

# THEMATIC FOCUS: ETHNOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO CULTURAL HERITAGES (II)

## Memorialising Europe Revitalising and Reframing a ‘Christian’ Continent<sup>1</sup>

PETER JAN MARGRY

### ABSTRACT

In the economic and political unification process of Europe, the idea of the creation of a pan-European identity was put high on the political agenda. With the failure of this effort, the emphasis shifted to the apparently less fraught concept of ‘shared cultural heritage’. This article analyses how the politically guided rediscovery of Europe’s past has contributed to the creation of a ‘Religion of Heritage’, not only by raising up a political altar for cultural heritage, but also through the revitalisation, instrumentalisation and transformation of the Christian heritage, in order to try to memorialise and affirm a collective European identity based on its Christian past. In the context of this process, the network of European pilgrims’ ways appears to have been an especially successful performative form of heritage creation, which has both dynamised Christian roots as a relevant trans-European form of civil religion that has taken shape, capitalising on the new religious and spiritual demands created by secularisation, and responded to the demand for shared – and Christian inspired – European values and meanings in times of uncertainty and crisis.

### KEYWORDS

Christianity, civil religion, Europe, heritage, memorialising, pilgrimage

How tempting it can be to let yourself get carried away by mythology, and to daydream about that exquisite woman Europa, the Asiatic daughter of the



Phoenician king Agenor. Then to imagine yourself in the place of the ruler of the gods, Zeus, to be in love with Europa, to seduce her and, in your imposing guise as a bull, to carry her off from Asia on your back, bringing her to that part of the world that was to assume her name!

There are men today who cherish similar idealised and romantic fantasies. More precisely, they are now guided by the new mythologies of the Internet, which as a modern medium has succeeded in establishing itself as an intermediary and vehicle for new, idealised images of women – such as of beautiful Slavic women who still answer to the archetypal and idealised expectations that a woman must fulfil, as a loving spouse and caring mother. Going online on websites like [www.meetrussianbrides.com](http://www.meetrussianbrides.com), European men seek women of subservient mien in the European east or Asia, no longer under the name Europa, but under exotic sounding names and pseudonyms like Natasha, Tatiana, Elena or Anastasia. It is a contemporary expression of Orientalistic mythology. They bring their bride to Europe and voluntarily enter into a confrontation with another culture, their notions of which, as a rule, are scarcely in accord with reality. It is not something solely restricted to men, because it is a question of supply and demand, in the basic sense that is postulated in rational choice theory. Reciprocally, using sophisticated or sexy clothing, make-up and professional photography, potential Russian and Ukrainian brides try to hook an equally idealised Western man – in other words, one with ample social, economic and, if possible, cultural capital. Yet, how do their mental images relate to the perhaps equally vague, idealised notions that African boat people entertain about Europe, notions which drive them to try to reach that economic paradise by means of a dangerous odyssey? What perceptions and frames do all these women and men without exception have about modern Europe and its cultures? Hardly any research has been done on this question, although it would provide insight into how stereotypes and ‘otherness’ are constructed on both sides, and how these are in turn transformed and reconstructed when the initially distant parties finally have found one another (cf. Johnson 2007).

Europe is and remains a constantly recreated myth, and whatever successive images of this continent follow one another, these myths remain an enormous task for us as researchers expressly active in this continent, a task calling for scientific, ethnological reflection and liberating imagination, and presenting a challenge to the valorisation of politics and society (cf. Kockel 2008). The political changes within the European Union and on the Euro-

pean continent, the immigration question and politics of ethnicity from the bottom up, as well as the new role of public religion in society have become more problematic. The redefined concept of 'heritage' functions increasingly as an umbrella and portmanteau notion, chiefly because it has also become a historical and cultural term and a key political theme that to a great extent appears to be taking the place of charged concepts like identity and ethnicity. Although these concepts have lost little of their immediacy, they have been eclipsed not only by the theme of heritage, but also by the debate on religion, which often gives the impression of a clash of religions, including a caricature opposition of Islam against the Judeo-Christian West.

At the same time the increasing European unification which has taken place over a relatively short time has altered the image of that continent still further. It is not only for outsiders that a different Europe has arisen, but also those who live on this continent are facing radical changes. That has to do not just with the political and administrative strengthening of the European Union, but just as much with a mental reordering of the local, regional, national, supranational and global spheres within which people live by turns, and the growing resistance against the idea of social and cultural loss that is related to this. This is a process that cannot be seen apart from the heritage boom and the quest for defining identity on different societal levels. In short, we have a continual reclaiming, reconstituting and reframing of an indefinable continent, in which heritage and religion are both central and bound together with each other in an unsuspected relation.

### **Convergence and divergence**

It was shortly after the Second World War that the Swiss thinker Denis de Rougemont made his idealistic call for a free Europe, with free circulation of ideas, persons and goods. To work toward this, he established a study centre for European culture in Geneva that focused on human rights, parliamentary democracy and freedom of expression. At the same time De Rougemont sought a political construct that could guarantee the liberty of the democratic nation states. This was in part as a response to the Second World War, but no less as a Christian-inspired counterweight against the Communist block arising to the east. Thus, in this phase, the concept of Europe developed as a contrast defined on the basis of an atheistic ideological threat. That would remain the case, whether the issue was the protection of coal and steel in

1952, or the keeping of aliens outside the borders by means of the Schengen Agreement of 1985.

To be sure, the European Union has acquired its crucial European institutions with binding powers, but the member states also function within this Europe in contrast to it – states that through the unification process have gained new strength, as Reinhard Jöhler (2000) argues. The nation states provide the conditions within which the sanctuary of national identity and the protection of national culture, heritage and rituals can prosper, reinforcing this biotope of nationality, civic society and civil religion, while disintegrating forces are also at work causing the decay of national identities and a revival of regional ones.

