

# THE UNSTABILITY OF LOCAL POLITICAL FLOW IN MALUKU: PROCLAMATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH MALUKU

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**Submission date:** 27-Oct-2021 05:48AM (UTC+0700)

**Submission ID:** 1685037674

**File name:** Pa\_John\_Ruhulessin\_4-Artikel\_Q2.pdf (227.37K)

**Word count:** 5007

**Character count:** 25909

## THE UNSTABILITY OF LOCAL POLITICAL FLOW IN MALUKU: PROCLAMATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH MALUKU

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Received: 27.06.2020

### ABSTRACT

The outbreak of the Republic of South Maluku, April 25, 1950, would not be understood without understanding the social-political processes and dynamics in society, prior to the outbreak of the revolution. The political situation at that time was exacerbated by the insistence of federalist political actors who did not want the formation of a unitary Indonesian state. At the same time, new participants emerged in the political battle arena, as in the increasing number of soldiers returning to Ambon to wait for a decision on their future to be decided in Den Haag, through the Round Table Conference (KMB). Together with the police, the soldiers began to take an interest in political matters and became more involved with the separatists, which was the Nine Serangkai Movement/the Great East Party. Their strong political opponent in Maluku was the Free Indonesia Party, with the figures Pupella and Wim Rewaru. The struggles of politicians at the local level were also influenced by conditions in Makassar, which at that time became the center of the State of East Indonesia (NIT). When the NIT could no longer fulfill the political interests of the federalists who did not want the formation of a unitary state, they began to choose the path to make Maluku an independent and sovereign state. The situation and process of the proclamation of the Republic of South Maluku (RMS), as well as its influence on political stability in Maluku will be discussed as the objective of this paper.

**Keywords:** Local Politics, RMS, NIT.

### 1 INTRODUCTION

After the transfer of Indonesian sovereignty from the Dutch government to the government of the Republic of Indonesia, some members of the KNIL Ambon wanted to return to society, which was Central Maluku. After arriving in Ambon, the facts showed that there was tremendous chaos, among the *baret* and the KNIL. This situation was put to the best possible use of separatist politicians. It was in this chaos that the "RMS" was proclaimed in Ambon, the process of which began on 24 April 1950 (Leirissa, 1978).

According to Wairissal, at that time there was a disagreement between *baret* and KNIL in Ambon. KNIL's attitude was different from that of *baret*, because KNIL wanted to switch to APRIS. In this atmosphere of conflict, Soumokil arrived in Ambon on 16 April 1950 with propaganda to separate Maluku from RIS and NIT. KNIL members were influenced by the circumstances at that time, so that their stance was uncertain and became confused. For Tahya and Manuhuttu, if Jakarta took over 350 KNIL who were in Ambon, maybe

there would be no RMS proclamation (van Kaam, 1977).

Two days after Soumokil arrived in Ambon, Ir. J. Manusama, as a Maluku federalist political figure, held a rally on April 18, 1950 to inform the people about the struggle between unitary and federalism; and to demonstrate Ambon's support for the NIT government, which was at a critical stage in the last negotiations with Jakarta, after Andi Aziz' failed attempt to seize power (Chauvel, 1983). In his speech which lasted for one hour, Manusama ignited the spirit of the people to maintain federalism (Chauvel, 1983). After the meeting, Manusama sent a telegram to Makassar urging the government to maintain federalism (NIT), and if necessary proclaimed a separate, independent republic (Chauvel, 1990).

Perhaps one might think that the "grand meeting" and the sending of the telegram from Ambon to Makassar by Manusama meant nothing. However, in the author's opinion, the Manusama political maneuver was an important starting point in the effort to mobilize political power around the idea that the "republic" should be defended, and that politically it had won the support of a number of Kings who were GSS/PTB leaders or figures. For Manusama, President Soekawati's proclamation was not the end of his political efforts. Two days after, on 23 April 1950, a meeting was held by Manusama in Tulehu, a Muslim village. So on 23 and 24 April 1950 there were a series of important meetings which in turn led to the proclamation of the RMS by the Regional Head, Manuhutu, 24 April 1950.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### RMS Proclamation

In the lead-up to the proclamation of the RMS, there were meetings that resulted in controversial views among the meeting participants, between Manusama versus

Manuhutu, Wairisal; also controversy among the Manusama – Soumokil group and friends themselves. Especially it was regarding the process of making the proclamation decision itself. For Manusama and his friends, the proclamation was seen as an expression of the freedom of the people of South Maluku, while Manuhutu constitutionally maintained that he proclaimed the RMS under intense pressure from the soldiers.

