

NATIONALISM IN EXILE: NATIONALISM AMONG MOLUCCANS IN THE NETHERLANDS 1951-1990

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On 25 April 1990 several thousands of Moluccans gathered in The Hague to 'celebrate' the fortieth anniversary of the South Moluccan Republic, the Republik Maluku Selatan or RMS. After a church ceremony a protest march was held through the city. When the crowd passed near the Indonesian embassy a group of 600 youngsters spontaneously went to the embassy. Here they were stopped by a small police force. After a short while Moluccan youngsters were fighting with the police. Rocks were thrown, as well as Molotov-cocktails according to the Police. The fight was hard. In the meantime most of the demonstrating Moluccans went to the Houtrusthallen where a celebration was to be held. While inside prominent leaders held their speeches alternated with cultural performances, outside many Moluccans wandered around to meet relatives and friends. They talked, laughed, flew a kite or went for a walk. I observed some 10 year old kids going for a walk in the city, while writing the abbreviations R.M.S. or slogans like 'RMS Merdeka' (Free RMS) on benches.

Every year Moluccans come to The Hague to celebrate the anniversary of the RMS. Every year the news service on TV shows us a part of the speech of the RMS-president Manusama as well as some cultural performance. This year was different. Dutch society, or should we say journalists, were shocked by the events at the Indonesian embassy. They wondered why and how this could have happened. The relationship between Dutch and Moluccans had improved, they thought. Especially after a historic agreement between the Moluccan political leaders and the Dutch government was reached in 1986, concerning past claims and future welfare of the Moluccans. Above all, already several years on little was heard about the RMS. The events at the embassy revived memories of the seventies when Moluccan youngsters hijacked trains and took hostages. A TV journalist even asked a Moluccan spokeswoman if Dutch society has to prepare for new hijackings. Other journalists interviewed some of the youngsters involved in the fight and wrote a sensational article about radicalising youth.

What happened in The Hague? Was it an outburst of social unrest? To some extent it probably was. In spite of the agreement in 1986 and special measures, for example, to fight high unemployment among Moluccans, the Moluccan community still has severe social problems. And several matters concerning the position of Moluccans in the Netherlands are still unsolved. But there was more. In the events at the Indonesian embassy were there also sentiments involved, which can be classified as nationalist.

How come Dutch journalists, as well as the police, were surprised by this

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outburst, and thought of the RMS as something of the past? What is the history of this Moluccan nationalism? In this paper I will describe a small part of its history. I will discuss the emergence of Moluccan nationalism and transfer of Moluccans to the Netherlands. Then I will discuss some changes in Moluccan nationalism and will show how this nationalism 'disappeared' to the background.

RISE OF NATIONALISM AND RMS

The Moluccan Islands in the eastern part of the Indonesian archipelago, were the first to be colonised by the Dutch. Because of valuable spices that grew on the Moluccas, the islands got special attention. Dutch intervention ruined the existing economic structure in favour of cultivation of spices. When the spice trade collapsed, the Moluccas were 'forgotten'. In the meantime about one half of the Moluccan population was christianised, most of the other half was Islam. The Christian Moluccans were given opportunities to work for the Dutch colonial power, as teachers, as clerks and later also as soldiers in the Colonial Army (the KNIL, Koninklijk Nederlands Indisch Leger). They were given privileges, such as better payments, better schooling etc. Many Moluccans took the opportunity to work for the Dutch, among other reasons because they had little other alternative. Those Christian Moluccans formed a special privileged middle class in colonial society.

After the Pacific War Moluccan soldiers fought against Indonesian republicans in a Dutch attempt to restore colonial rule. The attempt was without success. The Dutch had to negotiate with the Indonesian republicans on decolonisation. In this postwar period three political movements existed/emerged in the Moluccas. The first movement was striving for an unitarian Indonesian state. This movement was part of the Indonesian nationalist movement and started in the twenties. Most of its leaders were Christians, its followers mainly Moslem.

The second movement favoured a federal structure for Indonesia. Its leaders and followers were mainly Christians. They belonged to the privileged middle class of Moluccans working for the Dutch. A third movement existed of separatists. They wanted an independent state. Also this separatist movement consisted mainly of Christians.

