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### Religion, Gender, and Heritage

van Dijk, Mathilde

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## ANALYSIS

### Chapter 19

# Religion, Gender, and Heritage: Who Is Commemorated in the Dutch Cityscape?

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MATHILDE VAN DIJK

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Occasionally, religious heritage surfaces in unexpected places, as is shown by the Groningen neighborhood of Gravenburg. Built in the first decades of the twenty-first century, it takes its name from a nearby farm, the roots of which reach back into the fifteenth century at least (“Oude Grandeur” 2002: 13). In their wisdom, the city government’s committee for the names of streets decided to give the twenty streets the names of theologians, an unusual choice in the secular Netherlands. The streets are neatly divided according to historical periods: Saint Augustine as a sole representative of Late Antiquity as well as six medieval, seven early modern, and seven modern theologians. Four have a clear connection to Groningen, although all of them may be regarded as examples of European or even world heritage. The committee consisted of city government civil servants as well as experts, such as the city archivist.<sup>1</sup>

Dorothee Sölle (1923–2003) is the only woman who made it into this illustrious company (Figure 19.1). A German and a Lutheran, she wanted to make radical changes to much of the theology as it had been practiced under the Nazi regime, which either collaborated with it, like the *Deutsche Christen* had done, or looked the other way in the face of Nazi oppression and persecution. Instead, she advocated a theology that originated in societal situations of oppression and that was, essentially, political. Mystics, especially Meister Eckhart (c. 1260–1328), who also has a street in Gravenburg, were an inspiration for her. Contrary to what is often supposed, medieval mystics always worked in and for society, putting their insights to pastoral and political uses. Sölle’s choice for the oppressed put her in close connection with the liberation theology as developed in Latin America—Gravenburg honors the Salvadorian archbishop Óscar Romero (1917–1980) by a street. Eventually, her stance led to a connection to feminist theology (Hawkins 2005; Sölle 1999).

Sölle’s street is a cycle path just outside the neighborhood, taking the rider on a lovely route through the fields between several parts of Groningen. In a Dutch context, in which cycling is a very important way of transport, her relegation to a cycle path is no sign of marginality in itself. Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225–1274), generally seen as one of the most important theologians ever, also has a cycle path. Yet, his path, misnamed as “Of Aquino path” (in Dutch: Van Aquinopad)—“Of Aquino” is not a last name—is a central thoroughfare, connecting the three parts of



**FIGURE 19.1** Street sign for the Söllepad.

Source: Kjelda Glimmerveen.

Gravenburg to each other. Its prominence is in line with Groningen's longstanding policy of promoting cycling over driving (*Wijkstreefbeeld* 2003: 8–9). Yet, due to its position at the fringes, actually outside the neighborhood, Sölle's path appears to be the result of an afterthought or, possibly, criticism of the selection of theologians, which consists of the usual dead white males, who, except for Romero and Saint Augustine, were all from Europe.

As far as the latter is concerned, Saint Augustine was appropriated so thoroughly as the most important Western church father that few take into account his roots in the Roman province of Africa, along with several other theologians, who shaped Christianity and whose impact can still be felt today (Wilhite 2017: 3–5). Yet, over and against this construction of Augustine as a Western, obviously white, theologian, African American and African theologians reappropriated him, and claimed a dark color for his skin, from the nineteenth century (Wilhite 2013: 126–34). Given the low familiarity of so-called Black and African theologies in the Netherlands, it is doubtful whether the Committee for the Names of the Streets was aware of any of this. Thus, the presence of one African theologian is a fortunate bycatch.<sup>2</sup>

The street naming in Gravenburg also illustrates the marginality of women, when it comes to heritage. Even more so than history, heritage is the tale of the winners, the tale of those elements in the past that the dominant groups regard as constitutive of society. This includes happy and unhappy memories: on the pavement of Groningen and many other European cities, so-called

*Stolpersteine*, concrete stones with copper plaques engraved with names, dates, and places are set. These commemorate the Jewish individuals, who used to live next to those stones and who were murdered under Nazism. They have become an important part of the official memory of the Netherlands, after a long history of being marginalized before the Second World War. In the Netherlands, the latter, usually referred to as “the War,” is seen as a defining moment in Dutch history. Only recently, other persecuted groups such as Roma, Sinti, and homosexuals, came to be remembered in official commemoration ceremonies, the one in Amsterdam being the most important. On May 4, traditionally, the king lays the first of several wreaths at the National Monument on Dam Square. In the same city, a separate gay monument, the so-called *Homomonument*, was installed as late as 1987. In 2021, comedian André van Duin (1947–) was invited to give the official speech at the Dam Square event. Recently widowed, he told the audience that he had never attended the official ceremony, as he and his husband had felt a stronger sense of belonging at the unofficial ceremony at the gay monument.

