



On the geographies of monuments and migration memory-making

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ABSTRACT

Within the burgeoning geographical literature on public memory, a subset centres on what monuments can inform us about the complex realities of migrants whose lives often straddle between two (or more) nations, thus giving rise to trans-cultural and trans-local dynamics that exceed (and may even potentially challenge) the nation. This paper examines monuments established to *presence* the former-exiled-turned-migrant Moluccan community in the Netherlands to proverbially fold them into the Dutch population, and celebrate alterity in the context of pluralism. And yet, it also frames how these monuments reflect the limits and paradoxes of such an endeavour particularly by virtue of the fraught relationships – due to hitherto unresolved pasts but also tense presents – between the Moluccans and their host societies; as well as fault-lines – owing to myriad intersecting geographies astride religion, generational axes, socio-spatial variations, political affiliations or connections to original homelands – that exist among these Moluccans today, even as they may be born into (or have attained) citizenship status. More broadly, the paper puts into question the extent that public monuments, as a specific material commemorative *genre*, may in fact be appropriate for remembering phenomena typically associated with postcolonial mobility, diversity and flux.

1. Introduction

Within the burgeoning literature on public memory, an emergent subset centres on what the analysis of monuments can tell us about the complex realities of migrants whose lives often straddle between two (or more) nations, thus giving rise to *trans*-cultural and *trans*-local dynamics that can exceed (and even potentially challenge) the nation state (Marschall, 2020). Fast becoming popular markers of commemoration of/for migrant groups in public spaces, such monuments have become ripe subjects to unpack not just as ‘ornamental features of the urban landscape but rather highly symbolic signifiers that confer meaning on the city and transform neutral places into ideologically charged sites’ (Whelan, 2002, p. 508). While public monuments may be textually read in terms of their contested symbolic meanings that may in turn reveal tensions that exist within society, they can also be examined on another level as a commemorative *genre*, i.e., as ‘type’. This is especially useful when unpacking issues that can and may revolve around the subject of postcolonial migration and memory-making.

Simply put, migrants are members of an ethnic or religious group who have moved from one location (the ‘homeland’) to settle in another

host location, although still holding close ties – but to varying degrees – to similar others back in the homeland (Waldinger, 2017). In the context of this paper, this also includes subsequent generations, even those who were born or have been naturalised into host-societies, particularly if the members still hold a ‘migrant mentality’ in terms of being ‘haunted’ or burdened with (traumatic) memories of the experiences of the first generations, through what Tolia-Kelly (2004b), following Toni Morrison, has referred to as ‘re-memory’; or if they were to still consider themselves as an Other who continue to ‘mediate, in a perpetual lived tension, the experiences of separation and entanglement, of living here and remembering/desiring another place’, even one that they have never visited first-hand themselves (Clifford, 1994, p. 312). This paper therefore explores how such a ‘lived tension’ may be made manifest through the critical analysis of migration monuments in public spaces, in terms of their production and reception on the ground, both representationally as well as on a more material register (Tolia-Kelly 2004b).

Specifically, this paper examines public monuments associated with former soldiers (and their immediate families) of the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army (or KNIL [*Koninklijke Nederlandsch-Indische Leger*]) who, in 1951, became ‘forced exiles’ in the Netherlands (Steijlen, 2012).

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Initially numbering 12, 578, these were mainly Moluccans originating from the Moluccas islands in what is today Indonesia, but stationed then elsewhere in the colony. When the nation of Indonesia was declared independent in 1945,¹ those in the Moluccas, not wanting to be part of this, self-proclaimed themselves as the *Republik Maluku Selatan* (or Republic of Southern Moluccas, hereafter RMS) on 24 April 1950 (see Chauvel, 1990). To avert any bloodshed if the KNIL soldiers (and their families) were allowed to return to the Moluccas to potentially join in the RMS cause against Indonesian nationalists, the Dutch transported them to the Netherlands, the intention being that this was only to be a temporary sojourn. However, when the newly-minted Indonesian government demanded for these exiled Moluccans to be allowed to return home only if they were to denounce any RMS affiliations, and shed their KNIL uniforms and identities to be reenlisted into the Indonesian nationalist army,² many chose to instead settle in their fates as 'migrants' in the Netherlands (see Manuhutu, 1991).

Despite proclamations that the Moluccans in the Netherlands should now see themselves as permanently settled, many were still resistant to the idea of integrating with the local Dutch population, harbouring hopes that they would someday return to their 'homeland' (van der Voort 2014). Nevertheless, since then, many of the Moluccans have been moved from their temporary and isolating accommodations (from when they arrived in 1951) into more permanent wards where they were still able to remain together (known as *woonwijken*) even as they were now more blended with the population writ large. Still there existed real barriers between the Moluccans and the Dutch such that there continues to be not much mixing between the two. Meanwhile, poor living conditions, unemployment, and calls for the Dutch to pay the first generation of Moluccans from the 1950s their dues, persisted.³ The situation came to a head in the 1970s, leading to 'actions' – such as hostage taking, kidnappings and train hijackings – primarily by radicalized second-generation Moluccan youths agitated by the stories of their parents as well as their own marginalization till then (Bootsma, 2015). These 'actions' represented the culmination of both the unhappiness borne out of the experiences of the first generations as well as the issues faced by the Moluccans generally at the time.