In this connection, revisiting the ideas of the late Freddie Heineken, a major Dutch brewer with an important political network, may be relevant. Heineken was convinced of the positive consequences of this process of the decay of centralism in favour of a *Eurotopia* as he called it. Immediately after the signing of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, many were already afraid of a Europe that was becoming too large and too powerful, despite the fact that, as an antidote for this, a representational Committee of the Regions had been included in the Treaty in order to weaken these tendencies and, at the same time, answer the call for more regional autonomy. Initially, as a hypothetical response to this, Heineken (1992) went public with his plan for a United States of Europe. This involved a union composed of 75 independent states, created on the basis of political, historical, linguistic, cultural and ethnic affinities and sensitivities. Taking cultural differences into account in precisely this way would strengthen Europe as an entity. Although nothing was ever done politically as a consequence of this idealistic proposal, the underlying analysis is not inconsistent with developments in the years that followed – on the contrary.

The proposed decentralisation and federalising of Europe on the basis of smaller geographic units proceeded from the central idea that it would prevent conflicts and promote stability and equality. This assumption was based, on the one hand, on the theory of the British historian C. Northcote Parkinson that smaller national units could be less centralised, more efficient and therefore more stable, and, on the other hand, on the thesis of the Austrian sociologist Leopold Kohr (1957) that 'bigness is a problem'. In effect, both embroider De Rougemont's initial preference for a regionalised, federalist Europe.

As early as the late 1960s, as a result of the European Communities, a process of growing regional autonomy had slowly gotten under way. The converging supra-national and diverging national forces would, it was supposed, bring Europe more to its 'natural state', preserving the various regional identities. Because of regionalist tendencies the nation-state network was breaking down, and within various member states regions were gaining far-reaching autonomy. According to an almost apodictic commentary in the *Economist*, if the logic for splitting up Czechoslovakia could be carried through, then there was all the more reason that the same should be done in Belgium, with its even greater language and economic divisions. Meanwhile, Spain fears the regional autonomy claimed by the Basques and Catalans, while France has to deal with a Corsican struggle for autonomy; similar claims are made by the Scots, Hungarian minorities throughout the Balkans, and so on. The Kosovo scenario of 2008 has only further strengthened the fears about the disintegration of nation-states. After its independence was proclaimed, the editor of the Kosovan newspaper *Java* wrote: 'Now we need to create Kosovars' (quoted in *The Economist*, 23 February 2008: 32) – a call necessitated by the lack of its own distinct national and cultural identity, because despite Kosovo's history, population and borders, that identity is far from evident. But who is going to address this issue? We know from the past that whenever scholars become involved in the quest for identities and heritages, tensions and contestation arise – because perhaps the one thing more contested than the nations and their regions is the cultural heritage itself, and the accompanying identification and authentication processes.

One consequence of this was – if things may be simplified a bit – the rejection of the European Constitution in 2005, followed in 2007 by a compromise in the form of a mini-treaty in which the all too symbolically charged term 'constitution' was tossed overboard; nor was there any mention of a European flag (though one does exist and may be used), nor of a European anthem (though one does exist, and may be sung).

While it has become almost impossible for professionals in our field to offer conclusive answers to the questions involved here, politics expects them to subsume territories and their inhabitants in manageable cultural-ethnic taxonomies. That presents us with a dilemma. A Kosovan exercise could, in any case, be covered by what UNESCO intended with its Convention on Safeguarding Intangible Heritage in 2003 ([www.unesco.org/culture/ich](http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich)). In spite of the qualifications introduced in its text and explanations, this Convention

focused on such problematic classifications. Ratified at a speed never previously seen (in itself a first indication of the political, economic and cultural interests surrounding the Convention), this document established an almost universal heritage language for dealing with world culture, with an UNESCO grammar, however open and free the implementation for each state might seem. This created an awkward situation, all the more so because the phenomenon of heritage is, by and large, hostage to the problematic paradox of the persistent assumption of immutability and tradition, thereby denying the actual continual transmission, change, renewal and transformation of culture.

In the meantime, governments themselves have begun to call upon heritage to compensate for their legitimacy problems, by what Hafstein calls ‘staking claims to culture and claims based on culture’ (Hafstein 2007: 75–76; see also Hafstein 2004). Over the past few years, history and heritage have begun to play a central role. Culture and heritage have even become the pre-eminent instruments for positioning nations or societies today in confrontation with, or to distinguish themselves from, other nations, regions or places. Because of the public’s hesitancy about identifying with Europe, more emphasis is again being placed on national sovereignty and cultural identity, and attempts are made to find solutions from the perspective of the citizen. In the course of this, national identity and heritage have been rediscovered as political instruments, and citizenship ceremonies and canons with key events in national histories have been developed as educational programmes to substantially enhance citizenship (Grever and Stuurman 2007; Margry and Roodenburg 2007; Damsholt 2008a, b). The question is, do they represent a dominant stately narrative or can they be seen as a shared framework of historical interpretations? In practice they also revalue identity and give an idea of the country newcomers are living in, and that it is not an open society, but really a state. In an extension of these developments, politicians have also rediscovered Folk culture, indeed as part of the cultural heritage. Folk culture is assumed to be a binding agent at the local level, or, as a Dutch politician wrote: ‘Folk culture is something shared by all people who dwell here’ – a definition including all the tendencies of reduction, constructedness and essentialism, without any clarity about how everyday culture, popular culture, folklore or folkloristics should be understood in this context (van der Zeijden 2008).

Since an ethnic approach, addressed in an ethnic-specific way, does not work well enough in the population’s practice of cultural participation, politics now is deploying the concept of cultural citizenship. Here heritage, his-

tory and the processes of commemoration and memorialisation play a central role (see, e.g., Hemme et al. 2007). But what is being done with it, and how problematic is its relation to the UNESCO Convention?

