

Symposium: Popularized Culture, Ritual and the Making of Heritage

Date: 8 – 9 November 2018

Venue: Meertens Institute/Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

The central concern of this symposium is to explore processes of popularization and heritage formation and the role of ritual therein. The symposium will be organized in the context of Irene Stengs' inauguration as Professor by Special Appointment of "Anthropology of Ritual and Popular Culture" at the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam.

In a world characterized by high mobility, and in which images, practices and people are taken up in ever-changing constellations of pluralism and polarization, popularized culture and heritage play a crucial role in politics of identity formation. Through the popularization and heritagization of cultural forms and practices, collective sentiments are shaped and performed in ways that are difficult to map or envision. Along which national, religious or cultural boundaries such sentiments unfold, or how and when certain forms and practices are taken up and become popularized are challenging questions. This symposium aims to address these issues by focusing on the role of ritual and ritualized activities in the creation of affects, the popularization of cultural forms and practices, and the formation of heritage. Consisting of shared sequences of repetitive elements, ritual is an excellent mode of cultural transmission and dissemination, and, as a consequence, of popularization.

To flesh out the multilayered contexts, from local to transnational, in which culture is popularized and heritage is made, presentations are invited that zoom in on what I propose to call 'high-density events': all-embracing, momentary events in which the overall elusive processes of selection, mediatization and transmission of cultural forms and practices become tangibly present and, by implication, researchable.

A fine illustration of a popularizing, transnational, high-density event full of ritual is the wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle. Why do people not just in the UK but all over the world find such an eager interest in the castle, chapel, gowns, uniforms, dresses, jewelry and hats, the sermons and speeches, the music, flowers, flags, and the carriage-ride? Such an embrace highlights the significance attributed to each and every ritual element of the event and by implication of their significance for a scholarly understanding of popularized culture. Perceived as royal tradition and national heritage, the wedding makes its imprint on a

wide variety of popularized cultural forms and rituals across the globe, to live on in other weddings, fashion, documentaries, drama series, exhibitions and tourism.

Another example, more limited to a national level, offer the farewell ceremonies for the late Thai King Bhumibol Adulyadej, which in October 2017 engaged millions in elaborate spectacles. To the eye of the world, the main images were the eventual funeral processions. Thai society, however, was submerged in a veritable ocean of mourning rituals and commemorative activities for over one year. The royal ceremonies as well as each ritual step taken in the preparations were closely followed on websites, in magazines, and talk shows as well as the daily news, with detailed attention for their religious, traditional and heritage qualities. Again, we may ask how to understand the tremendous fascination such events exert, their power to affect a wide range of people, and significantly, the overall importance attributed to their tradition or heritage value.

As high-density events, the examples of the royal wedding and the royal cremation condense three intersecting issues this symposium seeks to address. The first issue is the popularization and mediatization of cultural forms and practices attributed to specific circles, places, groups or persons that become part of the everyday lives of apparently ever more people. Herewith, this symposium calls attention to processes of popularization, a notion preferable to the framework of popular culture. Problematizing normative categorizations and essentialist understandings of culture, the proposed perspective acknowledges that the cultural expressions of any group or class may become popularized, bringing into view the ambiguities, fluidities and tensions that come with any form of popularization. The notion of popularized culture invites researchers to explore how cultural transmissions combine change and recurrence: although always subject to adaptation, creative reworking and reinterpretation, cultural forms are at the same time transmitted as distinctive, recognizable continuities, and valued precisely for that.

The second issue concerns the forming and valorization of cultural forms and practices as heritage. In principle, anything may become heritage: food ways, songs, attires, song-bird competitions, commemorative gatherings, celebrations, television series. Analogous to things, places and practices held to be sacred, no form or practice is heritage by itself. Cultural heritage is always produced, by people, in a context. This raises questions about the people involved, the choices they make and the strategies involved: when, where and how are cultural forms and practices made heritage? In contrast to common-sense understandings of heritage as valuable culture inherited from the past, a focus on the

significance of the here-and-now, and the in-the-making dimensions of heritage may help to fathom the embrace of all kinds of popularized cultural elements as heritage.

