

[Article] Returning to Nunusaku through Songwriting: Imagining Moluccan Identity and Reconciliation in the Songs of John Beay, Christian Tamaela, and Pontong



MATT CONNOR

Matt Connor lives in Papua, Indonesia with his wife and four children. He has worked with Wycliffe Bible Translators in Indonesia since 2002 in the areas of language survey, scripture engagement, ethnoarts, and education. Matt is currently pursuing a PhD in World Arts from Dallas International University.

Christian Tamaela's huge smile overwhelms his tiny body as he bursts into the studio, laughing uproariously and engulfing me in a bear hug as he attempts to pick me up. John Beay's waist-long hair swings wildly, revealing his tattooed arms, as he beats out an earthshaking Buru rhythm on a traditional *tifa* hand drum. Pontong members dance and laugh freely as I play back a new song they just recorded in our tiny, sweltering studio. These are the memories that come flooding back when I think about these giants of Moluccan church music—Tamaela, Beay, and the songwriting group Pontong. These new musical compositions for the *Gereja Protestan Maluku*¹ (GPM) make use of rich musical layers of Moluccan² identity and contextual theology as a way of encouraging holistic salvation and reconciliation within the GPM and wider Moluccan community. Drawing on several published sources as well as my own experience living in Ambon and working under the GPM from 2008 to 2018, this article will focus on songs composed by Christian Tamaela and John Beay since the end of the Moluccan civil war,³ as well as those written by the members of Pontong.

The late Christian Tamaela⁴ was the foremost expert on Moluccan music, considered the father of contextual Moluccan music in the GPM, and a dear personal friend of mine. John Beay is the current head of ethnic music for the GPM, frequent facilitator for Scripture songwriting workshops throughout Indonesia, and my faithful friend and teacher for the last five years. Pontong is a group of about fifteen Moluccan songwriters⁵ who started meeting together after a GPM scripture songwriting workshop in 2015. The word *pontong* means “firebrand” in Ambonese Malay and refers to the Ambonese proverb, “One firebrand doesn't make water boil; many firebrands make water boil.”

Historical Background

Maluku is an Indonesian province comprising hundreds of small islands between Nusa Tenggara to the west and Papua to the east. It is populated by 1.5 million people—half are Christian and

¹ The Protestant Church of Maluku.

² The people living in the province of Maluku are known as Moluccans.

³ The conflict between Christians and Muslims from 1999 to 2002.

⁴ Died April 2020.

⁵ Including John Beay and Christian Tamaela.



half are Muslim. Ambon is the capitol city, with a population of about 330,000. The GPM was formed in 1935 when it broke away from the Reformed *Indische Kerk*, and it's now completely under the control of the Ambonese (Aritonang and Steenbrink 2008, 395). GPM is by far the largest and most influential Christian denomination in Maluku, with over 700 congregations and the large majority⁶ of the Christians.

History of Christian Mission in Maluku

In order to understand a Moluccan view of Christianity, especially in relation to Islam, it is necessary to go back to the beginning. Moluccans trace their history back to Nunusaku, a large banyan tree in the middle of Seram Island⁷ where the original Moluccans lived in perfect harmony. When a group of men murdered Hainuwele, the coconut princess, they had to leave Nunusaku, and split into two groups—the *Pata Siwa* (“the Faction of Nine”) and *Pata Lima* (“the Faction of Five”) (Tamaela 2015, 28). Ever since that time, there have been two opposing groups in Maluku, “regarded as necessary to create stability and coherence” (Aritonang and Steenbrink 2008, 24).

The Pata Lima settled on the north coast of Ambon in the village of Hitu. They engaged in commerce with Muslim traders and adopted Islam early in the sixteenth century. The Pata Siwa settled on the south part of Ambon Island, retaining their traditional animist religion. The Portuguese came to Ambon in 1512 in order to trade with Hitu but were expelled by Muslim traders from Java in 1538. The Portuguese then moved to the south part of Ambon and made alliances with the Pata Siwa, who began the process of becoming Christian (Aritonang and Steenbrink 2008, 35).

