Diaconal Service in the Postcolonial Condition

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1. Introduction: diaconal work in the postcolonial condition

The diaconal service of the Christian church, widely regarded as indispensable to the mission and self-understanding of the church, is under scrutiny by the postcolonial currents sweeping through academic theology. An investigation is needed because by its very nature diaconal service is linked to power dimensions between giver and receiver in neoliberal societies marked by concomitant inequality. It is therefore surprising that recent Dutch handbooks on the diaconal service of the church, whether on an academic or at a lay level, mostly fail to mention these dimensions.[1]

Therefore, and in reply, the present article attempts to apply postcolonial analysis to diaconal science and engage the questions of power and inclusivity in the discipline. The first step is to start with an examination of the postcolonial condition, combined with an outline of how postcolonial theory can fruitfully serve contemporary theology. Armed with the necessary vocabulary, I will then proceed to outline three fallacies that can occur in contemporary diaconal practice:

1. The fallacy of erecting a watershed between diaconal service abroad and at home. This division fails to take into account the consequences of living in a global community.
2. The fallacy of secrecy. Secrecy often surrounds the work of the diaconal office in many Protestant churches while the receivers of charity but hamper the understanding of both the communal nature of the church and its neocolonial predicament.
3. The fallacy of a bourgeois church failing to engender discussions on class. Congregations composed of middle-class membership run the risk of erecting strict distinctions between givers and receivers of diaconal assistance. Whether – or to what extent – these problems be-

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[1] See Matthijs Geluk/Aart Peters (eds), *Diaconaat, hoe doe je dat? Handvatten voor startende diakenen* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2015); Hub Crijns et al., *Diaconie in beweging. Handboek diaconiewetenschap* (Kampen: Kok, 2011).

come manifest depends on the nature of each individual congregation and its context. Although not all congregations engage formally with postcolonial approaches, many are already seeking ways to make diaconal service as inclusive and communal as possible. The discussion of these three fallacies and their remedies therefore serve as illustration as to how postcolonial theology might assist contemporary churches in being faithful servants in this postcolonial era. After discussing the nature of the postcolonial condition and the possibility of connecting postcolonial thinking with the diakonia, I will outline the tools that can be provided by this framework to aid diaconal service in a postcolonial approach. The three fallacies will be countered by three challenges articulated by voices from the Two-Thirds World.

2. Defining the postcolonial condition

The postcolonial condition denotes the formal end of colonial hegemony indicated by the temporal marker, the word, "post." At the same time, the "post" in postcolonial contains a progressive agenda: to move beyond the logic of empire, which perpetuates itself within neocolonialism by replacing colonial ownership with economic dependency. Postcolonial theory focuses on researching, analyzing, and critiquing the "hegemonic systems of thought, textual codes, and symbolic practices which the West constructed in its domination of colonial subjects."[2] Postcolonial theory arose after the formal end of colonial empires. Decolonial thought, in contrast, arises from within the colonial condition in the midst of oppression and is less preoccupied with the dense philosophical framework occupied by postcolonial theory.[3]

Decolonial thinking is observed as early as the seventeenth century; consider the example of Kimpa Vita (1684-1706). Kimpa Vita lived in the Congo and assembled a sizable following as a teacher. She taught that Jesus and his disciples were black. At that time, her teaching was perceived by the church as a threat to their monopoly on teaching and interpreting Christianity. Eventually, Kimpa Vita was persecuted, killed for her heresy,

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2   Catherine Keller, 'Introduction: Alien/Nation, Liberation, and the Postcolonial Underground', in: eadem et al. (ed.), *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004), 8.

3   Aníbal Quijano, 'Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality', *Cultural Studies* 21 (2007) 168–178.

and condemned as a witch. She died a violent death and was burnt at the stake by colonial rulers. According to some missiologists, she may have been the first recorded black theologian; she would be a forerunner to black theology, black power, and black consciousness, which took root in the 1960s in the United States.[4]

The example of Kimpa Vita illustrates how it is possible to resist Euro-centric theology from within the system, but also shows the violent backlash that occurs when the monopoly of colonial white theology is threatened. Postcolonial diaconal theology might also do well to likewise attempt to recover such courageous, subversive narratives from its own history.

