

# Sharing the Past

Heritage and Education in the 21st Century

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Prof. Dr. Hester C. Dibbits delivered this inaugural lecture in abridged form at the acceptance of the appointment of endowed professor of Historical Culture and Education at the Center for Historical Culture (ESHCC) of Erasmus University Rotterdam on 16 October 2015. This chair has been established on behalf of the National Centre of Expertise for Cultural Education and Amateur Arts (LKCA).

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As early as the nineteenth century, elements of the past were brought to the present and positioned as heritage by means of walking trails, exhibitions and stagings, and they have been ever since.<sup>1</sup> This process takes place through formal and informal collaborations between museums, heritage organizations, schools and local governments. In these collaborations, the desire to convey historical knowledge and insights takes a prominent place. But there are other interests too, like reaching and serving a wide audience and the protection of identities presumed threatened. Besides, heritage evokes emotions. The question arising is how these agendas, views, missions and emotions interrelate, how they affect the several heritage programmes and, first and foremost, what implications this may have for education and transmission.

In this inaugural lecture, I argue that it is important to research these collaborations from a network perspective. A wider knowledge on this subject could promote the quality of education programmes. A network perspective would make us more aware of the layered character and the dynamics that characterize the world of heritage. It will provide us with a better understanding of the ways in which heritage comes about, how it is made, how it is put in a box for protection, and how it is commented upon, or, in other words, how heritage can become the object of creating, crating and commentating.

Please allow me to elaborate on this. First, I will present a general view on heritage, education and the network perspective. Then I will take you on a walk past three types of collaborations that deserve further investigation. By the end you will have – or so I hope – a clear picture of my agenda, my view and my mission as holder of the endowed chair of Historical Culture and Education.

### Heritage, education and the network perspective

Heritage is man-made. Heritage is not a given, but a construct. It is the result of sticking a label onto something. But sticking the label on does not automatically make something heritage. Heritage is heritage only when others recognize, acknowledge or discuss it as such – and the latter point should not be ignored. It is the preliminary result of a complicated process of negotiation, appreciation and selection, which involves power relations and many other factors, including some very practical ones.<sup>2</sup>

1 I wish to thank Eveline Weenink, Marlous Willemsen, Kees Ribbens and Marlies Tal for their critical and constructive comments on earlier versions of this text.

2 See for instance D. Hemme, M. Tauschek & R. Bendix (Hrsg.), *Prädikat "Heritage". Wertschöpfungen aus*

Heritage is about elements of the past that are being positioned in the present, with the future aim of creating an identity that is experienced as collective. Or, as John Tunbridge and Gregory Ashworth put it: “The present selects an inheritance from an imagined past for current use and decides what should be passed on as useful to an imagined future.”<sup>3</sup> Social anthropologist Sharon Macdonald describes the creation of heritage very succinctly as a practice of “past presenting”, of bringing the past to the present.<sup>4</sup> There is also a case for arguing that heritage is a form of “historicizing the present” in the sense that certain phenomena – which one wants to preserve for the sake of a particular group because that group identifies with these phenomena – are presented or experienced as “old” and “indigenous”.

Heritage is a potential source of contestation because it forms part of a process of identity construction. Some occasions give rise to more contestation than others. The commotion around Black Pete is much more fervent than around Halloween.<sup>5</sup> Heritage engenders the formation of constellations that Marlous Willemsen and I once characterized as emotion networks, networks consisting of people with wide-ranging emotions, including subdued, unuttered emotions.<sup>6</sup> All sorts of people, including teachers, museum educators and heritage professionals, form part of such emotion networks, as do pupils who are having discussions with their teachers about the old building next to the school, the feast of St. Nicholas or the depictions on the Golden Coach.<sup>7</sup>

*kulturellen Ressourcen* (Berlin, 2007); R. Bendix, “Heritage between economy and politics. An assessment from the perspective of cultural anthropology”. In: L. Smith & N. Akagawa (Eds.), *Intangible Heritage* (London/New York, 2009) 253-269. For a survey of recent Dutch scholarly research into heritage from a dynamic perspective: W. Oosterbaan, *Ons Erf. Identiteit, erfgoed en culturele dynamiek* (Amsterdam, 2014). This book was released in connection with the Cultural Dynamics research programme, which was largely funded by NWO and led by Willem Frijhoff. See also W. Frijhoff, *Dynamisch erfgoed. Heeft de cultuurgeschiedenis toekomst?* (Amsterdam, 2007).

- 3 J.E. Tunbridge & G. Ashworth, *Dissonant heritage. The management of the past as a resource in conflict* (Chichester, 1996) 6.
- 4 S. Macdonald, *Memorylands. Heritage and Identity in Europe Today* (London/New York, 2013) 15.
- 5 In this context, I would like to refer to Alex van Stipriaan, professor of Caribbean History at the Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication, who advocates a more pronounced stand among lecturers and students in the Black Pete debate. See [www.erasmusmagazine.nl/2014/12/01/universiteiten-geven-verkeerd-signaal-af-over-zwarte-piet/](http://www.erasmusmagazine.nl/2014/12/01/universiteiten-geven-verkeerd-signaal-af-over-zwarte-piet/). See also the interview with Van Stipriaan in G. Kozijn, *Zwarte Piet. Verkennend onderzoek naar een toekomstbestendig sinterklaasfeest* (Beilen, 2014).
- 6 H. Dibbits & M. Willemsen, “Stills of our liquid times. An essay towards collecting today’s intangible cultural heritage”. In: S. Elpers & A. Palm (Eds.), *Die Musealisierung der Gegenwart. Von Grenzen und Chancen des Sammelns in Kulturhistorischen Museen*. (Bielefeld, 2014) 177-198.
- 7 The Golden Coach (**Dutch: Gouden Koets**) is a coach owned and used by the **Dutch royal family**. The Golden Coach is used every year to carry the Dutch monarch from the Noordeinde Palace to the Ridderzaal in order to deliver the **Speech from the Throne**. The coach features a celebration of the country’s history of subjugation of African and Indonesian peoples in the form of a painting by Nicolaas van der Waay, who depicted barely clothed African and Indonesian men presenting spoils to the Dutch royal house, symbolized by a fully clothed white woman on a throne. According to Barryl Biekman of the Landelijk Platform Slavernijverleden, this is a “celebration of slavery and colonialism.” Calls for the painting’s removal or the ending of the use of the Golden Coach have intensified in recent years. (See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden\\_Coach\\_\(Netherlands\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_Coach_(Netherlands))), last visited on 6 October 2015).