Written history is unclear about the reason so many Moluccans wanted to become Christians. Considering the existing conflict between *Pata Siwa* and *Pata Lima*, however, the following quote from Andrew Walls (2007) may give us a clue: “There are all sorts of interesting examples of the debates that take place over whether to adopt the new faith and the new worship. In many, the decision turns on the question of whether this is going to be a better and more effective source of power and protection than the traditional ones” (15). It appears that once the Pata Lima made alliances with Muslim traders from Java, the Pata Siwa felt the need to make their own alliance with an external power, keeping the balance of power. Over time, the Pata Siwa and Pata Lima distinctions faded in importance and were replaced by Muslim and Christian identity. But the underlying conflict and balance remained.

In their comprehensive history of Christianity in Indonesia, Aritonang and Steenbrink (2008) show that it was never the intention of Portuguese or Dutch traders to Christianize Maluku. They only sent priests and pastors at the request of the Moluccans themselves. The spice trade took priority over all other concerns, so there were never enough priests, pastors, or religious teachers

⁶ Probably 80–90 percent of Moluccan Christians belong to the GPM.

⁷ The largest island in Maluku, often called *Nusa Ina*, or “the Mother Island.”

to respond to the many requests. In his dissertation on indigenous-driven mission in sixteenth-century Maluku, Baker asserts:

Religious change in the region occurred as a consequence of an indigenous-driven mission effort. Interest in Christianity originated with indigenous people, not with Europeans, and not with missionaries once they arrived. Local individuals actively sought out opportunities to explore and embrace the new faith. They then aggressively attempted to draw Christian influence into their lands. (2012, vii)

In the absence of Christian teachers from the outside, Moluccan Christians developed Amaga Ambon (“Ambonese religion”), a hybrid of Christian and traditional religion (Bartels 2003). However, when Joseph Kam, a Dutch missionary with the Indische Kerk, came to Ambon in 1815, he attempted to purge Christianity of “idolatry and pagan remnants” (Aritonang and Steenbrink 2008, 388). It was during this time that traditional religion went underground, leading from the hybridity of Agama Ambon to what Bulatao calls “split-level Christianity” (Bulatao 1966).

History of Muslim Relations

The missionary efforts of Moluccan Christians have never been targeted at Muslims, but rather are always focused on people following traditional animist religions. This pattern continues to the present day in Maluku. In 1817, when it was rumored that the Dutch would force Muslims to embrace Christianity, the Christians themselves led a revolt against the colonial government (Aritonang and Steenbrink 2008, 385–91)! By the early nineteenth century, “there was a strong feeling among Ambonese that the division of society among Christians and Muslims had become part of the Moluccan identity. . . . Efforts to bring Muslims to . . . Christianity would disturb the social balance” (Aritonang and Steenbrink 2008, 393).

For almost the whole sixteenth century, Christian communities were under constant attack from Muslim forces, while the Portuguese barely held the city of Ambon. When the much more powerful Dutch expelled the Portuguese in 1605, however, the Christians suddenly had the upper hand. For the next three hundred years, they experienced better education and active participation in local Dutch government. Bartels writes,

In order to conquer and control these regions, the Dutch recruited among the impoverished Ambonese Christians soldiers and administrators, only too willing to serve. This allowed this tiny minority to rapidly rise in the colonial hierarchy. More economically dependent on the Dutch than ever, the Christians identified themselves more and more with the Dutch, eventually seeing themselves as “Black Dutchmen” (*Belanda Hitam*). The common religion was the strongest point of identification between Ambonese and the Dutch. (2003, 12)

Maluku became so associated with the Netherlands that in 1950, five years after Indonesian independence, Maluku even tried to secede from Indonesia (Aritonang and Steenbrink 2008, 397). The secession attempt failed, and the balance of power between religions once again shifted, as Maluku became part of the Indonesian state dominated by a Muslim majority. Although Maluku was now part of Indonesia, “[Moluccan Muslims’] arrears in education were so large that the

Christian Ambonese continued to play an important role in education, the professional fields, and the provincial governmental structure” (Bartels 2003, 2). The architects of Indonesia wisely instituted the *Pancasila*, which made pluralism the official stance of the Indonesian state (Saidi 2009, 28). Over the next fifty years, Moluccans lived in relative peace and began to see Christianity and Islam as two alternate paths to God (Bartels 2003, 15).

