

# *Undur-é undur-é: stay in the city*

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**Abstract**— In the Moluccan churches in the Netherlands, theology has always been subordinated to the congregation life. The emphasis has been placed on the church as an institution. It was about status and formalities. In this article I am trying to illustrate some considerations for the development of a Moluccan theology in the Netherlands. The concepts of contextualization in Indonesia is a boast for the development of a Moluccan Dutch theological approach. Also in the field of pastoral care amongst the Moluccan Protestants in the Netherlands. It is an opportunity to be present as the living church. In what way does the Moluccan ecclesial community manage to involve people in the church at local and national level? Is it possible to replace the old ecclesiastical and colonial mindset by another and integral way of being church? Are we able to connect people from the traditional ecclesiastical setting when it concerns the calling of the church? What does this mean for the pastoral approaches?

**Keywords**— *contextualization, Moluccan churches, historical consciousness*

## I. INTRODUCTION: FROM THE “TANGSI KNIL” TO THE DUTCH CITIES

The history of the Moluccan church in the Netherlands is characterized by a lot of tensions. Time and again we detect the negative attitude of the Moluccan people towards the Dutch society. It took more than 30 years before one was able to oversee the problems of loyalty and neo-colonialism in order to coop with them in a right way.

In the spring of 1951 a group of Moluccan soldiers and Marine crew members with their spouses embarked the royal kingdom of the Netherlands. Because of the decolonization of Indonesia the Dutch government ordered them to leave Indonesia for a temporary stay. From the start they longed to return as soon as possible to a free republic of the South Moluccas. But in historical perspective they became losers, who lived isolated and far away from their home islands. As they arrived in the land of their colonizer the Netherlands turned out not to be the promised land they hoped for. Their arrival was the beginning of a struggle to become free and independent people. At first in a political sense and after more than half a century it also in a more metaphorical sense. The church leaders, who also served in the Royal Dutch Indies Army, organized the spiritual and ecclesiastical life. It was grounded on the Moluccan Calvinistic tradition they brought from Ambon.

In the first 25 years of the stay the focus of the church was to maintain the ministry. Therefore the ministers were assisted by elders, who were – after being trained and ordained – assisted in

the preaching of the gospel on Sunday. There was no need and no space to do or to read theology.

The radicalization of the Moluccan youngsters in the seventies of the last century illustrated the changes in the traditional church. There was gradually a search for identity among the youth as Christian-Moluccans in the Netherlands. In the beginning of the Moluccan churches in the Netherlands the focus was a temporary stay. Through the unpaved paths of the years of the residential situation in Holland there were several changes as I described in a short history of the Moluccan church in the Netherlands. In the overview below I tried to formulate the decades of the Moluccan Evangelical Church in the Netherlands in terms of the relationship of church image, keywords and ethnicity [1].

## II. METHODOLOGY

This article is written on the basis of long-time field research as well as literature review. Ethnography is the basic element for doing this research which is combined with cultural and philosophical interpretations toward many hybrid cultural elements in Moluccan communities in Indonesia and Netherlands.

## III. DIASPORA AND MIGRATION IN THE DUTCH MOLUCCAN PERSPECTIVE

### A. *Many Faces of Diaspora*

During the settlement of the Moluccan community in the Netherlands we can discover different faces of diaspora. In the beginning the migration to Holland was seen as the result of a political powerplay between the republic of Indonesia and the Dutch monarchy. In this game the Moluccan soldiers of the KNIL and the marine – and their families – were sacrificed. In the Netherlands they were the losers of history, who lived as isolated strangers far away from home. In their stories they became victims, who had a bad relationship with their enemies the Dutch and the Javanese. As a youngster I didn’t want to be identified with asylumseekers from Biafra, who flew to the Dutch state or with the Spanish, Italian and later on the Turkish and Moroccan workers, who started an economic existence far away from home.

