Mother’s Day is actually a nasty business of trade people. That one day, you see children buying their mothers flowers, while they call them names the rest of the year. As a child, I was quite different; I had no pocket money and yet, almost every week, I went out to pick a bouquet of wild flowers for my dear mother. Yes, I picked them myself, those little flowers. I do love my mother dearly.

In an interview for a women’s magazine in 1966, Dutch singer Gert Timmermans apparently knew how to pick his words as well. Timmermans was renowned in the 1960s for such sentimental songs as ‘I honour your grey hairs’ (*Ik heb eerbied voor jouw grijze haren*), which was particularly appealing to elderly women. Consciously and astutely, he presented himself as a sincere youngster, placing his self-denying and repeated efforts – in short his authenticity – in sharp contrast to the unauthentic behaviour of other children. To him, their so-called expressions of filial love were but a whim and a fraud, as could be expected of such comparatively affluent and easy-going children who knew nothing of the countryside. In their baseness and empty-headedness, these children eagerly let themselves be taken in by the lures of impersonal commerce.

Ethnology and Authenticity

To ethnologists, this mental operation has a familiar ring. It lies at the very heart of their discipline, as it was conceived in the late eighteenth century. Far removed from the superficial and internationally oriented culture of life in the cities, the simple utterances and manners of people in the countryside retained truthfulness, originality and authenticity, only to be unearthed by perceptive scholars. Current scholars are obviously well aware of the presuppositions that underlie this particular view of culture. Much historiographic work has shown that this mechanism has been derived from ways of coping with the onslaught of modern society. More specifically, by promoting visions of harmony and continuity in the face of social divisiveness and rapid change, it is also derived from strategies for resisting or at least canalising
its progress. Symbolic fences were necessary for preventing the loss of true self or maintaining stable identities.

Particularly in the twentieth century, ethnologists have played a major part in this ideological project in the Western world, and the Netherlands is no exception. Lectures and writings about the nature of popular culture, traditions or folklore; exhibitions of material expressions and a variety of live performances and staged enactments have exposed the general public to the view that the allegedly timeless culture of rural society contained superior moral qualities. For their own good and that of the nation as a whole, people should relate to this authentic culture and participate in it. Although this intellectual offensive has now been well documented and analysed (e.g. Köstlin 1996; Bendix 1997; for the Netherlands: Van Ginkel 1999; De Jong 2000; Van der Zeijden 2000; Dekker 2002; Henkes 2005), the study of the popular reception of the categories that frame this ethnological vision of culture is still in its infancy (Eriksen 1994; Knecht and Niedernmüller 2002; Götz 2004; Schippers 2005).

Ethnologists became aware of the extent to which the European public had effectively appropriated their teachings when, particularly since the 1960s, it showed no hesitation to elaborate freely on them (the so-called 'Rücklauf'-process; cf. Bendix 1997: 177–178). For example, to legitimise a local community festival, more than one of its organisers made up an attractive combination of ethnological and historical ingredients, arbitrarily taken from often dubious or undisclosed sources. Paradoxically, great care was often taken in these performances to ensure the perceived authenticity of folk costumes, folk dances and the like. At first, many academic ethnologists were dismayed when confronted with these would-be traditions, denouncing them as unjustified fabrications ('fakelore'), which should be exposed as such. In the 1960s and 1970s, they began an often-painful process of self-reflection, questioning the basic premises and concepts of their discipline. Demonstrably, many so-called traditions were not unchanging expressions of a timeless and predominantly rural culture, but recent inventions.

The concept of folklorism (cf. Bendix 1997: 176–187, Roodenburg 2000: 98–104) generated a more positive attitude. Focussing on the actual conditions and mechanisms underlying these new 'traditional' phenomena, this conception stimulated ethnologists to make sense of what they saw in the field in a less biased way. Only after an alternation of generations in ethnology and the general impact of a postmodern philosophy that denounced all hierarchy in value judgements, however, was it recognised that questioning the claimed authenticity of traditions prevented one to come to grips with cultural reality. In order to do justice to practitioners of would-be traditions, it was advisable to accept these festivals, performances and representations, not as distortions, but as expressions of equally authentic emotions, perceptions or interests (e.g. Smidchens 1999: 63–64, Rooijakkers 2000: 181–182, Van der Zeijden 2004: 13–18). As Anne Eriksen underlines, tradition is 'not an essence from the past, but a discourse in the present: what is said to be tradition is tradition'. Quoting Richard Bauman, Eriksen argues that tradition is best understood
Vernacular Authenticity


In this chapter, joining currently emerging research (Van de Port 2004), I argue that these notions of the authenticity (or unauthenticity) of traditions and rituals and the debates that evolve around them have not been confined to academia. There also is a ‘popular culture of authenticity’ (Taylor 1991: 61). Gert Timmermans was certainly not alone in playing with basic ethnological interpretative constructs. Goffman’s concept of frame is helpful for grasping these concepts because, as Turner (1982: 28) states ‘Celebratory behavior is “framed” behavior’. Frames provide actors with ‘relational styles, perceptions, values, sentiments, and social and symbolic types’ on specific occasions. They may be taken as mental tools that define ‘the situations in which we find ourselves’ and offer ‘a way of organizing our experiences’ (Manning 1992: 118). They also allow analysts to grasp ‘the ways in which actors negotiate and structure the meaning of experience’ (Crook and Taylor 1980: 244). Goffman discriminated between ‘cynical’ and ‘sincere performances’ and observed that, ‘As members of an audience, (...) it is natural for us to feel that the impression the performer seeks to give may be true or false, genuine or spurious, valid or phony’ (quoted in MacAloon 1984: 6). Similarly, Schmied (1996: 59) distinguishes a ‘pole of authenticity, a seemingly automatic inner reaction to a situation or object’ in the expression of emotions, as well as another pole, in which ‘social norms are followed without the emotions being present. This latter behaviour is often discredited as hypocrisy and cynicism’. Other researchers have also ascribed to actors ‘a finely tuned capacity for discriminating among frames’; in other words, they discriminate between ‘accurate’ and ‘fabricated’ frames. The latter generate ‘false ideas’ (Burns 1992: 278–279; Manning 1992: 126).