The third issue addresses the relation between heritage formation and ritual. Rituals (festivals, carnival, religious holidays etcetera) are arguably among the most obvious practices to be regarded as heritage of a certain group or community. Much scholarly work has been dedicated to the study of 'rituals as (intangible) heritage'. The role of ritual in the naturalization of certain practices and forms as heritage, however, has not received much ethnographic and theoretical attention so far. This symposium therefore proposes to further investigate the processes of popularization, transmission, reification and heritage-making through the prism of ritual. The public, symbolic and expressive qualities of rituals account for their persuasive potential: rituals are experienced, felt and believed, and evoke a wide range of (not necessarily positive) engagements.

In short, the symposium serves as an occasion to explore 'high-density events' so as to further probe into the complexities of processes of popularization, heritagization and ritualization. Materializing in an endless (re)production and circulation of images, texts, objects and associated happenings, high-density events are of great significance. Evolving around powerful symbols and emotive material, high-density events may bring into view everyday politics of aesthetics and belonging, bringing into purview relations between nationalism, religion, the role of new media technologies, and the structuring forces of neo-capitalist economics in a world that is increasingly characterized by mobility and diversity.

To study these issues in a comparative perspective, ethnographic presentations are invited on the transmission and transformation of images, texts, objects and practices in the ritual sequences that are part of high-density events, preferably based on thick descriptions.

Program

Thursday	Venue: Theater Perdu, Kloveniersburgwal 86
9:30	Start of the day
10:00	Welcome by Irene Stengs
10:15 – 11:15	Chair: Markus Balkenhol
	Martijn Oosterbaan (Utrecht University) <i>Re-sanctifying Carnival: Patrimony, Heritage and Religion in Brazil</i>
	Francio Guadeloupe (University of Amsterdam) <i>An enactment and call for a decolonial scholarship of memory, or just simply an account of enjoying Rotterdam Zomercarnaval</i>
11:15 – 11:30	Break
11:30 – 12:30	Chair: Ernst van den Hemel
	Leonie Cornips (Meertens Institute, Maastricht University) <i>The popularization of ‘language’ and the soft ‘g’-sound in the production of intangible heritage</i>
	Marleen de Witte (NIAS, Amsterdam) <i>High Density Dashiki: A History of the World in One African Shirt</i>
12:30 – 13:30	Lunch
13:30 – 14:30	Chair: Birgit Meyer
	Anna Niedźwiedź (Jagiellonian University, Kraków) <i>Mass religious event, cityscape and heritage in the making: 2016 World Youth Day in Kraków</i>
	Ferdinand de Jong (University of East Anglia, Norwich) <i>Brick-by-Brick: Building Religious Heritage in a LEGO Cathedral</i>
14:30 – 14:45	Break
14:45 – 15:45	Chair: Ernst van den Hemel
	Belle Phromchaya (Designer/Artist, Amsterdam) <i>A Year in Grayscale: The design strategy for collective mourning in the digital era. A case of Thailand and the passing of King Bhumibol.</i>
	Jeroen de Kloet (University of Amsterdam) and Lin Jian (University of Amsterdam) <i>Kuaishou: Platformization of the unlikely, the banal and the ubiquitous</i>
15:45 – 16:00	Break

16:00 – 17:00 Chair: **Irene Stengs**

Lotte Hoek (Edinburg University)
Films in Fields: Crowds and Open-Air Cinema in Bangladesh

Mattijs van de Port (University of Amsterdam, Vrije Universiteit)
High-density. A videographic contribution to the debate.

