

# Desire and Seduction: Multiculturalism and festivals<sup>1</sup>

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## **Abstract**

This article addresses the question how ethnic identities are framed at festivals and which role consumption and commoditization play in this process. It looks at three kinds of festivals, multicultural, ethnic and neighbourhood festivals, and is based on observations at several festivals as well as interviews with organizers. The festivals are regarded as spaces of consumption. Not only is food and drink often a central part of such festivals, also the staged performances and the ethnic identities presented at the festivals should be considered consumables. It appears that ethnicity is framed in ways which are very particular, and which are seductive to the visitors of such festivals. Ethnic identities are highlighted with recognizable symbols, and less attractive aspects of culture are not included. Furthermore, through the consumption of ethnicity, visitors can even be said to enable this performance. Thus, the role of visitors and consumers at the festivals cannot be neglected in the performance of ethnicity. However, looking at the performance of ethnic identities through the lens of consumption acknowledges an active role for those who bring their ethnicity to the marketplace. Ethnic identities made tangible in objects and staged performances become objects of desire, but the people who identify with a certain ethnic identity also actively seduce the visitors.

## **Introduction**

At the 2004 Amsterdam Roots Festival in the Oosterpark I was witness to an interesting social interaction. Whilst sitting on the grass and enjoying an Indian pastry with some friends four men were approaching and passing us nearby. They wore simple pants and T-shirts, but incongruously they had white chalk on their faces. They passed by, but were halted by a young woman in a long skirt, her hairstyle long and loose. With enormous enthusiasm she ran towards them, so as, it seemed to me, to express her appreciation for their presence and their 'being' as such. Just as my friend, who – unlike me – had been to Australia, she seemed to

have recognized them as aboriginals. Within a minute a photographer also approached the men. He asked them to pose for him one by one, and took his time.

How might we understand this scene? Due to the woman's and the photographer's reactions, the men became a spectacle. And to me and my friends, subsequently all six together, the woman and the photographer as well as the men with their chalked faces, also became a performance. In this we as onlookers were not just passive. To put it more strongly, without our presence there would have been no performance; Because the key is in the combination, the interaction, and the changing roles of audience and performers that creates a performance (see e.g. Fischer-Lichte 2005, 23).

In the instance above, but also in the present article as a whole, my own role is unmistakable. Or rather, my roles are. Even before I decided to study multicultural festivals, I frequently attended them. In Amsterdam, where I live, and especially in the summer in the Oosterpark five hundred metres from my home, such festivals are fairly frequent.

The decision to do fieldwork at multicultural festivals added a role to my previous one as a visitor, and this also changed the latter. Thus all by myself, one very rainy day I went to Rotterdam to attend the Dunya Festival – something I would not have done had there been no research interest. But the other way round, my visitor's role also influenced my researcher's role. After all, my experiences in that role were the reason for my analysis.

For visitors, the festivals offer many sociocultural frameworks to guide my experiences and observations. Thus the multicultural festival is a genre that gives rise to expectations about all festivals in that genre. But of course such frameworks also cohere more broadly with the way in which in Dutch society ethnicity is defined, and with the mounting debates on multiculturalism and integration. In my role as researcher I have tried to describe exactly which frameworks play a part at the festivals, and which aspects of the festivals' design are central to the transfer of these frames.

So as to arrive at a definition of multicultural festivals, one should first define the festival. Festivals always have a theme, for those discussed here for instance its 'multiculti' or world music. Besides, at the festival there always is a mixture of insiders and outsiders. Aside from the organizers, many visitors merely come to experience the festival. In addition, a wide range of performances is staged. Some are part of the official programme, others – such as the one described in the opening paragraph – are not. All these different performances, in which the audience as well as the performers have their own roles, intertwine, and together these form the festival. Looking at the festival from a performative perspective the spectator or consumer can acquire an active role, side to side with the performer or presenter; roles which are not fixed, however. The festival thus defined, can still take all kinds of forms. Also events not presented as festivals; carnivals for instance, such as the Summer Carnival, or markets such as the Pasar Malam,

can share the characteristics mentioned. Of course this does not mean that all markets and carnivals are festivals.

The question central to the present article is how at the festival ethnic diversity is framed and which role consumption and commoditization play in this process. This is done from a performative perspective, in which the roles of spectators as well as 'performers' are taken seriously, so that a performance is not reduced merely to the spectacle or to what is shown. Consumption too, is considered in terms of this performance. In addition, a performative perspective implies attention paid to the physical experience of both players and audience.

### **Multiculturalism, multiculti and multiculturalization**

Quite often Holland is called a 'multicultural society'. This designation describes an actual situation, i.e. one in which the territory is inhabited not just by people with a Dutch cultural background, but also by others. Multiculturalism is an ideology pertaining to this society. It deems cultural diversity desirable and positive. The various ethnic groups are encouraged to maintain their 'own' culture and propagate it. According to this ideology's adherents, to do so contributes not merely to one's own well-being, but also to a colourful society as a whole (see Young 1999, 100; Van Leeuwen 2003, 245-267). Multiculturalism regards culture as plural. That means it assumes there are different more or less clear-cut and homogeneous cultures. Meanwhile, in scientific debate this perspective has been severely criticized (see for instance Fox and King 2002, 1; Sewell 1999, 52-53). Nowadays culture is sometimes seen as a repertoire to draw from and to use in substantializing identities, ethnic ones for instance (Swidler 1984, 273), a perspective popular in cultural studies, but whose phrasing sometimes tends toward an image suggesting too much freedom of choice and flexibility (Kuper 1999, 241-242). Due to multiculturalism's emphasis on the symbolic expressions of cultural individuality, it is akin to this 'culture as repertoire' approach. But in multiculturalism there is a conspicuous lack of freedom of choice, because it constantly draws on the same recognizable canon.