In the ‘Believing Camp Church’ and the ‘Confessing Ghetto Church’ the Moluccan Christians found shelter and protection. There they could express their hearts; they could cry for help

Decade	Church image	Keyword	Ethnicity
1950-1960	Believing Camp Church	Excluded	In captivity
1960-1970	Confessing ghetto Church	Compartmentalisation	On hold
1970-1980	Searching Church	Identity questions	New orientation
1980 -1990	Competing Church	Coming out	Enrichment
1990-2000	Open Church	Gospel & Culture	Innovation
2000-2010	Future Church	Disturbances	Vision
2010-2020	Missionary Church	Intra- and inter-religious contacts	Home coming as partners in togetherness

and searched for consolation. They could live as they used to in the army barracks speaking their own language without worrying to connect or to adjust to the Dutch society. The church provided also peace of mind. I was raised within the Moluccan congregation and enjoyed the spiritual hymns in Ambonese style. In the church together we were at home. In the middle of the waiting in silence and doubt there was the consolation of His presence. There were chaplains who read the Bible as the stories of the Moluccan congregation and identified themselves with the people of Israel. How to deal with this issue of the theology of diaspora? Could the Moluccan congregation afford themselves to identify their life story with the people of God? It were confusing times in the land of the Dutch. There were also questions about the relationship of the soldiers and shipmen and the Dutch royal marine and colonial army. Was the voyage to the Netherlands a curse because of the involvement of the Moluccan soldiers in the enforcement of the Dutch colonial rule? What about the isolation referring to their political aspirations of the RMS?

As a student I was hostaged by many questions concerning the Moluccan Christian society in the Netherlands. One of them is still a guiding principle in being a mental caretaker and a preacher. If the Gospel is ‘good news’ what is the sense of suffering in the history of the Moluccan christian people in the Netherlands? At the university I met foreign scholars with all kinds of theological concepts. I found inspiration in the story telling C. S. Song, who showed that in story of Lady Meng is still happening nowadays [2]. The tale contains the story of the Bible in a nutshell, where political analysis, prophetic insights, politics, tears and hope come together in the reality of everyday life.

*Pain alone does not bring sense to life.  
Pain alone does not reveal the meaning of history.  
Pain alone does not enable humanity.  
And pain alone does not make the present worth living.  
There must be, beside pain hope.  
There must be, beside present, a future.  
There must be, beside one dreadful destruction after another,  
One joyful construction after another.  
Life is a race against pain.  
History is a never-ending process of construction on the ruins  
of destruction.*

My understanding of diaspora was broadened in the eighties of the last century when as a student I read an article of the Korean American theologian, S. H. Lee. His theological thoughts about liminality showed me a way to deal with the Dutch and the Moluccan context/culture. As a Korean Christian, he refused to live in the USA in what he called the position of ‘*in-between-ness*’. As American citizens many Koreans lived at the margins, not as the equals of their (white) fellow Americans, but as inferiors. The liminal situation is a calling to embrace the special history of the Koreans in the USA. People are proud that they feel at home in the American and the Korean world. But Lee does want to stick in the ‘*in-both-phase*’. The challenge is to leave the old situation grounded in the Korean culture and to participate in an integral way in the new American context. The liminal position leaves also the phase of being part of the both worlds; being at home in both worlds can also become a handicap, especially if one is only partially integrated in one of the two worlds. Lee chooses for a third way. According to him this liminality has to be transformed into an ‘*in beyond-phase*’ [3].

Lee refers to the calling of Abraham, who left his home city Ur and showed his faith in the living God (Gen. 12:1-9). As members of the Moluccan Theological Council, we were very pleased with the opportunity to elaborate further on the issue of liminality in the case of the Moluccan Protestant Christians in the Netherlands. It showed us the other face of diaspora and migration. As Dutch Moluccan Christians, we are more than victims. On basis of our faith, we are able to participate in an positive way in the diaspora.

#### *B. Biblical Understanding of Migration and Diaspora*

The creation of heaven and earth ends with the extradition of Adam and Eve. Outside paradise they are condemned to live. Adam and Eve are archetypes of the human basic history. Cain is also in his wanderings a lonesome person traveling through the world. The inhabitants of the city of Babylon who were building their tower unto the heavens, enter into his footsteps. But while building the tower they are scattered throughout the world. In Genesis 12 we read about the calling of Abraham. A city man who fulfills his calling and leaves the city to become a farmer/pilgrim and hoping for his offspring with Sara. This episode is followed by the division of the clan of Abraham, where Lot is choosing a road for his own happiness. Within 2 generations there is the flight of Jacob to his uncle Laban. And one generation later the sons of Jacob were forced to migrate to Egypt because of the economic crisis and the famine.