*The Golden Coach, manufactured in 1898, Royal Collections, The Hague.*

*Photo: Dutch Royal Family Archive.*

The way we think about heritage, or what we consider to be heritage, is in part determined by our upbringing. This upbringing – education – takes place in a variety of ways and in a diversity of contexts. A distinction often made is the one between formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts. In this framework, the school is considered as a formal learning context, the museum as a non-formal learning context and the domestic domain as an informal learning context.<sup>8</sup> It must be noted, however, that the school is not a context of formal learning alone. Children learn from each other, and teachers are not robots on automatic pilot, but individuals with their own agendas and emotions. Like all other domains of everyday life, the classroom is a place where the setting may change from formal to informal. People learn all their lives, wherever they go, consciously and unconsciously.

As it happens, we live in a world where several different domains are becoming more and more interwoven. We see schools and heritage institutions collaborating more closely these days, and there is an increased commitment to participation, on the part of parents in the case of schools, and on the part of a variety of audiences in the case of museums.<sup>9</sup> The participants are individuals with highly various backgrounds and frames of reference: old and young, newcomer and old-timer, people with various creeds, convictions and experiences. And given the fact that the world of heritage, too, is heading towards globalization, there is an increase in international collaboration, also in the field of education programme development. These developments call for further investigation.

The past decades have seen the release of a great many studies looking at organizations, collaborations, society, or the world as a whole from a network perspective. One famous study

8 See for instance Onderwijsraad, [www.web-leren.nl](http://www.web-leren.nl). *Advies* (The Hague, 2003). See also the definitions in UNESCO's glossary *Guidelines for the recognition, validation and accreditation of the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning* (Hamburg, 2012).

9 See for instance L. Meijer-van Mensch, "Von Zielgruppen zu Communities. Ein Plädoyer für das Museum als Agora einer vielschichtigen Contituent Community". In: S. Gesser, M. Handschin, A. Jannelli & S. Lichtensteiger (Hrsg.), *Das partizipative Museum. Zwischen Teilhabe und User Generated Content. Neue Anforderungen an kulturhistorische Ausstellungen* (Bielefeld, 2012) 86-94; L. Meijer-van Mensch & E. Tietmeyer (Eds.), *Participative Strategies in Collecting the Present* (Berlin, 2013). See also the heritage cahier *Publiek* (Amsterdam, 2015), compiled by Ruben Smit, with contributions by Jan Sas, Ruben Smit, Simone Stolz, Fieke Tissink and Arja van Veldhuizen.

is *The Rise of the Network Society* by Manuel Castells from 1994.<sup>10</sup> Fascinated by digital developments that took place in those days, Castells described the world as a system of more or less closed networks that interconnect into larger networks. More recent studies have paid more attention to the unpredictable dynamics within and between networks. These studies focus not only on the interaction between people among themselves, but also between people and things.<sup>11</sup>

Network studies with a contemporary focus present an image of a world in which people, goods and knowledge are moved from one place to another by the speed of lightning. This brings about – or so it is argued – some fundamental changes in our society. Some researchers speak of a radical process of individualization, others point to the development of new collective identities, and yet others notice the rise of “light communities”, a development in which collectivity is replaced by “connectivity”.<sup>12</sup>

This focus on networks is nothing new, of course. In the 1980s, prosopography was a popular method among historians. One decade later, cultural-historical research had shifted its attention towards cultural circuits. In the end, it all comes down to a way of looking that involves an eye for relationships, change and the crossing of borders. It implies giving attention to translocal, transnational and global relationships and to the notion that culture takes shape in complex constellations with a network-like character.

An important point of interest in this process is the role of sensory experiences and emotions, which is also relevant in educational settings, of course. This issue comes to the fore in all its poignancy in the NWO research programme *Heritage Education*, which was led by Maria Grever and performed at the Center for Historical Culture. Heritage may contribute to a better understanding of the past. At the same time, emotions can get in the way of critical reflection.<sup>13</sup>

Taking this view as a starting point, I will now set out on my walk past three types of collaborations, as I had announced earlier. My first stop, which will not take long to present itself, is the collaboration between primary school teachers and local heritage practitioners. At the second stop, I will go into the collaboration between secondary school teachers and

10 M. Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society. The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture, Volume I* (Malden, MA, 1996). See also W. Welsch, “Transculturality. The Puzzling Form of Cultures Today”. In: M. Featherstone & S. Lash (Eds.), *Spaces of Culture: City, Nation, World* (London, 1999) 194-213.

11 Cf. Y. van Dijk & M. Olon, “Radicaal relationisme. Het andere engagement in de jongste Nederlandse literatuur”, in: *De Gids* (2015) nr. 3, 3-7.