The actions did catch the attention of the Dutch government. In 1976, the Moluccans in the Netherlands were granted Dutch citizenship and, in 1986, the government also signed an agreement with the Moluccan leaders which allowed for Moluccan veterans to receive an annual allowance and a medal of honour (Bartels, 1989). A job scheme for Moluccans was also set up. In addition, funds were provided for a cultural hub to be set up, the Museum *Maluku* (hereafter MuMa) in Utrecht (Manuhutu, 1991).⁴ Since the late 1990s, monuments were also established in some parts of the country, as a gesture to not only commemorate the experiences of the first-generation Moluccans and to recognise the injustices meted to them, but also to fold the community squarely into the national Dutch memoryscape. This may be said to symbolically reflect how the Moluccans, now numbering over 60, 000, most of whom second through fourth generation, have, since then, become more settled, where desires have shifted from a 'waiting-to-go-home' to investing in a life in the Netherlands (Steijlen, 2010a). However, as this paper aims to unravel, it is more the case that notable

tensions still exist.

Following a discussion of the conceptual literature centred on monuments and migration, and a short note on methodology, the paper proceeds to explore the ways in which the monuments have been put to 'work' by the Dutch to fold plurality into its national imaginary, and making visible a postcolonial minority group long peripheralised. The next section then examines how migrants may have ambivalent sentiments about these monuments as reflecting their place in constructed national narratives not necessarily (ethnically) theirs, compounded by how the monuments also reveal frictions and fault-lines among the Moluccans, related to internal differences astride religion, generational axes, socio-spatial variations and myriad connections with the 'homeland'. After all, as Hall (1990, p. 235) puts it, the 'diaspora experience ... is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference'. In doing so, the paper highlights how monuments intended to fold the Moluccans into the multi-complexioned face of Dutch society today have in fact reproduced – and made even more pronounced – fissures not only from without but also from within the community itself, hence presenting a paradox of plurality in terms of intended purpose and actual work of the monuments (Tambar, 2010). Ultimately, it questions the position of the public monument, as a specific commemoration *genre*, in terms of its capacity to remember phenomena that is typically associated with postcolonial mobility, diversity as well as flux.

2. The geographies and politics of monuments and migration

Many geographers have studied public monuments as 'not merely the material backdrop from which a story is told, but [where] the spaces themselves constitute the meaning by becoming both a physical location and a sight-line of interpretation' (Johnson, 2002, p. 293). The focus is frequently on how these tangible memory structures represent 'a material signifier of identification with land, territory and environments which contribute towards formal and informal connectedness with national cultures and citizenship' (Tolia-Kelly, 2004a, p. 675; see also Forest et al., 2004; Till, 2005). Yet, we are also reminded how public monuments can be divisive when there is no consensus over what (and how) monuments are to remember, reflecting clashing ideas pertaining to gendered roles, inclusivity of race, or messages delivered through them (see Zheng, 2017; Whelan, 2002; Muzaini, 2012). Monuments thus reveal *and* reproduce fractures within (as much as consolidate) collectives, hence rendering themselves, as Cooke (2000, 450) aptly puts it, 'sites of contestation, terrain over which various actors employ symbolic capital to in an attempt to control meaning'.

As 'sites of memory' (Nora, 1998), monuments can be contested from without as much as within the nation, especially when the phenomena commemorated straddles over multiple national positionalities (see Johnson, 2014). Such transnational complexities are especially apparent when considering monuments dedicated to migrant groups. As gestures to honour the experiences faced by migrants (to be) where they are today, these monuments often fold migrants into the story of host contexts 'rather than existing as a mere guest in them' (Byrne, 2016, p. 265). Frequently, these monuments are put forward as a nod to the benevolent host nations, as beacons through which ideas of tolerance may be projected (see Bunnell, 2008). However, questions arise as to whether the monuments are nothing more than empty gestures that gloss over fissures between migrants and hosts (Crimson, 2005). It is especially jarring in the Netherlands (and many other countries in Europe) where, for all the proclamations to be more inclusive of its minority (migrant) communities, the general policy sentiment seems to lean towards assimilation seen to rather dilute (if not erase) the cultural uniqueness of these communities in order to 'fit in' (Vasta, 2007). Even so, there has been more rather than less demands by minority communities for their differences to be recognized, such as in being allowed space for their own rituals and cultural practices to be done (see Jedan et al., 2020;

¹ While the Indonesians see 1945 as their year of independence, following the expulsion of the Japanese after the Second World War, for a long time, the Dutch saw it as 1949 after a protracted attempt to maintain control over their Southeast Asian colony, Ang, 2003.

² Ironically, upon arrival in the Netherlands, the KNIL members were already demobilised.

³ At this time, the Dutch also sought to make the Moluccans more self-reliant by removing financial support, further intensifying the already tense relationships between the two.

⁴ However, due to financial difficulties, the museum had to be closed down in 2012.

Beebejaun et al., 2021). Collectively, these reflect how the difficulties in integrating migrant memories into the collective master narrative and cultural memory of the nation may stem both from the duplicity of official policies but also from the attitudes of migrants themselves.

