

From Black Dutchmen to White Moluccans: Ethnic Metamorphosis of an East-Indonesian Minority in the Netherlands¹

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Moluccan Exiles in Holland

After returning to Indonesia after World War II, the Dutch employed 25,000 Moluccan soldiers in their attempt to foil the movement for Indonesian Independence. With the transfer of sovereignty in 1949, 12,000 of these troops were demobilized, 6,000 were discharged, and 1,000 entered the Indonesian army (TNI). Circa 2,000 soldiers stationed in the South Moluccas became the core forces of a movement to establish an independent South Moluccan Republic, the RMS. About 4,000 others, mostly stationed on western islands, mainly on Java, refused to be mobilized or discharged anywhere but in the Moluccas or (then still) Dutch New Guinea (Decker 1957:31).

The problem was solved by “temporarily” moving the troops, and about 8,500 family members, to the Netherlands in 1951. Over 75 percent of them were Protestant Christian ethnic Ambonese from the Central Moluccan islands who were dominating the political actions of this minority. Fanatically anti-Indonesian, they were never allowed back and over the next two decades their population increased to approximately 40,000. In the late 1960s and 1970s, the Moluccan youth became restless and shocked the world with a number of spectacular acts of terrorism in futile attempts to force the Dutch to help them to return to their homeland to be freed of Indonesian rule.

Ironically, when the Moluccans arrived they were the most loyal servants of the Dutch and most would have been flattered by being called “Black Dutchmen”. In this paper, I want to describe how the Moluccans became “Black Dutchmen” and then show how the exiles in the Netherlands evolved into “White Moluccans” - in what may have become the closing chapter of Dutch-Moluccan colonial history.

The Ambonese and the KNIL

The Moluccas, or Spice Islands, in the eastern Indonesian archipelago had drawn the Dutch to the region in the early 17th Century when great fortunes could be made in the clove and nutmeg trade. In the 19th Century, the region experienced a drastic economic decline and Dutch interests shifted to Java and other islands. The task of conquering, pacifying and controlling the far-flung island empire of the Dutch East Indies was in the hands of a specially formed colonial army of native and European soldiers led by Dutch officers, the *Koninklijke Nederlands Indisch Leger* (Royal Netherlands Indies Army), usually referred to as KNIL.

Believing that Christian natives are by far trust worthier than Moslems, the Dutch

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preferred to recruit people from the Indo-European population and ethnic minorities such as the Menadonese and Moluccans. However, in the beginning attempts to entice young men from the ethnic Ambonese, as the population in the Central Moluccas was referred to, met largely with failure. The lack of volunteers made the Dutch to resort to impressment practices, kidnapping Christian youths and forcibly shipping them off to Java – a practice, which was one of the main reasons for the so-called Pattimura rebellion against the Dutch in 1817.

Questionable recruitment practices continued even after the uprising was quelled. Alcohol was used to persuade young men; minors in difficulties with their parents were accepted; and village chiefs received a bribe for every recruit they supplied (Riedel 1885:323). The Ambonese continued to view soldiering as a very low-level profession and the enlisted men were nicknamed *laskar kompeni*, i.e. slaves of the army². Thus, enticements such as establishing the principle of privileged position of Ambonese soldiers, expressed in double enlistment pay of other native troops, “European” food rations, superior clothing and living conditions in 1832 did little to drastically raise recruitment.

Neither did measures taken by the Dutch at the outset of the Aceh war in 1873 and 1875³, namely to significantly raise enlistment pay and pensions and to grant fully paid leave to which in 1879 as an additional “bait” the establishment of special schools for soldier’s children were added. Most volunteers were “rejects” of the village (*negeri*), i.e. people whose position had become precarious because of asocial behavior, misdemeanors, debts, family conflicts, or marital problems.

The dramatic turning point came in 1896 when all of a sudden over 1,000 new recruits joined up as compared with a trickling of less than a 100 men in most years of the previous decades. From then on, Ambonese enlistment turned into a tide and in some years the rush was so great that acceptance had to be cut back or even stopped⁴. Why this sudden turnabout?