Interreligious Conflict

Pela is an intervillage alliance system that developed in Maluku during the colonial period. If a village had a *pela* alliance with another village, it meant that if either village was attacked the other village would help defend it. To safeguard against escalating interreligious conflict, *pela* alliances almost always include Christian and Muslim villages, weaving mutual help and protection into the fabric of Moluccan society. As military alliances, *pela* were meant to safeguard against any armed conflict between Christians and Muslims. Tamaela suggests that singing songs about *pela* helped these systems stay strong in Maluku (Tamaela 2015, 69).

Despite the *pela* system and a growing belief in pluralism and tolerance, the peace between Islam and Christianity was shattered in early 1999, when a three-year armed religious conflict broke out in Maluku. Reasons for the conflict are numerous and varied, but the following reason given by Bartels seems especially likely:

There was dissatisfaction among the general Moslem population about the continued holding of many key positions in the bureaucratic structure as well as a creeping suspicion and fear of designs to try again to create a separate Moluccan state under Christian domination. Christians were increasingly irritated about the large influx of Moslems from other parts of Indonesia. (Bartels 2003, 19)

Every Moluccan Christian has harrowing stories of the conflict, but almost all of them include a renewed interest in spirituality as they sought God for peace, often praying so earnestly that they ended up literally rolling in the aisles of churches. It may have been this renewed spirituality that brought on a flowering of church music being written by GPM members after the conflict. King et al. write, “wherever there is a new movement of the Holy Spirit, there is a burgeoning of new song, usually drawn from the local folk style of the era” (King et al. 2008, 22).

Contextual Movements

In 2004, as Maluku was reeling from interreligious conflict, the GPM met to discuss the need for contextual liturgy and music in the church (Tamaela 2015, 70). After two hundred years of separating their traditional beliefs and rituals from the church, they recognized the need for traditional music, symbols, dances, and language to be included in the GPM worship and liturgy. In 2010, GPM published *Nyanyian Jemaat GPM* (NJGPM),⁸ the first hymn book written by

⁸ Congregational songs.

members of GPM from across Maluku. In 2015, a few colleagues and I facilitated a week-long Scripture songwriting workshop in Maluku; forty-five songs were written, and Pontong was formed.

GPM Worship and Liturgy

To fully understand the place of new songs in the GPM, we need to consider liturgical practice in the GPM. Moluccan culture has been influenced by European music for over five hundred years, and as a result, it is very much a part of Moluccan Christian culture (Tamaela 2015, 98). This is reinforced by the fact that Moluccan Christians, much more than Moluccan Muslims, identify strongly with the Dutch. The Dutch musical influence is so strong that “the majority of the older generation is not willing to accept cultural art forms (musical, instruments, dances, symbols) within church services” (Tamaela 2015, 102). Western musical influence is seen not only in church but also in popular music, such as Ambonese pop and Ambonese folk. Christian Tamaela, John Beay, and others have struggled for years to introduce traditional instruments and indigenous languages into Christian worship. For example, the *tifa*, a hand drum used with traditional music, has only recently been used in a few churches in the GPM. Using indigenous languages like Ambonese Malay, Alune, Nuaulu, and Wemale in church is encouraged by the GPM synod, but pastors and congregants alike frequently resist, preferring to use high Indonesian. There are many reasons for this hesitance. High Indonesian is the most respected language in the region, and some feel that using another language would be less respectful. Others feel that Ambonese Malay is “broken Indonesian” rather than a language in its own right. Some simply don’t feel that the effort needed to change is worth the benefit of change.

