

# USING OLD NOTIONS FOR NEW IDEOLOGIES

## RMS and the Moluccan conflict

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In his famous 'Imagined Communities' Benedict Anderson raises the important question why people are not only prepared to be killed for their nation, but are also prepared to kill. Part of the answers to this question lies in ideology. Nations as well as ethnic groups are social entities. The differences between nations or ethnic groups depend on interpretation and may change according to circumstances. People who identify themselves as Dutch opposite to Germans might make a differentiation between themselves when there is no German around, calling themselves Friesians or Limburgers. People from Sumatra and Maluku may call themselves Indonesians vis-à-vis a Dutchman, but feel no identification when there is no Dutchman around. What all these people call their identity, their national or ethnic identity, is what they suppose they share. A believed shared history, language, culture or maybe religion. It is not necessarily a 'real' difference or shared history, it is the believed in history or identity that makes the distinction between groups. In that way it is to a large extent ideological how people interpret the boundaries and differences between themselves and 'the other'. Religious groups may, in some circumstances, function in the same way as ethnic groups or nations. The moment that people are prepared to kill or be killed for their nation, ethnic group or religious group is even more subjected to ideology. In order to urge people into violent or collective action on behalf of their group they have to be convinced it is for the benefit of their group, that it is of their interest. It is ideology that makes people believe their group identity, whether it be a religious or ethnic group, is worthwhile killing for. It is also ideology that gives people the legitimisation for their actions, killing or sacrifice. Ideology is not necessarily based on what really happens, it is a coloured view. Ideology is a construction in which interpretation of reality is connected with aspired goals and the means (tools and tactics) that are believed necessary to reach those goals. Above all ideologies serve to legitimise and convince. In the interpretation of reality ideology does not only incorporate

coloured views of events, but also adds events that are taken from rumours and it reintegrates old, sometimes long forgotten, notions or events to justify actions or standpoints.

The conflicts in former Yugoslavia give ample examples of these added events. The 'battle' between the Serbs and Turks in the fourteenth century for example became one of the core events in Serbia's ideology to prove historically that the Serbs always tried to protect the west from Islamic intrusion. At the same time this historical interpretation functioned to 'prove' the authenticity of the Serb nation. One might question whether or not there was something as a Serb nation in the fourteenth century? We can also question who were the Turks then, it was the time of the Ottoman empire which included parts of present day eastern Europe, the Middle East and North Africa.

The ideologies that set Serbs and Croats in action against each other shows us some other examples of added events. An anthropologist who did research on the conflict noted a similar narrative among Serbs and Croats. Both sides claimed that 'the other' killed many of 'theirs' during the Second World War and dumped the dead bodies in a cave. So somewhere in the area there should be a cave containing the bones of the deceased. Nobody knew exactly where the cave was, but everybody was convinced there were bones in a cave and that these bones were the ultimate prove of the untrustworthiness of 'the other'. Notwithstanding the fact that the Croats and Serbs lived together as one nation for forty five years and married among each other. The power of the narrative if the cave containing bones is that it appeals to the naked feeling of existence of a nation: bodies left behind still have an identity. Bones are the remnants that cannot be broken down they are witnesses that cannot talk. For each side the bones were not just bones, it were 'Serb bones' or 'Croatian bones', not just human bones. Ideologically the bones served as warning what would become of you if you did not stop 'the other' and stopping of course meant fighting. The bones also served as symbol of the core of the group identity, it were not 'just bones' it were 'Serb bones' or 'Croatian bones', depending on who told the story. Human bones function as sacred symbols that we should protect; they appeal to some primordial instinct. There are alternatives to this theme. In many conflicts we can hear narratives about pregnant women who are captured by 'the other' and cruelly killed after their bellies are cut open and the baby was taken out to be killed after it was shown to celebrate siege or intimidate the attacked. We never hear about an embryo, it is always a baby suggesting new life, a promise and hope for 'our future' killed by 'the other'. Surely pregnant women are captured and mistreated and for sure their belly will be slit while being mutilated, most of the stories however serve to show that 'the other' is capable to attack the innocent that bare new life. In religious conflicts destruction of a praying houses –

mosque, temple, church or synagogue – is sufficient to mobilise masses for collective action and in some circumstances it will help people to prepare themselves to kill or to be willing to die.