Once again, cloves determined the course of Ambonese history. After the abolition of the Spice Monopoly (1863) the price had initially fallen below the fixed price paid before by the VOC but a decade later the free market price rose considerable above it and remained high during most years in the period between 1874 and 1890. Thus there was little incentive for joining the KNIL. Then in the early 1890s the prices fell to absolute lows and producers could no longer meet ends, resulting in a neglect of clove cultivation and permanently leaving the clove market depressed until after Indonesian independence (Chauvel 1984: 68-69; De Klerck 1938: II: 316-317).

It was however not so much the renewed decline in clove prices *per se* but the ever widening gap between the standard of living one could enjoy by staying in the village versus the one in the KNIL which led to the sudden willingness to join the army. While

² Kompeni was the traditional Ambonese name for the United East-Indian Company (VOC). After its demise at the end of the 18th Century, the term *kompeni* continued to be used as a general appellation for the Dutch colonial administration and specifically was used for the KNIL.

³ Aceh was a powerful Moslem state on the northern tip of Sumatra that resisted Dutch conquest for over thirty years.

⁴ Although the actual numbers of Ambonese soldiers rose steadily, their total percentage in the KNIL during World War I was only about 10% – a figure remained pretty steady until the outbreak of World War II. In comparison to the ca. 3,500 Ambonese troops in 1916, there were 17,854 Javanese, 1,792 Sundanese, 151 Madurese, 36 Buginese, 1,066 ‘Malays’ (Sumatrans), and 8,649 Europeans (6,061 of them Dutch, the rest from Germany, Belgium, Poland, etc.). The Ambonese were also outnumbered by their fellow Christians, the Menadonese (ca. 6,000) who were in official figures counted as “Ambonese” (Kaam 1977:31).

during the first depression of the clove market from 1864–73 life in the KNIL offered no significant material advantage over village life since the benefits the army offered were still low. The situation at the second collapse of the clove market after 1890 had radically changed. Now the prices had fallen even lower while at the same time the KNIL benefits were much higher. Thus, there was for the first time a real incentive to join the military and the hard-pressed Ambonese no longer resisted recruitment⁵.

Dutch-Christian Ambonese Symbiosis

The dismal economic conditions certainly played an important role in the decisions of many individual Ambonese to take the Dutch bait and enroll in the KNIL. However, the ease with which the Ambonese now followed the colonial pied pipers cannot be explained solely in terms of economics. The Ambonese Christians became very fast aware of the value the Dutch placed on their services as instruments for the maintenance and expansion of Dutch rule. They became convinced that the Dutch conquest of the archipelago was mainly due to Ambonese military prowess, a belief still widespread among members of the generation over 60 years of age interviewed during my fieldwork in the Central Moluccas in the mid-1970s. Simultaneously, the Ambonese became very much aware that their collaboration with the Dutch gave them a privileged position in the colonial hierarchy where they ranked themselves somewhat below the almighty Dutch at about the same level as Indo-Europeans and Christian Menadonese but clearly above all other ethnic groups in the colony including the Javanese with all their pretensions of civilization.

Thus, while economic considerations were crucial on the individual level, the Ambonese, as a group, could gain a more ephemeral but nevertheless precious commodity, namely a recapture of a sense of destiny, self-respect and respect by others. The turnabout in history that followed was truly amazing. For 200 years the Ambonese had been bitter enemies of the Dutch who had ruled the Moluccas in a reign of terror, mercilessly exploiting the native population. Then, in a few decades, the Ambonese Christians transformed into the most loyal collaborators of the Dutch, willingly and quite consciously becoming the instruments of Dutch rule. Thus both Ambonese and Dutch entered into an uneasy symbiotic alliance in which each side took advantage of the other in the pursuit of diverging but not incompatible goals.

