

Can The Train Ever Be Stopped Again?

Developments in the Moluccan Community in The Netherlands Before and After the Hijackings ¹

Dieter Bartels

Introduction

April 25, 1985. Shortly after sunrise, shivering people gather around flagpoles near the churches in Moluccan wards of small towns all over the Netherlands. A brief ceremony of prayers, speeches, and singing culminates in raising the flag of a country which today exists only in the hearts of the participants. Immediately after the ceremony, the people board hired buses, climb onto trains, or pile into private cars to begin their annual pilgrimage to the Houtrusthallen exhibition center in The Hague, the political capital of the Netherlands. On this day, they commemorate the 35th Anniversary of the proclamation of independence of the Republic of South Moluccas (Republik Maluku Selatan, generally referred to as (RMS), while simultaneously lamenting their thirty-fourth year of exile in the Netherlands.

The annual gathering has essentially two objectives. The first is to remind the Dutch people, and particularly the Dutch government, of their continuing obligation to aid Moluccans in the establishment of a free homeland, independent of Indonesia, to which the exiles in Holland will then voluntarily repatriate. The second objective is a reaffirmation of those goals commonly referred to as the "RMS ideal" or "RMS ideology"² among the exile community itself, and a show of solidarity both internally and externally.

Over the years, the festivities have become routine, the grand entrance of the RMS exile government is followed by a military flag-raising ceremony and the emotional singing of the national anthem by the thousands in the hall. A speech by RMS President J. A. Manusama is usually followed by orations from a prominent Dutch supporter, and more recently from leaders of other Indonesian independence movements, namely Aceh, Papua (Irian Barat), and Timor Deli (East Timor).

During the speeches, the sweltering hall hums like an active beehive. Only the dignitaries in the front rows remain in their seats. The crowd swarms back and forth, clogging the aisles, huddling in corners, and flocking around food stands. Everywhere people exuberantly greet friends, acquaintances, and relatives. Most of the speeches they have heard before, but if anyone says something new that touches their hearts, they reward him with thunderous applause. This, however, is the time of reunion and social gossip, a gigantic family feast that contributes more to group solidarity and expresses better group vitality than any speech from the podium.

Various traditional dancing and singing groups appearing on stage in the second half of the afternoon reflect the prevailing mood of the crowd, a mixture of melancholy and joy. A sense of loss and despair, overwhelming homesickness for the faraway islands, frustration, but also an abundant joy of life, mirth and the happiness of being among friends can be read on the faces of old and young, in rapid succession or simultaneously.

The annual ritual could seem merely a replica of earlier ceremonies except that the proud and erect President Manusama has become frailer as the years pass by and the girth of the uniformed men on stage has increased ever so slightly. As the time ticks cruelly away, the ranks of the old soldiers are becoming thinner, the hopes of those left behind more faded, and the crowd attending more sparse.

However, in 1985, there was a marked difference. Many more young people were attending than in previous years. No only did they come to participate in the RMS festivities, but in the morning they marched

1 This analysis was carried out while the author worked at the Center for the Study of Social Conflicts (COMT), University of Leiden, The Netherlands (1983-85), conducting research on socialization and identity formation among Moluccans in the Netherlands. The work was supported by a grant from the Dutch Ministry of Welfare, Public Health and Culture (WVC) and executed in cooperation with the Moluccan Advisory Council (IWM). An earlier version of this article was presented at the South East Asian Studies Research Seminar, University of Kent, Canterbury, England, December 7, 1984. The author is indebted for helpful comments and criticisms to André Köbben, Roy Ellen, Benedict Anderson, Ferry Siwabessy, and Lies de Fretes.

2 Little attention has been paid to the form this free republic should take, other than what was outlined in the provisional constitution dating to 1950, which has been printed repeatedly in publications on the RMS written by those close to the Moluccan cause. For a complete reprint, see Bung Penonton, *De Zuidmolukse Republiek* (Amsterdam: Buijten and Schipperheijn, 1977), pp. 246-60. Many Moluccans feel that this is an issue which can be discussed only when the RMS has become a reality, and that it must involve Moluccans living back home. Concerning the relationship a free RMS would maintain with the Netherlands, there has been no public discussion. It appears that a close economic tie but not political dependency.

by the thousands through the streets of The Hague, shouting RMS slogans. The police had sealed off the street on which the Indonesian Embassy is located, but when the demonstrators reached its vicinity they could not suppress their pent-up emotions. Groups of youths broke away from the demonstration and stormed through police lines to vent their anger and frustration in front of the gates of the embassy. Rocks flew across the fence smashing several windows, before the demonstrators finally left peacefully, prodded by their own leaders to rejoin the main formation and eventually disperse in front of the Houtrusthallen.³

Over the years more and more youths had stayed away from the reunion, disillusioned with the lack of progress of the RMS struggle. They had lost faith in a RMS leadership perceived as timid and inept, and they had become dispirited by the realization of the fruitlessness of their own often violent attempts in the sixties and seventies to force the hand of the Dutch government and gain international support. Yet, the 35th Anniversary was for many of them sufficiently special to invite their return. Not because they suddenly had found renewed faith in the movement, but, as almost all those I polled stated, they returned to honor their parents and elders.