The Bible is a book of Migration. According to A. F. Walls, “The first book of the Bible might almost as readily have been called ‘Migrations’ as Genesis.” He states that migration is a biblical motif [4]. The theme of Exodus is the creation of Israel through the migration and the liberation of the twelve tribes out of Egypt. God put them on their way to the promised land: Canaan. In this story we are facing the paradox of how God is dealing with his people. In the crisis we can see His presence.

In the stories of Genesis within 3 generations we can see almost every known form of migration from voluntary to involuntary migration. Jacob is a fugitive, who consciously

chooses to fly. His sons filled with anger and jealousy sold Joseph – their brother – by ruse and deceit, who was carried away as a slave to Egypt. But the quarrel between brothers popped out to be a blessing in disguise, when the sons of Jacob had to move to Egypt when they were struck by severe famine and became economic refugees and luck seekers. Through these stories we see the hand of God, which is revealed in the oppressed lives of His people during a number of generations. Migrants may bring with them the memory of their ancestors. The concept of the God of our fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob represent a strong sense of historic identity throughout the Bible.

Is migration a curse or a blessing? In the book of Ruth we read about a migrant worker, who is determined to work without issuing a claim for a residence permit. The continuing story describes how divine judgment brought upon Israel successive and forced migrations to Assyria and Babylon. Divine mercy lead the people back: re-migration to the homeland (Ezra and Nehemia).

Migration and diaspora are concepts we meet in the Old Testament via the manifestation of refugees, traders, invaders, prisoners of war, deportees and returnees. In the story of God and his people we can find a key to understand the world history yesterday, today and tomorrow. Is there anything new under the sun? The stories highlights how migrations determines the future. Migration stands for dispossession, loss of patrimony, or habitat.

It can be punitive as in the case of losers like Adam (paradise), Cain (security of the group) Israel (land). It is the result of wrong-doing, leading to dislocation and deprivation. Adamic migration: disaster, deprivation and loss.

Migration can also be redemptive as we see in Genesis 12, where Abraham calling is the escape to a relatively better future. His migration was part of the deal of the Promised Land. Abraham the settled city dweller became a perennial migrant.

In Hebrews Abraham heads the list of those who died in faith without attaining the well-founded city; Christians as migrated workers seeking a better future.

Other NT writers use the figure of Diaspora: migration whereby so many Jews lived outside the Promised Land, to portray normal Christian experiences in the world (Phil 3:20) Christians as ‘refugees’ (1 Pet. 1:1; 2:11).

### *C. Diaspora a Struggle to become Living Church of Christ*

In the history of the Moluccan Churches in the Netherlands we recognize an emancipation history. The first generation arrived as strangers and political exiles and it took more than a quarter of a century before they were moved to become inhabitants and citizens of the land. During the years in the Netherlands this became a part of the good news: as the church of Christ the GIM was challenged to become free and independent in Christ. They gradually accepted to serve humanity in the Netherlands. In the story of the Dutch Moluccans, the diaspora experience eventually manifest itself as a blessing. The generations now realize that on the brink of the first century of the stay in the Netherlands they are more than strangers in the Dutch society. They live in different contexts in which they are challenged to become followers of Christ.

## IV. UNDURE-UNDURE: THE CHALLENGE TO BE MOLUCCAN CHURCH IN THE NETHERLANDS

### *A. Theological Keywords*

In the colonial church the western way of reading theology was normative. During the Second World War, the government of the church came into the hands of the natives. This was continued during the decolonization of Indonesia. The Dutch ministers were replaced by Indonesian reverends. Gradually the way of believing changed too. We cannot discuss this extensively here; we limit ourselves to the great changes in reading and doing theology. In the slipstream of liberation theology, (inter)contextual theology also developed in the Indonesian archipelago.

Since the edition in 1994 of the book *Seputar Teologi Operatif* is used at the theological faculty of Duta Wacana in Yogyakarta [5]. Theology is the human effort of the faithful to be obedient to and carry out the will of God in real life. In biblical Christian faith all members of the church are called to reinterpret constantly new and contextual experiences of lived faith, Church traditions and Scriptures. The book aims to find and understand something that appears to be present and influential in the daily practice of the life of the church. What is the main source of faith life, under the light of God?