12 W. Duyvendak & M. Hurenkamp, *Kiezen voor de kudde. Lichte gemeenschappen en de nieuwe meerderheid* (Amsterdam, 2004). In 2010, the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science quoted Duyvendak and Hurenkamp in its so-called Kennisagenda (“Knowledge Agenda”). See Kennisagenda OCW, p. 12: “Modern individuals no longer connect in the way and with the same intensity they once did. Weak or loose connections, memberships that can be ended are preferred over relationships for life. Strong institutions are replaced by flexible networks, and institutions that remain to exist acquire a more network-like character. This applies, for example, to traditional institutions like the family and to political parties. In addition to this, people participate in several networks at the same time.” (translation MdJ.) See also M. Tal & O. van Munster (Eds.), *Cultuur in de kanteling. Strategische Verkenning cultuureducatie en actieve cultuurparticipatie (2017-2020)* (Utrecht, 2015).

13 M. Grever & C. van Boxtel, *Verlangen naar tastbaar verleden: erfgoed, onderwijs en historisch besef* (Hilversum, 2014). See <http://www.heritageeducation.nl> for information about the programme Heritage Education, Plurality of Narratives and Shared Historical Knowledge.

museum professionals, and at the third stop, I will discuss the collaboration between teachers in higher education and activists. It goes without saying that I could have chosen different combinations instead. For one, there is quite an intense collaboration going on between primary schools and museums,<sup>14</sup> and there are a great many interesting heritage parties that do not feature in my walk, like zoos, archives and libraries. However, it is not a comprehensive survey that I am after, but rather the collaborations that challenge me to do more in-depth research. What is more, every next stop will entail a shift of emphasis towards a different type of heritage – from the constructed environment via collections or movable heritage to traditions or intangible heritage – and towards a different geographical unit – from local and national to international. My walk will primarily confine itself to the Netherlands, but I can assure you that this will not stop me from looking across the border.

### Primary school teachers and local historians

The first collaboration presenting itself for investigation is the one between teachers and local heritage practitioners, like local historians and private collectors. This collaboration is interesting for two reasons. Firstly, it has a historical dimension: there is a long tradition of studying local customs and folklore in the school system, and teachers have always had a strong representation in the field of local history.<sup>15</sup>

The second reason would be the learning paths (“leerlijnen”) for heritage education, recently developed to be applied in primary education. These learning paths are not binding. They offer suggestions to teachers who wish to implement the primary learning goals (“kerndoelen”) matching the learning areas of “artistic formation” and “getting to know yourself and the world”. One of these learning goals has an explicit focus on heritage.<sup>16</sup> It would be interesting to know what sort of view emerges from the learning paths, how they are regarded by the teachers, how they are used by them, and how it all fits in with the agendas of the members of local history societies. The larger question lurking in the background concerns the view that serves as a point of departure for all related activities: What it is all about with heritage: to create, to crate or to commentate?

One of the available learning paths comes from SLO, the Netherlands Institute for Curriculum Development.<sup>17</sup> This learning path provides starting points for interdisciplinary assignments that allow pupils to work on, respectively, their “identity formation and the

14 In the Netherlands, the memo *Cultuur en School* (1996), drawn up by government officials Aad Nuis and Tineke Netelenbos, was an important booster for the collaboration between schools and museums. According to *Museumeducatie in de praktijk. Trendrapport museumeducatie 2007* (Cultuurnetwerk Nederland, 2008), this memo has put museums on the map as ideal learning environments for the public sector and the domain of education. The trend report mentions several collaborative projects and some types of collaborations that were fairly new at the time, like those between museums, libraries and archives.

15 A. van der Zeijden, “De Graafschapse folklore als schouwtoneel. Musealisering en visualisering van de Nederlandse volkscultuur in de jaren twintig van de vorige eeuw”, in: *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 120 (2007) nr. 1, 20-39, q.v. note 70.

16 Primary learning goal 56: “Pupils will acquire some knowledge of and appreciation for aspects of cultural heritage.” See: J. Greven & J. Letschert, *Kerndoelen primair onderwijs* (The Hague, 2006) 63.

17 On its website, the LKCA (National Centre of Expertise for Cultural Education and Amateur Arts) presents a survey of the continuing learning paths that is constantly adjusted: in July 2015, it had 30.



enlargement of historical awareness and historical reasoning, the enlargement of a sense of connection with one's own environment or community and the enlargement of a cultural consciousness and citizenship." The underlying intention of this policy is for pupils to examine traces of the past in their own environment by using their senses, and talk to each other and "experts" about the things they see, to experience the "meaningfulness of their own environment" and to understand how they "connect with their cultural heritage".<sup>18</sup>

"The enlargement of a sense of connection with one's own environment or community": the choice of words calls up associations with the study of local customs in its more traditional form and with local history education practices from the period after World War II.<sup>19</sup> Research will be required to shed light on any historical parallels.

Where did teachers take their pupils in the 1960s, where do they take them now, and what are their choices based on? There is the impression that schools in the Randstad area these days prefer art museums, whereas schools elsewhere in the Netherlands tend to visit mills and castles.<sup>20</sup> Does this mean that teachers in the east and the north of the country are more inclined to explore the vernacular side of their respective regions? Or are such differences simply the result of practical considerations – like museums being too far away? And what effects does this have?

In any case a lot of consultation takes place between teachers and local heritage practitioners about the interpretation of heritage lessons in the region of the school. In this process, they get assistance from provincial heritage organizations.<sup>21</sup>

In the past, local history clubs and societies have often been labelled as local-chauvinistic and romantic-nationalistic.<sup>22</sup> When we look at the current situation – while approaching the societies as a network of individuals – we may get a more balanced picture. Some of the members may have changed their focus (content-wise) as a result of the rise of social media and the possibilities of digitization. Some will have expanded their field of activity substantially and built up an international network of contacts. One good example would be the genealogists, who are frequent Internet users. What is more, many societies are going through a process of professionalization, harbouring ambitions to grow into museums and to develop education programmes.<sup>23</sup> These aspects of today's dynamic historical culture will be dealt with in a research project which is presently set up by my colleague, Professor Kees Ribbens, and myself as part of our respective chairs. The focus in this research lies on local history clubs and collectors of war memorabilia and their appreciation of heritage and networks.<sup>24</sup>

18 <http://kunstzinnigeorientatie.slo.nl/leerlijnen/kunstzinnige-vakdisciplines-en-cultureel-erfgoed/cultureel-erfgoed>. Other learning paths incorporate similar goals, as was shown in an analysis of several different learning paths by a project group of the LKCA, led by Piet Hagenaars in 2014. See P. Hagenaars (Ed.), *Erfgoededucatie in het primair onderwijs* (Utrecht, 2014) 9.

