6 Closing the 'KNIL chapter': A key moment in identity formation of Moluccans in the Netherlands

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6.1 Introduction

At the time of their arrival to the Netherlands in 1951, the lives of 12,500 Moluccan soldiers and their families were dominated by their desire to return home – to an independent Republik Maluku Selatan (Republic of South Molucca, RMS) in the eastern part of the Indonesian archipelago. They had come to the Netherlands as the consequence of a complicated decolonisation process. Temporarily, they thought. Up until the mid-1970s they were convinced that they would return to a re-established RMS. Reluctantly integrating into Dutch society, they developed a politicised and oppositional identity towards it. This culminated in train hijackings and the taking of hostages by Moluccan youngsters in, among others, schools in 1975 and 1977, resulting in several innocent casualties. It was during and after these hijackings that members of the second generation of Moluccan immigrants began to review their relationship with the Moluccas, as well as their position in the Netherlands. In retrospect, it seems that this was the point at which they began accepting the fact that they would stay. It was attended by a flurry of creative and cultural projects: from magazines and literature to music and theatre. Moluccan identity now had to be articulated within Dutch society, rather than as a culture of exile.

Most experts think that a failed second train hijacking in 1977 and its violent ending spurred the changing ethos in the Moluccan communities. In their view, the 'failure' of that terrorist action compelled Moluccans to reconsider how they had pursued their political aspirations (see e.g. Bartels 1986). Politicians were inclined to believe it was the government's hard, fast response in 1977 to the hijackings that brought the radicalisation to a halt.¹ I would argue, however, that a reorientation was already underway within the Moluccan community at the time of the train hijackings. This was a key moment in the identity transformation of the Moluccan group when they changed from refugees to immigrants.

The history of the relationship between the Moluccans and the Dutch government is very much determined by their colonial relationship and by the Dutch colonial project. Throughout the timeline of their stay in the

Netherlands, this colonial adventure and experience reverberates. But rather than starting a fundamental discussion on the colonial project – and the post-colonial condition at large – Moluccans only referred to their colonial past and their connection to it in discussions about the specific responsibilities of the Dutch government vis-à-vis the Moluccan community. In the mid-1980s, the leaders of the Moluccan communities settled their disputes with the Dutch government about debts of honour with an agreement that ‘closed the chapter’ on the colonial era.

How can we explain this? Why did the Moluccans not join up with the Indische Nederlanders and Surinamese to engage themselves with the consequences of the colonial past? Particularly in the 1970s, young Moluccans were inspired by the Black Power Movement and by books such as Fanon’s *Black skin, white masks*. There were certainly ample opportunities for a critical reappraisal of the colonial past.

This chapter explores these questions, starting with the shift in perspective among second-generation Moluccans and using manifestations of the ‘cultural explosion’. I then explain the momentum of change by linking it to identity formation of the Moluccans in the Netherlands since the 1950s. I argue that central to this change was the redefinition of the RMS. It was the transformation from refugee to migrant, from a waiting-to-go-home to actually investing in a life in the Netherlands. It created the necessary momentum for a profound post-colonial reflection that had the potential of reaching out to other post-colonial groups. Why this did not happen is also explained in this chapter.

6.2 A sign of change: The Moluccan Moods album

In late 1982, *Moluccan Moods* was released. This record album comprised the harvest of one year of Moluccan Moods theme parties held at the Amsterdam rock music club and cultural centre Paradiso. It contained tracks by the ten best Moluccan bands that had performed monthly on the Moluccan Moods stage and photographs of all ten were printed on the cover. The album was an example par excellence of the diversity in styles and music among Moluccan bands in the Netherlands at that time. Its broad spectrum of musicians and music is epitomised by three particular bands. Their album cover photos alone give a sense of their individuality.

The photo of Perlawanan (the band’s name means ‘opposition’ or ‘resistance’) shows four young men – three Moluccan and one Dutch – posing against a tiled wall with graffiti, presumably in an underground station. They wore either a pullover or a jacket and two of them wore sunglasses; not the Ray-Bans that were in fashion among Moluccans, but even trendier ones. The frontman’s hairstyle, with curls in front of his eyes, links him with the more sophisticated urban alternative scene. The band members

refer to themselves by the nicknames V0 10, Pelor ('bullet') and BMW. Their contribution to *Moluccan Moods* was in Dutch, entitled 'Tastbare Nacht' (meaning 'tangible night'). With a heavy bass sound and melodramatic vocals, the song was emblematic of the experimental underground music genre.

Another featured band is the H-Gang. Their name is derived from an alley behind the houses of the Prins Hendrikstraat, a street in Amsterdam's Moluccan ward, where some band members grew up. Of the seven band members, most posed in their photo in jeans and bomber jackets. Their clothing style was representative of Moluccans living in the Moluccan quarters, where most of the members came from. Their song 'Buka mata sama sama' ('Open our eyes together') was in the variant of Malay spoken by Moluccans, though their repertoire also included songs in Dutch and English. 'Buka mata sama sama' was a call to the Netherlands-dwelling Moluccan community, living in comfortable conditions, not to forget the oppression of their relatives in Indonesia. H-Gang varied from reggae to ska, the style of which 'Buka mata sama sama' embraced. The band embodied a political group of Moluccan youth who were as critical of their own community as they were of the outside world. Their songs criticised the Dutch police force, but also expressed concerns over the global risks of nuclear proliferation and nuclear energy.