Rituals that combine gift giving with notions of traditionality represent one area of cultural behaviour that particularly exemplifies the operation of these attitudes. In general, customs express ‘a narrative about an ideal world’, about ‘how we could and should behave towards each other: loving, thoughtful, kind’ (Frykman and Löfgren 1996: 15). Paradoxically, within this ideal world, ‘gift giving (...) is socially defined as non-normative (i.e. non-rule governed) behavior. Forms of gift giving which contradict that definition of the situation are likely to be seen as not quite right’. Valued instead are ‘spontaneous acts of people who have genuine feelings for each other’ (Cheal 1988: 85–86). The standard for evaluating these acts is their authenticity or the lack thereof. As Schmied’s notion of ‘pole’ indicates, however, it is not a simple matter of one or the other. The evaluating process is more complex because, as Collins (1988: 58) rightly comments, ‘It is not just that different people might have different definitions of the same situation, but that each participant can be in several complex layers of situational definition at the same time’ (see also Hochschild 1983: 76–86, 185–198).

This raises the question of how actors recognise, deny or negotiate the authenticity of (gift-giving) traditions and, by extension, the authenticity of their own involvement in these traditions, as well as how they can remain true to their own selves in this context. This is probably best exposed by testing the notion of
authenticity. Confrontations with new or foreign situations may be prime occasions for eliciting such reflexivity (cf. MacAlool 1984: 11–13; Bendix 1997: 8). As a case in point, I analyse the introduction of and response to Mother’s Day and Father’s Day (both of which originated in the United States) in the Netherlands. Notions of authenticity and unauthenticity play a key role in the perception and performance of these rituals.

My main source of information is the discourse (e.g. comments, stories and advertisements) that appears annually around Mother’s Day and Father’s Day, particularly in the 1940s through the 1970s (in later decades, a saturation point had apparently been reached), in a fairly representative sample of newspapers, women’s and youth magazines and trade journals.¹ The limitations of these sources are obvious; they cannot possibly be said to reflect actual opinions and valuations of participants or bystanders (Hausen 1984: 484; LaRossa 1997: 177–179). They may nonetheless be assumed to offer an indication of the possible range of reactions; rather than conveying a uniform ideology, the sources display ‘disruptions and inconsistencies and spaces for negotiation’ (McRobbie 1994: 163). Conversely, they may have been influential in shaping these attitudes. Additional data were drawn from an ethnological questionnaire on the celebration of both Days, which was issued in 2003 by the department of ethnology at the Amsterdam Meertens Institute.

In order to provide a general background, the first section of this chapter describes the various campaigns to promote Mother’s Day and Father’s Day in the Netherlands, and the second section deals with the types of responses – positive, negative or aimed at negotiating a middle ground – to these initiatives. On the factual basis that is presented in these sections, the main issue is revisited in the concluding section.

Promoting Mother’s Day and Father’s Day in the Netherlands

Word of the new holiday probably first reached the Netherlands through evangelical channels. As early as the late 1910s, the Dutch Salvation Army had begun to incorporate Mother’s Day into its yearly cycle of holidays. At special meetings of its local branches on a Sunday in June or September, officers testified to the privilege of having been brought up by a devout and good mother, no doubt echoing the views expressed in the Army’s journal Strijdkreet (War Cry) that mothers were ‘a revelation of God’, second only to Jesus. Honouring one’s mother was thus associated with spiritual benefits. For the same reason the Salvation Army has sent flowers and greeting cards to the inmates of the country’s prisons for decades. Some slight efforts were apparently also made to induce children, of salvationists and others, to

celebrate Mother’s Day at home by sending their mothers flowers or letters and by doing small domestic chores.

This idea was thus obviously not completely unknown in 1923 and 1924, when a national-scale introduction of a Mother’s Day was proposed at the meetings of

Figure 10.1 ‘A flower for Mother and our heart for Mother’s God’

*Poster for the florist industry’s Mother’s Day Campaign (1975).*
the Royal Dutch Society for Horticulture and Botany (*Koninklijke Nederlandse Maatschappij voor Tuinbouw en Plantkunde*) – a professional organisation dedicated to promoting and safeguarding the interests of this sector of the economy. This initiative was prompted primarily by similar efforts that had been made by florists in Germany and Austria in the same years, and which were mediated through well-read international horticultural magazines (*Hausen* 1984: 478; *Boesch* 2001: 27, 37). The American origin of the Day, however, was duly acknowledged. ‘The idea is imported. America led the way’.2 In a circular letter issued by the Society in 1924, its local branches were invited to use the United States as a model. ‘Surely the Dutch Mother is as important as her American counterpart is, and no Dutch child would wish to be second to the American child in his affection and ardent love for his Mother’. As in Germany and the United States (*Hausen* 1984: 479; *Schmidt* 1995: 256–267), the Society presented itself from the outset as an organisation ‘honouring the idealistic side of the trade’. As the Society’s chair stated unreservedly, however, this coincided with keeping a keen eye on its commercial interests.

Central to the florist industry’s concept of Mother’s Day was that all mothers were to be honoured simultaneously (i.e. nationally) on a fixed day. Although mothers obviously already had birthday celebrations, Mother’s Day addressed the ‘idea of the Mother’ in addition to individual mothers. Correspondingly, only an ‘ideal’ gift could be deemed appropriate. The Society expostulated that a floral tribute best met this condition. Consistent with the self-image of disinterestedness that it displayed, the Society pointed out that buying flowers at a market or in a florist’s shop, depending upon means, was only one option. It was equally valid to pick them in the fields (cf. *Schmidt* 1995: 265–267) – one of the origins of Gert Timmermans’ approach.

