CHAPTER FOURTEEN

KOLLEKTIEF MUZIEK THEATER'S REPOSITIONING OF MOLUCCAN ISSUES

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*Introduction*¹

In this contribution I focus on the *Kollektief Muziek Theater* (KMT), a Moluccan collective that emerged at the beginning of the 1980s. The KMT was a politically active, left-wing collective, which consisted of a theatre group named *Dengan harapan* (With hope), a choir *Merantau* ('Abroad' or 'in exile'), and a popular music band called *H-Gang* (named after the playground of its members). H-Gang was the best known and the band performed most regularly out of all three. The repertoire of KMT reflects both the fundamental political changes taking place among Moluccans in the Netherlands and the turbulent 1980s in which many social movements manifested in the Netherlands. In more than one respect the repertoire of KMT can be seen as an encounter between Indonesia and the Netherlands (or more generally, the West). Such an encounter is reflected in the use of language – mixing Indonesian, Dutch and English – but it can also be recognized in the themes taken up in the songs and the critical stance towards both Indonesian and Dutch society. The repertoire reflects the audience KMT imagined itself, the issues they were willing to address, the call for self-reflection among their Moluccan peers, but also signs of solidarity with other more external cases elsewhere in the world. KMT fitted into a wider tradition of awareness theatre that was popular in the 1970s. KMT was a child of its time. Today, listening to its performances one cannot help but feeling it is outdated. However, its sounds echo the often radical changes within the Moluccan community throughout the 1980s.

¹ This contribution is based on earlier 1980s research (see references), observations and a recent interview with Roy Wannee (Oost-Souburg; 30 March 2010). All quotes are from this interview. On several later occasions I verified statements by Roy with others involved in MTK and Pemuda 20 Mai. These members were Njonkie Pattinama, Anis de Jong, Joop Sahetapy, Jan Malawauw and Nico Lopulissa.

Echoes

Browsing the internet I found a YouTube clip of H-Gang that was uploaded in 2006. The group played a song called *Ibu Tien* (the nickname of the wife of former Indonesian President Suharto) in the headquarters of the Moluccan Evangelical Church in Houten (province of Utrecht).² The clip showed a bunch of Moluccans in their fifties, singing about the need for revolution in Indonesia in the month of May. The song dated from 1982, when it was written just before the May general elections in Indonesia. It was performed at different gigs by the band, especially at meetings of left-wing Moluccan youth organizations that opposed the military regime of Suharto. I had quite often heard them play this song back in 1982 when I was involved in some of these meetings. For example, together with *Merantau*, the Moluccan choir, H-Gang played at a conference of the Moluccan Schooling Kollektif in Assen (April 1982), which focussed on the upcoming Indonesian elections, but also at a conference of the *Komitee Indonesia* in which the arms trade with Indonesia was fiercely discussed (June 1982). Later on, H-Gang was to perform at the Melkweg Venue (one of Amsterdam's better known pop-stages). Listening to and watching H-Gang on YouTube was like hearing an echo from a distant past. Indonesia had been transforming over the last decades; Suharto had stepped down in 1998, but also the Moluccan community had thoroughly changed. Meanwhile, at the end of the 1970s and at the beginning of the 1980s, the Moluccan community in the Netherlands had changed from exiles into migrants. To understand the implication of these changes we need to know more about the political background of the Moluccan community.

Political Background Moluccan Community

In 1951, upon arrival to the Netherlands, the vast majority of Moluccans considered themselves nationals of the *Republik Maluku Selatan* (RMS); the South Moluccan Republic that was proclaimed on 25 April 1950 in Ambon. The proclamation of the RMS was a response to the dismantling of the Federal Structure of Indonesia in 1950. The federal structure was the result of the colonial war and negotiations between the Netherlands and Indonesia after the latter's proclamation of a free Republic in 1945. During

² www.youtube.com/watch?v=hprwHoyUPro (last accessed, May 2011).

