CHAPTER NINE

THE MAKING OF MIDDLE INDONESIA (1962–1965)

Three town devils, getting rich,
Use their power as they please!
But here come the People wanting justice!
Hayo, bayo, smash those three wild devils!

The contrary tendencies in the previous two chapters inevitably led to conflict. In important respects, Middle Indonesia was born out of the violent resolution of that polarizing process. This chapter begins with the seductive mobilization left incomplete at the end of Chapter 7. By the early 1960s this broad movement for modernization and even for peasant rights was transforming increasingly into a protest against the urban gatekeepers of the new state, described in Chapter 8. The second half of the present chapter turns to the growing reaction among privileged parts of the community – rural landlords and ex-rajas in the countryside, and in the town religious conservatives who voiced bureaucratic concerns. As the optimistic cross-class coalitions that had underlain the political work of earlier years began to break down, embryonic rival coalitions formed along class lines. The best resourced of these broad coalitions ultimately came out on top. This became the new establishment in town, the core of what we have called Middle Indonesia. Just what the nature of those resources was, what role geography played in them, and how they were deployed in this brief, violent and constitutive episode of provincial class conflict, is the burden of this chapter.

Rapid state formation had by the early 1960s created a new urban middle class. It was busy building a still-tenuous hegemony in town, and it had little grip in the countryside. Its core was conservative – bureaucratic, localist, and religious. It worried increasingly that further expanding citizenship rights to rural folk might become costly to themselves. As in colonial times, it preferred to limit modernization to technocratic reform. In

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1 Second stanza of PKI song *Ganjang Tiga Setan Kota* (Smash the Three Town Devils), by Subronto K. Atmodjo, 1965 (*Harian Rakjat Minggu*, 3 October 1965). The original runs: ‘Tiga setan kota, makin kaja,/ Gunakan pangkatnja sekehendaknja! / Tapi [illegible] datang Rakjat tuntut balas! / Hajo, bajo, ganjang tiga setan ganas!’

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the swirl of competing notions of the kind of national freedom (*merdeka*) that Indonesia ought to pursue, it adhered to what Indonesian intellectuals in the 1950s called ‘green’ concepts (Akers 1956). These were rigid ideas of moral rights, prejudged values held by established elites including Muslims, Christians, feudalists and Stalinists. At the same time the very expansion of the middle class also created many energetic individuals whose ambitions could not be fulfilled through existing local patronage. These people were likely to be attracted to the open-ended ‘red’ notions of freedom, which arose spontaneously out of the people under slogans like popular sovereignty (*kedaulatan rakyat*).

From the mid-1950s onwards, politically active townsfolk increasingly built links with (or were sought out by) national institutions. Whether focused on education or rural development, policing or transport infrastructure, all institutions within Indonesia’s ‘soft state’ at this time (Myrdal 1968) were highly politicized. Educated townsfolk played crucial mediating roles in these fluid influence-peddling coalitions, all trying to build authority throughout Indonesia’s vast territory, as previous chapters have explored. Conservatives in town increasingly built links with the military, while progressives built them with the communists favoured by the President. Both these organizations were centrally controlled, but both were forced to take considerable risks by mobilizing provincial elites whose loyalty was by no means guaranteed. A remark made about the communist party by the (astute but politically unsavoury) American intelligence analyst Guy Pauker\(^2\) could as well be applied to the military at this time:

> [O]nce issues are broadcast into society, they are likely to gain a life of their own and continue a self-propelled course, beyond the control of the elite at the top. The initiative comes almost exclusively from the small group of leaders at the top, but they cannot count on popular response unless they have the support of the intermediate strata, that increasingly large segment of the population with a mind of its own, the reference groups and opinion leaders for the broad popular masses below (Pauker 1958:137).

**Mobilizing the Poor**

The PKI only began to organize vigorously in the regions far from Java in the late 1950s. Most organizations in this period were brittle and lacked

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\(^2\) He later became a hard-line senior CIA advisor, who urged the Indonesian military to remove President Sukarno and to assume ‘full responsibility’ for the nation’s leadership (Scott 1985).
commitment. But by 1958 this party had made itself into the most important intermediate organization in the country by adopting organizational techniques from abroad. Like the Italian communists, the PKI under Aidit operated within the bounds of democracy, trying gradually to move politics to the left rather than aiming for revolution. Where the PKI differed from other political parties was in its approach to membership (see Chapter 7). All the other parties were essentially instruments for intra-elite manipulation, avoiding contact with ordinary people between elections, and living off rents extracted from the state and big business. The PKI, however, made a direct appeal to a class of people who had never been mobilized before. Its populism proved attractive to individuals not tied to the local establishment. These unhampered souls are still recalled in Kupang as orang bebas, free people. Unlike the educated, who were mostly ‘bound’ (terikat) to bureaucratic organizations in local government and the church, they could afford to indulge their dreams in the prestigious but somewhat dangerous PKI. Like the young anti-feudal activists of a decade earlier, they looked to Jakarta rather than to Kupang for support. The PKI was particularly good at finding people like this. It is they who also populated the communist women’s movement Gerwani, the party’s urban trade union Sobsi, and its cultural organization Lekra (the only place in town to offer music and theatre outside the church).