Unlike the H-Gang, Umatilla was rooted in the urban environment of Amsterdam. The seven band members – two of whom were Dutch – knew each other from Amsterdam West, the neighbourhood where they all lived. The name Umatilla comes from that of a Native American tribe; the band was known to use a logo incorporating an Indian battle axe.² The Moluccan members of Umatilla did not have the experience of living in Moluccan camps or quarters like members of H-Gang, but belonged to a minority of Moluccans in the Netherlands. They pose in their photo as though they are a group of young friends at a party. Their music is smooth Latin funk, a popular genre among Moluccan bands, such as the nationally renowned Massada. Umatilla's album contribution, 'Spotlights', is sung in English.³

In retrospect, it is amazing that such an album was released at all – primarily because of its diversity. After all, the socially engaged H-Gang conveyed political messages out of step with the predominantly pro-RMS voice of the Moluccan community. Another novelty was the presence of Umatilla, a group that was not rooted in one of the camps or quarters. These were signs of a widening understanding of who the 'real' Moluccans were.

6.3 Moluccan Moods as part of a broader movement

The success of Moluccan Moods concerts was not only thanks to the band line-ups and performances. It was also greatly facilitated by the independent Moluccan magazine *Tjengkeh*, its title meaning ‘clove’ – one of the spices originating in the Moluccan Islands and a reason for Europeans to first sail there. Spices were also the reason the Dutch East India Company (the Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie in Dutch, VOC), established itself in the Moluccan Islands from 1605 onwards. *Tjengkeh* was an initiative begun in 1977 by young Moluccans who left the Moluccan camps and wards to live in Amsterdam and Utrecht. The first issue was published in 1978. Like the organisers of Moluccan Moods, the *Tjengkeh* group wanted to make a statement to Dutch society: to counter biased reports in Dutch media and to create an independent, critical Moluccan magazine. Up until then, almost all Moluccan journals had been affiliated with political or religious associations or movements.

With the help of a young Dutch journalist,⁴ *Tjengkeh* commenced as a professional organisation. In no time, it had a large number of subscribers, reaching almost every Moluccan quarter. *Tjengkeh* reported monthly on the Moluccan Moods parties and published the line-ups of forthcoming events. Moluccan youngsters throughout the Netherlands became familiar with the parties at Paradiso. While *Tjengkeh* thus helped Moluccan Moods, the concert series supported the magazine by organising benefit parties at Paradiso. This was necessary, as subscription fees did not cover the magazine’s costs. Cooperation between *Tjengkeh* and Moluccan Moods was not just based on business, but was cemented by personal friendships and family linkages. People involved knew each other from the Moluccan camps and quarters.

Moluccan Moods functioned as a platform for new musicians, encouraging new creativity, whereas *Tjengkeh* was also a platform for emancipation. It published articles about entertainment, sports and music, but also discussed taboo issues and socio-economic problems within the Moluccan community. Articles about couples living together without being married yet still attending important church ceremonies incited discussions; the same went for articles about mixed marriages and about being Moluccan on the police force. *Tjengkeh* represented the emancipation process that took place in Moluccan society.

The Moluccan Moods programme was initiated by Eddy Tutuarima, who was nicknamed Ed Kadet (*kadet* meaning ‘bagel’) because he sold bagel sandwiches in Paradiso (Mutsaers 1993: 111). Tutuarima lured Eddy Lekranty, the guitarist in the group Cheyenne, and Zeth Mustamu, the percussionist in the band Massada, into a project for a series of Moluccan concerts in Paradiso. At the time, this centre was programming more themed series, some of which were ethnically based. The series thus started

in 1982 as Moluccan Moods. It was a success because, contrary to other themed series, Moluccan Moods – being the brainchild of active Moluccan musicians – continued to be part of Paradiso's programming for several years. Mustamu and the two Eddys continued to organise the Moluccan Moods events.

The objective of the Moluccan Moods events was twofold. They were aimed both at encouraging Moluccan bands and introducing Moluccan musicians and bands to a wider Dutch audience. The 1982 album was released with the aid of the Nationaal Pop Instituut (known in English as the Dutch Pop & Rock Institute, NPI). After their second album in 1983, Moluccan Moods was discontinued for a year. The organisers considered new activities including a documentation centre, a presentation of Moluccan bands in Berlin and the formation of a new band: the Moluccan Moods Orchestra. In 1985, Moluccan Moods parties resumed at Paradiso. In the programme, there was more room now for expressions of Moluccan culture beyond music. Fashion shows by Moluccan designers, traditional dances, theatre and talk shows by the Moluccan journalist Rocky Tuhuteru were featured, together with band performances (Steijlen & Wessels 1990: 48). The Moluccan Moods Orchestra functioned as a 'music school'. The idea was to invite young Moluccan musicians to play with a core of professional Moluccan musicians. The orchestra's repertoire consisted of new arrangements of traditional Moluccan songs (Steijlen & Wessels 1990: 48).