the colonial era and the subsequent colonial war, the Moluccans, especially the Christians among them, had partly sided with the Dutch colonial power. Within the framework of a federal state, with the South Moluccas as a province of the state of East Indonesia (*Negara Indonesia Timur*; NIT), they felt safe because of a reasonable measure of self-governance. However, with the collapse of the federal structure they were afraid of losing this self-governance, as they feared that old scores would be settled and they would be dominated by their old enemy, the Indonesian republicans. In order to escape all of this, they proclaimed the independent RMS. When in September 1950 the Indonesian army attacked the RMS movement, forcing it into the hinterlands of the island of Seram, it sparked a guerrilla conflict that would last until 1963. Moluccans still serving in the Dutch army outside the Moluccan Islands and awaiting their demobilization supported this new Moluccan republic. The developments in the Moluccas made their return almost impossible, because they were seen as potential RMS guerrilla and the Indonesian and Dutch governments did not want them to go to the Moluccas. As the Dutch government was still responsible for the 12,500 Moluccans (3,500 soldiers and their family) they were eventually transported to the Netherlands (Steijlen 2010).

After their arrival in 1951, the Moluccans were housed in special camps. Because most of these camps were not really fit for long-term residence in the 1960s the government built special wards to house Moluccans. Inside the wards, the community was organized along the lines of the previous camps, with a Moluccan council, social welfare, a Moluccan church, etc.

As the Moluccans had come as supporters of the RMS, they – like the Dutch government – were convinced their stay would be a temporary one. They would go home as soon as the RMS was re-established. This expectation continued until the end of the 1970s and into the 1980s. During this time, Moluccans were perceived as exiles. The second generation of Moluccans became active in the politics of the RMS and they started to radicalize. This led to an outburst of violence into the 1970s with six hostage-taking actions, the consequences of which were thirteen casualties, including six Moluccan hijackers. The very same networks of second-generation Moluccans, which had given birth to more radical and violent groups, would also give rise to a new perspective. In the mid-1970s, young Moluccans started to discuss the rigidity of the RMS ideas and its proclamation was largely perceived to be as a result of decolonization. It was a reaction to the dismantling of the federation, which itself was a construction forced upon by the Dutch. In their opinion, it was better to

fight for the remaining Moluccans at home and their right to self determination, enabling them to opt for a self chosen future.

In the course of the 1980s, this redefinition of RMS ideals became more generally accepted among Dutch Moluccans. This significant change in the course of the RMS, from ex-patria nationalism (independence for the homeland) to vicarious nationalism (advocating right for relatives in the Moluccas), changed Dutch Moluccans from exiles into migrants. Their future no longer depended on the realization of a RMS, but was now in the Netherlands (Steijlen 1996: 223–247; Smeets and Steijlen 2006: 360–376).

It is important to notice that one of the factors that contributed to the change of political orientation was the social problems the Moluccan community faced during the mid-1970s. Two of the major problems were unemployment and drug abuse. In 1981 it was estimated that drug abuse among Moluccan youngsters was almost twenty times as much as among their Dutch peers (Steijlen 1984: 42). Unemployment among Moluccans in the same period was 2.5 times higher (Smeets and Steijlen 2006: 299). The shift in political orientation coincided with a shift from political activism to social work advocated by a second generation of Dutch Moluccans. It was also an era in which the Moluccan community started to liberate itself from the social control exhorted by RMS and the first generation that had arrived in the Netherlands. It was an era for Western-inspired women's rights organizations to come to the fore, with new and independent Moluccan media mushrooming and fierce debates on topics hitherto taboo among the Moluccan community (Steijlen 2008).

Pemuda 20 Mai

The core of people who had started questioning the RMS ideals was organized around two left-wing Moluccan youth organizations: *Gerakan Pattimura* and *Pemuda 20 Mai*. *Gerakan Pattimura*, the Pattimura Movement, was named after a Moluccan freedom fighter in 1817, and had its origins in circles of Moluccan students in 1973/1974, many of them living outside the Moluccan wards. *Pemuda 20 Mai*, in turn, had its base inside the wards and was founded in 1978. In referring to the 20th of May (*20 Mai*) the initiators hinted at the proclamation of East Timorese independence, which had been declared in 1975 by Fretilin, but also at the founding of *Budi Utomo* in 1908, the first Indonesian political party that stood at the cradle of Indonesian nationalism. In the 1980s yet another organization, the Moluccan Schooling Kollektif (MSK) from the town of Assen could

be added to the Pattimura and May 20 movements. MSK was a regionally based youth organization, organizing discussions on all sort of political issues and it was very critical of the RMS, in spite of its roots in traditionally pro-RMS wards. The hijackers of the mid-1970s had come from the very same wards; some of them were even brothers or friends of the MSK members.