Having said that, such monuments can also be renarrated by migrant groups beyond national narratives. Ruminating about the London's Memorial Gates Military memorial in Hyde Park, that recognises the Asian countries for their contributions to the world wars, for instance, Marschall (2020, p. 18) reflected upon how the monument has been embraced by members of the Asian immigrant communities in the city, such as through 'handwritten notes, pictures and other small items that connect them to the memory of their forefathers'. However, while this is testament to migrants endorsing the idea they are now accepted within host societies, they can also indicate 'deeply felt, private subjective meanings for [migrant] individuals [within] an alienating, sometimes hostile environment far away from home'. Migrants too can establish their own alternative ways and rituals of remembrance to reject more formal ones, where such gestures become extensions of how migrant communities seek to establish their own identities in a foreign land, to remember their past and ensure their origins are not forgotten, especially in the light of biased and essentializing national memory narratives of host societies (see Muzaini, 2014; Maddrell et al. 2022; Jedan et al. 2020). In some cases, migrants may also vote with their feet, pushed out by unfavourable conditions in the host country, to either return home or resettle elsewhere (Kadrouch-Outmany, 2013).

Migration monuments can also demonstrate just how coherent the migrant 'community' is to begin with. Peteet (2007) has called for grounded empirical studies of migrant formations to better understand their coherence as a unified whole. Notwithstanding how these groups may comprise individuals originating from the same homeland, they may still embody different beliefs, religions, political affiliations and personal stories of migration that shape their experiences differently. Within the same host nation, migrants may also be settled in different locations that would also influence their views about their new settlement. In addition, subsequent generations of migrants, particularly those who have been naturalised or born there, may not even feel much affinity with the homeland (Waldinger, 2017). However, this does not necessarily mean its total attenuation, due to what Brubaker (2015) refers to 'ethnocultural exclusion' in the host country, a type of double consciousness where one feels excluded not only in where one is but also where one's ancestry harks back to, or when subsequent generations are able to relate to the often-difficult experiences and injustices faced by their parents or grandparents through what Tolia-Kelly (2004b, p. 316), following Toni Morrison, calls 're-memory', which is 'not always a recall or reflection of actual experience... [but] 'memories of others as told to you by parents, friends, and absorbed through day-to-day living', albeit strongly felt as if the pain of their elderly Others were in fact theirs (Tolia-Kelly, 2004b, p. 316; see also Hirsch, 2012 and the idea of 'postmemory'). These would play a role in how migration monuments are evaluated, with the potential to reveal lines of difference not only from without, but also from within migrant communities.

In addition to considering public monuments in terms of what they represent, it is also important to consider them materially, following Bakhtin, as a form of commemorative *genre* (see Tambar, 2010). Despite, or perhaps due to, its ubiquity across the globe today, it is easy to forget that, as with many *lieux de mémoire* ('sites of memory') (Nora, 1989), public monuments are in fact a modern and, in the context of many non-Western nations, a 'colonial' construct. Muzaini (2014), for instance demonstrated how many Malaysians tend not to engage in commemorative memorials dedicated to those who died during the Second World War not only because it is not seen as 'their' way of remembering the past, but also how the monument as *type* is a reminder of how the colonial still lives on in the postcolonial (Stoler, 2008; see also Tyner et al., 2014). Such is also the case where the Moluccans here too consider monuments as a 'Dutch' commemorative *genre* which in fact diminishes rather than reflects or celebrates the ethnic *lived* diversity of the

community more generally. Thus, even as monuments may be perceived as a way to – in the name of nation-building – mobilize difference within plural societies today, they can also be criticised for reproducing difference and paradoxes that may actually threaten to divide the nation even more (see Tambar, 2010).

3. Methodology

This paper is based on a multi-sited critical analysis of the monuments, with data collected between 2016 and 2019 (over periods of 3–4 months each year). Physical visits were made to most (if not all) of the monuments throughout the Netherlands. In each location, the monuments were photographed and duly examined with respect to their visual appearance, location, scale, design, what is inscribed on them, who placed them there, who designed them, and observations of how passers-by engaged with the monuments (or not). While limited in terms of the author's ability to speak directly to the creators of the monuments, motivations behind the monuments were gleaned from publicly available records (e.g. documentations of opening ceremonies of monuments, newspaper articles, virtual forums, etc.) and other associated reports pertaining to the theme of the Moluccans in the Netherlands, mainly in English although relevant Dutch sources were also subsequently translated and included.

This data was then supplemented by in-depth interviews conducted with 39 Moluccans (29 male, 10 female; second through third generations), mainly sourced through word of mouth and introductions by members of the community itself. The interviews were conducted in English and/or Bahasa Indonesia, frequently in the homes of the respondents or in public locations such as cafes and parks.⁵ The data, particularly pertaining to how representative they thought the monuments are of the Moluccan experience and heritage, was then transcribed and subsequently analysed. Given the monuments are often located close to where the communities are (*woonwijken*), there were also informal chats conducted with Dutch and Moluccans over the same periods, such as during my personal visits made to the monuments, where such individuals were seen to be engaging in various ways with the commemorative structures. These 'informal chats' – numbering in the twenties – also provided important information regarding what about the monuments that made them stop to look, and what they felt about seeing them as markers of 'Moluccanness' in the Netherlands.