Manusama explained: "On April 22nd, King Ohorella of the Muslim land of Tulehu met me and said that all your efforts were going well at the meeting on 18 April. But now that the NIT is over, what are you going to do next? " Manusama said: "I will not do anything if no one wants to help me ..., only in that general meeting I emphasized that to defend federalism... heard that the King of Tulehu proposed to hold a meeting in Tulehu, bringing together representatives from the military, police, and civil servants/citizens (van Kaam, 1977). Regarding the meeting itself, Ohorella said that:

"Sunday 23 April 1950 Soumokil, Manusama, (Alex) Nanlohy and about 30 leaders, KNIL and police, came to Tulehu. They discussed how it was decided that Manuhutu and other members of the DMS executive be brought from their homes to Batugaja (the Kepala Daerah Office) and ordered to make decisions about their demands. Later in the day they allocated soldiers, two for every executive member, to bring them to Batugajah" (Chauvel, 1990).

Furthermore, in relation to the meeting, Manusama stated that:

"...The meeting was to discuss and hear about the situation in South Maluku. The only solution thought of at that time was the 'separation' of

Ambon's existence, where freedom and human values were respected and defended. The meeting decided to present the executive leader of the DMS and on the same day withdrew from NIT and RIS and proclaimed self-determination" (van Kaam, 1977).

After the Tulehu meeting, a follow-up meeting took place in Ambon on the 23rd afternoon. Manuhutu viewed:

"...Soumokil's request for me was to proclaim an independent, free and sovereign RMS, separated from NIT and RIS. I asked Soumokil: can you do this? Soumokil said he could. I asked Soumokil on what basis all this had to happen. Soumokil replied: on 2 decisions from the KMB ... then I said to Soumokil and the audience that it was only a state, not a region within a state. Therefore, this was not possible. But Soumokil further stated that if one region did this it was natural. I then said that I would not do this, because I was not a dictator, I was only the regional head and chairman of the South Maluku council. I had to ask DMS opinion. Soumokil said there was no time for that. Then I told Soumokil and the audience that in order to get a good solution to this meeting I would be suspended until tomorrow - April 24 at 10.00; I would invite several village heads in Ambon island and heads of government agencies, I would talk to them, and based on their opinion, then I would do the Proclamation (Chauvel, 1990)."

On the morning of 24, Manuhutu attempted to seek contact with the NIT Home Minister. That morning he also held a meeting with the heads of agencies, village heads, several council members, with the aim of reporting what Soumokil wanted.

Despite the meeting's view that the decision regarding the proclamation of the RMS should be made by DMS, Nanlohy did not agree with it (Chauvel, 1990). Pressure also came from Manusama, who urged DMS to take a stand, because of the situation in Makassar, where NIT would turn to the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (Chauvel, 1990). Sehari kemudian, pada tanggal 25 April 1950 (pagi hari), anggota eksekutif DMS, Manusama, A day later, on April 25, 1950 (morning), the executive members of the DMS, Manusama, Soumokil, Pesuwarisa, and A. Nanlohy jointly formulated a "declaration" of RMS independence. It was also at this meeting that the first cabinet was formed based on the DMS executive and an advisory body, consisting of Manusama, Soumokil, A. Nanlohy, Dr. Pattiradjawane, and J. Pattiradjawane (Chauvel, 1990).

#### Factors in RMS Proclamation

In this section, it is perhaps important to put forward some comments or judgments regarding the RMS: first: if you pay attention to the "RMS declaration", then the RMS proclamation is "constitutionally" based on two reasons, namely:

- 1) NIT was no longer able to maintain its position as a State in line with the regulations of the Denpasar Congress which were still in force.
- 2) RIS had acted contrary to the decisions of the KMB and the Constitution itself, while the "proclamation" itself was considered "in accordance with the DMS decision on 11 March 1947 (Leirissa, 1975)."