In 1949 sovereignty was transferred to a Federation of Indonesian States (Republik Indonesia Serikat, RIS), being a compromise between Indonesian Republicans and the Dutch. Shortly after independence several federal states decided, with or without pressure, to join the Republic of Indonesia. The RIS started to transform into an unitarian republic. An attempt to prevent inclusion of the state of East Indonesia—of which the Moluccas were a part—into the unitarian state failed. The Moluccan federalists radicalised and turned to separatism. On 25 April 1950 they proclaimed the Republik Maluku Selatan (RMS, South Moluccan Republic). The RMS-leaders did not want to negotiate with the Indonesian republicans, whereupon the latter invaded the Moluccan Islands. A guerilla by RMS troops continued on the island of Ceram until in 1963

Dr Ch Soumokil, president of the RMS and leader of the resistance, was arrested. Soumokil was executed in 1966.

At the time of the RMS-proclamation, about 4,000 Moluccan soldiers (formerly KNIL) were awaiting in camps on Java to be demobilised. Among other reasons because of the political tension in their home-islands they did not want to be demobilised in territory controlled by Indonesian republicans. They sympathised with the RMS and wanted to return to the Moluccas. The Dutch government could not allow them to do so, for it would damage the fragile relationship with the new Indonesian government. At the same time a Dutch judge prohibited the Dutch government to demobilise Moluccan soldiers against their will. In order to escape this stalemate the Dutch government decided to transfer the soldiers with their families to the Netherlands. In 1951 12,500 Moluccans came to Holland, temporarily they thought as did the Dutch. Nowadays the Moluccan community in the Netherlands contains an estimated 42,000 persons, including Moluccans serving the Dutch Navy at the time of decolonisation and a small group of Moluccans that came to the Netherlands in later years.

MOLUCCAN NATIONALISM IN THE NETHERLANDS

Arriving in the Netherlands the Moluccan soldiers were discharged from the army and given housing in former monasteries and concentration-camps. They lived socially and geographically isolated from the Dutch. Most of the camps were situated at a distance from villages and in the first years there was no stimulus at all to find work. In the mid-fifties this situation changed. Moluccans were stimulated to find jobs and in the sixties the Moluccans were transferred to special wards in small rural towns.

Already in the camps Moluccan nationalism (the RMS) became part of everyday life. Parades were held, flags raised and special prayer meetings for the guerilla on Ceram were held. In the beginning of the fifties several Moluccan-delegations came from Ceram to the Netherlands. They were sent by the RMS-government to find support for the Moluccan cause. In The Hague the RMS-government had its own representative. The Dutch government tried to prevent contact between the inhabitants of the camps with the delegations from Ceram, the RMS representative in The Hague and Dutch sympathisers (most of the latter from conservative anti-republican circles). In spite of this the Moluccan nationalist movement in the Netherlands grew stronger. Several mass-demonstrations, attended by Moluccans from camps all over Holland, were held in The Hague.

In political terms the main goal for the Moluccans in the Netherlands was to support the guerilla on Ceram. They tried to do so by collecting money and attempting to gain recognition for the RMS at national and international levels. From 1953 on, several splits took place in the nationalist movements. Although divided in different organisations, the majority of the Moluccans in the Netherlands supported the RMS. Most of the nationalist leaders were intellectuals and former lower officers of the colonial army.

A radical change took place about the mid sixties when Soumokil was arrested and the guerilla war in the Moluccas came to an end. After the execution of Soumokil in 1966 attempts were made to unify Moluccan organisations in the Netherlands, with success. At the same meeting where a new organisation, the Badan Persatuan (body of unity), was founded, a government in exile was established. The new president, Ir Manusama, was member of one of the Ceram-delegations that came in the early fifties and was one of the initiators of the RMS-proclamation.

With the establishment of this exile government the perspectives of the RMS changed radically. There was no longer a clear movement on the Moluccas, for which support or recognition could be asked. The nationalist initiative fully came into the hands of the Moluccan exiles in the Netherlands.

At the same time another important change took place. Until the beginning of the sixties Moluccan youngsters were hardly involved in the political arena of Moluccan nationalism as political cadre. This was the terrain of the first generation. From 1960 on youngsters started to organise themselves and participated more prominent in mass demonstrations. In 1966 second generation Moluccans started to take the initiative in political action. Their actions were more radical than those of their parents. They set fire to the Indonesian embassy in Wassenaar and took hostages. In the mid-seventies some hijacking of trains and hostage taking followed.