Based on these premises, the Society launched a concerted campaign to win over the Dutch public for the new holiday, their first Mother’s Day, to be held on Wednesday, 20 May 1925. *Het boek der moeders* (The Mothers’ Book) was published to underline the truly national character of the Day. In this book, leading intellectuals and writers from various religious and ideological backgrounds contributed meditations ‘on an ideal possession, common to all’ – their mothers (*Van Zuylen* 1925: 7). There was a broadcast on Mother’s Day on the national radio. Local branches of the Society sent articles on Mother’s Day and advertisements to local newspapers and sought the cooperation of clergymen, priests, school teachers and voluntary societies in order to familiarise their flocks, pupils and members with ‘the elevated idea underlying a general tribute to Mother’. Teachers directed schoolchildren, who had been provided with small paper flags bearing the message ‘For Mother’, to the local flower market to buy plants for their mothers. To children in the late 1920s, someone recalled, all of these activities truly resembled the celebration of a national holiday (*Dijkema-Jansen* 1977: 8). In the years to come, the primary school was to be a major locus for propagating the Day.

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From 1931 onwards, the Netherlands conformed to practices in the United States and some other European countries by establishing the second Sunday in May as Mother’s Day (Van Gilst 1998: 35). Each year, the holiday was signalled by newspaper articles and advertisements; in the mid-1930s, the advertisements adopted a slogan that would be used for decades: *Moederdag – Bloemendag* (‘Mother’s Day – Flower Day’). In their May issues, magazines for women, families and youth provided various hints, inspired by the florists’ campaign, for how to celebrate the Day. In addition to the recurring radio broadcasts, Mother’s Day also became an item in television programmes in the late 1950s.

Although the florists tried to claim a monopoly for their products on Mother’s Day, this did not remain uncontested. From the late 1920s, the Dutch Society of Confectioners (*Nederlandsche Bankethakers Vereeniging*), styling themselves as “Mother’s friend” (*de vriend van Moeder*; Van Gilst 1998: 35), advanced the notion of a fancy cake as the most appropriate gift for Mother’s Day. They even remodelled the florists’ slogan to read *Moederdag – Taartendag* (‘Mother’s Day – Cake Day’). The material nature of cakes seems to have restrained confectioners from propagating the high-minded ideas concerning the moral significance of the Day that were advanced by the florists. A more spectacular element in their campaign, which emerged in the 1930s and 1940s, was the presentation of free Mother’s Day cakes to new mothers, women in hospitals, mayors’ wives and, up to the present day, the queen of the Netherlands, who is sometimes known as *de moeder des lands* (‘the mother of the country’). These presentations obviously attracted much-sought publicity for their product.

As could be expected, other trades began to discover business opportunities as well, albeit not on an organised scale. Appealing simply to the joy that their items would bring to grateful mothers, an almost unlimited array of manufacturers and shopkeepers began to advertise Mother’s Day gifts, particularly of household goods (which were meant to ‘ease and alleviate her task’), cosmetics and undergarments. Since the 1950s, there has been a growing tendency to accentuate the femininity of mothers in addition to their motherhood on Mother’s Day. Such ‘stereotypical gifts’ as cakes, bouquets and anything domestic were to be abandoned in favour of ‘something really personal’, such as a piece of jewellery or a shawl. This way, the notion of ‘indulging’ mothers on their Day was given new shades of meaning (Jacobs 2003: 24).

Even on the ideological front, the florists were unable to sustain exclusive ownership of the Day. Miss C.P. van Asperen van der Velde, the director of an institution for popular education, *Ons Huis* (Our Home), which was based in a working-class district in Amsterdam, immediately embraced the idea of a Mother’s Day. She had a less positive opinion, however, of the rather narrow focus on selling flowers that the Society for Horticulture maintained. On a visit to the United States in 1928, she saw Mother’s Day celebrated as ‘a perfectly ordinary family holiday, enjoyable and pleasant’. Thereafter, she decided to impart a more idealistic
foundation to the Day.\textsuperscript{3} From a general drive to promote ‘harmony in the family, brotherhood in humanity at large’, she focussed on raising women’s self-image as mothers. After all, they were fulfilling an ‘elevated, holy task’ in society (quoted in Sorée and Snepvangers 1992: 86–87). She established a Mother’s Day committee and propagated her views in lectures and radio talks (Van Asperen van der Velde 1946: 118–124).

Some Roman Catholics became another major ideological force with which the florist industry would have to contend. In the Roman Catholic liturgy, the entire month of May was already dedicated to a mother – Mary, the divine mother. To avoid interference with socio-religious practice, many Roman Catholics had voiced ‘objections’ to the new holiday since its inception. The Society for Horticulture attempted to accommodate these reservations by setting Mother’s Day on other dates (e.g. Mother’s Day was observed on 7 July in 1926). Because the Society was unwilling to maintain this policy, however, Catholics initially appeared to adopt a general attitude of aloofness, which was understandable, as they had been subjected to some strong, negative opinions. In 1932, one Catholic women’s magazine quoted the German cardinal Michael von Faulhaber, to whom celebrating Mother’s Day represented ‘one further step in the direction of de-Christianisation, of paganism’.\textsuperscript{4} The awareness of the neutral, vaguely Protestant (or at any rate, decidedly non-Catholic) origin of the Day may have contributed to this view as well (cf. Van Es 1958: 12). The florist industry’s ‘national’ approach notwithstanding, this mattered in the heavily ‘pillarised’ (i.e. strongly divided internally along religious lines) Dutch society of the time.\textsuperscript{5}

As the church hierarchy apparently offered no clear guidelines, other voices could be heard at the same time. In 1931, the Roman Catholic League for Large Families (\textit{R.K. Bond voor Groote Gezinnen}) even ventured to take the initiative of celebrating Mother’s Day in the Netherlands (De Jager 2001: 198).\textsuperscript{6} By wilfully ignoring the previous efforts of other interest groups, the League clearly sought to establish the Day on a new platform that would be acceptable to Roman Catholics as well. With the exception of their recommendations to dedicate special masses to mothers, however, their proposal followed the established practice of presenting flowers and helping mothers with their housekeeping chores on that day. Local parish priests and other Catholic organisations made similar efforts to ‘Catholicise’ or ‘Christianise’ the Day. For example, as a boy, the future Dutch cardinal Adrianus Simonis played the piano in a Mother’s Day broadcast on Catholic radio in 1939.