From a sociological point of view, the most interesting characteristic of the Moluccan Moods events was that they functioned as a village square. This hearkened back to the traditional *alun alun* (town square) in the Moluccas, which was important for a Moluccan community that had been dispersed over the country into 60 separate Moluccan quarters during the process of settlement. Moluccans came to Amsterdam to see the bands play at Paradiso and to meet up with each other. Each performance was attended by about 600 to 750 Moluccans arriving by bus from all over the country. Moluccan Moods events became the main podium for Moluccan bands in the Netherlands, although it was not the only one. Community halls in Moluccan quarters,⁵ and sometimes local facilities in Dutch villages and towns where Moluccans lived, formed a network where Moluccan bands could play. The best gig, of course, was to play on the main podium: Moluccan Moods in Amsterdam.

Two other movements at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s signify the transition from a rigid community to a more liberal and emancipated one. First of all, there was a Moluccan women's movement. In the 1950s, when Moluccans arrived in the Netherlands, women's organisations already existed. Most of them, however, were related to the church or to core political organisations. A new Moluccan women's movement arose in the second half of the 1970s, led by Moluccan women; some were involved in the Dutch women's movement. They organised weekends

when women could discuss their positions within the Moluccan community, as well as in Dutch society. Their discourse was cautious, defining the emancipation of Moluccan women as part of the emancipation of the community as a whole. Despite their moderate tone, it was clear that this Moluccan women's movement determined its own pace of emancipation.

Indeed, youth and women's emancipatory activities began to change the political map of the Moluccans in the Netherlands. Before the mid-1970s, critical remarks about the viability of a Republic of South Molucca were hardly ever heard, even though some groups were clearly dissident (see Steijlen 1996a). It was only in the 1970s that in wider circles, the idea of an RMS came under discussion. In particular, Moluccan youth organisations like Gerakan Pattimura and Pemuda 20 Mai questioned the ideal of an independent RMS and began to redefine it. The Gerakan Pattimura was named after a Moluccan warrior who had rebelled against the Dutch in 1817. Pemuda 20 Mai directly referred to foundation of the Budi Utomo movement in 1908, a defining moment in the development of the Indonesian nation. These organisations argued for as long as Moluccans in the Moluccas did not have a chance to make their own decisions on their political future, it was paternalistic to impose an independent RMS on the Moluccas from outside. They advocated solidarity with other Indonesians who resisted the oppressive military regime of Suharto and confined their political objectives of self-determination, rather than independence for the Moluccas.

The rise of these emancipation movements and the development of independent media were concomitant to cultural projects like Moluccan Moods, as well as Moluccan theatre, poetry and literature. It was a momentum that marked change.

6.4 Understanding the moment of change: Migration and radicalisation

Moluccan Moods and *Tjengkeh* were two expressions of a broader process of transformation in the identities of the Moluccan population in the Netherlands. When the majority of Moluccans came to the Netherlands in 1951, it was as a group. The reason for their migration was that their demobilisation from the Dutch colonial army had become very problematic in the wake of Indonesia's independence. Immediately after the formal transfer of sovereignty to an Indonesian Federation in December 1949, the federation started to collapse and was replaced by a unitary state. In reaction to the federation's dismantling, an independent RMS was proclaimed in the city of Ambon on 25 April 1950. It was a step taken by the Moluccan elite, who had collaborated with the Dutch during the colonial era and had enjoyed a position of privilege. Amongst them were teachers,

clergymen and army sergeants, most of whom were Christians. At the time, 4,000 Moluccans located on Java were still in the colonial army, which was at the point of being disbanded. They were waiting for demobilisation and transfer to the Moluccas, as was the right of demobilised soldiers. They shared with the Moluccan elite a fear of retaliation by the Indonesian government and supported the RMS movement. Obviously, the Indonesian government did not allow these militia to return to the Moluccas until it had regained control of the islands.

The Moluccan KNIL soldiers were protected by soldiers of the Dutch Royal Army, who were sent to Indonesia during the decolonisation war. A deadlock in the demobilisation of the Moluccans arose as time was pressing, because the deadline for the withdrawal of Dutch troops from Indonesia was nearing. The Netherlands feared a bloodbath if they left their Moluccan military behind on Java. The Moluccan soldiers were given the choice of either demobilising in Java or being transferred to the Indonesian army. But as the militia held on to the right to be returned to the Moluccas – or, as a matter of fact, to Dutch New Guinea, which was close to the Moluccas – the Dutch government added a third option of being sent to the Netherlands. They accepted this,⁶ not knowing that they would be discharged immediately upon arrival. In ten transports, some 3,500 Moluccan soldiers, together with their families (totalling some 12,500 people) were brought to the Netherlands. They came under the assumption that they would be in the country only temporarily, on their way to the RMS, and that the Dutch government would help them achieve their ambition of an independent RMS. For their part, Dutch authorities held onto the belief that the Moluccans would be in the Netherlands for a few months before they returned to Indonesia, definitely not to a free Moluccan republic.

In the Netherlands, the Moluccans were housed in camps – most socially and physically isolated from Dutch society – where the Dutch government looked after their basic necessities. Men were discharged from the army upon, or just before, arrival and not, as they felt entitled to, in accordance with the military charter of the KNIL in their own Moluccas. This caused a sharp conflict between the Moluccans and the Dutch government. Attempts to fight the discharge in court failed for procedural reasons. Deep mistrust and resentment resulted among the Moluccans. They felt betrayed by the Dutch government whom they had served during the colonial era.