Not all events used to legitimise action or to convince are as extreme as the example of the cave filled with sacred nationalist bones or the pregnant woman. Thanks goodness most of the added and symbolic events deals with less bloody situations, like the battle between the Serbs and the Turks.

If we look at the recent conflict in the Moluccas we see some of the phenomena described above. There were the stories about pregnant woman being slit open by ‘the other’ to prove the cruelty of ‘that other’. But there were also other ideological presentations to legitimise collective action. One of them was the RMS, which stood for Republik Maluku Selatan (South Moluccan Republic) and in the recent conflict was also translated in Republik Maluku Serani (Christian Moluccan Republic). Using it as a symbol for a Christian attempt to rule out Islam and the involvement of Moluccans from abroad (especially from the Netherlands).

Albeit less ancient, the RMS can be traced in history like the battle between the Turks and the Serbs and is therefore ideologically convincing evidence because there are historical records. But inspired by the other examples we may question whether or not the involvement of RMS in the Moluccan conflict is genuine and to what extent it is ideological created or used.

Let us first examine the situation before the Moluccan conflict started. What happened when the RMS came into being, how did this RMS developed in the Netherlands and in Maluku?

### **The ‘birth’ of RMS, de-colonisation**

Shortly after the Japanese surrender in 1945 the struggle over control over Indonesia started. On the one hand Indonesian nationalists proclaimed the Republik Indonesia, while on the other hand the Netherlands tried to restore its colonial power. The Republik was strongest on Java while the main influence and power of the Dutch was located in the eastern parts of the Indonesian Archipelago. The first allied forces to land in the western parts of the archipelago were British troops who had to take over control from the Japanese. The power vacuum as result of the fact that the British did not fully take control enabled the Indonesian nationalists to strengthen their positions and power in that part of Indonesia.

Although the struggle between the Dutch and the Indonesian nationalists continued four years and can be called counter insurgency, a colonial war or revolution, whatever perspective one takes; it was already clear to the main political actors in Indonesia that in one way or the other Indonesia would become independent. Simplified the struggle was about how and in what way and on who's conditions.

In outline the main options were a unitary state, as the Republik Indonesia wanted, and a federation as the Dutch advocated. From 1947 on the Dutch already started to implement a federal state system in the eastern part of Indonesia. The first federal state was East Indonesia, Negara Indonesia Timur (NIT) with Makassar as its capital. Understandably many Moluccan intellectuals and soldiers, who had many privileges during the colonial era, were in favour of a federal system. For them it was the only way to prevent a subordinate position to Indonesian nationalists. The South-Moluccan council which had to decide on joining the NIT decided to join the state of East Indonesia as a province (daerah) under the condition that the NIT should prevent the federal system from breaking down.

This standpoint was very logic, not only because control over the Moluccas was the only way to keep their future under control (Moluccans who were working in other parts of Indonesia could come home to the Moluccas), but also because they feared oppression in a Java-dominated state system.

When the sovereignty was handed over to the United States of Indonesia (Republik Indonesia Serikat) in December 1949, those Moluccan intellectuals who welcomed it. The break down of the federal system soon after caused a lot of fear among them. Developments in Makassar in 1950, where former KNIL captain Andi Azis tried to prevent that the NIT surrendered to the Unitary State of Indonesia made Moluccan federalists change their minds. In an effort to prevent being absorbed by the Unitary State they proclaimed an independent South Moluccan Republic (Republik Maluku Selatan, RMS) on 25 April 1950. In the proclamation text references were made to the conditions put by the South Moluccan Council when it decided to join the NIT, and by doing so the proclamation was given (at least the idea of) a legal ground. Not all Moluccans who were resident in the Moluccas at that moment were content with this RMS. Although there were Muslim Moluccans among the initiators, it was a Christian dominated republic. In a way this was no surprise because at that time half of the Moluccan nation was Christian and it were they who were privileged in the colonial era and therefor had most to lose. Moreover Moluccan soldiers, especially Moluccan commandos were oppressing Moluccans who were suspected to be in favour of the Indonesian Nationalist (Merah Putih/Red White).