It is hard to gain insight into the place of multiculturalism in Dutch society. Years ago, columnists and publicists in leading newspapers declared multiculturalism dead, particularly in the wake of Scheffer's article on 'the multicultural drama' (2000). This 'cuddly ideology' was claimed to be of no help to aliens (see also Wikan 2002 for a comparable thesis in Norway). According to these opinion leaders it would be far better to communicate prevailing norms and values from a solid Dutch identity. When labelling the current climate, various authors now speak of anti-multiculturalism. This trend argues for the idea that there are shared values that should unite society, but resist multiculturalism's cultural relativism and essentialism (Eller 1997, 250-251). In the Dutch debate, even the descriptive term 'multicultural society' has become discredited. Though the terms in

the discourse have changed, daily practice shows that in all sorts of places multiculturalism is propagated and consumed. Hence to declare it dead was perhaps premature.

Multiculturalism cannot be seen as separate from consumption. It is linked to numerous events, projects, shops and objects. Somewhat ironically, this varied group of products is called 'multiculti'. Thus for instance the present article reviews the multiculti festivals Roots, Dunya and Mundial. These multiculti products are closely related to multiculturalism, but multiculti and multiculturalism cannot be reduced to one another. The latter is an ideology, whereas multiculti is used for a group of products.

In addition to those two terms, the present article also discusses the multiculturalization of festivals. By this is meant that, for example, ethnic festivals come to connect with the symbols, representations and ideals of multiculturalism, and may themselves finally become a new symbol of it. Multiculturalization may imply both the influence of multiculti as a lifestyle and multiculturalism as an ideology.<sup>2</sup> Subsequently the principles of the market play a substantial part in the unequivocal form in which ethnicity is framed at these festivals. As the Comaroffs formulate it: 'Those who seek to brand their otherness, to profit from what makes them different, find themselves having to do so in the universally recognizable terms in which difference is represented, merchandised, rendered negotiable by means of the abstract instruments of the market: money, the commodity, commensuration, the calculus of supply and demand, price, branding. And advertising.' (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009, 24)

It is precisely the existence of a market for this ethnic singularity that offers the possibility of maintaining that singularity. Though the form and perhaps also the content are adapted to the consumers' wishes, the identity itself, or the feeling of ethnic solidarity, remain intact exactly due to this possibility to display or perform ethnicity to others. Hence the commoditization is not just a process of expropriation by market parties, but frequently it is also a process by which people themselves make money with their ethnic singularity and experience it.

## **Consumption at multicultural festivals**

There are different types of multicultural festivals, or festivals which in their themes cohere with multiculturalism or the multicultural society. First of all, there are the multiculti festivals already mentioned. Then there are those with a very different origin, and in some cases these adopt form elements of the multiculti festival or of the ideology of multiculturalism. This occurs in some ethnic and neighbourhood festivals. All these types are currently common in Holland, though historically specific. The present article does not offer a history of these festivals, but clearly this type of festival, perhaps the 'festival' as form itself, coheres with prevailing ideas of identity and ethnicity, but also with the available

facilities in the form of e.g. subsidies. Below I shall first discuss the multiculti festivals. Next, I shall take a look at ethnic and neighbourhood festivals, and at the possible processes of multiculturalization these undergo.

### **Multiculti festivals**

Large festivals such as *Dunya* in Rotterdam, *Roots* in Amsterdam and *Mundial* in Tilburg can be considered part of a relatively new and growing category in the European festival landscape: the multiculti festivals. Each of the three has its own character, but there are significant similarities. They offer a varied spectrum of activities, but the emphasis is on music groups from all over the world performing on several podiums.<sup>3</sup> Sometimes these venues are continental, i.e. one per continent, so that the spectator can visit all continents in one day as it were.

But certainly nowadays there often are other arrangements. In addition to the official programme, multiculti festivals offer markets selling jewellery and trinkets, clothing and accessories. The food smells are also similar, and enhance the visitor's physical experience.

The *Dunya* festival has three main podiums: African, Latin-American and European / Asian. In addition to these 'continental' podiums there is a 'Young and Urban' podium, a 'Poetry Park' and a children's playground. Strikingly, many groups performing on the continental podiums consisted of members with a Dutch background as well as members from other cultural backgrounds. Thus, while offering music from all over the world, this also confirmed Dutch society's multicultural character.

In addition to the performances the *Dunya* festival also features a market, with so many products that it defies description in full. I selected one stall to focus on, not because it was so special but precisely because the array of products it offers is so similar to the collections found in many other stalls. In the stall I chose there were African masks, but also wooden drums with a top of stretched skin pulled taut with a rope. Some drums were decorated, for instance in red, yellow and green, the colours of the Ethiopian flag also used by Rastafarians.