The decolonial theorists Walter Mignolo and Aníbal Quijano used these examples of creative resistance to colonial power to fashion their theory of decoloniality. They argue for a direct relationship between rationality and modernity, on the one hand, and coloniality, on the other. Mignolo and Quijano suggest that contemporary ideas about what is rational and modern developed, not independently, but in tandem with the colonial project. Their far-reaching conclusion suggests that the rationality of the Enlightenment is not neutral rationalism but primarily reserved for white males. People of color and women did not share in the same rationality.[5] As a result, decoloniality is needed to disentangle ourselves from the epistemic imprints of coloniality/rationality. According to Mignolo, "Decoloniality is therefore the energy that does not allow the operation of the logic of coloniality nor believes the fairy tales of the rhetoric of modernity."[6] Although post/decolonial theory developed many analytical tools, this paper will explore two concepts from this discussion: the concepts of "subalternity" and the "imperial gaze," which appear to be particularly salient discursive tools to critically assess current diaconal practice through a postcolonial lens.

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[4] Tinyiko Maluleke, 'Towards a Century of Christian Theology of Africa' (unpublished paper delivered at the conference Public Theology in Plural Contexts, Hong Kong, 2017). See for an overview of the life of Kimpa Vita: John Thornton, *The Kongolese Saint Anthony. Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita and the Antonian Movement, 1684–1706* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[5] Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (ed.), *Race and the Enlightenment. A Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).

[6] Walter Mignolo, 'Epistemic Disobedience and the Decolonial Option: A Manifesto', *Transmodernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World* 1 (2011) 46.

2.1 Subalternity

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, one of the most significant theorists of post-colonial thinking, was the first to use the term subalternity. She published her groundbreaking essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak," in 1988. Spivak holds that those who are subaltern, who are outside of history and repre-sentation, cannot speak as long as hegemonic ways of thinking and being persist.[7] The subaltern cannot speak if she is only allowed the right to speak by an act of benevolence. In this case, she speaks only on the terms of the oppressor – not her own terms. The subaltern cannot speak if she has to use the language of the oppressor because she literally does not use her own words.

The concern for subalternity within theology leads to a fundamental inquiry of contemporary theological praxis. Who is invited to speak at conferences and meetings? Whose perspective is given priority? Why do publishing houses in the West have more clout than African and Asian publishers? There are related questions regarding subalternity in diaconal science. Can a charity recipient speak? Can the recipients of charity speak on their own terms or is what they say always mediated through the structures of charity? The question whether the subaltern can speak is a guiding question in the search for postcolonial diaconal theory and practice.

2.2 The imperial gaze & the diaconal gaze

The concept of the imperial gaze is another salient feature of postcolonial theory; it is an expression for the acts of seeing and being seen through the lens of empire. Derived from Derrida and Foucault, the idea of "the gaze" signifies the way power structures replicate themselves through the act of looking and being looked at. This gaze is prevalent in gender relationships when the male gaze objectifies women – men seeing women as objects. Analogue to the objectifying male gaze, the imperial gaze is a way of looking in which the colonized other is viewed as an object to colonize. The logic of empire perceives the colonial other as uncivilized, undeveloped, superstitious, and in need of both conversion and governance.[8]

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7   Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, '"Can the Subaltern Speak?" [Revised Edition]', in: eadem, *Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea* (ed. Rosalind C. Morris; New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 21–78.

8   Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 2nd revised edition, 2007).

The idea of considering a gaze as a critical analytical instrument to uncover harmful power relationships could be a tool for postcolonial diaconal practice. Critical questions include: How is a charity recipient seen? Are stereotypes applied to recipients of diaconal assistance? What is the self-understanding of diaconal professionals?

3. Diaconal conversations with post-decolonial thought

Before making the step from postcolonial theory to diaconal theology, one must question the viability of applying the results of postcolonial reasoning to the diaconal discipline because the appraisal of postcolonial thought within theology reveals an uneasy relationship between the two. Edward Said, the seminal postcolonial thinker, famous for his work *Orientalism*, is well-known for his vigorous anti-religious convictions, and would consequently not automatically welcome constructive theological projects.[9]

Furthermore, some criticism leveled against postcolonial theory is not without merit. The works of the (un)Holy Trinity of postcolonial theory, Spivak, Said, and Bhabha, are themselves dense with theory, which makes them inaccessible to lay readers. Thus, they are members of the elite academic framework that they are critically scrutinizing.[10] The challenge remains therefore to pair postcolonial theory with practical examples proceeding from the concrete engagement of real lives and to present case studies grounded in their respective contexts and local constraints. In other words, the thick descriptions, which have been prevalent within the many varieties of social work, are helpful to counteract the over-abstraction of postcolonial theory. Postcolonial analysis can, therefore, never function as a single hermeneutic approach but needs to be supplemented with other analytical frames.