The French poet René Char (quoted in Arendt 1968: 3) once wrote: ‘Heritage is our legacy, without a testament.’ That is in itself true, but really there is never a proper testament, just as in the case of a personal legacy: as soon as the deceased breathes their last breath, all the objects have a different meaning, and the squabbling among the heirs begins. What ostensibly once was a shared heritage then proves to have become each person’s individual heritage. Memory is, then, as subjective as it is problematic. The observation of the Canadian scholar Michael Ignatieff is applicable in this connection: how much a land must forget in order to exist, and how much its people must remember to go on! In other words, how much a society must forget in order to get and keep the community together, and how much it must (or may) celebrate, without the community being split again. We do not wish to be reminded of some things any longer, and other memories or monuments can be dangerous because they can again expose sensitive issues – just as the liberating destruction of the Berlin Wall ultimately also led to feelings of nostalgia and new interpretations of the recent past. The greater the need to remember, the more complicated it becomes.

That is certainly true also for the city of (London-)Derry. It is in Northern Ireland that we are confronted with memorialising in its basic meaning. The long politico-religious strife – ‘the Troubles’ – came formally to an end in May 2007, with the swearing in of a power-sharing government. The American scholar Jack Santino has drawn attention to the mural paintings of Northern Ireland, saying that they ‘comment on paramilitary violence by forcing recognition of the havoc it wreaks on ordinary people’ (Santino 2001: 369; cf 2001: 25–74). The Northern Irish government now wants to redecorate these walls for the tourists with more welcoming images. But, notwithstanding the painful moments to which they refer, the people of Northern Ireland – at least if we go by web postings – appear to want to preserve them as a reminder of the past. A central thought behind this is that we can learn from them, and learn to respect one another. That the meaning and perception of the paintings is anything but static, and that the authorities should also realise that, emerges from a recent observation by a resident of Belfast who wrote: ‘I have seen the effect of the murals change over the years. Where they were once provocative and angry, they are now seen in a different light by many.’ (peacelinetours

.g2gm.com/reviews/murals.html) Turning the murals into cultural heritage could ultimately transcend the different significance they have for the various communities and transform them into a new and meaningful component of a shared past (cf. Nic Craith 2002: 173–175).

### **Heritage as religion**

Whereas in the Middle Ages Europe was synonymous with Christianity, today it is, among the Christian regions, perhaps the one which could be called least Christian. Italy's continuing bond with the Mother Church is chiefly socio-cultural – one might say a form of *mammismo* – and less a matter of religion. In a subjective sense, this phenomenon can be seen as a religious crisis that has long held Europe in its grip. The question is whether this is a temporary crisis, and whether it is part of the process of the weakening of the institutional church or secularisation that has been so manifest since the French Revolution. Notwithstanding this decline in the role of ecclesiastical institutions in the public domain, at the same time there is also a re-definition taking place in the relationship with regard to religions such as Christianity and Islam. Europe is seeing a growing appreciation of the significance and value of faith – and in particular Christianity. Thomas Meyer assesses a Christian dominance in the public sphere [*christliche Dominanz der Öffentlichkeit*] that influences the European moral agenda (Meyer 2005; see also Davie 2000, 2002).

First, Europe's reflection and fixation on its own past and on European heritage involves a general reassessment of all that is Christian, both in the heritage and in the religious domain. Second, as a result of the rapid and widespread institutionalisation of Islam throughout the transnational European community, this religion determines more and more both the religious and political debate. The dichotomy between Islam in general and extremist Islam permeates the debate. For example, the attacks in Spain on March 11, 2004, and the murder of the filmmaker Theo Van Gogh in the Netherlands in the same year, were used as examples to underline the contradictions between a supposedly 'enlightened' Christian civilisation and a supposedly 'backward' Islamic civilisation (cf. Asad 1993: 239–268; Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2007; see also Margry and Roodenburg 2007). This issue has undermined political and social stability in different countries and opened the way for the emergence of what Andre Gingrich has called an anti-globalist political concept of neo-nationalism (Gingrich 2006a, 2006b).

The growing social and political role of Islam in the world has strongly enhanced the significance of the *hajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca, which is one of the five sacred obligations of Islam, in strengthening identity in the Islamic community (Abdurrahman 2000; Bianchi 2004; van der Veer 1994). This significance in terms of identity formation is not only manifested on a global scale as in the case of the *hajj*; the symbolism and identity-forming powers of shrines have also increased greatly at the local, regional and national levels. With its public performance, ordinary Islam has also taken the initiative in the space that the churches have abandoned in Europe. *Mawlid an Nabi*, the celebration of the birthday of the Prophet, is one example. For three years now a long cavalcade of hundreds of automobiles has moved through the centre of the city of Amsterdam with honking horns, adorned with flowers and green Islamic flags and Arabic texts and, most importantly, loudspeakers broadcasting praise of the Prophet. Presently it is perhaps one of the most ostentatious open-air manifestations of religion in the modern Netherlands, a country where for centuries the public performance of religion was forbidden. It is not surprising, therefore, that on the street, along the sidelines, the spectators' primary response is surprise, mixed with wariness; hardly anyone knew what the feast was, or was aware of why all this celebration was going on. Unfamiliarity with the occasion, the ostentatious nature of the performance, and not being able to understand the written and spoken Arabic texts led many to make associations with the mediatised formats of a demonstratively militant Islam. This deep misunderstanding makes it clear just how thoroughly the performative framework of phenomena defines their perception in contemporary culture.

Such phenomena contribute to the perception of many citizens that Islam is a threat to Europe and its Christianity, and stokes an overheated rhetoric, as expressed for example by the Dutch right-wing politician Pim Fortuyn (Margry 2003; Rydgren and van Holsteyn 2005; cf. Schimmel 2008). Images of Europe as imperilled by floods of Muslim immigrants and the demise of European Christianity have been painted by religious historian Philip Jenkins as politically convenient myths. It is true that organised Christianity is relatively weaker in Europe than outside Europe, but European Christendom is also receiving a new impetus precisely from an influx of migrants from 'southern' Christianity (for instance from Asia, Africa and South America), which attracts much less attention than the Muslim influx (Jenkins 2006, 2007; Jansen and Stoffels 2008). Their religious input will certainly bring

about a further transformation and reappraisal of Christianity in a rapidly changing Europe.