The relative isolation of Moluccans continued until the mid-1960s, even though the Dutch government curtailed their living allowances after 1956, forcing them to look for jobs in Dutch society. In 1956, for example, central services in the camps were stopped. In the 1960s, most of the camps were broken up and their residents were housed in special quarters within villages and small towns. While still living in one of the 60 camps (the number changed over time), a whole range of associations and institutions was established, varying from churches and sports clubs to societies based

on villages or islands of origin known as *kumpulan*. Each camp had a council representing the interests of its inhabitants vis-à-vis the Dutch government and its representatives. These Moluccan institutions were locally based, but were presided over by national boards. There were conflicts and schisms among the organisations and churches.⁷ Supporters of rivaling ones were housed in different camps. The result was that in 1953, the Moluccan camps (which were spread all over the country) formed a kind of Moluccan archipelago. Some of the camps were linked to each other by interest organisations and churches, but almost all were linked by the *kumpulan*, which were not influenced by politics. When the camps were closed in the 1960s and Moluccans were transferred to the Moluccan quarters, the structure of the community basically stayed the same, except that some new institutions like community centres were introduced.

Moluccans considered provision of housing and subsistence allowances to be a token from the Dutch government who felt a responsibility towards them in their status as exiles. Within a few years of their arrival, however, an increasing number of Moluccans found work on the labour market. For that reason, the Dutch government curtailed its subsistence allowances. Moluccan leaders sharply reproached the Dutch government for neglecting its true responsibility to them as exiles. Meanwhile, they exerted tight social control over their rank and file, to ensure that the RMS ideal was upheld.

For as long as a guerrilla movement, under the leadership of RMS president Chris Soumokil, was still active on Seram,⁸ the RMS movement in the Netherlands, which consisted of several organisations, could be considered a nationalist support movement. It solicited international support for their cause. Its leader was Johan Manusama,⁹ a representative of the RMS government who fled Seram and came to the Netherlands in 1953. In 1963, Soumokil was captured in Seram, as were remaining members of the RMS guerrillas, and he was executed three years later. After his death, a RMS government in exile was inaugurated, headed by Manusama as president. The RMS movement in the Netherlands transformed from a nationalistic support movement into an ex-patria nationalistic movement: Moluccans in the Netherlands were convinced that they had to liberate the Moluccas working from the outside. While Soumokil's prestige among Moluccans in the Netherlands went unquestioned, this was not the case with Manusama, whose position was challenged by other Moluccan leaders there. The most prominent of these was Isaac Tamaëla, a former officer in the RMS army. He had left Seram together with Manusama, but only arrived in the Netherlands in 1962. In the middle of all this rivalry and politicking, the second generation came to the fore. They started to organise themselves and became more radical and extreme in their methods. At the same time, they tried to overcome the schism between the two RMS governments.

This second generation found its inspiration in movements such as the Black Panthers in the United States and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, as well as in Castro's Cuba. Inspired by the spirit of the time, when it was believed that violent actions could influence political developments, the Moluccan youngsters turned to terrorist activities. Inspired by the 'black is beautiful' movement, they took a provocative attitude towards Dutch society, travelling around the country in large groups. This quite often resulted in fights and confrontations with local youths. Some Moluccan youngsters became involved in criminal activities, robbing banks or selling drugs to raise money for 'the struggle', as it was called. 'The struggle' meant being engaged in the cause of the RMS.¹⁰ From the mid-1960s onwards, young Moluccan activists from all over the Netherlands met and entered into discussions, overcoming the many political divides among existing Moluccan organisations. Within these networks, the radicalisation process took shape.

It was not just a radicalisation process, but also a process of exploring their history. Young Moluccans started to study Dutch colonial history, the role and position of the Moluccan Islands and particularly of Moluccans in that history. They immersed themselves in the history of social and political movements and with classic works in the field, such as those by Fanon and Marx. The Moluccan youngsters met at different places to discuss their findings. This varied from informal meetings at playing fields near the Moluccan wards, to monthly meetings at local or regional centres. In the mid-1970s, for example, Gerakan Pattimura held monthly discussions in the city of Nijmegen, attended by young Moluccans from all over the country. They learned that their forefathers were initially forced to produce spices for the Dutch and were abandoned after the market for spices collapsed. Later they had been recruited as a 'martial race', purely to serve the colonisers' 'divide and rule' policy. By interpreting this history in their own way, the Moluccan second generation came to the conclusion that the Dutch were to be less trusted than their parents had always taught them. The second generation developed a genuine distrust of the Dutch. In a radicalising atmosphere, this meant that Dutch citizens could also become the victims of politicised actions (see Steijlen 1996b). Young Moluccans were fed up with what the second generation saw as their parents' soft approach, which never went beyond peaceful demonstrations and appeals to authorities. For them, it was time to take up arms. Six violent acts were subsequently carried out. In 1970, the residence of the Indonesian ambassador was attacked, just two days before the scheduled arrival of President Suharto, which was also the first visit of an Indonesian head of state to the Netherlands. Early in 1975, a group of Moluccans was arrested for plotting to take the Dutch queen, Queen Juliana, hostage. In December of the same year, Moluccan youngsters hijacked a train and, four days later, friends of theirs joined in on the action by taking hostages at the Indonesian

consulate in Amsterdam. In 1977, two coordinated terrorist acts followed: the hijacking of a train and the hijacking of a primary school (for more information, see Barker 1980; Steijlen 1996b). Unlike earlier acts, 1977's hostage-taking did not end with the surrender of the Moluccans, but was halted forcefully by the Dutch army. A last terrorist act in the series occurred in 1978 when three Moluccans attacked the provincial government building in the province of Drenthe. Special forces responded decisively and ended the hostage-taking the next day. In total, eight hostages, one police officer and six hostage-takers were killed.¹¹ These acts of violence were the clearest expressions yet of the Moluccans' support for the RMS and the fact that they did not consider their future to be in the Netherlands.