Twenty-one years later reverend Chris Tamaela in his dissertation is describing the shifts in the GPM by compounding the term “*supuization*” as a model of contextual theology in the field of church music and liturgy within the GPM [6]. The word *supu* is based on the indigenous language in Central Maluku *supu*, or *sopa* or *sopo*, which means ‘acquire’, or ‘receive’ or ‘accept’ and ‘respond positively’. With the concept of *supuization* he refers to an interaction between two parties working together to create something good. It is a process of communication between humans and ancestors, humans and the Christian God, or between the Moluccan people in their cultural context.

In the Moluccan churches in the Netherlands theology has always been subordinated to the congregation life. The emphasis has been placed on the church as an institution. It was about status and formalities. In my dissertation, I have illustrated some considerations for the development of a Moluccan theology in the Netherlands. The above mentions concepts of contextualization in Indonesia is a boast for the development of a Moluccan Dutch theological approach [7]. Also in the field of pastoral care amongst the Moluccan Protestants in the Netherlands. It is an opportunity to be present as the living church. In what way does the Moluccan ecclesial community manage to involve people in the church at local and national level? Is it possible to replace the old ecclesiastical and colonial mindset by another and integral way of being church? Are we able to connect people from the traditional ecclesiastical setting when it concerns the calling of the church? What does this mean for the pastoral approaches?

### *B. The Dutch Situation*

There is no Moluccan district in Amsterdam. From the beginning, the Marine families of Moluccan origin lived throughout the city and later also in the region. The church congregation was characterized from the outset by mobility and

individualization. Later on young Moluccans came to study and work in the city of Amsterdam.

The first generation choose to be responsible for the ministry in the Moluccan church. With the support of the Dutch authorities they were able to build up their church on basis of the traditions they brought with them. Almost 70 years later not only in Amsterdam, but also in the Moluccan districts there is the challenge to find deacons and elders (ecclesiastical office bearers). Nowadays people want to be members of the church, but they have doubts to take part in church work as officials. The examples from the camp and the district church frighten the current church members. The role of the former soldiers in the establishment of the GIM was essential. The first generation realized their shortcomings, but they trusted completely in the interference of God. They dared to become instruments in the hand of God. Nowadays most of the GIM members consider the task to commit themselves unselfishly as too heavy and not feasible. They just want to be a member of the church.

Anno 2018 the GIM is also facing a great shortage of ministers. In the last five years there is no supply of ministers. Is this a consequence of the low wages and the high expectations? The GIM still struggles with the legacy of the colonial church, where everything was literally arranged from above. Despite those serious memories of the strong elders and deacons in the camp church we notice an interesting increase in the way how church members are committing themselves in all kinds of activities for the building of the congregation. As volunteers they want to be a part of the community of Christ as Sunday-school leaders and choir leaders. They also provide administrative support as well as to take care of the maintenance of the church building.

In Amsterdam the church building is prepared for the services by a team of sextons. In former days the sexton or verger was called in the Malay language *tua-agama*, literally this means 'the eldest in faith'. Next to this team there is also a visitors group. In cooperation with the board of the church the members of this group visit the elderly or the sick people. Their support in the pastoral ministry is essential. Every visit - even with laypersons - shows the communion as the body of Christ. This can be of importance in this period of transmission, in the search of being a church of the future.

The starting point is the personal relationship as an individual person with the church of Christ. Because each person is not just a member of the Church. You also hold the office of a believer, a person of faith. This profession has been neglected in the days of the colonial church. And now it can become an element in the empowerment of the church. As members of the body of Christ they can be used in the congregation on the basis of the office of every believer. Especially when it comes to pastoral care. They can become a living sign of the presence of the Living Lord.

#### V. CONCLUSIONS: CHANGING WORLDVIEW AND THE NEED OF A CONTEMPORARY CREED

In the decades of the GIM in the Netherlands we have used church images and keywords to reveal the developments in the

short church history. It also illustrates the emancipation of this church. From a church with a colonial heritage to an independent church far away from home in the Dutch polder landscape. After 8 decades, the temporary stay seems to take permanent forms. The GIM has a calling to fulfill among the Moluccan (church community) in the Netherlands. She can also testify how God has taken a place in her existence.