Although the established churches have never related well to the spirit of the Enlightenment, humanism, secularism and the deeply-felt individual autonomy in the European democracies, signs can nonetheless be seen that both the monotheistic religions, Christianity and Islam, are culturally adapting, although, compared with the current prevailing high speed of events in the world, much too slowly for many (Pratt 2005; Timmerman and Segaert 2005). Here the ethnological research perspective on everyday life proves fruitful in counterbalancing the stereotyped positions often heard in the realms of politics and the media, and the one-sided focus on the processes of globalisation and on modernity, by giving insight into what is happening at the grass-roots level.

Probably the greatest enemies of European Islam are the political-fundamentalist and terror-related movements and the socio-religious input from non-European Islamic cultural communities (Al-Azmeh 2007; Samad 2007). Christianity, for its part, has to deal with the problems of a lack of appeal, clergy and callings, and a moral authority which has been eroded on many fronts. Therefore, in regard to the manifold individual religious forms, it is hard to say what the role of the institutionalised and hierarchic churches, still declining in confidence, will be in the future (Davie 2002).

This background is reason to examine more closely two key contemporary themes – heritage and religion – in relation to one another. Cultural heritage has by now become a political keyword to be employed at all administrative levels in European society, with the background – and one might also say transcendent – aim of making identification possible, realising cohesion, and thereby warding off or exorcising problems (Shore 2000; Kuutma 2007; Welz 2007). In other words, heritage as political gospel – what I would call the transcendence of heritage – or heritage as ‘religion’. But can such a connection be made between the two concepts? After all, one of the great questions in Western modernity is how rationalism and humanism are to be reconciled with the irrational-existental, human need for mysticism, religion and rituality. Europeans are at a complete loss as to what to do with this conflict, and have therefore created over the past decades a range of alternative and neo-traditional, subjectified and individualised forms of spirituality, which have acquired their own place in society (e.g., Fuller 2001; Partridge 2003; Heelas and Woodhead 2005).

In addition, European society has a growing need for a new or recalibrated paradigm of general norms and values and a religious framework, a demand for a *Richtbild* that fits with our modern morality and identity, but is usable in a life that transcends the everyday office work and the embrace of digitocracy. If a major return to the hierarchic, dogmatic churches is not an obvious possibility as a source for this, and if the social and political contours of the European Union offer insufficient solace, what are the values with which Europeans can then identify? The sense of cultural, social and religious loss and a lack of cohesion and personal identification have produced widely shared feelings of displacement in society and increased existential uncertainties, while the demand for heritage is well-nigh insatiable. Could there be an intrinsic connection between culture, heritage and religiosity?

Heritage and the canonisation of history have thus achieved a new, high status, and are creating new regimes of ‘truths’, from the top down, that are considered essential for society, and for similar reasons could be crucial for life itself. From this perspective, it is indisputable that heritage be employed as an ostensibly secular portmanteau category, which can in a more neutral form simultaneously remould religion and give it a more open shape. As an example, some years ago a version of All Souls, a characteristically European Catholic feast, was introduced in neutral cemeteries in Protestant Northern Europe. It began as an artists’ project that organised Remembrance Day performances based on Christian rituality and Christian heritage. In combination with commercial care and funeral parlours, this created new ranges of observances for the surviving relatives. It is particularly interesting that research reveals that three-quarters of the participants in these observances are not members of any church community, but feel the need to commemorate their loved ones in a syncretistic manner of this sort. They also do not reject religious or spiritual reflections (Quartier et al. 2008; van der Lee 2008). For me, this is a clear example of the way in which people use heritage as a sort of guideline that can help them navigate through personal crises and spiritual disorientation, on the basis of a personal ‘chain of memory and tradition’, to relate this to the concept of the French sociologist Danièle Hervieu-Léger (2000: 171–177). Heritage and ritual then become instruments for maintaining connections with others in a constructed and imagined spiritual community, which seeks its inspiration in the past and which helps individuals to deal with their existential insecurities and doubts.

### Pilgrimage Routes

A second example of the direct connection between heritage creation and religious renewal emerges around European pilgrimage routes. The beginning of a renewed interest in pilgrimage trails – in particular the route to Santiago de Compostela – can be situated in the 1960s, and arose at first from the perspective of pilgrimage in relation to art history, with a focus on Romanesque and Gothic churches and art along the medieval routes. This interest arose first in France, where a major part of the old trails were situated. Although Romain Roussel published *Les pèlerinages à travers les siècles* in 1954, it was Raymond Oursel who provoked a broad interest in the cultural heritage of Santiago in France with his book *Les pèlerins du moyen âge* (1963), published in a series under the unintentionally appropriate title *Resurrection du Passé*. In the years that followed, this focus was slowly transformed into what today can be called the ‘art of pilgrimage’. That characterisation, in analogy to Robert Pirsig’s famed 1974 philosophical novel *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, may be taken to refer to the central significance of pilgrimage and foot routes in new forms of religiosity. After all, Pirsig also wanted to demonstrate that rationality and ‘Zen-like irrationality’ can coexist well, and that the combination of rationality and mysticism can raise life to a higher level of quality. It is this unsuspected combination of rationality, spirituality and mysticism that can be found in contemporary foot pilgrimages in general. Apart from the centuries-old metaphor that every human life here in this world is a pilgrimage, in individualised modernity these pilgrimages are seen as an inquiry and a quest of the self for values and meanings in life, as well as for the understanding of life and its hereafter (e.g., Cousineau 1998; Rupp 2005; Webb-Mitchell 2007).