6.5 Understanding the time: Redefining the RMS

In contrast to the public disapproval shown by some Moluccan political leaders, the majority of the Moluccan community sympathised with the hostage-takers in 1970 and 1975. But it was also precisely in these years that support for the RMS ideal began to crack.¹² Before the second train hijacking had taken place, new developments were already challenging the dominance of the RMS ideal. The first was under the surface: Moluccan intellectuals began to question things, understanding their own history as part of the political situation in Indonesia, where a military regime was in power. They concluded that it would be paternalistic to force an RMS upon the people of the Moluccas and embarked upon a process of reworking the RMS ideal into a plea for the right of self-determination for the people of the Moluccas. In order to achieve this, they cooperated with Indonesian exiles in the Netherlands. This cooperation was revolutionary in itself because Indonesians had been seen as the enemy. Discussions on redefining the RMS ideal marked the beginning of a liberal political atmosphere.

The second development was that Moluccans in the Netherlands started to go to the Moluccas. Visiting the homeland was long taboo because the Moluccas were considered occupied territory and visiting the islands was seen as treason against the RMS. Beside this political dimension, there was also a practical problem. Most Moluccans were stateless, and Indonesia was reluctant to provide them with visas because they were expected to be RMS sympathisers.¹³ Notwithstanding the taboos and practical problems, some Moluccans from the Netherlands had gone to visit the Moluccas as early as in the 1960s.¹⁴ From the beginning of the 1970s, more second-generation Moluccans started to feel a desire to visit the Moluccas. Coincidentally, shortly after the first train hijacking, the Dutch government started a programme to 'normalise' the relationships between the Moluccan community and Indonesia.¹⁵ Part of this programme consisted of organised trips to Indonesia, so-called 'orientation visits'. Moluccan foremen were

invited to the first ones. The visits¹⁶ were heavily criticised, but helped to break the taboo on visiting the Moluccas. Older Moluccans were consequently able to renew bonds with their families and villages and younger Moluccans could create their own relationships. In the tide created by the to-and-fro, discussions ensued about whether anybody felt alienated in the Moluccas, missed the Dutch pleasures such as going to the disco and so on. These discussions and the 'renewed' relations with the Moluccas helped nuance the political RMS rhetoric.

A third development was the growing awareness of social problems within the Moluccan community. For a long time, unemployment was not seen as a problem by Moluccans because they were not meant to become a part of Dutch society. However, in the course of the 1970s, unemployment, as well as the use of hard drugs, became serious problems. Dutch social work institutions seemed incapable of helping Moluccans. From 1976 on, this led to an increasing number of Moluccan initiatives to deal with the problems within their community. Like the political discussion on reformulating the RMS ideal and the visits to the Moluccas, the 'discovery' of social problems resulted in a minimised emphasis on the RMS. Many people who were politically active in earlier years could be found in the emerging Moluccan social work initiatives. Some of them combined their activities in social work projects (such as drug aid) with organising political courses, but they were no longer rigidly oriented towards the RMS ideal. A large group of young Moluccans entered academic programmes for social work, called 'second-chance education' for people who had dropped out of school.

Major changes were taking place in the second half of the 1970s. While some youngsters still followed radical ways and most Moluccans still thought they were only temporarily in the Netherlands, a process of reconsidering their position in the country and their relationship with the Moluccas began.

In the second half of the 1970s, the political atmosphere in the Moluccan community became more and more liberal and less dominated by mobilisation for the RMS. Magazines like *Tjengkeh* and publications by organisations such as Gerakan Pattimura and Pemuda 20 Mai took a leading role in this process of liberalisation. Visits to the Moluccas helped to re-establish relations with families and villages. Development projects became the new way of showing solidarity with the communities of their origin. Both practically and symbolically, these projects were instrumental in fostering a sense of belonging to the communities in the Moluccas, while staying in the Netherlands and accepting that their future would be there. And finally, the content of the RMS ideal itself began to change. It was no longer framed in terms of a struggle for independence, which until then was taken for granted as the cause embraced by all Moluccans. Now, it was accepted that people in the Moluccas should have the right of self-

determination. Further, the decision could not be made for them in the Netherlands. Ex-patria nationalism that had started in the 1960s was replaced by vicarious nationalism. The striving for an RMS gradually acquired the meaning of a plea for self-determination for the 'brothers and sisters' in the Moluccas and it became disconnected from the future of Moluccans in the Netherlands. Moluccans in the Netherlands could start integrating without renouncing their roots or their political history. This was an important and necessary step for integration into Dutch society.