17:00 End of the day
 Drinks at Meertens Institute

Friday **Venue:** VU, room 1E24 (Hoofdgebouw Campus, Boelelaan 1105)

10:00 – 11:00 Chair: **Markus Balkenhol**

Rik Adriaans (CEC, Budapest)
The Participatory Materialization of Nagorno-Karabakh: Performing Media Rituals in the Armenian Diaspora

Duane Jethro (CARMAH, Berlin)
Braai Nation: Taste, Consumption and South African Commemorative Days

11:00 – 11:30 Break

11:30 – 13:00 Chair: **Birgit Meyer**

Thijl Sunier (Vrije Universiteit)
Creating authority and trust in a troubled Dutch neighborhood. The remaking of local community through rituals

Pooyan Tamimi Arab (Utrecht University)
To whom do the Sixties belong? Posters, free love, and diversity in the Netherlands today

Markus Balkenhol and Ernst van den Hemel (Meertens Institute)
Black Petes and Kissing Men: Catholic Activism of Civitas Christiana and the Culturalization of Religion in the Netherlands

13:00 Concluding Thoughts

13:30 Lunch

15:45 Inaugural Lecture Irene Stengs (AULA, Vrije Universiteit)

Abstracts

Martijn Oosterbaan (Utrecht University)

Re-sanctifying Carnival: Patrimony, Heritage and Religion in Brazil

In the past decade, evangelical groups in several large Brazilian cities have started to organize blocos (carnival parades) that publicly perform samba music with percussion instruments during carnival. This new phenomenon can be labeled as carnaval gospel (evangelical carnival). This presentation juxtaposes carnaval gospel with several televised carnival parades of non-evangelical groups that performed in Brazil in the past two years. I will pay special attention to a collaboration between the Roman Catholic Church and a major escola de samba (samba school) in São Paulo in 2017 and to the parades of several escolas de samba in Rio de Janeiro in which Afro-Brazilian deities featured prominently. The purpose of this juxtaposition is to show that Brazilian carnival is an important mirror and catalyst of religious transformation in Brazil. By no means suggesting that carnival was profane, the current growth of evangelical movements in Brazil has spurred the Roman Catholic Church and Afro-Brazilian movements to seek rapprochement with popular carnival traditions. This rapprochement shows the continuing importance of carnival as a stage for patrimonial representation but also lays bare the struggles between different religious groups in relation to hegemonic patrimonial representations in Brazil.

Francio Guadeloupe (University of Amsterdam)

An Enactment and Call for a Decolonial Scholarship of Memory, or Just Simply an Account of Enjoying Rotterdam Zomercarnaval

Zomercarnaval in Rotterdam. Man was I excited to be here. I was at home. No, I was coming home. A city in creolization. Rotterdam wasn't Rotterdam today. Yet it was. Well it was and it wasn't. The city, called the havenstad van Nederland, summoned memories. Recollections of other places. Carnivals in the Caribbean and Latin America. Multisensorial echoes of my past arrived and were at home in Rotterdam. Did these remembrances of mine really arrive, or where they always there? Perhaps both. One way of appreciating all of this is, is to conceive of memories as constitutive of who we are even if most the time these recollections (which are part of a larger reservoir without boundaries) are not explicitly remembered. In fact perhaps they cannot be consciously remembered all the time otherwise we might not be able to function in what we call the here and now.

Yet in the Netherlands, like perhaps everywhere else in post-imperial Europe, the here and now is reductive. Politicized in a xenophobic way. In that scheme there are those who belong and those who belong less. Real Dutch and un-real Dutch. Culture belongs to certain people. Rotterdam's carnival is zomer's. To whom does it belong? Is it mine, or am I a guest? Who is guest and host in all this? The madness of the here and now!

In such a Manichean atmosphere, which does not allow one to breathe and enjoy culture and each other, it might be imperative to let memory do more decolonial work; that is connective work across the lines of the here and now, the us and them. Perhaps a decolonial scholarship of memory is called for. Such a scholarship cannot forget the city. I mean the entire city. Bricks, mortar, dogs, cats, humans, plants, and water. The hustle and bustle. The joy and the pain. The multicultural conviviality and everyday animosity. The sounds, sights, and smells, that touch one for a time and at unexpected times.