Not long before the Camino to Santiago was declared a symbol of European unity and a ‘European Cultural Itinerary’ by the Council of Europe in 1987, a book entitled *The Pilgrimage*, by the internationally bestselling Brazilian author Paulo Coelho appeared, in which he, like a new Pirsig, describes how through his walking he achieved self-awareness and spiritual awakening, a decisive moment in the long spiritual quest that had begun in Coelho’s hippie years.

Since that time a whole new genre of travel books and diaries written by Santiago pilgrims has arisen, which serves as source material yielding ample evidence for this quest. According to one of these travellers, this is ‘how to

travel outward to the edges of the world while simultaneously journeying to the depths of your soul' (Cousineau 1998: backcover). If in Pirsig's book motorcycle maintenance is the basic earthly activity, in pilgrimage the goal is not to be found anymore in the destination and its sacrality, but in the activity of *making* the pilgrimage, the actual walking itself. Walking, and certainly long distance treks, can be boring and toilsome, but it is the art to perform this basic activity in the proper, sublime way, so that as a combined physical-sensory activity, when connected with the human capacity for reflection, it will create sufficient satisfaction and sense that deeper thoughts or spiritual experiences will flow from it (Cousineau 1998; George 2006). Moreover, recent fieldwork by Albers indicates that the element of movement in the pilgrim's journey can release forces that can be perceived by pilgrims as sacral (Albers 2007: 445–450). Apart from the fact that hiking can also actually be physically healing – as it happens, walking releases hormonal dopamines that help your body and yourself to feel better – it seems that walking also in fact can deepen one spiritually and emotionally (Albers 2007: 418–445; Peelen and Jansen 2007: 79–86). A female pilgrim wrote of her journey: 'The essence is that you are in search of the sense and absurdity in life. I have learned to put aside my tendency toward rational logic. There is more between heaven and earth' (quoted on [www.katholieknederland.nl/soeterbeeck/archief/2007/detail\\_objectID611692.html](http://www.katholieknederland.nl/soeterbeeck/archief/2007/detail_objectID611692.html)). There are many such statements.

The historical, cultural and heritage element introduces a new dimension, one that is connected with questions about sources and meaning. Still another pilgrim said of this: 'On my journey westward along the Camino, I felt I was traveling backward in time to a place that began the experiences that made me and the human race what we have become today' (Maclaine 2000: 10). This can be interpreted as 'transcendence of heritage'.

Walking the Camino to Santiago today, one reaches at the same time back to the wanderings of the early missionaries, who by their *peregrinatio* gave shape to the spiritual 'grand tour' of the early Middle Ages (Kötting 1950; Bitton-Ashkelony 2005). It was with their wanderings that Christian thought was broadly dynamised for the first time and spread across Europe as culture and religion. Today that is happening anew; via the 'chain of memory and tradition', heritage and Christian history are again being mobilised, and new forms of religiosity created. The network of pilgrim ways thus becomes a supranational instrument which creates connections with others in a newly constructed and heritage-based imagined spiritual community. This commu-

nity seeks inspiration from the past in creating new forms of religiosity which help individuals cope with their insecurities and doubts, but also re-confirms Christian roots and values in modern society.

The modern pilgrimage to Santiago also led to a remarkable innovation in the phenomenon of pilgrimage. For centuries the rationale for Christian pilgrimage had lain in the sacrality of the destination: pilgrimage sites shaped the pilgrimage (Eade and Sallnow 1991: 6–9, Dubisch and Winkelmann 2005: xviii). Whereas before the mid-twentieth century the cathedral of Santiago was the pilgrimage destination in this classical sense, it is now largely the other way around: the pilgrimage in the sense of a spiritual journey has become the rationale (Margry 2008a: 23–28). Santiago has been discovered and reinvented by spiritual seekers and lovers of cultural history and tranquillity. For many walkers the journey along the *camino*, the ‘transit pilgrimage’ as I would call it, has become an individual rite of passage, or ‘a pilgrimage to one’s self’, as Eberhart (2006: 160) once called it. Trekking the pilgrim trails has become an inward-orientated activity for questioning oneself or giving meaning to oneself in relation to the world. For many walkers the shrine in the final destination Compostela is now so far removed from their new experiential worlds, that when they arrive there they are disillusioned. This phenomenon is clearly reflected in the notes in pilgrim’s books, a new genre of reflective journal which has arisen as a result of these changes. Most pilgrims keep these journals, and if possible have them published later (e.g., Frey 1998; Post et al. 1998: 221–242; cf. Coleman and Elsner 2003). One of the best-known diaries is the book *The Camino: A Journey of the Spirit* by Shirley Maclaine (2000).

### **Pilgrimage Politics**

Without the extensive and widespread media coverage of this ancient pilgrimage, the cultural politics of Spain and the European Union, the transition from a destination-oriented pilgrimage to seeing the journey as a pilgrimage in itself would not have been so universal. It was due to this process that ‘transit’ pilgrimage made its appearance in the West. Transit pilgrimage does not really have a beginning or an end, or at any rate they are not relevant. Being detached from daily life, moving, walking, the accessibility and freedom of the ritual, time for reflection, being in nature, and tranquillity are all elements which have contributed to its success.