As might be expected the Indonesian government did not accept the RMS-movement and started a military campaign against it. November 1950 Indonesian troops invaded the Island of Ambon (Moluccas main Island) and took over control. The RMS government with its army pulled back to the interiors of the Island Ceram, where it started a guerrilla. The guerrilla maintained until mid 1960's when the last guerrilla's were arrested, among them Soumokil, the RMS president and one of the initiators for the proclamation.

The RMS movement was primarily a movement that emerged within the context of de-colonisation. It was the people who feared the new regime that supported the RMS. In order not to misunderstand the positions of Moluccans then, it should be added that there was also a large group of Moluccan intellectuals who backed the Indonesian nationalist cause. They were in the first Indonesian governments and even were part of the Indonesian troops that invaded the Moluccas fighting the RMS.

### **RMS in the Netherlands**

The proclamation of the RMS was well received by most of the Moluccans living outside the Moluccas. They of course were in the same position as the intellectuals who started the proclamation, and feared repercussions in the Unitary Indonesian State like the initiators of the RMS proclamation did.

Among the Moluccan soldiers who at that time were not yet demobilised from the KNIL the proclamation was received with much enthusiasm. They wanted to leave for the Moluccas immediately to support the RMS struggle, which of course was not allowed by the Dutch military authorities and Indonesian government. Demobilising the Moluccan soldiers on Indonesian controlled territory was difficult, because of the animosity between the Indonesians and the RMS-minded Moluccan soldiers.

To escape a stalemate in the demobilising process the Dutch government in a way forced the Moluccan soldiers to come to the Netherlands with their families. In 1951 about 12.500 Moluccans came to the Netherlands and went into exile. They expected this exile was just temporarily and that they would be able to return to a 'free Moluccan' very soon. The majority of them were RMS sympathisers who started to organise themselves in several political organisations supporting the RMS guerrilla on Ceram.

These developments created in a physical split in the Moluccan nationalist movement. Its leadership and core of the movement was on Ceram entangled in guerrilla warfare, while a large part of its support was on the other half of the world: into refugee in the Netherlands. In the Netherlands the Moluccans lived in camps isolated from the Dutch, because the Dutch government expected that the Moluccans would go back to Indonesia within some years. Because of the conditions they were living in and because of their idea that they were only temporarily in the Netherlands, the exile Moluccan community developed towards a closed and separated community in the Netherlands. Although internally it suffered from some fragmentation, the Moluccan community as majority acted towards Dutch society as one and pro-RMS.

The Moluccan nationalist movement in the Netherlands was what we can call a support nationalist movement. It had to follow the directions of the core of the movement, lead by Soumokil on Ceram. Their job was to find international support for the RMS guerrilla and recognition for the RMS proclamation. This support movement in the Netherlands was direct linked to the guerrilla in Ceram because it was headed by Manusama who came from Ceram to the Netherlands as a delegate of the RMS government. Manusama was with Soumokil the main initiators of the RMS proclamation, and minister of defence in the RMS government. The possibilities of the Moluccan nationalists in the Netherlands were very limited. Not only because they had to walk in line with the directions from Ceram, but also because the international public opinion at that time stood not open for the rights of the so called small peoples or nations.

