

Inter- and intra-religious appropriation

Generational relations in the Moluccan Protestant church in the Netherlands

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Moluccan people arrived in the Netherlands in 1951, as a result of the complicated process of the decolonization of Indonesia. A situation of permanent waiting and political disappointment resulted in this growing Moluccan community remaining. The Moluccan Protestant church reflects the migration experience and generational developments. The Moluccan churches face a decrease in membership and a lack of youth. The Malay language, the adherence to strict, liturgical rules and the unchanging, 'old-fashioned' character are possible causes. The challenges result in transformations of the Moluccan Protestant landscape. Moluccan Christians move to evangelical denominations. Here, they appreciate another style of worship against the background of traditional religious roots that cross into the ethnic-cultural domain. In turn, Moluccan Protestant churches experiment with bi- or tri-lingual services and hymns, with a broader range of instruments that accompany congregational singing (including traditional Moluccan instruments) and with different styles of song and service. This article discusses the appropriation or borrowing of practices within the Moluccan Protestant landscape. I aim to shed light on generational differences, relations and conflicts. I argue that both inter- and intra-religious borrowing as appropriation is a helpful perspective for analysing religious transformation and embodied religiosity.

Introduction

The rhythmic, pounding sound initiates vibrations of air. The hands of the players synchronically strike the membrane of the *tifa* drums. Elegantly

and powerfully, the palm and fingers move from the edge to the centre. The rhythm fills the circular space and enters our bodies. As we begin to pronounce the first words of the hymn *api indjil*, our tones adjust to each other, forming polyphonic factions. The interlocking voices become embedded as one body of people. Some bend their heads, sit still, and close their eyes. Others stand up straight, stretch their arms into the air, and look up. Seeing the green, Dutch trees through the large, coloured windows, we sing about Ambon, from where the fire of faith has been radiating.

Ambon is the capital island of the Moluccas, situated in the south-east of Indonesia. At the beginning of February 2023, a diverse group of Moluccan Protestants came together in the centre for Moluccan migrant churches in Houten, the Netherlands, that hosts five church organizations. The occasion for the assembly was a religious service. A variety of Moluccan generations and denominations were present, ranging from traditional mainline Protestants to evangelical and Pentecostal adherents. While scattered across the organizational landscape, people's preference of worship

style and theological content was mostly evangelical. The exuberance of praise, testimony of faith, electronic instruments, and revival songs, the focus on evangelization, laying on of hands, and the preaching about the satanic source of Moluccan ancestral powers all pointed in that direction. At the same time, several traditional Malay hymns, as well as the Moluccan drum (*tifa*), formed part of the service too.¹ These typical elements embrace a broadly shared Moluccan sense of ethnic religiosity. On the one hand, the *tifa* and the Malay hymns span geographical distance, diasporic generations and Protestant denominations. On the other hand, they shed light on the differences and conflicts among young and elderly evangelical or mainline Protestant Moluccan people in the Moluccas and in the Netherlands.

The playing of the *tifa* and hymn-singing are examples of religious practices that form a vehicle for travelling through the Moluccan Protestant landscape, in order to understand the generational relations and tensions. The drum and the song *api indjil* bring out themes like purity, tradition, aesthetics and authenticity through a journey of exchange. The practices entangle and cross, mix and clash, and give insight into religious change and embodiment.

The goal of this article is to analyse practices such as those described above as a material study of religious appropriation. This means that I use a material-religion approach, analysing material affordances and practices of mediation to further conceptualize religious appropriation. Appropriation is a word that is often mentioned, employed and claimed. Many people refer to the term as meaning cultural

appropriation. Richard Rogers (2006: 474) defines cultural appropriation as ‘the use of a culture’s symbols, artifacts, genres, rituals, or technologies by members of another culture.’ The concept of appropriation seems to have originated in the context of a critique of representations, uses and commodifications of certain elements of marginalized or colonized cultures by dominant cultures. In my view, the concept exists in a paradoxical reality that operates through numerous tensions. On the one hand, appropriation is, as Rogers (p. 474) says, ‘inescapably intertwined with cultural politics.’ The practice of appropriation constitutes and is constituted by power relations between different groups. In this light, the reality of appropriation is analysed as negative, against the backdrop of an almost non-existent ideal of equal cultural exchange. On the other hand, appropriation in itself is inescapable, since, in our current, globalized world, cultures and peoples continually come into contact with one another. Whereas the concept originally refers to a process that is often evaluated as wrong, as the practice of appropriation takes place in a context of unequal relations, it is, at the same time, a natural, human, historical process.

The tension is my point of departure. I argue that appropriation as a term encapsulates the idea that this concept is not only a label or practice, but is also being experienced by people. The scale of these experiences might vary from negative to positive – experiences that are aesthetically formed throughout people’s lives. In other words, practices of appropriation might be felt as exchanging, borrowing or stealing. This is also the reason why I use practices of appropriation and borrowing practices almost synonymously throughout the article. I broaden the concept of appropriation and show the particular and fascinating feature of the term, that brings together

1 Moluccan Malay is the native language of Moluccans.

a human practice and the judgement and experience of this practice – something that distinguishes appropriation from other terms (e.g. exchange, transformation). The concept of *sensational forms* will function as a tool to demonstrate the embodied and varied experiences of appropriation.