19 K. Wils, "Geschiedenisonderwijs en erfgoed: een terreinverkenning", in: *Hermes* 14 (2010) nr. 47, 1-6; P.-P. de Baar. *De Canon van Amsterdam* 3. [www.onsamsterdam.nl/component/content/article/15-dossiers/281-de-canon-van-amsterdam-3](http://www.onsamsterdam.nl/component/content/article/15-dossiers/281-de-canon-van-amsterdam-3), last visited on 15 September 2015.

20 I am grateful to Arja van Veldhuizen, who drew my attention to this information.

21 See the list of provincial heritage organizations at [www.lkca.nl/erfgoededucatie/wie-wat-waar](http://www.lkca.nl/erfgoededucatie/wie-wat-waar).

22 Wils, "Geschiedenisonderwijs en erfgoed", 1.

23 Apart from this, one may wonder if the possibilities to maintain private contacts via the Internet will not jeopardize the survival of local societies.

24 K. Ribbens, *Een eigentijds verleden. Alledaagse Historische Cultuur in Nederland, 1945-2000* (Hilversum, 2002); C.R. Ribbens, "Historische cultuur in veranderend perspectief". In: H.C. Michielse & E. Paepe (Eds.), *Lokale Geschiedenis tussen lering en vermaak* (Hilversum, 2004) 31-52.





*The Pernis Antiquities Room, city of Rotterdam.*

*Photo: Hester Dibbits, 5 May 2012*

A fact well worth mentioning is that the circuit of local heritage practitioners includes many people who have recently moved into the area. In other words, they are newcomers. What drives them? By doing what they do, they appropriate their new environment. In her book *Memorylands*, Sharon Macdonald makes mention of attempts to preserve industrial heritage in the North of England. Research shows that these worried attempts do not exactly spring from a romantic longing for the past. Rather, they must be interpreted as a “claim of belonging”, using knowledge of local history as its vehicle: “What was involved was not some blanket nostalgia for the past or wish to return to it [,] but a select discourse embedded in ongoing social relations”, according to Macdonald.<sup>25</sup>

Looking at historical circles from such a perspective – i.e. by focusing on the relational aspect – will create the space necessary to review practices that we might otherwise have labelled as mere nostalgic longing. It will also make us aware of the distinction – made by social anthropologist Matt Hodges – between “palliative nostalgia” and “critical nostalgia”; two forms of nostalgia, which may well exist within one person.<sup>26</sup> In the first case, it is about “searching out a blissful if temporary shelter from the demands of the present”, whereas in the other case, the present is critically subjected to comparison with “remembered or invented pasts”.<sup>27</sup> It would be interesting to know if the members of historical societies are in any way moved by these two types of nostalgia, and how this would affect teaching programmes for primary schools.

The Netherlands has some 800 (local) history societies.<sup>28</sup> Some of these are into genealogy, others focus on archeological activities or on research into special historical events, while yet others emphasize the study of local traditions, customs and dialects. Some do all at the same time. Many of these societies have an education programme on offer. The same thing is true for the multitude of non-local historical societies, like the society for “computer heritage”, the

<sup>25</sup> Macdonald, *Memorylands*, 93.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> M. Hodges, “The time of the interval: historicity, modernity and epoch in rural France”, in: *American Ethnologist* 37 (2010) no. 1, 115-131.

<sup>28</sup> A. van den Broek & P. van Houwelingen. *Gisteren vandaag. Erfgoedbelangstelling en erfgoedbeoefening* (The Hague, 2015) 72.

society for collectors of historical radios, and societies focusing on the collection of objects from World War II.

And how about the various migrant societies in the Netherlands? To what degree have they entered the educational picture?<sup>29</sup> In the light of the social dynamics I described earlier – the network society, the shift from collectivity to connectivity – migrant organizations could be valuable collaboration partners. They may take an alternative approach to the local environment and to local (everyday) histories. Moreover, collaborations with migrant organizations may create obvious connections with other places in the world.<sup>30</sup>

In the (Dutch) memo *Heritage Education in Primary Schools, a Survey* (2014), it is observed that primary schools in the process of developing their heritage curricula are given the opportunity to avail themselves of the expertise of several actors, including their own teaching staff, people who actively manage forms of intangible heritage in the area, local or regional heritage institutions, and parents “who are enthusiastic about a particular aspect of heritage and love to talk about their passion”.<sup>31</sup> This is a good starting point, especially when their views of heritage and their heritage-related emotions are also included in the conversation. Then, and only then, could there be projects in which the quest for collective identities gives way to a susceptibility to and a skill for dealing with dynamics and unexpected connections, also across local and social borders.

## Secondary school teachers and museum professionals

The second type of collaboration I intend to research as holder of my chair is the one between secondary school teachers and museum professionals. First, let us look at the expectations the Dutch government has of teachers. History teachers are urged to introduce students to a critical approach of various types of sources and to further their development of a historical consciousness.<sup>32</sup> In my view, research into and opinion formation on collection and exhibition practices in past and present are an important part of the development of a historical consciousness.