Church music in GPM is closely tied to the liturgy, primarily the Sunday service liturgy. The liturgy includes four basic sections, with several subsections. Each subsection requires an accompanying song. Therefore, every church song must fit into one of these subsections:⁹

1. Entering God’s presence
 - Praises and opening of the service
 - Confession and forgiveness of sin
 - Kyrie and Gloria
2. The service of the Word
 - Bible reading
3. Response to the service of the Word
 - Thanksgiving and offering
4. Closing of the service

⁹ I have translated all of these from the GPM’s liturgy sections.

- Departing
- Blessing

Approved Hymn Books, and Krabill's Six Stages of Worship

The official approval of songs is an issue of great importance to the GPM. A song is automatically approved if it is printed in one of the three official ecumenical hymn books—*Kidung Jemaat* (KJ),¹⁰ *Pelengkap Kidung Jemaat* (PKJ),¹¹ *Dua Sahabat Lama* (DSL)¹²—or if it is published by the GPM itself. The first two hymn books were compiled by the *Yayasan Musik Gereja* (Yamuger). The PKJ and KJ are primarily hymns translated by Yamuger, but there are also some original songs written by Indonesian composers. Most of the composed songs were used quite widely before they were ever published. The DSL is an old compilation of translated hymns. If a song is not in one of the official hymn books, it must be approved at the Sidang BPL, a churchwide meeting which happens every five years. If a song has not yet been approved, it can be used in services, but it must be used with other approved songs. James Krabill (2012), working in an African church context, suggested the following six stages of music development:

1. **Importation.** Hymn tunes, texts, and rhythms are all from a foreign culture.
2. **Adaptation.** Imported hymn tunes or text are in some way localized.
3. **Alteration.** Some part of the imported song is replaced or significantly modified.
4. **Imitation.** Songs are locally composed, but in a style that replicates a foreign musical genre.
5. **Indigenization.** Songs are locally composed in indigenous musical styles.
6. **Internationalization.** Songs from the global faith family become incorporated in the life and worship of the church.

Applying Krabill's six stages of worship in African churches to the GPM context, we see that most of the songs in the approved hymn books would be considered adaptations, because they are simply translated into high Indonesian. A few songs in the KJ and PKJ were written by Indonesians, but even these songs are in the imitation category, exhibiting mostly Western musical characteristics. A handful of the songs from the KJ and PKJ are in the indigenization category. GPM's own NJGPM boasts 352 songs from Moluccan songwriters, and while most of them still could be considered imitation, many exhibit indigenization—mostly by Christian Tamaela and John Beay.

Scriptural Understanding

¹⁰ "Congregational Hymns," published in 1984.

¹¹ "More Congregational Hymns," published in 1999.

¹² "Two Old Friends," published in 1912.

The GPM has traditionally held a more historical than creational view of Scripture, situating them in the story of Israel rather than Nunusaku. During the conflict of 1999, the Christian Moluccans were even called “Israel,” while the Muslims were called “Palestine.” On the streets of Ambon, this distinction can still be seen in numerous Star of David bumper stickers on Christians’ cars and “Free Palestine” bumper stickers on Muslims’ cars. The historical reading of Scripture also reflects an alliance with Western power. The Christian Moluccan identity as Western and Jewish is reflected in the plethora of “White Jesus” paintings all over Ambon and in GPM churches (Spyer 2008).

On Hofstede’s culture index, with a scale of 1 to 100, Indonesia has a score of 14 for individualism and 78 for power distance, meaning that Moluccan culture is very communal and exhibits high power distance (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010). This cultural context is reflected in the GPM understanding of Scripture. Unlike a Western view of Scripture, Moluccans almost always understand and read Scripture communally (Richards and O’Brien 2012, 95–110). Although the GPM’s theological background is from the Dutch Reformed focus on personal justification by faith, the Moluccan understanding of salvation tends to be more about reconciliation, reflecting a cultural and historical felt need for peace between warring groups (Beay 2020). Reflecting high power distance, Moluccans also value strict hierarchy. Every liturgy and sermon for every service is created at the synod level and passed down to the local churches. This combination means that Moluccans interact almost exclusively with the Scriptures that are passed down to them by the GPM synod.