Both the wide linguistic and practical appearance of cultural appropriation spurs a broader analysis of the concept. Appropriation always deals with the formation and identification of *us* and *the other*. Furthermore, appropriation points to processes of cultural tradition and change. Therefore, I think the practice of appropriation is an interesting lens for studying human relations in cultural contexts, and for how people form a sense of authenticity while adapting to changing circumstances. In this article, I aim to do this through the presentation of a case study focused on Moluccan Protestants in the Netherlands. The analysis of the specific case has much to offer in the context of broader and international research on cultural exchange, borrowing practices and appropriation. The pathways of the Moluccan Protestant landscape lead to a historically and geographically entangled inter-relationship among Moluccan Protestants of various ages, nationalities and denominations. A long tradition of contact exists between the Dutch Reformed Calvinist church and the Moluccan Protestant church, which started with colonial contact in the year 1605, was intensified by projects of missionization in the nineteenth century, and continued after the independence of the Moluccan church in 1935. Several of the oldest Protestant congregations can be found on the Moluccas. Therefore, regarding Christianity in this region, the Central Moluccas occupy a special position, as the Indonesia expert Adolf Heuken states: ‘the Christians of Ambon and the neighboring Lease Islands

are the only Christian communities in the Moluccas that have survived without interruption to the present day’ (Heuken 2008: 31). Although the Dutch- and Indonesian-Moluccan Protestant church are related to each other, they are also embedded in differing and dynamic national, religious and cultural contexts. Moreover, the growing presence of Pentecostal Christianity is visible in the Moluccan religious landscape – a reflection of global Protestant dynamics. In short, the case of the Moluccan Protestant migrant community highlights colonial and post-colonial religious change and exchange, because of a unique landscape of so-called lines of influence. These lines run back and forth between the Moluccas and the Netherlands, but also between mainline and evangelical denominations, and even within denominations between different age groups. The specificity of the case is suitable for telling a bigger story about religious transformation and embodied religiosity. It does so by highlighting practices of exchange or appropriation that shed light on generational and denominational relations and tensions between and within Moluccan Protestant communities.

Hence, in line with the theme of this special issue, exploring a variety of perspectives and forms of appropriation, I will focus on appropriation within the religious realm. What can the Moluccan Protestant landscape teach us about the workings of religious appropriation? The goal of the article is to argue that both inter- and intra-religious borrowing as appropriation constitutes a helpful perspective in analysing religious transformation and embodied religiosity. By examining the generational and denominational relations, differences and conflicts among the Moluccan Protestant community, I aim to shed light on religious change and tradition, on authentic identity, and on changing realities.

In order to map and understand the generational relations among the Moluccan Protestant community in the Netherlands, several theoretical ideas are discussed. First, the transcultural and relational reality of the Moluccan Protestant landscape is laid out conceptually. I also reflect on the central term in this article: religious appropriation or practices of borrowing. Themes such as purity, authenticity, aesthetics and tradition flow from this discussion and form the stepping stones for the empirical analysis later on in the article. Subsequently, a section on methodology accounts for the research process of anthropological data-gathering. I present a short overview of the Moluccan case study, because the Moluccas as a geographical place with historical relevance, as well as the story of the diasporic community, are not very well known. After that, the case study will be presented and analysed through a focus on song, music and liturgical language. I argue that the inter- and intra-religious practices of appropriation demonstrate generational relations and tensions, which are formed through contextual changes in religious realities and feelings of embodied comfort regarding religious identity. The article ends with a conclusion.

Transcultural and relational: religious appropriation

Because the term 'appropriation' is used in a wide range of contexts, I aim to reflect theoretically on the concept, in order to state clearly what I mean by the word and how I use it to look at my case material. The inherent transcultural and relational character of appropriation lays out the foundations of religious tradition and change in the Moluccan Protestant landscape.

Rogers (2006: 477) identifies four so-called conditions under which acts or practices of appropriation take place. The first

three are cultural exchange, cultural dominance, and cultural exploitation. Rogers (p. 477) uses the fourth category, transculturation, to challenge the assumptions underlying the other three categories. According to Rogers (p. 489), transculturation reveals and corrects the false assumption that cultures are singular, bounded and autonomous entities. Appropriation as transculturation is thus based on the deconstruction of boundaries.

The concept of transculturation is not only part of the concept of appropriation, but also conceptually close in itself, when looking at the similar lines along which the theorizing seems to have evolved. D. G. König and Katja Rakow (2016: 93–5) work towards *transcultural* as an approach, in order to analyse phenomena that question supposed boundaries that underlie many definitions of the concept of the transcultural. In other words, both terms – appropriation and transcultural – shifted from conceptualizations that relied on the assumption of cultures as being fixed, bounded frameworks, to a conceptualization that sees cultures as always in the making, socially constructed through relational processes (Berg and Rakow 2016: 186).

Processual relations entangle the concepts of appropriation and transculturation, which is why I find the work of Eva Spies (2019) of help here. On her account from a relational perspective, Spies departs from the idea of religious diversity. In her view (2019: 63, 65–6), the notion of encounter between religions often implies a concept of religious diversity that is not helpful for understanding how religious difference is produced and how people deal with difference in religious practice and identity; diversity is often seen as the plural of a singular unit or as the part of a whole. Spies (p. 63) sees cultures and religions as 'the

temporary result of relational processes. She treats 'religious communities, actors, doctrines, objects, and so on as relational, which means understanding them as constituted in and through relations and processes of relating' (p. 63).

König and Rakow, Berg and Rakow, and Spies developed their theoretical approaches in the context of religious studies. Therefore, I think the application of their relational and transcultural approach to the concept of appropriation is useful. The complicated lines of influence that form and map the Moluccan Protestant landscape make especially clear the conditional transcultural and relational context in which practices of appropriation take place.

In this article, I specifically look at religious appropriation. This can be described as, or felt by people to be, stealing, owning, borrowing or offending. All these words carry different associations and point to a variety of appropriative practices in a variety of situations and relations. As stated, I am interested in the material study of religious appropriation, which means that I am less focused on appropriation as an academic label, perception or judgement, and more on the embodied, sensational religious formations of people themselves, that constitute the emotion and experience of practising or dealing with practices of appropriation.

Many authors, contrary to my approach, write about religious appropriation from an ethical viewpoint (see e.g. *The Ethics of Cultural Appropriation* [2009] by James O. Young and Conrad G.). Liz Bucar (2022: 2), for instance, uses the word *stealing* and defines religious appropriation as instances 'when individuals adopt religious practices without committing to religious doctrines, ethical values, systems of authority, or institutions, in ways that exacerbate systems of structural injustice'. I acknowledge the

unequal power relations when addressing the issue of appropriation. Nevertheless, in my own work, I focus on the conditions and changes that may induce or allow practices of religious appropriation, and how, in turn, such practices constitute religious transformation. To me, the fascinating question is how and why people, in this case Moluccan Protestants, adopt certain religious practices, and how they themselves, as well as other Moluccan Protestants, view borrowing practices as such.