In this article, the complexity of coming to a truly inclusive perspective of the defining past will be studied. The question is whether creating special interest narratives or including more women, gays, and ethnical or religious minorities into “normal” narratives actually helps in engendering a more inclusive and pluralist view of what constitutes a community’s heritage. Two heritage practices will be juxtaposed: street naming and the creation of special interest walks, in this case women’s and feminist walks in particular. Street naming offers a clear perspective on the dominant view of a city’s past, usually in connection with the national, European, and global past, in so far as it commemorates events, organizations, or people. Except for members of the royal house, women are seldom included. The same goes for other marginal groups, although, in all fairness, Groningen does have a gay neighborhood, De Held (The Hero), named after a local mill and built around the same time as Gravenburg. Three out of De Held’s eleven streets commemorate women. James Baldwin (1899–1961) is the only non-white among them and as such a rarity in Groningen street names. Unlike street naming, the creation of special interest walks tends to be a bottom up action of marginalized groups who feel that their heritage is not acknowledged. In the following, I will concentrate on the Groningen women’s walk and compare it to similarly-themed tours in Glasgow (Scotland) and Perth (Australia), of the few that have been studied under the aegis of heritage studies.

Usually, the debate is whether marginal heritage should be included in the large narrative of a community’s heritage or remain separate. The Nottingham heritage scholar Ross J. Wilson rejects attempts to inscribe marginal heritage into the wider heritage of a community. Marginality should be kept alive because of its critical, society-changing potential, rather than being ironed into a flat, safe, unchallenging narrative (Wilson 2018). This is what could happen when, for instance, in the commemoration of the Second World War, new groups of oppressed people are simply added to the list of those who should be remembered, without attention to their special fates or the specific reason why they were persecuted. In this case, difference is forgotten, and there is no real discussion of the status of “deviants,” why they were targeted specifically, possible guilt of the “normals” in this, and so on. In contrast, the American archeologist Patricia Kim warns that it is not much better when marginal heritage is celebrated, for instance, by creating a monument for a marginal group, like a gay monument. Creating additional, separate heritage could keep such “deviants” in their niches and domesticate them without impacting the dominant narrative at all, in which gays as gays are largely absent, except making those who decide what is heritage

and what is not, feel better about themselves, for their tolerance in creating a space for “them.” In this case, “their” fate becomes something that has nothing to do with the dominant discourse. Inspired by Foucault, she coined the term “carceral heritage” to describe such heritage, safely locked into a separate cell (Kim 1997). Focusing on gender, but occasionally including other forms of difference, I will attempt to find a route between the Scylla of incarcerating marginal heritage or the Charybdis of the flatness of a general narrative. In both cases, “deviants” become invisible, either by submerging them into the wider heritage or by putting them into a ghetto, into which the dominant groups need never venture.

Except for detours to Sweden, Scotland, Australia, and the rest of the Netherlands, the city of Groningen will be the main case study. Located in the North of the Netherlands, it is a city of some 202,900 inhabitants, about a quarter of whom are students in the University of Groningen and the Hanze University for Applied Sciences. Traditionally, Groningen has a strong sense of regional identity, as evidenced and enhanced by its distinctive dialect and the cultivation of a *habitus* of sobriety, restraint, and outspokenness. A diversity of material will be studied: selected literature about heritage, especially in Groningen; conversations with heritage professionals and civil servants; and, finally, by walking and cycling through the city. First, it is necessary to explain the concept of heritage as used in this article, and, second, why acknowledgment of and access to heritage is so important, especially when one is marginalized.