29 See [www.vijfeeuwenmigratie.nl/cgm/database-migrantenorganisaties-nederland](http://www.vijfeeuwenmigratie.nl/cgm/database-migrantenorganisaties-nederland) and the database of the CGM (Centre for Migrant History) on the website of the IISH (KNAW): [https://collab.iisg.nl/web/migration\\_organisations/search](https://collab.iisg.nl/web/migration_organisations/search).

30 In this context, I would like to bring up some interesting research results related to heritage education in Flanders. One of the conclusions of the project *Erfgoededucatie in het Vlaamse onderwijs. Erfgoed en onderwijs in dialoog* (Brussels, 2007) was that heritage is mainly associated with the notions “material”, “indigenous” and “old”. See also K. D'hamers, “Culturele diversiteit”, in: *Faro. Tijdschrift over Cultureel Erfgoed* 1 (2008), nr. 3, 4.

31 Hagens, *Erfgoededucatie in het primair onderwijs*, 14.

32 Grever & Van Boxtel, *Verlangen naar een tastbaar verleden*. In this context, see also: R.J. Pérez, J.M. Cuenca López & D. Mario Ferreras Listán, “Heritage education: Exploring the conceptions of teachers and administrators from the perspective of experimental and social science teaching”, in: *Teaching and Teacher Education* 26 (2010) 1319-1331.



*Oostwaarts!* An exhibition on art, culture and colonialism at the Tropenmuseum (Amsterdam, 2003).

Photo: National Museum of World Cultures Foundation

When we look at the museum world, there appears to be some cause for tension there. On the one hand, museum professionals advocate critical reflection on the history of museal collections and (re)presentations, processes of image creation and constructions of collective identities. The Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam has a tradition of this kind. An example to illustrate this would be their permanent exhibition *Oostwaarts!* (“Heading East”), which was installed in 2003 under the leadership of the then head of museological affairs, historian Susan Legêne.<sup>33</sup>

One of the objectives of this exhibition was to address youngsters between the ages of 12 and 17 in particular to “get a discussion going about the significance of the colonial past of the Netherlands for today’s society”.<sup>34</sup> The foundation of the *Research Center for Material Culture* has led to the organizational embedding of the self-reflective museological movement in the National Museum of World Cultures, which is the result of a merger of the Tropenmuseum, the National Museum of Ethnology and the Africa Museum.<sup>35</sup>

On the other hand, we can discern a trend aiming at the presentation of collective identities. The dominant presence in the museum world of what I would call the DNA trend – which boils down to the telling of the glorious tale of the city or region where the museum is located – is not an isolated phenomenon, but a development which is interconnected with and reinforced by tourist programmes and city branding. It says a lot that the notion of DNA is also employed in the plans for the yet-to-be-constructed open-air museum Fort New Amsterdam in Suriname. On closer inspection, it seems that most cultural-historical museums combine the fairly static DNA approach with a more dynamic, critically reflective approach to heritage – whether intentionally or unintentionally. The Netherlands Open Air Museum may serve as an example. Please allow me to escort you there.

33 See S. Legêne, *Spiegelreflex. Culturele sporen van de koloniale ervaring* (Amsterdam, 2010). See also: <http://tropenmuseum.nl/nl/node/88>.

34 C. Gloudemans, “Jongeren moeten Oostwaarts!” and: “Koloniaal (poppen) Theater” in: *De Volkskrant*, 1 February 2003. About youngsters and visiting museums, see M.-J. Kommers (Ed.), *Zicht op... jongeren en cultuurdeelname. Achtergronden, literatuur en websites* (Utrecht, 2006).

35 See [www.materialculture.nl/en/](http://www.materialculture.nl/en/). The *Research Center for Material Culture* is led by Wayne Modest.

Over the past few years, the Open Air Museum has incorporated some presentations that thematize migration and the multicultural society: the Moluccan Barracks, an Indonesian backyard, a Chinese restaurant (all since 2002), and a Turkish boardinghouse (since 2012). All these presentations tell the story of a specific group. A presentation of a more critical-museological nature was the one about the kotomisses. The presentation told the story of Surinamese items of clothing that the museum had refused to incorporate for a long time because they were regarded as a mismatch to the story of the Netherlands. They were housed elsewhere, until they were rediscovered and retrieved in 2012, when they were considered to match after all.<sup>36</sup> The most interesting aspect of this presentation was that prominent attention was given to the biographies of the objects and to the stories about the network of stakeholders around the objects. It would be interesting to know how much room the Open Air Museum is willing to allow for a more critical historical-museological approach. Like former director Jan Vaessen said, it is like finding your balance on a slackline.<sup>37</sup>



*Detail of the "Chinese restaurant" at the Netherlands Open Air Museum, 2010, Arnhem. Photo: Netherlands Open Air Museum.*

It is precisely this aspect – finding one's balance on a slackline – that requires reflection on the relationship between various agendas, views, missions and emotions in collaboration projects between teachers and museum professionals. And in this case too, there is reason to urge the broadening of the network. Why include only teachers and museum professionals as collaboration partners in the development of education programmes, and not also young people? This is not inconceivable. In line with ideas about public participation, we now see a development where museums are setting up programmes not only for, but also with the public.<sup>38</sup>

The network could be broadened in yet another way, namely by transnational collaborations. This too could be a cause for tension. This tension was the topic of conversation

36 Meanwhile the kotomisses, and all other items of the presentation *Kleur Bekennen*, have been transferred to the depot to make room for the presentations related to the Canon of Dutch History. The new presentation will include a "presentation specimen" of a kottomisse.

