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The Exodus of KNIL Soldiers from Maluku to the Netherlands in 1950s

ABSTRACT: The transition of power on 27 December 1949, resulted in a conflict between pro-Indonesian and pro-Dutch forces, namely the KNIL (Koninklijke Nederlands Indische Leger or the Royal Netherlands Indies Army). The group that was pro-Dutch, chose to exodus to the Netherlands. The research method used is historiography, the Author conducted interviews with ex-KNIL families in the second and third generations, interviews were conducted in the Netherlands. Researcher also conduct document and library research. Respondents of this study were the second and third generation of ex-KNIL families from Maluku who lived in the Netherlands since 1950s. The second and third generations of the Ex-KNIL family, see Indonesia as their ancestral land but they do not have the emotional ties as strong as the first generation. RMS (Republik Maluku Selatan or South Maluku Republic) for them is just their old man's dream in the past, unrealistic for now. The love of the Maluku people for their country is manifested by helping the government in carrying out various positive activities. In Indonesia, they help develop health, education, and agriculture. Hopefully the dark story of RMS in the past will be a memory and lesson for current and future generations.

KEY WORDS: Exodus; KNIL Soldier; Maluku, Indonesia; Netherlands.

INTRODUCTION

On 27 December 1949, *de jure* Indonesia was recognized by the international community as an independent country, with a temporary constitution. The Dutch colonial power, which ruled for a long time, created social groups that felt privileged and special. One group was worried about the transfer of power. They were Indonesian indigenous military communities serving in the Dutch Royal Army, namely the

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Dutch KNIL or *Koninklijke Nederlands Indische Leger* (Wibisono, 2008; Budiardjo, 2014:432; and Kadir, 2015).

KNIL soldiers in Indonesia came from various tribes: Javanese, Sundanese, Makassar, Minahasa, and Maluku. In this context, Maluku tribe, who were Protestant Christians, became the KNIL soldiers. Various rebellions in the Dutch East Indies region, led to the Dutch Government forming the KNIL, whose soldiers came from indigenous citizens, so it was more efficient in terms of budget, compared to lifting troops from Europe. KNIL who came from the army of Indonesian officers, their salaries were much lower than KNIL soldiers of Netherlands.

During the Indonesian revolution and war, 1945-1949, the Dutch government directed 220,000 militaries, of these around 160,000 of whom were Dutch and the remaining 60,000 were KNIL soldiers, indigenous recruits came from various ethnicities, especially Ambon in Maluku, Minahasa in North Sulawesi, Javanese, and so on. Of the 160,000 Dutch soldiers, about 100,000 soldiers were conscripted, 50,000 were volunteers for war, and only 1,000 were professional soldiers. In terms of age, the conscripted soldiers and volunteers were on average young people in their 20s, most of whom have never even received military training and experience far from their birthplace (Gert, 2016).

After the transfer of sovereignty from the Netherlands to Indonesia, on 27 December 1949, the KNIL Army became an economic burden for the Dutch government; the number of KNIL soldiers at that time was around 60,000. The indigenous KNIL army was in a dilemma, because according to the results of the Round Table Conference or KMB (*Konferensi Meja Bundar*)'s negotiations, the Indonesian indigenous KNIL Army will join to APRIS (*Angkatan Perang Republik Indonesia Serikat* or the United States of Indonesia Republic Armed Forces). Many of the KNIL soldiers were worried about their future joining APRIS. One of the rebellions carried out by the KNIL Army was the Andi Aziz rebellion in Makassar, South Sulawesi, in 1950, who refused to attend APRIS troops in Makassar (Clancy, 1992; Bustan, 2017:37; and Eddyono *et al.*, 2017).

This paper is the result of research that discusses political changes in Indonesia after the Dutch recognition of Indonesian sovereignty on 27 December 1949. KNIL soldiers, who came from indigenous of Maluku islands, were in a dilemma, when they were not allowed to return to Maluku, due to the RMS (*Republik Maluku Selatan* or South Maluku Republic)'s rebellion in Maluku islands.

KNIL soldiers from Maluku were forced to follow the policy of the Dutch government to be dispatched to the Netherlands, they wanted to be evacuated to the Netherlands, because the Dutch government promised

to return them to Maluku, after political conditions allowed. The refugees to the Netherlands were temporary.

METHOD

This research method is historiography. Sources of information can be obtained from literature research and interviews. With the help of the Indonesian Embassy in the Netherlands, Researcher conducted interviews with families of KNIL (*Koninklijke Nederlands Indische Leger* or the Royal Netherlands Indies Army) members in the Netherlands. After this, the Researcher conducted a comparison and analysis of the data sources obtained (Zed, 2008; Sjamsuddin, 2012; and Kuntowijoyo, 2013:63).