4. Monumentalising Moluccans in the Netherlands

On 29 May 2018, a huge crowd gathered before the *Oudekerk* (Old Church) in the middle of the city of Barneveld in the Dutch province of Gelderland to witness the unveiling of a monument (Fig. 1). This monument, which consists of three figures – a mother looking tentative, her son behind her with a hand on his mother's shoulder and, behind him, the grandson looking confidently ahead – is a long-awaited dedication to Moluccans who first arrived in the city on 22 March 1951, and to later generations who have made Barneveld home, now numbering about 1,100. In conjunction with the 65th anniversary of the arrival of the Moluccans, a Dutch artist, Lotta Blokker, was commissioned to come up with the design where the image was to convey the story of the Moluccans in the city. As Lotta says, 'The image is not only for the Moluccans in Barneveld, but for everyone, to realize just what injustice has been done to the Moluccans' (cited in Kas, 2018). Symbolically, the monument represents three generations depicting three outlooks with the mother facing the anxieties of settling in a foreign environment to

⁵ Where interviews were conducted at the homes of the respondents, the author was also brought around to see how their Moluccan identities (and ties to the homeland) are reflected within domestic spaces through visual, material and other artefacts, which were in many cases also framed as ways – alternate to monuments – to remember their heritage.



Fig. 1. Moluccan monument in Barneveld (source: author).

the grandson being a lot more comfortable born as a Dutch citizen even as he feels the grief of his forefathers (ibid.).

This is but one of the monuments dedicated to the first generation of Moluccans that began to emerge in various places in the Netherlands since the 1990s, today numbering over 20 of them, usually where sizeable Moluccans were settled when they first arrived or in the areas (*woonwijken*) where they later resettled (Steijlen, 2010b). The first was established in 1997 in Balk, in the shape of a boulder, marked with seven cloves and a nutmeg to denote the motive for the Dutch colonial adventures around the 1600s (Steijlen, 2013). Balk was the camp for Muslim Moluccans, although closed in 1969 when its inhabitants were resettled to places like Ridderkerk and Waalwijk (ibid., p. 2). While some of the monuments were designed by Dutch sculptors, others were accomplished by Moluccan artists. Regardless, the monuments were done in close consultation with the Moluccans. Many of the monuments were funded by government monies (or by provincial governments) while some were community funded.

For the most part, the monuments, as reported in the media and speeches during unveiling ceremonies, as well as documented through the in-depth interviews, are meant to be commemorative of the first generations of Moluccans in the Netherlands. Speaking at the unveiling of the Moluccan monument at Nijverdal, for instance, the community leader proclaims it as ‘an ode to the Moluccan elderly of the 1st generation, many of whom have passed away’ (Twente Journal, 8 June 2011). The monuments are also seen as compensation for the frigid reception of the first Moluccans. As Johan says: ‘I see the monuments as making up for... ignoring us for so long’ (aged 50s, pers. comm., 4 June 2018), thus representing Dutch acknowledgment of the ‘cold welcome’ his parents (and others) received when they first arrived in 1951, as well as the Dutch ‘coming clean with [its colonial] past mistakes’. The monuments are also seen to counter the community’s hitherto invisibility. As

Loupatty avers, at the opening of the Barneveld monument (Van Dijk, 2018): ‘I find it shocking how many Dutch people do not know what the story of the Moluccans is’.

Most significantly, many saw the monuments as showing the Moluccans as more accepted within Dutch society today. A speech made when the decision to build the monument in Barneveld was made two years earlier, had Lukas Scheijgrond, a political leader, saying: ‘Today we say: Moluccans, you belong to us... a valued part of the Barneveld community’ (Barneveldsekrant, 15 June 2016). As such, the monument recognizes how the Moluccans represent a community within the cities where they are located as much as they are part of the Dutch community writ large. The monument in Nistelrode, for example, depicts the Moluccans as faceless figures to show how it is harder today to distinguish them from the Dutch (see Fig. 2). The intertwining bodies represent, as inscribed, ‘solidarity of Moluccan community in Nistelrode with the Nistelrode population and integration into Dutch society’. Elsa (pers. comm. 8 June 2018) claimed: ‘The monument here should not be seen as setting us apart from the Dutch population... We too are Dutch’. (As clear later, however, this monument has also been interpreted in a less flattering manner.).

This narrative also coincides with the official reading of the Barneveld monument in terms of how the Moluccans, particularly those from the third and fourth generations, have settled well within the Netherlands such that they should no longer be seen as ‘different’ from the Dutch. Such narratives play out repeatedly during their respective unveilings, attended by Dutch and Moluccans alike. The one at the Culemborg monument even had multicultural festivities that lend to the general narrative of the Netherlands as embracing its many minority groups. As Katy (aged 40s, pers. comm. 8 September 2018) says of the monument in Barneveld: ‘This monument shows how this country is made up of many different groups. It is about time we showcase that



Fig. 2. Moluccan monument in Nistelrode (source: author).

there are many faces of 'Dutchness' here', thus feeding into the general idea of a more pluralized Netherlands. These narratives thus portray the monuments in three specific templates: (a) as commemorative – of the story of the first-generation Moluccans; (b) as apologist – redress for what the Dutch did in the past; and (c) as integrative – denoting the Moluccans as now 'Dutch'. Nevertheless, there were also many issues with the monuments revealing tensions between the Dutch and Moluccans, and among Moluccans themselves. In fact, some were even discontent with the *genre* of the monument itself, seen as very 'unMoluccan'.