The primary argument in favor of employing postcolonial theory is the need to disentangle the practice of development from its colonial origin and reasoning. Postcolonial theory emphasizes that development is intricately bound up with the idea of progress, a sense of the "white man's burden," and the superiority of European civilization.[11] This emphasis on

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[9] See for an overview of the reasons of Said's antipathy against religion: Wietske de Jong-Kumru, *Postcolonial Feminist Theology* (Münster: LIT, 2013).

[10] Mignolo, 'Epistemic Disobedience and the Decolonial Option' (as note 6), 45.

[11] Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development. The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

empire does not imply that diaconal work carried out "at home" will not benefit from postcolonial analysis. On the contrary, this investigation may be beneficial to unearth the structural inequalities still present between the descendants of former colonies in the Netherlands and the remainder of the population. The legacies of slavery in the Netherlands should factor into the approach to diaconal work aimed at descendants of enslaved people.

Postcolonial diaconal praxis needs, therefore, to be communal and dialogical: in this case envisioned as a dialogue between former enslavers and formerly enslaved people. In the words of Mark Lewis Taylor, "Postcolonial theology becomes possible, thinkable – and then achievable – when and if it lives from communities of social practice that embody its viewpoint and values."[12] The communal dimension of postcolonial theology attempts to take the role of faith communities seriously through advocating ecclesiologies from below and challenging the primacy of academic theology. Postcolonial subalternity and the "preferential option for the poor" from liberation theology then merge to form a diaconal theology from below.

4. Diaconal work in the public sphere

In the following, three critical tools of postcolonial theory will be brought into conversation with diaconal theology. These three tools lead to a postcolonial key for articulating a revised theology of the diaconate. In the first place, postcolonial theory draws attention to the nature and accessibility of the public sphere in which diaconal work is carried out. Second, a critical review of the terminology employed in diaconal theology might display undesirable and unequal power relationships. Third, I recommend that diaconal work must urgently address the subject/object distinction between givers and receivers of charity. The subversion of the subject/object distinction opens the possibility of post-development and the post-diaconate. Is it possible and desirable to imagine a post-diaconal world?

Postcolonial theory proceeds from the assumption that the public sphere has not always been equally accessible to all, but that the ruling elites banned various groups' participation in the public sphere. The di-

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12 Mark Lewis Taylor, 'Spirit and Liberation: Achieving Postcolonial Theology in the United States', in: Keller et al. (eds), *Postcolonial Theologies* (as note 2), 39.

aconal science operates and intervenes within the public sphere through acts of charity and the challenging of unjust structures. Therefore, accessibility to the public sphere for everyone is a primary concern.[13] As a form of public theology, diaconal theology is automatically party to the current debates concerning Christian presence in the public domain. The discipline offers a distinct voice as issues of poverty and affluence combined with their mechanism of exclusion and inclusion are at the heart of the praxis and theory of diakonia. Diaconal science is thereby a valuable conversation partner for the social sciences, contemporary philosophy, and contemporary culture.[14] As an actor in economic systems such as neoliberalism, which produce widespread exclusion, diaconal service offers a prophetic vision of the *oikos* of the Kingdom of God that contradicts and subverts the contemporary economic order.

4.1 Critical review of language

Postcolonial theory helps to critically review the language used in diaconal work. To illustrate this theoretical point requires an examination of the mechanism and the concrete terms currently in use in diaconal discourse.

Taken at face value, the term "urban mission" describes the location where mission activities take place: in the city. Upon closer inspection, the meaning of the phrase "urban mission" shifts from a primarily geographical marker to a marker of ethnicity and social class. According to some theorists, "in the United States, urban ministry became a code word for ministry to poor, especially to Blacks and Latino/as."[15] The term "urban mission" carries hidden class and race distinctions. Urban mission often proceeds from the middle-class white population to the poor, black, and brown inner-city populations. When using the word "urban mission" one should, therefore, be aware of whether one truly wants to indicate cityscapes or if one is coding language to obfuscate the race differentials hidden in diaconal and missionary work.

In the Dutch context, a critical review of language can be applied to the praxis of being present (*presentie*). This approach to diaconal work be-

[13] Paul S. Chung, *Postcolonial Public Theology. Faith, Scientific Rationality, and Prophetic Dialogue* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016).

[14] Chung, *Postcolonial Public Theology* (as note 13), 2.