A crucial change of character in the Moluccan nationalist movement in the Netherlands came mid sixties, when the remains of the RMS guerrilla on Ceram were arrested and when in 1966 the Indonesian government executed Soumokil. From that time on there was no provable RMS movement in the Moluccas anymore. The movement in the Netherlands reacted in 1966 by establishing a RMS government in exile with Manusama as president. From that moment on the task for the Moluccans in the Netherlands changed. It became their task to (re-) establish the RMS from outside. Because the large majority of the Moluccans still believed they would return to the Moluccas we can characterise the Moluccan nationalist movement then as ex-patria nationalism, coming from outside the patria.

With this change of character something else changed also. Until 1966 the leader of Moluccan nationalism was Soumokil who reached a mythical stage while he stayed in the interiors of Ceram. As soon as Manusama took over, the movement got a leader who could be criticised and competed. Fractions in the movement were not longer subordinated to the core of the

movement in Ceram. This resulted in rivalry by counter governments in the seventies and a radicalisation among the Moluccan youth.

In the radical vision of the youth it was allowed to victimise Dutch citizens if it would bring the ideal of a RMS closer. Within the time spirit of the seventies Moluccan youngsters started to confront the Dutch with the Moluccan history and sought more radical ways of expression. Ultimately this resulted in six hostage taking actions in 1970, 1975, 1977 and 1978. Several Dutch and Indonesians were killed as well as six Moluccan hijackers when the train they hijacked was attacked by the Dutch army in 1977.

A short time before this hostage taking action in 1977 the feelings among Moluccans in the Netherlands started to change. For a long time they had not been interested in a future in the Netherlands and did not have direct contact with the Moluccas. Because of growing social problems (drug abuse and unemployment) and the growing need of youngsters to visit the Moluccas themselves, time was ripe for a new reflection on their relationship with the Moluccas and their position in the Netherlands. Thanks to the fact that in 1977 the six Moluccan youngsters in the train had proven that they were prepared to die for their ideals, this reflection could make a start. Nobody could persist that the Moluccan ideal were just easy words: in the north of the Netherlands there is this tomb with six martyrs. The political ideal was put on a less prominent place of the agenda.

Mid eighties the political issue came on the agenda again. One of the reasons was that Manusama who decided to retire as president and the fortieth anniversary of the RMS proclamation. It turned out the character of Moluccan nationalism in the Netherlands had changed again in the meantime. The idea that Moluccans had to return to the Moluccas after the RMS was realised was no longer the overall thought. The right for self-determination Moluccans in the Netherlands claimed was not anymore for them, it was for their relatives in the Moluccas. The general idea was that the Moluccans in the Moluccas had the right to determine their own future. Regardless the result of this self-determination Moluccans in the Netherlands would decide on their own whether or not they would return to the Moluccas to live. They could be of use for the Moluccas while living in the Netherland (and making a career there), besides: not all Jews went to Israel when it was established in 1947; Moluccans said. To characterise this last change in Moluccan nationalism in the Netherlands we could say it changed to a form of vicarious nationalism: it was not for them anymore but for the core of their community who still lived on the Moluccas.

In this change of character the new relation of new generation Moluccans with the Moluccas was very important. The second and third generation Moluccans established their own relation

and links to the Moluccas during holidays and especially visits to their offspring villages. First of all these contacts resulted in renewed bonds with the Moluccas, based on contemporary contacts. Secondly many Moluccans found new ways to express their former nationalist sentiments; by supporting development projects that benefits the villages they came from. Many of these projects deal with the improvement of the church or infrastructure of a village or region.

For the overwhelming majority of the Moluccans in the Netherlands RMS became a symbol for their identity and their connection with the Moluccas. Not in the sense that it should necessarily be separated from Indonesia, but in the sense that the people in the Moluccas should decide on their future themselves and should not be dominated by Jakarta.

### **RMS in the Moluccas before *kerusuhan***

The first year the RMS movement in Ceram must have consisted of some hundred people. Very soon however the group decimated. According to former RMS guerrillas the initial support from the indigenous Ceramese people changed into antagonism. It became hard for parts of the guerrilla to get hold of food and moreover they had to watch out for ambushes by the local people. Already the first year many RMS guerrillas surrendered themselves to the Indonesian troops who were controlling the coastal area. Soumokil and a nucleus hardcore of the guerrilla stayed in the interiors of the Island.