Rotterdam is an apt place to do such scholarly work. The city's secret is that it is here and there. My memories and those of many who are called newcomers are hers. So too those whose great-grandmothers buried their navel strings in her soil. She, he, it, (Rotterdam is

queer) is one of the port cities in post-imperial Western Europe. Embracing the Rotterdam that becomes that is comes into view during the zomercarnaval is acknowledging the future rebelling against the here and now.

This presentation focusing on Rotterdam zomercarnaval is an enactment and a call for a decolonial scholarship of memories in Dutch Academia.

Leonie Cornips (Meertens Institute & Maastricht University)

The Popularization of 'Language' and the 'Soft G' Sound in the Production of Intangible Heritage

For people 'language' is more than just a vehicle of transmission of linguistic heritage; it is a highly valued dimension in heritage production especially in contexts of power differences between national and (minority) regional languages. Language heritage production is part and parcel in the construction of local/regional identities which goes along with strong feelings and emotions. Language use as such is never socially neutral. In this presentation, I will focus on how a regional language spoken in the Netherlands i.e., Limburgish is produced as linguistic heritage. From the speakers' perception, the use of a regional language and/or specific forms associated with it such as sounds and words is ideologically, as formulated by Kathryn Woolard (2017) 'rooted in and directly expresses the essential nature of a community or a speaker'. The main question to be addressed is how selection of these specific sounds and words takes place and which meanings they index. The focus will be on the materialization of the soft 'g' in pop music, social media, objects and carnival.

Marleen de Witte (NIAS, Amsterdam)

High Density Dashiki: A History of the World in One African Shirt

This talk focuses on the popularization of one cultural object currently in fashion and known as 'dashiki'. Broadly valued as a piece of African heritage worn on the body, the shirt also evokes a range of emotions and debate. Taking the dashiki as a 'high-density object', I first explore the multiple layers of cultural exchange, appropriation, and transformation it has come to condense through its globe-spanning genealogy. Secondly, I consider the paradox of the dashiki's deep-rooted cultural hybridity and its naturalization as African heritage and look at how that paradox plays out in everyday politics and aesthetics of identity and belonging today.

Anna Niedźwiedz (Jagiellonian University, Kraków)

Mass Religious Event, Cityscape and Heritage in the Making: 2016 World Youth Day in Kraków

In July 2016 World Youth Day (WYD) - a global mass event organized every two or three years by the Roman Catholic Church and dedicated to young people – brought almost one million visitors to the city of Kraków (Poland) for a week. WYD, which was combined with an official visit by Pope Francis to Poland, will be analyzed here as a 'high-density', multilayered event that stimulated old and created new discourses within local (inhabitants of the city of Kraków) as well as transnational (global pilgrims) contexts. I will analyze perceptions of the WYD in terms of 'religious ritual' (a pilgrimage) as well as a global youth cultural festival (an event). Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork I will present unifying and conflicting narratives, moments, and experiences related to this two-dimensional character of the WYD. I will focus particularly on the event's scenery: a particular cityscape, that was presented, performed and lived as pervaded with 'religious heritage' and 'spiritual value'. I

argue that in the case of the 2016 WYD, Kraków's cityscape served as an active and activating scenery which framed this global religious event as well as confirmed, created and popularized local and national concepts of cultural heritage. While this complex mass religious ritual and festive event reinforced some of these concepts, it also contested, challenged and changed others.