Transformation into “Black Dutchmen”

Ambonese identification with the Dutch colonial masters became so complete that it led the Dutch clergyman Hendrik Kraemer remark after a visit to Ambon in 1926:

“They feel at least half European and they want to be Europeans. Since van Heutz’s policy of opening up the territory of the Indies, they feel pacifiers and conquerors of the archipelago. Among the usual pictures displayed in the schools for instance, the children like the picture of the conquest of Tjakranegara best of all, for they feel that those inhabitants of Lombok are their enemies, just as if they, the Ambonese, were unalloyed Dutch colonials. All these peoples and tribes of the Indies which rebelled with armed force or had to be subdued by the sword they consider ‘their enemies’, just like the average Dutchman” (Kraemer 1958:13-14).

⁵ In order to get lucrative employment, most had to leave the Central Moluccas and by 1930 at least 16% of the Christian Ambonese were residing outside the Moluccas (Chauvel 1984:51-52).

Kraemer appears to have captured well the self-image of the Christian Ambonese during the later colonial period. The reverence for the Dutch flag and pictures of the royal family on the wall of almost every Ambonese house are further examples of the closeness they felt with the Dutch. However, it would have been more correct if Kraemer had stated: “*They feel at least half equal to the Europeans and they want to be like Europeans*” rather than “*they feel half European and want to be Europeans*”. For the Ambonese never wanted to become Europeans but aspired to become the counterpart of the Dutch among the native peoples in the Netherlands-Indies.

To protect their privileged but precarious position near the top of the colonial hierarchy, they had to sacrifice some of their cultural heritage and shift the accent of their cultural identity to those aspects most useful, and thus most appreciated by the Dutch: Loyalty to the Dutch, Christianity, western-style education, and martial skills and bellicosity.

Reinterpretation of History. The Ambonese had to accept, and eventually did believe in, the Dutch-invented myth of “Loyalty Through the Ages” (“*Door de Eeuwen Trouw*”), i.e. that a special bond existed between Ambonese and Dutch ever since Dutch arrival in the Moluccas centuries ago. This myth, utterly cynical in view of the ruthless oppression of Moluccans until the Pattimura rebellion, first appears in Dutch writings during the Aceh war. For the Ambonese, the myth had the advantage that it eventually cemented their privileged status in the colonial hierarchy. It was used for the first time in the 1920s and 1930s to remind the Dutch of their special obligations based on this age-old bond when the Dutch began to treat all natives in the military and administration as being of equal status thus threatening the privileged Ambonese position. The second time it was used by Moluccan exiles after the KNIL contingent brought to the Netherlands in 1951 was stripped of all its privileges.

Religion. Christianity became the most important identity marker since it most closely identified them with the Dutch and most clearly distinguished them from the Moslems, Hindus and animists among the rest of the indigenous population. They actually spoke of their status as pangkat Serani, i.e. “rank of Christian”, which they conceptualized as somewhat below European but higher than Moslem, pagan, or Chinese (Kraemer 1958:14). This rank was ideally obtained by receiving instructions in Dutch language during confirmation classes since it was believed that the mystical power the Dutch possessed was more effectively transferred in the Dutch language and, if possible, by Dutch ministers⁶. Only the poor were instructed in Malay and it was considered better to remain half-Christian (*setengah Kristen*), i.e. only baptized but not confirmed than choose for inferior Malay instruction (Ibid: 29). Yet even the non-confirmed second-class Christians were considered superior in status to non-Christians or Christians of other ethnic groups.

By pronouncing non-Moluccan Christians as inferior, an attempt was made to ward them off as potential rivals vying for their privileged position with the Dutch. Thus Chinese Christians who attempted to worship in the main church in Ambon City were, at times, turned away with the argument that this is an Ambonese church – implying that

⁶ Ambonese ministers were only in 1917 allowed to minister the sacraments. However, they had to overcome their own peoples’ resistance since many believed that the host administered from a white hand was magically more powerful than when it came from a brown one (Tutuarima 1960:155). This episode shows that the Ambonese did not simply believe in Dutch military might but also ascribed superior supernatural powers to them that could be tapped by being close to them. (On Moluccan conceptions of power, see also Bartels 1979).

being not Ambonese (or Dutch) was equivalent to not being a true Christian (Ibid: 20). Indeed, being Ambonese and being Christian became synonymous as it is reflected in the term 'Agama Ambon', Ambonese religion, which was used interchangeably with 'Agama Kristen', (Protestant) Christianity.