[15] Dale T. Irvin, 'The Church, the Urban, and the Global. Mission in an Age of Global Cities', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 33 (2009) 178.

came popularized through the Dutch scholar Andries Baart, who focused on being present in the context of older urban neighborhoods in the Netherlands.[16] His approach gained momentum in the 1970s and 1980s when emphasis on conversion to Christianity through mission and diaconal church services decreased in favor of methods that stressed being present with people in search of a common humanity. *Presentie* was mainly carried out in *oudestadswijken* ("old urban neighborhoods") with a striking resemblance to the Anglo-Saxon urban mission in the United States. Translated literally, *presentie* means "presence", but when it means the *presence* of the relatively affluent with the relatively disenfranchised, it is coded language for dilapidated areas primarily inhabited by people of color and lower class. The practice of *being present* is, therefore, mainly organized along class and racial fault lines. The key concept used in the *presentie* approach is called "exposure," which means being exposed to those neighborhoods and taking part in daily life. The emphasis lies on the participative-experiential dimension. Although "exposure" rightly stresses careful observation rather than immediately acting, the notion of being exposed to an unfamiliar neighborhood shows how far removed the middle class is from life in these neighborhoods. Additionally, the method of exposure hardly offers the possibility that a person born in these neighborhoods can carry out diaconal work in the same fashion as people from outside the community. As a result, despite good intentions, the subject/object distinction is not called into question. Rather, emphasis falls largely on the emotions, experiences, and culture shock experienced by the diaconal workers, and their boundary crossing into unfamiliar and ultimately racially charged territory. This is a lopsided approach, which overemphasizes the experiences of diaconal workers, and fails to pay adequate attention to the material dimension of poverty. Restoring dignity to impoverished people is a worthy goal; however, poverty cannot be erased without prioritizing the structural and material dimensions and inequalities that cause it.[17] Applying postcolonial theory to diaconal discourse allows

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[16] Andries J. Baart, *Een theorie van de presentie* (Utrecht: Lemma, 2001). See for a more detailed overview the dissertation of Rob van Waarde regarding the value of the theory of presence in contemporary ecclesial practice. Rob van Waarde, *Oog in oog. Een missiologische studie naar de betekenis van de exposurebenadering in de stedelijke context* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2017).

[17] Dirk Geldof/Kristel Driessens, 'Tijd voor aanwezigheid als voorwaarde voor duurzame hulpverlening. Kritische reflecties bij de presentietheorie', *Sociale interventie* 12 (2003) 18–30.

an evaluation of the roles that class and race play in concrete examples; this method could emphasize the material dimension of diaconal work even further.

4.2 Problematizing the subject/object distinction

Mission studies, a theological discipline related to diaconal studies, realizes that it needs to problematize the subject/object distinction which was once at the heart of the discipline. For example, twentieth century ecumenical mission theology is characterized by the goal to dismantle the subject/object distinction that surfaces when discerning the difference between missionaries and the missionized or sending and receiving countries. Slogans such as "mission on six continents," "mission from everywhere to everywhere"[18] and "the whole church taking the whole gospel to the whole world" helped to break down this subject/object distinction.[19]

However, the most recent Dutch handbook on the diaconal mission of the church is missing the same impetus to mitigate the subject/object distinction so prevalent in diaconal work.[20] This subject/object distinction has manifested itself in clearly demarcated roles of diaconal giver and receiver without pointing out that it is possible to occupy both positions at once or to switch positions. Instead, the handbook establishes pervasive professionalism – the diaconate as a professional occupation. Although professional practices are praiseworthy, this emphasis should be augmented with encouraging grassroots practices, empowerment, self-determination, and community organizing.

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[18] This idea is already present in Kraemer's 1938 "The Christian Message in a non-Christian world" but has been popularized in particular by Samuel Escobar in the 1970s and 1980s. Hendrik Kraemer, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (London: The Edinburgh House Press, 1938), 40; Samuel Escobar, *The New Global Mission. The Gospel from Everywhere to Everyone* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

[19] This slogan originates from the Lausanne Movement. See here for an insider perspective on how the meaning of this slogan has changed over the years: https://www.lausanne.org/content/twg-three-wholes (accessed December 28, 2017).

[20] Crijns et al., *Diaconie in beweging* (as note 1).

5. Towards postdiaconal presence

In order to facilitate this shift towards grassroots diaconal practices, one could take inspiration from the trajectory that (secular) development work is following. Developmental studies are currently moving toward the new paradigm of post-development as a way of coming to terms with the colonial legacy. The espousal of post-development arose from poststructuralist and postcolonial critique. Those critical disciplines analyzed the project of development as a set of discourses and practices that had a profound impact on how Asia, Africa, and Latin America came to be seen and treated as "underdeveloped" continents.[21] One of the major proponents of this turn towards post-development, Arturo Escobar, proposes the emergence of,

> a field of transition and pluriversal studies anchored on a view of the earth as an always emergent living whole. Rather than one based on so-called globalization, this field would foster the imagination and discovery of forms of 'planetarization,' in which humans and other living beings can exist on the planet in a mutually enhancing way.[22]

Planetarity is the opposite of globalization. Globalization depicts the logic of global markets and the commodification of humans, while planetarization represents the unity of the natural world and its irreducible alterity.[23] The discipline of developmental studies criticizes its own legacy and concludes that it consists of discourses and practices that designate certain parts of the world as developed and other parts as underdeveloped. The underdeveloped necessitate foreign aid to achieve the imposed standard of developed countries.

