CHAPTER ONE

THE VOC IN MALUKU:
IMPOSING THE SPICE MONOPOLY

The European presence before the Dutch

The first Europeans who imposed radical change on the Malukans during the sixteenth century were the Portuguese and the Spaniards. After the conquest of Malaka in 1511, Alfonso de Albuquerque sent three small ships under the command of Captain Antonio de Abreu and his Deputy-Commander Francisco Serrão to the Spice Islands in eastern Indonesia. The fleet which left Malaka sometime between November 1511 and January 1512 sailed eastwards to the islands of Buru, Ambon, and Seram. After having visited Banda, Serrão’s vessel, loaded with cloves, nutmegs, and mace, ran into stormy weather and sank. Only the commander and six or seven of his crewmen survived and were taken to Ambon by local fishermen. Kaicili Vaidua, brother of Sultan Abu Lais of Ternate, visited Serrão and informed him that the Sultan invited him to come to Ternate. In a subsequent letter, Sultan Abu Lais (r.1500–23) entrusted the Portuguese King, Dom Manuel, with ‘his land and all in it’. Nine years later in 1521, not to be outdone, Sultan Mansyr of Tidore also welcomed the surviving Spanish ships of Magellan’s expedition around the world.

Soon after the death of Sultan Abu Lais in 1523, the building of a Portuguese fortress was completed on Ternate. The longstanding ‘dualistic’ rivalry between Ternate and Tidore flared up again, now involving the Portuguese on the Ternate side and the Spaniards on the side of Tidore and Jailolo. In 1524 Sultan Tidore’s settlement at Marieko was destroyed during a Ternate–Portuguese attack. The arrival of Spanish expeditions under Alvaro de Saavedra in 1528 and Ruy López de Villalobos in 1543 did not help to strike a counterbalance. Unfortunately for Tidore, the Spaniards left Maluku in 1565 because they decided to devote all their resources on the establishment of their colony in Luzon. As a result, Ternate enjoyed the most advantageous political development at the time.

The Jailolo Sultanate, which had been known as one of the most powerful in Maluku, was conquered by the Ternate–Portuguese alliance in 1551. The strong fort and well-equipped troops were of little use when the castle’s water source was captured and the great Sultan Katarabumi of
Jailolo was forced to surrender. The Jailolo ruler had to relinquish his title of Sultan and became a *sangaji* under Ternate and a vassal of the King of Portugal. Several days of looting denuded the palace of its riches and the Sultan fled to the mountains. After the defeat, Jailolo lost most of its population and its political influence in Maluku faded. The only remnant of its greatness was its symbolic participation in ceremonies requiring the presence of all four Malukan kingdoms held in Ternate.5

Such conquests did not imbue the relationship between Ternate and Portuguese with peace and harmony. It started amicably enough but soon conflicts broke out. In 1527, for example, Captain Dom Jorge de Meneses arrested *Kaicili* Vaidua and insulted him by smearing bacon fat on his face. This same Portuguese also ordered his men to ‘forage’ around Ternate. He cut off one *sangaji*’s hand and had him pulled into the sea by dogs. The most important pro-Portuguese Ternatan leader, Darwis, the *kapiten laut*, and the *hukum* were also hanged on Meneses’ orders. This led to open hostility between Ternate under the leadership of the Queen Mother, Boheyat (r.1523–35) and the Portuguese. The tensions continued under the leaderships of Vicente de Fonseca in 1531, Tristão de Ataide in 1533, and Antonio Galvão in 1536. The worst incident occurred when Captain Duarte de Sá arrived in 1555. He appropriated the annual Makian clove harvest destined for the Sultan of Ternate and even ordered the seizure of Sultan Hairun (r.1535–70), his brother, and his mother to guarantee the loyalty of the Ternatans. This conduct unified the pro- and anti-Portuguese factions within Ternate and led to an outright war against the Portuguese who were allied with the remaining force of Jailolo. Ternate’s force proved superior, the captain was removed and Sultan Hairun was subsequently restored. The enmity culminated in a fever pitch after the murder of Sultan Hairun by the Portuguese.

Sultan Babullah (r.1570–83) vowed to avenge the death of his father by chasing all Portuguese and other Christians from the Archipelago. His troops seized four sampans from Moro loaded with food for the Portuguese fortress. He then attacked the Christianized Moro from Galela, moving down to the east coast of northern Halmahera killing all Portuguese, *mestizos*, and native Christians he could find. The Christian population of Bacan was defeated in 1571. The Sultan also laid a long siege to the Portuguese fortress on Ternate. During the siege only four Portuguese ships from Goa and Malaka managed to reach Ternate, but they failed to liberate the fortress. Consequently about 500 people within its walls died from illness and starvation. When the fortress was surrendered on 26 December 1575, only 400 of the garrison were still alive. Most of the Portuguese and native Christians expelled from Ternate resettled in Ambon. Sultan Babullah kept only a Portuguese captain, a factor, and twelve soldiers.6