As has become clear by now, I talk about practices of appropriation, rather than appropriation alone. Appropriation is often employed as a label, whereas I intend to give insight into the workings of religious appropriation. Practices constitute so-called doings and sayings, focus on people, and are embodied. This article is a material study of religious appropriation, and a praxeological approach allows me to analyze religious formations and sensations. I am inspired, for instance, by the work *Taking Offense* (Kruse *et al.* 2018), although I do not focus on images *per se*. The book is meant to show what is at stake in the heated debates and tensions over images that are perceived as highly insulting or offensive in societies that are increasingly religiously diverse. The authors state: 'Images are not simply depictions; they become visible to beholders in the context of embodied, habitual practices of looking, display, and figuration – a visual regime' (p. 9). I am interested in the exchange or borrowing of religious and cultural forms among Moluccan Protestants, and how these practices of appropriation are deemed to be authorized or unauthorized by different people. Hence, religious appropriation in the Moluccan case not only maps a relational Protestant landscape, but also demonstrates how people view, judge and feel about the change and borrowing. Such

experiences and feelings are formed by embodied, habitual practices, which is why the case analysis on religious appropriation sheds light on embodied religiosities.

Furthermore, the analysis of the case study argues for attention to be cast on the pluriform and multi-directional interactions, when addressing practices of religious appropriation. I take note, for example, of the work of Dann Wigner (2018), who looks at closely related, internal forms of appropriation (although I do not agree with his strict division between spiritual practices and theological content). His analysis shows that intra-religious borrowing reveals something about perceptions and experiences of contested authority, tradition, authenticity, identity and differences that form and show the boundaries of the groups of people that do the borrowing. I think more can be gained than only studying two (putatively uniform) groups of people, whereby the dominant, Western religious group uses cultural or religious forms from the passive, marginalized group. Not disregarding such realities, I mean to take into account a relational network of people and practices. Jørn Borup (2020), for instance, writes about internal dynamics in the context of Western Buddhism, by which important questions about authority and ownership are raised. In the same light, Laurel Zwissler (2011) analyses an intermediate, dynamic position and practice of appropriation, that she calls ritual borrowing. In this article, I map a landscape or network of appropriative religious practices and relations that acknowledges the complex dynamics, responses and perceptions between and within different Moluccan Protestant groups that are, at the same time, also alike.

The starting point for this article are practices of appropriation. These cultural and religious practices among – in

this case – Moluccan Protestants of varying generations and denominations in the Netherlands constitute and are constituted by the relational and transcultural realities of Moluccan lives. Against these ever-changing realities, the practices form a lens for understanding how conceptions of ethnic and religious belonging, authentic identity and immutable traditions arise through embodied religiosities. Religious forms and practices move, are borrowed, stay the same or change between, across and within Moluccan Protestant areas, denominations and generations. The case study complicates straightforward directions of appropriative practices and offers insight into religious tradition and transformation through contacts and exchanges that make up the transcultural and relational landscape.

Purity and authenticity, tradition and aesthetics

Culture, as well as religion, is constituted by and engaged in appropriative relations, which is an ongoing process of transformation (Rogers 2006: 495, 499). Thus, religious appropriation is inherently relational and transcultural. This lack of *purity* contrasts with a clear sensation of cultural-religious authenticity that people feel and experience in their lives. Appropriation, then, operates through a paradoxical condition of tension. Practices can only be seen, felt and experienced as appropriation because of a sense of transgression of boundaries of purity or authenticity. At the same time, practices of appropriation can only happen precisely because of the inherent transcultural and relational definition. The tension is the basic reason for why I apply the concept of appropriation. The Moluccan Protestant landscape complicates straightforward directions and scales of religious appropriation, illuminating

ating a transcultural, relational reality of cultural and religious exchange. However, I do not advocate for a total deconstruction of the concept of appropriation. In the term and phenomenon of appropriation, the transcultural exchange and experience of purity or authenticity come together – a paradoxical aspect that would be lost when simply referring to religious transformation or transculturation, for example. In other words, the concept appropriation also brings forward the experience of the phenomenon itself. Through the case analysis, I show how these experiences can be positive and negative. This is also the reason why I use practices of appropriation and borrowing practices almost synonymously, to highlight the scale of experiences, which might range from disgust to euphoria. Both the practice and experience, both the scales and directions, deepen our understanding of the workings of religious appropriation.

The field of heritage studies deals with such a paradoxical tension in the same way and, therefore, is informative. Instead of merely stating that cultures or religious forms are fabricated entities or bounded entities, the fascinating question is why these forms are perceived as essential, while being constructed at the same time. The ‘cultural production of the real’, a term coined by Birgit Meyer and Mattjis van de Port (2018), grasps this underlying tension.

Heritage formation ‘denotes the processes whereby, out of the sheer infinite number of things, places and practices that have been handed down from the past, a selection is made that is qualified as a precious and irreplaceable resource, essential to personal and collective identity and necessary for self-respect’ (Lowenthal 2015: 81). As Birgit Meyer and Marleen De Witte (2013) explain, heritage formation entails some sort of *sacralization* through which cultural forms are lifted up and set apart.

However, the appeal of cultural heritage partly lies in its denial of being merely made up – ‘on its promise to provide an essential ground to social-cultural identities’ (Meyer and Van de Port 2018: 6).

Authenticity is central to formations of heritage, since the material and immaterial remnants have to be authenticated to qualify as heritage. Meyer and Van de Port (2018: 16) state: ‘Our basis proposition is that a sense of authenticity as an essence is evoked in beholders through shared sensations and experiences with regard to forms of cultural heritage.’ This sense of authenticity is effected through a particular aesthetics – sensational, emotional and intellectual relations – to which it owes its reality effects.