Respondents of this study were the second and third generation of ex-KNIL families from Maluku, who lived in the Netherlands since 1950s. Interviews were conducted in the Hague, the Netherlands, on 12 and 15 December 2019 and at the *Keratoan* (Palace) Sultanate of Ternate on 15 March 2020 (Haryanto, 2011; Sjamsuddin, 2012; and Rojabi, 2019).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The transfer of power from the Dutch government to the Indonesian government, through the KMB (*Konferensi Meja Bundar* or Round Table Conference) held in the Hague on 27 December 1949, resulted in several agreements, among others, the merger of ex-KNIL (*Koninklijke Nederlands Indische Leger* or the Royal Netherlands Indies Army) soldiers into APRIS (*Angkatan Perang Republik Indonesia Serikat* or the United States of Indonesia Republic Armed Forces). This was a decision that was not easy to implement, considering KNIL and APRIS during the first Dutch Military Aggression, on 21 July 1947, and the second Dutch Military Aggression, on 19 December 1948, engaged in open warfare. In the Dutch Military Aggression, KNIL members who came from indigenous Indonesians, generally, rejected the Dutch while the TNI (*Tentara Nasional Indonesia* or Indonesian National Military) for Indonesian independence struggle, 1945-1950 (Crouch, 1988; Ricklefs, 2005; and Fatgehipon, 2017).

Many of the KNIL soldiers chose to join APRIS, especially those from Java, Minahasa in North Sulawesi, and Sumatera, but many also refused to join APRIS, especially those from Maluku island. This was because, firstly, their loyalty to the Dutch government very high, both of them were consumed by provocation from RMS (*Republik Maluku Selatan* or South Maluku Republic)'s propaganda as if the Indonesian government, APRIS, was dominated by Javanese and Islamic powers (Smeets & Veenman, 2000; Ricklefs, 2005; and Stott, 2017).

The RIS (*Republik Indonesia Serikat* or United States of Indonesian Republic)'s government issued Emergency Law No.4/1950, which opened the opportunity for the KNIL Army to join the APRIS. There were 18,750 KNIL soldiers, who chose to join APRIS; meanwhile 3,250 were evacuated to the Netherlands (Crouch, 1988; Ricklefs, 2005; and Aditian & Kuswono, 2017).

The important agreement of the KMB was the RIS which consisted of the RI (*Republik Indonesia* or Republic of Indonesia), the NIT (*Negara Indonesia Timur* or State of East Indonesia), the NP (*Negara Pasundan* or Pasundan State) in West Java, the NJT (*Negara Jawa Timur* or East Java State), the NM (*Negara Madura* or Madura State), the NST (*Negara Sumatera Timur* or East Sumatra State), and the NSS (*Negara Sumatera Selatan* or South Sumatra State). Located at *Sitihinggil Kraton* (Main Palace) of Yogyakarta, Ir. Sukarno was inaugurated as President of RIS on 17 December 1949 (Ricklefs, 2005; Kahin, 2013; and Sari, 2015).

During the passage of time, the states merged one by one into the Republic of Indonesia, on 21 April 1950, the President of NIT, Sukowati, announced that he would join the Republic of Indonesia. The joining of NIT with NKRI (*Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia* or Unitary States of the Republic of Indonesia) led to rejection from NIT officials. Dr. C.R.S. Soumokil, who was then serving on 5 April 1950, mobilized the KNIL rebellion in Makassar led by Andi Aziz, who was a KNIL officer (Leirissa *et al.*, 1993; Denny, 2017:18; and Stott, 2017).

After mobilizing the KNIL rebellion in Makasar, South Sulawesi, Dr. C.R.S. Soumokil went to Ambon, moving the declaration of the establishment of the RMS (*Republik Maluku Selatan* or Republic of South Maluku), on 25 April 1950. The RMS rebellion was difficult to overcome, because the RMS troops were KNIL soldiers, who were highly trained in modern and guerrilla warfare (Hadimadja, 1988; Leirissa *et al.*, 1993; and Conboy, 2003).

In the 1950s decade, with the emergence of several regional rebellions demanding independence, such as Maluku, South Sulawesi, West Sumatra, and Aceh. Regional rebellions consume a lot of energy from the central government (Leirissa, 1991; Leirissa *et al.*, 1993; Ricklefs, 2005; Syamsuddin, 2005:29; and Harvey, 2009).