### Heritage is a Narrative

Heritage is not a monumental building such as a church or, if one includes intangible heritage, a social practice such as a procession. First and foremost, it is a narrative, a discourse, around a historical phenomenon. It is heritage because it supposedly defines who “we” are, what constitutes “our” identity, which values “we” adhere to, and what is remembered as important (Smith 2006: 29–34). It is authorized memory, a selection of what “we” remember as the defining instances or objects from “our” past. As the *Stolpersteine* show, it includes the glorious moments of a community’s past as well as its traumas, although, traditionally, there is a tendency to focus on the former.

Largely, what was heritage and what was not, used to be determined by what the Australian scholar Laurajane Smith defined as “authorized heritage discourse (AHD)” (Smith 2006: 29). In conversation with the powers that be, experts determined what is worth preserving: which churches to restore, which monuments to erect, and which practices to protect. Because of its connection to “us” as a society, be it in the scope of a city, a country, or another unit, it is political. The result of AHD is presented as “general” heritage, shared by the entire community. It privileges dominant groups: cisgender male, white, and heterosexual. Thus, it is a classic development of Simone de Beauvoir’s theory that males are the “first sex” to women’s “second sex” and constitute the normative humanity as opposed to women as “the other.” The same goes for other groups that do not participate in normative humanity, as De Beauvoir already hypothesized (De Beauvoir 1950: 15, 26). Smith, and this has become the shared opinion of many scholars working in heritage studies, views challenging, and criticizing this “general,” authorized discourse as a primary assignment for scholars in heritage research.

Lately, the top-down AHD is not as omnipotent as it used to be. Increasingly, marginal groups claim their own heritage, adding new materials, or attacking the dominant heritage. The causes

for this are manifold. Undoubtedly, under the influence of globalization and migration, societies became more diverse. In addition, emancipation movements such as feminism increased the self-awareness of marginal groups. Those who were a part of such groups felt that their past was as memorable as what was recorded in the official narrative about it, in which they had no or only a minor part. Internationally, the value of non-dominant heritage has been recognized by resolutions of UNESCO and the European Council, which acknowledge access to it as a human right. Quoting article 4 of the European Council's Faro Convention:

- a. everyone, alone, or collectively, has the right to benefit from the cultural heritage and to contribute towards its enrichment;
- b. everyone, alone, or collectively, has the responsibility to respect the cultural heritage of others as much as their own heritage, and consequently the common heritage of Europe;
- c. exercise of the right to cultural heritage may be subject only to those restrictions which are necessary in a democratic society for the protection of the public interest and the rights and freedoms of others (Council of Europe n.d.).

The Faro Convention puts forward a vision of Europe as a diverse, pluralist society, in which what is seen as heritage must also be pluralist and diverse. Although the Netherlands, along with several other countries, has not yet ratified this agreement, it still created an awareness that a society's heritage should be as diverse as the society itself. A recent example of an attempt to include "other" perspectives is the renaming of the Rotterdam Witte de With-Museum. This is a modern art museum named after an admiral from the seventeenth century, an era that is traditionally seen as the Dutch Golden Age. Witte de With (1599–1658) came under fire for being too closely connected to colonialism and the slave trade. His name was replaced with Melly, referring to a work of art, placed on the outside of the museum. This is an image of a young, smiling Asian woman, working in an office, under the title of "Melly Shum hates her job (About - Kunstinstituut Melly 2021) Increasingly, the notion of the Golden Age itself is criticized as referring to a period of wealth for some and of oppression, poverty, and colonialism for others, in and outside the Netherlands. This led to the cancellation of the term in at least one museum, The Amsterdam Museum, from September 12, 2019 (Pontzen 2019).

These examples show that official heritage can be hurtful. In the Netherlands, the debate around the figure of *Zwarte Piet* (Black Pete) is the best-known example. *Zwarte Piet* is an important character in the feast of *Sinterklaas*, which is widely celebrated on the eve of Saint Nicholas's Day, December 5.<sup>3</sup> The saint, casually known as *Sinterklaas*, supposedly gives presents to children and grown-ups, usually accompanied by a self-made poem or a so-called *surprise*, an original way of wrapping it up, which mildly mocks the receiver, for instance, by hiding a present for a train-buff in a self-made locomotive. Next to the saint's bishop's attire, white beard, and unpainted face, *Piet* appears in a kind of Renaissance page-costume and blackface, featuring pitch-black skin, an Afro-wig, and red lips. Usually, he is played by a white person, whereas a Black person playing Nicholas is unthinkable, except in mocking situations. The *Sinterklaas* tradition got its present form fairly recently, in the nineteenth century, and underwent several adaptations since. Nowadays, after a previous history as the devil and a demon, *Zwarte Piet* is cast as Saint Nicholas's comical servant (Rodenburg and Wagenaar 2016).