According to Leirissa, the two reasons rested on the regulations that suppressed the autonomy rights of the regions in Eastern Indonesia. According to the opinion of the RMS kingpin, these rights were legally enforceable in the decisions of the Denpasar



and KMB congress. In addition, the principle of self-determination was also the main base for the proclamation of the RMS. References to the Denpasar Congress and to the KMB and RIS in the proclamation was actually shown in the right of self-determination. According to them, South Maluku had the right to determine its own destiny by forming an RMS. According to G. Decker:

"The Council justified its decision to secede from Indonesia by arguing that the Ambonese had expressed their willingness to join the Indonesian State only because it would take the form of a Federal Republic. But by April it became clear that the federal order was being dismantled (G, 1985).

<sup>1</sup> In the author's opinion, accepting that Manuhutu and Wairisal were forced to proclaim the RMS did not need to give the impression that this decision was not supported outside of the military and Manusama's kingpin. The involvement of the soldiers, police, and youth in discourse on political violence, the events in Makassar, and the possibilities of the Ambonese TNI soldiers themselves, were undoubtedly related to many things in society. Leirissa saw that the RMS was moved, because the political structure in Maluku at that time was very weak; there was no information from the leadership, while the government and administration ties were not yet solid (Leirissa, 1975).

In connection with the conditions that occurred in Ambon, at that time, Chauvel said that the atmosphere in Ambon had been built since the end of 1949 and reached a high emotional level during the month of April. He saw two social changes in the atmosphere: first, it was related to the presence of Ambonese soldiers. It was either regarding their status in the country, or the anxiety about the KNIL authority that would

experience disintegration. Second, it was related to the fear of Ambonese immigrants about their future under the Republic (Chauvel, 1990).

This atmosphere was also sharpened by Soumokil's "propaganda" from the perspective of religious and ethnic ideology. 'Propaganda' or arguments put forward by Soumokil had an impact on the soldiers, government officials and also some Christians (Lususina, 1950), apart from a number of Muslim kings, such as Ibrahim Ohorella (King Tulehu), King Morella, King Asilulu (who were clearly supporters of PTB).

The critical question that could be asked is whether the "propaganda" regarding "Javanese hegemony" was based on the "myth of Javanese imperialism" around the years of 1949-1950. This myth arose based on the Dutch East Indies (Leirissa, 1975). According to the colonial historical view spread in the period before World War II by Dutch historians, that the Nederlandsch Indie was a form of unity created by the Dutch since the 17th century (Leirissa, 1975). Leirissa basically rejected the notion of Javanese imperialism, pointing to the role of Maluku figures, such as Ir. Putuhena, Dr. Leimena and others, as not Javanese imperialism. He also saw the existence of Bhineka Tunggal Ika ideology adhered to by RI. Leirissa's assumption can be questioned. Leirissa was too simplistic in understanding reality. The entry of the Ambonese people and playing a role in the Indonesian political constellation at that time, did not at all mean eliminating the fear of Javanese hegemony, as Sundhaussen contended that the Diponegoro division troops who landed in Makassar, appeared to behave like civilian soldiers, and Javanese officials held important positions outside the island of Java.

What about Islam-based "propaganda". Regarding this, we could

trace the journey of Indonesian nationalism. Where it must be honestly admitted that at a certain stage Indonesian Nationalism was "identical" to "Islamic Nationalism", in which Islam appeared as a "force" to face the power of colonialism, to fight for a better fate. By saying it like that, it does not mean that there were no struggles of Christians against colonialism. In such a historical perspective, "fears and worries" against Islam could only disappear if the Indonesian Nationalism that was being fought for, and especially today, was in the form of awareness and reflection of togetherness to build a better future for Indonesia, where all human beings are respected in the equality as a human with dignity.