Education. Dutch-language education was also increasingly seen as a magical formula to draw nearer to the colonial masters and, at the same time, increase the distance to other ethnic groups within the colonial empire. In the 1920s there was such a "*catastrophic rage for learning Dutch that the Dutch schools were not able to handle the demand*" (Ibid: 25). Parents made great financial sacrifices to get their children into Dutch schools and, in order to get them into European schools, they sought in increasing numbers to gain legal status as Europeans (*gelijkstelling*) which gave them also other legal and occupational advantages, and perhaps most importantly, it symbolized their assertion of being near equal with Dutchmen.

However, it was not primarily thirst of knowledge that drove both parents and students. The pupils were taught subjects of little relevance to the environment in which they grew up. Dutch education was, above all, seen as a means for economic advancement and, even if it did not realize, for gaining status and prestige. For those whose parents were too poor to send them to Dutch schools, the KNIL was an alternate, but clearly less desirable, route to fulfill the Ambonese dream of secure employment and high prestige.

Those failing to gain jobs in accordance with their schooling, considered their status too high to accept menial work. After all, the white Dutchmen were never seen to do menial jobs in the colony. The educated unemployed were often seen strolling around Ambon City, dressed in their best western-style suits and relishing their high position.

Militarism. Symbolic changes also occurred in the military field. Not Pattimura, the last Ambonese hero to resist the Dutch became the hero of Ambonese KNIL soldiers, but the early mercenary Captain Jonker who had fought for the Dutch in the early colonial period (mid-17th Century), at a time when both Ambonese Moslems and Christians tried to rid themselves of the white intruders. Jonker's grave became the center of worship of Ambonese soldiers who went there to make offerings to receive magical powers in return. The spirits of Jonker and his wife were believed to accompany the soldiers in battle and there are many stories about their appearance in the shape of doves in times of dire need, timely rescuing the soldiers from certain doom⁷.

Culture and Adat. As visible status symbols of their superiority, they further adopted certain aspects of Dutch behavior and life style while at the same time neglecting, or even consciously abandoning, much of their own traditional adat. For example, in the KNIL, the eating of certain Dutch foods and the wearing of boots became markers of status differentiation from native soldiers of non-Moluccan (and non-Menadonese) origin.

This shift in accent of cultural identity occurred not only among military personnel (Cf. Chauvel 1984: 73ff) and low-level administrators but also among the whole Christian Ambonese population in the Moluccas and wherever else they had settled in the

⁷ While Jonker was indeed a faithful servant to the Dutch who fought for them as far away as Ceylon, he is nevertheless an odd hero of the Eternal Loyalty myth in that he was eventually executed by the Dutch claiming that he planned treason. Perhaps the fate of Jonker should have been a warning to the Ambonese soldiers.

archipelago. However, the Ambonese Christians never altered, or intended to alter their ethnic identity. Wilhelmina, the Queen of Holland – lovingly and familiarly called “*Nene Mina*” (“Grandma Mina”) – was revered as a source of Dutch power but the center of their world always was Ambon. This becomes abundantly clear from their own writings in the first half of the 20th Century, as well as from their traditional cosmology, in which Mt. Nunusaku, their sacred mountain on Seram, was always seen as the navel of the world, place of origin not only of the Ambonese but all mankind. It is also expressed in their sentimental songs, with the ever-recurring themes of love for their islands and of homesickness they experience in the Diaspora. They were never ashamed of their physical characteristics. Quite to the contrary, the motto “Black is Sweet” (*Hitam Manis*) was a cultural premise throughout the days of the “love-affair” with the Dutch.