*Zwarte Piet* had been under intermittent fire from the 1960s, but the debate turned virulent when the poets Quincy Gario (1984–) and Jerry Afriyie (1981–), both dark-skinned, were arrested

for wearing “Zwarte Piet is racism” (Black Pete is racism) T-shirts during a *Sinterklaas* parade in Dordrecht in 2011. This was not just any *Sinterklaas* parade, but the official one, aired on national television. It did not help that the arrest was heavy-handed, unusual in the Netherlands, as the police tends to cultivate a friendly attitude, especially during demonstrations. In addition, there is the inflammatory effect of social media to consider. A heated debate about *Zwarte Piet* ensued, which led to threats, rioting, and court cases. Thus far this controversy shows no sign of ending soon, resurfacing every year around *Sinterklaas*. Against *Zwarte Piet*’s opponents, his supporters argued that he is a part of their heritage and therefore of their identity as being Dutch. In a context of rising right-wing populism, many appropriated a discourse of suffering, in which Dutch heritage is under threat from both outsiders and leftist intellectuals, ready to sell out all that is valuable in Dutch culture (Hilhorst and Hermes 2016). Apparently, as far as these *Zwarte Piet* supporters were concerned, this trumps the opponents’ discourse of suffering under racism, colonialism, and slavery (Helsloot 2012).

The *Zwarte Piet* debate shows that his supporters regard heritage as a fixed set, unchanged over the centuries. They are not alone in this vision. Few realize that, in fact, like any discourse, what is a part of heritage and what it means is highly flexible (Brienen 2014). The changing narratives around *Zwarte Piet*, the Golden Age, and Witte de With are cases in point. Because of its flexibility, heritage has a close connection to the concept of *lieu de mémoire* as developed by the French historian Pierre Nora and his research group, a connection that they did not make, incidentally. Nora defined a *lieu de mémoire* (site of memory) as a site, a person, or a concept that summarizes the identity of a group (Nora 1984: xvii–xliii). In the three hefty volumes of *Les lieux de mémoire*, he and his collaborators investigated how different groups in France appropriated certain historical sites, objects, concepts, and people how these came to be a cornerstone of their identities. Primarily, their discourses are about today, about what certain facts from the past mean in the present day. The connection with what actually happened in the past and what this meant at the time may be tenuous. Claiming a *lieu de mémoire* as one’s heritage is in the interest of the group that claims it as heritage, and always excludes of non-participants in that group, as the Dutch historian Willem Frijhoff later specified (Frijhoff 1997, 2003, 2007).

## Heritage Empowers

The above already shows the importance of heritage. Discovering and highlighting one’s heritage empowers and enhances identity and self-esteem, as shown by the enthusiastic response to certain findings about marginal groups’ pasts. This is not a new thing. The women who headed the suffragist movement sought inspiration in the abbesses and queens from the Early Middle Ages, who made crystal clear that women were just as able rulers as men were (Eckenstein 1896). The *furor* after the publication of new data around a mysterious Viking warrior grave in Sweden is a more recent example. From the excavation in the nineteenth century, this individual puzzled the archeologists as it was fully armed, but still wore female accouterments such as a specific type of brooch. Originally, it was labeled male, as the grave clearly was a warrior’s and therefore a male’s, as the reasoning went. It is true that Norse sagas frequently referred to female warriors, the so-called shieldmaidens, but these had always been seen as strictly fictional characters. Recently, after initial suggestions that the pelvis pointed to a female figure rather than

a male, DNA-analysis confirmed that this was indeed so. Further projections showed that she must have been stronger than female Olympic rowers today (Colwill 2021). News and social media exploded, not in the least because shieldmaidens had acquired new currency through the popular television series *Vikings*, which features the redoubtable Lagertha (played by Katheryn Winnick), and her many female comrades in battle.<sup>4</sup> If anyone still doubted that women could do what men did, they needed to think again, was the general feeling.