5. Dissonant Moluccan monuments

5.1. On emplacement and deployment

Some of the Moluccans spoken to took issue with the location of the monuments themselves being where the Moluccan *woonwijken* are, even as these may be generally isolated, if not 'hollowed out' altogether such as in the case of Balk where the community has been resettled elsewhere. The general sentiment here is that, given how not many Dutch people go to these wards (*woonwijken*), the monuments' purpose to make the community visible to the Dutch is defeated. In fact, the isolation of the monuments parallels how the community feels more generally. As Jeffri says, 'the monuments here are good but... Since not many Dutch come here, it is not something that shouts 'we are here!' (aged 40s, pers. comm., 18 June 2017). Referring to the monument at Opheusden, Jaclyn (aged 37, pers. comm., 14 June 2018) says:

'Many monuments are in wards that many Dutch don't go to. So how can it be for a better relationship between us and the Dutch? It is nothing more than a reminder that we are still not really a part of the Netherlands I say.'

Indeed, some of my respondents commented how, despite being framed as symbolic of the Moluccans as 'Dutch', outside the official unveilings, the monuments are still used mainly by the community such as when they become focal nodes for ceremonies to celebrate RMS Day (in April). As Jaclyn continues: 'we do have community celebrations at the monuments but, unless you are married to or are a friend of the Moluccans, these events are not attended by those outside of the community. Not that they are promoted to *them* anyway'.

These comments thus put into question whether the monuments may be seen as a serious attempt to bring the Moluccans into the national fold. Some of the monuments are even indoors, such as the plaque at the mosque in Ridderkerk which one can only see during special events and prayer times since the mosque is closed all other times. Interestingly, the leader of the mosque also highlighted how 'the [other] monuments are against our religion because they show human figures which Islam does not allow; hence why we have a plaque here' (aged 70s, pers. comm. Ridderkerk, 14 June 2018). This suggests that the monuments are in fact more for the Moluccans than for the general Dutch population. Secondly, it also highlights how the Moluccan so-called 'community' is in fact divided (see below), in this case astride religion with implications for not only how the monuments should be designed but if there should even be one. For Muslim Moluccans, it is unsuitable to have a monument seen to undermine Islamic beliefs against corporealized materialities of memory. It also does not help that individual wards are generally still primarily confined to such differentiations.⁶

In fact, the Barneveld monument was the first of the monuments to be located away from the *woonwijk* and in the very centre of the city itself, close to a prominent Dutch monument, the *Oudekerk*. As Jasmina (aged 30s, pers. comm. Barneveld, 30 June 2018) says:

'I am glad the monument depicts later generations and is in the city. There is nothing like seeing a Moluccan monument beside a Dutch one... more people can see it here'.

Speaking to Karen about a planned monument for the city of Tiel (which was subsequently unveiled in 2019), the consensus of the Moluccans there is that the forthcoming monument should, firstly, be 'in the Tiel city centre, just like in Barneveld, so we can see ourselves as proudly part of the Netherlands' rather than 'a dirty little secret in some quiet corner!' (40s, pers. comm. Tiel, 5 July 2018). The idea is that the monuments should be located in places where all can access such that, as Julia (aged 30s, pers. comm. 4 July 2018) puts it, 'it would make the Dutch curious about us and want to visit the *woonwijken*'. After all, she continues, 'we know we are here. We do not need a monument to remind us of that'. Consequently, the new monument for the Moluccans in Tiel was set up in the city centre. Having said that, there are concerns too that Moluccans (and *woonwijken*) may become like, as Kadir (30s, pers. comm. 16 July 2019) says, 'a weird attraction for the Dutch to visit, like going to the zoo!'

5.2. On narrating movement and individuals

Some of the Moluccans also highlighted how the monuments do not do justice to the complexities of the story of the arrival of the Moluccans in the Netherlands, and their experiences thereafter. According to Jaclyn (aged 50s, pers. comm. Culemborg, 14 June 2018) who took issue with how monuments (such as in Opheusden) oversimplify 'the story':

'The problem with the monument is that it does not say much and there is not much that tells you of the experiences of our fathers and mothers who had to leave Indonesia, get onto a boat and come to a totally foreign land'.

To be sure, even if one were to encounter the monuments, there is nothing much on site to actually tell the stories of the Moluccans, unlike



Fig. 3. Moluccan monument in Vaasen (source: author).

⁶ Initially, due to conflicts in the camps, the Muslims were moved to their own camps.

when the story was told through the medium of a museum like MuMa (Seo, 2014). When I first visited the bronze monument in Vaasen in 2016 (Fig. 3), designed by Greet Grottendieck, and established on 21 October 2006, I knew the story of the Moluccans but if I did not, I would have not known much from the statue of a KNIL soldier standing alongside his wife and their two children. There is a captioned quote at the monument by The Raja (King) of Rohomoni, a Muslim Ambonese Village, saying, in 1637: 'We shall swim through the wide sea but we do not really know where to' (translated) but, beyond that, there is nothing that would inform the visitor as to the protracted history of the Moluccans and issues they have faced as erstwhile forced migrants.

Another issue that emerged in the interviews relates to the idea of movement. Taking the example of the monument in Opheusden again (Fig. 4), which is a stack of *koffers* or suitcases to symbolize not only the fact that the Moluccans had to travel far and wide to finally end up in the Netherlands but also how for many their lives were centred on the *koffers* in anticipation for when they were going home. That said, some respondents remarked on how the monuments – e.g. in Opheusden – ignore, as James puts it, 'the horrible conditions faced by Moluccans on their travels and how their lives were in the Netherlands upon arriving here' (aged 40s, pers. comm. 7 May 2017), referring also to the 1970s actions:

'During openings, they mention these difficulties but *in the past*. Also, after the ceremonies, we... forget. And [the monuments] do not mention how memories of the hardship is still very real and that we are still not good yet with the Dutch.'