From the stall's tarpaulin roof hung a Chinese lantern. With tiny mirrors attached to its green and yellow fabric, a feature that was also found on an oblong cloth decorated with black and red fabrics, and hanging at the front of the stall. The tiny mirrors as well as the miniature golden yellow elephants embroidered on the cloth reminded one of India or its neighbouring countries. Flat little rectangular textile bags in brilliant colours also hung there. Equally bright were the colours of the roughly woven textiles used for the rucksacks on the floor. At the back there were batik print T-shirts, and in front of the stall stood a rack of coats at 25 euros each, 45 for two.

Other stalls offered different collections but nevertheless they breathed the same exotic 'far-off countries' feeling, for instance a Latin-American stall where

under its top Canadian dream catchers whirled about, and thick woolen jumpers with loud prints were on display as well as leather and textile wrist straps. Though varied, to the frequent visitor of multiculti festivals like myself, the collection is very familiar.

Together with other visitors, I slowly moved along the whole display, and like the others I rarely buy anything. First the entire market is looked over, and the small bags, the wrist straps and cloths are fingered. It is the seduction, the foreplay that I and many other visitors enjoy most of all. We are more active spectators who actively and physically experience and form the festival's performance. Like the woman in the introductory incident, we let ourselves be seduced by the exotic character, in this case not primarily of people, but of merchandise. In fingering, judging and selecting the products and in our surrender to the seductions, we are active consumers. Thus, consuming the products becomes a performance, in addition to all the other performances at the festival, in which presenters and stage performers meet with consumers and spectators.

The intertwining with a specific group of visitors makes it possible to see the Dunya festival as a kind of lifestyle fair where world music lovers can watch their favourite music being performed, where household accessories from countries we would someday like to visit on vacation can be purchased, as well as outfits befitting the multiculti lifestyle. Here the latter concept refers to a group sharing a certain taste and consumption pattern. Clearly this is coherent with all kinds of other factors, such as a specific combination of economic and cultural capital, as Bourdieu puts it (1984, 114-125). However, not everyone adopts the multiculti lifestyle to the same extent and in the same way. I see people who in appearance totally fit the multiculti lifestyle, and others who do not. And though I myself loyally visit the various festivals in my neighbourhood, I am also somewhat sceptical about both the multiculti lifestyle and multiculturalism.

The Dunya festival attracts visitors from all over Holland, in 2004 there were 150,000 to 160,000.<sup>4</sup> The varied supply of food, music, clothing and accessories has a certain target audience, and in attracting that audience the components mentioned reinforce each other. Just like other lifestyle fairs, whether erotic or for millionaires, each offers the opportunity to experience one particular lifestyle – rather than a location where different lifestyles or cultural backgrounds meet, as intended by the organizers and as is obvious from their presentation of the festivals. For instance, the Dunya festival newspaper's front page cries out: 'Step into the city's mirror!' This implies that all groups in the city are equally represented at the festival. One glance at the crowd suffices to realize that this is not the case.

That the multiculti lifestyle is intertwined with the festival, is obvious at the Dunya festival where for instance the type of objects sold, reappears elsewhere at the festival. Quite a few visitors wear clothes and jewellery very similar to those on offer at the festival market. And the Press Centre features loudly decorated purple,

yellow and red cushions with tiny mirrors that could have been bought at the festival as well.

In addition to the official programme and the products offered at the stalls, of course there is something which to many is foremost in their minds: food and drink. Here as well, the selection is familiar, due in particular to a specific kind of diversity. We can get food from various continents: Surinamese *baras*, Turkish *döner*, but also Dutch ‘*poffertjes*’ (miniature pancakes) and chips. These are offered in a way that emphasizes the ethnic or national singularity, for instance by means of cocktail sticks decorated with little national flags. And tacos sold against a background poster showing swarthy men wearing *sombreros*, with brightly coloured Mexican cloths and a real *sombrero* hanging from the roof.

The presentation and combination of refreshments are not always directly linked to an ethnic or national origin. For instance, a stall near the European / Asian platform of the Turkish Association for the Unity of the Peoples sells mint tea, a Moroccan version I never encountered in Turkey or when visiting Turkish-Dutch families. But this Moroccan tea that some trendy Amsterdam *cafés* feature on their menus, is more popular than the strong version used in Turkey, and provides more profit and interest for the organization.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the abundantly clear interest of the market and the consumption of food and drink and objects, the map of the *Dunya* festival location does not show where the latter are sold, and in the festival newspaper most attention focuses on the stage performances. Finally, on the 17th of its 19 pages the publication mentions food and drink. There is a good reason for this. At the 2004 *Dunya* festival the event organizer *Loc 7000* took care of the stalls selling food and drink. As a result the number of stalls was reduced by 50%. So as to reassure the visitors, the paper reported: ‘Of course there still are the exotic snacks. And still catering to every taste: from *baklava* to *falafel*.’ However, the paper’s interpretation of this representation of the festival – in which music gets far more attention than food – could also be turned around. The music then forms the background against which people eat and drink, and buy all sorts of products.