Heritage can be wielded as a weapon in the struggle for empowerment of marginal groups. This is the obvious aim of the website *sekswerkergoed.nl* (Sex Workers' Heritage), recently recognized as digital heritage by the Royal Library in the Hague, definitely a speaker of the AHD. This site was created by historian and philosopher Sietske Altink (1954–2020), an expert in the history of prostitution (Altink 1983). Throughout her life, she defended the rights of sex workers, arguing against both the vision of them as morally substandard and as pathetic victims of pimps and sex traffickers. Instead, she advocated an acknowledgment of prostitution as a profession like any other and campaigned for better working conditions. In addition to information on practical matters, the site is filled with items about how sex workers stand or stood up for their rights, citing medieval and contemporary examples. Moreover, it commemorates famous prostitutes, such as Sybilla Alida Johanna Niemans (1927–1959) from The Hague, known under her professional pseudonym Blonde Dolly. Her murder caused a considerable stir in the Netherlands as she was reported to have many clients in high places, including government circles. It was never solved, which led to the inevitable theories about how one of these powerful men must have killed her and how his status had ensured that the matter was hushed up. The sex workers' website provides a rounded picture of this woman, by detailing how she worked independently, without a pimp, and got rich off the proceeds; how she was a shrewd investor into real estate, owning several buildings at the time of her death. Every weekend, she read poems to the people in homes for the elderly (Sekswerk Erfgoed 2020).

### Bottom-Up: The City Walk

Returning to Groningen, the interest in discovering gendered, especially female heritage, started bottom-up, from women engaged in feminist projects such as the women's library *Savante* or the history students in the women's history group. At first, the interest was to add women to the city's history, for instance, in its reaction to the so-called Groningen Canon (Dijk 2008). This led to the creation of a thematic walk in the city of Groningen, focused on women: "Women on the map" (Wilts 2009).

The Groningen Historical Canon was created in response to the first version of the so-called Canon of Dutch History, alongside other regional canons and special interest canons, such as the so-called *Bètacanon* that commemorates Dutch achievements and people in the natural sciences (Dijkgraaf et al. 2008). The Canon of Dutch history was the result of an effort by the national government to standardize history in school, so as to make sure that all children would know about the essential historical developments that made The Netherlands into The Netherlands. A learned committee was charged with the task to determine what this essence was and to create an authorized framework for the history lessons in school. It is a classic example of the AHD at work. The committee created lists of events and people as well as "windows" to newly divided historical periods. Only three women, all from the Modern Age, made it into the list of essential





**FIGURE 19.2** Theresia van der Pant, *Aletta Jacobs* (1988), in Groningen city centre.

Source: Kjelda Glimmerveen.

people: Aletta Jacobs (1865–1929), Anne Frank (1929–1945), and Annie M. G. Schmidt (1911–1995).

Aletta Jacobs was the first woman ever to graduate from a Dutch university, that is, the University of Groningen (Figure 19.2). A medical doctor, she worked at ensuring better healthcare for women and was an internationally renowned activist for the women’s suffrage. Anne Frank needs no introduction: through her world-famous diary, she became an icon of the Shoah. Annie M. G. Schmidt became famous for her children’s books, musicals, TV scripts, and other works, because of her signature stance against all forms of bourgeois stuffiness, for instance, by representing a child’s tantrum in a poem without moral judgment, instead sympathizing with its mood (Schmidt 1955). As for the more general framework of the windows, these appear to be rather male defined, for example, “knights and monks” for the Early Middle Ages.

As far as diversity was concerned, the Groningen Canon did only slightly better than the official national canon, because it included one woman from the Early Modern Age. Beetke of Rasquert († 1554) had the manor of Nienoord built, in Leek, west of Groningen. A shrewd businesswoman, she continued the success of their peat digging business, after her husband died at an early age. Moreover, she considerably increased her family’s wealth by strategically buying land. Her intriguing portrait in the collection of the Groninger Museum may have helped her appeal (Figure 19.3). She had such an influence on the imaginations of the people around her



**FIGURE 19.3** Anonymous portrait of Beetke of Rasquert, Groninger Museum, between ca. 1520–ca. 1530.

that, supposedly, she still haunts Nienoord (Nip 2004: 50–64). The total number of women in the Groningen canon was three, following the standard set by the official Dutch canon. In addition to Beetke, national celebrities Aletta Jacobs and Marianne Timmer (1974) were included. As the first *alumna* of the University of Groningen, Jacobs had an obvious connection to Groningen.