#### **Mission of "RIS and RMS" Settlement**

After the RMS Proclamation, various reactions with a tone that did not approve of the proclamation came from the people of Maluku all over Indonesia, and standing behind the RIS government urged the government to take action. Also, there were regrets about the Ambon-RMS which began with a mission known as the "Leimena Peace Mission, 30 April 1950. This mission failed. "... After the failure of the Leimena Mission, the central government tried again to resolve the Ambon problem by peaceful means by trying to connect with the powerful people in Ambon, namely:

- 1) A mission was sent consisting of former KNIL soldiers who, according to the KMB, had entered APRIS to hold negotiations with RMS soldiers. All members of this mission had been killed by RMS soldiers,
- 2) A fraternal mission consisting of Maluku people outside Ambon also to negotiate with RMS, could not go to Ambon, because RMS did not want to get in touch (Leirissa, 1975).

The efforts of the RIS government to resolve the Ambon problem by peaceful means failed. The Indonesian government regrettably was forced to take strong action against the RMS soldiers in Ambon" (Leimena, 1950). APRIS launched a blockade against Ambon on 16 June 1950 (Leirissa, 1975).

#### **The Failure of the RIS Peace Mission with RMS**

An RIS diplomatic mission went to Ambon under the leadership of Dr. Leimena, in order to prevent the bloodshed in Ambon, which was a complete failure. According to Pak Simatupang, Om Jo said how deep this failure was. For the first time in decades he returned to see his hometown, but was unable to set foot in Ambon. Leimena said they closed the door to a peaceful settlement, now guns would speak, blood and tears would flow. Furthermore, Kaam said, according to Leimena, that:

"The ship (Hang Tuah) was already near the bridge. Suddenly the commander of Hantua told me: 'Sir, let's not get too close, for I saw that there were guns in Fort Victoria pointed at us. This is very dangerous'. At that time, I saw many people standing on the bridge. Hang Tuah then stepped back a little and stopped. Then we indicated that a peace envoy from RIS was on board. With cues we asked to come to the ship. Then a motorboat came to the ship, in which was a person (the port commander Brother Tanasale). He said that: 'I was ordered by the Ambon government. Do you want to say something? 'Then I invited him to get on the boat:' ... we have not done anything for you ... ". Then we gave a letter to take ashore. While the man returned to land, we followed him with binoculars. It

turned out that after arriving at the bridge, he was beaten by a group of *barets*. Apparently Tanasale received orders not to board the ship, only to deliver a letter and receive a reply” (van Kaam, 1977).

The reason RMS did not want to accept Leimena and the group, according to Ir. Manusama was:

“We have sent a telegram to the peace envoy from RIS who said that we only want to negotiate on a ship attended by UNCI. But this proposal was never answered” (van Kaam, 1977).

Meanwhile, in connection with Leimena's arrival, Manuhutu said:

“On behalf of the RMS Cabinet, he wrote a letter to Dr. Leimena to come ashore to hold negotiations. This letter was under by the port commander, but Dr. Leimena was afraid to come, and only stayed on the ship. After I was released from prison, I went to see Dr. Leimena and said: 'I am so sorry that Dr. Leimena did not go ashore at that time” (van Kaam, 1977).

When the RIS government was trying to solve the RMS problem, UNCI (UN commission for Indonesia) also wanted to be involved in solving this problem. UNCI had proposed to the Indonesian government the willingness of its good services to resolve the Ambon issue peacefully, among others, UNCI had offered themselves to go by boat to Ambon to negotiate with Soumokil and his friends. After the government took action against Ambon, UNCI, at the request of the Dutch, asked the Indonesian government not to fight in South Maluku and seek a settlement of the problem peacefully. Responding to UNCI's request, the Indonesian government was of the opinion that the Ambon question was merely an internal problem from

Indonesia and the government had the right and obligation to solve it on its own. Therefore, the government could not agree to the intervention of the Dutch and the UNCI. The intervention of the Dutch was also proven by the telegram of the Dutch Prime Minister, Dr. Drees, to the Prime Minister of Indonesia, Moch. Natsir, on October 5, 1950, which could not be accepted, not only by the government but also by the Indonesian parliament and people (Leimena, 1950).

The pressure and demand to maintain Indonesia's national unity as a new country has resulted in multi-complex consequences, be it socially, politically, economically, psychologically, culturally or victims of thousands of people's lives through the force of arms.