### **Ethnic festivals**

Much writing and thought has been devoted to ethnic groups’ celebrations. A classic explanation of Durkheim’s work considers the celebration functional within the ethnic group itself. By this medium the group communicates with itself and forms its own identity. Baumann (1992, 98-99) criticizes this explanation. He argues that it neither does justice to Durkheim’s work nor is it helpful in understanding celebrations that take place in the context of multicultural or multi-ethnic societies, because there the ‘other’ is always implied. Within the Durkheimian framework festivals of ethnic groups are even harder to understand. Ethnic festivals are celebrations that, in addition to the communication with one’s own

group, precisely aim at communicating with the 'other'. Thus they also become the platform of an ethnic identity. During the celebration this identity is redefined in relation to the 'other'.

The Turkey festival in Deventer, organized in 2004 by two local mosque associations, hence in two locations, is an instance of an ethnic festival where – though with the emphasis on one group – elements from the multiculti repertoire are recognizable. What matters is not that it is aimed at various ethnic groups, but the mould in which the own identity is cast. As became clear above, this form consists of an emphasis on the physical experience and on the colourful aspects of ethnicity. Furthermore, the suggestion of authenticity is aroused by the attention for an ethnically profiled heritage of dance, music and material culture. At the Turkey festival much attention is paid to the various dishes from the Turkish cuisine and to handicraft. At the Milli Görüş mosque for instance, demonstrations were given of preparing lahmacun, manti, sarma and börek, all of which are Turkish dishes. In addition there are 'folklore dance' performances, a henna evening and Sufi music. As at the multiculti festival, music and food are very important, and ethnic identity is emphasized using a canon of what is considered 'typically Turkish'.<sup>6</sup>

Also important in the form of the multiculti festival is the market with its specific genre of multiculti products. At the small-scale Turkey festival the opportunity to buy is far more limited than at the multiculti festivals. Yet here as well, consumption is not unimportant. The supply of various Turkish dishes contributes to the ethnic profiling that the organization aims to achieve. Although there are two market stalls, this does not suffice to render it a market. Besides, the second-hand articles of the Turkish mosque visitors hardly appeal to the mainly middle-class public that the festival attracts from outside. The books are in Turkish and most of the needlework consisted of head scarves. In an interview after the festival an organization member stated that the market was added at the last moment, and that the organization took whatever was available. She added that in a future edition of the festival this might change. On the other hand the market products support the festival's Turkish character, and thus contribute to communicating a Turkish identity.<sup>7</sup>

Contrary to the different multiculti festivals, at this festival religion did play a part – as was to be expected when two mosque associations are the event's main organizers. Still, very attractive and accessible aspects from the religion were selected, such as festivities surrounding boys' circumcision, and the prayer rug as a source of creativity. Here as well, there was a connection to the non-confronting character that ethnicity adopts within multiculturalism and at multiculti events (see also Van der Horst 2003).

Though the festival organization emphatically wished to reach a non-Turkish public, the great majority of visitors had a Turkish background. And they all seemed familiar with both the spaces and the organization. As non-Turkish visi-

tors my friend and I were well aware of our 'otherness' in this context. This was accentuated shortly after our arrival; while we were still aimlessly looking around we were approached by a young Turkish woman with a head scarf who offered us a guided tour. Later I learned she was a HBO student (i.e. she studied at a Dutch institute for higher vocational studies). Disappearing anonymously into the crowd, as at multiculti festivals, was not an option here. At that moment there was only one other non-Turkish visitor and she soon joined us, as if she too felt somewhat insecure in this setting. Later we were 'transferred' to a sister and her friends who took us to the festival's 'Ottoman Corner' where they ordered tea and baklava (Turkish sweets). We exchanged information on our activities in daily life. The women took the opportunity to ask us about the origin of our interest in the festival. However, I grasped the chance to ask them about the background and occasion for the festival. The dominant impression was that we were on a visit in unknown surroundings in which our hostesses as well as we ourselves assumed an attitude in a performance that suited this mutual unfamiliarity.

At the Summer Carnival in Rotterdam, the second originally ethnic festival that I single out, we see a very different kind of multiculturalization. This is not about adopting form elements from the multiculti festival, but about expanding the focus from one ethnic group to several groups. In an interview an organizer tells us that as a successful festival it attracts groups who want to hitch a ride on its success, and use the festival as a platform on which to exhibit their own identity. The Summer Carnival has accommodated these groups. Comparable developments may be observed at the Kwakoe and Pasar Malam festivals.<sup>8</sup>

The Summer Carnival developed from a Dutch-Caribbean initiative, i.e. from the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba, and takes place in Rotterdam. It began in 1984, and by 2004 it attracted one million visitors. The successful carnival was embraced by other ethnic groups, some of which, such as the Cape Verdians, did have their own carnival culture, whereas some other groups, for example those from Surinam, did not. Meanwhile the Antillean origin is hardly recognizable in promotion material and websites – although the festival organization is still almost completely Antillean.

