brief description of Gebe and its political and economic position in the region, see Andaya, *The World of Maluku*, 99.

992 Willard Hanna and Des Alwi. *Turbulent Times in Past Ternate and Tidore*. Banda Naira: Yayasan Warisan dan Budaya Banda Naira, 1990, 195-206. It should be noted that the subsequent British occupations of Ambon and Banda during the French Revolutionary Wars and the Napoleonic Wars, during which a large number of saplings was also transported elsewhere, was ultimately more consequential.

the European. [They] prove beyond any doubt the futility of the former Dutch East India Company's efforts to eradicate these spices in the forbidden areas.⁹⁹³

That, however, was not how De Vlaming saw it in the immediate aftermath of the Great Hoamoal War. In his report to his successor, he briskly made all manner of suggestions for future policy, including solving the present shortage by planting a million clove trees in the Ambon and Lease Islands as soon as the end of the drought then plaguing the island allowed it. It had come to his attention, though, that the wild deer roaming Ambon might be an obstacle to these efforts, as they tended to nibble on the saplings and rub their antlers against the young trees, damaging them. But of course De Vlaming knew just how to deal with that kind of thing. 'If this turns out to be the case, then these deer should be utterly eradicated. They would otherwise be a good source of provision in these meagre lands, but it is for the cloves, and not for the deer, that the Company holds residence in these lands.'⁹⁹⁴

993 Report about Maluku to Governor-General Van der Cappellen, by H.J. van de Graaff and G.F. Meijlan, 5 June 1821, in: Van Fraassen e.a. eds., *Bronnen betreffende de Mid-den-Molukken*.

994 Memorie by Arnold de Vlaming, 24 May 1656, in: Knaap e.a. eds., *Memories van overgave*, 200.