The rebellion of the RMS in Maluku, causing the return of the KNIL troops to their native Maluku, before the dissolution of the KNIL, on 26 July 1950, was hampered. The President of RIS (*Republik Indonesia Serikat* or United States of Indonesian Republic), Ir. Sukarno, did not allow the Dutch government to return approximately four thousand KNIL soldiers from Maluku to their hometowns, because they would help the

KNIL forces who had joined the RMS.

KNIL soldiers were considered to have qualified military capabilities, because they experience modern military education. Besides that, KNIL also had a good organizational spirit, because they were quite solid within the KNIL organization itself (Matanasi, 2011; Abin, 2016; and Atno, 2018:13).

In resolving the above problems, the Dutch Government chose to bring the KNIL Army with their family to the Netherlands for a while, waiting for political developments in Indonesia. KNIL members were only in the groin bringing their wives and two children.

In March and April 1951, as many as 12,500 Ambonese, consisting of 3,578 soldiers and 8,500 families were brought to the Netherlands. Now, it was estimated that there were 40,000 Moluccans in the Netherlands, some of whom were repatriated to return to their home countries. Many had chosen to stay in Indonesia. The journey by ship to the Netherlands took more than a month. The *Kota Inten* Ship, the first ship carrying KNIL Members and Families, arrived at the Port of Rotterdam on 21 March 1951 (Kotarumalos, 2010:129).

Ex KNIL Family Life in the Netherlands. The exodus of the ex-KNIL (*Koninklijke Nederlands Indische Leger* or the Royal Netherlands Indies Army)'s family in the Netherlands was a choice for the dilemma experienced by ex-KNIL, even though they had served and defended the Dutch national interests in the colony, but they did not imagine living in the Netherlands.

From the cultural aspect, the people of Maluku have a strong connection with their homeland; and from various Maluku poetry, they always describe their longing for their hometown. The kinship of the Maluku people is very broad, not only from the nuclear family, but also with clans; and also across regions that have cultural ties, known as the *Pela Gandong* ties (Horvatic, 1993; Rozema, 2018; and Matitaputty & Masinay, 2020).

Although the majority of ex-KNIL families have theological similarities with the majority of the Dutch people who are Protestant, they have different cultural and social aspects. This is what causes many ex-KNIL families, especially the first generation, who cannot adapt and some choose to return to the land, their birth Maluku, after several years living in the Netherlands.

Of the approximately 12,500 Moluccan immigrants, who arrived in the Netherlands in 1951, the majority of them were low-ranking soldiers in the KNIL. Of the total number of KNIL soldiers, there were 300 Westerling's Red and Green Beret soldiers, who were notorious for massacring the people of South Sulawesi during the period 1946-1947. They arrived

with a family that was mostly Christian. Most of these soldiers were pariah, with low educational background, who spoke very limited Dutch (Chauvel, 1990; Hatib, 2012:28; and Rozema, 2018).

The ex-KNIL Muslim family lives in the Westerbok area (Drenthe Province). Muslim identity is still adhered to by using a cap as a dress style. Despite their religious differences, the relationship between Muslims and Christians is still bound in one *Pela*. These *Pela* ties make Maluku Muslim and Christian relations much better than their relations with Maluku people (Horvatic, 1993; Leirissa *et al.*, 1993; and Rozema, 2018).

The ex-KNIL family, originating from the Maluku landmarks, has a communication gap with the Ex-KNIL family from South Maluku, such as Ambon, Seram, and Saparua, due to factors of religious differences. Southeast Maluku, the majority are Catholic and have cultural differences with South Maluku. Ex KNIL Maluku landmarks and North Maluku did not support the RMS (*Republik Maluku Selatan* or Republic of South Maluku)'s rebellion, in contrast to the South Maluku KNIL family mostly supported the KNIL rebellion.

Of the four second and third generation ex-KNIL family informants, all told of the disappointment their parents felt when they arrived in the Netherlands. The former KNIL family did not expect that the struggle they were doing in defending the Kingdom of the Netherlands, to the point of having to fight with their own nation, was not appreciated by the Dutch government. The former KNIL family felt they were treated as second-class citizens, not as a Hero family who had contributed to defending the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

After members of the KNIL Army and their families arrived at the Port of Rutterdam, the Dutch Government read out a Decree on Dismissal of the Royal Netherlands Army, so that their rights and facilities as Dutch royal soldiers did not get. The Kingdom of the Netherlands did not want the KNIL Army to become an economic burden for the Dutch kingdom, so they were dismissed from service so that the government did not pay official salaries as soldiers of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

After the transfer of sovereignty, the KNIL soldiers no longer had any beneficial value for the Kingdom of the Netherlands. They were treated as refugees, placed in a concentration camp for Jews before being sent to the NAZI (*Nationalsozialismus* or Sosialism National) slaughter concentration camp in Auschwitz, Poland, when NAZI Germany was in power (*cf* Chauvel, 1990; Zucker, 2001; and Rozema, 2018).