When they proudly called the Moluccas the “Twelfth Province of Holland” and referred to themselves as “Black Dutchmen” (*Belanda Hitam*)⁸, they symbolized both their closeness to the Dutch and their separate identity⁹. They were content to be “black” just as much as being like “Dutchmen” and they used the term “Black Dutchmen” not only as a self-bestowed honorific expressing their proximity to the Dutch and their superiority vis-à-vis all other ethnic groups in the Netherlands-Indies but also to signal clearly to both the Dutch and the other indigenous groups that they are special and deserving their elated status in the colonial hierarchy.

Anti-Loyalists. Not all Ambonese subscribed to the Eternal Loyalty myth. A sizable minority, including many KNIL soldiers became convinced that the Eternal Loyalty myth mainly benefited Dutch policies of oppression, not only of other ethnic groups but also of the Ambonese themselves. Spearheading this minority was a small Ambonese intellectual elite consisting of people who had been given the opportunity to get a higher education, including some who had studied in the Netherlands. As the Dutch had hoped, this elite became westernized in outlook, thought and action. However, as it turned out, they had learned their lesson only too well. Firmly embracing western ideologies, they did not turn into loyal lackeys of the Dutch but into true “Black Dutchmen” fighting for emancipation of all Indonesian peoples within the Netherlands-Indies in the period between the two world wars.

The most important anti-loyalist organization was *Sarekat Ambon* (Ambon Association) founded in 1920 by A. J. Patty¹⁰. To the total surprise and shock of the Dutch many KNIL soldiers showed an interest in this organization which was open not only to Ambonese Christians but also Moslems and promised to work for equal status and pay of both European and native soldiers regardless of nationality. Perhaps, for many the interest in an anti-loyalist institution constituted a flight forward, i.e. they favored overall emancipation of the military at a time when the Ambonese were threatened by Dutch plans to take their special privileges away and equalize them with the rest of the native soldiers.

Renewal of Bond after World War II. Membership in *Sarekat Ambon* was

⁸ The Menadonese also claimed the appellations “Twelfth Province of Holland” and “Black Dutchmen”. As Ben van Kaam (1980:4) points out, the Moluccan tendency to refer to themselves as “Black Dutchmen” “... generated in the Dutch both irritation (Who do they think they are?) and satisfaction (“loyal soldiers”) in turn”.

⁹ A good example of simultaneously stressing closeness to the Dutch and a separate Ambonese identity is an essay by Pattipelohy (1921), a KNIL soldier trying to defend the privileged Ambonese position.

¹⁰ For an extensive treatment of A.J. Patty, the *Sarekat Ambon* and Ambonese anti-loyalist opposition to the Dutch, see Chauvel (1984: 89-289); Kaam (1980:45-63); and Leirissa (1975:51-99).

outlawed and, largely isolated, the Ambonese KNIL troops remained loyal to the Dutch. During World War II many soldiers fought in the underground for the Dutch against both the Japanese and Indonesian nationalists. Others shared their meager rations in Japanese prison camps with the Dutch and engaged in other heroic acts to save many a Dutch life. Upon the return of the Dutch at the end of the war, the KNIL enjoyed renewed popularity and the Dutch had no trouble to sign up many young recruits in the Moluccas in addition to the returning veterans. While other Indonesians, including many non-KNIL Ambonese fought for Indonesian independence, the Ambonese KNIL ferociously fought against it.

The rest is history: While they fought on the battlefield, the Dutch lost in the political arena. A last-ditch, military-backed effort to proclaim an independent Moluccan state, the *Republik Maluku Selatan* failed and part of the troops were removed to the Netherlands.

Schismogenesis: Black versus White

The Ambonese felt that their unswerving loyalty to the Dutch after their return at the end of the war had revitalized their bond with the Dutch and those arriving in the Netherlands in 1951 expected to be rewarded for their aid given to the Dutch during and after the Japanese occupation of Indonesia. The arriving soldiers were still pretty much the “Black Dutchmen”, both proud of their heritage and their closeness to the Dutch whom they continued to admire and fear.