This testifies to the tendency of monuments to make static what was a history and heritage of movement (i.e. the movement of migration), and second, how the monuments make neutral what was (and in fact still is for some of the Moluccans) a very tumultuous period, referring to the ebbs and flows of the experiences of the first generation Moluccans, extending even to subsequent generations who may still feel like they do not really belong as Dutch even as they are now Dutch citizens. In



Fig. 4. Moluccan monument in Opheusden (source: author).

addition, these monuments were also seen to neglect there is still fierce hostility between the Dutch and the Moluccans (and other Indonesians) today, as debates of the role of the Dutch in the East Indies evidence (e.g. *NL Times*, 2 October 2021).

Statues – as metonymic of the Moluccans who alighted from various ships in Rotterdam in 1951 – was also seen as impersonal. As Kathy avers, 'Who are the first-generations? We do not know. That's why here [in Moordrecht] we have a monument but also a picture with the faces of the first generation so they can be better remembered' (aged 40s, pers. comm. 14 June 2017). Kathy is referring to a more community-centred effort to commemorate the first generation through a large photograph on canvas and hung on the side of one of the houses (Fig. 5) and in view of the monument itself (unveiled in 2006), an example of a counter-memorial set up by the community in Moordrecht. It is interesting that the Moordrecht monument was also one of those designed/funded by the community. According to Joop Sahetapy, co-initiator for the image, the monument was to be a tribute to the first generations: 'We did not want to apply for a subsidy... To get the money together, we went around with the cap, organized parties, sold spring rolls, you name it' (cited in *Schilthuisen*, 2016). Here we have a monument that was therefore not only community-driven but also established for the community with no resonance or any form of connections of it being a 'Dutch' effort.

5.3. On identity: 'Are we Dutch you ask? No, not yet!'

The subheading here was mentioned by Maria when asked if the monuments represented a symbolic attempt to make the Moluccans feel more welcome in the country. For her, the designs of the monuments can be too abstract. Talking about the Nistelrode monument (see Fig. 2), for instance, she said: 'There is nothing Moluccan about it... They do not have faces... And the tallest one looks scary, like an alien' (aged 40s, pers. comm., 22 May 2018). Entitled 'Connections' (*Hubungan*), the monument was established in 18 May 2008 to honour the Moluccans who settled in Nistelrode, and praise their integration into Dutch society. It consists of faceless figures and intertwining four torsos which symbolize ancestor, mother, husband and girl. The opening of the monument that was, to paraphrase the inscription, to represent the solidarity of the Moluccan community in Nistelrode with the Nistelrode population, was even attended by Dutch officials as well as select Indonesian representatives.

However, notwithstanding the fact that Nistelrode is one of those areas where many of the Moluccans have resettled elsewhere, while some saw this positively as representing how the Dutch and the Moluccans as today 'the same' (see above), some respondents were



Fig. 5. Picture of first generation Moluccans in Moordrecht (source: author).

offended at the design of the monument which was seen as ‘unMoluccan’. Indeed, without reading the inscription, one would be forgiven for not knowing who the statues were intended to represent. Similarly, Jeffri also lamented how the Barneveld monument should be ‘more Indonesian’ (somewhat ironic given the first generation ended up in the Netherlands *because* they did not want to be part of independent Indonesia): ‘what are they wearing? Western clothings, jackets and all’ (aged 30s, pers. comm., 18 June 2017). While this was to showcase the integration of younger Moluccans, as ‘more Westernized’ if not ‘more Dutch’, some read it as the loss of Moluccan identity if not the insinuation that integration means becoming ‘the same’ as the Dutch. After all, as Maria indicated, the Moluccans are ‘not yet’ Dutch and to suggest that is wrong. Jefri also says ‘no matter how hard they want to make us the same [as Dutch], they cannot’, pointing to the colour of their skin, a reminder of their difference.

These comments also refer to the very real difficulties faced, especially by the older generations, to preserve their Moluccan identity. As Linda (pers. comm., 10 May 2018) said: ‘This is not a monument to integration as it is a monument to our dying culture. Just look at the younger generation. They are more Dutch than Moluccan’. Indeed, I have come across sentiments pertaining to how the younger Moluccans have begun to do away with tradition, some seeing this also as the result of a tendency towards assimilating (*vis-à-vis* integrating) difference in Dutch society more generally (see Vasta, 2007). While there have been attempts by the community to organize Moluccan festivities and other events, targeted at outsiders and younger Moluccans to know Moluccan cooking, cultures, traditions, etc., the general sense is that the latter tend not to (want to) be involved. While this may be an indication of the successful integration the monuments are to embody in the first place, for the older Moluccans, this is more of a threat to their identity. As Maria (40s, pers. comm. 9 July 2017) said: ‘We may be “Dutch” by nationality but we need to remember we are still Moluccans!’.

5.4. Monuments as commemorative genre

Another way the Moluccans may be seen as divided is with respect to the monument as commemorative *genre*. Historically, the common thinking that tied many of the first-generation Moluccans who arrived in 1951 was the realization of the RMS as a political entity. While many seem to be ‘comfortably settled’ in their adopted country, there are still those who harbour the dream of returning to the ‘homeland’, defined by them and not a part of the Indonesian republic. In fact, in Indonesia, there are still those who aspire for an independent South Maluku even as the movement has lost much of its steam since the 1960s. This might explain why the Moluccans in the Netherlands still fly the RMS flag



Fig. 6. RMS flags hanging out of Moluccan homes (source: author).

outside of their homes whenever they can (see Fig. 6), or for passionate speeches to be made on special occasions that make reference to the dream of an independent RMS and how they would continue to reach for it. As Ahmad (pers. comm., 16 June 2017) puts it, ‘Some of us are still hopeful. We still have a RMS government-in-exile here and we will not stop fighting!’.