Of the three left-wing organizations, *Pemuda 20 Mai* was to be most involved in various international networks. Members of *Pemuda 20 Mai* joined trips to Cuba with organizations such as *Venceremos*, a pro-Cuba organization. Another international link was with the Indonesian communist party, the PKI. Two *Pemuda* members even visited the official delegation of the PKI in China. This PKI delegation was stuck in China when visiting that country in 1965 at the moment of the putsch in Indonesia. With the PKI now banned in Indonesia, its China delegation was forced into exile. It was this China delegation that was to head a network of PKI members throughout Eastern and Western Europe, and *Pemuda 20 Mai* members, but also other left-wing Moluccan youth organizations, had regular contacts with these PKI exiles. In the 1970s some *Pemuda 20 Mai* members were even politically trained by the exiles. This relationship was extraordinary because the RMS was generally considered to be right-wing and ideologically anti-communist in stance. Until the 1970s, social control within the Moluccan community had also effectively discouraged contacts with Indonesians.

The Moluccan initiators of Kollektief Muziek Theater (KMT) were all part of *Pemuda 20 Mai*. They were critically minded and politically active on a local level, in the wards of Zeeland Province. Here, they opposed established social welfare organizations dominated by the national – RMS oriented – Moluccan organization, instead organizing their own venues to meet and a documentation centre in a Dutch community house called *Het Zwaantje* (The Swan). They were deeply involved in reformulating the RMS ideology, organizing discussions on Indonesia related issues, the communist party and East Timor, a former Portuguese colony now violently occupied by Indonesian forces in December 1975. In reference to Indonesia, they positioned themselves as resolutely anti-Suharto.

Whilst being unemployed, they also looked for alternative ways to serve their community, as one of the founders of KMT and a good friend since the 1980s, Roy Wannee, told me:

We wanted to help, so we bought a second hand van and went around in the ward saying: *Tante* [a way to address older women, FS], the houses are badly

maintained, let us help to repair its shortcomings; in that way we gained sympathy. We were unemployed; a lot of Moluccans were unemployed then in Zeeland, as elsewhere in the Netherlands, and wanted to help the people. Our slogan was: to serve the people.

Kollektief Muziek Theater

As said, the band H-Gang I happened to watch on YouTube was part of a larger collective, the *Kollektief Muziek Theater* (KMT). KMT was based in two of the Moluccan wards in the province of Zeeland (Smeets and Nanuruw 2009). When KMT was launched, towards the end of the 1970s, it began with the band:

We started in '*het Zwaantje*', under the auspices of social cultural work. Every Wednesday we had a music workshop. We gathered there with our guitars and amplifiers. We already could make music, but were discussing how to perform differently than others who used to sing in Dutch or the Malay language. The music had to be about us. Later on people would say, your songs are critical, but we were just singing about ourselves, about our live and what we thought about it. That's how it all started, with a song about unemployment. Nan (one of the members) had written the song, and we said, you have to add this and that. Being unemployed also included a glimpse of discrimination at least that is how we experienced it (Interview Roy).

More or less at the same time, the choir and a theatre group were launched, partly by the same people. It was not a professional or commercial endeavour but very much framed by their political activism:

All three started in the same period; indeed, shortly after each other, and starting from the same place. The idea was to have a broad approach and to present the three as one deal. If somebody wanted to book H-Gang, then we said we also have a choir and a theatre group, together for a nice price. We used the money to buy equipment and for travel expenses. H-Gang did not bring us a penny, but we had something to eat however. If we played in Den Helder, for example, the deal was that we wanted to have food at least (Interview Roy).

KMT was referred to as a collective so as to avoid any sense of hierarchy. Nevertheless, within the collective one could distinguish a core group of people who were involved in all three of the units. They were the foremen or leaders of the collective. The choir, and to a lesser extent the theatre, consisted of more people than the band. Most others were recruited from family and friends of the core group who also happened to live in the wards. Two member of the band (two brothers), for example, no longer

lived in Zeeland, but now lived close to Amsterdam. The sound system was organized by their brother-in-law. And Roy played in H-Gang, sang in the choir (together with his wife) and also participated in the theatre.