Timmer is a speedskating champion, a gold medalist in the Olympics and other competitions. Her presence illustrates the high status of this sport in the Netherlands. Compared to other regional canons, Groningen belongs to the better kids in class: very few succeed in finding at least three essential women. Some canons lack women entirely.

In preparing for this article, I made the walk “Women on the Map” with Groningen city guide Paulien Ex. She told me that it is one of the more popular walks in her portfolio. Given the many women who have been uncovered since the first version, it is available in several versions of varying lengths. As the weather was freezing that day, we did a short version. Yet, I encountered many forgotten women, some of whom I, a historian, knew, others, whom I had never heard of. The map included a world famous mezzo-soprano, Julia Culp (1880–1970), known as the Dutch nightingale: the first female professor of the University of Groningen, botanist Jantina Tammes (1871–1947); feminist Etta Palm (1743–1799), an advocate of women’s rights in the French Revolution; resistance fighter Sieta Tammens (1914–2014), and others, connected to the sites where they used to live or in Tammens’s case, the *Sicherheitsdienst* headquarters where she was questioned (Stadswandeling n.d.).

Perhaps as a consequence of its connection to the official historical canons, “Women on the Map” highlights individual heroines. As far as people are focused on, this bias toward outstanding individuals also goes for “general” canons. Most of the women in “Women on the Map” are from upper-middle- or upper-class families; all of them are from the nineteenth and twentieth century. An additional reason for their dominance would be that the walk concentrates on visible signs of female activity, as marked by a statue, a plaque on a wall, or the enduring presence of a building connected to a famous woman. It stands to reason that elite women from the Modern Age would have the best chance of such visibility as working class women would have left fewer individual traces. The same is true for medieval and early modern women. The original guidebook made an effort to include them, for instance, by mentioning working-class women’s careers as domestic servants and as seamstresses in the many local clothing workshops, but without pointing to specific sites. Ex told me that, like the original guidebook advised, she usually includes the *Doorgangshuis* (Transit House), which could also serve as a working-class site. This was a refuge for children and girls, usually poor, who were “morally neglected.” Aristocratic founder Magdalena de Ranitz (1837–1919) sought to protect them from a fall into further depravity, that is, a career as a prostitute (Swaan 1965: 6–20). By way of medieval and early modern heritage, the original guidebook also mentioned the several *béguinages* and other female religious communities in the city as well as almshouses, some which were founded by women (Wilts 2009: 10). The latter are included in Ex’s almshouses’ walk, the most popular of her thematic walks.

The feminist bus tours in Perth and Glasgow follow a different strategy than the Groningen walks. The makers specifically targeted the heritage of working-class women and others, who did not conform to the white, cis-gender, heterosexual norm. In Glasgow, women were included by pointing to the contribution of groups of women, for instance, by using the central mosque as a site for a narrative on female initiatives in interreligious dialogue. In Perth, the bus took the usual tourist route, but like in Glasgow, it explained the female contribution to the various sites. A special interest was to highlight indigenous women, for instance, Fanny Belbak (1840–1907), who persisted in taking traditional paths, ignoring the fences that white Australians had erected. In contrast to the Groningen walk, both tours were primarily about sites that are no longer there, where women’s contributions were no longer visible (Bartlett 2020).

Scholars in women's history, and its more inclusive successor gender studies, always insisted that adding women would fundamentally change dominant historical narratives. As far as the Canon of Dutch History is concerned, this seems underway. In 2019, the Minister of Education ordered a reboot, with the express assignment to take care that the diversity of Dutch culture would be acknowledged. The new canon increased the number of women to eight. In addition to Jacobs, Frank, and Schmidt, it now included Trijntje (*c.* 5500 BC), the oldest skeleton ever to be excavated in the Netherlands; Duchess Mary of Burgundy (1457–1482), the first female ruler of the Low Countries; *Sara Burgerhart*, the first novel to be published in the Netherlands, written by two female authors, Betje Wolff (1738–1804) and Aagje Deken (1741–1804); and Marga Klompé (1912–1986), the first female minister and the first woman to receive the honor of being appointed as a permanent counselor to the Crown, a “minister of state.” The renewed canon also included a non-white man: resistance fighter Anton de Kom (1898–1945). Thus far, the national government's initiative has not been followed by rebooted regional and special interest canons.