In the interview the organizer mentioned that he wants to avoid the Summer Carnival becoming a 'parade of cultures', thereby consciously distancing himself from the multiculti genre – which he considers vulgar. Nonetheless there are groups that by means of national flags or texts on their cars make it very clear where they are from. Besides, their attire is often traditional, hence not 'progressive, original and artistic' i.e. in line with the organization's wishes. The groups take advantage of the platform offered to present their ethnic identity to the outside world – just as is customary at the ethnic festivals. Someone interviewed in the NPS documentary broadcast the day after the 2004 Carnival appreciated all groups showing their uniqueness, thus implying that he views the Carnival as a parade of cultures, rather than the intercultural event the organizers had in mind.

But obviously the latter are unable to determine the image, as both participants and spectators shape and give meaning to the festival in their own way.

While due to the focus on several ethnic groups, the Summer Carnival has become multiculturalized, this does not apply to its form. As stated in the introduction, the festival has various forms and the carnival is one of these. However, these different forms do have consequences for the festival's charisma and the way a spectator experiences the festival. The Summer Carnival parade route runs through the entire inner city, and everywhere along the route crowds gather to watch. In a carnival parade a market would seem out of place, hence there is none. At the multiculti festivals the visitors constantly move around the fixed podiums, whereas at the Summer Carnival parade the people stay where they are and line the streets to watch the podiums pass them.

The audience is different as well. Those on the political left with above-average education who visit the multiculti festivals, are here not as clearly present. The women wear short skirts and brightly coloured tank tops. Most men prefer sports clothes. And here too, an African male has set up a display of merchandise: belts made of cheap-looking or imitation leather with shiny buckles and iron studs don't appeal to notions of authenticity or African identity as the products in the Dunya festival stalls do. But then it isn't the multiculti public that can be found here; the Summer Carnival spectators are eager customers.

My experience of this festival is very different from that of the Turkey festival described above. This is primarily due to the difference in size. At the latter small-scale festival I was spotted very soon, but at the Dunya festival I was part of an anonymous mass. Moreover, my physical experience of the festival is far more passive. Having wrestled my way from the station through the crowds to a spot with a reasonable view of the parade, I am reluctant to abandon it in search of a better one, for fear of ending up behind the crowd with no view at all. I eat and drink very little all day, so as not to lose my spot. This is made easier by the supply that is far less attractive than at the multiculti and Turkey festivals. Tent stalls sell beer and soft drinks and there is the odd chip van. Oh, and one stall sells ham rolls. So, unlike the supply at the festivals described before, the food available in my vicinity does not support a multicultural or ethnic theme.

### **Neighbourhood festivals**

In mixed neighbourhoods organizers often use neighbourhood festivals to try and forge unity from diversity. They have become an instrument to stimulate a 'neighbourhood feeling' or social cohesion in neighbourhoods where in daily life the various groups of inhabitants live parallel lives, hardly ever reaching out and getting in touch. What seems to contradict this aim, is that these urban neighbourhood parties often emphasize the different origins of the participants. Thus however, they do connect with the multiculturalist credo of unity in diversity.

The annual Oosterparkfestival<sup>9</sup> named after its Amsterdam location, fits this framework. It is financed by MDSO, a foundation for community work that in various ways tries to promote this social cohesion in the neighbourhood. It's a Liberation Day event (5 May), and emphasizes the combat against racism. At this festival, elements of the multiculti form reappear most strongly in the commercial activities within the festival area. The food stalls organize themselves along ethnic lines, and in various ways they make it clear from which countries their dishes originate. There are Surinam stands, a Turkish kebab stand where the proprietor sports a 'Turkey' bandana, and an Ethiopian stand demonstrating a coffee ceremony. But Dutch 'oliebollen' (deep-fried lardy cakes) and 'poffertjes' (miniature pancakes) also fit the image. These too, are presented in a national / ethnic way. The 'poffertjes' stand is decorated with red-white-and-blue streamers. On top of the cart a banner proclaims 'Hollandsche poffertjes' and in the middle a large golden amulet bears the Dutch coat of arms.

As at the Dunya festival discussed above, the non-food stalls are organized differently. Somehow, they clearly seem to be about 'ethnic' products, in some cases a continent or region seemed to be linked to a stall, but nowhere is a national identity or product origin clearly emphasized. The stalls display the same colourful collection of African jewellery, decorative objects, Surinam cloths, drums and dream catchers as described above for the Dunya festival. Here as well, the binding element seems to be the multiculti lifestyle.

The Oosterpark festival is part of a network of nationwide liberation festivals. Yet they particularly emphasize the character of a neighbourhood festival, for example in the way in which the programme is published in the neighbourhood paper. Thus it announces the possibility of a dialogue between the neighbourhood's youth and elderly people, and an exhibition of drawings and poems by neighbourhood children. It is a small-scale festival and various groups of inhabitants are represented both on stage and in the audience, even though the attending contingent from Surinam is far more numerous than the neighbourhood Turks and Moroccans, while nevertheless the largest group are native white Dutch.

By day a local youth centre is in charge of the programming. There boys and girls imitate their American pop idols and dance to their music, with some candid Dutch 'gangsta rap' and music of an ethnic hue thrown in for taste. The evenings offer artists who are more professional. And here too, diversity is the trend; a Caribbean carnival dance band, but also a North-African band whose latin influences announced in the programme brochure escaped my laywoman's ears.