Mr. Costa was a bicycle repairman in the heart of old Kupang aged about 45 or 50. His wife was from Madiun in East Java. She rode around town on her bicycle selling clothes. Costa led an urban village-level PKI unit and had a PKI sign in front of his house. He was witty and insolent. When the government car drove by with a loudspeaker to make an announcement he would shout at it: ‘You can talk, an ounce for two cents!’ To a customer waiting while he fixed their bicycle he would sometimes whisper mischievously: ‘If some time I were to tell you to kill the Catholic priest would you do it?’

In charge of the leftist trade union Sobsi was Simon Bubu, Kupang’s most colourful communist in the early 1960s. He became rich in Kupang’s shadow economy, helped by the town’s thuggish politics. At the same time he was a generous patron of his workers, and he tried hard to make himself acceptable to the town’s religious establishment. An ethnic Sabunese,

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3 Interview with Eleanor Toma, Buraen, 21 June 2009. This could refer to the then 65-year old SVD priest Johann Nelissen (http://www.svdcuria.org/public/infonews/misc/obit/rip1875-.pdf, accessed 19 July 2011).
he had a large number of tough men at his disposal, as boss of Kupang’s harbour workers from the 1940s.4

He was also in a powerful position to extract rents from the town’s import-dependent economy. According to some accounts these advantages had first begun to bear fruit during the Japanese occupation when, amidst general scarcity, he was able to buy a large tract of land in Bakunase, then the centre of government. His blessings multiplied in the chaotic 1950s, when he bought more land all over town. One leafy parcel lay at the end of the valley in Fontein, a predominantly Sabunese suburb just west of the town centre. He allowed his most loyal labourers and political associates to build their houses on his land. In the 1950s his political base was the PNI, home to the bureaucrats who ran the harbour and the ships. When the national PNI split into left and right wings in the early 1960s and Kupang’s PNI went right, Simon Bubu joined the disaffected leftist exodus to the PKI. Michael Marcus, who owned a house on Bubu’s land at Fontein, joined him. They both needed protection from allegations of corruption – that standard weapon in Kupang’s factional fights – and Herewila (who had stayed with the rightist PNI) was no longer willing or able to supply it. But the PKI now offered connections to Jakarta, as good as any the PNI had ever had.

Tough as he was, Simon Bubu and his clients were as zealous about their Christian faith as any white-shirted pen-pusher in town. But they wanted religion on their own terms. They felt patronized by the bureaucrats’ congregation of GMIT in the suburb of Airnona where Bubu lived. Bubu encouraged a breakaway called the Gospel Tent (Gereja Kemah Ibadat) in 1956. Sectarian breaches for political reasons were not unusual in GMIT, as we saw in the case of Hans Nisnoni. Their biggest problem was to persuade an ordained minister to lead the sacrament of Holy Communion. In 1961, with food once more scarce, Bubu had some of his men carry bags of American relief rice to the house of the young female minister in charge at Airnona, Rev. Margreta Gertruida Noelik. But she angrily refused to break regulations to service the breakaways on the sly.

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4 Kupang’s harbour may have been a conduit for communist ideas for decades. Between the 1920s and the 1950s, thousands of Rotenese and Sabunese passed through it on their way to or from the pearling industry in Broome, Australia. Australian journalist Michael Grant has compiled a database of 20,000 names from shipping lists (personal communication, Kupang, 17 June 2009). Besides ideas, they smuggled back cigarettes (*Pewarta Timoer*, 3 February 1940).
By this time Simon Bubu was the provincial secretary of the PKI in NTT. He lived next door to Sutarman, the energetic provincial secretary of the farmers union BTI. Bubu died suddenly in 1962. Some say he was poisoned after chairing a PKI meeting in Soë, Timor’s PKI heartland. At his funeral it appeared that church leaders hated the PKI more than PKI leaders hated the church. The preacher criticized the dead man for his communism. When the deputy party secretary, Sam Piry, who had himself been banned from Holy Communion for communism, spoke out on Bubu’s behalf, youths from the Airnona GMIT stormed the house of mourning. Police had to be called to save the women.

The PKI and its affiliates dominated Kupang’s mobilizational agenda from 1962 onwards. Participants revelled in the feeling that they were on the right side of national politics, a government report recalled some years later, while at the same time being able to express themselves through ‘mass rallies focused on dissatisfaction’ (Tari 1972:I, 260). The first moves had begun the previous year. PKI youth organization Pemuda Rakjat held a congress in Kupang on 20–22 July 1961 at which they condemned the murder of Patrice Lumumba and killings in Angola and welcomed the Cuban revolution. For Indonesia they demanded elections, lower prices, higher civil service salaries, better schooling, communist representation in the provincial parliament, land reform, and an end to the rule of the rajas. They were preparing to join the Jakarta congress that September. A week earlier the PKI labour union Sobsi had held a public meeting in Kupang’s famous cinema, now renamed the Bioskop Raya, for a lecture about the anti-colonial struggle of the Sonbai kingdom of old, and to support demands for higher civil service salaries. The following October, Sobsi held its provincial conference in Kupang and elected Octavianus Marcus, the son of Michael Marcus, as its secretary (Tari 1972:I, 258–60).