Since the history of diaconal work is firmly tied up with the history of Europe as an imperial power, and given that diaconal work developed in light of severe power imbalance between ruling elites and beneficiaries, the question is: are we in need of postdiaconal presence? Paul Chung answers this question in the affirmative. He writes,

> *Diakonia* – in orientation toward God's *topos* of life – critiques an espousal between the Empire and the barbarism of neocolonialism in the acceleration of neoracism and hyper-casino capitalism, threatening the poor and our plan-

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21 Escobar, *Encountering Development* (as note 11), xii.
22 Ibid.
23 Stephen D. Moore/Mayra Rivera (eds), *Planetary Loves. Spivak, Postcoloniality, and Theology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011).

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etary life. This offers a post-developmental notion for public theology to promote the church's commitment to prophetic *Diakonia* and economic justice in anticipation of God's *oikonomia* and in-breaking future in our midst.[24]

Chung's point is that post-diaconal service is urgently necessary, and this means distanciation from the implications of past empire, the implications of neocolonialism in the present, and the failure to examine the status quo that leads to dire poverty and ecological destruction. A post-*diaconal* framework adds a strong prophetic and eschatological dimension to the service of the church working towards justice and abundance for all.

6. Identifying problems in diaconal work

With these postcolonial tools in mind, and with the resolve to incorporate practices based on a framework of post-diaconate, the following serves to identify three specific problems or fallacies of current diaconal practice.

6.1 The fallacy of dividing diaconal work between home and abroad

The error of dividing diaconal work between the context of a home country, on the one hand, and diaconal work elsewhere, on the other, becomes apparent when the respective areas of engagement are seemingly completely disconnected from each other. An example from a local congregation of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands illustrates this point. Their local diaconal chapter works together with other churches and the municipality to provide practical and financial assistance to people who would otherwise not be eligible for government support. The foreign involvement of the local church is combined in the Mission, World-Diaconate, and Development Committee, as is the case in many Dutch Protestant congregations.[25] Through this committee, involvement abroad concentrates on the support of an orphanage in Rwanda. Assisting an orphanage is a surprising choice as the primary object of charity because it is not a continuation of the emphasis on solidarity, liberation, and transforming

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[24] Chung, *Postcolonial Public Theology* (as note 13), 197.

[25] See for an overview of the history and function of those committees: P.R. Boersema, 'De verhouding van zending, (wereld)diaconaat en ontwikkelingssamenwerking. Een rondblik,' in: Govert Buijs (ed.), *Als de olifanten vechten ... . Denken over ontwikkelingssamenwerking vanuit christelijk perspectief* (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn Motief, 2003), 86–106.

unjust structures within societies, which emerged in the 1960s and 1970s as the focal points for foreign involvement of the churches. Collecting funds to support an orphanage without paying attention to the structural issues that make orphanages necessary seems to be a reversal to an earlier paradigm of diaconate that predates the developments in the 1960s and 1970s.[26] Consequently, local congregations are unaware of how diaconal service abroad is linked to diaconal work in the Netherlands.

6.2 The fallacy of secrecy

An egalitarian perspective of the church emphasizes that all baptized members are part of the one body of Christ and assumes that sharing resources in times of need is inherent to the communal nature of the church. From this egalitarian perspective, the secrecy that often surrounds the work of the local ecclesial charities connected with the Protestant churches is surprising. Secrecy implies that shame is attached to receiving assistance from ecclesial welfare, which leads to non-disclosure of the nature of support.

An example from my family history serves to make this point. My grandmother grew up in a family of subsistence farmers in a farmhouse that her family rented from a wealthy landlord. In her local church congregation, the wealthy and influential members usually fulfilled the church offices. Consequently, the church was stratified along the same lines as wider society.[27] Receiving help from the local charity was perceived to take away the dignity the congregants desperately craved as independent, proud people. This mentality can be described as a "culture of proudness," where congregants derived their self-esteem and pride from their ability to care for themselves, even in challenging circumstances.

Some of this secrecy has carried over to this day where many Protestant charities operate relatively autonomously without much accountability to or influence from their congregations.