In my view, practices of religious appropriation, and opinions and feelings about them, work according to a similar process. Religious cultures, religious traditions and religious identities are felt to belong to one’s own. The sensation of a bounded essence of religious authenticity is embodied and formed by aesthetic formations, in the words of Birgit Meyer (2009). She introduced the term ‘sensational forms’, which are relatively fixed, authorized modes of invoking and organizing access to the transcendental (Meyer 2006: 9). Sensational forms refer to a configuration of religious media in which a believer’s sensorium is tuned through techniques of the body (Meyer 2012: 26–7). As such, sensational forms play a role in the construction of religious identities and communities. I use the idea of sensational forms as a tool to describe, explain and analyse the scale of experiences of religious appropriation. As stated, the concept of appropriation embraces practices and experiences of the phenomenon itself. In the case study, I choose material examples (music, liturgical language and hymns) that mediate religious experience and form

the practices of religious appropriation. I see these material examples as sensational forms. Their embodiment tells a lot about the diverse experiences of religious appropriation, reflecting generational relations in the Moluccan Protestant landscape.

Practices and experiences of religious appropriation show Moluccan communal relations through embodied religiosities that inform the protection and transgression of perceived boundaries of religious traditions. Tradition is another concept that operates in a condition of tension between a constructive nature and the sensation of immutable authenticity. Authors such as Olav Hammer (2016) and Michel Despland (2005: 29) highlighted the dynamic character of tradition. Within the available cultural repertoire, in this case the Moluccan Protestant landscape, traditions are continually innovated upon – often in light of circumstances of change that are perceived as a threat. As Hammer and Despland explain, transmission and transformation go hand in hand. Traditions are passed on from generation to generation, and innovations are justified through the invocation of anteriority as ground of authority by which continuity is guaranteed. Through the case study of Moluccan Protestants in the Netherlands, I analyse practices of religious appropriation that are afforded by and result in changes of religious tradition and religious transformation.

Research methodology

The case study is based on anthropological data that was gathered from June 2021 to July 2023 in the context of my Ph.D. research about the role of hymn and psalm texts for the identity formation of Moluccan Protestants in the Netherlands. The data collection consisted of approximately eighty semi-structured and unstructured interviews among second- and

third-generation Moluccan Protestants in the Netherlands, as well as participant observation in Moluccan traditional/mainline Protestant churches and evangelical churches. The interviews were conducted in Dutch.

Extensive fieldwork notes and interview transcriptions were coded and formed the basis for the research analysis. I used the theme of the special issue, appropriation, as a lens to look at my research material, and, in turn, used my research material to broaden perspectives on appropriation conceptually.

The research design and methodology have been approved beforehand by the ethical review committee of the faculty of humanities at Utrecht University, the Netherlands. The research meets standard ethical requirements for anthropological projects. For instance, to safeguard ethical principles, to each informant, the subject, goal and procedure of the research were explained so that informed consent could be given. Interviews were recorded with the permission of the informants, and the real names of the interviewees are left out.

The Moluccan Protestant landscape

The Moluccas, the so-called spice islands, have attracted foreigners since time immemorial. Trade brought a variety of religious traditions to the Moluccas. Geographically, the Moluccas can be divided into three areas, each of which has a distinct religious history: the North Moluccas are predominantly Muslim, the South Moluccas are predominantly Catholic, and the Central Moluccas are predominantly Protestant. The last are the most relevant in the context of this article.

The Dutch arrived on the scene in 1605, and the VOC, the United East India Company, was able to establish an often-contested trade monopoly. Along the way,

Reformed Christianity was introduced (Patty 2018: 73, 77). The year 1605 marked the beginning of what would be more than three centuries of Dutch colonial rule over large parts of present-day Indonesia.

The year 1815 marked the shift from chartered company mission to independent missionary societies, which aimed to develop a Moluccan Christianity modelled after Dutch Reformed Calvinism. The Moluccan Protestant church (Gereja Protestant Maluku, GPM) became autonomous in 1935.

Moluccan Protestantism is the product of religious and cultural relations and encounters. Evolving from a missionary context, Moluccan Protestantism interacted with local cultural-religious forms. In other words, Moluccan Protestants' cultural-religious cosmologies played a large role in the formation of Protestant identities. An example is the use of the *piring natzar*, a white offering plate with coins under a white cloth, where people meet God and their ancestors (for more information, see Hendrik 1995).

As in many missionary and post-missionary contexts, such entanglements gave rise to contestations on the *purity* of Moluccan Protestantism (see e.g. Keane 2007). The GPM pursued a policy of purification from the 1960s on, absolutizing the view of the Dutch missionaries and simultaneously symbolizing the aspiration to be seen as *modern Christians* in the context of Indonesian nation-building. After 2000, the GPM and Moluccan theologians started to develop contextual theologies. Contextual theology refers to the theological alignment with a variety of contexts (social, political, economic, and so on).

Dutch colonial rule ended in 1942. On 17 August 1945, Soekarno and Hatta declared Indonesia independent. A bloody

war followed, in which the Dutch tried to reclaim its colony, making use of the KNIL army – the Royal Netherlands-Indies Army – an important part of which consisted of recruited Moluccan men. Under UN pressure, a decolonization process was started in 1949. However, discontent among a faction of the Moluccans, who had high hopes of Indonesia becoming a federalist state rather than a republic, led to the declaration of the RMS, the Republik Maluku Selatan or the Republic of the South Moluccas, on 25 April 1950. Nonetheless, the RMS never became a political reality. The Moluccas, therefore, have always formed part of the Indonesian republic (Chauvel 1990).

The decolonization of Indonesia placed many Moluccan KNIL soldiers in a difficult position. Out of fear of retaliation from the Indonesian republic, many did not want to join the republican army nor demobilize themselves on Indonesian soil. On the other side, the Indonesian republic did not want the soldiers to support the declared RMS. The situation led the Dutch government to decide to bring these soldiers with their families – in total around 12,500 people – to the Netherlands to discharge them (Amersfoort 2004: 155).