### **Local Political Turmoil <sup>1</sup> Leading to the Proclamation of the RMS**

When observed carefully, the local political process in Ambonese society between 1945 and the outbreak of RMS - 1950 - was marked by political struggles and fight of various different socio-political groups, each of which had "interests". The differences between them; be it from cultural aspirations and orientation, political perspective, experience in history, education, or in function. Because of this there was also a difference in perceptions about the future of Ambon and the Republic of Indonesia itself. Their perceptions were largely determined by the subjective "perspective of meaning" from each group. There was no common perspective on Ambon's future. There were those who saw it regardless of Indonesia, and others saw it from the perspective of Indonesia.

### **Political ideals and power struggling**

To realize political ideals was by the perspective of that meaning. In the perspective of meaning, each social group

seeks to maintain the social order steadily (without variation), or to maintain the status quo of the existing group social system. This is where patterns of change emerge in the political process resulting in disharmony or disintegration of the social system as a whole, which in turn results in conflict within society.

The above thesis presents a theoretical 'complexity', because to what extent can Parson's theory which emphasizes balance and functional relationships provide sufficient space for social change in the existing social system (the existing system's status quo)? For conflict theorists, Parson's model of social life which emphasizes balance and functional relationships leaves no room for social change and conflict. Dohrendorf, for example, considered the perspective of Parson's theory as 'utopian' (Dohrendorf, 1964). More strikingly, Parson's theory has been criticized as having a conservative bias, which sees within itself: e.g. justice or unequal well-being (due to social stratification) is seen as functional; an efficient way of letting the system run, as differences in status; power is distributed in a functional way to achieve the objectives of the system; everything is perfect.

The space for conflict in the functional approach has also been suggested by other experts, such as Robert Merton, who made an important distinction between latent functions; both of which can be constructed to understand change and conflict. Or also, for example, Lewis Coser who stated that "social conflict can be seen as having a vital unifying effect through releasing tension and forming a chain of adaptation (Lewis, 1956). The author considered that the disintegration of the social system of society as a whole which eventually created conflict, material for rebellion, through the RMS incident, would eventually lead to adjustment. Although the power factor as a change in the conflict

came from outside (the soldiers). There are two things that the author can point out, namely the Ambonese (Maluku) people when it failed to solve their own problems and second, to what extent did the solutions have a positive effect on society?

Political struggles and arrangements occurred precisely within and through the South Maluku Council (DMS); an institution of "people's political participation" which functioned to discuss and decide on important political issues. It is within and through this institution that issues regarding the future of Ambon (South Maluku) inside or outside Indonesia were brought into question, at the same time, issues regarding social leadership in Ambonese society. By saying that, it does not mean that there were no political struggles and fight outside the 'arena' of the end of 1949 and the beginning of 1950, the struggle moved to the streets, even in the life of the countries between PTB and PIM politicians in Maluku.

It is too "anachronistic" to question whether the DMS as an institution that voices the aspirations of the people is really "democratic"; whether the political struggles between warring groups to seize the masses and the socio-political leadership really fair. For example, the proclamation of the RMS, which was understood as constitutional because it was "decided" by the DMS, actually raised objections among the members of the DMS that, in essence, they saw that the proclamation was only carried out by the executive members of the DMS. Also, for the other example were the allegations against PIM by the Raja group as the core of the GSS. PIM's victory in the DMS 'election' twice was due to political manipulation and intimidation. The author would not question the existence of this institution any further, nor did he intend to validate the allegations or objections. The author wanted to say that theoretically, political behavior and awareness in a society



is often influenced by the options that can be made by the State for political engagement. In many cases, it is state institutions that develop the role of mass political participation explicitly on the basis of certain groups, whether because of ethnicity, religion, or because of certain ideologies.

The question that arises is, what about the political reality that happened in DMS? This question is difficult to answer. However, although Ambon at that time was militarily controlled by the Dutch military, it turned out that the political climate was quite conducive to freedom of political expression, freedom for political organizations. One indicator that triggered this development was the very strong Dutch obsession with the credibility of the federal Indonesia. It is necessary to encourage formal political institutions that are reliable and allow the activities of political organizations freely. Whether we realize it or not, this "engineering" automatically provided "opportunities" for PIM under Pupela's leadership which supported the federal system, as a tool for the creation of Indonesian unity. This certainly created problems for the conservative Kings within the GSS as well as the upcoming separatist organization, PTB, which wanted South Maluku to be part of the *Kingdom of the Netherlands*.