6.6 Closing the 'KNIL chapter'

Less well known than the hijackings was another defining moment in the relationship between Moluccan immigrants and Dutch society at large. This was an agreement between the Moluccans and the Dutch government made in 1986. Its prelude was a growing dissatisfaction about the condition of housing in specific Moluccan quarters, most of which was built hastily by the Dutch government or housing cooperatives in the 1960s and was in bad shape by the 1980s. In Capelle aan den IJssel, for example, the courtyard had subsided by one metre. During the tense 1970s, some housing cooperations and the Dutch government had not raised house rents in Moluccan wards. In the 1980s, they nevertheless decided to bring rents up to par with the normal level in the Netherlands, though without improving the housing's poor quality. Small wonder that the inhabitants often refused to pay rent. Efforts to evict these tenants in January 1984 led to battles and police had to draw guns. Again, tensions between Moluccans and Dutch authorities increased and once more, the issue became political. Moluccan spokesmen pointed out that the Dutch government had brought Moluccan soldiers to the Netherlands and therefore were responsible for providing proper housing. They explicitly used the term '*KNIL-rechten*' ('the rights of KNIL soldiers'). Even the second generation born in the Netherlands laid claim to these rights despite the fact that Moluccans were slowly integrating and, as said before, were in the middle of reorienting their position within the Netherlands.

The housing dispute coincided with a major change in Dutch government policy towards ethnic minorities. From the 1950s onwards, this policy was focused on establishing specific ethnic-based facilities under the so-called 'group-oriented approach'. Its basis was the policy towards the Moluccan community, which was the major ethnic minority in the Netherlands in the first decades after World War II.¹⁷ When, however, in the 1970s the Netherlands became an immigration country and other ethnic groups appeared, the government wanted to abandon the group-oriented approach. It was too expensive and considered an obstruction to integration. The new principles concerned a general policy whereby members of

ethnic groups were supposed to use general facilities; only in specific circumstances could an ethnic facility be funded.

The change to minority policies was particularly painful for the Moluccans, in light of their special relationship with the Dutch government stemming from the colony and the events that propelled Moluccans to the Netherlands. They were going to lose their extraordinary position as a minority. On the part of the Dutch government, the special position of the Moluccans was also felt. The issue of KNIL rights, the history of the Moluccan camps and the many conflicts between the Moluccans and the Dutch authorities made creation of a Moluccan dossier very sensible. Above all, the Dutch government still owned many of the houses in the Moluccan wards as well as most of the Moluccan church buildings.

The housing issue in 1983 and 1984 brought up this problematic history in a polarised way, but at the same time catalysed closure to the chapter of Moluccans being in an extraordinary position. A few Moluccan cadres felt that Moluccans were going to end up as a small minority, because all other ethnic groups were larger than the Moluccan community. They were familiar with the Dutch government because they had been working as advisory bodies and also occupied key positions in the largest Moluccan interest organisation.

The cadres offered the government their help in solving housing problems and in privatising Moluccan homes and church buildings. In return, they asked the government to make a gesture to first-generation Moluccans. In 1986, 35 years after the Moluccans arrived in the Netherlands, an agreement was signed by the Dutch prime minister and the chairman of the largest Moluccan organisation in the Netherlands. This historical agreement foresaw arrangements to improve the socio-economic position of Moluccans and made gestures to acknowledge their contribution during the colonial era and the war. These gestures comprised an annual allowance for first-generation Moluccans, a medal of honour and the establishment of a Moluccan Museum.

With this agreement, the so-called KNIL chapter ended. Part of the deal was that through the medal and the annual allowance, the Dutch government paid off debt towards the first-generation Moluccans – its former employees. Within the Moluccan community, negotiators were criticised for having sold out the 'rights' of Moluccans. But they responded by pointing out that, because of the changing minority politics, it was only a matter of time before Moluccans would be considered a 'regular' minority. Because of the housing issue, they were in a bargaining position to obtain as much as possible for the community. What had started as a conflict thus turned, by coincidence, into a process finalising the extraordinary position of the Moluccans.

The impact of this on the identity of Moluccans in the longer term was that symbols referring to the RMS became identity markers. Waving the

RMS flag, for example, no longer necessarily meant that somebody wanted to realise the free Moluccan republic – it meant that the flag waiver was a Moluccan, not someone from Turkey or Surinam. RMS and KNIL became elements of the specific migration history of new generations of Moluccans in the Netherlands, which, in turn, became part of their ethnic identity. What made third- and second-generation Moluccans different from other migrants, beside some cultural elements, was the shared history of their parents and/or grandparents fleeing from Indonesia as members of the KNIL because of the RMS and their stay in the camps and wards.

6.7 Identity formation and post-colonial debate

The new phase in the identity formation became fully manifest in the beginning of the 1980s, amidst an explosion of creativity including emancipation movements, theatre, publications, discussions and music. As we have seen, the initiatives that manifested the change of identity and the start of integration were also directed towards the Dutch public. There are two apparent reasons for this. We have to understand this in two different ways. Firstly, the second generation wanted to redress their surroundings after becoming conscious of, and accepted the fact that they were going to stay and integrate into the Netherlands. Secondly, Moluccans wanted to make the point that they had no intention of becoming fully assimilated with the Dutch. Their desire to preserve and relive their cultural heritage was expressed through theatre and music.

How does this connect with the absence of a post-colonial debate in the Netherlands, which has been noted by several authors in this volume? In his contribution at the end of this book, Bosma defines post-colonial debate as a critical and systematic reflection on colonialism. In principle, Moluccans were positioned well to engage themselves in such a reflective process. Very much part of the colonial system, they were also sharp critics of how the Dutch government had acted as a colonial power and taken up its post-colonial responsibilities. This resentment about the colonial past did not, however, lead to a wider debate.