One underlying component of this approach, which gained momentum in the 1940s and 1950s (Van der Veer 2001: 9), was the growing awareness that Mother’s

\textsuperscript{3} \textit{Libelle} 8-5–1965.
\textsuperscript{4} \textit{De Katholieke Vrouw} 7-5–1932.
\textsuperscript{5} I found no examples of organised Protestant resistance to Mother’s Day.
\textsuperscript{6} The League’s incentive was most probably the commemoration that Pope Pius XI held that very year (1931) of the 1500th anniversary of the proclamation of Mary’s divine motherhood at the Council of Ephese.
Day could ‘no longer be denied’, that it was admittedly a ‘happy thought’ and that it suited ‘us Catholics very well’; it should therefore be incorporated into Catholic devotional practice, both public and domestic. For decades, Catholic children had been familiar with decorating Mary’s statue with flowers during the month of May in their churches, schools and homes. In a gradual shift of emphasis, ‘Mary’s month’ became known as ‘mothers’ month’, and celebrating Mother’s Day represented its ‘apotheosis’. This combination of religious and secular practice was even more natural, as Catholic children were taught to imagine that they had ‘two mothers’, ‘Mary in heaven and mother at home’ (quoted in Van der Veer 2001: 10), both of whom were equally fond of receiving a surprise gift of flowers. When the Church began to lose its hold on the lives of individual Catholics in the 1960s, this specific Catholic rendering of Mother’s Day gradually lost its meaning and appeal. From then on, Catholics have generally participated in the Day without any further religiously inspired reservations or appropriations.

Whereas Mother’s Day was heavily instrumentalised in Nazi Germany to further the regime’s ends and war effort (Weyrather 1993), there is no evidence that it received a similar ideological twist in the Netherlands during the years of German occupation. On the contrary, the florist industry adopted the strategy, as they stated prudently, of reminding the public of the Day ‘without giving offence to anybody’. Because goods other than flowers were in increasingly short supply as possible gifts, the war gave an unexpected boost to the Day. Excellent sales were reported and, as stated contentedly in 1942, ‘In a few years time, Mother’s Day has gained enormous popularity in this country’. When this exceptional condition lost ground after the war, florists were once again forced to fight for their territory.

The American origins of Mother’s Day are now a matter of common knowledge. In the 1980s, however, it was (possibly unwittingly) sometimes misrepresented as a Nazi invention (e.g. ‘occasioned by the birthday of Hitler’s mother’) – by feminists who opposed the glorification of what they felt were outdated and repressive gender roles on Mother’s Day (Schlimmgen-Ehmke 1988: 147; De Jager 2001: 199). In 1973, women declining this ‘sop for a whole year’s work’ raised a makeshift statue for the ‘unknown mother of the family’ on Amsterdam’s central Dam square.

To some degree, these protests left their mark. Since the war, however, Mother’s Day has largely been a self-perpetuating ritual and ideological machine (as was the case in Germany, Schlimmgen-Ehmke 1988: 151; Matter 1988: 155), which has continued to elicit both positive and negative responses. As Frykman and Löfgren

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8 Taptoe 1–5–1954.
9 I found no editorials on Mother’s Day in the Dutch national-socialist party’s newspaper Volk en Vaderland for the years 1933–1944.
10 De Bloemisterij 1–5–1941.
12 Leaflet issued by Vrouwen tegen sexisme & fascisme (Women against sexism & fascism), Amsterdam 1982. Meertens Institute Archives.
(1996:16) observe, ‘Just as much as they [customs] produce cultural conformity, they also stimulate protest and alternatives. They become their own critics, precisely because they make certain sides of a culture visible’. These responses, however, referred more to the gradual incorporation of the Day in the domain of ‘tradition’ than they did to external ideational forces. I address this discourse, along with the intricate processes of negotiation that it entailed, after the next section.

Compared to the publicity and commotion surrounding the introduction of Mother’s Day, Father’s Day entered the Dutch scene more or less casually. Even though there is no explicit evidence of a connection, Father’s Day in the Netherlands probably emerged in the wake of renewed efforts to promote Father’s Day in America in the mid- and late 1930s (Schmidt 1995: 275, 279, 286; LaRossa 1997: 170). During this period, voices would occasionally appear in the Dutch press asking ‘Father’s Day, why not?’ or, more positively, ‘(...) if there is a Mother’s Day, there should be a Father’s Day as well!’ As in the United States, this plain logic, which was also repeated in women’s magazines in the 1950s, was particularly appealing to trades that felt they had missed their share in a gift-giving market that had been successfully created by other trades for the occasion of Mother’s Day. In 1936, the Dutch Union of Tobacconists’ Societies (Nederlandsche Bond van Sigarenwinkelier-Vereenigingen) took the initiative to promote Father’s Day in the Netherlands.\footnote{De Sigarenwinkelner 22–8–1936. I owe this source to L. Bracco Gartner, Tabaks Historisch Museum, Delft.} Either independently or in mutual competition, the idea was also adopted by men’s outfitters in the late 1940s. Remarkably, each group proclaimed its own Father’s Day, the former fixing it on the second Sunday in October, the latter on the third Sunday of June; the result was the sudden appearance of two Father’s Days. Conforming to the American practice, the disagreement was settled around 1950 in favour of the June date. Understandably, the Roman Catholic Church voiced no objections, as they had finally accepted Mother’s Day around the same time.