In *Music in the Life of the African Church*, King et al. state that “to sing is to theologize” (King et al. 2008, 7). Although the authors are writing about an African context, this is very true of Moluccans as well. Music is an integral part of their lives and beliefs. Moluccans are known throughout the Indonesian archipelago as being the most musical people. Ambon is even called the “City of Music,” and Ambonese pop songs are played from Sumatra to Papua. As such, music is the primary way Moluccans engage with theology. In the following section, we will study the theology presented in the songs written by Tamaela, Beay, and Pontong since the civil war. I begin with a discussion of how these songwriters employ musical and linguistic characteristics to create a unique Moluccan Christian identity.

Moluccan Musical Influences

Current expressions of Moluccan music show a wide variety of influences: traditional Moluccan music, European colonialism, Indonesian nationalism, and modern global youth culture. Unless otherwise noted, I learned most of what I know of Moluccan music directly from Christian Tamaela, while studying music with him in 2014. Traditional Moluccan music is called *kapata*. The primary characteristics of *kapata* are use of local languages (that is, not Ambonese Malay or Indonesian), whooping or yelping (called *huele*), extensive use of glides, pentatonic (1–2–3–5–6) or tetratonic (6–1–2–3) scales, and use of *tifa* (hand drum) playing from the four rhythms shown in figure 1.

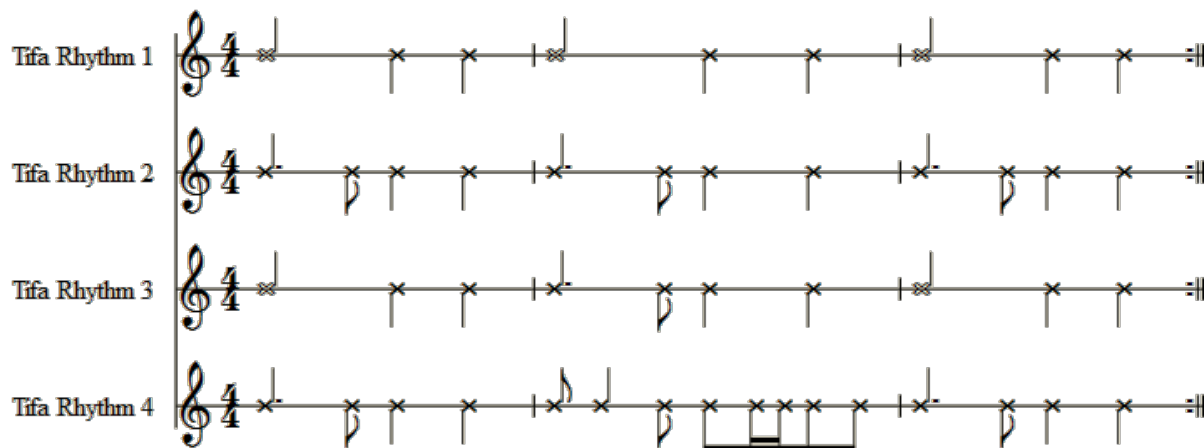


Figure 1. Tifa rhythmic patterns

In the notated examples, the notes with the tail going up denote a lower, resonating sound produced by the right hand striking the center of the drumhead while notes with the tail going down denote a higher, staccato sound produced by striking the rim of the drumhead with the fingertips while the fingers of the left hand put pressure on the head. Other instruments often used are the *tahuri* (conch shell trumpet) and a dizzying variety of bamboo-based instruments. *Kapata*, and indigenous languages in general, is often associated with traditional religion (*adat*).