However, when the Dutch officials did not welcome their faithful comrade-in-arms in brotherly fashion but instead treated them as a nuisance, slamming them into makeshift camps after unceremoniously kicking them out of the army, the “Black Dutchmen” image disappeared as fast as a mirage. Rapidly, the Ambonese disassociated themselves from their former masters through progressive differentiation, or schismogenesis. The same Ambonese, who in the colonial setting had placed such great emphasis on the communalities they shared with the Dutch, now made a sharp turnabout and stressed the differences. In the process, they developed a new ethnic identity, calling themselves “Ambonese”, stressing their “Moluccanness” and thus setting them radically apart from the Dutch ¹¹.

With much of Moluccan adat having fallen into disuse during the period of Dutch-Ambonese symbiosis, there was a dearth of identity markers to establish clear-cut cultural demarcation lines between themselves and the Dutch, apart from skin color and other obvious racial characteristics. To establish barriers, a number of often arbitrary and sometimes contrived aspects of their culture deemed “typical Moluccan” were used as identity markers. Malay was one of the handiest distinguishing signs, becoming a symbol of group solidarity and cohesion. It became a frequent practice that Ambonese conversant in Dutch nevertheless parleyed in Malay, to the studied exclusion of present non-Malay speakers (Wittermans and Gist, 1961:130). Other identity markers included a strong, sometimes fanatical adherence to adat, whose revival, revitalization, reconstruction, and partial reinvention were also largely motivated by the perceived need to establish ethnic

¹¹ Schismogenesis, in a milder form and at a lesser speed, would have probably occurred even if the exiles were afforded a better reception since it was more necessary in the new all-Dutch surroundings to set themselves apart than it had been previously in the Netherlands-Indies. This is precisely what occurred with the Moluccan members of the Dutch navy and Moluccans who arrived from New Guinea in 1962 after the Dutch were forced to relinquish it to the Republic of Indonesia (For more details, see Bartels 1989:271-272).

boundaries.

Of course, the strong adherence to and emphasis on adat among the exiles served, and serves, not only to set them off from the Dutch but also prove to their kindred in the Moluccas, and to themselves, that they are, and remain, true-blue Moluccans, unadulterated by Dutch influences. Indeed, they succeeded in impressing, and continue to astonish, those back home with their fixed loyalty to adat, which has become an “endangered species” in post-independence Indonesia and many informants in the Central Moluccas told me to search among the exiles for “genuine Moluccan adat”¹². Their bona-fide Moluccanness claim is of course also a cornerstone in their claims to be allowed to eventually return to their homeland and assume whatever rights and obligations they may have there.

One mark of distinction especially stressed by the exiles is their collectivism, in contradistinction to Dutch individualism. They further stress that, despite the western influences they admit have touched their culture, they do have their own way of life, which essentially has remained eastern. Obviously western culture traits shared with the Dutch are downplayed. Even their common Protestant Christianity is now perceived as two different religions. To achieve complete schismogenesis, the traditional ties with the Dutch churches were cut and a separate Moluccan church was created where they have a visible opportunity to display group identity and solidarity.

The nucleus of schismogenesis, as well as the very core of exile ethnic identity, became the RMS ideal, with its twin goals of an independent Republic of the South Moluccas and the repatriation to this new state. The genuine desire for realization of the RMS ideal became such an obsession that, in terms of symbolic significance, it was to overshadow all aspects of the newly shaping ethnic identity. Symbolizing the total rejection of Dutch society, the RMS ideal was the ultimate identity marker and the one most readily relied on in flagging to the Dutch, and in convincing themselves, that there was no common ground between them.

The ethnic exclusiveness the exiles strove for had to be further fortified by a symbolic reversal of the mental image the Moluccans had of the Dutch. The previous picture of the Dutch as allies, friends and benefactors was shattered and replaced with one depicting the Dutch as villains, exploiters, and traitors. With the vilification of the Dutch, the last bond of communality was broken and the process of schismogenesis completed.

Searching for a New Identity

In the late 1960s, a change in labeling occurred in the Christian Ambonese KNIL group, whose younger, mostly Dutch-born members began increasingly refer to themselves as “South Moluccans”. To some extent, the name change was cosmetic, since the content of Ambonese identity remained the same. It did however underline the increasing political radicalization of Moluccan youth and their claim to an independent South Moluccan state, culminating in the hijackings and other terrorist acts in the 1970s¹³.