At the festival it is difficult not to get infected with a positive feeling about the multicultural society, or at least by the festival's multicultural neighbourhood. There is only one stage for everyone, hence no division across continental tents. We all listen to music, eat tasty food, without getting wrapped up any further in

an all too clear multiculti concept. The physical experience of the festival nurtures a feeling of solidarity.

## Desire and Seduction

The way in which the multicultural society is propagated at the festivals discussed, is much akin to marketing. This vision has a specific target group, packages its message attractively and does not delve too deeply in religious and political matters. But mainly it is organized along orderly lines of desire and seduction. This is manifest in the festival's wide range of performances. The representation utilizes simple, interculturally recognizable symbols such as flags, folklore and national dishes, adapted to the necessity of recognizability as it applies in the market, in neat accordance to the ideas of the Comaroffs (2009). Here light is shed only on certain elements of ethnic diversity. Recognizable elements from the cultural repertoires, such as handmade objects, design and food, are placed in the foreground. Complex ethnic groups are reduced to folklore and made more abstract. Differences within ethnic groups are hardly included in the representation (see also Young 1999, 100-104). Cultural complexity is reduced to simple vignettes. And only at the Turkey festival does religion get a chance.

Consumption is broader than buying and consuming products. As became clear above, it can also be aimed at the experience associated with consuming. But also the act itself is much broader than the economic transaction economists mean by it. At the multicultural festival for instance, consumption is an activity involving the whole body. Using all senses, the festival is absorbed. Not only the music and the food, but also the colours, the smells and something more ethereal called 'the vibe', reach the body in different ways, as we saunter across the grounds. This form of consumption that can be found at a festival, connects to the wishes of today's consumer, who according to various authors, is driven by the desire to experience something special (Gillmore and Pine 2000; Rojek 1995).

Campbell (1987, especially 58-76), sketches how in traditional consumerism desire was aimed at satisfying concrete needs, and how on the other hand current consumerism is aimed at a certain kind of desire, namely the desire for emotions and experiences. This desire can be fulfilled by acquiring certain tangible objects, but also by consuming a fantasy of these products, or by adapting the image to the fantasy. Multiculti festivals offer a fantasy that visualizes only the positive aspects of the multicultural society. Other realities of multicultural coexistence, such as the economically unfavourable position of many migrants, are left out (see also Jacobs 1998, 256; Harvey 1989, 87; Van der Horst 2003, 196).

According to Campbell the modern hedonist's desire cannot be satisfied. This type of consumer is constantly looking for stimulating experiences that can lead to enjoyment. These experiences are sought in images that have either been created in ideas, or consist of a reality adapted to this desire. The action taken by the

consumer becomes focused on seducing and being seduced. This image of consumption that Campbell sketches is confirmed at the multicultural festivals. In addition, Campbell's body of thought can be combined with the performative approach that is central to this article. Consumption then becomes a performance in which suppliers adapt their merchandise to the consumer's desires and fantasies, and thus shape the performance together with the consumer.

It is not only at the multicultural festival that the interaction between suppliers and consumers leads to adaptations of that which is on offer. For instance, in England Irwin and Brett (1970, in Miller 1987, 123) researched how in colonial times the images that the English in England had formed of people from the Orient, did not match the oriental products imported to England. The indigenous Indian fabrics were not to the British taste. Therefore new fabrics were produced, closer to the received images of the Orient. And the same applies to objects which the western world labelled 'primitive' art from Africa: these proved to have been adapted to the western imagination. For centuries African artists have been doing their best to pander to this desire for a certain representation of Africa (Donne 1978, in Miller 1987, 123). Likewise, at the multicultural festival suppliers of the 'other' do their best to seduce the spectators by means of a recognizable style and symbols that are easy to place.

The Indian fabrics' and African wood carvings' context is utterly different from today's multicultural society. Origin and destination of the masks and fabrics were worlds apart. But in the multicultural society the 'other' is always near. Thus the 'other' can also consume his own otherness. The various types of multicultural festivals quite often attract visitors from a non-Dutch ethnic background. In particular a mono-ethnic festival like the Turkey festival draws relatively many visitors from its own group. Standing right next to the Dutch multicultural consumers, they watch the various performances of their own otherness, not just on stage, but also in the different stalls with merchandise.

Products can turn into objectifications of the 'other', as in the stalls at the Dunya and Oosterpark festivals. Through these products the 'other' can be consumed. However, as Hooks shows, the human body itself can be objectified as 'other'. In her article with the revealing title 'Eating the other', Hooks (2000) speaks of appropriating the dominated other by means of consumption. In her article this consumption comprises the carnal consumption by means of sex, as well as the objects associated with that other. Through these forms of consumption the other is actively produced and transformed. In other words it is a 'practice of othering'. Throughout the process Hooks describes, the inequality of power between the dominant white male and the dominated black woman is maintained. The consumed other is used only as an object onto which fantasies can be projected which then can be consumed as well. How this other views herself and the situation, is considered hardly relevant.

Though Hooks's article is very good at acknowledging and describing the active, productive capacities of consumption, in her view the consumed one is powerless. In her story the Afro-American women seem to walk the street nonchalantly till the moment they are used by white students for consumption, whether just once or repeatedly. Due to the emphasis on the consumers' actions, the space for agency of those consumed wrongly remains underexposed.