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[26] The authors in this volume explain in detail the relationship between developmental work and Christianity from a Dutch perspective. Govert Buijs (ed.), *Als de olifanten vechten* (as note 25).

[27] The trajectory of my family follows closely the emancipatory movements of the 20th century, both in society and in the churches, allowing my grandmother to eventually work her way up to a comfortable middle-class existence, and allowing her to serve as a deacon herself in the church.

Although the connection between secrecy and diaconal work is rarely discussed, other relevant literature focusses on the distinction between confidentiality and secrecy in the disclosure of HIV/AIDS status. The literature differentiates between confidentiality – a mandatory element of medical professionalism – relationships and secrecy that stigmatize and discourage people from seeking out timely medical advice.[28] Ergo, one of the explanations for the continuation of secrecy in the diaconate is an "archetypical pattern of expectation" that one has come to anticipate from local ecclesial charities.[29] However, this individualistic approach to receiving assistance may benefit from an egalitarian diaconal theology that alleviates shame and propagates confidentiality over secrecy. Moreover, as argued above, a move towards an egalitarian model of being church requires discussions of the sensitive and difficult topic of class differentials and their bearings upon diaconal work.

6.3 The fallacy of ignoring class and race

In the example above, the fallacy of secrecy for diaconal work in rural areas was organized along class lines. Small farmers without land and working-class people recieved charity, while land owners and other elite social figures were in charge of delivering it. The same class lines combined with racial fault lines are manifest in the theory and praxis of *presentie* in today's old Dutch city neighborhoods. These class and racial fault lines implicitly reinforce the distinction between benefactor and recipient and between active and passive roles. Yet, methods to rectify the fallacy are available.

For instance, intersectionality analysis has proven a successful tool for class and race analysis. Initially developed in the late 1980s in the field of legal studies, intersectionality was soon adopted into feminist discourse. Intersectionality criticizes the essentialist and monolithic ideas of identi-

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[28] Minrie Greeff et al., 'Disclosure of HIV Status. Experiences and Perceptions of Persons Living With HIV/AIDS and Nurses Involved in Their Care in Africa', *Qualitative Health Research* 18 (2008) 311–324; Gill Seidel, 'Confidentiality and HIV Status in Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa. Implications, Resistances and Challenge', *Health Policy and Planning* 11 (1996) 418–427.

[29] Toine van den Hoogen/Paul van Gerven, 'Gemeenteopbouw in de Spiegel van de Diakonie', *Praktische theologie* 13 (1991) 46–67: 49.

ty.[30] According to intersecionality theory, every human being is made up of various identities, who mutually influence and reinscribe each other. Especially within feminist theory, intersectionality destabilizes the category of "women" by inscribing "women" with vectors of difference along the lines of class, race, ability, and sexuality.[31]

How does intersectionality bear upon the diaconate? In the first place, diaconal discourse might be informed by the tools developed in the humanities that have intersected academic boundaries and have inspired activist spaces, both online and offline.[32] The aforementioned Dutch handbook on diaconal science lacks engagement with power structures organized along the lines of class, race, and gender.[33] The same holds true for a recent publication of the Protestant Church of the Netherlands that is a practical resource for those who are starting their office as deacons in the church.[34] Interestingly enough, this second publication takes a more critical stance regarding "world diaconate," that is, the foreign diaconate, especially regarding the ethics of supporting diaconal projects overseas. This instruction manual pleas, for example, to be careful about using photographs for fundraising benefitting people in destitute situations because these images are not displaying the inherent dignity of human beings.[35] Although the suggestion is helpful, a critical discussion of race relations is missing. Race perception is an especially relevant topic and people of color are still often depicted solely as recipients of charity and white people as benefactors.

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[30] Kimberlé Crenshaw, 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex. A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics', *University of Chicago Legal Forum,* 1989, 139–167. Although discussions on gender and sex are very much part and parcel of the postcolonial discussions currently underway, this article focuses mainly on the elements of race and class, as they came most poignantly to the foreground in analysing the current Dutch situation. However, sustained gender analysis remains a necessity, as Edgardh and Lundström have undertaken in their own context of the church of Sweden. Ninna Edgardh/Erik Lundström, 'The Gender Order of Prophetic Diaconia', *Diaconia* 8 (2017) 38–50.

[31] Kathy Davis, 'Intersectionality as Buzzword. A Sociology of Science Perspective on What Makes a Feminist Theory Successful', *Feminist Theory* 9 (2008) 67–85.

[32] See for example the popular website www.everydayfeminism, which frequently employs intersectionality vocabulary.

[33] Crijns et al., *Diaconie in beweging* (as note 1).

[34] Geluk/Peters, *Diaconaat, hoe doe je dat?* (as note 1).