¹² While the adherence to adat among the exiles may be stronger, their knowledge is not. Many of the soldiers had left the Moluccas at an early age and have almost as little knowledge as those soldiers born outside the Moluccas.

¹³ The developments in the Moluccan exile community before and after the hijackings are analyzed in Bartels (1986).

In the years after the hijackings, from the late 1970s on, the label was changed again to the even broader “Moluccans”. This shift reflects not only the steady devaluation of the RMS ideal after the disillusionment after the political failure of terrorism but also an increasing consciousness all Moluccans belong together, i.e. the inclusion of Ambonese Moslems, Southeast Moluccans, Navy and New Guinea Moluccans. The new label also reflects the beginning of an intensive identity search among the youth trying to salvage their distinctiveness after the loss of the RMS ideal and in face of the onslaught of western culture.

The new ethnic revivalism, spearheaded by urban Moluccans, has led to a greater awareness and critical evaluation of Moluccan adat and history among the young and to some extent given them a renewed ethnic pride making it easier to function and at least economically integrate into Dutch society. The search process is far from being complete but appears to go in the direction of a westernized Moluccan society that insists, and maintains, a separate ethnic identity from the Dutch on basis of a new historical consciousness and a streamlined, i.e. “modernized”, adat, which does not interfere with their essentially western life styles.

Ethnic Etiolation: Turning into “White Moluccans”

The picture is complicated by the fact that the intermarriage rate with the Dutch (in some regions as high as 60 percent). In these interracial marriages, the Dutch partners are usually “converted” into Moluccans and frequently act more Moluccan than their Moluccan spouses (For details, see Bartels 1989: 383–385) and Siwabessy and van Wijk 1986). Offspring from these relations are considered to be Moluccans but the children are much more westernized and may eventually constitute a separate racial group.

Even though Moluccan exiles are, frequently fanatically, defending their separate identity and resisting emotional integration into Dutch society, they have been from the very beginning exposed to Dutch cultural values and majority pressure to conform. Since they were already very much Dutch-oriented, they took many of these values and norms for granted and thus very susceptible to what I want to define here as processes of “ethnic etiolation”.

I have borrowed the term ‘etiolation’ from biology where it means “to bleach or alter the natural development by excluding sunlight”. I have selected the term ‘etiolation’ because of its figurative value for the description of the processes through which a non-white ethnic minority metamorphoses into a western society without loss of ethnicity. I want to define “ethnic etiolation” as an largely unconscious alteration of the cognitive, behavioral, and emotional make-up of personalities of members of non-white minorities, under the influence of a surrounding white majority, in such a way that the minority members think, act, and feel in more or less identical patterns as the majority but without surrendering their ethnic identity and without the development of a strong emotional commitment to the host society. In other words, the minority undergoes a transformation in character without a change in form. While in biology this “blanching” is externally visible, in ethnic etiolation the alteration is intrinsic to the affected person or group. Ethnic etiolation is interdependent with the processes of integration, assimilation, acculturation, and culture change, in that it may lead to such developments and/or in that those processes may set ethnic etiolation into motion. However, it may occur independently from assimilation and integration, as it has been partially, or at certain times, the case in the Europeanization of Moluccan exiles.

In the Moluccan community, ethnic etiolation occurred despite simultaneous countercurrents such as schismogenesis, cultural revivalism, and categorical refusal of integration. It does not counteract these active and conscious attempts at identity salvation and maintenance, nor does it threaten ethnicity. Rather, it affects and determines the process and direction of these currents. For example, in the still ongoing reevaluation of Moluccan culture by Dutch-born Moluccans, internalized criteria of western standards are used to determine the viability and usefulness of this or that belief or custom. Or when Moluccans negotiate with Dutch officials, they use western strategies to achieve Moluccan goals.