The empty promise, made by the Dutch state, of a temporary stay of several months (the Moluccan community would return to a free, independent Republic of South Maluku) turned into the reality of a permanent stay. The year 2021 commemorated the seventy-year presence of Moluccans in the Netherlands.

Religion is seen as one of the main ways by which the Moluccan exiled community tried to hold on to its identity. In the Netherlands, the Moluccan Protestant church was uncoupled from the mother church on the Moluccas. Over the years, the

church disintegrated.² Rather than theological disputes, personal and political disagreements resulted in the establishment of a variety of Moluccan church organizations. In terms of theology, doctrine and tradition, the organizations are similar.

The largest Moluccan church organization is the pro-RMS Geredja Indjili Maluku (GIM). The other two relatively smaller church organizations are the Noodgemeente Gereja Protestan Maluku di Belanda (NGPMB) and the NGPMB Maart '53. The NGPMB is the most comparable to the GPM on the Moluccas. This organization is more Indonesia-minded and less politically oriented. For example, since 1984, the NGPMB has been using an Indonesian hymnbook, called *Kidung Jemaat*, which contains a collection of old and new international and national hymns. For a long time, the GIM and the NGPMB Maart '53 did not sing songs from the *Kidung Jemaat*, because of the Indonesian association and language to which they were politically opposed.

Nowadays, the GIM uses its own hymnbook, the *Buku Njianjian Geredja* (BNG), which also contains a collection of hymns, including songs from the *Kidung Jemaat*. Moreover, in 2010, the GIM co-produced a new hymnbook together with the GPM on the Moluccas, which consists of locally composed Moluccan hymns (*Nyanyian GPM*).

In congregations of the NGPMB Maart '53, songs from the *Kidung Jemaat* are now sung as well. The NGPMB Maart '53 is often seen as the most traditional of all Moluccan church organizations. Congregations belonging to this organization, for instance,

have been using the hymnbook *Mazmur dan Tahlil* for a very long time. This hymnbook was printed in the nineteenth century. The book contains psalms and hymns in archaic Malay. The Moluccan migrant community arrived in the Netherlands with this particular hymnbook, which is why church organizations want to hold on to the book. However, in the Moluccas, the hymnbook *Mazmur dan Tahlil* is considered to be outdated and is no longer used.

The landscape of Moluccan Protestant church organizations in the Netherlands is complemented by the GJPIN, which is fully directed towards Indonesia, and the GKMS (Geredja Kristen Maluku Selatan/Serikat).³ The latter originated from a parting with the GIM in the 1970s. More than a decade ago, two Moluccan men took over the role of minister in the GKMS congregations. They took the organization in a strongly evangelically inspired direction.

Furthermore, especially from the 1970s onwards, many Moluccan Protestants converted to evangelical denominations, in collective moments that are referred to as *revival*. Since then, Moluccan evangelical churches and associations have been founded, which have evolved into multi-cultural congregations, also including Dutch members.

The information above illustrates the historical and present-day lines of influence that form the Moluccan Protestant landscape. I use this landscape to illuminate how religious appropriation takes place not only between religions or religious organizations. The case complicates the directions and scales of religious appropriation. The lines move through colonial and post-colonial times, through missionary

2 In this article, I use the terms Moluccan Protestant church in the Netherlands, traditional Moluccan church and Moluccan church interchangeably.

3 I did not include the GJPIN in my anthropological research.

encounters and Moluccan congregations, and through national politics and denominational contexts. Religious appropriation in the Moluccan Protestant landscape demonstrates the relations between and within mainline and evangelical Moluccans – groups that consist of a variety of nationalities, ages and organizations. The boundaries of these groups are moving, conflating and changing, depending on the point of view. Therefore, I talk about inter- and intra-relations: religious appropriation shows how the relations that make up the Moluccan Protestant landscape can be between and within at the same time. The example of the use of hymnbooks demonstrates the lines in a concrete way, disclosing organizational, historical and political relations, which also change over time. Hymnbooks travel along with Moluccan Protestants; they show hymnological histories of missionary and international contacts, and they form a site for theological, political, liturgical and denominational exchange and contestation. I see the use (or the non-use) of specific hymnbooks in a diversity of Moluccan congregations as a material example of religious appropriation that unfolds (changing) relations in the Moluccan Protestant landscape.

Inter- and intra-religious appropriation

The GPM and the Moluccan mainline Protestant churches in the Netherlands share the same background and theological basis. Therefore, they can be seen as intra-related – although, in terms of geographics, the distance between the GPM and the GIM, NGPMB or NGPMB Maart '53 is enormous. At the same time, the particular Indonesian context of the GPM after 1945 and the context of migration and isolation of Dutch-Moluccan church organizations have resulted in totally different religious realities. For example, the GPM is seen as

modern and evolving, whereas Moluccan congregations in the Netherlands are viewed as static and old-fashioned. An informant, who grew up in the Moluccas and moved to the Netherlands when she married, said: 'I think, after I moved, I went back in time! The time of my grandmother, so far back.'⁴ She referred to the archaic version of the Bible, the old hymns, and the slow, lingering way of singing. In the Dutch-Moluccan context, traditions of liturgical practices and rules are sustained, out of respect for the first-generation Moluccans, out of nostalgia, and out of a feeling of necessity to hold on to one's identity *as it was*.⁵ Simultaneously, Moluccan congregations and Moluccan Protestants in the Netherlands are inspired by what they have heard, seen or experienced in the GPM on the Moluccas. Think of electronic musical accompaniment to congregational singing or Indonesian hymnbooks. Moluccan Protestants in the Netherlands listen to Indonesian hymns and gospel music on Spotify and YouTube in their daily lives, and gospel groups perform such songs as part of the liturgy.