Although the demonstration and subsequent festivities evoked nostalgic images of their fierce struggles, it was another kind of nostalgia that prevailed. There is growing realization among the young⁴ that, with the steady dying away of the members of the first generation, an era of Moluccan exile history is coming to a close. They further realize that their community is changing ever more rapidly. By coming out in force on this occasion to show solidarity and appreciation for their elders; sufferings, they were reaffirming their own links with the past and a continuous commitment to the Moluccan community in the face of these changes and an uncertain future.

In the following discussion, I want to analyze some of the major developments in the Moluccan exile community, particularly among the former members of the so-called KNIL⁵ and their families, since the arrival of this group in the Netherlands in 1951, with a special focus on the impact of the notorious hijackings in the mid-1970s. It is my contention that, while the hijackings (and related activities) utterly failed to advance RMS aspirations, the resulting shock effect jolted the Moluccan community out of its sociocultural paralysis, accelerating many already ongoing changes, and most importantly, forcing the Moluccan community to reevaluate their position in Dutch society and consider new directions parallel to or even beyond the RMS ideal.

Brief History of Moluccans in Holland

Let begin with a brief historical outline. The Moluccas, an island group in the eastern region of the Indonesian archipelago, were once famed for their spices. In the nineteenth century, the region experienced a drastic economic decline. Dutch interests shifted to Java and other islands. The task of conquering, pacifying, and controlling those areas was in the hands of a colonial army of native and European soldiers led by Dutch officers, the aforementioned KNIL.

No unlike the British use of the Christian Karen in Burma, the Dutch preferred to recruit from ethnic minorities adhering to Christianity such as the Menadonese and Moluccans, since it was felt that they were the most trustworthy. Of all groups, the Moluccans most justified the trust put into them. Not only were they fierce and daring soldiers, often used as advance troops in trouble spots such as Aceh, but they developed an unquestioning, if not fanatical loyalty to the Dutch, especially to the House of Orange. Their identification with the Dutch was so complete that they referred to themselves as "Black Dutchmen" (Belanda Hitam).⁶ Just like average Dutchmen, they came to see those groups in the Netherlands Indies who rebelled and whom they helped to subjugate as "their enemies"⁷

3 A compliment has to be paid to the hopelessly out numbered Dutch police. By refraining from using force or calling in reinforcements, they managed to keep tempers sufficiently low to prevent any outbreak of violence.

4 The term "youth" in Moluccan society is liberally applied to people in the 18-40 age group.

5 Koninklijke Nederlands Indisch Leger or Royal Netherlands Indies Army.

6 As Ben van Kaam (The South Moluccans [London: Hurst, 1980], p. 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."

7 Hendrik Kraemer, *From Missionfield to Independent Church* (The Hague: Boekencentrum, 1958). Kraemer, a keenly observant missionary, also discusses the feelings of superiority, based on religion, felt by Central Moluccan Christians vis-à-vis their Moslem brethren who, during Kraemer's time (1926), made up roughly one-third and today constitute at least half of the Ambonese population. Yet, despite the large number of Moslems, the fiction remains in Indonesia and elsewhere that the Central Moluccas are Christian islands. Even among young, Dutch-born Moluccans, the impression prevails that Moslems constitute only a tiny minority in their home islands. These misconceptions are due to the fact that it was overwhelmingly Christians who joined the Dutch colonial services outside the Moluccas and to the publicity Christian exiles received during their political actions. Only a tiny minority (an estimated two percent) of the exiles is Moslem and they have generally been politically passive. For an analysis

During the Japanese occupation of the Netherlands Indies in World War II, the Moluccans did not abandon their masters. Many of those who were not captured fought valiantly in the underground and those who were put into the camps shared their meager rations with the Dutch prisoners-of-war, saving many Dutch lives. When Netherlands forces returned after Japan's defeat, most Moluccan soldiers immediately rejoined ranks to fight against the Indonesian independence movement. Their numbers were swelled by many new recruits from the Moluccas.⁸

The transfer of sovereignty late in 1949 and the subsequent dismantling of the federal state in favor of a unitary Republic of Indonesia led to mass confusion and increasing panic not only among Moluccan KNIL soldiers but also among the general population back in the Moluccas. Although there was a sizable pro-Indonesian movement, many Christians carefully put their Dutch flags away in the desperate but vain hope that the Dutch would after all return. Many feared that the Javanese would take revenge for the role the Ambonese played in the colonial empire, and rumors spread that all Christians would be circumcised and forcefully converted to Islam. Federalists like Manusama, a Dutch-educated civil engineer and teacher, who was born on Java and only in 1947 set foot for the first time on Ambon, convinced many that only a federal state would assure them some measure of autonomy from Javanese domination.