While it is not within the purview of this paper to discuss the political situation of the RMS fight in any great detail (see Bootsma 2015), the Moluccan monuments represent the split of the community – pro-RMS camp vs anti-RMS camp – and how there are still fissures, and unresolved resentment among camps. According to David (60s, pers. comm., 18 July 2017):

‘The [monuments], especially because they are ‘allowed’ by the Dutch government symbolize that we are now part of Dutch history. But that is not the case at all. The RMS is still alive, we are still active and we are still political’.

There is therefore the feeling that the monuments have bookended their RMS fight. When Moluccans begin to feel too settled here (with the monuments – as a fixed *lieux de memoire* – rendering the story of the first-generation Moluccan as ‘done and dusted’ [Nora, 1989]), people will forget they should continue to pressure the Indonesian government to rescind the law against RMS. As Michael puts it: ‘There is the fear with any type of memorialization... it would render the RMS project as historical, not political and this would therefore prevent the movement to go back to Indonesia... to have their land back’ (pers. comm., 18 December 2016). For these individuals, there is thus the fear such monuments or any commemoration of their (settled) presence in the Netherlands would render the RMS dream to be *passé*, thus deadening any possibility of gathering especially the younger Moluccans around the cause.

Thus, those who support initiatives such as MuMa or, in this case, the monuments, can be seen as ‘traitors’ who have forgotten from where they came and how they got to be in the Netherlands in the first place. The pro-RMS sentiment is also strengthened by the desire to better the lot of their brethren in Indonesia. As David (60s, pers. comm., 18 July 2017) added:

‘Even if Moluccans in the Netherlands are comfortable here [in the Netherlands], we must not forget that our brothers and sisters are stuck in Ambon [in the Moluccas]. They still need our help. An independent RMS can improve their lives there.’

This pro- vs. anti-RMS division has another geographical layer with Moluccans in the north (of the Netherlands, primarily harking from Ambon) seen as ‘more fanatical’ than the ones initially settled in the south (generally from islands to the south of Ambon, e.g. Tenggara, Kei, Tanimbar, etc.). The latter are seen as different from those who come from Ambon who are more aggressive in their support for the RMS. While the reality is more complicated, not least because there have been many shifts between wards that they no longer align fully to the logic back in 1951 where points of origin also determined where one was resettled in the Netherlands, it is noteworthy that many of the events associated with actions of the 1970s were ‘almost always’ instigated by the Moluccans ‘in the north’. One should also remember that while many who were shipped here in the 1950s were Moluccans, there were also others of Javanese and Sumatran descent that may not even identify with the RMS. This again shows Dutch Moluccans to be more of a heterogeneous vis-a-vis homogenous community.

It was not only the Muslim Moluccans who saw monuments as inappropriate for telling their story (see above). There are also those who mentioned that monuments are, as Jamie (pers. comm., 16 June 2018) puts it, ‘not the way Moluccans do things’. In fact, it was intimated that the best way to know the Moluccans is not through monuments or museums but through:

'Seeing how we do things the Moluccan way. This could be in terms of how we cook, how we decorate our homes, how we talk to one another and so on. It is a culture that is living which cannot be represented through the monument that is like a tombstone!'

In fact, when asked to express their Moluccan identity, nobody pointed to the monuments but to their own language, culture and rituals, as well as things (e.g. framed photos, furniture, figurines, etc.) in the house and around the community as 'metonymical signifiers of other environments and landscapes' (Tolia-Kelly 2004a: 676), in this case of where their parents, if not themselves, came from (i.e. the Moluccas). More than a reference to the homeland, these visual cues and artefacts are also means through which Dutch Moluccans have sought to preserve their cultural identity against the danger of being, as Lyn (aged 50s, pers comm, 18 June 2018) says, 'too Westernized we forget who we are as a people'. Steijlen (2013) too has pointed to how, for the Moluccans, the *woonwijk* itself (in addition to organizations and publications, etc. spearheaded and established by members of the Moluccan community), may be seen as situated right 'at the core of Moluccan identity' even more closely than things like monuments. As Lyn says: 'We do not need monuments; we are the monument we need.'

6. Conclusions

This paper has highlighted what public monuments can tell us about the politics associated with the contemporary remembrance of former Moluccan KNIL soldiers (and their families) who, in 1951, due to political exigencies, became 'forced exiles' – and later, 'migrants' – in the Netherlands (Steijlen, 2012). At another level, it also sought to evaluate the place of public monuments as a modern tool with which to proverbially fold alterity within plural societies. On paper, the monuments that emerged since the 1990s throughout the Netherlands represent symbolic gestures on the part of the Dutch to recognise the story of the first-generation Moluccans; make right past wrongs; and render visible the minority Moluccans as part of the national Dutch complex. This is the result of erstwhile 'Dutch policies [that] have been driven by a coherent and consistent belief that the recognition and accommodation of cultural, ethnic, and religious groups in society will lead to their successful emancipation into the Dutch multicultural society' (Duyvendak and Scholten, 2011, p. 332; Wekker, 2016). Yet it is also important to note how such discourses are not always received well, especially when the 'talk' of being more respectful to minority groups within societies often do not translate into any actual 'walk' on the ground, or if associated gestures – like the monuments – may be seen to contribute towards a 'repillarization' where 'rather than integration, in actual fact, segregation appears to be taking place' (Jedan et al. 2020, p. 17).