Protest against established elite privileges increasingly began to replace these moderate modernizing demands in the early 1960s. Much existing literature on the communist mobilization of this period overlooks the depth of resentment that the exploitative and cynical practices described in previous chapters created. Instead it echoes New Order propaganda in portraying provincial communist sympathizers as passive clients misled by devious patrons. Certainly clientelism played a role in most political practices of that period. And propaganda of the crudest kind was as effective among a poorly educated public in Timor as it was in Europe and North America at about the same time. But none of this is enough to discount the reality of class resentments, which burned for a while with considerable intensity even in Kupang.
In 1962 the provincial party started a weekly 12-page bulletin called Pelopor. Some say it was stencilled in red, but no copies survive to check. Old people today recall a strident tone that went far beyond Herewila's witty irreverence. It routinely lambasted respected local figures. Raja Alfons Nisnoni was ‘feudal,’ the Australian foreign missionary Gordon Dicker was ‘imperialist,’ as was an intellectual like Hendrikus Ataupah, who was about leave for the USA on a postgraduate scholarship. Its editor was Paulus Kanuru, originally a primary school teacher in Kefamenanu in the early 1950s. He was a fat man, already a radical activist when he moved to Soë in mid-1955 (Netti and Itta 1997:110–1).

Raucous PKI mobilization in town sometimes provoked violence there (far more than in the country, where BTI activities were more often seen as benign). Fist fights and beatings were a regular part of politics in Timor since the mid-1950s, and they became more frequent as the temperature rose in the early 1960s. Similar mobilization took place all over the archipelago in the late 1950s and early 1960s. It has been extensively described for Bali, for example, by Geoffrey Robinson (1995). The Catholic anti-communist activist Kanis Pari (Canisius Parera, then aged 35) later recalled how aggressive the ‘three town devils’ agitprop sounded in his ears: ‘Three years before 1965, the NTT governor was practically lame, his communist advisor Th. Rissi decided everything. Then in 1964/65 military commander Sutarmadji was PKI, ditto the military police, the economy ran through their Copra Foundation, they controlled food, etc., etc., etc... “Crush the town devils and the village devils” pointed the way. I was their prime target. Because my group stood up with the Pos Kupang stencil, I got aggressive anonymous letters, mysterious phone calls’ (Wawa 2004:180f). He was exaggerating the degree of PKI influence, but the aggression was real.

Theatricality was a key mobilizational tool for all parties, and also for the government. As an official report put it wryly a few years later, the government promoted gigantic rallies to ‘Smash Malaysia!’ as a way of reducing social tensions arising from the ideological contest between the religions and the communists. The Dwikora Command was formed in

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5 For example, a Chinese Catholic member of the Timor parliament visiting Kefamenanu ahead of elections was beaten up in October 1954 by ‘a people’s gang’ (gerombolan rakyat) while the local head of government stood by (Bentara, 15 October 1954, 15 April 1955). BTI executives complained to the military authorities in Kupang in March 1965 (‘on behalf of 155,000 members!’) about a local government official who had threatened violence against BTI peasants who refused to pay their taxes in the words: ‘In Russia things are good because it is a nation of law, but Indonesia is just a nation of beatings’ (negara pukul) (Harian Rakjat, 22 March 1965).
May 1964 to channel these unifying energies. All the local parties participated fanatically in these rallies. As a result, everyone ‘competed with each other to prove themselves the dominant force in implementing the Dwikora Command.’ On 13 April 1964 the National Front, the government mobilizational organization, held a ‘Big Roll-Call’ (Apel Besar) in Kupang at which 10,000 participants pledged to destroy the Puppet State Malaysia. Similar meetings were held at district level throughout NTT (Tari 1972:i, 266).

The PKI had an especially innovative theatrical repertoire. Its mobilizational activities remained within the bounds of democratic practice, but in town they were sometimes shockingly shrill. From 1962 onwards it set new standards of agitprop that other parties could only emulate (and did). Kupang saw show-of-force mass rallies, prominent signs in front of its numerous local branch ‘offices,’ and a local newspaper named Pelopor, full of personal attacks on non-communist elites (including the military after 1963), which complemented the imported national communist daily Harian Rakjat.

Harian Rakjat reported a constant round of public rallies all over the country at which the rank-and-file echoed central party demands, vented outrage at imperialist atrocities overseas, but also gave voice to local concerns, such as the desire to create a new province. Massed choirs sang rousing melodies to provincial audiences, hoping to make it into extravagant national competitions. The exhilaration of organized collectivity was new to the small towns of the eastern archipelago. The tiny town of Namlea, on Buru Island in Maluku, became the proud owner of a ‘Marxist library,’ consisting of 35 new books.6 The women’s organization Gerwani in tiny Kapuas, inland from Banjarmasin, condemned ‘US imperialism and foreign military bases.’ The provincial PKI secretary of West Kalimantan told a Gerwani meeting in the Chen Chiang building in Pontianak they should tell their husbands to give them more freedom to take part in social activities.7 Kupang had seen rallies on the Bakunase sports field during the Japanese occupation, and occasional street processions around election time in the 1950s, but the rallies of the early 1960s took the technique to another level of spectacle. An entertainment-starved town found them fascinating. The town’s new Merdeka football stadium provided a venue for gatherings of such a size that they left the