Whatever the case, this transnational network of pilgrim's tracks leading to Santiago, with their art, culture, antiquity and their contemporary revitalisation, brought the *camino* also to the attention of supranational organisations. Because the dynamics of the network enhanced European Christian culture, even as it had in the Middle Ages, the European Union recognised the significance of the pilgrimage ways very early on. The potential of such a value-creating network, which moreover was transnational in character, dovetailed perfectly with European political ambitions (Schrire 2006). In 1987, less than a year after Spain had become a member of the EU and – important for pilgrims – open borders had come into effect, this led to the Council of Europe proclaiming the *camino* to Santiago de Compostela the first European Cultural Itinerary. The conclusion of the founding declaration of the 'Programme of Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe' read: 'May the faith which has inspired pilgrims throughout history, uniting them in a common aspiration and transcending national differences and interests, inspire us today, and young people in particular, to travel along these routes in order to build a society founded on tolerance, respect for others, freedom and solidarity' – a statement that in a Christian way wants to connect Europe's past with its future. The high status of the *camino* was even upgraded in 1993 through its inclusion on the UNESCO World Heritage list. With that listing it was established that the road had 'outstanding universal value' as a logistic system – thus not because of the static historic material culture along the route, but chiefly because of the fundamental role of the route in 'encouraging cultural exchanges between the Iberian peninsula and *the rest of Europe* during the Middle Ages' – and, I would add, also after the Middle Ages. Or, as the UNESCO site has it: 'it remains a testimony to the power of the Christian faith among people of all social classes and from all over Europe'. This is the appreciation of intangible heritage in its performative dimensions. But every bit as much, the recognition is a canonisation of the rediscovered Christian pilgrimage as an instrument of trans-European cohesive force. One consequence of this was that the route, as a mixture of cultural heritage and a natural area with significant interactions between people and the natural environment, was also subsequently recognised as a major 'cultural landscape'. Quantitatively, this resonates in the yearly growing numbers of pilgrims, from 2,905 in 1987 to 114,026 in 2007; and this only represents the officially counted pilgrims.<sup>2</sup> When these numbers are related to the pilgrim's motives, it appears that the spiritual incentive is increasing while the cultural incen-

tive seems to be going down. Of the pilgrims questioned in 1999, seventy-five percent had (or also had) a cultural motivation; in 2002 this was thirty-four percent. In 2002, sixty-six percent had only a religious motivation; the figure for 1999 is not clear due to different phrasing and multiple answering possibilities (Degen 2001: 50; Döring 2003/4: 61).

The fascination of spiritual seekers remains deep, as does the engagement of the organisations behind it, at such a level that in addition to the Spanish-French *camino* similar routes were sought, found and, moreover, created *ex nihilo* all over Europe (e.g., Döring 2003/4: 54). In relation to Connorton's (1989: 39–40) view it is clear that the images of the past pilgrimage and the recollected knowledge about it are conveyed and sustained by a modern ritual performance of the new pilgrims. The construction of a mythical network of trans-European pilgrim ways as part of the Camino to Santiago reflects then how Europe is imagined as a thoroughly Christian subcontinent, and how Christian heritage is being reinvented. The pilgrimage itineraries form one of the implicit answers to Europe's confusion about religion and spirituality in general, and symbolically and practically reposition Christianity as a unifying historical factor. An interesting example of this development is the renaming of one part of the German *camino* as an ecumenical pilgrims' way [*einer Beziehungslinie: zwischen Ost und West, zwischen jung und alt, zwischen Christen und Nichtchristen*] ([www.oekumenischer-pilgerweg.de/](http://www.oekumenischer-pilgerweg.de/)).

Today, the wide interest in pilgrimage routes and the decisive role attributed to the many revitalised and new pilgrimage trails to Santiago, the *Via Francigena* to Rome, Saint Michaels Way, the 'Spiritual Path' in Austria and the 'European Path of Contemplation', created for religious denominations, followers of esoteric philosophies and even agnostics (Eberhart 2006: 157–159) and later also to places like Glastonbury and many others, has extended beyond the domains of cultural heritage and the open religious domain. Now the Catholic Church itself has also begun to focus more strongly on the journey than on the cult object (*Pastorale* 1996: 44–57; *Il Pellegrinaggio* 1998: 39–58). Whereas formerly the walking journey was a necessary evil, nowadays it is seen as 'tradition' or as pilgrimage heritage, and more and more often a pilgrimage is only seen as 'real' pilgrimage if it is completed on foot. While this is not the invention of a tradition, it is a reinvention of the meaning of a tradition. Not only does the pilgrimage performed in this way create cohesion and reinvigorate European Christianity (Jenkins 2007: 26–54), it also gives a visual and performative Christian answer to the increasing presence of Islam

in Europe's public domain. This development involves not only pilgrimages, but also the increasing popularity of the procession ritual.

In order to emphasise the importance of pilgrimages made by foot and the visitation of holy sites, in 2004, under the collective auspices of the bishops' conferences in Europe, the Catholic Church organised an international pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela to mark the expansion of the EU with ten new member states. Pope John Paul II used this occasion to stress once again how the 'soul of Europe rests on Christian values'. Moreover, according to him, Christianisation had led to the unification of Europe which then, in 2004, was sealed on the economic and political level in the context of the EU. John Paul II was deeply sensitive that in the post 9/11 era a moral, religious and cultural uncertainty had crept into Europe. Even countries where secularism has to a certain extent become the norm, voices were beginning to be heard arguing that religion should again be allowed to play a larger role in politics and society. The argument is that humankind continues to have a need for religion, and that it still appears to be a stabilising and civilising factor, and in Europe also a moral factor regaining influence in the public sphere and politics (Meyer 2005). Pilgrimage in its elementary form, on foot, in reflection and silence, to the sacred sites that anchor Christianity geographically and spiritually, connects with the modern needs of the European citizen, offers space for ecumenical engagement and new forms of religiosity, and ultimately has salutary effects (Albers 2007: 451–474).

Meanwhile, the European Union has set out a policy with regard to intercultural exchange and dialogue. With a programme of cultural politics with the same title and an appeal to civil society, it is seeking to minimise differences within the EU and encourage European identity and citizenship. The year 2008 has therefore been proclaimed the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue (<http://ec.europa.eu/culture/eac/dialogue/year2008>), with, as the inspired prose of the EU functionaries put it, 'the fundamental ambition underlying the construction of Europe, namely to bring together the peoples of Europe . . . while respecting their national and regional diversity and also highlighting their common cultural heritage'. One of the projects contributing to this is once again a path, UNESCO's Route of *al Andalus*, again in Spain, which is constructed on the basis of Judeo-Christian and Islamic heritage and traditions in order to identify 'shared values' and, in so doing, to encourage the convergence of cultures. Author Paulo Coelho was then appointed Multicultural Ambassador, and assigned the function of be-

ing the ‘special UNESCO counsellor for intercultural dialogue and spiritual convergences’ ([www.interculturaldialogue2008.eu/430.0.html](http://www.interculturaldialogue2008.eu/430.0.html)), a position that he owes primarily to the millions of copies sold of his books on Santiago and *The Alchemist*, with which he in practice also became an active producer of mysticism and spirituality. Popular literary culture proves to be actively tied in with multiculturalism and other new forms of religiosity.