This is apparent in the ways in which the migration monuments aimed to celebrate the different face(t)s of 'Dutchness' have largely been contested with the threat to make the minority Moluccan community feel even more excluded instead. First, dominant discourses related to the monuments have been challenged by conflicting views as to whether the monuments adequately reflect the lived realities of the community today, many of whom still struggling with accepting the 'imperial debris' (Stoler, 2008) of how the first-generation Moluccans were treated, as well as how the community still feel generally marginalised (in social and economic terms) within the Netherlands today. In fact, even if one were born, or has been naturalised, into host societies, it seems that some still hold a 'double consciousness' of being Dutch and 'different' due to alignment with the trauma of their forefathers – through 're-memory' (Tolia-Kelly 2004a) – or being 'ethnoculturally excluded' today (Brubaker, 2015). In this regard, the monuments may have had the unintended effect of '[bringing] forgotten memories to the fore, becom[ing] catalysts for debate and caus[ing] division' (Marschall, 2020, p. 9), even raising questions as to whether the monuments are but empty gestures, especially if becoming more 'Dutch' also means becoming less Moluccan or running the risk of diminishing aspects of

one's ethnic or cultural identity, a sentiment that is also shared by other migrant groups in the Netherlands (see also Kadrouch-Outmany, 2013). This is also compounded by how, more generally, there has been a shift in the nation's official policies on minority groups towards assimilation more than integration (Vasta, 2007).

More than the monuments showing strains between the Moluccans and their hosts, the paper has also shown how the Moluccan community in the Netherlands itself is not homogeneous. After all, Brubaker (2005, p. 13) warns against treating migrants as singular, be it in terms of their levels of commitment to the homeland, desires to maintain boundaries against host communities, or affinities among their own kind. Indeed, based on the responses of the Moluccans here about the monuments, the notions of 'sameness' among the Moluccans is deceptive, even as they may hark from the same original 'homeland' and are currently living in the same adopted 'hostland'. The paper has shown how there can actually be many 'Dutch Moluccans', depending on lines pertaining to religious affinities, political affiliations and connections to the homeland, generational differences and where they were/are located in the host country. Thus, the analysis of migration monuments here has revealed how in actual fact there are many (sometimes dividing) geographies that define the Moluccans here as a 'migrant' group in the Netherlands, again portending yet another challenge to the role of monuments in galvanising politically diverse societies under the subtext of national identity.

In fact, the paper also shows how there is discord extending beyond the symbolic nature of the monuments to include anxiety over the monument itself as commemorative *genre*. As the monument – or in fact any type of *lieux de memoire* – is not something that is seen as 'Moluccan' or even an 'Asian' way of memory making, many of the respondents here also highlighted how it may not be the most appropriate way to commemorate the postcolonial community here. In fact, many chose to point to the Moluccan community as 'living heritage' itself – the *woonwijken*, the language, the cultural traditions, oral stories, etc. – as the best way to learn about the first-generation Moluccans in the Netherlands and also Moluccans today. As Ahmad (aged 60s, pers comm., 16 June 2017) said: 'if you are interested to learn about us, just ask us'. The preference here is less for physical *sites* (e.g. monuments), seen as fixing, static and 'Western' in nature, but more fluid and dynamic *genres* of memory that may be secreted in the embodied and more quotidian rituals and practices, such as within the home and around the community itself (akin to what Nora (1989) refers to as *milieux de memoire* or 'environments of memory') (see also Muzaini 2012; Tolia-Kelly 2004a). When looking for markers of memory/identity of/for migrant groups, therefore, it is critical to look beyond what is tangibly obvious towards less spectacular genres which the community may feel are more reflective of their cultural identity and innate sense of belonging (Maddrell et al. 2022).

According to Tambar (2010, p. 658), writing about Turkey, '[e]fforts to politicize communal differences into public spaces does not, in and of itself, threaten the unitary vision of belonging enforced by the nation-state'. Yet, he continues, 'the taming of communal differences within an ideological imaginary of the nation can be one manner of preventing, rather than consolidating, the emergence of a pluralist politics'. Similarly, instead of folding the minority Moluccans in the Netherlands in, the monuments may be seen in some ways as the 'taming' (or even trivialising) of not only the severity of the trauma that the first generation experienced in the past but also what even the current generations are going through today. In addition, the monuments here may also be seen to enable what Bull and Hansen (2016) refers to as antagonistic (vis-à-vis cosmopolitan) memory making, where discussions have tended to reproduce more of the fractures and fault-lines within as well as without the community rather than what would really potentially bring them together, hence portending 'expressions of a pluralist challenge to the national state, even as they incorporate the minority into the rhythms and gestures of national spectacle' (Tambar, 2010, p. 653). All of these ultimately raise questions if monuments have a place in diverse societies today particularly when, as is

the case shown here, they may be seen to merely obfuscate or, worse, essentialize the depth and complexity of the experiences as well as identities and positionalities of migrant groups.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

The data that has been used is confidential.

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