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6 Harian Rakjat, 27 February 1965.
7 Harian Rakjat, 10 April 1965, 9 July 1965.
venerable Kupang cinema down the hill looking puny. It had been built in 1962/63 on the military shooting range by the military area commander (danrem), Lt. Col. Paikun. Although it lacks a roof and is now in a serious state of decay, it remains in use today. Paikun was a builder – his tour of duty 1959–1964 also left behind a lot of new housing. The provincial PKI may have been the first to make use of this space for politics, but all the other parties – PNI, Parkindo, Partai Katolik – held rallies there too as a ‘show of force.’ To celebrate Labour Day in 1963, the PKI brought together all its affiliate organizations from a wide area for a huge rally in the Merdeka stadium. PKI gatherings in the early 1960s were not unique in their militancy, but they did out-perform the other political parties. They added an oppositional undertone to the rally that unsettled the town’s political class. Although all the town’s military and civilian worthies were in attendance – PKI was after all an official party enjoying the president’s favours – some posters were seen criticizing Governor W.J. Lalamentik. Lalamentik was an experienced bureaucrat, originally from Menado, whose retiring personality kept him signing papers in his office for fear of unpleasant confrontations outside (Liliweri et al 1984:112, Tari 1972:I, 263).

To mark the 45th anniversary of the party’s founding on 23 May 1965, branches were encouraged to go all out for a massive display of strength. Eager to please with exact numbers, the Kupang correspondent for the national Harian Rakjat reported that ‘5,793’ people took part in a procession of members and supporters. The day, 29 May, had begun with a rally in the Merdeka football stadium organized by the youth branch Pemuda Rakjat. Provincial deputy secretary Sam Piry had addressed the crowd. Towards evening, by the light of flaming torches, a kilometre-long procession then left the stadium. BTI farmers, who at home rarely acted demonstratively, marched behind banners naming their village, carrying their new hoes on their shoulders and singing ‘Nasakom Bersatu’ (Nasakom Unite). Snaking around the normally quiet town, the procession eventually arrived at the provincial PKI headquarters in Naikoten, where they were welcomed and fed by Piry, along with the entire town’s other political party leaders and senior government officials, including the governor. Also present was Sardjono from the PKI Central Committee in Jakarta. Piry spoke once more, first on the encouraging leftward move at the national level and the progress towards Nasakom (government policy to place PKI representatives in every government agency). Then his speech adopted a darker tone, moving on to the need for ‘iron discipline’ among communists
as they faced local obstacles, conventionally referred to as ‘pure Manipol forces.’

The Kupang rally of 29 May 1965 had been preceded a week earlier by celebrations at village level in the vicinity of Kupang. In rural villages they had gone well, such as the gathering of about 1,000 ‘PKI members and candidate members’ in Buraen south of Kupang, which enjoyed the popular dances and the declamation of revolutionary poems by farmers’ children. But in the semi-urban kampongs on the outskirts of Kupang some village chiefs belonging to rival parties took exception to what they saw as displays of insubordination. In Oepura, Nunhila, Kuanino, and Oebobo, PKI branches had planted signboards announcing their presence, and hung out banners with slogans like ‘Let us race to become communists who are Red and Expert!’ According to a later government report, Kupang was ‘flooded with posters reflecting the political temperature.’ Some condemned non-revolutionary leaders in general (‘Hypocritical Manipolists ... step aside!’, ‘Smash Manikebu!’), others urged the new land reform judges to side with the ‘pillars of the revolution,’ others again insisted on the destruction of the ‘New Colonial and Imperialist Project called Malaysia’ (Tari 1972:1, 279). Such signs were flashpoints all over the archipelago. The Oebobo village chief was a Parkindo man. He ordered the removal of the signs as soon as they went up. Knife-wielding men surrounded the house of the PKI village secretary.

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Sam Piry

Samuel Nicodemus Piry (1922–1966) (Figure 31) was a middle class vanguard intellectual. His father was an ethnic Sabunese colonial government official in Waingapu, Sumba. Older brother Yakob discovered the PKI when he was in Java during the 1945 Revolution, then became a convinced communist during

(Continued)
university studies in Leiden, the Netherlands. In the 1950s Sam worked as clerk in the Christian hospital in Waingapu, and was active in Parkindo. But when the PKI began its recruitment drive later in the decade, Yakob persuaded Sam to join up. Sam began by handling subscriptions to the national PKI paper *Harian Rakjat*, the only newspaper to reach Waingapu. His son Ratu collected them from the post office on his bicycle and took them to educated subscribers around town – Chinese shopowners and a few senior government officials. Sam was severe with his own children if they did not study, and read legal and political texts even at the dinner table. The PKI had good government connections; policemen would come to his home asking for help with promotion.

His connection with Yakob led to an appointment as deputy provincial secretary, and in 1960 as member of the prestigious Temporary People’s Consultative Assembly (MPRS) in Jakarta. This required a move to Kupang with a large young family, at first sleeping at Simon Bubu's home in Airnona before a new house became available on the outskirts of town at Oebobo. He had the right to a car, but it never arrived. The house was often full of PKI activists, especially primary school teachers. If they had come from out of town – Sabu, Soë, Kefamenanu – they slept overnight in the garage. On public occasions it was Sam Piry rather than As Rissi who addressed the crowd.

After the events in Jakarta on 1 October 1965, none of this prestige helped him. A couple of days later, on a moonlit night, GMIT youths surrounded Simon Bubu's house where he was staying. They began throwing stones. Some were armed with grenades given by sympathetic soldiers. BTI youths quickly gathered from all over Kupang to defend him, but they realized the military were in touch with the church youths and avoided a fight. When Piry rang military commander Soetarmadjji asking for protection as a MPRS member, troops came and deposited him in the athlete's quarters at the football stadium. He was never released again. Soldiers tortured him with electricity for information, and later detained him at the old jail. Some time in 1966 soldiers took him out to Tanah Merah, on the eastern outskirts of town, and told him to run. He was shot as he ran and left to die. His body was never identified.