Western colonial influence is likely familiar to the reader, but a few characteristics are of particular importance in Moluccan music. As early as the sixteenth century, Moluccans were already incorporating the ukulele—brought to Indonesia by Portuguese sailors—into their local song styles, and it is now recognized in Indonesia as either a Moluccan or Javanese *keroncong* instrument. Traditional *kapata* exhibit what Tamaela calls “accidental harmony”: when participants sing different notes together but don’t follow Western harmonic rules (Tamaela 2015, 156–57). When Western harmonies were introduced hundreds of years ago, Moluccans adopted the diatonic scale and Western harmony. However, their music almost always exhibits parallel motion, not oblique or contrary. Hawaiian slide guitar is also well known in Maluku, and according to Tamaela, Moluccans adopted it quickly after the Hawaiians did because it matched the glides in *kapata*. Western hymns have also become very familiar and beloved by many Moluccan Christians.

Indonesian Nationalism and Modern Musical Influences

Indonesian nationalism, arising during and after World War II, gave rise to a new Indonesian identity and focus on the Indonesian language and suppression of local culture. Between 1950 and 1998, the Indonesian language became the standard for church worship, sermons, and Bible reading. The 1971 *Terjemahan Baru* translation of the Bible was particularly important in cementing the use of formal Indonesian in church. In 1998, when the Suharto regime ended, government restrictions on local cultural expression were lifted and Indonesia began to experience somewhat of a folk revival. Modern popular music has also had a strong influence in Maluku. Electronic keyboards are particularly ubiquitous throughout the province. Moluccans seem to be especially enamored of beats common to “soft rock” or “rock ballads,” and this influence can be heard everywhere. Keyboards have the advantage of being easy to carry and amplify, easy to play, and easy to sing along with. As a result, many of the new Moluccan songs use programmed beats from the keyboards and synthesized sounds.

The fusion of these variety of influences is usually called *Pop Ambon* for music written in the last fifty years and *Lagu Daerah Ambon* for Moluccan music written before about 1970. They display a mix of Indonesian and Ambonese Malay, parallel harmony, and frequent use of Hawaiian guitar, ukulele, guitar, and keyboard. Much of the newer Pop Ambon uses kapata beats played on a keyboard. A uniquely Ambonese lyrical trait is the frequent addition of -e (pronounced like the French é) at the end of words. Besides using Ambonese Malay language for lyrics, Ambonese music favors certain words or phrases that immediately signal Moluccan identity and unity. These words include *satu hati* (“one heart”), *baku sayang* (“love one another”), *basudara* and *gandong* (both meaning “relative”). There is also a uniquely Ambonese dangdut genre, modeling what could be considered Bollywood and Middle Eastern sounds. Dangdut is very popular in Muslim communities throughout Indonesia; the only noticeable difference between Ambonese dangdut and dangdut from other areas of Indonesia is the use of Ambonese Malay lyrics.

The Songs of Tamaeala, Beay, and Pontong

Tameala, Beay, and Pontong create Moluccan Christian identity by using a combination of these historical musical influences. They often write songs that sound much like Pop Ambon, appealing to peace with their Muslim brothers who also enjoy Pop Ambon. Many of their songs could be considered Indonesian hymns—a nod to both their Dutch and Indonesian heritages. Many of their songs also use tifa, the pentatonic scale, huele, and indigenous languages to invoke a traditional Moluccan feel. They are often used as an invitation for worship, such as *Mae Lahatoe*, a goosebump-inducing song that begins with a loud huele, followed by a tifa beat and what could be called a pentatonic processional. Maluku is home to over fifty local languages, but many of these songwriters use what they call *bahasa tanah* (literally, “language of the land,” or indigenous language). Even in his dissertation, Tamaela simply refers to the local language in his notes as *bahasa tanah*, even though it is most certainly a specific language, such as Nuaulu, Wemale, Amahai, Alune, or any number of other local languages. I often puzzled over this omission, but I

began to understand that Tamaela and other GPM songwriters simply want to connect to a general Moluccan past, not necessarily a specific indigenous tribal identity. Summit (2016) describes something like this when he explains how Jewish communities value reading the Torah in Hebrew, despite the lack of understanding. Some of the songs written use bahasa tanah, Ambonese Malay, and Indonesian all in the same song, clearly making connections to a wide variety of audiences and traditions.