In every decade the GIM was in search for their calling as the church of Christ. And now they have a challenge to stay in the Dutch city and also to pray for the city! I want to end this article with some remarks. It can be seen as an attempt to do intercultural theology: seeking an opportunity to do Moluccan theology in the Netherlands. Therefore, I am using the words of the song '*undure-undure*' as a symbol for the Moluccan cultural identity next to the framework of the intercultural theology as I referred to in the concepts of Yogyakarta, Ambon and Amsterdam. In this way I try to find new elements for a framework for an appropriate Moluccan Dutch Christian theology in the Netherlands. In the field of pastoral care people can become important. It's not because of the office, more over it is the presence of a fellow man/person. In the challenging situation for the GIM the presence of the Lord is seen in the way how the people are being consoled in their life situations.

On the one hand, the Moluccans seem to be fully integrated in the Netherlands; but on the other hand they are confronted time and time again with all sorts of identity issues. By this I mean especially their religious identity: who are the Moluccan Christians in the Netherlands. In the last 5 years there were 3 Moluccan theological theses published at Vrije University Amsterdam. It appears that language, life concepts, culture and history are important for a contemporary Moluccan theology in the Netherlands. What is their religious identity? Who are they as Moluccan Christians who are living in the Netherlands? Is it possible to describe their religious identity?

In order to be able to formulate an answer I consciously make use of a songverse of '*Undure undure*'. The two words only stands for a withdrawal. But when we sing the whole verse according to me the message is a theological dialectic oneliner, where we are encouraged to persevere in the battle of life.

*Undure Undure  
Kata djangan undure  
Apa datang dari muka  
Kata djangan undure*

For this verse I can formulate two oneliners in order to keep the fighting spirit:

- 'Don't withdraw whatever you are facing!'
- 'Never speak out the word withdrawal!'

This traditional song gives inspiration and courage to face the future. Combined with the Gospel it will keep us going to be able to do theology in His church.

In the spring of 2018, I was involved in an exchange program of Moluccan churches. It gave me the opportunity to give lectures at the UKIM on pastoral theology. At the campus we made use of multimedia. How to be present and support people in their existential questions by making use of a mobile phone and internet? Most of the lessons were given together with the UKIM teachers. This cooperation in team teaching was a good practice in describing what I am actually doing in the specific

situations of pastoral care in the GIM. It was an eye-opener for my religious identity. It showed me that the Moluccas was also a point of orientation for my identity as a Moluccan Christian. In the lessons I presented a personal creed, which I wrote at the end of my thesis. It was the beginning of a dialogue. Pastoral theology can open the way for our liberation as people from God. It helps us to be confronted with our identity. A contemporary creed is an opportunity to add something here. I end my article with this creed as a starting point for new pastoral activities.



**Pengakuan iman dari seorang Maluku di Belanda II**

*Beta pertjaja kepada Allah Bapa, jang sebagai Upu Lanite telah mentjiptakan bumi, dan jang menghembuskan nafasNja di dalam Alifuru di atas gunung Nunusaku. Dan beta pertjaja kepada Jesus Kristus, Tete Manis di antara Tete Nene Mojang jang dalam wujud itu mendjadi hubungan dengan Allah Abraham, Ishak dan Jakub. KehidupanNja dinjatakan oleh kasih tanpa batas, Jang telah memberikan diriNja sebagai korban jang disalibkan Jang telah mati dan Jang bangkit sesudah tiga hari sehingga turun temurun akan ada kemungkinan untuk mendapat ketentrangan dalam persekutuan dengan Tuhan Beta pertjaja kepada geredja sebagai persekutuan jang didjiwai oleh kasih sajang sebagaimana dinjatakan dalam tjara hidup Maluku 'ale rasa beta rasa, lain sajang lain dan pela gandung', penuh rahmat dan kesetia kawan. Beta berani untuk pertjaja bahwa dengan persekutuan dan kesetiakawanan seperti ini akan ada tjukup ruangan hidup di seluruh dunia di bahwa langit*

*supaja semua orang dapat hidup dalam keadilan penuh di bawah naungan Upu Lanite kemarin, hari ini dan pada semua hari hidup ini. Amin*

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