**Reaction**

These mobilizational tactics were intended to polarize, and they did. In rural areas a reaction came from village and subdistrict chiefs who had been harried about land reform. The ‘pillars’ had only recently been stripped of their last claims as sole rulers of the soil under what remained of the Dutch indirect rule system. Rajas, *fetor*, and another layer
of dependents known as temukung, no longer had a place in the modern administrative system. Many had been re-appointed under the new system, but they now had to put up with central orders and political party interference. What bothered them most was the central government’s land reform policy, loudly supported by their own peasants through the PKI.

The first symbolic land redistributions were already taking place. At a ceremony in Kupang on 24 September 1964 to mark National Farmers Day, some hundreds of hectares of state land were redistributed in the districts of Kupang, South Central Timor, East Flores, Sikka and Manggarai (both the latter also in Flores). On 29 October 1964 district level rulers from around the province met in Kupang and declared they were ready to redistribute thousands of hectares of land considered state-owned to the farmers who were working it. More land reform conferences were held in Kupang late in 1964 to set targets and build the special land reform court, on which farmers’ representatives from various organizations would also
sit (23–27 November, 5 December, 10 December). The provincial BTI had been mobilizing popular participation in the reforms since 1962, while at the same time consolidating its own organization and appointing new leaders (all named in official reports – Tari 1972:I, 269–270). Michael Marcus and his South Central Timor BTI never took over land by force, as in the unilateral actions in Java, but they did urge farmers to withhold local taxes until the government had implemented the land reform act (Tari 1972:I, 26). Individual land ownership title for peasants, with credit to finance the transfer, remained an official policy objective in Nusa Tenggara Timor until about 1968 (Sidik et al 1968:72), but after that it faded.

The PKI anniversary committee told the assembled mass on 29 May that the number of participants in the procession would have far exceeded five thousand ‘if evil village-level power-holders in various subdistricts had not prevented farmers from taking part in this big procession.’ Some subdistrict chiefs had imposed a ban on villagers leaving for town. Beatings had occurred, leading to at least one injured schoolteacher.

Overshadowing reaction by rural landlords and ex-rajas in vehemence, however, was the religious reaction in town. Disputes over the boundaries of bureaucratic fiefdoms were primarily urban and religious. Religion had put the brakes on the secular Jakarta party PNI in the 1950s, and it was now turned against the PKI. Central Committee member Sardjono used his speech at the 29 May rally to defend the PKI against charges that it was ‘against Pancasila,’ the national ideology that places God first.

One of those who embodied the mobilizational potential of religious reaction in town was Kanis Pari. He discovered a gift for oratory when still a teacher in the 1950s. Borrowing the proletarian title ‘Bung Kanis’ during a visit from ‘Bung (Su)Karno,’ he began to write for the Catholic news magazine *Bentara*. The style was vividly Sukarnoist but the substance far from it. During the 1955 election he did sterling work turning Florinese voters away from the secular PNI towards the conservative Catholic Party. By 1960 he was in Kupang, working for the Livestock Cooperative and soon producing an anti-communist news bulletin called *Pos Kupang*. His lifestyle was Spartan, he lived for politics and never married, and he had a magnetic personality for young men who loved the thrill of action. He organized Catholic students into a branch of the national organization PMKRI in 1963, and other youth into the Catholic youth organization AMKRI the following year. The students he trained ‘totally,’ so they could become part of an anti-communist action when the time came.
Kanis Pari felt himself to be the target of the PKI’s noisy campaign to ‘crush the town devils and crush the village devils,’ as we saw above. By this time the list of town devils had ballooned from three to five, and the fifth – the ‘bureaucratic capitalist’ (*kapitalis birokrat, kabir*) – was not wholly inapplicable to him. The Livestock Cooperative was one of the more lucrative government ventures in town (Chapter 8). Recalling the hostile environment in Kupang afterwards, he told an audience (somewhat mixing his metaphors): ‘Kupang was no baby on the PKI map.’ Politics in Kupang were highly personal. PKI activists from the *Pelopor* paper intimidated Pari with anonymous pamphlets and mysterious phone calls. Party sympathizers in the tiny telephone exchange listened in on his conversations. The real power, Pari felt, lay with Thobias (‘As’) Rissi, the PKI provincial secretary. Rissi was a rather humourless man, the son of a Protestant preacher from Rote, who always walked everywhere in town wearing a white shirt and white trousers. He was the provincial PKI secretary and a member of the prestigious People’s Consultative Assembly in Jakarta, but he was a poor public speaker. In private, though, he had a sharp tongue and persuaded much new talent to join the party.

Polarization split the Protestant churches, GMIT which was dominant in Timor and GKS (Gereja Kristen Sumba) in Sumba. Many church school teachers felt attracted to the PKI programme for the mix of reasons that has already been reviewed – the exhilaration of being at the forefront of change they believed in, solidarity with the poor whom they knew well, and, most importantly for a teacher whose salary was partly subsidized by the state, the satisfaction of being on the right side of national politics. Teachers in the towns of Kupang, Lelogama and Soë heeded the call most clearly (Peters 1973:54). Even some ministers felt attracted by the integrative possibilities of the cross-class coalition that PKI power generation implied.