37 J. Vaessen, *Ervaring delen. Verhalen en beelden bij honderd jaar Nederlands Openluchtmuseum* (Arnhem, 2012) 6-24.

38 See the initiative "Blikopeners" (Eye Openers) of the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam as an example of collaboration with and for young people.



at the conference *Bombs on Rotterdam: two perspectives, one story*<sup>39</sup>, organized by the Dutch World War II commemoration committee “Nationaal Comité 4 & 5 mei” and Museum Rotterdam on 13 October 2015. The central question of this conference was how Dutch and German museums could get a proper cooperation off the ground and do more than just exchange loans. Under the heading “Cooperation”, it was explained that “German-Dutch cooperation can become exciting and interesting when we get to develop exhibitions and education programmes in a genuine collaborative process. It may be hard. It will take us out of our comfort zone. But we will get something in return: the possibility to think, work and observe from different perspectives.”<sup>40</sup> This is precisely my point too. Making points of view the topic of conversation in our collaborations will make us all the wiser in the long run. By the way, as far as I am concerned, we could have done without the addition that these are skills “that will make our sector future-proof”. The sector is not the issue; it is the result that matters.

### Lecturers in higher education and activists

My last stop will be characterized by the collaboration between lecturers in higher education and activists. Unlike primary and secondary education, higher education in the Netherlands does not have any coordinating policies as far as the content of the curricula is concerned. Content-wise, course tutors are allowed to make their own choices, be it said that lecturers in Europe are bound by the general final attainment levels for higher education, the so-called Dublin descriptors. Further coordination in this area is achieved by visitation committees.

At the end of the day, heritage-related programmes are faced by the same question as primary and secondary schools. What is it to be with the focus of heritage: to create, to create or to commentate?

Up till now, my focus lay on the Netherlands, but in this case I would suggest taking a more international approach. Doing so alerts us to the existence of many research and education projects that include the involvement of socially engaged movements, either on a project basis or in a more permanent context.<sup>41</sup> The background of this collaboration is closely linked with the international academic discourse on heritage and heritage formation, and ideas about participation. I have discussed this subject in some length in my introduction, but nevertheless I would like to interrupt my journey once more to elaborate on the matter. At this point I will also bring up the term “intangible heritage” for the first time in this lecture, which you may have expected me to do for some time.

Theoretically speaking, everything could be considered as heritage: landscapes, buildings, plant and animal species, implements, artefacts, stories, songs, everyday and not-so-everyday

39 “Bommen op Rotterdam: twee perspectieven, één verhaal”.

40 [www.eshcc.eur.nl/news/?id\\_channel=16742&id\\_msg=245640](http://www.eshcc.eur.nl/news/?id_channel=16742&id_msg=245640), last visited on 15 September 2015.

41 One example would be the research and exhibition project *Crossing Munich*, which took place in 2008-2009 ([www.melt-europe.eu/munich-crossingmunich-more.html](http://www.melt-europe.eu/munich-crossingmunich-more.html)). This project was part of the European programme MELT (Migration in Europe and Local Tradition) ([www.melt-europe.eu/about.html](http://www.melt-europe.eu/about.html)). For other examples, see also T. van Kessel, R. Kistemaker & L. Meijer-van Mensch (Eds.), *City museums on the Move. A dialogue between professionals from African countries, the Netherlands and Belgium* (2012). See also: L.R. Graham & H. G. Penny (Eds.), *Performing Indigeneity. Global Histories and Contemporary Experiences* (Lincoln/London, 2014). On social movements and the role of emotions in social movements in particular, see A. McGarry & J. M. Jasper, *The Identity Dilemma. Social movements and collective identity* (Philadelphia etc., 2015).

knowledge and practices, rituals, traditions, habits and customs. Departing from the conviction that diversity is good – whether it be biological or cultural diversity – and that this diversity needs guarding, UNESCO is making attempts to mobilize people around the world to safeguard heritage. UNESCO does so by making countries sign conventions. At present, a great many conventions have come to see the light of day, one of which being the so-called *Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage*. After quite some discussion, the Netherlands has joined in and signed this convention, which implies that we, like all other participating countries, are expected to draw up an inventory of “OUR intangible cultural heritage”. The interpretation of the inventories (i.e. the contents) is left to each individual country. UNESCO's main concern is for the participants to become aware of the importance of diversity.

UNESCO's heritage policy and all the initiatives that are being pursued in its wake are a rewarding object of research and debate for heritage curricula in higher education. The initiatives that are being developed show the importance of critical reflection on the relationship between heritage, politics, commerce and identity.

The academic world has done more than embark on a theoretical debate about UNESCO conventions. Many academics also play an active role in the development and implementation of these conventions, for instance as members of the committee assessing the nominees for the national inventories, or as lecturers in one of the so-called field schools that have been founded under the auspices of UNESCO to train students into keeping alive the heritage of communities.<sup>42</sup>

A platform for both debate and collaboration is *The Association of Critical Heritage Studies*. This is a collaboration (founded in 2012) that intends to promote heritage as a playing ground for critical research by stimulating the dialogue and network formation between academics, practitioners and activists. Two prominent players in the academic heritage debate, Gary Campbell and Laurajane Smith, drew up a manifest on the occasion of the launch of the network. In their manifest, they call for a critical look on the conservative approach to heritage, where experts, who focus on the traditional canon, decide what to safeguard and what not. In addition, their manifest invites communities that were marginalized in the process of heritage formation and heritage management to actively participate in the development of a new heritage practice.<sup>43</sup>

Like in the case of historical societies, the world of social movements is characterized by a large degree of diversity. In this world, heritage is sometimes positioned by marginalized groups to support their struggle for survival.<sup>44</sup> Departing from the notion that not only knowledge, but also identities can become extinct, certain groups feel compelled to fight for the preservation of their cultural or linguistic repertoires.