When the federal bubble burst, the Ambonese panicked, according to all accounts, including their own. They declared their independence on April 25, 1950, claiming as their territory the Central and Southeast Moluccas.² This bubble burst too when the new Indonesian government imposed a blockade and its forces then attacked Ambon, defeating the "rebels" after a few months and only after vehement resistance. A guerrilla movement continued under the leadership of Dr. Christiaan Soumokil on the large island of Seram into the 1960s.¹⁰

In the meantime, an overwhelming number of Moluccan KNIL soldiers stationed elsewhere in Indonesia, mostly on Java, fearing reprisals from the nationalists, refused either to be demobilized on Republican-controlled territory or to enter the TNI. Instead, they demanded that their discharge take place on Ambon or in western New Guinea (now Irian Jaya), then still under Dutch control. A stalemate developed when President Sukarno, suspecting that the soldiers would reinforce the RMS movement, refused to go along with this demand.

A delegation of KNIL soldiers went to the Netherlands and took their case to court. The judge agreed to their demands, and the Dutch government decided to bring the 4,000 soldiers plus around 8,500 family member "temporarily" to Holland in March and April of 1951.¹¹ Most people expected that emotions would

of Ambon's Moslems, see Richard Chauvel, "Ambon's Other Half: Some Preliminary Observations on Ambonese Moslem Society and History," *Review of Indonesian and Malayan Affairs* 14, 1 (1980): 40-80.

8 After World War II, 25,000 Moluccan soldiers were in the service of the KNIL. With the transfer of sovereignty (1949), 12,000 of these 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 the RMS army and about 4,000 others, stationed mainly on western islands, mostly on Java, refused to be demobilized or discharged anywhere but in the Moluccas or (then still) Dutch New Guinea (Günter Decker, *Republik Maluku Selatan* [Göttingen: Schwarz, 1957], p. 31).

9 The islands claimed by the RMS are identical to those constituting the present-day kabupaten, Maluku Tengah and Maluku Tenggara, subdivisions of the province Maluku of the Republic of Indonesia.

10 This short summary of the events surrounding the declaration of the RMS is based on Ben van Kaam, *The South Moluccans and Bung Penonton, De Zuidmolukse Republiek*. A succinct account of post-World War II Moluccan history can be found in Richard Chauvel, "Ambon: Not a Revolution but a Counterrevolution," in *Regional Dynamics of the Indonesian Revolution*, ed. Audrey R. Kahin (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985), pp. 237-64.

Soumokil, a former minister of justice and attorney general of the federal State of East Indonesia (Negara Indonesia Timur), was involved in the Andy Aziz coup in South Sulawesi and later was one of the chief figures behind the RMS. In 1952, he became president of the RMS emergency government on Seram. Arrested in 1963, he was condemned to death in 1964 but only executed in 1966 by order of Suharto.

Manusama, who had left Seram on a political mission in 1952, arrived via New Guinea in the Netherlands in 1953. Having played at least as important a role in the RMS proclamation as Soumokil, he was of great symbolic value to the RMS movement in the Netherlands and became president of the RMS exile government after Soumokil's death.

11 76.1 percent of the troops were ethnic Ambonese, i.e., people born in the Central Moluccas (65.5 percent) or born outside the Moluccas but of Ambonese origin. Most of the remaining 23.9 percent came from the southeastern Moluccan islands (e.g., Kei and Tanimbar). No breakdown for the total 12,500 people is available, although it is known that 93 percent of them were Protestant, ± 4.5 percent Roman Catholic (mostly from the southeastern Moluccas) and ± 2.5 percent Moslems (largely ethnic Ambonese). A number of the soldiers' wives were of non-Moluccan origin (mostly Javanese), who generally had converted to the religion of their husbands. For more details, see Commissie Verwey-Jonker, *Ambonezen in Nederland* (The Hague: Staatsdrukkerij-en Uitgeverijbedrijf, 1959).

