CHAPTER TEN

THE ENGLISH MONOPOLY AND THE ANTI-CLIMAX
IN NUKU’S STRUGGLE

The clove monopoly contested again

The British occupation actually opened up an opportunity for the East Seramese and the people in the region of the Amboina Islands to ‘smuggle’ cloves from the production areas. In 1797, the East Seramese and their merchant friends were busy pursuing their trade all over the region. Taking advantage of the unstable political situation, local ‘rebels’ joining people from East Seram had surrounded the fortress at Haruku during the night and forced the sergeant to fire upon them. When a guard was sent in pursuit of the rebels’ prahu which happened to be passing by, he was fired upon by the prahu which carried swivel guns, and compelled to retreat. This in conjunction with other reports of more prahu assembled in that neighbourhood and yet more information from Saparua that eighty prahu had assembled at another part of Seram, fuelled suspicions that some sort of concerted plan for an attack on the Islands was being hatched. At the time of the insurrection, when the attention of the English Resident and his forces was being directed towards the people of Hitu, cloves which had been withheld from delivery to the stores and kept hidden awaiting a convenient opportunity were shipped away, the bulk of them from the negeri on Haruku and Saparua. On 24 January 1797, an English brig picked a fight with a large Makassar vessel, but had to veer off when it ran out of ammunition.

Another incident occurred in the area off Nusa Laut at the end of July 1799, when thirty vessels, plus three or four large paduakang, suddenly made their appearance and assembled at Negeri Amahai. They informed the orangkaya that they had come to secure the remainder of the cloves concealed on Nusa Laut. These vessels, Resident Farquhar averred, had been chartered by the groups of traders from Waru, a settlement on East Seram where Prince Nuku’s headquarter had formerly been located. Afterwards an English officer on Saparua, Lieutenant Slingsby, captured the Raja of Amet, one of the leaders on Nusa Laut, when he came across him trading spices with the East Seramese. Feeling he had been humiliated by the officer, the Raja, who was sent to Ambon, ordered two men—Pieter Sawaitu and Pesega—to assassinate the man who had putatively disgraced him, promising them a reward of 100 Spanish dollars. When
this conspiracy came to light, the Raja was executed and his close relatives were banished to Madras.\(^6\)

This incident is proof that the East Seramese also did not shun the use of force to intimidate the local heads who remained loyal to their European rulers, the British. They terrorized any of the local heads, *orangkaya* or raja, who declined to sell them their spices. This scheme had clearly been orchestrated by some groups of traders from East Seram. Waru was mentioned specifically, but probably it involved various leaders from other settlements in east and south-east Seram as well as the elite of the Tidore Sultanate. It seemed that Raja Amet was also part of the conspiracy. ‘Smuggling’ intermingled with village politics can also be seen as a strategy for creating opportunities to open up the way to transport cloves to East Seram and its vicinity. Some areas such as Haruku and Nusa Laut benefited from the situation, revealing the relationship between the Seramese and other traders, notably the Makassarese, Sultan Nuku, and other Tidoran grandees.

Later, it was discovered that the spice trade was flourishing in both East Seram and East Halmahera; it was even rife in the Raja Ampat when the English Resident William Jones visited these areas between March and May 1798. On Geser he observed that the country trader ship, the *Diana*, under Captain Lynch, was loading 100 *pikul* of cloves against a rate of 5 pieces of blue *serampore* cloth per *pikul*. Calling at the house of one of the chiefs, Abdul Kadir, he found about four hundred *pikul* of cloves heaped on the ground, reputedly all from Ambon. When he put in at *Negeri* Kilmuri, one of the heads informed him that two Makassarese vessels were lying at anchor there ready to load spices. As Jones could obtain neither firewood nor water, he continued to Waru where he met the Tidoran Prince Saintolo, who told him that two of his vessels were collecting spices from the islands of Saparua and Haruku on the orders of Sultan Nuku and Prince Mangoffa. The Prince likewise informed him that about a fortnight before, the ship the *Duke of Clarence*, under Captain Risdon, and the schooner the *Tweed*, under Captain Duncan, both heavily laden with spices, had sailed from that place for Pulau Penang.\(^7\)

In Salawati, in *Negeri* Sailolof to be precise, Jones wanted to barter his commodities in exchange for food supplies. However, the *Kapiten Laut* of Salawati preferred to trade in spices. Its vessels were plying back and forth constantly from Tidore to Bacan. On 9 April a vessel, commanded by Salantar Jeef who had collected all the spices in Maba, arrived in Salawati where it was told to await some ships, but the names of these ships and their commanders were unknown. When Jones failed to procure the food supplies he desired, he proceeded to *Negeri* Namopope in Misool where he found the ship the *Thetis*, commanded by Captains Court and Stuart, which had arrived a few days before him, and had just completed loading