In the fifties the Indonesian army started to become less interested in the RMS movement on Ceram. It had its attention, but there seemed to be no structural campaign to roll up the RMS. One of the reasons for this lack of attention was that the army was heavily involved in Indonesia's conflict with the Netherlands over Dutch New Guinea. The western part of New Guinea was left out the de-colonisation process and still was a Dutch colony. Indonesia on its part wanted Dutch New Guinea to become part of Indonesia, because it used to be part of the Netherlands Indies, and therefore should be part of Indonesia.

Because the Moluccan islands are located close to New Guinea they became a major base for the so-called trikora: the troops that had to 'liberate' Dutch New Guinea. The presence of large numbers of soldiers on the islands prevented new uprisings of nationalist movements. Although many Moluccans experienced the presence of the army oppressing, they did not doubt Jakarta's power over the Moluccas at the same time.

The second half of the sixties the situation in the Moluccas changed completely. The conflict over New Guinea came to an end in 1962, the last RMS guerrillas were arrested in 1964 and in 1966 Suharto's New Order came into power. Towards the end of the sixties the government in Jakarta started to give attention to the infrastructure and economic development of the Moluccas. Till then the economic development of the Moluccas stayed behind likewise other outer parts of Indonesia. This was among others the result of Jakarta's decision to give economic priority to the densely populated Java and Sumatra. Moluccans however saw the lack of attention by the government for the development of the Moluccas as punishment for the RMS. So when in the sixties some improvements in infrastructure and economy came it was warmly welcomed by the Moluccan population. People were prepared to give Suharto's New Order the benefit of doubt, although they noticed that large numbers of soldiers stayed in the area and higher functions in administration were occupied by non-Moluccans.

Because the economic situation in the Moluccas improved during the seventies there was no reason to act against the central government. This changed in the eighties when Moluccans started to annoy themselves by the idea that most of the profits from economic activities in the Moluccas disappeared to the central government and that most high and important functions stayed occupied by non-Moluccans. Mid eighties when the New Order decided that all people working for the government had to follow a renewal course 'Panca Sila' (state philosophy), the Moluccans were fairly sceptical of it. There started to develop a sense of growing distrust towards the government in Jakarta.

In the nineties this process sharpened. More and more people were dissatisfied about the situation and started to think about changes in control on province level. At the same time they realised they had little power to enforce the changes they wanted. Repression by the large number of military present was felt whenever there was a minor conflict, for example between transmigrants and Moluccans, or between two villages. Military acted in such instances with a lot of violence. Comparing themselves with Aceh, East Timor or West Papua, the Moluccans realised they had no organisation or movement that could stand up against the central government.

### **RMS and the *Kerusuhan***

The first mentioning of RMS in relation to the *Kerusuhan* came already in the first months by Islamic spokesmen. They spoke about involvement of the RMS as instigator of the conflict

with the intention to expel the Islam from Maluku and to create disorder as an initial stage to separate Maluku from Indonesia.