In the beginning, all the newcomers were generically referred to as "Ambonese," a label resented by people from the Tenggara region who have had longstanding feuds with the Ambonese because of the latter's dominating and condescending attitude based on feelings of cultural superiority. Violent clashes between the two groups in the camp period prompted the Dutch government to place them in separate wards. Relationships have been improving in recent years among the young people, who do not share the bitter memories of their elders.

After some years, Moluccans began to refer to themselves as "South Moluccans," a term which is more inclusive and is also a

cool down within a few months and the Moluccans could then return safely to the Moluccas. This, of course, never happened.

Once having arrived in cold, damp Holland, the soldiers were rather unceremoniously discharged and put into camps spread all over the country, such as the former German concentration camps of Schattenberg and Vught.¹² This discharge, in the form of a mimeographed slip of paper, was the single biggest blunder the Dutch made and the primary source of all troubles to come in future years. The Moluccans felt sold out, treated like worthless trash. Even today, many feel that dogs would have been better rewarded for their loyalty.¹³ Love and devotion were replaced by disappointment and embitterment. The proud soldiers felt emasculated, quickly grabbing onto the RMS ideal to salvage meaning in their lives.¹⁴

While living in the drafty, ramshackle camps, the dreams of an imminent return to their home islands could be maintained. However, starting in the early 1960s, the Moluccans were moved, group after group, into newly built wijken, or words, often located on what were then the outskirts of small to middle-sized towns. The solid, drab, stone buildings symbolized permanence and a bleak future in a foreign country, an idea most Moluccans did not accept.

The older generation did not yet give up the belief that the Dutch government would return them to a free Maluku in accordance with a promise they are convinced was made to them.¹⁵ Moluccans view a promise (janji) as a very serious undertaking, making the person who gives it subject to supernatural punishment if his promises are not kept, so they continued to believe the one given by the Dutch would eventually be fulfilled.

The Moluccan Community Prior to the Hijackings

Life in the camps, and also perhaps during the early years of the wards, was extremely public. In the camps, only paper-thin walls separated families from one another, and doors were never locked. People would go in and out of each other's cramped living quarters without ever knocking on the door.

Hospitality was a matter of course and so was mutual help whenever needed. The Moluccans call this *maschi*. In Java, it is known as *gotong-royong*. Virtually everyone was invited to the numerous baptisms, confirmations, weddings, and, of course, funerals, which traditionally have the function of creating unity in an often divisive society. Large feasts were common, but so were large-scale fights, both apparently enjoyed with the same relish. Despite the spartan, harsh living conditions, life in the camps was *ramai*, filled with fun. In a way, it was little different from their former life in the military barracks (*tangsi*) back in Indonesia. It should come as no surprise that in such a situation of open living, social control was very strong, and at times oppressive. Individuals had very little room for personal freedom. All had to conform to established, rigorously enforced rules and norms of *adat* (customary laws and traditions) and the military code of behavior.¹⁶

political statement of a commitment to the RMS. The Dutch government has stopped using the term "Ambonese" but also rejected the designation "South Moluccans" because of its sensitivity vis-à-vis Indonesia. Instead, it has adopted, uniformly, the term "Moluccans."

12 See map for the geographical distribution of the former camps and most of the wards mentioned below. After this map was issued by the Dutch government, fifteen more wards were built. All the camps were abolished, with the exception of camp Lunetten in Vught. Once the second largest camp with ca. 2,100 inhabitants, the numbers there have dwindled to a few hundred who have held out mostly for political reasons. The planned dissolution of the camp in 1986 has created a lot of tension among Moluccans nationwide. Many would like to see at least part of it preserved as a historic monument.

13 Since most Moluccans who came to Holland never felt themselves to be Indonesian nationals, they never faced the question of whether or not their role in colonial times was morally correct. Younger people do realize that their elders were tools of Dutch colonialism, but they almost entirely blame the Dutch.

14 The Dutch soon realized their mistake and tried to rectify the situation by offering the soldiers the opportunity to enlist in a civil guard in July 1952. The offer came too late. Nationalism ran high in the camps, and the Moluccans refused even to consider the proposal before some political concessions regarding the RMS were made, and they eventually rejected it altogether (van Kaam, *South Moluccans*, p. 138).

15 The Dutch authorities insist that such a promise was never made. It is, however, conceivable that Dutch officials in Indonesia made statements to the effect to assure a smooth transfer of the KNIL troops to Holland. Whatever may be the truth, older Moluccans firmly believe that such a promise exists.