The nature of the 'performance' in the incident described at the beginning of this article, was not merely determined by the behaviour and exterior of the men with the chalked faces. The behaviour of the photographer and the woman also helped to transform the men's presence into a performance. Just like my and my two friends' presence and attention were instrumental in them becoming a performance. Here the festival's context is crucial; it offered a consumptive environment in which cultural otherness was on the menu. In another context the men would perhaps not have enjoyed the kind of attention described. At the festivals those consumed are simultaneously suppliers and performers as well. Furthermore, in this performance the own identity is powerfully experienced, and one can even argue that the performance consumes this experience. Hence the casting of consumer and performer, the division of roles between them is not fixed.

Both the consumed and the consumer can strategically manipulate the consumptive situation. Individuals and groups can make themselves attractive by anticipating their spectators' imagination, while the latter did not surrender to their lust in apathy. For their projects, multiculturalist organizations find allies in ethnic organizations, as becomes clear at the Turkey festival and with various groups participating in the Summer Carnival. In Baumann's terms they are into strategic reification, or the process by which for opportunistic reasons, ethnic groups adapt their presentation to the desires of dominant groups (Baumann 1999, 139). Contrary to Hooks who merely seems to establish passivity and failing resistance (2000, 354-359), various groups defined as 'other' are very active in anticipating the desire of dominant groups, and the multicultural festival is a suitable stage for performances of desire and seduction around ethnicity. As emerged earlier from the Comaroffs' book quoted above (2009), in part there are commercial motives for this: in order to sell an ethnic identity, be it for money or for recognition, it needs to be framed according to the rules of the market.

## Conclusion

The multicultural festival is a consumptive location. Thus it offers certain opportunities for the propagation of identity, but it also guides the performance in a certain direction. The consumption that takes place is broad, but also comprises eating and drinking and more durable objects. Consumption of such products is not a by-product, or worse, a non-authentic addition, but is central to the creation of the festival's meaning. Through this consumption the event is given meaning

and does not merely draw attention to an already existing meaning. Appadurai argues in 'Modernity at large' that consumption at various lifecycle celebrations merely serves to mark these 'rites de passage' (1996, 69), the possibility of consumption at the multicultural festival is not just a necessary by-product – people having to eat and drink anyway; stall rent as a necessary source of income for the festival – nor a festive framework for the performances and activities announced in the programme booklets. The festivals are formed by the possibility of consuming things away from the podiums, even though this is not fully admitted in their presentation. The multiculti festival has developed into a powerful symbol. Many know the recipe of exotic music, cheerful backdrops, exotic smells and steam coming off all kinds of even more exotic snacks, stalls with bits of Asia and Africa, mixed with 'tie and dye' T-shirts.

The consumption of music and performances on the podiums is just a small part of the consumption at these lifestyle festivals. In addition one can also consume household articles, interior accessories, clothing, but in particular a certain atmosphere of like-mindedness; a good vibe. These very different forms of consumption in which all senses are involved, make the festivals into a performance of various forms of otherness, but also of a certain ideology: multiculturalism. By consuming Surinamese bars, African music and the atmosphere among the audience, multiculturalism's image of society is transferred and ethnic identities are shaped.

The multiculti products such as the multiculti festivals have a concrete target group: a segment of the middle class that feels attracted to the multiculti lifestyle and wants to be seduced by exotic products and experiences. In spite of this, to charm the public, multiculti happenings depend on an aura of enclosure and universality. This provides an interesting contradiction between presentation and reality. While the festival is presented as a location for everyone, or as a 'mirror of the city' like the Dunya festival, it is also and perhaps primarily a location for a specific target group.

In the relation between consumption and multiculturalism, the keyword is seduction. The multiculti festivals as well as at the multiculturalized ethnic and neighbourhood festivals, present a seductive image of ethnic groups and cultural repertoires, in which they themselves often are actively involved. They stand next to each other, so that visitors can taste the different kinds of music and products. In Campbell's terms, reality is adapted while leaving space for the visitors' imaginations. The various identities are presented in a cheerful, non-threatening and colourful way. On the other hand, the experience is not completely boarded up. Walking around the festival site, people can for themselves form new images of the different countries where music, food and objects come from. But they can also buy products from the stalls, and imagine themselves being an Indian beauty or an African drummer.

This seduction is not merely focused on the 'other'. After all, as the Comaroffs argued (2009), performing one's own identity for others, intensifies the performer's experience of that identity. Being seen by the other also enables the performers to see themselves and their ethnic singularity through the other's eyes. Festivals which originally were not intended to be *multiculti* and began as ethnic or neighbourhood festivals for instance, adopt symbols and images from multiculturalism and the *multiculti* festivals. In the first place this seems linked to the commercial activities. The fact that the *multiculti* festival is a commercial location, contributed to the dominance or hegemony of the repertoire. For other festivals that have certain aspects in common with the *multiculti* festival, such as the attention paid to a non-Dutch culture, it seems hard to think beyond this repertoire or framework. Since the ethnic and neighbourhood festivals attract an audience which is very similar to that of the *multiculti* festivals, stallholders respond by providing products selected accordingly.