Currently, challenges face the Moluccan traditional church organizations. The biggest issue, comparable to that for Dutch mainline Protestant congregations, is the decrease of membership. Most congregants of the Moluccan Protestant church are from the second generation. This generation grew up with a self-evident religious education according to the age-related pattern of Baptism, Sunday school, Catechism and Confirmation. Although a small group of Moluccan people from the third generation

4 Interview, 28.10.2021.

5 First generation refers to the Moluccan people who arrived in the Netherlands in 1951, second generation refers to their children, and so on.

and their children form still part of the Moluccan Protestant church, differences – in comparison with former times – are noticeable. Generally, the third generation has been raised more freely. Often, this generation speaks the Moluccan-Malay language less fluently and has become better integrated into Dutch society. Furthermore, for study- and job-related reasons, third-generation Moluccans have moved away from the villages where their congregations are located. The implication is that particular religious traditions are difficult to preserve, especially the ones that require skills that are passed down from generation to generation. Think of choirs and traditional music groups that accompany congregational singing, such as the *suling* (traditional Moluccan traverse flute) orchestras. Moreover, young, new members for the consistory and boards are increasingly hard to find. Sunday schools have decreased in number, not only because fewer children are born, but also because fewer Moluccan children are raised religiously. An informant, who had been a Sunday-school teacher for forty-two years, told me how his team taught a group of thirty-five children (aged three to fifteen) in three different groups. Now, his congregation has only seven Sunday-school students, which is already considered a lot for one of the rare Sunday schools that still exist.

A decreasing group of people, therefore, remain in the mainline Moluccan church. Some Moluccans still consider themselves religious but do not attend the service regularly, whereas others are no longer religious or have moved to evangelical denominations. Reasons for shifting to another denomination are often the strict, hierarchical rules, traditions and relations in the traditional Moluccan Protestant church. Also, the Malay language is mentioned as a barrier for understanding the sermon

and songs, and some find the style of worship old-fashioned. A ‘denominational mover’, as I call them, said: ‘there were a lot of empty chairs. ... The songs were sung *a capella* and no one played an instrument, and the sermon was very monotonous.’⁶ Furthermore, people referred to the organizational hurdles and quarrels, to the social control and to the predetermined liturgical ways of *doings and sayings*. The minister of an evangelical-minded Moluccan congregation said: ‘there is no freedom in the traditional church.’⁷ Denominational movers often find this freedom in Moluccan evangelical churches, where the sermons are in Dutch and the praise and worship consists of Dutch and English revival and gospel music, accompanied by full bands and led by cantors. Here, people feel that they can do and move however they want. An informant explained her worship experience in a Moluccan evangelical church: ‘I thought like, so this is also a way! So you do not have to sit still! ... Do you want to sit or stand? Do you want to raise your hands or dance? ... You can be free, really yourself.’⁸ Her words illustrate the variations in styles of worship that differ across denominations. Such styles are not merely diverse expressions of similar inner beliefs, but are embodied practices that also form religious ideas and attitudes. A second-generation Moluccan woman, who moved to the evangelical GKMS a long time ago, recounted how she had felt when she visited a traditional church again: ‘I wanted to stand and had to stop myself. Oh no, I cannot do that! I wanted to do it automatically, out of joy, happiness. I felt a bit hindered then. But I did not do it, because I thought: people will

6 Interview, 9.1.2023.

7 Interview, 9.6.2023.

8 Interview, 21.4.2023.

think I am crazy!⁹ For her, authentic, real, sincere worship means the freedom to do and say what she feels.

The Moluccan Protestant landscape is formed by relations within a theological and organizational frame of mainline/traditional Moluccan Protestantism – that stretches across geographical distance and widely varying contexts – and by relations between the former and Moluccan evangelical churches. Moluccan congregations take inspiration from others in this landscape. In other words, they borrow or appropriate religious practices from each other. These practices are embodied and, at the same time, demonstrate the boundaries, differences and contestations in the landscape. The borrowing is both the result and the cause of religious change. Changing circumstances, such as a decrease of membership and the increase of denominational movers, lead to the borrowing of practices, and the borrowed practices lead to religious transformation, such as changing musical traditions in church. I call the borrowing of practices within and between Moluccan traditional and evangelical churches intra- and inter-religious appropriation. Below, I present several concrete examples.

Music

Over recent decades, traditional Moluccan Protestant churches have changed and evolved. The decrease in membership – entailing other problems, such as a lack of youngsters, which leads to the discontinuation of, for example, choirs and orchestras – and people moving to other denominations have led to the introduction of a broader range of instrumental accompaniment. The younger segment of congregants often prefers electronic instruments, which are characteristic of evangelical churches and also

common in GPM congregations on the Moluccas. In earlier times, the traditional Moluccan church (much like the Dutch Reformed church) was opposed to this so-called worldly music, but nowadays, guitar and keyboard are common instruments for the accompaniment of congregational singing (with the exception of several congregations, where *a capella* singing is the norm). Often, full bands (especially drums) are still considered too exuberant or too worldly for most mainline Moluccan congregants. The selection of electronic instruments demonstrates the effort of the traditional Moluccan church to meet musical preferences of (mostly) third- and fourth-generation congregants, in order not to lose members and to attract the youth. At the same time, the musical boundaries show how the conception of sincere, authentic religiosity is embodied through sound, which is a sensational form. For evangelical Moluccans, the drum is part of the instrumental repertoire with which one can praise and access God's presence, whereas for mainline Moluccans, it interrupts the solemnity and perceived purity of religion.