Protestant church leaders, on the contrary, saw the PKI as their rival, both for the affections of the poor, among whom they were just beginning to make inroads, and for those of the government. Church relations with government were mainly about money. After independence most state subsidies for the church dried up but not for the schools (see Chapter 6). The quid pro quo for this arrangement became clear in 1964. As the state

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11 Theological objections to communism seemed not to be a major concern to Protestants. Whereas most Catholics had been made well aware of these objections, only a few of the most highly educated Protestants ever voiced them in this region. The GKS synod in Sumba had issued a condemnation of communism at its synod in 1957, but the impulse seemed to come mainly from Dutch missionaries.
grew more assertive, the suggestion arose that Nasakom might also apply to those institutions the state was subsidizing. Church leaders feared schools might have to appoint some teachers approved by the PKI. An increasingly communist government might force them to teach 'atheistic' doctrines at the many church-run primary schools in Timor. Some panicky church officeholders even worried the PKI might insist on placing its representatives on local congregational councils. Synod chairperson Rev. Radja Haba started a committee in 1964 to protect the ‘Christian character’ of the schools. Later that year he attracted much attention with a public lecture on this theme. The Kupang district chief, the former *fetor* Oematran, was persuaded to intervene on behalf of the church against the wishes of the provincial parliament. Political pressure on the church eased with the suppression of the PKI, and the church thought back on this escape with relief. The church historian M.A. Noach wrote: ‘[I]n a situation that is humanly impossible, the Lord will act, and cleanse the schools and the church from communist elements’ (1972:24–5). Ironically, the flow of state subsidies still began to decline from 1967.

Protestant church leaders were just as suspicious of efforts to mobilize the poor as were senior Catholics and, for that matter, most senior bureaucrats. But there were many poor within the church, and not all believers were prepared to defend a Protestant establishment that had filled elite rice bowls but had done little for others. Leaders began to speak of ‘PKI infiltration.’ In 1958 the then-synod secretary Radja Haba had written an influential article in a church bulletin warning of this (Brookes 1977:85), and early in 1960 the GMIT synod felt compelled to remove one minister for being a member of the PKI. At the end of that year it issued an ultimatum to members of local church councils to ‘choose’ between the PKI and the church. In March 1961 the synod became so concerned about the spread of communism among its members that it contemplated a ‘frontal attack’ in the form of public rallies to expose the dangers of communism. But, fearing this might backfire, it fell back simply on trying to blow some life into what even they acknowledged were ‘lifeless’ sermons. This half-hearted response, according to the missionary Dicker, did little to prevent people from joining the communist party (Dicker 2007:121). On the contrary, the 1960 ultimatum later led several ministers in Amarasi to leave the GMIT in June 1964 and join a breakaway church, calling on other communist Christians to join them (Brookes 1977:98). The loss of discipline within the church continued, leading an American investigator to say afterwards that ‘[c]ommunists had invaded the churches and in many places practically controlled them’ (Peters 1973:54).
The flashpoint for confrontation was the town of Soë in South Central Timor. This was where Michael Marcus, himself an active church member, was successfully mobilizing farmers for the Indonesian Farmers Union BTI. But this was also where the pioneering missionary Piet Middelkoop had lived from 1922 until 1957, and where the theological college stood. The first mass conversions had taken place near here in the 1920s, at the mission base in the garrison settlement of Kapan 20 km from Soë. The outreach from town to countryside had become highly competitive. The BTI was better than the church at bridging the class gap that yawned there. By 1965, according to the church historian Graham Brookes (1977:84), the BTI was ‘practically in control of many villages and districts.’ BTI village activists told a Soë doctor they would only allow him to make his visits to a village polyclinic if he agreed to do so under PKI ‘auspices.’ What precise form of acknowledgement they wanted from him is not clear from these words – one of my informants thought the issue was part of the village-level resistance to raja-cum-district chief Koesa Nope – but the doctor stubbornly refused to give it (Dicker 2007:110–1). Medicine as a field for ideological contestation had a history in Timor. In March 1961 the American hospital ship SS Hope, a military-civilian partnership, anchored in Kupang harbour for two and a half weeks to provide medical help to a poor and isolated area of Indonesia. Locals flocked to this white marvel of technology to get their cavities filled and to eat apples. But it was also a show of force in a nation on the frontline of the cold war. Dicker wrote afterwards that ‘except for the Communists, everyone felt unusually fortunate that Kupang was on the vessel’s itinerary’ (Dicker 2007:118–9).12

In August 1965 a remarkable ‘spiritual revival’ burst out in Timor. The build-up to this moment lasted almost a year, and about another year later it was all over. Ecclesiastical scholars have written mainly about its spontaneous visions and miracles, but it seems clear the events also reflected the extraordinary class tensions between town and countryside then reaching a peak of intensity. Like the earlier sermonizing against drinking and in favour of bible recitation and correct clothing for worship, these