Highlighting female or other non-dominant heritage could indeed lead to a different vision of a community as being pluralist and inclusive. Yet, as Wilson and Kim show, it is a challenge to accomplish a pluralist and inclusive heritage practice. Groningen street naming provides an example.

### Top-Down: Naming the Streets

Street naming clearly shows the complexity of coming to inclusive heritage, which mirrors the pluralist city, in which many voices can be heard. Recently, inspired by similar research in Amsterdam, University of Groningen scholars investigated the division of street names, concentrating on differences in sex, nationalities, and temporalities (see Bol 2018; Langelier 2021; Slager 2018). About a third was named after a person. White, presumably heterosexual, cis-males, are in ample evidence. Preferably, these are dead, as to avoid the naming of figures who go astray later in life or in whose closets skeletons are found after their demise. Male and female members of the royal house and, in one case, a former player of the local football team in the streets on the grounds of the former stadium are exceptions.<sup>5</sup> Almost half of the streets were named after a nineteenth-century figure. People born or flourishing in the Netherlands were an overwhelming majority.

Downtown, the oldest part of Groningen, roughly retains its medieval street plan and traditional names. Several streets are named for the aristocratic families who owned a city house in those streets. In the newer areas, which were created after the demolition of the city's ramparts, the names are assigned thematically. In addition to neutral names such as the nautical terms used in the neighborhood of Lewenborg, matching its shape as a moored ship, several are connected to historical events. These celebrate either these events or the important people who participated in them. Some are geographical, for instance the neighborhood, which focuses on the Netherlands' former colonies in East Asia and the West Indies.

The neighborhood of Laanhuizen commemorates the Second World War, which is so important in Dutch culture. In addition to the Bevrijdingslaan (Liberation Avenue), it also has a Verzetssrijderslaan and a Koeriersterweg, the former honoring resistance fighters, the latter the couriers who delivered messages and materials to resistance groups and safe houses. Predominantly, the latter were young women. For a long time, their work was seen as the most

important way of resistance for females, as it did not involve male-defined actions, which required using violence. Historians like Marjan Schwegman and the sociologist Jolande Withuis corrected this image, but at the time of building these streets, it was the dominant narrative about the roles of men and women in resistance (Schwegman 1980; Withuis 1996). In retrospect, the division of male and female in Laanhuizen, in which the supposedly female form of resistance was even highlighted, was ahead of its time.

The creation of a gay neighborhood in De Held connects to the status of homosexuality in the Netherlands, in which acceptance and inclusion have become the dominant narrative about “ourselves,” as evidenced by the legalization of same-sex marriage in 2001, as the first country in the world. The power of this discourse is also clear in other ways, for instance, in the fact that prominent men and women, including ministers, are open gays and that, after an incident in which a gay couple was beaten up, several male, presumably heterosexual, politicians showed themselves in public holding hands. Like it is with any discourse, there is a gap between the narrative and the actual practice: thus far, in contrast to their female colleagues, no male footballers came out of the closet. Moreover, the acceptance of people preferring their own sex is always conditional, even in supposedly liberal environments. A discussion of this important subject lies beyond the scope of this article. Here, I stick to gay representation in heritage.

The streets in the gay neighborhood of De Held are named after authors and political activists. Although undoubtedly engaged in out of the best intentions, it struck me as diminishing to honor figures like Oscar Wilde (1854–1900), James Baldwin, and Anna Blaman (1905–1960) as gays, whereas their primary claim to fame is their work as authors. In Wilde’s case, it is doubtful whether we would even “know” (in so far such knowledge is possible, as though sexual preference is a fixed thing) about his gayness, if he would not have had the misfortune of running into a marquess’s son, whose father started legal action against him. Baldwin, although open about his sexuality and writing about it, was at least as important as a politically engaged writer about African American life. The same is true about some political activists, such as the anti-Zionist activist and author Jacob Israël de Haan (1881–1924), who just happened to prefer his own sex. To celebrate them as homosexual icons runs the risk of forgetting about their groundbreaking work as authors or political activists of incarcerating them into a narrow niche. The former, after all, is why we still remember them. It is also arbitrary: for instance, the authors’ neighborhood in a different part of the city contains gays as well, but these are not celebrated as such.