Despite such a policy, at the same time the EU appears to have no desire to neglect the Christian element within the Union. When in 2004 it appeared that the preamble of the draft constitution mentioned the Greco-Roman roots, Humanism and the Enlightenment, but not Christianity, the then Chairman of the European Commission, Romano Prodi, stated that the history of Europe and that of Christianity are so inseparably linked with one another that Christianity must also appear in the new constitution. The former German chancellor Helmut Kohl (2006: 15) shares this opinion, continuing to insist that Europa is unthinkable without its Christian identification, and that Christian culture is the pre-eminent binding agent for Europe. This led, in considerably more neutral terms, to the following description in the reform treaty: Europe is ‘drawing inspiration from the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance’ (<http://consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/cg00014.en07.pdf>). Christianity does not appear there in so many words, but the text expressly takes into account the rise and growth of a European multi-faith society.

All of this is in accord with what Cris Shore (2000) says in his book on the cultural politics of European integration. With regard to the creation of a European identity, he argues that the European construction is the last and greatest of the Enlightenment grand narratives. The paradox in the practice is, however, that while the route to Compostela was being employed from the top down and being turned into a European trademark, at the same time a new narrative was being created that caught the popular imagination, and an informal bottom-up Europeanisation was taking place, which transcends the nation-state and nationalism (Shore 2000: 231). The Camino appears then to be a portmanteau construct in which contemporary European-wide needs for new forms of religiosity and spirituality can be generated and provided with content.

### **Civil Religion in Europe**

Although originally derived from Rousseau’s work *Du contrat social* (1762), since 1967, when Robert Bellah developed his model of a transcendent uni-

versal American civil religion as a general belief system within American society, the concept of civil religion has largely been perceived as an American topic. Bellah's theory has been debated and worked over, but a consensus remains about the existence of a particular form of civil religion (Bellah and Hammond 1980; Gehrig 1981). I would like to continue in that line by altering the concept in two ways: by making it more universal, detached from the American situation, and by stretching the concept into a transnational, and more specifically a European Union domain. Coleman made a rather convincing effort towards a conceptual synthetic definition. Based on that definition, and leaving out the 'American' element, an operational definition could be as follows: 'the religious symbol system . . . which relates the citizen's role and society's place in space, time and history to the conditions of ultimate existence and meaning' (Coleman 1970: 69). Today Bellah's concept has also taken root outside America, and it appears that forms of civil religion can be discerned in other countries too. I would like to apply this definition to two examples, one in The Netherlands and one in the European Union.

In the last decade the collective public manifestation that in Dutch is termed a *stille tocht*, or silent march, has become a general and widely accepted ritual in the Netherlands after traumatic deaths and in crisis situations. The ritual, which takes place precisely in times of social turbulence, has acquired a place as a prototype in national observance or memorialisation. The organisation of the modern silent march is characterised by a high degree of active involvement by citizens themselves. As a 'democratic' phenomenon it is accessible; the local ritual is nationally mediated, and the theme is widely recognisable and understandable. As Bellah (1974: 270) affirmed, 'every community is based on a sense of the sacred and requires a context of higher meaning'; the silent marches connect sensitive questions around life and death and the norms and values of Dutch society with questions of moral and religious significance. Rooted in Dutch history, through time the silent march or procession has proven itself as a qualitatively strong, expressive and effective ritual of wide appeal. At moments of collective trauma and emotional crisis it appears that this political and memorial ritual, with a national base and the power to unite people, can generate a meaningful answer to events and feelings of unease that bring the society and individual citizens into existential turmoil. Because of its generally accepted significance and the transcendent notions which accompany it, in the secularised Dutch society silent marches can be considered as an expression of civil religion; civil reli-

gion at a national level (Bellah) and not in the institutionalised way as Hammond indicated (Bellah and Hammond 1980: xiv, 41–42). The marches can be characterised as part of the transcendent, universal religion of the nation which, from social-cultural and political contexts, assumes its shape in an implicit manner over and against Christian religion, which has been thoroughly relegated to the private sphere. This form of civil religion – performed locally and mediated nationally – embodies a consensus with regard to the wish and need for social cohesion, healing and recalibrated societal values that can in a certain transcendent way manifest itself in ‘an overarching sense of unity’. Silent marches in the Netherlands prove to be a clear example of a ritual that generates civil religion (Margry 2008b: 27–30; cf. for England and Italy: Parsons 2002).

While the Dutch example demonstrates that civil religion can be manifest in this way on a national level, my next step is to ask if civil religion can also be discerned on a European level. Not only the heritage discourse of the *camino* is being enacted ‘from below’ as a follow-up to the EU’s heritage politics, as a search for a common ideal in the *camino* tradition and heritage romanticism, as Schrire (2006: 73–84) argued, but so is the idea of Christian history and values. These aspects are expressed by an imagined community which has – as pilgrims or in any another respect – a relation to one of the many pilgrims’ trails. They form a vehicle for the need for new forms of rituality, spirituality and religiosity in modern society. As argued above, this has caused a crucial change to the pilgrimage, as the journey has also become an end in itself and the pilgrims’ ways network more and more ‘de-catholicised’, ecumenical, and indeed an open spiritual domain. For many of those walking these routes, being in transit is a performative journey of purification in which elements such as self-reflection, the experience of silence as an expression of the sacred, and a form given to Christian values are central. The mediatization of, and the cultural politics surrounding the Camino have given the pilgrimage a meaning beyond itself, which offers a moral and spiritual frame of reference for both European society as a whole, as it comes under increasing pressure, and for its citizens individually. This pilgrims’ praxis is a symbol system within which, in the light of history and Christian heritage, the European citizen in modern European society can find support, both with existential problems and in the search for the meaning of life. For Europe as a whole this practice generates a stage for open spirituality and revitalises (Christian) values and meanings.