Also echoing the florist industry’s original slogan, tobaccoists began to advertise with the slogan \textit{Vaderdag – Sigarendag} (‘Father’s Day – Cigar Day’). In the 1950s and early 1960s, they copied the florists’ strategy of presenting cigars to mayors, the youngest or eldest father in town and to retirees in an effort to attract publicity for Father’s Day. The notion of honouring an ‘idea of the father’, as promoted in the United States in the 1930s and 1940s (Schmidt 1995: 289; LaRossa 1997: 189), was generally absent in promotional activities. The tobaccoists simply conveyed the message that a Father’s Day gift of cigars would render ‘a content Father’, who would ‘increase a family’s happiness and conviviality’.

Paralleling developments in Mother’s Day advertising, a specific focus emerged on fathers as males who longed for such gifts as after-shave. Florists tried to claim their share as well by advocating ‘real men’s plants, robust and full of character’ as gifts, and by propagating Father’s Day as ‘Plant Day’. In the 1970s and 1980s, a representation emerged of a father who, instead of being glad to receive the canonical and outdated trio of cigars, socks and ties (in Dutch, “the three S’s”: \textit{sigaren, sokken,}}
stropdassen), was 'ready for a change', now preferring such items as gardening tools or fishing rods. For example, the notion of 'indulging Father' transformed from not disturbing his afternoon nap or his reading the newspaper (as was popular in the 1950s and 1960s), to allowing him to express himself freely in his hobbies and leisure activities on 'his' Day. This transformation corresponds to shifts in patterns of the self-image and gender roles of fathers in society as a whole. As was the case with Mother's Day gifts, such gifts and offers were not generally welcomed, no matter how attractive they may have appeared from the outside.

**Negotiating the Authenticity of Mother's Day and Father's Day**

Right from the start, those who promoted Mother's Day in the Netherlands were well aware that 'some sceptics' might reject the idea (Van Zuylen 1925: 7). As mentioned before, some Roman Catholics initially opposed the Day. From the late 1930s, others were able to negotiate its wider acceptance by stressing outward congruities. The response by organised socialism followed a similar pattern. In 1925, Mother's Day was considered a 'worthy product of degenerated capitalist society', 'exploiting sentiments of motherly and filial love to benefit commercial profits', and 'set up exclusively to the advantage of mothers of a certain class'. In later years, these voices fell silent, and leftist newspapers followed mainstream opinion by largely endorsing both Mother's Day and Father's Day.

In both cases, references to wider ideological standards caused the new holiday to be weighed in the balance and found wanting for a short time. Another type of standard, however, was (and remains) more pertinent to the response on both Days in general. Although less articulate or elaborate, this standard was powerful, as it emanated directly from people's understanding of their authentic selves, especially as mothers and fathers, and of the authenticity of calendar traditions. Although they do not form an explicit ideology, these reactions are not entirely unsystematic. They appear to revolve around a rather limited set of structural oppositions that claim, on the one hand, that these Days should be rejected because they were new, superfluous, inspired by twisted ideals, commercial, artificial, and imposed from above, or, on the other hand, that they should be welcomed for reasons that were based on the exact opposite. Interestingly, these opinions and sentiments could be firmly held, while proving themselves, often at the same time, equally open for discussion and negotiation. In the following section, I consider these arguments and the ambivalence surrounding them in some detail.

**New and Superfluous Holidays**

Whereas 'anything was possible' in the United States, the florist industry's trade journal commented in the early 1950s that it was regrettably 'an unpleasant trait of

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14 *De Proletarische Vrouw* 14-5-1925, cf. 14-5-1930. I found no similar condemnations of Mother's Day in later volumes of this weekly.
ours [the Dutch] that we are so sceptical’ with respect to attitudes about Mother’s Day. Somewhat later, this observation was confirmed as prominent figures denounced Father’s Day as a ‘silly thing’ or a ‘peculiar affair’. Such a Day was something ‘new’, and ‘it is in our national character always to be somewhat dismissive of anything new’. The novelty of Mother’s Day, however, was more open to debate. Hausen (1984: 474) maintains that, in Germany, Mother’s Day was not so much an invention of the 1920s as it was a practical summary of diffuse ideas already prevalent at the time. This also pertains to the Netherlands. The ‘idea of the mother’ to which the florists referred was certainly not wholly new or unknown (Dankbaar 1984; Bakker 1987). Motherhood or motherly love itself was not at issue; the debate centred on whether or how to celebrate it.

For example, some argued that such an occasion already existed in the celebration of mothers’ birthdays. In the bourgeois culture of the late nineteenth-century, this occasion was gaining importance as a family ritual. Nonetheless, birthdays were certainly not celebrated in all classes of Dutch society prior to the Second World War. This did not prevent some of those taking issue with Mother’s Day from focussing on ‘mother’s birthday’ to make their point. This occasion was ‘good and nice and beautiful, because it was natural and a matter of course’, compared to ‘a massively celebrated family holiday with its ready-made gifts’. In addition, mothers were supposedly well satisfied with having only ‘one birthday party a year’.

In reaction, others claimed that a mother’s many domestic duties, even on her birthday, prevented her from experiencing it ‘as a true holiday’. Mother’s Day, on the other hand, was not intended to honour ‘her person’ as much as it was intended to recognise her ‘as the central figure in the domestic circle’. Mothers would therefore ‘not suffer themselves to be misled that an annual Mother’s Day was superfluous’. On the contrary, ‘this holiday answers a real need and makes up for a deficiency’. To bring this home to those around her, a children’s story in the 1930s offered a role model for negotiating this view. After a ‘fierce internal struggle’, a girl who had initially considered the practice of giving gifts on Mother’s Day ‘nonsense’ – ‘that’s what birthdays are for’ – was finally convinced of the superiority of Mother’s Day, having felt bad about denying her mother a gift.