KMT may have been unique to the Moluccan community, but outside similar things happened. The 1970s saw a movement of socially engaged awareness theatre (Van Noort 1988; Van Kerkhoven 2004). Music and musical theatre were used as a means to communicate political messages and to promote the struggle of liberation movements. A well-known example was the African National Congress' music theatre, which toured the world to promote the ANC's struggle (Gilbert 2007). KMT's choir, *Merantau*, could be linked to a wider tradition in the Moluccan community of church choirs, but singing liberation songs was a new thing to do. Another such a choir had previously been organized by other *Pemuda 20 Mai* members, living in the eastern part of the Netherlands. In the north of the Netherlands, a group of Moluccans copied *Merantau* by setting up the choir *Bintang Merah* (Red Star). They sang a repertoire that was similar to *Merantau*'s.

The Repertoire

Of the three KMT units, the band and the choir were the most active, each having a broad repertoire. *Dengan Harapan*, the theatre group, had only one play. The band H-Gang picked up on various music styles such as ska and reggae. Latin-funk, which was popular with so many Moluccan bands at that moment, was left aside, although the members of H-Gang often played this kind of music in other bands:

At the beginning of the 1980s, there were influences from ska and punk, bands such as Doe Maar and UB40. The music and lyrics came right from our heart. Members of H-Gang also played Latin-funk and rock and ska to keep up with the times. We wanted an identity of our own (Interview Roy).

The repertoire of the three units all reflected political engagement. The theatre group *Dengan Harapan* only played one piece: *Batu Badaun*. This play was inspired by the Moluccan folk tale *Batu Badaun* (see also the contribution by Rein Spoorman in this volume): a stone in the form of a leaf. The original story tells of a mother with two children who would not listen or obey her. Finally, the mother is so sad and disappointed that she goes off to the *Batu Badaun* and asks to be swallowed by it. *Dengan Harapan* used this folk tale, but imbued it with a new meaning, which

Image 14.1 Members of H-Gang and the Bintang Merah Choir at a private party, 1984 (Private collection author).

referred to their own recent past: that of their fathers being mobilized into the colonial army, transferred to the Netherlands and the problems they faced while surviving there:

Batu Badaun is a folk tale that can be interpreted in various ways. We wanted to do so from a political perspective. Due to colonialism, the father was taken from his home to serve in the colonial army. The family was torn apart and then, at some stage, the mother had nothing to live for any longer, her only option left was to go to the *Batu Badaun* asking to be swallowed (Interview Roy).

During the preparations for the play, the actors of *Dengan Harapan* were coached by two members who had professional careers as actors. They tried emphasizing the theatrical aspects of performance, whereas other members were more interested in sending a political message to the audience:

The others just wanted to play. Me, I wanted the message to get across. Such as the message about the colonial era, with families being torn apart and the forced migration of our parents to the Netherlands. We started with a piece of history and then added social problems. In my monologue, as a first-generation father and former soldier of the colonial army, I was talking about how beautiful the city of Amsterdam was, and that I noticed that there were many girls. I played it as if I did not notice I was in the Red Light district, that's the way I had to play it, and that I saw so many of our own people, Moluccans, especially in casinos. People laughed when I had my monologue because they recognized this situation; like, 'yes, you are right, most of them are in the casinos'. And when I started to talk about the Red Light district they would feel ashamed. We wrote the play together (Interview Roy).

The audience felt uneasy with the father-figure starting to talk about the Red Light district because the scene showed its hypocrisy: going there to gamble and look at the prostitutes while there were also Moluccan girls selling themselves there. This was felt to be unacceptable, as it was considered a slur on the reputation of Moluccans.

The language used in the play was mixed Dutch with Melaju Sini, referring to a form of Indonesian spoken by Moluccans in the Netherlands (Tahitu 1989). Thus, it was close to the way Moluccans would communicate with each other, but in such a way that the Dutch audience could follow the story.

The repertoire of H-Gang consisted of songs in Dutch, English and Melaju Sini. As mentioned, it all started with a song about unemployment. The lyrics of one of the first songs dealt with the issue of discrimination when looking for a job:

Later, lyrics referred to when you were a child you were a 'curly wurly', and when you grow older you became a knife fighter. That's how we experienced it in Zeeland. If you are grown up you don't get a job, then you are discriminated against (Interview Roy).