[35] Geluk/Peters, *Diaconaat, hoe doe je dat?* (as note 1), 77.

7. Listening to solutions from the Two-Thirds World

A discussion of three fallacies to avoid in diaconal theory and practice leads to solutions. Three mirror-images, that is, three challenges can be incorporated into diaconal discourse and praxis to avoid and transform the pitfalls. Voices from outside Eurocentric discourse will offer solutions.

7.1 The challenge of planetary thinking

Planetary thinking foregrounds the fundamental interconnectedness of all life on our planet. The concept of planetarity came to fruit in the work of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. In her work, planetarity and globalization are opposed to each other. Globalization proceeds primarily along an economic logic. Key features of this economic primacy are strong faith in trickle-down economics, the importance of global trade agreements, and the ease with which consumer goods can travel the globe, while human movement becomes more and more restricted. Opposed to this logic, "planetarity signifies an alterity that does not derive from us, a system that is beyond us, and yet we inhabit in it."[36] Spivak invites us to imagine the complexity and pluralization of planetary systems and not to be confined by narrow identity politics or superficial binary thinking. Planetarity resists abstraction because it points to what is "utterly present, irreducible, unrepeatable, and incommensurate [sic, EDH] local."[37]

As a consequence, planetary thinking could help to confront the problems of the planet in an integrated manner and pays adequate attention to the ecological perspective of current societal issues. Planetarity recognizes the contingent and constructed nature of borders and is not content with taking the nation-state as the organizing principle of diaconal work. Some questions can help raise awareness of the planetary impact of diaconal actions. For instance, where will the consequences of these actions be felt? Are there actors in this situation who are not immediately visible? How can we act holistically in this situation? Will this action, that is helpful for humans, have negative consequences for the environment (travel by plane instead of train) or animals (serving meat instead of vegetarian options at community meals). Planetarity widens and lengthens inclusive thinking.

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[36] Moore/Rivera, *Planetary Loves* (as note 23), 33.

[37] Laurel C. Schneider, 'The Love We Cannot Not Want. A Response to Kwok Pui-Lan', in: Moore/Rivera, *Planetary Loves* (as note 23), 46–54: 47.

7.2 The challenge of a comprehensive diaconal theology working towards openness

Openness and equality are the diaconal response to the challenge of secrecy. Indeed, two factors cause secrecy. First, a stratified society with distinct class awareness fosters a "mentality of proudness." In addition, a narrowly defined role of the diaconal office fails to respond to the structural factors leading to this stratification.

Limbani Jeromy Juttah works for the Anglican church in Malawi. He discerned through his empirical work with the deacons in the church that many of them are not aware of the diaconal role of the church to foster societal transformation.[38] His findings indicate that many congregations consider deacons to be servants in the literal sense of the word. Deacons often function as lowly servants of the bishop and are instructed to perform personal chores like collecting firewood for the bishop. Bishops consider deacons to be on probation, since deacons must obtain good reports from the bishops to be promoted to priests.

This example reminds that contextual theology indeed is *contextual*, raising issues about social stratification, social status, and leadership. The problems that exist in the Anglican church in Malawi magnify the general need for integrated diaconal service. When the position of the diaconate is ill-defined, without a clear theological mandate, there is a danger that the diaconal office can be used to perpetuate power games instead of dismantling them. Moving from secrecy towards confidentiality, therefore, necessitates the first step of working towards the abandonment of class prejudice and unjust wealth disparities, while at the same time consciously working towards a culture of confidentiality instead of a culture of secrecy.

7.3 The prophetic role of the church in diaconal service

To engender discussions on the influence of race and class in diaconal practice, we need prophetic courage to speak about racial and class-based inequality. The second voice from the Two-Thirds World is that of Leonard Wobilla Shwei, who argues forcefully for the connection of the diaconal mission of the church with the concern for social justice. Working from

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[38] Limbani Jeromy Juttah, *The role, identity of deacons and the practice of diaconal ministry in the Anglican Church in Malawi. How is the deacon's ministry understood and how does this affect the practice of diaconal ministry in the Anglican Church in Malawi?* (unpublished MA Thesis; Oslo, 2016).

the context of Cameroon, the issue of corruption is all-important, since corruption is widespread in society and hampers the ability of life in fullness for all. Wobilla Shwei holds that,

> The *Diakonia* of the church should be thinking in terms of restoring moral leadership and spiritual authority in society. The church must find a balance between "excessive theological radicalism" which places the salvation of the material at the center of its mission and theological rigidity that denies the need for constructive engagement with the political power.[39]

As a consequence, the prophetic role of the church is not distinct from the diaconal function but reinforces the diaconal vocation. Through her prophetic role, the diaconal service of the church is not limited to alleviating the consequences of corruption but pertains instead to battling the causes of a corrupt society. The struggle against corruption requires a culture change since local congregations need to understand how they are part of the problem. Translating the struggle against corruption as part of the diaconal task of the church in our own postcolonial societies, it means that the diaconia of the church is called to prophetically address the root causes of inequality and injustice.