It seems that changes in the political environment as a whole and in the political perspective of the Netherlands have not been accompanied by changes in the infrastructure of Ambonese society, such as culture, economy, and so on. This means that in a functional system interaction it is impossible to liberalize political practices and the activities of political parties in an ad hoc manner. Whether we realize it or not, this in itself would be paralyzing if it was not completely destructive to the social system as a whole. In other words, it was liberalization in the political subsystem of

society without liberalization in the economic and cultural fields. It may be premature if the author said that the RMS revolution was proof of how impossible liberalization is was in the Indonesian political system. As a whole, without liberalization it created imbalances in the socio-cultural and economic fields in Ambonese society.

Meanwhile, in mid-1946 the political problem was getting sharper around the emergence of the Dutch construction of Indonesia as a federal system. This has become a trigger for political battles from various socio-political forces within Ambonese society. For conservative and 'loyal' kings, the return of the Dutch was expected to give or restore their 'supremacy' or authority, but their hopes were lost when they faced the fact that the Dutch they had 'served' carried out a political policy on Indonesian independence in the form of a 'federal system'. It seems that the colonial government did not take into account, if not completely ignorant of, the socio-political and psychological realities and expectations in society, where disharmony and disintegration had occurred in the whole social system. This is what the author said, the changes in the socio-political system that occurred were *ad hoc* without cultural reorientation in society, especially for the traditional elite of the King. Related to that, what needs to be questioned is the extent to which the awareness of Indonesian nationalism (Merdeka 17 August 1945) has become a kind of social glue in people's lives, which can foster solidarity together, what are the perceptions about Indonesia itself and Ambon's place in it? All of this is still a big question mark.

The political struggle and fight of the 'parliament' to determine the socio-political leadership and determine Ambon's political future, for three times, both in DMS and in Makassar, turned out to be a landslide

victory for the nationalists (PIM) and the Kings with their associations (GSS and later PTB's newcomer separatist organization) bounced off the political arena. The Kings who in previous years were supported by the Dutch, had a strong social function and leadership, which had economic opportunities, faced a reversed reality.

After all, the outbreak of the RMS revolution was not like a cheerful comedy, but a very heartbreaking tragedy of Ambonese people, which gave birth to socio-political consequences. A tragedy of the malfunctioning of infrastructure in society as a functional social system as a whole, which in turn had given rise to a tragic 'conflict'. This tragedy also reflects the "shakiness" of the Ambonese smart looking for solutions and consensus in people's lives. It also reflects very significantly on the great power obsession in seizing hegemony among the Ambonese clever people. This tragedy has also shown very clearly the fragmentation of society, either religiously, sub-ethnically, or obsessions and perspectives on a common future.

### CONCLUSION

The proclamation of the RMS had implications for Ambon or to be precise Maluku as an integral part of an independent and sovereign Indonesia. Socio-political leadership on the basis of an educated political elite was 'paralyzed'. Ambonese human resources on a reliable local basis were relatively 'stopping'. Thus, the *bargaining position* in the process of political change in Indonesia as a whole shows a flat face without relief. It can be noted, for example, after Governor Latuharhary (1945-1953), then Gerit Latumahina (1965-1968) (all of them were immigrant Ambonese intellectuals and not based in Ambon). Only then in 1992 a local son appeared to lead district of Drs. Akib Latusinsina. Whether this is a reality as a

cultural insistence of society, it depends on the people of Maluku to understand it in a future perspective.

The fragility of solidarity, the fragmentation of society, both religiously and sub-ethnically, the unclear vision of Maluku's future in an independent Indonesia, whether it was realized or not were the product of the RMS results. Tensions between communities, not impossible, were also sharpened by the emergence of religiously affiliated political parties, such as Masyumi and Parkindo in Maluku. These tensions have continued until now, whether we are aware of it or not, especially in the struggle for bureaucratic positions and free competition in education.

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