H-Gang's first song reflected on serious social problems within the Moluccan community of that time. Their songs also criticized the police and intelligence services. This was partly based on their own experiences with the police, but also on information that circulated within the Dutch social movement. In a song about the anti-riot squad (*ME*, short for '*Mobiele Eenheid*') H-Gang refers to rumours of the police watching porn movies before getting into action. Whether this was true or not, the social movement was convinced such things occurred in order to make the police more aggressive. H-Gang was certain about the unjust police behaviour towards demonstrators. The violent reaction to a demonstration by women in The Hague or the use of tear gas to suppress demonstrations at the nuclear plant in Dodewaard in 1980 and 1981 were seen as evidence of this. Another song dealt with the *Nederlandse Volks-Unie* (NVU), a 1980s right-wing nationalist party. In the 1980s, the upcoming right was one of the main drives for the social movement in the Netherlands to organize further. However, it was not merely politics, but also human behaviour they criticized. The lyrics of the song *Disco* dealt with the presumed emptiness of visitors of clubs and discos.³

If we look at the language H-Gang used in its lyrics, one can distinguish only two songs sung in Melaju Sini: *Buka mata sama sama* and *Realiteit*. Both of these songs contain messages addressing the Moluccan community. In *Buka mata sama sama* (Let's open our eyes together) H-Gang calls upon Moluccans in wealthy and prosperous Europe (*tanah senang Europa*) to choose sides with those oppressed under the regime of Suharto. This was the only one of H-Gang's songs to be officially released and it was included on the *Moluccan Moods* album of 1980. The song *Realiteit* (Reality), sung in Melaju Sini in spite of its Dutch title, deals with the dark side of Moluccan life in the Netherlands, with members of the community working in prostitution and the rampant use of hard drugs (heroin). Most other topics dealt with were aimed at a broader public. The unemployment of Moluccans, for example, could not be seen separately

³ In the 1970s and 1980s in most towns there was a strict separation between youngsters visiting discothèques and those visiting so-called 'brown café's' and youth centres. The latter were more into politics, the first were supposed to be just partying. H-Gang sung about what they deemed a necessity to get involved in politics.

from Dutch society; discrimination on the labour market was an inherent component of this. The attitude of the police to citizens was something that other Dutch people were also confronted with.

Realiteit, a song about heroin use, bemoaned the ostrich attitude of the Moluccan community. Its first section reads as follows:

<i>Aku djalan djalan di kota amsterdam deng kawan kawan</i>	I was walking in Amsterdam with friends
<i>Ketorang minum makan ketawa banjak omong katjo katjo</i>	We were drinking, eating and talking tough
<i>Satu bilang mari pi di jelanan lampu merah</i>	One said: let's go to the red light district
<i>Lihat lihat bikin lutju lutju kawan kawan bilang sebarang sadjah</i>	Just looking for fun the friends were just saying
<i>Djalan djalan di jelanan lanu lampu merah ketorang semua kagit</i>	Walking in the red light district we all were shocked
<i>Lihat perempuan Maluku berdiri djual badan</i>	Watching Moluccan girls standing selling themselves
<i>Lihat anak Maluku banjak datang di situ</i>	Watching so much Moluccans coming there
<i>Buat bli tjandu obat putih</i>	To buy drugs, heroin
<i>Bli tjandu obat putih</i>	Buy drugs, heroin
<i>Bli tjandu obat putih</i>	Buy drugs, heroin

Reflecting on this particular song, Roy again refers to the topic of illusion and shame in relation to the Red Light district:

Moluccans should have no illusions; we live in a hard world in which Moluccan girls even prostitute themselves. That was the song with *aku djalan djalan di Amsterdam*; it's also about heroin. The song has to do with the idea that we should not hide (from) ourselves. We should not have the illusion that Moluccan girls do not prostitute themselves. We had heard about that before and Njonkie (writer of the song; FS) saw it himself. So I said: we have to denounce that (Interview Roy).