42 See for example

[http://www.ucl.ac.uk/archaeology/research/directory/intangible\\_heritage\\_thailand\\_alivizatou](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/archaeology/research/directory/intangible_heritage_thailand_alivizatou)

For a survey of the debate, see M. Jacobs, “Cultural Brokerage, Addressing Boundaries and the New Paradigm of Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage. Folklore Studies, Transdisciplinary Perspectives and UNESCO”, in: *Volkskunde. Tijdschrift over de cultuur van het dagelijks leven* 115 (2014) nr. 3, 265-291.

43 See <http://criticalheritagestudies.org>. The network is supported by the *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, with Laurajane Smith as its editor in chief.

44 E. Waterton & S. Watson (Eds.), *Heritage and community development: collaboration or contestation?* (London, 2010); E. Waterton & L. Smith, “The recognition and the misrecognition of community heritage”, in: *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 16 (2010) no. 1&2, 4-15.

Here, too, it may not be a bad idea to not take collectivity as a matter of course, but to consistently question and explicitate the views and expectations of those who are involved, and also to listen to dissonant voices, to what is not being said.<sup>45</sup> And on top of that, to define one's position as an academic – this also goes for historians specializing in heritage. The tradition of critical and ethical reflection in museology, ethnology and anthropology provides a stimulating frame of reference for doing so.<sup>46</sup>

One example is provided by the work of the American anthropologist James Clifford, who researches the collaboration between anthropologists and indigenous movements. While doing so, he alerts his readership to the existence of academically schooled, local representatives, whose number is on the increase. According to Clifford, they do not represent the essentialist perspective often attributed to insiders. As cultural activists, they remain committed to the academic world, albeit “in partial ways, and from a rearticulated Native distance”. And, he goes on to say – while at the same time offering a nice illustration of the network-like character of many of these projects: “Other activists, 'culture bearers' and Native 'artists' bring links and expertise from the working and corporate world to the heritage agenda”.<sup>47</sup>

Clifford argues in favour of the approach of “the politics of tradition”, which takes into account complexities: “Native heritage projects reach selectively into the past, opening paths to an undetermined future. They act within and against new national and transnational structures of empowerment and control.” He discusses example projects to illustrate that natives and anthropologists can take up an active, central role (in these projects), as long as they openly acknowledge to sharing an emotionally-charged past.<sup>48</sup>

“Intangible Cultural Heritage with Pop”, a series of seminars initiated by the Amsterdam organization *Imagine IC* in collaboration with the Cultural Heritage research group of the Reinwardt Academy (AHK), is also based on this concept of the transparent network, though without necessarily sharing Clifford's view of the relationship between native traditions and the world. Our point of departure is not one particular homogeneous community, one type of heritage or one type of heritage approach, but the culture of everyday life, which we try to link up to the matching emotion network. Such an emotion network is made up of people with

45 For a similar plea – though related to the subject of subsidy schemes in the field of heritage and folklore – see G. Rooijackers, “Cultuur terug aan de samenleving. Het Fonds voor Cultuurparticipatie en het proces van folklorisering”. In: T. Ijdens (Ed.), *Jaarboek Actieve Cultuurparticipatie 2011. Participanten, projecten en beleid* (Utrecht, 2011) 146-163, q.v. 162.

46 For ethnology, see for instance R. Bendix, *In Search of Authenticity: The Formation of Folklore Studies* (Wisconsin, 1997) and P.J. Margry & H. Roodenburg, “A History of Dutch Ethnology in 10,5 Pages”, In: P.J. Margry & H. Roodenburg (Eds.), *Reframing Dutch Culture. Between Otherness and Authenticity* (Ashgate, 2007) 261-271. For more on the topic of reflection on the position of academics in the public debate, see J. Helsloot, “Zwarte Piet and Cultural Aphasia in the Netherlands”, in: *Quotidian. Dutch Journal for the Study of Everyday Life* 3 (2012) nr. 1, 1-20. For museology, see for example P. dos Santos, “Introduction. To understand New Museology in the 21st Century”, in: *Sociomuseology III. Cadernos de Sociomuseologia* 37 2010, 5-11; P. van Mensch & L. Meijer-Van Mensch, *New Trends in Museology* (Celje, 2011), special chpt. 6 (Museum Ethics), 95-107. See also P. Basu & W. Modest, *Museums, Heritage and International Development* (London, 2014). See also the four-volume series *The International Handbooks of Museum Studies* (2015), edited by Sharon Macdonald and Helen Rees Leahy, with A. Withcomb & K. Message, *Museum Theory* (Chichester, 2015), A.E. Coombes & R.B. Philips, *Museum Transformations* (Chichester, 2015), and others.

47 J. Clifford, *Returns. Becoming Indigenous in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, MA/London, 2013) 258.

48 *Ibid.*, 260.



compatible and incompatible emotions regarding a particular heritage practice.<sup>49</sup> One of the cases under investigation in the first meeting was the new tradition of the Keti Koti Table, an initiative by social activist Mercedes Zandwijken. It is a “ritualized dialogue table” where invitees “from black and white communities” share a set menu and a set of defined customs of descendants of slaves, while having a conversation about their shared slavery past.<sup>50</sup>

“Intangible Cultural Heritage with Pop” is an example of an interdisciplinary collaboration involving academics, social activists, heritage professionals, local residents and other interested parties with the purpose to research old and new heritage practices. Such collaborations could also be useful in higher education, to make lecturers and students aware of alternative ways of viewing the world. It widens the view. It shows how individuals can change their outlook and combine perspectives. It is important to realize this when dealing with networks that involve the development of education programmes, but also when dealing with the programmes themselves.



Cover of a “Keti Koti Table” manual, written by Mercedes Zandwijken and Henna Goudzand Nahar. The concept of the “Keti Koti Table”, “A new tradition for everybody”, was conceived by Mercedes Zandwijken. See [ketikotitafel.nl](http://ketikotitafel.nl).