## **Toward a Polyphonic Heritage**

Until recently, the concept of heritage was policed by the experts speaking the authorized heritage discourse. The examples of the women’s walks or the naming of streets show that there is no strict distinction between experts and non-experts. The problem of the young female historians who did the research for “Women on the Map” was that they had not yet penetrated into the halls of authority, where the AHD was created, not having a position yet as a university professor, a museum curator, or a policy advisor. Although their heritage was not yet recognized as a part of this, they still played the traditional part of experts in heritage, by doing research into history and by advising on which women were worthy of a pin on the map.

What matters most in determining what counts as heritage and what does not, are power relations and changing mentalities in a given culture, such as the Netherlands. As shown by recent developments in the Dutch canon and Groningen street naming, those in power have come to feel that these should reflect society's diversity and give marginal groups a platform to celebrate their pasts of achievement, despite a history of denial, oppression, and persecution. Such good intentions do not preclude contestation. Also, it is hard to get rid of the flavor of "us" being nice to "them," priding oneself about one's tolerance. Another problem is that the inclusion of the one leads to the exclusion of the other, as Frijhoff argued (Frijhoff 1997, 2003, 2007). The defenders of *Zwarte Piet* would certainly endorse his observation, feeling as they do that, in the current climate, they are the ones who are being oppressed.

If the above shows anything at all, it is that it is devilishly hard to come to a truly inclusive heritage, a polyphonic heritage in which many voices can be heard. I do not have a magic recipe for this, except for a few recommendations. On a practical level, such as when streets need to be named, it would help to have diverse committees that include members of marginalized groups. In the case of the theologians in Gravenburg, more specialized expert knowledge of the way in which traditional histories of theology tend to exclude non-white, non-male, and non-cis-gender theologians might have resulted in a more diverse list of theologians, including, for instance, great mystics such as Teresa of Avila (1515–1582) or the thirteenth-century Hadewijch of Antwerp. In short, the temporary addition of a feminist theologian for the purpose of a neighborhood of theologians might have helped. A gay, or for that matter women's or dark-skinned neighborhood creates even more problems as sexuality, sex, or skin-color is what one is born with, whereas one qualifies for a street by other achievements, such as becoming a successful author. This also causes me to have very mixed feelings about the recent plan of the city council in Spring 2021 to create a women's neighborhood in the third section of De Held, yet to be finished. Authors belonging to these minorities are certainly underrepresented, but in those cases, it would help a little if there were a byline to a street name, for example, "Oscar Wilde Street. Author" or "A. Jacobs Street. First woman to graduate in university, suffragist." Yet, it remains difficult to avoid ghettoization.

These practical and, admittedly, self-evident measures are not enough, obviously. A precondition is more awareness of the diversity of a community's past and, consequently, heritage. History should not be seen as an antiquarian hobby, but as a most relevant force in society and culture today. The level of emotion that arises around heritage issues makes this clear. After a long tendency of cutting down on history lessons, these should become far more prominent in school curricula as a most important tool in the education of its members into citizens. This history should not just be about whatever is currently in the canon as important people, events, and facts but also about how history works as a discipline, how it is an ongoing discussion of what makes a community to this community and what counts as its identity-defining heritage. I may be too idealist, but more awareness of the flexible nature of *Zwarte Piet* might have prevented a lot of the bother, which still plagues Dutch society.

Generally, I would second inscribing marginal heritage into the wider heritage of a community more than putting it into a ghetto. The latter incarcerates marginal groups in their separate niches, which makes their heritage something with which the non-marginals do not need to engage. However, if one inscribes, it is indispensable to continue showing and discussing the diverse experiences of different groups within society to avoid the flattening that Wilson fears.

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## Notes

- 1 Information from current chairman, Johan de Boer.
- 2 Unfortunately, the minutes appear to be lost, making it impossible to follow the discussions in the Committee for the names of the streets.
- 3 Similar figures are present in versions of the feast in other countries, but here I concentrate on the situation in the Netherlands.
- 4 *Vikings* (History Channel 2013–).
- 5 Information from Johan de Boer.

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