The second generation tells that when they were little they often found remains, teeth, skulls, victims of the murder of NAZI Germany soldiers. The ex-KNIL family was in isolation, so that they cannot mix with the

outside world, makes them very isolated in social life. Until 1956, they got to eat for free in this public kitchens like refugees.

The soldiers and the KNIL family suffered greatly, when it entered winter, many died in winter, because they did not have clothes and equipment in winter. Generally, ex-KNIL and their family in the first generation wanted to return to Maluku, because they could not adjust to social and cultural conditions.

Depressed economic and social conditions and being treated unfairly became one of the triggers for acts of terrorism committed by Maluku residents in the Netherlands. Attack on Wisma Indonesia, on 31 August 1970; occupation of the Indonesian Consulate General in Amsterdam, on 4 December 1975; terrorism occurred on 2 December 1975; and RMS supporters in the Netherlands held a train hostage for 13 days, took hostages for teachers and students who served at the school in Bovensmilde at 105, on 23 April 1977.

The second generation of the former KNIL Army family can speak Ambon Malay and Ternate well, even though the Malay language they use is the Malay language of the past, creating the third and fourth generally cannot speak Malay, this is due to creating the three social interactions. They are already open to the outside world, they are educated, work in various fields, most of them are also married to Dutch citizens.

The interviews were conducted with the descendants of the KNIL, created the second were Muslims. Their *Marga* (Clan) were Kaplale, came from Sirisori Islam, Saparua. Their fathers became a KNIL soldiers, who joined Raymond Westerling's troops, their fathers participated in the APRA rebellion in Bandung, they often used the Island with pride on how the Westerling Army carried out actions in West Java.¹

The interview was also conducted with Anis Senen, the Second Generation of the KNIL Army family. His father became a KNIL Army, because he followed the orders of the Sultan of Ternate. His father was a Soldier of the Sultanate of Ternate. At that time, the Sultanate of Ternate had a good relationship with the Dutch East Indies Government. Even though they were born and lived in the Netherlands, the kinship relationship with the Sultanate of Ternate was well established, they often used the Ternate *Legu Gam* Sultanate event. Anis Senen was crowned *Kapitan* or Customary Leader of the Sultanate of Ternate in the Netherlands.²

¹Interviews with Respondents, who are Ex-KNIL Family Members (*Koninklijke Nederlands Indische Leger* or the Royal Netherlands Indies Army) from Maluku from the second and third generations, who have lived in the Netherlands since 1950. Interviews were conducted in The Hague, Netherlands, on 12 and 15 December 2019; and at the *Keratoan* (Palace) of the Sultanate of Ternate in North Maluku, on 15 March 2020.

²See also, for example, Interview with Anis Senen, a Second Generation of the KNIL (*Koninklijke Nederlands*

The ex-KNIL family has different political choices. The ex-KNIL family who came from North Maluku supported the NKRI (*Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia* or Unitary States of the Republic of Indonesia) government, and were not involved in supporting the RMS movement, as well as from Southeast Maluku. According to Anis Senen, their loyalty to the Indonesian government is inseparable from the direction of the 48th Sultan of Ternate, Mudaffar Sjah, who asked the ex-KNIL family from North Maluku, who were indigenous members of the Sultanate of Ternate to support the Indonesian government in facing terror and demonstrations from RMS sympathizers in the Netherlands (Aditian & Kuswono, 2017; Rozema, 2018; and *ibidem* with footnote 2).

Anis Senen was a security staff member of the Indonesian Embassy in the Netherlands. The Government of Indonesia appointed security staff from the Indonesian Embassy, who came from Maluku, who were also pro-Indonesian, considering that there were still frequent demonstrations and terror committed by RMS sympathizers in the Netherlands. To face the demonstration from the people of Maluku, a cultural approach was used, where those who faced the demonstrations were fellow Moluccans (*ibidem* with footnote 2).

Anis Senen explained that in the Netherlands demonstrations were protected by law. The government cannot prohibit demonstrations, Moluccans often hold demonstrations in front of the Indonesian Embassy, and the content of their demonstrations often said that those who were pro against Indonesia were pro against Javanese power. Javanese power has been arrested, due to colonized their homeland in Maluku (*ibidem* with footnote 2).