Interestingly, the traditional Moluccan drum (*tifa*) – introduced at the beginning of the article – is different, because of a broadly shared Moluccan sense of ethnic religiosity. According to Moluccans, the sound of the *tifa* evokes an immediate sensation of Moluccan identity. A minister explained: 'When I hear the *tifa*, it touches my heart and soul. I know this is me, this is my sound. ... It is the sound of my ancestry, of my roots, of who I am.'¹⁰ As part of the contextual theological endeavour in the Moluccas, *tifas* have begun to be incorporated as instruments for musical accompaniment in the GPM. On special

9 Interview, 19.6.2023.

10 Interview, 6.10.2021.

occasions, the *tifa* is occasionally used in traditional Moluccan churches in the Netherlands as well. Despite the special status of the *tifa* among most Moluccan Protestants, elderly congregants may regard the instrument as too loud or too worldly for their sensation of authentic religious attitude and atmosphere. *Tifas* are common in Moluccan evangelical churches. A congregant said: 'When the *tifa* begins to sound, I think it is so powerful. If, in church, we sing in the Moluccan way, with the *tifa*, in Malay, it feels personal.'¹¹ The popularity of the *tifa* in Moluccan evangelical churches is remarkable, since evangelical and Pentecostal denominations are generally characterized by their rejection of local cultural elements that – in their native form – carry religious associations, hereby threatening religious *purity*. In Moluccan evangelical churches, this discourse prevails as well. Many Moluccan cultural traditions are presented as ancestor worship and superstition – even as the work of the devil – that stand in the way of a true Christian faith according to the Bible. An example is the use of the *piring natzar*, that is seen as an unchristian ancestral tradition (whereas the *piring natzar* is common practice among many Moluccan mainline Protestants). Nonetheless, for evangelical Moluccans, the *tifa* is a cultural instrument to worship God, stripped of native-ancestral religious associations. The *tifa* becomes a neutral tool to praise and worship as a Moluccan.

Language

In Moluccan traditional Protestant churches, it has become normal, even required, to hold church services in both

Dutch and Malay. In this way, Moluccan congregants from different generations are able to understand the liturgy and sermon. Some ministers of Moluccan church organizations in the Netherlands are originally from the Moluccas and completed their theological education over there. Often, these ministers are less fluent in Dutch and speak Indonesian, as is common for ministers on the Moluccas. For example, almost all ministers of the NGPMB graduated from the theological university in Ambon and, therefore, are used to speaking Indonesian. For many Moluccan congregants in the Netherlands, however, the Indonesian language still carries negative associations with respect to the migration history. My point is that language is not merely the semantic meaning of words, but carries sensational associations. Interestingly, as part of contextual theology, the local Malay gains prominence in the GPM. This means that GPM ministers begin to experiment with preaching in Moluccan-Malay, a practice that is the standard in most mainline Moluccan congregations in the Netherlands, because of the history of the Moluccan church in exile: lower-educated army chaplains built the Moluccan Protestant church in the Netherlands, and they spoke the Moluccan daily language.

In Moluccan evangelical churches, Dutch is the main language. The reason for this choice is the fact that Dutch is the mother tongue of most Moluccan congregants, especially young members. As a clear understanding of scripture is the most important objective in evangelical contexts, as well as the openness to welcome as many potential converts as possible, clear communication prevails over associative feelings that – for many Moluccan evangelical congregants too – often are connected with the Malay language.

11 Interview, 16.6.2023.

Hence, as a response to language proficiency among the varied generations of the Moluccan traditional Protestant church, a balance between Dutch and Malay/Indonesian is sought. Inspiration is taken from Moluccan evangelical churches. Language, therefore, is another example of a sensational form and practice of religious borrowing, which shows a change of times and, henceforth, a change in religious tradition, as well as contestations about such practices – even within one specific congregation – that centre on embodied religiosity. An elderly second-generation Moluccan man told me, for example, how he is unable to sing in Dutch: ‘I prefer to sing in Malay. When I sing in Dutch, I am totally lost, I cannot do it. I do understand the words, but it is like an immediate blockade. ... And the feeling is totally different, whereas the meaning is the same.’¹² For him, singing only feels like something that belongs to his religious self when it is done in the Malay words that he has heard and sung since he was a child.

Song and liturgy

In connection to the above, hymnological repertoire is another material example of religious borrowing or appropriation. In many mainline Moluccan congregations, the hymnological repertoire has been extended over recent decades and includes a variety of Malay and Indonesian hymnbooks. Stanzas are sometimes sung alternately in Malay and Dutch, gospel groups perform new songs, and Indonesian, Dutch or English revival music is played on the beamer screen or during offertory. Depending on the congregation and church organization, several revival hymns now form part of congregational singing.

12 Interview, 27.9.2021.

A minister explained how she introduced changes in her congregation in response to youngsters moving to evangelical denominations: she added Dutch revival songs, ‘So that young people also understand what they are singing. I think that is important. ... You have to change your own church.’¹³ Her words illustrate how the hymnological tradition of the Moluccan traditional church is changing in response to changing membership. By borrowing revival songs, which constitute the central repertoire of evangelical churches, traditional churches try to connect to a preference for musical style and facilitate an understanding of the lyrics among younger generations of congregants. The innovations in the hymnological repertoire that are borrowed from Indonesian gospel, hymnbooks in the GPM, Dutch evangelical revival music, or the collections in other Moluccan congregations reflect and form the embodied religious identities of a new generation.

At the same time, the diverse membership of traditional Moluccan churches requires a precarious balance. Respect for the embodied religiosity of the first generation – an aesthetic formation in which the traumatic history played a large role – is transmitted through religious upbringing and results in the preservation of liturgical traditions and ways of worship that feel comfortable and authentic to people. For example, a second-generation Moluccan man explained that he preferred the old hymnbook *Mazmur dan Tahlil*:

When I hold the *Tahlil*, it is the book that my parents and ancestors held, brought to church and sang from. At that time, the church was full. Holding the hymnbook, singing together poly-

13 Interview, 6.10.2021.

phonically ..., it is like a warm blanket over you. Perhaps that is why I prefer to sing from the *Tahlil*, and hear the traditional choirs. I also like gospel and praise music, but sometimes I have the feeling it is about the guitar or [other instruments]. And the gospel choirs all sing on one pitch. The old hymnbooks and choirs are flawless. How the elderly did it in the past. Your voice was the main instrument. The hymns from the *Tahlil*, they were just always there.¹⁴

This person describes how a whole world of embodied religiosity lies behind and is activated by specific hymns and hymnbooks. The sounds, words and ways of singing have all aesthetically formed the religious tradition to which the man feels that he belongs. A sensation of religious purity is perceived to become lost when new songs and instruments are introduced.