I am about to wind up my argument. In order to create a proper match between education programmes and our contemporary transnational, multiform society, we must make sure to acquire a clear impression of the various collaborations at play, and of the importance that the players in these collaborations place on a critical reflection on heritage formation. What is their approach to the raw sides of heritage? How is one to handle longings and fears, or the different types of nostalgia? How do education programmes deal with the emotion networks that take shape around heritage? These are the sort of questions that will set the course for my research into, and my teachings about heritage approaches in various educational collaborations in the field of heritage. Heritage is something people create, create and commentate in networks. The more we become aware of this, the easier it will be for us to share elements of the past from that point of view.

49 Dibbits & Willemsen, “Stills of our liquid times”.

50 See [www.ketikotitafel.nl](http://www.ketikotitafel.nl), last visited on 8 August 2015. Keti Koti means “break the chains”. For more information on this example, see Dibbits & Willemsen, “Stills of our liquid times”, 187.

## Acknowledgements

Dear listeners. Now that I have come to the end of my inaugural lecture, I would like to thank a number of people. First of all, I would like to thank the members of Erasmus University's Executive Board for the trust they have placed in me. My thanks also go to the Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication, in the person of Dean Dick Douwes.

A special word of thanks is due to Maria Grever: Maria, without your support, I would not be standing here today. I admire your enthusiastic and energetic way of approaching matters, both content-wise and in an organizational way. I consider it a privilege to work for the *Center for Historical Culture* of which you are the founder and the director.

I would like to thank the students who took the elective course *Travelling Things* earlier this year for their involved participation and their thoughts about heritage and education in various contexts.

I want to thank the LKCA for enabling this chair. I am looking forward to our collaboration. Looking forward in anticipation, that is, for we do not share a past. The first connections have been made, though, and they look very promising.

Teus, I would like to thank you for the support you expressed in your capacity of director when I told you I was going to combine my work at the Reinwardt Academy with an appointment as endowed professor. Riemer: our shared lectorate at the Reinwardt Academy was established because we are each other's opposites. A luckier strike could not have been made. It soon turned out that we have many, many things in common. I hope we will be able to share each other's company for a long time to come.

I have never really had any second thoughts about my choice to study history. But looking back, I must conclude that the elective course of cultural sociology at the University of Amsterdam has been pivotal to my formation; that, and my traineeship at the Rijksmuseum. Being given the chance to become one of Willem Frijhoff's PhD students after my graduation is something I regard as a great privilege. Willem, when I was working on my PhD, but also in the years after, you have never ceased to look over my shoulder. I regard myself as a true "Frijhoffian".

At the Meertens Institute, I was formed as an ethnologist. For almost two decades, the institute was a trusted biotope to me, with wonderful colleagues, some of whom became friends for life. During my secondment at the Netherlands Open Air Museum, I was introduced to an organization that requires its staff members to be able to shift gears quickly and frequently. I learned a great deal in a short time there. And the museum has gained a permanent place in my heart. The same thing can be said of *Imagine IC*, an organization I have shared projects with for over a decade. Marlous, I am so happy this collaboration has brought us together as colleagues.

The way I intend to "practise" my chair – and the rest of my life, for that matter – cannot be understood without knowing something about my personal history and the influence it had on me. The role of my parents in this formation must not be underestimated. I deeply regret the fact that my father is not here to witness this. The enthusiasm and the sense of urgency that took hold of him when he shared his knowledge and his views was truly unique. Physically, he is not among us today, but in all other respects he is very present. Dear Mum, you too were, and are, in the habit of sharing your views and your wide-ranging interests in your own special way. You try and appreciate other people's interests, while at the same time you open our eyes to new worlds. It is the devoted way of sharing of you both that has brought me here today.

My appointment entails a weekly shuttle between Amsterdam and Rotterdam. To me, that is no problem at all. On the contrary, I have been happily married for almost 15 years to a man who likes Feyenoord more than Ajax. Dear Aart, your presence in my life renews my happiness every single day.

Dear Jonas and Geert, you had expected me to kick off today with a passage from *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, about Greg Heffley and his mother, who turns *everything* into an educational project. The passage got lost when I was forced to shorten my text. Perhaps that is just as well: today's audience might think that I, too, am one of those people who turns everything into an educational project. You boys know better, of course... That being said, I think it is about time the four of us visited a museum again. The choice is yours.

“Ik heb gezegd.”



*Two cups from the museum store of Museum Rotterdam.*

*Photo: Hester Dibbits*

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Hester Dibbits (1965) is Endowed Professor of Historical Culture and Education at the Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication (ESHCC), on behalf of the National Centre of Expertise for Cultural Education and Amateur Arts (LKCA). In this capacity, Dibbits is attached to the Center for Historical Culture (CHC) of Erasmus University Rotterdam. Besides endowed professor, Hester Dibbits is a lecturer of Cultural Heritage and course director of the international Master of Museology at the Reinwardt Academy of the Amsterdam University of the Arts. Formerly, she was a researcher at the Ethnology Department of the Meertens Institute (KNAW) and Chief Curator at the Netherlands Open Air Museum.

In the course of her work, Dibbits never ceases to uncover possible links between the scholarly world and real-life practice. In doing so, she employs a historical-ethnological perspective, focusing on heritage and the culture of everyday life in particular.



## **Colophon**

*Sharing the Past. Heritage and Education in the 21st Century*

Prof. Dr. Hester Dibbits delivered this inaugural lecture in abridged form at the acceptance of the appointment of Endowed Professor of Historical Culture and Education at the Center for Historical Culture (ESHCC) of Erasmus University Rotterdam on 16 October 2015. This chair has been established on behalf of the National Centre of Expertise for Cultural Education and Amateur Arts (LKCA).

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