It were these radical and violent actions that to a high degree determined the 'face' of Moluccan nationalism in the Netherlands. For the Dutch the ideal of an independent state was a phantom. The backgrounds of Moluccan nationalism, or the meaning of it for Moluccan identity, never really was subject of discussion or research. According to Dutch public opinion RMS was a dream, a myth.

DIFFERENTIATION

Let us now turn to other important changes. The ideology of the nationalist movement at arrival in the Netherlands was a separatist ideology. There was hardly any room for other opinions. Social control, part of everyday life in the camps and wards, kept dissident thinking on a low level. This does not mean other ideas did not exist. Already in the first years of their stay in the Netherlands some groups of Moluccans turned their backs on the RMS. Most of them did not belong to the majority of Christians from the central Moluccas, they were people from the South-east Moluccas or Moslems from the central Moluccas. After clashes between RMS and non-RMS groups occurred, the Dutch government separated competing groups by transferring them to different camps, and later wards.

At the end of the sixties and early seventies leftist Moluccan students, most students were living outside the wards, started to examine their own and Indonesian history. They started to doubt of the RMS as the only solution for their future and that of their fellow Moluccans in the Moluccas. Inside the wards a group of youngsters were involved in the same process. There was a big

difference between the two groups. The students could easily talk about their doubts, while the youngsters in the wards had to reckon with the social control that surrounded them.

In the mid-seventies, because of the hijackings and hostage taking, a lively discussion on the RMS and the future of Moluccans took place in the Moluccan community. Slowly a process of rethinking of the RMS-ideology by a broad group of Moluccans started. Two factors influenced this process. First a continuous process of social differentiation in the Moluccan community, which had stayed homogeneous the first decade and a half. A second important factor was a change in Indonesian policy and Moluccan attitude towards visits to the Moluccas in the second half of the seventies. Earlier the Indonesian government put many restrictions on visits to the Moluccas and the Moluccans in the Netherlands thought of a visit as treachery because the Moluccas were seen as occupied territory.

The social differentiation made it easier to get in touch with other ideas or ways to look upon things. And by visiting the Moluccas, Moluccans could re-orient their relationship with their home country, a relationship that used to be dominated by the RMS. Many Moluccans also started to doubt if they would be able to live in the Moluccas. The social pressure to stick to separatist ideas slowly was replaced by a more tolerant political climate. Although many Moluccans and some organisations left the separatist ideology this did not mean they were not nationalist anymore. RMS and non-RMS groups both agreed on the need for self-determination for the Moluccas, and were in one way or the other nationalistic.

At the same time social problems in the Moluccan community like drug abuse, housing and unemployment—reached a point on which something had to be done to solve them. Because Dutch organisations could not solve the problems and the existence of a self-help tradition, Moluccans started to set up their own organisations dealing with those social problems. In a way Moluccans started to realise that they would not return to the Moluccas at short notice and they therefore had also to find a way to survive in the Netherlands. Even many, so called, group-specific organisations dealing with social problems were nationalist oriented. This orientation is present in their interpretation of the problems as well as in the development of methods. Most of the workers in those organisations belong to the second and third generation. Seeking new ways to express their relation with the Moluccas, in the second half of the eighties many second and third generation Moluccans became active in the so-called *kumpulan*—an organisation based on and organising support for the ancestral village.

CONCLUSIONS

In the beginning of this paper I questioned why Dutch journalists and police were surprised by the outburst at the Indonesian embassy in April 1990, and why they thought of the RMS as something from the past. When we consider the above described changes in Moluccan nationalism, we can try to answer these questions.

In Dutch public opinion Moluccan nationalism was a myth and associated with radical actions. This as a result of the changes that took place in the mid-sixties and the hijackings that followed in the seventies. In the eighties there were no more such actions. So the Dutch were not really confronted with RMS anymore, except maybe 'the yearly folklore' on 25 April. In addition most attention given to Moluccans in the Netherlands dealt with social problems. It was the group-specific welfare organisations, not the political ones, that were in the focus of public interest. Especially after the historic agreement in 1986, which besides special welfare measures resulted in a restoration of the ex-KNIL soldiers' honour.

As I stated earlier, the backgrounds of Moluccan nationalism were never really the subject of discussion or research. The focus of most research and discussion concerned mostly the legitimacy of the RMS-proclamation and the possibility to realise the RMS-ideal. Therefore the Dutch could hardly see the nationalist sentiments still vivid under the surface of every day life while especially on occasions like the fortieth anniversary of the RMS one could expect that these sentiments would come out into the open, as they did.

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