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12 Project HOPE (Health Opportunities for People Everywhere) was started in 1958 by an ex-US Navy officer and had the free use of a navy ship. It operated under the Geneva Convention like a military hospital ship. Its first mission was to Indonesia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Project_HOPE; http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/systems/ship/ah-ngo.htm, accessed 19 July 2012; ‘White fleet ship starts her mission,’ Life magazine, 19 December 1960, p74–9). Governor Lalamentik, who had studied in the United States, translated a little booklet with statistics about NTT into English especially for the occasion of this visit (Lalamentik 1961).
events too began as a contestation over the body. This time the disease was political. In October 1964 the GMIT congregation in the small town of Niki-Niki, the seat of the Nope clan 35 km east of Soë, wrote a letter to church leaders. They implored them to send a ‘healing team.’ There were literally sick people in Niki-Niki, but the more serious problem was that ‘parties… have spread like an epidemic.’ The crisis-ridden church was delighted when a young Rotenese teacher called Johanes Ratuwalu, son of a minister, declared he had heard God’s voice calling him to volunteer for the healing ministry. His faith mission soon brought wellness to many people, particularly in Amarasi south of Kupang. However, just as the church was about to ordain him and give him a car, the man abandoned his mission and went to Alor. He was last reported to have become ‘crazy about money, crazy about women, and crazy about status’ (Brookes 1977:97–100, 1980:111).

A year later another young teacher arose, this time in Soë itself. Miss Priscilla ‘Hennie’ Tunliu had grown up in the home of the missionary Pieter Middelkoop for seventeen years; her mother had been a protégé. She then married a minister and was given a scholarship to study at Satya Wacana University, a new Christian university in Central Java where students were constantly reminded of the incompatibility of communism with their faith. Here she developed a strong sense of nationalism. Once back in Soë she was soon very senior as director of the two Christian high schools. Her first vision occurred on the evening of 16 August 1965, at a church thanksgiving service for Independence Day (17 August). The next morning Jesus spoke to her again with a message urging action. This led her to travel to Batu Malang, in East Java, to ask the foreign-funded evangelistic mission based there to send a mission to the youth of Timor.

Well-organized teams were soon fanning out from Soë to retake possession of the countryside. Its spectacularly successful healings and conversions owed much to Timorese messianism. The enthusiastic but poorly educated young preachers ‘vied with each other in telling stories of the greatest miracles’ – birds sang gospel songs, stones preached and sang, people walked on water, water changed into wine, the dead were raised. Nothing was impossible (Peters 1973:28–32). The atmosphere was apocalyptic. Rising tensions caused by the escalating conflict between the PKI and the establishment were exacerbated by economic and even natural calamities. Terrible inflation had caused cattle exports to collapse. Anthrax was raging among the cattle. Drought had by December 1965 struck 170,000 people in the Amanuban kingdom with famine, out of a
total population of 200,000–250,000. To top it all a strange comet appeared in the sky (Brookes 1990:274, Pemda NTT 1966).

The massed ‘conversions’ (many were already nominal Christians) began on 26 September 1965, just days before events in far-away Jakarta were to bring a radical regime change also to Timor (Brookes 1980). Within weeks the mission teams were operating in the midst of a bloody crackdown on the PKI throughout Timor. We have little information about how the young missionaries were able to do their work amidst the purges. An occasional hint suggests they were politically aware. The leader of Team 17, an illiterate woman named Mrs. Boimau, announced triumphantly at one point that she had had a vision predicting that ‘before long Indonesia would govern the world and that President Suharto would become president of the world.’ The declaration apparently created some resistance on the part of her hearers, perhaps because they knew President Suharto as none other than General Suharto who had sent the troops down on them (Brookes 1977:114).

The mission to bring communist heathens into the fold was at first marvellously fruitful. Thousands of rural people flocked into the church in the months after the military crackdown (described in the next chapter). In the old Amanuban kingdom in South Central Timor, 60% of the church’s membership had joined immediately after the regime change (Brookes 1980:86). Heathens were known as *khalaik*, from *khalayak*, meaning creature, a reference to the animist reverence for what Muslims call creatures of God. To the church, the term translated to ignorance, but to the military after 1 October 1965 it translated to wilful atheism and communism. In South Central Timor, terrified *khalaik* peasants entered the church in such droves that a sub-district chief was reported able soon afterwards to tell the military: ‘There are no *khalaik* here’ (Cooley 1976:347).

However, the mission eventually proved to be a mixed blessing for the church. The military were swarming all over the countryside. Under this intense surveillance many ministers were reluctant to associate with the unpredictable charismatic phenomena the evangelistic teams were unleashing. Conservative churchmen also worried about the dominant women who often led these teams, and they suspected men and women were sleeping together on tour. By the end of 1967, just as the military began allowing foreigners to travel into the interior of Timor again, most healing teams had ceased to exist. Their job was done. The church had reined them in and was giving them ‘further training’ in a new institute in Soë, under the Rev. Y.M.E. Daniels. He said with satisfaction: ‘The Lord used the coup to make the people seek the Lord, and revived the church
to gather in the people.' Not long afterwards, American missionary Frank Cooley observed that indigenous church life in Soë seemed, on the whole, little changed (though the conversion of the Chinese does date to this period) (Brookes 1977:129, 145, 151–2, Peters 1973:56, 100, 155).

In the purges that followed, thousands of civil servants plunged back to the lower class when they lost their jobs. Mrs. Yulianti Meno of Soë was one of them. She had delayed marrying her teacher husband Kristofel Meno in the early 1970s because the military had detained him for three months due to his PKI affiliation. By 1975 things seemed to have blown over, he went back to teaching, and they married. But five years later a new purge broke out and he was fired. He lost his state pension, their children became ‘PKI kids’ with no chance of a civil service career, and not even the pastor would defend their rights. To pay for the children’s education Yulianti did people’s laundry, babysat, and sold dried fish (Kolimon and Wetangterah 2012:263–6).