In general a fight on 19 January (Idul Fitri) 1999 is seen as the start of the conflict. Already by the end of that first month a leader of the Ambonese Islam Community living in Jakarta suggested that the RMS was involved and that the RMS worked together with the Moluccan Protestant Church and the PDI-P. Hendropriyono, who later became head of the security service did the same in March. This conspiracy theory was repeated during the first year of conflict and written down in two books by Rustam Kastor in 2000. Especially these books became the 'evidence' for non-Moluccan Muslims that the conflict in Maluku was about Christian separatism and that Moluccans from abroad were involved. One of the reasons to believe his theory was Kastors background as intell-man, so he would know, another reason was that he presented a plausible sounding explanation for a bloody conflict nobody understood. It were the books of Kastor and some VCD's showing the fights in the Moluccas that were used to mobilise Muslim youngsters to volunteer for the Jihad in the Moluccas. The proof of involvement of the RMS in the *kerusuhan* was very thin. There were no real data or facts delivered that supported the analysis that a RMS movement did instigate the conflict in an attempt to separate Maluku from Indonesia. According to Kastor there already were slogans in favour of the RMS in the demonstrations in Ambon on 16-18 November 1998 in Ambon. These demonstrations were organised by Moluccan students in support of the then ongoing reformasi. It was the first time students in the Moluccas spoke out in favour of the democratic developments that took place in Indonesia at that moment. Their demonstration was not a support for a separatist movement. A suggestion of pro-RMS slogans might be raised by the security forces as justification for a hard repressive reaction on the demonstration. Since the 1950's 'RMS' was used to justify crude and oppressive actions on the side of the security forces in the same way 'PKI' and 'radical Islam' was used as label in the rest of Indonesia during the Orde Baru.

The chronology of the Moluccan conflict written by the Forum Komunikasi Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jamaah, the base of the Laskar Jihad that went to the Moluccas in 2000, did not mention the RMS slogans in 1998. It did however report the finding of a letter written by the RMS-president in exile F. Tutuhaturnewa dated 22 February 1997 on 21 January 1999 in one of the houses in Ambon. Kastor refers to similar 'evidence' by pointing to a recovered letter written on behalf of a RMS-organisation by O. Sahalessy from the Netherlands and a RMS-meeting 19 December 1998 in the town of Barneveld in the Netherlands.

These references can hardly be understood as evidence of a conspiracy from the RMS. As we have seen earlier the political dimension of the RMS movement in the Netherlands was quite low in the end of the nineties. There were some groups still supporting and seeking an independent RMS, but it was a minority. And of course these people meet once and again in some places in the Netherlands. Contact between RMS-minded Moluccans in the Netherlands and their relatives in the Moluccas had never disappeared. So it can not be surprising that there are letters written by Moluccans in the Netherlands are found in Ambonese houses. The same goes for letters sent to the Netherlands. At one point the Dutch radio revealed that Moluccans in the Netherlands supported the purchase of arms in the Moluccas. This only underwrites the close relationship between Moluccans in the Netherlands and their relatives in the Moluccas. Because when you are cold you ask your relative for a blanket and when you are afraid somebody will kill you, you ask your relative a gun. In a way we should worry if there was no discussion about weapons. Even letters written by the president in exile and other small RMS-organisations are not convincing. Tutuhaturunewa had given press conferences in March 1999 to state that he and his RMS were not involved in the conflict. He made clear that he saw the *kerusuhan* as something from outside that had to be solved by the Indonesian government in order to let him struggle for his RMS. In a way his analysis of the *Kerusuhan* was that it was a barrier for the RMS and surely not something he could gain from. A delegation of Moluccans from the Netherlands visited Indonesia by the end of 1999. Among them were some members of the so called RMS-government in exile. They were received by Abdurahman Wahid and Megawati Soekarnoputri. Bot accompanied them on a visit to the Moluccas in an attempt to help the conflict end itself. Wahid did his utmost to convince people that the RMS was not involved in the conflict, it was like he wanted to prevent people to seek a scapegoat.

The general reactions of Moluccans in the Netherlands when the *kerusuhan* started was at first one of disbelief. Their idea of the Moluccas was one of a peaceful co-existence of the Muslim and Christian part, they could not think of hatred and bloodshed among their relatives and *pela*. The second reaction was to try to help in a humanitarian way and send signals that Muslim and Christian Moluccans could co-exist. The latter was done by organising silent demonstrations asking for the attention and help of the world. In these demonstrations they always tried to let Muslim and Christian Moluccans walk together and there was a taboo on using RMS-flags. As far as the political ideas, like RMS, were concerned the majority of the Moluccans in the Netherlands shared the idea that most important was to stop the *kerusuhan*.