Ferdinand de Jong (University of East Anglia, Norwich)

Brick-by-Brick: Building Religious Heritage in a LEGO Cathedral

In their bid to attract untapped audiences, several Anglican Cathedrals in the UK have recently hosted LEGO Cathedrals, miniatures of the houses of God that host them. Seducing the audience to buy a LEGO brick and contribute to the build of the miniature, the LEGO Cathedrals engage established and new audiences in a collective project that is meant to raise funds for the upkeep of the medieval buildings that house the plastic miniatures. In the Cathedral of Bury St Edmunds, a LEGO Cathedral has been in construction for almost two years. According to the LEGO project manager, the build will require another 5 years to complete. To speed up the process, the project manager plans to create a platform for the project on Twitter, speaking to the interests of the town's youth and an established LEGO fan base around the country. Using the LEGO figure of the patron saint St Edmund, the manager is creating a series of tweets that will provide the potential audience with information about the LEGO build.

Critically, this mediatisation of images and stories about the LEGO Cathedral focuses on the patron saint of St Edmund whose relics were once housed in the Abbey that generated large numbers of pilgrims to Bury St Edmund. Demolished in the Dissolution, the Abbey has since been ruined but one of its parish churches has survived and has become the local Cathedral. In a bid to attract visitors to the Cathedral and seduce them to buy a brick, the project is turning the religious heritage of a saint into a Twitter storyline.

The case raises questions about the place of ritual in religious heritage today. Whilst many Cathedrals have now embraced the adage, "They come as tourists, but leave as pilgrims", the envisioned visitor the LEGO Cathedral may come as tourist and leave as builder, de-ritualising the visit to the Cathedral. Moreover, although approved by the Cathedral, the online transformation of the saint into a LEGO character is a commodification of religious heritage into popular culture. This paper will tease out whether religious heritage and popular culture should be understood as antinomy or as complementary, and to what extent the circulation of images desacralizes a religious heritage.

Belle Phromchaya (Designer/Artist, Amsterdam)

A Year in Grayscale: The Design Strategy for Collective Mourning in the Digital Wra. A Case of Thailand and the Passing of King Bhumibol.

The presentation brings attention to cases that show how creative practitioners deal with practical matters that came with adopting the new mood & tone of the mourning period. Upon the announcement of the passing of the beloved King Rama IX on 13 October 2016, graphic designers, webmasters, content editors, and media producers worked overnight to transform their public channels to fit the national sentiment. As well as citizens who seek ways to collectively express their sadness in the online world. Among the flood of genuine, creative expressions made by individuals, some popular ones were found to be in conflict with ambiguous customs and traditional beliefs. Since there is no centralized manual how 'the public' can react to the royal passing, particularly in the 21st century context and medium, social media becomes the space for citizens, private, and public sectors to collectively

propose, debate, seek solutions, and come to terms on the progressive creation of national mood & tone during the year-long period.

Jeroen de Kloet (University of Amsterdam) and **Lin Jian** (University of Amsterdam)
Kuaishou: Platformization of the Unlikely, the Banal and the Ubiquitous

While high-density events like the Beijing Olympics (2008 and 2020) or the Shanghai Expo of 2010 serve as key ritualistic moments in the making of modern history of China, in our paper we like to zoom in on the flip side of such mega events. We will show how ubiquitous, banal forms of mediated cultural expressions permeate the everyday and are also part of “processes of popularization, heritagization and ritualization.” We thus want to deliberately steer away from the mega event towards the banal and the everyday. We do so by focusing on a quite unique video platform in China - kuaishou (快手) - that targets on second and third tier cities as well as the countryside.

When thinking about the creative class one tends to think of an urban elite, an educated group of predominantly young people that work in the cultural industries, who gather in hipster bars with their Macbooks, dressed in the latest fashion by local and cosmopolitan designer brands. But the creative industries in China also offer opportunities for the lower educated, rural population. In our paper, we want to investigate this emerging yet unlikely creative class in China, and into the, sometimes, unlikely aesthetics of their work. Labelled by Chinese mainstream media as ‘revitalizing Chinese rural culture’ (Liu 2017), kuaishou attracts hundreds of millions of Chinese from the countryside and the second and third tier cities. As we will show, based on interviews with makers and an aesthetic analysis of the video’s, Kuaishou’s contents moves far beyond those of the state controlled media, they give us insight into the complexities, absurdities and perversities of Xi Jinping’s China Dream. A dream that then is bound to implode into multiple dreams, ranging from the aspiration to have a fancy car to that of getting a new and sharper nose. By focusing on places beyond the first tier cities in China, and on unlikely creative workers that are not part of a higher educated urban class, and the unlikely aesthetics they produce, this paper ventures towards the mediated eventfulness of the banality of everyday life.