Meanwhile careers for those on the right side of politics blossomed. Protestant student leader Melkianus Adoe, for example, thanks to his activism in ‘crushing the PKI’ enjoyed a varied career in Kupang in government broadcasting, state banking, and the state political party Golkar culminating in the provincial parliament (Adam et al 1997:198). Kanis Pari talked Governor El Tari into employing ‘thousands’ of his young anti-communist protégés (Wawa 2004: xxiv, 313).

**Betting on the Strong**

The interactions between national and local interests in this key moment of Indonesia’s history were complex and dynamic. This chapter has adopted a contentious politics approach that attempts to do justice to both. At the national level, polarization had produced two big power blocs, a ‘red,’ mobilizational, broadly progressive one around the president and the PKI, and a ‘green,’ reactionary one around the military and religious parties (Alers 1956). Each deployed mobilizational strategies based on the resources and opportunities available to them. Provincial constituencies were an indispensable resource. The Jakarta actors had to deal skilfully with a huge network of intermediate organizations based in the provincial towns.

This chapter has traced a parallel process of polarization and mobilization in one such town. Until 1961, polarization had not been marked in Kupang. But as its urban middle class members invented new ways of excluding the poor from state rents, the cross-class coalition aiming to
seduce the rural and urban poor into participating in the modern state began to falter. With the coalition sabotaged from within, vague hopes among the poor for a ‘red’ new social order crystalized into protest against the new rulers. ‘Red’ PKI propaganda from Jakarta provided the idiom for this protest. From ‘green’ Jakarta’s point of view, the choice familiar from colonial times became urgent once more – to bet on the people or on the strong. The people were more numerous, and the PKI mobilizational network in the towns was impressive. But the party had not counted on the strength of provincial conservatism. It was forced to rely on townsfolk who were rather marginal to an urban establishment that was growing increasingly assertive. Teachers, lower level clergy and trade unionists hoped to bypass the conservative establishment by mobilizing urban ‘free people’ and rural ‘mountain people.’ They found themselves increasingly at odds with white-collar townsfolk led by senior bureaucrats and their local business allies, senior clergy, former aristocrats, and upwardly mobile students.

A vertical coalition between this provincial establishment – the new strong – and the military in Jakarta was by no means a natural one. The locals were religious and anxious to protect their turf; the military were generally secular and nationalist. But they were broadly united in the ‘green’ values of order and hierarchy. Indonesia was not a democracy from 1959 onwards. Long subversive of democracy, the military allied pragmatically with those provincial actors least committed to national, secular democracy in the period 1964–66. This was blatant cynicism, but also reflected a growing degree of military embeddedness in provincial middle classes, a decade after Kupang’s integration into Indonesia. If the choice for betting on the strong was easily made, the cost was to be high. Abandoning the most broadly associational forms of power generation was sure to leave behind social dysfunctionalities.

From 1960 onwards and particularly from 1963, local conflict escalated as each side undertook innovative actions in response to opportunities and to threats from the other side. The initiative lay with the PKI. Its supporters made the most of the opportunity of presidential protection to recruit unreached people of the lower classes on justice issues that had been framed for them by the revolutionary discourse of merdeka: freedom and independence, land rights for peasants, workers’ rights for harbour labourers and – for urban young people – civil rights, the right to freedom of expression and to engage in the arts. Their repertoire ranged from routine lobbying through official channels to episodic theatrical events designed to recruit new members, increase support from the centre and
intimidate enemies. The anti-feudal, anti-clerical language grew increas-
ingly shrill.

The local official and religious establishment at first reacted hesitantly
to this threatening language. On the one hand it had enough control over
the machinery of office that yielded it rents not to have to fear the worst.
But on the other, should it become necessary to counter-mobilize, its elit-
ism had left it with minimal organizational resources among the ‘free
people.’ Non-communist political parties had no branches outside
Kupang, and they were in any case oriented more towards elite rent-
seeking and communal competition than seeking contact with the
masses. The churches were divided between conservatives at the top and
young progressives at the grass roots. Their leaders feared the church
might lose if the confrontation escalated, though they gave their blessing
to an evangelistic campaign that tried to shift the escalation to the spiri-
tual domain. The military initially had even fewer organizational resources
to mobilize. But since the early 1960s it had considerably expanded its
territorial presence, and established a variety of mobilizational organiza-
tions that sought contact with the population. As the next chapter will
explain in detail, it used these to approach religious conservatives who
shared concerns about communism. It was precisely the lack of associa-
tional resources both in the centre and in the provinces that led the reac-
tionary alliance to engage in a bloody crackdown.

Escalating confrontation between the two broad coalitions in 1965 led
to a violent and one-sided denouement that ended further experiments in
democratic reform for the rest of the century. There were many problems
in the period after 1961, and many of them were outside the town’s control.
But of those within the grasp of the political class in Kupang, the biggest
problem had been its own decision to sabotage the cross-class alliances
that had been building up until then. Thus Middle Indonesia was born. It
at once holds the country together because it controls the towns with cen-
tral state rents, yet also destabilized it with its undercurrent of disenfran-
chisement and class violence.