I would like to submit the following explanations. Primarily, although second-generation immigrants made a new study of the past and reinterpreted some parts of it, post-colonial issues did not lead to a thorough reflection on the colonial past. At best, it was used as an argument to prove the unreliability of the Dutch government as an employer and, with that, to justify an anti-Dutch attitude among Moluccans. The dispute between former colonial soldiers and their former employer, the Dutch government, was first of all framed as a conflict between labourer and employer. Next, it was a conflict about whether or not the Dutch government could be held responsible for not demobilising the Moluccan militia on their own islands.

Probably the main reason Moluccans did not initiate a post-colonial debate, deliberately or not, is that up until the end of the 1970s they were not oriented towards the Netherlands. They conceived of themselves as exiles, although they were interested in reflecting upon their post-colonial condition in the Netherlands.

A post-colonial debate is foremost an intellectual debate and the Moluccan group lacked a critical mass of intellectuals. The first generation consisted of subaltern militia, and not until the 1970s did the Moluccans first become active as academically trained professionals. Certainly, there could have been Dutch intellectuals who might have started a post-colonial debate while taking up the Moluccan cause. However, the Dutch intellectuals who supported the Moluccans in the early 1950s came from political circles that had staunchly opposed Indonesian independence. They would have been the last to have started any critical reflection on, or debate about, the colony; they would rather have liked to re-establish colonial relations. Further, most scholars working with Moluccans were active in the field of applied research for the Dutch government on policy-related issues.¹⁸ As soon as the idea of temporality was abandoned and Moluccans began to care about their position in the Netherlands, the colonial past declined as a point of reference. In the 1980s, moreover, the Moluccan 'problem' lost much of its urgency within Dutch society and became increasingly overshadowed by concerns about the integration of labour migrants and Surinamese as well as Antillean immigrants.

By the end of the 1970s and into the 1980s, several alliances were made with the Surinamese. This was visible in the fields of welfare and welfare education, where a lot of ideological debate was ongoing. Fanon's *Black skin, white masks* became a standard book. These overtures could have blossomed into a post-colonial debate because Fanon was a pre-eminent thinker on colonialism and decolonisation. It did not because the Moluccans and Surinamese did not join together for the sake of their shared post-colonial position. The reason was that the growth of Surinamese migration in the mid-1970s and their entrance into higher education in the fields of social welfare coincided with when Moluccans entered the same fields. Moluccans already had their own welfare organisations, but from the mid-1970s onwards, felt the need for professionalisation.

One of the rare moments Moluccans sided with Surinamese and Antilleans as post-colonial migrants was in the beginning of the 1980s. Ethnic groups were creating alliances to fight for emancipation and political influence and to discuss discrimination and racism. In Amsterdam, for example, groups of immigrants organised themselves into democratic organisations of foreigners, known as the Platform van Democratische Buitenlandersorganisaties (Platform of Democratic Immigrant Organisations). An Amsterdam-based Moluccan organisation participated in this platform together with Surinamese, Antilleans, Moroccans and Turks (Steijlen &

Wessels 1989: 42). Sometimes the divide was between the Mediterranean versus the post-colonial.¹⁹ But here again, it was not about colonialism, per se. As far as the Moluccan participants were concerned, it was to articulate themselves as a group who had not come for economic reasons, but because the Dutch government had ordered them to embark on the Netherlands.

Related to the question of why Moluccans hardly engaged in a post-colonial debate is the remarkable distance between Moluccans and Indische Nederlanders. Together, they could have comprised a critical mass. But first of all, Indische Nederlanders did not feel any urge to start such a debate. Second, in spite of their shared long history in colonial Indonesia, the two groups do not mix easily. Although in the 1950s and 1960s, some Moluccans and Indische Nederlanders both participated in the Indo rock music scene, sometimes joining the same bands, there was generally much antagonism between both communities. This antagonism was a continuation of the different positions the groups had in colonial society from a social perspective. From interviews with Indische Nederlanders, we know they tried to avoid contact with Moluccans, 'because Moluccans meant trouble'. Within the Moluccan community, Indische Nederlanders were looked down at. In the suburbs of some big cities, like Amsterdam, there were friendships between Indische youngsters and Moluccans, but the latter were rather peripheral to their own communities.²⁰

At the organisational level, some cooperation exists today in the field of care for the elderly and the welfare organisation Pelita, for example. At the same time, Moluccan and Indische clients do not want to mix and sometimes bluntly express a dislike of each other. In the 1990s, Pelita started programmes to include Moluccans in their clientele. Pelita organises walk-in meetings, the *masoek sadja* (i.e. just come in). Most of the public who attend are Indische Nederlanders; Moluccans only come if there is a *masoek sadja* especially for them. In 2007, Pelita celebrated its 60th anniversary with a large meeting in Utrecht. To help organise its clientele, Pelita organised bus transport to the meeting from all over the country. There was a large group of elderly Moluccans present. This led to complaints from older Indische Nederlanders about Pelita events becoming increasingly Moluccan and expressions of regret about the loss of Indisch identity.²¹ The line-up of artists was also criticised for being too Moluccan.²²

As we have seen, Moluccans and Indische Nederlanders constitute two different memory communities. Each is defined and shaped by distinct positions in late colonial society and different experiences throughout de-colonisation and settlement in the Netherlands.