My interview with Edward, who was the third generation of ex-KNIL family descendants, explained that the third and fourth generation of Maluku youths, many of whom do not have an emotional connection with their grandfather's homeland, they already feel Dutch, even though they are racially not white. The third generation is busy with work and they don't care about political issues like RMS. RMS for them is a story from the past, they think now how to keep them competitive in work and have a good life.³

The third and fourth generation of the Netherlands, the mindset is very much influenced by the mindset of the European society which is a modern industrial society. This makes young people of Maluku descent

Indische Leger or the Royal Netherlands Indies Army's Family at the *Keratoan* (Palace) of the Sultanate of Ternate in North Maluku, on 15 March 2020.

³Interview with Edward, a Third Generation of Ex-KNIL (*Koninklijke Nederlands Indische Leger* or the Royal Netherlands Indies Army's Family Descendant, in The Hague, Netherlands, on 12 December 2019.

more individual. The concept of family kinship is different between them and their parents who are heavily influenced by Maluku culture (Adition & Kuswono, 2017; Rozema, 2018; and *ibidem* with footnote 3).

The history of the European (Dutch) family is gradually getting smaller, starting from the clan in the middle ages, at the beginning of the Middle Ages (in the sense of the extended family group) to the root family in modern times, to turning into the nuclear family which is characteristic of society industry (Burke, 2001:78; Arblaster, 2006; and Wielenga, 2015).

Andres, the third generation of ex-KNIL family from North Maluku, explained that he sometimes feels sad because in the Netherlands, he is often said to be Indonesian, but when he returns to his parents' village, Tobelo, North Maluku, Maluku people always say that he is Dutch; so, he feels loss of identity and recognition.⁴

Interview with the Chairman of the Indonesian Diaspora Network in the Netherlands, Ebed Litaay, explained that Maluku residents in the Netherlands still feel part of Indonesia; their souls are still red and white, and they play a role in helping development in the health sector with the NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations), such as *Desa Emas* (Gold Village), together with their diaspora friends in the Netherlands assisted the government in improving health services, in the regions of Lampung in Southern Sumatera, Semarang in Central Java, and Riau in Sumatera. Ebed Litaay also said that:

We also work together with the West Java government in developing agriculture. We want to build Indonesia together, even though Indonesia is far away from the eyes, but very close to our hearts.⁵

The ex-KNIL family's perception of Indonesia has changed a lot, many of them criticize poor public services in Indonesia, health services, education, poverty of the population, especially in Maluku Province. Their criticism is a manifestation of their love for the Maluku ancestral country. The RMS (*Republik Maluku Selatan* or Republic of South Maluku)'s movement has no place in the hearts of young people of Maluku descent, they think more realistically and rationally (Adition & Kuswono, 2017; Rozema, 2018; and *ibidem* with footnote 5).

The RMS for them is only a memory story of their parents in the past, many of them feel called to help development in Indonesia, development in the fields of health, education, and agriculture. Many of the KNIL families

⁴Interview with Andres, a Third Generation of Ex-KNIL (*Koninklijke Nederlands Indische Leger* or the Royal Netherlands Indies Army)'s Family from North Maluku, in The Hague, Netherlands, on 15 December 2019.

⁵Interview with Ebed Litaay, a Chairman of the Indonesian Diaspora Network in the Netherlands, in The Hague, Netherlands, on 15 December 2019.

have been successful, not only in sports and art, but also education and business (Chauvel, 1990; Leirissa *et al.*, 1993; Aditian & Kuswono, 2017; Rozema, 2018; and *ibidem* with footnote 5).

CONCLUSION

Dutch colonialism in Indonesia brought many sad stories, violations of human values. Even though ex-KNIL (*Koninklijke Nederlands Indische Leger* or the Royal Netherlands Indies Army) served the Kingdom of the Netherlands, but there was no desire for them to live in the Netherlands, they memhe has a very high love for his ancestral country Maluku.

Colonialism in Indonesia not only gave birth to wars between Indonesia and foreign nations, but wars between fellow children of the nation, with the politics of *devide at impera* (divided and ruled), making fellow nationals kill each other. The love of the Maluku people for their country is manifested by helping the government in carrying out various positive activities.

In Indonesia, they help develop health, education, and agriculture. Hopefully the dark story of RMS in the past will be a memory and lesson for current and future generations.⁶

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⁶**Statement:** It is the true result of my research, not a plagiarism, and it has not been published in other journals. Thus, my statement, which I can accounted before the law, thank you for your cooperation.

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