In the same light, an informant of the third/fourth generation said that, despite current developments of loosely structured services with input from young members, he was used to the step-by-step liturgy in his traditional congregation: 'I noticed that I thought, oh no, I like the liturgical, clear pattern.'¹⁵ Although everything was possible and allowed, the new elements and different order did not work for this person. Often, he thought: 'what does this have to do with faith?' In short, the Moluccan Protestant church navigates through a landscape of Moluccan embodied practices that reflect and constitute religiosities – feelings and perceptions of comfort and authentic faith.

Moluccan evangelical churches also include well-known Malay hymns in their

congregational singing, although the majority of the repertoire is Dutch revival music. In terms of church development and evangelization, the focus is on religious growth and moving with the times. Dutch revival songs, accompanied by a full band, are deemed the best fit for that focus. Nevertheless, the evangelical congregants greatly appreciate the Moluccan hymns, as a minister made clear: 'In Malay, people stand, there is a different atmosphere. The words feel different, there is emotion. I myself feel at home.'¹⁶ These hymns connect people with their ethnic roots. In other words, traditional hymns, forming part of people's religious and/or cultural backgrounds, are borrowed and incorporated into an evangelical worship frame. The hymn *api indjil*, for example, was composed in the 1990s on the Moluccas. The hymn has become immensely popular among the Moluccan Protestant diaspora in the Netherlands. The borrowing of *api indjil* in Moluccan mainline and evangelical churches demonstrates how the song travels through the Moluccan Protestant landscape. The Dutch context adds meaning to the sound and lyrics of the song, that differs from the Indonesian context. In the Netherlands, the singing of the hymn establishes a link between the Moluccas as ancestral home and the Moluccan migrant community. *Api indjil*, then, is a material example of religious borrowing that brings forward relations, changes and differences among Moluccan Protestants and their embodied traditions and practices.

Conclusion

A vast vocabulary is involved in the study of appropriation. Depending on the context, person, purpose, situation, and so on,

14 Interview, 29.10.2021.

15 Interview, 12.12.2022.

16 Interview, 9.6.2023.

words such as remediation, appropriation or borrowing are used – processes that, in turn, are viewed as stealing, offending or appreciating. Judgements, experiences or perspectives on the appropriative practices tell something about religious identities, traditions, relations and transformations, as well as people's embodied religiosities.

In the term appropriation, an experiential label or judgement comes to the fore. At the same time, the process and practice of appropriation has a relational and transcultural character, which points to its inevitability as it relates to the human condition. I believe that this tension, as a point of departure, is a fascinating feature (which, for instance, is lacking in terms like exchange or transformation) which allows me to broaden perspectives on the concept of appropriation, through the presentation of a case study. The idea of a *landscape* and the theoretical tool *sensational forms* demonstrate the diverse directions and scales of experiences of religious appropriation.

In this article, I travelled through the Moluccan Protestant landscape – a relational, transcultural network across time and space. Moluccan Protestantism is constituted in and through processes of relating. Through the colonial and missionary encounter between Dutch reformed Calvinism and Moluccan cosmologies, Moluccan Protestantism formed and was formed by Moluccan identities. In 1951, the Dutch state translocated more than twelve thousand Moluccans to the Netherlands. In a situation of homesickness, isolation and insecurity, Moluccan Protestants built their church. On the one hand, the diverging contexts have resulted in different religious realities and church organizations. On the other hand, the similar theological and historical background, as well as contacts, technology and experiences mediate the borrowing of religious practices.

The Moluccan case study complicates perspectives on and forms of religious appropriation. The analysis also draws attention to the pluriform and multi-directional interactions when addressing practices of religious borrowing. In general, therefore, the case shows a broader relevance, because the pathways of the Moluccan Protestant landscape lead to a historically and geographically entangled interrelation among Moluccan Protestants of various ages, nationalities and denominations. All people in this case study are Moluccan and Protestant. The strands of the network stretch out from colonial times up to the present, from the Netherlands to the Moluccas, back to the Netherlands, and thence to Indonesia. The lines move along Dutch Reformed Protestantism, the Moluccan mother church, traditional Moluccan Protestant churches and Moluccan evangelical associations and churches – lines along which religious lives are lived. I mentioned the *piring natzar* as an example of a religious practice through which these paths and lines can be traced and mapped. Being the relational product of the colonial Dutch-Moluccan encounter, the practice of the *piring natzar* produces contestations regarding *authentic* Christianity. As such, the practice is a lens by which to see changing religious relations and traditions between and within groups of Moluccan Protestants – between the GPM and Moluccan Protestant churches in the Netherlands, and between the traditional churches and Moluccan evangelical churches.

The borrowing of liturgical styles and languages, musical instruments and hymns is a religious practice of appropriation between Moluccan Protestant denominations, between traditional Moluccan church organizations, and between Moluccan generations. These borrowing practices

can be seen as inter- and intra-religious appropriation. The opinions on these practices of appropriation, and experiences and attitudes towards them, show and form relations between and within groups. The Moluccan case study demonstrates the inter- and intra-borrowing of religious practices within the Moluccan Protestant landscape.

The conditions and reasons for borrowing point and lead to views on and responses to religious transformations. In the traditional Moluccan church, generational differences and challenges result in the borrowing of bi- or tri-lingual services and hymns, a broader range of instruments that accompany congregational singing, and the extension of the hymnological repertoire with different styles of songs, such as revival and gospel music. Moluccan congregations take inspiration from others in the Moluccan Protestant landscape. In other words, they borrow or appropriate religious practices from each other. These practices are embodied and demonstrate the boundaries, differences and contestations in this landscape. Church organizations look at each other, at other denominations and at their own congregants. Borrowing practices that relate to changing circumstances and changing religious realities tell something about religious traditions and embodied religiosities that are deemed and felt to be authentic. The case study shows how appropriative liturgical, musical and hymnological sensational forms and aesthetically formed practices shed light on Moluccan Protestant identities, perceptions and feelings of authentic faith and traditions. Organizational, generational and denominational relations become apparent, offering insight into embodied religion and religious transformation. ■



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