CHAPTER FOURTEEN

KOLLEKTIEF MUZIEK THEATER’S REPOSITIONING OF MOLUCCAN ISSUES

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Introduction

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 Today, listening to its performances one cannot help but feeling it is outdated.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.

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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.

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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). 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

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