Lotte Hoek (Edinburg University)
Films in Fields: Crowds and Open-Air Cinema in Bangladesh

What are the potencies of a crowd gathered in a field to watch a film? This paper explores the iconic mode of ‘film in fields’, the non-theatrical mobile film screenings employed in Bangladesh by everyone from communist activists to British colonial officers and public health officials. I will suggest that this is both a well practiced ritual form as well as an unpredictable format for the generation of collective sentiments. I will argue that the arrival of mobile screens in village fields during the 1950s, 1980s and 1990s for improvised film screenings of short films were an attempt to articulate the political principles of freedom, sovereignty and democracy that had suffered despite decolonisation. While public screenings were able to momentarily conjure ‘the people’ in concrete forms to enact the promise of democracy that had been denied since the 1940s, the energetic force with which the people emerged in those fields was often unpredictable to those organising the screenings. The potential and excess of the energies stirred in the open-air film crowd form the analytical focus of this paper and will allow me to discuss the question of form as generative of political affects.

Mattijs van de Port (University of Amsterdam, Vrije Universiteit)

High-density. A Videographic Contribution to the Debate.

As a recent convert to visual anthropology, I would like to contribute to the discussion with an experimental videographic reflection on the notion of 'high-density'. I'm wondering what becomes of high density in a text. Isn't this exactly one of these elusive dimensions of life and being that evaporates the moment one tries to articulate it in language? The conference call gives us a circumscription of the phenomenon ("all-embracing, momentary events"). And it produces high-density through the literary strategy of the enumeration ("castle, chapel, gowns, uniforms, dresses, jewelry and hats, the sermons and speeches, the music, flowers, flags, and the carriage-ride"). Enumerations may produce a high-density effect in the reader, but we need to critically ask ourselves how this experience of the reader ought to be linked to the experience of someone watching the royal wedding. I hope to present examples of what high-density becomes in the medium of video, then to explore what questions are brought to the table by this intervention.

Rik Adriaans (CEC, Budapest)

The Participatory Materialization of Nagorno-Karabakh: Performing Media Rituals in the Armenian Diaspora

Fundraising spectacles such as gala dinners and concerts have long been central to the culture and institutions of the Armenian diaspora. Since the early 1990s, the conversion of money into ethnicity takes on increasingly mediatized and transnational forms. My paper examines the Armenia Fund Telethon, an annual pan-Armenian spectacle broadcast from Los Angeles that collects donations for infrastructure in the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic on the de jure territory of Azerbaijan. The event also extends into the realm of cultural politics, as it seeks to promote diaspora tourism to the contested region and circulates music videos that portray the de facto state as an integral part of Armenian identity. Through the establishment of a transnational sphere of media rituals that links up Armenians across five continents, the occupation of formerly Azerbaijani-occupied lands is turned into a diasporic celebration of humanitarian ethics and cultural heritage.

Duane Jethro (CARMAH, Berlin)

Braai Nation: Taste, Consumption and South African Commemorative Days

This paper looks at the relationship between taste, consumption and commemorative days in post-apartheid South Africa. It discusses the entrepreneur Jan Scannell's attempt to rename Heritage Day to Braai Day, or barbecue day, and invite South Africans to celebrate their heritage by braai'ing. Paul Nugent's work on nationalisms established through the consumption of cuisines informs the discussion in this chapter. The Braai Day project is situated in a history of national cuisines in South Africa, and the history and official meaning ascribed to post-apartheid commemorative days. While Scannell's project is shown to be self-serving and problematic, it is also socially significant for three reasons: by foregrounding taste and consumption as an arena for the contested negotiation of South African heritage; by raising important questions about the meaning and social significance of national commemorative days; and by asking questions about which cultural forms could be considered for inclusion as heritage.