Ethnic etiolation is a long drawn-out process starting at the arrival of the exiles in the Netherlands and spanning generations. Each successive generation, due to an ever-increasing exposure and familiarity with western values and ideas, has become more “blanched” in their thought and action. Furthermore, the mere duration of stay has also had an etiolation effect on each generation. Thus, the first generation of exiles is today noticeably more etiolated than three decades ago, as can be seen, for example, in the question of Dutch nationality. Until as recently as the mid-1970s, the majority of the first generation strongly rejected Dutch citizenship, mainly because, in their Moluccan minds, such a step would be tantamount to treason and contrary all beliefs they held in the schismogenesis phase. Nowadays, they feel just as strongly about their being Moluccans, but they use western pragmatism to justify a change of mind, arguing that one still can be a true Moluccan even with a Dutch passport – which after all is *“just a piece of paper”*.

The degree of ethnic etiolation varies not only from generation to generation but also from individual to individual. Emancipation and preparedness to integrate are usually in a direct relationship with the degree of individual etiolation. It also appears that individuals first etiolate in terms of thought and behavior, with emotional blanching lagging behind. Most Moluccans, even those who have already adopted “white” thinking and mannerisms, still react emotionally in a Moluccan rather than a western way, letting their feelings interfere with their daily existence and affect their actions much more than the less sanguine and more emotionally disciplined Dutch. However, even here slow but steady changes can be seen.

Until recently, Moluccans who thought and acted “too white” could realize the extent of their “westernization” when they were confronted by disapproving fellow Moluccans, but as the whole community becomes more etiolated, these confrontations become rare. It is often not until they journey to the Moluccas that they really are jolted into awareness of the “whiteness” through being treated as “whites” by the indigenous population and through observation and comparison of their own behavior and that of their hosts. Especially among those born after 1960, there are more and more who state that they feel themselves to be “Europeans”, putting themselves into the same category as Germans, Swedes, Italians and Dutch, rather than perceiving themselves as a subgroup of the Dutch, or as Dutch. Yet, at the same time, and frequently by the same persons, there is a tendency to view the exile community no longer as an ethnic group but as a large Family in a quite literal sense. On quite a few occasions, I have heard statements by young Moluccans like *“I could never marry a Moluccan because we are all one family and I’d feel that it would be incest”*. Sentiments like these are becoming more common.

In some instances ethnic etiolation takes curious twists and goes so far that Moluccans even accept western standards of beauty to judge themselves and other Moluccans. Quite a few young females measure their own looks on those of white models, expressing envy about their longleggedness, slenderness, eye and nose shapes, etc.

Younger people are also beginning to discriminate in their partner choice against those with typical Moluccan features such as frizzy hair or stockiness and particularly skin color. Girls talking amongst themselves can be overheard saying, rarely jokingly, something like “*Oh this guy? No, I don’t like him. He is too black!*”. Children of the second Dutch-born generation have been observed trying to scrub their color off while taking a bath or shower.

Some of the more astute observers among the first Dutch-born generation are beginning to fully realize what is happening to them and their bangsa – as Moluccans still lovingly call their people. Some are perturbed, others merely astonished about the pervasiveness of “white thinking”, as they call it, among their group. Even those who find this development disturbing and pitiful know that they themselves are afflicted and feel powerless to stem the tide. Others are more philosophical and would agree with the statement of a Moluccan fellow anthropologist who said: “*Well, what do you expect? We live in a white country, we intermarry with white people and we talk their language. Our future is in Holland. I guess it is the price we have to pay for emancipation.*”

With the conclusion of the processes of ethnic etiolation one or two generations away a cycle in Dutch-Moluccan relations will come to its close. It started in the 19th Century in the Netherlands-Indies when Moluccans became to see themselves as “Black Dutchmen” who outwardly wanted to be like the Dutch but continued to think and live like Moluccans. After the arrival in the Netherlands, faced with the traumatic realization that the Dutch no longer needed them, they went a phase of rejection of Dutch values and of stressing a black identity. The last phase is that they are turning into “White Moluccans who think and live like the Dutch but want to be Moluccans. Thus they have emphatically rejected assimilation, seeking a new symbiosis with the Dutch, namely to be separate but equal partners within Dutch society.

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