In his recent dissertation on Xerente fusion genres, Elsen Portugal proposes four signposts of authenticity for fusion genres: meaning, function, competence, and agency (2020, 180–81). Taken one by one, we can see that the signposts of meaning and competence are well attested, but function and agency are still lacking in the wider church community.

1. **Meaning.** New GPM music has brought meaningful musical influences into the GPM church experience. In worship services where these songs are performed, Moluccans seem to connect emotionally and experience a stronger shared Moluccan Christian identity (Beay 2020).
2. **Function.** The new GPM songs can only supplement the accepted translated hymns from the KJ, PKJ, and DSL until they are published by GPM. They are not yet seen as indispensable. They are very important for the rare fifth Sunday service liturgy and special church holiday services where something more “ethnic” is expected.
3. **Competence.** Pontong and other GPM songwriters are very competent at making this kind of music, and they are quite prolific and impressive in their diversity.
4. **Agency.** The GPM is very hierarchical, and although Tamaela, Beay, and Pontong have been trying for years to get a new song and liturgy book published in Ambonese Malay, it is still in the planning phase.

Although translated hymns don’t share the richly multifaceted identity of Ambonese songs, they cannot be ignored. Morehouse writes, “We can’t simply dismiss Western hymns in non-Western churches as irrelevant relics of the past, when in fact they represent so much meaning and history for so many people. To do so would be to imply that their own history, memories, and opinions can be easily dismissed” (2017, 38). In many ways, the hymns currently used in the GPM give a sense of predictability which helps with congregational participation. “Since the NJGPM is quite recent, it is apparent that not all songs of the book are already well-known and memorized by the congregations. A member of the choir in the Maranatha church commented that they did not often use this hymnbook, and when attending Sunday service a clear difference in singing volume and attention can be noticed between the NJGPM and DSL, for instance” (Lensink 2020, 84). Although translated hymns will likely always be a large part of GPM worship, some exciting missiological implications in the new songs should also be mentioned. The renewed focus on an older Moluccan identity as well as on newer global sounds has the potential to build bridges with the Muslim and animist communities. While the hymn style and high Indonesian hymns from the KJ, PKJ, DSL, and even much of the NJGPM shows a connection to the larger Christian community in Indonesia,

the new focus on Moluccan identity shifts to building bridges with other Moluccans. We'll see much more of this as we look at the texts themselves.

Holistic Salvation, and Reconciliation with the Muslim Community

Although Moluccan theology has historically been heavily influenced by Calvinist theology, the leadership of GPM feel an increasing need to shift their theological focus from personal salvation for eternity to communal salvation in the present (Beay 2020). It's not surprising that the themes of reconciliation and unity frequently come up in the new GPM songs. In the song "Mari Gandong, Sudara Hatie," Beay writes, "We live loving one another, because God has forgiven you, my brother, and me."¹³ This song reflects 2 Corinthians 5:18–21:

God has given us this task of reconciling people to him. For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!" For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ. (NLT)

Beay understands reconciliation between Moluccans as a return to Nunusaku, the Moluccan Eden. For Beay, Nunusaku is not just a place in history but a state of harmony with God and others. Beay describes a state of Nunusaku almost like the Kingdom of God, as something God allows us to access now while we still wait for it to come in its fullness in the future. For Christian Moluccans, any discussion about a return to Nunusaku must include peace with their Muslim brothers. There is still a deep divide and suspicion between the religions in Ambon, and any attempts at evangelism or conversion of either Muslim or Christian is seen as dangerous.

If salvation is understood as reconciliation with everyone, including Muslims, then there must be a way for Moluccan Christians to work toward this goal. Beay believes that seeking shared musical experiences and beliefs can help build bridges with their Muslim brothers. This is already happening in the arena of Pop Ambon, in which Christian and Muslim musicians collaborate on new musical creations and performances. Beay encourages the creation of new songs that can be bridges by focusing on love and brotherhood, using musical styles and languages that pull Moluccans back to their distant past when they were at peace with one another. Beay says that if he were to write songs that focused even more specifically on reconciliation between Christians and Muslims, he would first play the songs for Muslim relatives and get their feedback before playing the song publicly. He says, "when we sing Ambonese music, we feel together, one blood. We need to use music that we share, themes that we share, not saying that we're better than them" (Beay 2020).