And that after the *kerusuhan* was stopped a lot of reconciliation was needed before one even could think about whatever political future, including *otonomi daerah*.

The situation started to change after the conflict in the Moluccas entered a new phase. When the Laskar Jihad entered the scene in the course of 2000 and Indonesian security forces continuously did not succeed in stopping the ongoing bloodshed. Moluccans in the Netherlands started to question whether or not there were other ways out the conflict. The majority thought the solution was to be found with the people of the Moluccas themselves. They were the ones that should find a way of resolving the conflict among them. But in order to do so, involvement from third parties like the Laskar should be stopped. So these Moluccans called for the Indonesian government to act against Laskar Jihad and at the same time they asked the international community to intervene in case the Indonesian government would not succeed. They also asked the Dutch government and international organisations to use all channels to press the Indonesian government to act. In the meantime they remained active in human relief activities.

In the sidelines of this changing attitude there were some small groups that were looking for other political directions. Among them the idea took hold that the *kerusuhan* would never have occurred had there been an independent Moluccan state. So they grew in their conviction that the only way out was some sort of RMS. The same idea took hold among small groups of Christians in the Moluccan at that time. Both these drifts of ideas came together in the FKM, the Front Kedaulatan Maluku an organisation that arose in the second half of 2000. With the FKM there was for the first time a real exponent of the RMS involved in the Moluccan conflict. Like all parties in the conflict the FKM constructed an ideology to justify its existence. And like other parties involved in the conflict the FKM referred to the RMS movement and proclamation in 1950 to legitimise its existence and political role.

The highlights of the FKM activities were of course the re-proclamation of the RMS on 18 December 2000, simultaneously in Indonesia as well as in the Netherlands and activities around 25th April 2001 and 2002, the proclamation day of the RMS in 1950. Salient detail was that one of the representatives of the FKM in the Netherlands was a Muslim Moluccan. Among some Christian gangs that were fighting in the conflict in Ambon the idea of the FKM-RMS was met with a lot of support. The same goes for other, not direct involved, Christians in the Moluccas who came to feel that maybe this was the way out of the stalemate. April 2002 came the return of the FKM-RMS when its leaders Manuputy and Waileruny were arrested. Within a few months their explanation of the FKM-RMS ideology was that it was not a separatist ideology, but directed to federalism. The final blow to the FKM-RMS was the

arrest of the leader of the Laskar Jihad Jafaah Umar Talib after his visit to Ambon April 2002 and the abolition of the Laskar Jihad in October. The ground under the support for the FKM-RMS disappeared with these last developments.

### **Old notions, symbols and new ideologies**

As we have seen the RMS played some role in the Moluccan conflict. The question is however what role and which RMS? But let me first make some general remarks on the conflict.

Although the fighting parties in the Moluccan conflict are Muslim at one side and Christians at the other, most people are convinced it is not a religious conflict. There is no religious or theological dispute that caused the fighting. In essence it is a conflict between social groups, which involves power struggle at more than one level. As a remnant of the colonial era the Moluccan community was divided in two major social groups along the line of religion: Muslims and Christians. Both groups had access to other social-economic sources and were geographical divided because most villages were mono-religious. During the old order of Soekarno as well as the new order of Suharto these two social groups did not merge into one community. The fact that people with different backgrounds started to live more closely together in the urbanising area of Ambon, did not change this segregation.

Patronage systems, among others, prevented the merge of the social groups. When I visited Ambon in 1986 for example Christian Moluccans dominated the Bappeda II of Kotamadya Ambon, while Muslims dominated the Bappeda I of the province at the other side of the street. It was the same two habitats I experienced when visiting the Moluccas in 1992. Visiting the Muslim village of Kulur on Saparua with a Christian family from Booy was like passing borders.