**Ideal Mothers and Fathers**

Above and beyond individual mothers, motherhood itself was to be symbolically celebrated on Mother’s Day. In the late 1930s, florists admitted that ‘we Dutchmen have difficulty appreciating symbolism’. They did, however, claim an exception for ‘the mother symbol to which we are still a bit susceptible, aren’t we?’ Florists and other Mother’s Day activists sought to promote and exploit the power of this symbolism. One of their tactics was to represent mothers as victims. Particularly in the 1950s, women’s magazines contained a steady lamentation that the domestic

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work of mothers was ‘not fully appreciated’ (i.e. by their families). Mother’s Day was therefore a welcome occasion to set matters straight and ‘to thank her for a year’s work’, as several of the Meertens Institute’s informants wrote. When mothers began to take jobs outside the home in the 1960s, this lamentation re-emerged, claiming that mothers who remained at home were now being ‘discredited’ by other women.

A shift in emphasis against this view began to emerge in the late 1960s, as Mother’s Day came to be presented as an occasion to pay homage to ‘mother, the employed woman’. More generally, there was a tendency (in perception more than in practice) for relations between spouses to become more equal (Moree 1994, Knijn 1994, Vossen and Nelissen 1997). Nonetheless, this did ‘not diminish the purpose of Mother’s Day, for it is a good thing for Father to know that he is a “nobody” when it comes to housekeeping and child care’. Fathers echoed sentiments springing from this same need for compensation in regard to Father’s Day. For children, Father’s Day was a good opportunity ‘to express their special love for their fathers’, ‘to be reminded of his presence’. For fathers, it offered the opportunity ‘to experience on one day how much they appreciate me [as a father]’.

Not all mothers and fathers shared this opinion about the two Days. To treat motherhood as a ‘virtue’ instead of as a mere ‘privilege’ was ‘ridiculous, arrogant and foolish’, according to Annie Romein-Verschoor, a left-wing intellectual writing in the 1950s. Film director and writer Theo van Gogh, who was murdered in 2004, went even further by claiming, in commenting on Father’s Day in his deliberately shocking manner, that ‘fathers are there to be spat in the face’. This view objects to the practice of extolling mothers or fathers merely for their biological roles in the procreation process. As historian Ileen Montijn wrote in 1997, ‘On Mother’s Day, the animal in the mother is honoured’. As early as the 1930s, mothers were being pressed to guard against the inclination (i.e. the ‘almost animal instinct’), which was epitomised on Mother’s Day, to be possessive of their children.

In the 1960–1970s, both Days came to be seen as occasions on which, rather than being honoured, mothers or fathers were made to realise their own deficiencies in fulfilling their roles. One women’s magazine asked, ‘Are you really a good mother?’, and a father who was being spoiled by his family on Father’s Day wondered what he really amounted to as a father. These and similar feelings flowed together into a type of modesty and an admission that ‘it is somewhat overdone to praise ourselves’ on Mother’s Day. Instead of being saints or fairy-tale figures, mothers had become human beings. Such self-reflection still allowed the celebration of Mother’s Day, but now ‘with a wink’; it was no longer necessary for mothers to feel guilty about their shortcomings as a mother.

In the 1980s, the argument came full circle with the claim that Mother’s Day could allow a woman ‘feel like a mother again’, even if she was ‘not really a good mother’. This less serious, even frivolous attitude towards the Day was characteristic of general Dutch attitudes towards calendar holidays in the late twentieth century (Helsloot 2005). Holidays became a matter of choice and, in a process of negotiation or of personal appropriation, freed of prescribed standards. As observed by Frykman and Löfgren (1996: 19) ‘customs in modern society do not command people to
behave in a particular way. Instead, we are offered a framework in which to do our own celebrating’.

Commercial Holidays

A story from 1950 tells of a mother who, upon receiving a gift, says, ‘You may pretend to act out of sudden inspiration, but the confectioners and florists have been making a lot of noise about Mother’s Day. This isn’t completely of your own doing’. This discounting of the authenticity of the Mother’s Day ritual by discrediting participants as having been influenced or manipulated by commercial interests, was pervasive, if not dominant, in discussions about the holiday. The rejection of Mother’s Day as an invention of the ‘sickening shopkeepers’ (misselijk makende middenstand) appealed to many. Even cardinal Simonis in later years regarded it as ‘a strange commercial cult’. Fathers who preferred to pass it over were ‘talked into feeling guilty about it’. Underlying Mother’s Day was a ‘false sentiment, infused by an urge to sell’. It did not spring ‘from within’ or ‘from the heart’, as some of our informants wrote. These feelings were even more intense with regard to Father’s Day, particularly in the 1950s. Informants denounced the holiday as ‘bosh’ (apekool), ‘rubbish’ (onzin) or ‘meant to trick people out of their money’ (geld-uit-de-zak-klopperij).

Without denying their previously discussed commercial motives, florists took great pains to stress that a good turnover was merely ‘a welcome consequence’, not the ‘purpose’ of their endeavours. Faced with the ongoing criticism that they continued to commercialise Mother’s Day, florists eventually felt that it was time for a counteroffensive. Even though Ann Jarvis’ role in founding Mother’s Day in the United States is questionable (Schmidt 1995: 267–272; Jacobs 2003: 14–15), the florist industry referred to it in order to support their claim that denouncing the day as ‘an invention of the florist industry’ was to ‘fall short of the truth’. Shopkeepers were well advised to draw their customers’ attention to this ‘widespread misconception’. Newspapers and women’s magazines came to the florists’ rescue by also referring to Ann Jarvis’ ‘originally purely ideal’ motive behind Mother’s Day, as well as her ‘dogged’, ‘furious battle’ against those who would commercialise and thereby ‘denigrate’ the Day. In the 1970s, the florist industry even tried to turn its ostensibly auxiliary role to its own advantage. Whereas Mother’s Day was increasingly criticised for being ‘commercial’, flowers and plants were perceived to be beyond this criticism, as they were ‘green’ and natural. This realisation offered the industry renewed opportunities.