### **In Memory of the Self**

Whether it is on pilgrimage or during a silent march, memorialising refers to current individual and collective practices and politics which have as their purpose the presentation and disseminating of persons, objects, events or ideas in society in order to generate values, meanings and identities. The existential values that are created on an individual or group level in society through memorialisation also play a role in reducing, magnifying, renorming or revaluing cultural differences. Therefore, it is of major importance to determine which practices influence the relation between the culture of memorialisation, the creation of values, and cultural changes.

The wave of memorialising that is now spreading across the Western world, which Erika Doss somewhat cynically terms ‘Memorial Mania’ (Doss 2008: 7), is a unique phenomenon in its current magnitude. It involves not only the ‘ordinary’ commemorative monuments that are authorised by governments and civil society, but also many informal, individualised monuments, such as the roadside monuments and improvised and temporary memorials and rituals after disasters or for famous deceased individuals (Post et al. 2003; Santino 2006; Clark 2007; Margry and Sánchez-Carretero 2007). This practice is directly connected with the presentistic and much broader memorialising through which individuals themselves seek to make their mark and erect their own monument, not only post, but also pre-mortem. In the mediatised society, every individual wants to count, and not have his or her existence pass unnoticed. As may be seen from the proliferation of websites, wikis, blogs, Facebook pages and postings on YouTube, this kind of memorialisation is emphatically present today, particularly in its digital form. Everyone strives for his or her minutes of fame on TV, and if that is too long coming, then, as YouTube puts it in its logo, ‘broadcast yourself’. Like the popularity of the Santiago pilgrimage, this phenomenon basically refers also to an existential anxiety regarding meaninglessness and mortality. In this case oblivion is also at stake – being noticed and self-presentation is relevant for the now, and not after death.

In the widest sense, these forms of memorialising can also be conceived as ways of assigning meaning, or even as religiosity. In any case, people seek to legitimise their existence and find meaning in it, whether they are walking on a Spanish donkey trail or surfing on the digital highway. However superficial this sometimes may appear, the creation of a digital or virtual personality

with the aid of media can construct an apparently timeless monument for someone, giving them the significance they seek, even if it is only as a web photo with accompanying data and stats, to make contact with others in Europe, Asia, or wherever.

Heritage and memorials are as appreciated as they are contested, especially in relation to religion. Partly as a consequence of the latter, holy places have even become involved in the strategies of military conflicts; the deliberate destruction of pilgrimage sites and shrines has evolved into an effective tactic for the purpose of harming national or religious identities, or as a rationale for provoking conflicts, as in the case of the Sikh's Golden Temple at Amritsar, India, in 1984 or the Shiite's Golden Mosque at Samarra, Iraq, in 2006 and 2007. The iconoclasm of the Buddha statues of Bamiyan in 2001 was another striking example. But on a smaller scale, we can turn again to Santiago de Compostela, where an active memorialisation of St James the Apostle takes place in the cathedral. St James derives his status in part from the mythological designation as *matamoros* par excellence, responsible for the expulsion and extermination of the Muslims in Spain, and thus the liberator of Christian Europe. Unexpectedly, in 2004 his effigy and myth again became very timely. The train bombings of March 11 in Madrid raked up that past again. The eighteenth-century sculptural group of St James on horseback crushing three Moors goes back to the legendary battle of Clavijo in 844, when an outnumbered Christian army called on St James to help recover Spain from Islam. However, out of fear of angry reactions from Muslims, the church council decided to remove the sculptural group and reinstall it in a neutral, museal setting. The Muslim community had not yet said that this was a good step towards peace and reconciliation, when many Spaniards became indignant at what they saw as an extreme form of political correctness (Shrire 2006: 84). Although reclaimed as cultural heritage, this St James still turned into a performative political monument, if only because of the new discourse, as well as the placement of flowers and messages around it (Wilkinson 2004). This is not a lone example; monuments and memorials which apparently represent collective identity turn into major contested foci any time there is trauma, danger and social unrest. But this is an example of a local issue in the debate, which garnered a lot of media attention in the 'war on terror' era. It was felt as a threat to the communal heritage and tradition. Actually the issue did not affect the *camino* and the pilgrims, as the debate did not impinge on its overarching spiritual power.

The radical changes taking place in modern Europe are altering our existing ideas and conceptions about the continent. The politically guided re-discovery of Europe's past has contributed to the creation of a 'Religion of Heritage', not only by raising up a political altar for cultural heritage, but also through the revitalisation, instrumentalisation and transformation of Christian heritage, in order to try to memorialise and affirm a collective European identity based on its Christian past. In the context of this process, the network of European pilgrims' ways appears to have been an especially successful performative form of heritage creation, which has both dynamised Christian roots as a trans-European form of civil religion that has taken shape, capitalising on the new religious and spiritual demands created by secularisation, as well as responding to the demand for shared – and Christian inspired – European values and meanings in times of uncertainty and crisis.

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**Peter Jan Margry** holds an MA in history (University of Amsterdam 1983) and a PhD from the University of Tilburg (2000); he works as senior fellow at the Department of Ethnology of the Meertens Institute in Amsterdam, one of the research centres of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences.

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### Notes

1. This is a revised version of the opening keynote lecture at the 9th SIEF Congress, delivered at the University of Ulster on 16 June 2008.
2. Numbers given by the Oficina de Acogida al Peregrino in Santiago. During Santiago's Holy Years peak numbers were counted: 154,613 in 1999 and 179,944 in 2004.

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