16 In numerous interviews Moluccans, both old and young, described camp life with a mix of bittersweet exuberance and sentimentality. They remember political infighting, the bullying by some ex-sergeants, the intense pressure to conform, but when they add up the negative and positive aspects in their memories softened by the passing years, the good times outweigh the bad. The camp, like the *tangsi*, seems some Paradise Lost, a period of intense community feeling sorely missed and never to be recovered. From the beginning, however, there were many who left the camps for reasons of personal ambition or because of conflicts with others, and as time went on, quite a few were forced out for political reasons, as we will see below. For an eyewitness description of the situation in the camps in the first period, see Tamme Wittermans, "Social Organization of Ambonese Refugees in Holland" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of London, 1976), pp. 22-66 and *passim*. A close-up description

Adat was strictly adhered to. Probably more so in the diaspora than back in Indonesia. It was mostly adat-by-rote, i.e., people followed, and forced their children to follow, customs and rules of whose underlying philosophy the ex-soldiers knew little. Most of them had left their home village (negeri) in their teens and twenties, too young to be fully initiated, let alone interested, in the refinements of their own culture. About one-tenth of them had been born outside the Moluccas and so knew even less. In many instances, adat had to be reconstructed, piece by piece, from the little everyone remembered. The resulting end product sometimes differed from one to the other region in Holland and was occasionally quite different from the way a certain custom was, and is, handled in the Moluccas.

One such example is *pela*, an intervillage alliance system based on mutual help. In the Central Moluccas intermarriage between members of the allied villages is, with few exceptions, strictly forbidden; a person's village affiliation which determines with whom a person is "*pela*," is reckoned patrilineally.¹⁷ In the Netherlands, however, Moluccans trace village affiliation bilaterally. This means that young men or women must count not only the *pela* of their father, but also that of their mother, and by extension, of their grandparents on both sides, and so on-going back anywhere from three to seven generations. Thus, while someone in the Moluccas must take account of only a small fixed number of *pela*, a Moluccan in Holland can end up with a very large and ever increasing number of *pela*, limiting his or her marriage choice considerably. Within a few generations, everyone will be *pela* with everyone else and Moluccans will have to marry exogamously (i.e., with partners from other ethnic groups), if they don't return to the original rules or otherwise alter them.

Up to the mid-1970s, it can be said that, in general, adat and the Moluccan lifestyle as such were accepted as given and only of secondary importance. What dominated collective thought was the RMS ideology. For the group there was only one primary goal: the return to an independent state in the Moluccas.¹⁸ However, almost from the start Moluccans could not agree on a common strategy for achieving this goal. Numerous movements rose and disappeared, with their leaders frequently gaining followers more on the basis of traditional family, village, *pela*, and island loyalties than by the appeal of particular ideologies. There were various attempts at unification. In December, 1962, several factions decided to create a federation called Badan Persekutuan (BP), and when this failed the various groups within BP were dissolved in June, 1966, to form a new unitary front called Badan Persatuan Rajat Maluku Selatan (BPRMS). At this same meeting, formation of the Pemerintah Darurat ("Emergency Government") was announced, with J. S. Manusama as president. The exile government was promised the backing of the BPRMS, which could claim support from a majority of Moluccans in the Netherlands.¹⁹

This did not end factionalist strife. Another challenge was mounted in 1968 when a charismatic and colorful ex-KNIL sergeant, I. J. Tamaela, founded a movement popularly known as "Missie Militer" (later changed to Front Siwa Lima), and the following year declared himself president of a counter-government. Charging Manusama with having failed to further the RMS cause, especially in the international arena, Tamaela did not bother to deal with Dutch authorities, but concentrated on the United Nations, setting himself up in the United States. His major coup was when he gained recognition for his movement from the African state of Benin (formerly Dahomey), offering new hope to many Moluccans who likewise were disillusioned by the stagnation of the RMS struggle. Violent clashes broke out in many Moluccan communities between the followers of Manusama and Tamaela in the first years of the "Missie" movement. The movement lost much of its impetus in the seventies and has shown little activity since the death of its prophet in Benin in 1978, but many of its original followers still bear the mental scars of the fierce persecutions they suffered from the Manusama forces and retain their hostility toward that group.

As can be seen, much energy has been spent in bitter internal struggles between RMS'ers and those suspected of disloyalty, as well as between the various factions and splinter groups supporting the RMS. It was in connection with these struggles that social control was most oppressive. Deviants were often threatened with death, physical harm, or branded as traitors and ostracized. Inside the camps and wards, opposition was not tolerated.

of the situation in three small camps in one small town (Woerden, South Holland) is given by Nico van Wijk, *Ambon of Belanda?* (Leiden: COMT, 1985).

17 For a full account of the *pela* village alliance system see Dieter Bartels, "Guarding the Invisible Mountain " (Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1977)