People have apparently always been somewhat uncertain about the true role of the florist industry in Mother’s Day. The frequently asked question of whether the holiday originated from commercial or ideal motives was answered as follows in 1939: ‘let the question mark be left a question mark’. It was ‘(...) by all means disenchanting to presume the former, simply because the idea reached us from the country of Roosevelt, reputedly inclined to materialism’. This criticism, it was argued further, was merely a phase, which would gradually fade away in an ongoing process of acceptance or within the course of the life cycles of individual mothers:
as they grow older, mothers would be less likely to mind having their feelings so 'patently exploited by commerce'. Even Ann Jarvis' fight against commerce was discredited. She lacked the 'sense of humour' to see the 'innocence' of advertising for her Day. This line of argumentation allowed the florist industry to go farther than playing down the commercialisation of Mother's Day; it made the commercialism acceptable, essentially by responding to critics with, 'So what?' The involvement of businesspeople did not 'detract' from the idea; it was not 'objectionable', and it was of only 'minor importance'. They were 'welcome to their profits', because 'we are wise enough to understand and see through this' and to 'make our own choices'. 'When one comes to think of it, any holiday may be labelled commercial'. The latter argument was also advanced in defence of Father's Day. The fact that this Day had obviously been invented by commerce did not 'disqualify' the idea at all.

Downgrading the meaning of gift giving, and by extension the function of commerce in general, was another means of negotiating the acceptability of the two Days. It was claimed that 'being thought of' by their loved ones was far more important to mothers than receiving gifts was. It was the mental act behind a present, and not its material value, that counted (Cheal 1988: 113). When Dutch Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende could slip away for just two hours to visit his mother on Mother's Day 2002, she was still all too grateful: 'The point is his gesture'. The same could also be expressed through letters or phone calls. Contrary to the practice in the United States, however, sending special Mother's Day greeting cards never developed into a ritual in the Netherlands. The same line of reason underlies the general preference for giving a Kleinigheidje (small gift).

Taking this one step further, commerce could be bypassed altogether by propagating the notion that mothers prefer self-made gifts, as women's magazines stressed to mothers and children alike for decades. This was one aspect of a wider educational effort since the 1930s to stimulate children's creativity (Vos 1999: 121-140). Gert Timmermans' action, which was presented in the introduction, is consistent with this line of reasoning. The florist industry had already admitted that, 'under special circumstances', handpicked flowers could be 'more eloquent' than those bought in shops (cf. Schmidt 1995: 272). Connecting with these ideas of authenticity and self-expression, schoolteachers and magazines continuously urged children to make this gesture, thereby shaping their mothers' attitude of thankfulness.

This form of gift giving presented its own problems of authenticity. After she had grown up, a child learned from her mother that she had actually detested the particular flowers that she had received on Mother's Day (Dijkema-Jansen 1977: 9). This mother had nonetheless acted in accordance with the advice in magazines regarding children's self-made or self-procured gifts in general (cf. Schmied 1996: 60). 'The wrong choice, but bought out of their [children's] own pocket money, and mother is mollified and happy'. On listening to special Mother's Day verses or songs she had heard being rehearsed a hundred times, a mother should pretend to be completely surprised. Similarly, when confronted with the morning ritual of a child-made breakfast that she found revolting, a mother 'forced herself into a grateful
laugh'.

Many of our informants equally remembered their mothers and fathers, or themselves in these roles, reacting 'pleased (as fitting)', 'as if glad' or 'affectedly enthusiastic'.

Artificial and Enforced Sentiments

Particularly during the first decades after the introduction of Mother's Day and Father's Day, another type of charge emerged that was somewhat related to the charge of commercialism. Referring to Mother’s Day, a female Member of Parliament stated bluntly in 1925 that 'such an artificial incitement of motherly love will not endure'. Contrasting this to the 'always touching' spontaneous expression of that sentiment, the high esteem in which she held her own mother 'prevented her from airing such...'

16 'The tea looked unattractive, but I drank it courageously and thanked him [son] with a big hug. "Do you want some more?"', he asked', Margriet 9-5-1975.
feelings on demand'. Because the practice originated 'from the outside' or 'from above' (i.e. 'on the authority of absolute strangers'), many others considered it 'untruthful'; this caused 'resentment'. The Dutch national character, which resists being told when and how to celebrate, could be invoked in this respect as well. Some felt that Mother's Day was also wrongly conceived psychologically, as it was impossible to 'generate a sudden feeling of appreciation, simply because one was compelled to do so on one particular day of the year'. Father's Day was similarly rejected in 1948 because it was 'fabricated', 'made up' and did 'not originate from tradition and even less from people's inner needs'. The perception of the practice of 'producing tokens of love following a given, external schedule' as 'a sorry business' has a long history as well.

These criticisms elicited responses from various sources, including Miss Van Asperen van der Velde, who claimed that the criticism was overdone, as the call to Mother's Day was no more than 'an inducement that one was free to follow – or not'. Nonetheless, in the effort to prepare the ground for this mood, it was regularly pointed out that 'being caught in the daily grind' and 'in our times already so lacking in poetry and romance', one would be foolish not to 'seize upon' this 'unsought' occasion. Through the Mother's Day ritual, one could explicitly show emotions that were 'not so easy to approach' (e.g. 'voicing love, gratitude and many never spoken words'). The creation of such a 'pause' was 'much-needed' and, 'for practical reasons', a fixed day was a good 'solution'.

The Burden of Tradition

From the outset, the florist industry had reckoned with the possibility that not everybody would be readily convinced of the need for or value of the new holiday. To those children (supposedly only a few, and described as 'degenerate') who viewed their mothers' character as less stellar than they were expected to believe, thinking otherwise of their mothers' good character as expected of them, Mother's Day was likely to become a 'burdensome, compulsory day' and therefore to generate unauthentic behaviour (komedie). This diagnosis proved largely prophetic.