With this song, H-Gang linked up with a broader initiative within the Moluccan community to fight the use of hard drugs in its circles. The reference to Moluccan girls working in the Red Light district, was just one of the stories with which to justify their work: it connected moral and social issues, such as drug abuse, and was a strong call for preserving a sense of community, by protecting what was considered most valuable,

its women (Steijlen 1984). At the beginning of the 1980s, several new Moluccan women's rights groups emerged. Contrary to already existing organizations, these new women's rights groups were oriented towards women's emancipation, with some of the initiators having had experience in Dutch women's rights organizations (Smeets and Steijlen 2006). H-Gang supported such developments by performing a song entitled *Toekomstig Molukse vrouw* (Prospective Moluccan woman). Whereas its title may suggest some form of paternalism, the song was meant as a tribute to politically active women. Roy mentioned it to be one of H-Gang's most important songs.

To conclude this brief analysis of the band's repertoire I will refer to two other songs dealing with politics on yet another level: *Toekomstdroom* (Dream for the future) and *Ibu Tien* (the nickname of the wife of former Indonesian President Suharto).⁴

Toekomstdroom addressed the big political issues of the 1980s: the threat posed by the nuclear bomb, the problem of nuclear waste, and Reaganism as representative of the on-going cold war politics. The song showed H-Gang's involvement in larger issues, beyond the scope of Moluccan society. *Toekomstdroom* was written especially for one of the many demonstrations against cruise missiles that took place in the Netherlands during the 1980s. The song *Ibu Tien* was written anticipating the 1982 Indonesian general elections. It tells of the corrupt wife of Suharto who was said to claim ten percent (*Tien*) of all the state's earnings. The lyrics wonder why she continues to steal and oppress, and they call for a revolution in the month of May, *Bulan Mai musti revolusi é*. *Ibu Tien* was part of the campaign of left-wing Moluccan organizations cooperating with Indonesian exiles as well as the solidarity movement with Indonesia in the Netherlands. The latter was lobbying against development aid and arms trade between the two countries.

⁴ A reviewer noted that in the 1970s the Indonesian band Bimbo released songs on comparable topics: *Tante Sun* and *Surat untuk Reagan dan Brezhnev*. There is no connection between the H-gang's repertory and the mentioned Bimbo songs though. Bimbo was not known in Moluccan left wing circles in the Netherlands. Thematically songs may show similarities but in practice they dealt with different issues. *Ibu Tien* is about revolution and president Sujarto's wife personified oppression; *Tante Sun* is a critic of the Indonesian elites. *Toekomstdroom* fits in the struggle against nuclear weapons being installed in Europe and is far removed from the call to presidents Reagan and Brezhnev of *Surat*, a song that overall shows more resemblance with Frankie goes to Hollywood's hit single *Two Tribes*.

The repertoire of the *Merantau* choir did not include many self-written songs, one exception being the Dutch language song *Politiseer Organiseer* (Politicize, Organize). This call to mobilize, and the use of words such as 'the people', 'organize' and 'mobilize', resonates with the prevailing left-wing jargon of that era. The song very much represented what the KMT stood for, as did another song written by one of its members in Indonesia, *Panggilan Rakyat* (Call the People). Most *Merantau* songs were Indonesian, but they also came from East Timor or from South Africa and were sung in those local languages. *Merantau* obtained many of these Indonesian and East Timorese songs from *Kollektif 20 Mai*, the other prominent choir of the *Pemuda 20 Mai* movement.

Yet another remarkable song bears the title *Sumpah Pemuda* (The Youth Pledge). It appears to be an overt reference to the *Sumpah Pemuda* of October 1928, when Indonesian youth declared to believe and fight for one (Indonesian) nation, one country and one language, Bahasa Indonesia. The *Sumpah Pemuda* is an important moment in the rise of Indonesian nationalism as it clearly signals the promise of a united state of Indonesia. That same unitary ideal is quite contrary to the separatist ideal of an independent South Moluccan Republic, which the RMS was fighting for. Roy of H-Gang and *Merantau*, thinks *Kollektif 20 Mai* obtained the song through their PKI contacts: 'I think it was sung by the PKI, or maybe a student organization'.