8. Conclusion

The core of my argument has been that postcolonial theory is particularly well-suited for an *aggiornamento* of diaconal theory and practice. The tasks at hand are to discern the signs of the times and address the hard questions of structural injustice, racial, and class-based inequality. Three common pitfalls to avoid in the postcolonial diaconate have been identified. First, the fallacy of a dichotomy between service at home and abroad; second, the fallacy of secrecy; and finally, the fallacy of ignoring class- and race-based oppression. The proposed solution is to listen to theory and best practice from voices outside the traditional colonizing nations. The proposed direction for betterment is to envision the church and the world as a planetary community; develop an integrated and communal vision of the diaconate and embrace the prophetic role of the church in challenging racial and class-based injustice.

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[39] Leonard Wobilla Shwei, *Christian identity and the Fight against Corruption: Reflection on the need of a Diaconal Approach in the eradication of corruption in Cameroon* (unpublished MA thesis; Oslo, 2013).

Finally, post-diaconate, akin to post-development, must leave behind the bind of the colonial condition and move beyond the subject/object distinction of giver and receiver towards communal, critical, prophetic and planetary service and witness in the world. In the words of the World Council of Churches in their consultation on prophetic diaconal work: "Understood this way at this moment in time, diakonia may sometimes involve confrontation with powers vested in the status quo. Risk may be inevitable at times, requiring an attitude of love, humility, courage and commitment."[40] A confrontation with the status quo is necessary if the church is to address internal and external power balances.[41] Through this process of introspection, where local congregations and denominations assess how the relationships between giver and recipient are structured along class and race fault lines, and how the legacy of empire facilitates the consolidation of these racial and class-based lines. Through this critical, prophetic and communal efforts, the shape of a postdiaconal presence in the world and the church can become apparent.

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Zusammenfassung

Angeregt durch die derzeit fehlende Beschäftigung mit der postkolonialen Theorie innerhalb der Diakoniewissenschaft stellt dieser Artikel eine erste Erkundung

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[40] 'Theological perspectives on diakonia in the 21st century', paper delivered at Justice and Diakonia, Just and Inclusive Communities, and Mission and Evangelism programmes, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 2–6 June 2012, https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/unity-mission-evangelism-and-spirituality/just-and-inclusive-communities/theological-perspectives-on-diakonia-in-21st-century (accessed December 28, 2017).
[41] Edgardh/Lundström, 'The Gender Order of Prophetic Diaconia' (as note 30), 41.

des Zusammenspiels dieser beiden Disziplinen vor. Die Autorin legt dar, dass diakonale Arbeit das Erbe des Imperiums mit sich trage, und schildert drei Fallen, die diakonale Arbeit gegenwärtig belasten, verbunden mit drei Vorschlägen für den diakonalen Dienst heute: Erstens das Versagen, den Dienst vor Ort und den im Ausland miteinander zu verflechten; stattdessen könnte «Planetarität» als Modell dienen, den Erdball gemeinsam zu bewohnen. Zweitens der Trugschluss der Verschwiegenheit, wenn eine «Kultur des Stolzes» kombiniert mit einer Klassenunterscheidung einen egalitären, gemeinschaftlichen Dienst verhindert; Vertraulichkeit als professioneller Verhaltenscode zielt darauf, die Verschwiegenheit hinter sich zu lassen. Drittens der Trugschluss, Klasse und Ethnizität zu ignorieren, während man sich bemüht, die Armut zu lindern, ohne die Ursachen von Armut zu beachten. Stattdessen sollte die Kirche in prophetischer Weise handeln und Wahrheit zur Macht sprechen. Dieser Beitrag plädiert daher für ein «Post-Diakonat», verwandt mit «Postdevelopment» («Nachentwicklung»): die Bindung an koloniale Bedingungen hinter sich zu lassen und sich über die Subjekt-Objekt-Unterscheidung von Geber und Empfänger hinaus auf einen gemeinschaftlichen, kritischen, prophetischen und planetaren Dienst und ein ebensolches Zeugnis in der Welt hinzubewegen.

Key Words – Schlüsselwörter

Missiology – postcolonial studies – diakonia – subalternity – decoloniality