Repressive security forces tightly controlled potential tensions in the Moluccan society, whether it was between representatives of one social group or between Muslims and Christians. When a power vacuum emerged in the shade of the political transformations in Jakarta, combined with the presence of angry Moluccan preman who were just transported to Ambon from Jakarta and the effects of the ongoing economic crisis was feeling badly, all ingredients were there for an explosion. After the conflict broke out, it got its own driving forces like the reaction of the security services, the role of the preman, the rumours and so on. It goes beyond the theme of this paper to go further into these factors.

One other factor was the RMS as part of ideology and as organisation. As we saw Muslim leaders already used the RMS in the first months of the conflict as evidence that there was a Christian conspiracy to overtake the Moluccas. In the tradition of the orde baru they used the RMS as a symbol. They used it not only to explain the unrest but also to mobilise people against one of the fighting parties. The RMS is a strong symbol for this purpose because it is associated with separatism. And talking about separatism used to be one of the worst things one could discuss in Indonesia.

To record that Muslim leaders merely used RMS as a symbol to mobilise can be argued because at that time there was no active movement involved supporting a RMS. The evidence put forward by the Muslim spokesmen did not show new activities from the RMS. Letters were written already for a long time and the groups from the Netherlands that were represented were not strong movements. The general feeling among the Christian Moluccans as I have tried to show, did coincide with the emerging ideas of *otonomi daerah* and not necessarily separatism. In fact it was the symbol of the old separatist RMS that was used by Muslim leaders to justify their analysis of the conflict and their involvement. In order to exploit the RMS-symbol fully in their ideology they transformed the RMS into an exclusive Christian concern. The RMS in 1950 however was not completely a matter of Christians. Although Christians dominated the RMS movement then, there were also Muslims who supported it. But even more important is that the RMS then was not a reaction against Muslims, it emerged within the context of de-colonisation and its separatism had to do with the decline of the Republik Indonesia Serikat and protection of the interests of the Moluccan supporters of the former coloniser.

The moment RMS appeared on stage as a movement was much later and a reaction to the parties that were mobilised by using the RMS-symbol like the Laskar Jihad. We might speak of a self-fulfilling prophecy. The FKM-RMS was different from the 1950 RMS. The FKM-RMS was a Christian cause, notwithstanding the Muslim representative in the Netherlands. The re-proclamation of the RMS on 18 December 2000 showed two ministers sitting both sides of its leader Manuputty. The claim of continuity of the RMS by the FKM can only be seen as an attempt to give the FKM a history and by doing so the forum to act in international arena's. The re-proclamation of the RMS however has to be interpreted in the context of the conflict at that moment and not within the context of a continuing line of discontent and emerging Moluccan nationalism. Like the Muslim leaders the FKM used the 'old RMS symbol' to mobilise, not only to enter international forums but also to mobilise Moluccans outside Indonesia. The FKM was supported, although not broadly, by Moluccans in Amerika

and the Netherlands because they were sensitive for the use of these symbols. For them it must have been a disillusion when Manuputty, once he was arrested, stated that the FKM-RMS had nothing to do with separatism. Even the hundreds of people who enthusiastically welcomed him when he temporarily returned to the Moluccas at the end of 2002, cannot be absolutely be seen as a revival of a support for the FKM-RMS. This is part of the process towards stabilisation.

In the Moluccan conflict both sides used RMS to mobilise their supporters. Both sides referred to the RMS of 1950 which was a movement of former colonisers' aides that wanted to separate the Moluccas from the collapsing Federal Indonesian Republic at that moment. In order to function as a symbol 'RMS' had to be modified. The links to the remnants of the 1950 movement that still exists in the Netherlands were thin, contrary to what both sides wanted their supporters to believe.

If we want to understand what happens in conflict like the Moluccan conflict, it is important to understand the dynamics of ideology and to analyse the backgrounds of symbols used. That is as important as to find out what really took place and what is rumour. In other words to know whether or not a church or mosque is set afire is as important as to know what is true about the involvement of which RMS. If there is any real movement or if it is just in the imagination of some leaders.

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