Merantau participated in a wider network of choirs. One of them was the Amsterdam ANC choir. Through these contacts, they also came into contact with James Madhlope Phillips (1919–1987). Phillips was an African activist who, in 1950, had taken refuge in England. In 1980, he started to train choirs in, among others, Germany, Belgium, Sweden, and the Netherlands, performing South African liberation songs.⁵

Performing

H-Gang performed at important Dutch pop venues including Doornroosje, O'42 and the Vereeniging in the University City of Nijmegen, but also at the famous Melkweg Venue in Amsterdam. In the Melkweg, H-Gang won a 'battle of bands', each representing one of the provinces of the Netherlands. Roy recollects with some pride how they had won that contest,

⁵ [www.anc.org.za/people/jmphilips\(anc\).html](http://www.anc.org.za/people/jmphilips(anc).html) (checked June 2010).

Image 14.2 The Merantau Choir at the Conference Handel in Onderdrukking ('Trade in Oppression'), 1982 (Private collection author).

even while competing with far more professional bands: 'we participated in *Pop from the Province*. We were the only non-commercial band and still won the contest'.

H-Gang and *Merantau* also performed at political rallies, such as May Day (the International Workers' Day of the 1st of May), a day of action by trade unions. The song *Toekomstdroom*, which protests against the Neutron bomb, was even performed at the Amsterdam's central Dam Square stage during a large anti-cruise missile demonstration on the 21st of November 1981 (with some 400,000 people attending this demonstration). Preceding this huge national demonstration, smaller manifestations were organized at a more local level all over the country. H-Gang played at some of these in Zeeland. Due to their contacts with the local Communist party, the band was also invited to perform in Amsterdam. This was novel for two reasons: In those days, there were not yet many members of ethnic minorities participating in this kind of political action. It was a particularly new thing for Moluccans to do, as it showed concern for interests beyond the RMS. Roy: 'H-Gang said: the Bomb does not choose colours, if it drops it falls for everybody and in *everybody's* backyard'. Also with *Merantau*, KMT reached a more general Dutch audience when performing on Dutch national television with James Phillips. 'We always explained what we were singing about. For the Television performance James said: we just sing "Africa"'.

Best-known is their performance at the *Moluccan Moods* program in the famous Amsterdam Paradiso concert hall. In 1982, a programme began (see Spoorman's contribution to this volume), with Moluccan bands from all over the country performing at the Paradiso every month. It was a huge success, and Moluccan Moods continued over several years (other ethnic programming in Paradiso lasted for a maximum of one year). In 1984, *Moluccan Moods* was halted for a year and then re-launched to include talk shows and other cultural expressions. An album was also released, comprising the ten most popular bands and their songs, including H-Gang's *Buka mata sama sama*.⁶

Although performances for a Dutch audience were becoming important, solidarity with their kin in Indonesia (as an alternative to the RMS ideal) continued to be expressed towards their own people. The band and

⁶ The Moluccan Moods album was pirated in Indonesia and released on cassette. Two songs from the original album were not included. One sung in Dutch by Perlawanan and the political motivated song *Buka mata sama sama* by H-Gang.

choir also performed at different Moluccan occasions. Gigs in Moluccan wards were important as not all Moluccan wards were equally enthusiastic about the RMS ideal. Obviously, pro-RMS wards were most difficult to play. 'The message was important and that's what we could do in Bemmél, being a pro-RMS ward'.

Asked to name the most memorable performance Roy does not mention a gig in a Moluccan ward, but rather a performance at the Groningen Grand Theatre in April 1982. It was during a symposium on the upcoming elections in Indonesia. It was for this occasion that the song *Ibu Tien* was written. 'It was the most important performance, because it included all; it was about politics and even Basuki Resobowo (an Indonesian painter living in exile) was dancing to our music'.

Two months later, H-Gang and *Merantau* performed at a conference against the arms trade between the Netherlands and Indonesia, an event organized by the Solidarity Movement with Indonesia. H-Gang's respect for political exile Resobowo turned out to be mutual here, as is described by I. Jungsleger in the Dutch national daily *De Volkskrant* in 1982:

I asked an old man if he happened to be the father of one of the members of the Zeeland collective. No, he is the painter Basuki Resobowo, who lives in the Netherlands as a political exile. The band is proud that Basuki Resobowo appears at the same event as they do. Resobowo about them: I love what these boys do, because it comes from a new spirit. They are the children of the RMS, but they bring a new ideal.⁷