As the GPM incorporates more Moluccan culture into their worship, the cultural divide between Christians and Muslims can begin to fade. "Andrew Walls sees the Christian story's ability

¹³ *Katong hidup baku sayang, karena Tuhan su kase ampong par gandong deng beta-e.*

to adapt to different cultures as one of Christianity's great advantages over Islam" (Rah 2010, 73). This fact could help the Ambonese Christians embrace their Muslim brothers more fully because of the freedom Christianity gives them to adapt to the local culture. As GPM takes more of a reconciling and listening role, they could also be learning from the Moluccan Muslim community. McDermott suggests that Christians can learn from other religions, which is something that could help the Muslim community in Maluku appreciate the GPM more (2000, 218).

Tete Manis

Jesus as *Tete Manis* ("Sweet Grandfather") is another theme that often surfaces in the songs of Tamaela, Beay, and Pontong. Tamaela writes,

When the European missionaries came to Maluku in the seventeenth century, they struggled to explain who the Christian God was. They used Psalm 23, a Good Shepherd, as an example. . . . the missionaries taught us to call Him (Jesus) *Tete Manis*. This we knew well because He came from within our culture. So, since then, and until now, Jesus is *Tete Manis* for the Moluccan Christian. (2015, 164)

Though the phrase *Tete Manis* has been around for a long time, it has recently received much more attention and use, especially in these new songs. John Beay (2020) says, "When we sing of Jesus as *Tete Manis*, we feel cared for and loved by Jesus." In contrast to Moluccan fathers, who are often harsh or frequently absent, grandfathers in Maluku are especially present and affectionate. In Patrick Sherry's synopsis of beauty and divinity, he asks, "what effect it would have on our doctrine of God and on our religious practice if we moved divine beauty to the center of our reflections, alongside goodness, wisdom, and power. One result, I think, would be to produce more joy in worship" (2018, 54). More joy in worship is certainly one aspect of these new songs, often drawing people to church who are tired of the stilted hymns currently being performed in GPM churches.

Imagination and Songwriting

John Beay recently told me, "Music is the means for reconciliation because it has the power to change. We can clean people's hearts, thoughts, and worldview. It can also give us a strong family feeling, so that we can meet together." As Pontong continues to meet and write songs together, they have the opportunity to continually spark positive change in Moluccan society. At the intersection of imagination, the story of Scripture, and the story of Maluku, new songs can be born and carry the GPM to a better future. In her discussion of artistic imagination and religious faith, Thiessen writes, "Imagination . . . has essentially to do with possibility. It is this sense of the possible, of transformation, that presents a fundamental link between imagination and religious faith" (Thiessen 2018, 83). The ability to bring out this imagination in song is also how we understand God and bring the great possibilities of faith in God into our experience. McManus writes, "Only in our imagination can we begin to understand God. Faith is less about gathering information than it is about expanding imagination" (McManus 2014, 101).

As the GPM moves into the future, these songs and others that are still being written have the possibility to foster reconciliation and positive change in both the GPM and the wider Moluccan community. The result is hope for the future of Maluku and the GPM through the imagination of faithful songwriters in the GPM. As John de Gruchy says, “Through discovering their creative abilities, people are enabled to rise above their circumstances and contribute not only to their own well-being but also to the healing of their communities and keeping hope alive . . . Hope is, in fact, part of the creative human capacity of imagination that brings past and future into the present” (2018, 428). Hope is exactly what I felt when I used to meet with Tamaela, Beay, and Pontong for recording or songwriting sessions. In the face of an uncertain future for Maluku, this jovial band of songwriters is creating theology and connections with the wider Moluccan community through music. The Ambonese proverb is certainly true: *Satu pontong air seng mandidi, banya pontong air mandidi*—“One firebrand doesn’t make water boil; many firebrands makes water boil.”

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