We cannot tell how many people in the Netherlands have participated in the celebration of Mother's Day and Father's Day over the years. That they have done so increasingly, however, is certain. Through the combined effects of the introduction of the Days in primary schools, the media coverage and commercial advertising, the new rituals became ever more widely known and gradually less novel, thereby slowly but steadily becoming 'traditional' (i.e. more or less inevitable), whether as something to negate or with which to comply. Our informants described this process according to their memories: 'Unwittingly, it became “common” practice, so we

17 Eigen Haard 51 (1925) 290.
18 Nine out of ten women supposedly rejected Mother's Day, preferring an 'unsought moment' over a fixed day 'decreed' by florists and confectioners, Beatrijs 9–5–1959.
19 Floralia 5–6–1925.
Reframing Dutch Culture

went along’. ‘One just participated because “everybody” did so’. ‘Later on, more people felt like it; I simply followed’. The imitation of others was even easier when people agreed to the notion that the Days offered a ‘good occasion’ or when they considered the Days ‘fun’, thus allowing them to describe their own participation as ‘spontaneous’.

Others, however, voiced misgivings, as the counterweight to ‘thinking of’ mother or father on their Days was ‘forgetting’ them. From the mother’s point of view, this was likely to be perceived as resulting from a conscious and intentional act rather than from a slip of the mind. ‘Don’t they [children] appreciate mother’s work; do they think it’s nothing out of the ordinary?’ Not only were such children (regardless of age) ungrateful; they violated what had become a social norm. ‘Children ought to visit their parents on Mother’s Day; that’s only decent’, a character in a 1959 story stated. In the 1950s, disregarding the Days was already felt to create ‘a certain constraint’ in family life (Buter 1962: 112). A large proportion of our informants confirmed this from their personal histories. The realisation that their mothers would feel ‘slighted’, ‘wronged’, ‘displeased’, ‘hurt’, ‘disappointed’ or ‘miserable’ generated ‘bad feelings’, a sense of ‘guilt’ or of ‘failing’ their parents. Many therefore complied — ‘for the sake of peace and quiet’.

This peace had to be, and actually was, negotiated, by allowing for the existence of a kind of internal dissonance, an uneasy struggle between the pulls of authentic and unauthentic behaviour. In the 1960s, a woman was quoted as saying, ‘To me, it’s all humbug (flauwe kul), that Mother’s Day, but mothers are so fond of it, so I just take part’. As an adult, a woman could agree (partially at the insistence of her husband) to send flowers to her mother-in-law, even while harbouring the thought, ‘Still, to me it’s nonsense (onzin)’. This attitude of ‘well, all right then’, of feeling ‘unable to escape’ such an obligatory ‘nonsense day’, must have been pervasive, particularly when young children were involved. It would be ‘disappointing’ to children to ‘thwart’ their efforts to celebrate such a Day. On the other hand, as recipients of tokens of affection, mothers could ‘feel somewhat moved and completely forget that a Mother’s Day is in some respects actually unsympathetic to her’. Alternatively, they could smile at the fact ‘that it’s completely devoid of meaning’ and ‘forget that one has longed for a well-meant appraisal on one particular moment’. ‘We are taken in willy-nilly by Mother’s Day, and we actually consider it rather fun’. In a similar way, even though a father might say that his Day was ‘not that important’ or even ‘total nonsense’, he was known to hold a different opinion ‘in his heart of hearts’. In the second half of the twentieth century, these mental balancing acts, these negotiations through such devices as tactically ‘forgetting’ one’s authenticity, were an ongoing feature of the discourse and, according to the data from our informants, the actual practice surrounding both Days (cf. Schlimmgen-Ehmke 1988: 150).
Conclusion

The situation that is described in the previous section is perhaps best summarised as 'sincere confusion' (Cheal 1988: 42); in Goffman's terms, it is a 'frame dispute', an argument about what frame is relevant for responding to Mother's Day and Father's Day. Actors appear to perceive both Days primarily as something external to them. This strangeness may be labelled in various ways, including superfluous, unnatural or commercial. Behind these epithets and in their reflexive responses, actors rely on some inner frame or standard that is connected to conceptions of their identity. This yardstick may be said to consist of a basic notion of authenticity, of a 'romantic identification between ourselves and a culture, conceived as pure and natural' (Roodenburg 2000: 82; Berking 1999: 143, 129–133). In various respects, Mother’s Day and Father’s Day threaten this vernacular authenticity, creating the need to seek ways to preserve and defend it. As we have also seen, however, in other respects, both Days seem to resonate with this inner standard, as when they are considered 'rather fun' or 'a welcome occasion'. More often than not, responding to the Days entails a process of negotiation, a resolution of inner tensions by deliberately adopting an ambivalent stance (see also Schmidt 1995: 270). This does not preclude, however, acknowledging the existence of different framing possibilities.

Roodenburg has described ethnology's endeavour well into the twentieth century as one of 'conferring certificates of authenticity' (Roodenburg 2000: 71). Characteristically, the opinions of those to whom these certificates were attributed were largely left out of the considerations of ethnologists. This uneven power balance was disturbed particularly in the 1960s when, to the surprise of ethnologists, actors proved quite capable of engaging in acts of authentication or bestowing certificates of authenticity themselves. The pervasive process of social and cultural democratisation in Western societies was largely responsible for this development. Precisely how this convergence of academic and vernacular categories of authenticity came about, however, will be difficult to establish. In general, this testifies to an increasing popular appropriation of academic concepts. On the other hand, the sources generating the latter may have been more socio-culturally widespread than had previously been noticed and appreciated (cf. Doorman 2004: 40). My aim has been to underline the plausibility of this view by focusing on the operation of vernacular notions of authenticity in the perception of Mother's Day and Father's Day. Without falling back on antiquated notions of a presumed authentic popular culture, it opens the way to writing a history of ethnology from below, a vernacular ethnology.

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