But several times the organization as well, proved to have been the driving force of multiculturalization. In addition to communication with their own ethnic group, ethnic festivals also aim to communicate with the rest of society. In their efforts to seduce these outsiders and give them a positive impression of the group, they often use the multiculturalist form. There are also ethnic festivals that swap their monocultural focus for a multicultural approach, often in response to the wish of other groups to present themselves at the festival, as can be seen at the Summer Carnival.

In urban neighbourhoods where the composition of the population has changed, the multiculturalist form is extremely suitable to make the neighbourhood festival a driving force of social cohesion. The risk however is that the festival primarily connects with the preferences of the organizers and does not take seriously those of most people living there. For instance the Oosterpark festival does attract Dutch and Surinamese-Dutch neighbourhood people, but far fewer Turkish- and Moroccan-Dutch. Under the pretext of something for every ethnic group, the impression is created that everybody is satisfied. But if the neighbourhood Turkish-Dutch prefer Turkish pop music such as Tarkan, one probably does not do them much of a favour by providing them with traditional Turkish folk dances. The '*multiculti*' public on the other hand, can enjoy the aura of authenticity surrounding that latter genre, whereas it abhors the Tarkan beats which are deemed non-authentic.

The consumption of the festival experience is intertwined with the ideology of multiculturalism. The ideas connected to this ideology reach us through our bodily experiences. At the multicultural festivals the multiculturalist ideology is not transmitted primarily by way of language or verbal communication, but by manipulating bodily experiences. Thus it is much harder to claim that the ideology is incorrect, because this would also brand the experience as incorrect.<sup>10</sup> Besides, this experience seems to arise in the individual, and it is not so easy to experience

it as manipulation. Hence consumption and the bodily experiences it creates, are of central importance in multiculturalism. Perhaps this is why years after columnists proclaimed the moral death of multiculturalism, its various representations still surround us.

## Notes

1. This is a revised version of an article that will appear in Dutch in a volume edited by Irene Stengs. I greatly appreciate the helpful comments by Irene Stengs and an anonymous reviewer. I am however solely responsible for its content. Research for this article was made possible by NWO (Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research) and the Meertens Insitute.
2. An obvious idea is that this 'multiculturalization' is a consequence of the subsidy providers' demands. This did not prove to be an adequate explanation in interviews with organizers of the Pasar Malam Besar, the Kwakoe and the Summer Carnival, monocultural festivals that are more or less multiculturalized. In the Pasar Malam and Kwakoe budgets, subsidy is just a small item. In the Rotterdam Summer Carnival it is not, but there no demands are made towards linking multiculturalization to the subsidy. This does not mean that the festivals do not feel this pressure at all. Subsidy to Pasar Malam for instance, was earlier rejected because the money would have benefited only one group. In following applications the organization tried to define the festival as more multicultural.
3. Though the music on offer at all three festivals is indicated as 'world music', one glance at the programmes instantly shows differences. At the Festival Mundial for instance, in addition to 'exotic artists' there are also native white Dutch artists and bands of an ethnic tinge such as Hind, Beef and Di-rect. At Roots and Dunya these are absent. In harmony with the names of the tents, at the Dunya festival we find more 'traditional' music typical for certain musical traditions from various continents.
4. In comparison: in 2004 Mundial and Roots had about 50,000 visitors. Hence the Dunya festival is by far the largest of the three.
5. Also at the Haschiba festival in The Hague, a multicultural neighbourhood festival, Moroccan mint tea was sold in a Turkish stall that had köfte rolls as well.
6. Other Turkish festivals offer a similar representation of Turkish identity. For instance in 2006 at a Turkish bazaar in East Amsterdam organized by the White Tulip Foundation, we found similar elements such as an exhibition of Turkish handicraft, an Ottoman Corner and Turkish dishes such as lahmacun, sarma and börek.
7. At other festivals, such as the Indonesian Pasar Malam in The Hague and the Kwakoe festival in Amsterdam-Bijlmer, the products on offer support the identity of the group linked to the festival. Moreover, this ethnic group is anticipated, and the multiculti lifestyle much less so. For instance, though at the Indonesian Pasar Malam one can encounter the Canadian dream catcher, it are primarily Indonesian and Asian objects which are sold. And the food also is mainly Indonesian.
8. The Kwakoe festival in Amsterdam-Bijlmer seems to have developed in the same way. It began as a soccer tournament, intended as a summer recreation for newcomers to the Bijlmer. These were mainly from Surinam. But then other Bijlmer groups (mainly

- from African nations), also wanted to do something at the festival. Their soccer teams participated in the tournament, but they also hired tents where they sold African snacks and drinks. Meanwhile the concept 'multicultural festival' became so established that Kwakoe also profiles itself as such.
9. Not to be confused with the Roots festival at the same Oosterpark in Amsterdam, in the opening paragraph of the present article.
  10. Cf. also Roodenburg (2005, 223). To a significant extent, a gender hierarchy is supported by a bodily experience. Feminist actions aimed at unmasking a 'false conscience' in women, do not touch the core of this pre-reflexive bodily experience, and thus are doomed to fail.

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