Thijl Sunier (Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam)

*Creating Authority and Trust in a Troubled Dutch Neighborhood.
The Remaking of Local Community Through Rituals*

Shortly after the attack in Nice with a truck in 2016 a mosque in The Hague received an anonymous letter accompanied by a toy truck. The letter was a threat that soon a truck would drive into Muslims visiting the mosque, so referring to the Nice and Berlin attacks. Many people send mails to the board of the mosque to express their support and sympathy, among them a well-known Amsterdam rabbi. The present imam took a decision and invited the rabbi to talk and exchange views. In the followings weeks they had several talks in private and without the gaze of the media. Only much later they decided to plan the meeting, called: “not to be seized by fear”. The imam and the rabbi stated that rather than competing over the level of victimhood, the communities should take care for each other. They decided to plan a joint tour to schools to promulgate their views and to teach young children not to hate each other. The message is: ‘stop competing over victimhood, start teaching your own community to look at their own role’. They did not organize an ordinary neighborhood meeting, but a ritual in which they ‘performed’ their religious authority and explicitly played with the media images of animosity and controversy between the two religious communities. It was precisely the setup of this ritual that had impact.

In my talk I will unfold and analyze this event.

Pooyan Tamimi Arab (Utrecht University)

To Whom do the Sixties Belong? Posters, Free Love and Diversity in the Netherlands Today

The memory of the Sixties, a "worldwide happening" according to a 2015 exhibition on the 1960s at the Tropenmuseum, is a battleground for competing social and political causes in the Netherlands. In the 21st century, after Pim Fortuyn, scholars working in the field of cultural studies have noted and analyzed the usefulness of the Dutch Baby Boomer heritage of breaking free from church, from familial authority, and from repressive sexual norms, for political projects of cultural homogenization and nationalism. A 2018 poster campaign of affectionate couples of different ethno-religious backgrounds and diverse gender identifications, decorated by a frame design and color palette that invoke the Sixties, confirms that this period remains a key reference point in contemporary Dutch discussions about freedom and diversity. However, preliminary results of an ethnographic research of these and other contested pictures show that it is not a priori clear to whom the heritage of free love belongs in the contemporary pluralist setting, i.e. who desire to and who are capable of effectively claiming the Sixties as their own. A chronology of the posters' making and reception, based on participant observation and interpretation of the accompanying public debate, allows to reflect on the fact that the medium of the poster itself was part and parcel of critical debate about multiple, sometimes clashing and sometimes overlapping, heritage formations in the Netherlands. Rather than closing the meaning of these pictures with a definitively critical analysis, it is argued that in- and exclusion based on claiming the heritage of the Sixties is an open ended matter that is part of persistent public contestations of a diverse citizenry.

Markus Balkenhol and Ernst van den Hemel (Meertens Institute)
Black Petes and Kissing Men: Catholic Activism of Civitas Christiana and the Culturalization of Religion in the Netherlands

Religion and tradition play a central role in the polarized debates concerning Dutch national identity. In reaction to perceived threats, maintenance and protection of religious roots and cultural traditions are framed as crucial elements of Dutch society. These appeals on ‘Christian culture’ and ‘judeo-christian roots’ are the sites of new alliances and partitions. It is not uncommon to see secular, even outspoken atheist actors allying with conservative religious actors. But what precisely is meant by these actors when they claim to protect national religious culture?

In this paper we look at two high-density events, the controversy around black Pete and a campaign against the public display of homosexual images. In these high density events, secular and religious groups of actors find each other while around other topics they are divided. These campaigns and their successes and failures, illustrate how the politics of religion, secularity, and the nation play out in ethnographic detail.