It was not only the Indonesian exile who praised H-Gang and KMT for their new approach. Sam Pormes of the Moluccan Schooling Kollektif in Assen, and responsible for the April meeting in Groningen, voiced a similar enthusiasm:

What this band brings is a culture of struggle. At last there is a Moluccan band with success but without being tardy. *Massada* (a well-known Moluccan band) and other Moluccan musicians, they don't really deal with their own culture. This group from Zeeland does. It is not for nothing that we invited them to our own meeting last April, anticipating the elections in Indonesia. By inviting H-Gang, one shows how to abandon traditional positions.⁸

⁷ I. Jungsleger, 'Een Molukse popgroep die succes heeft zonder hoerig te zijn', *de Volkskrant*, 11 June 1982.

⁸ In: Jungsleger, 'Een Molukse popgroep die succes heeft zonder hoerig te zijn', *de Volkskrant*, 11 June 1982.

Image 14.3 Singing the socialist 'Internationale' anthem at the Free University, Amsterdam 1980 (Private collection author).

Looking Back

In more than one respect, the *Kollektief Muziek Theater* – consisting of H-Gang, *Merantau* and *Dengan Harapan* – was a child of its time. Political theatre and using a choir to sing explicit political messages was the way to do it in the 1970s and 1980s. Asked for what inspired them, Roy cannot think of something specific. ‘We did our thing and other people liked it, that’s enough of an inspiration’. Undoubtedly, the members of the KMT were influenced by the movements of their time, such as *Amandla*, which toured the world with theatre and songs in their struggle against apartheid. But there were many choirs singing such songs of freedom and it was an important means for social movements to reach a broader audience.

The mere fact that KMT did what it did at the beginning of the 1980s signifies that they were ahead of the majority within the Moluccan community. This period proved to be transitional, with Moluccans restyling themselves from exiles into migrants. With socially inspired songs about problems and politics in the Netherlands, H-Gang showed that they were already focussing on their new motherland. Expressing concerns about the N-bomb also demonstrated a wider orientation and that they were part of a broader global movement. Their concern with the Indonesian situation, expressed in songs such as *Ibu Tien*, but also songs referring to Indonesian history such as *Sumpah Pemuda*, emphasizes their non-RMS and liberal interpretation of history. It made them part of another Indonesian tradition, not always shared by fellow Moluccans; a tradition of leftism and Indonesian nationalism.

Their support for the anti-apartheid struggle is also significant. It manifested itself in the performing of South African liberation songs and, specifically, their participation in the choir project of James Phillips. Allying with others, rather than putting their own struggle in first place, reflected their political journey. Thus, they joined *Venceremos* and supported the East Timorese Fretilin. Members of KMT were part of the vivid solidarity movement of that era. This was unique, as most of these movements were rarely multiethnic in character. Ultimately, the meaning of H-Gang’s songs has to be interpreted in the context of particular historical circumstances.

Today, listening to some of H-Gang’s songs on YouTube, one becomes nostalgic for the 1980s. It reminds the listener of those exciting years and the big changes within the Moluccan community, but also of the engagement and political activism of movements that fought discrimination,

police violence or the threat posed by the N-bomb. Songs and lyrics may help us understand what happened in those years. Roy had a special experience recalling the East Timorese songs he sang with the *Merantau* choir. Former members of the *Pemuda 20 Mai* (the organization has been dismantled since 1987) are still involved with the East Timorese cause. Some of them, involved in development aid, even visit East Timor regularly since it gained its independence from Indonesia in 2001; something made possible by Suharto's resignation. Roy joined one of these trips and when they sat down with some East Timorese youngsters they started to talk about the meaning of the song *Ina ne Ama ne*.

Ina ne Ama ne means something like: father and mother, wake up! The chickens are busy again pecking everything. The chickens of course were the Indonesians taking all. We were on our way to Pasabe and stopped and talked about the song. Then they explained to us the contents of the song. And we talked about the other songs as they asked: how do you come to know these songs? So we said, in the early days we used to sing these because we stood up for East Timor. Then somebody said, they are comrades from the Netherlands, they helped radio Maubere. They are Fretilin from the Netherlands (Interview Roy).

Thus, recollecting musical memories not only framed a common history but also forged a connection between the Moluccan KMT and the East Timorese.

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