6.8 Final remarks

This chapter focused on a crucial shift between the mid-1970s and 1980s in the Netherlands concerning the identity formation of the Moluccan soldiers and their children. Their future was no longer in the RMS, but in the Netherlands. Moluccans were resident in the Netherlands for almost 30 years without coming much closer to the receiving society. It was as though they were stopping at a station in between: en route from the colonial society where they originated to the free Moluccan republic they hoped to go to. In this transitory situation, they did not engage themselves in a post-colonial debate, in which the colonial past would have been systematically and critically examined. The colonial past nonetheless became increasingly important. Firstly, because it supported the claim for an independent RMS and, secondly, because it referred to a special responsibility towards Moluccans on the part of the Dutch government. For second-generation immigrants, their reading of the colonial past was important to their radicalisation process, as it provided their own cause against Dutch society. The former colonial relationship did come very explicitly to the fore when the housing conflict got out of hand. Rebellious tenants used their former KNIL rights as an argument. In negotiations stemming from this conflict – which led to the historical agreement – the Moluccan cadre and the Dutch government convened to close the KNIL chapter. There were many openings for a critical engagement with the colonial past, but it did not materialise. In some way, the time was never ripe. Albeit not exhaustive, I have submitted here a set of possible explanations for this. It would be a challenge to explore these observations at greater length, in new and more comparative research.

Notes

- 1 Former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Member of Parliament Jozias van Aartsen suggested this in a comment on processes of religious radicalisation among Moroccan youth in the early 2000s.
- 2 It was not uncommon for Moluccans to look to Native Americans for inspiration. The band of Moluccan Moods organiser Eddy Lekranty was named Cheyenne.
- 3 A tape-recorded version of the album was bootlegged in Indonesia, although it left off 'Buka mata sama sama' for being too politically controversial, and the song by Perlawanan. The latter's exclusion was for two possible reasons: because it was sung in Dutch and its name meant 'resistance'.
- 4 In the magazine's first issue, the journalist, Peter Schouten, was referred to by the pseudonym of Etus Capitan (Etus being a Moluccan name for Peter and Capitan coming from the literal translation of the Dutch word '*schouten*' into English).
- 5 From the end of the 1970s onwards, the Dutch government subsidised community halls in Moluccan quarters.

- 6 There is a lot of debate on the question whether or not the Moluccan military were ordered to embark. The Dutch government denies this and insists that Moluccans came of their own choice. The Moluccans claim that orders had been given (for more on this dilemma, see Steijlen 1996: 54-55; for some orders that had been issued, see Smeets & Steijlen 2006: 64-68).
- 7 See also Smeets and Steijlen (2006); for schisms in the churches, see Van der Hoek (1994) and the IISH database *Postkoloniale Migranten*.
- 8 'Active' may not be the right word because, after some years, the guerrillas were busy just surviving. In the Netherlands, Moluccans thought the guerrilla movement was still active.
- 9 Manusama and Soumokil were the two initiators of the RMS proclamation.
- 10 There were some Moluccan criminals who said that they were doing 'it' for 'the struggle' though were in fact plain criminals.
- 11 The police officer was killed at the onset of the 1970 action. In the 1975 train hijacking, the hijackers inadvertently killed the train driver and then executed two hostages. The same year in Amsterdam, an Indonesian consulate employee died after he had jumped out of the building to escape from the Moluccans who had taken him and his colleagues hostage. The 1977 train attack that resulted in army intervention killed two hostages and six hijackers. Finally, in the 1978 terrorist act, one hostage was executed by the Moluccans and one was killed during the attack by the special forces. In the first half of the 1970s, a lot of similar plans were discussed among Moluccan youngsters, though not executed; other actions were undertaken, such as an arson attack on an Indonesian airways office (see Steijlen 1996: 154-165; Smeets & Steijlen 2006: 237-241).
- 12 Previously, there had been some ethnic and religious minority groups within the Moluccan community who turned away from the RMS. This was not the case in the 1970s.
- 13 According to decolonisation agreements, Moluccans were Indonesians. To keep this nationality they had to register at the Indonesian embassy. The vast majority did not do this because they considered themselves RMS nationals and Indonesians the enemy (see Smeets & Steijlen 2006: 326-328).
- 14 These trips were considered acceptable because people went to visit family.
- 15 A complex process of negotiations between the Dutch and the Indonesian governments had taken place to make this possible (see Smeets & Steijlen 2006: 241-242).
- 16 Not all orientation visits were paid for by the government; some were funded by the media. The 'normalisation programme' was a result of negotiations between the Dutch and the Indonesian governments that started after the first hostage-taking in 1970, which awoke the Dutch to the fact that something had to be done about the Moluccans' relationship to Indonesia.
- 17 In fact, Indische Nederlanders were the largest ethnic group after World War II. They were considered Dutch and their integration was expected to be very fast and smooth.
- 18 There is a whole range of such research: Verwey-Jonker (1959); Van Amersfoort (1971); Veenman (1990, 2001); Tuynman-Kret (1985); Bartels (1990).
- 19 These at least are my personal observations from the 1980s onwards.
- 20 Interviews done for *Het Indisch Knooppunt* between 2005 and 2008; see www.het-indischknooppunt.nl and also Steijlen and Wessels (1989: 18-19).
- 21 Personal observations 24 November 2007.
- 22 Comment by Jeanny Vreeswijk-Manusiwa to the author 31 October 2008.