



King Customer

Contested Conceptualizations of the Consumer and the Politics of Consumption in the Netherlands, 1920s-1980s¹

CHRIS DOLS AND MAARTEN VAN DEN BOS

This article examines the question of how transnationally traveling narratives of consumption have made sense of an emerging modern Dutch consumer society. It particularly focuses on the way in which the King Customer metaphor entered the Netherlands in the interwar years as an Anglo-American advertising industry effort to co-opt democratic aspirations for the market, and how it was appropriated and re-interpreted in a distinctive national context by a variety of historical actors in the decades to follow. Whereas proponents of the Dutch retail industry used the figure of King Customer from the 1920s onwards in order to highlight the 'right to choose', VARA-journalists turned to the metaphor in the postwar age of the consumer rights movement in an attempt to underline the importance of making the 'right choice'. In the mid and late 1970s, finally, the narrative increasingly moved towards de-politicization.

Koning Klant. Omstreden begripsvorming ten aanzien van de consument en het consumentenbeleid in Nederland in de jaren 1920-1980

Dit artikel onderzoekt hoe transnationaal reizende narratieven van consumptie betekenis hebben gegeven aan een zich vormende moderne Nederlandse consumptiemaatschappij. In het bijzonder gaat de aandacht uit naar de wijze waarop de metafoor van Koning Klant in het interbellum het land binnenkwam als gevolg van een poging van Anglo-Amerikaanse adverteerders om democratische principes te verbinden met de praktijk van het consumeren. Allerlei historische actoren beriepen zich vervolgens in een uitgesproken nationale context op deze figuur. Sommigen onder hen voorzagen hem zelfs van andere betekenissen. Terwijl protagonisten van de Nederlandse detailhandel sinds de jaren 1920 Koning Klant gebruikten om ieders 'recht op keuze' te onderstrepen, grepen VARA-journalisten in

de naoorlogse jaren van de consumentenrechtenbeweging terug op de metafoor om het belang van de ‘juiste keuze’ te benadrukken. Tenslotte worden er vanaf de jaren 1970 in toenemende mate depolitiserende tendensen zichtbaar.

In March 2015, Vroom & Dreesmann (v&d) CEO John van der Ent gave an interview with a Dutch newspaper. The company was suffering from an acute crisis of solvency. Drastic measures had been proposed to avoid bankruptcy. These included significant salary cuts and large reduction of rent payments, but such ideas were given up because of serious resistance from labor unions, staff, and property-owners alike. In the event, Sun Capital, a British hedge fund that bought the chain of department stores in 2010, decided to invest nearly forty million euros in an attempt to restore v&d’s status as a competitive player in the warehouse-industry. The firm appointed Van der Ent, and tasked him with restructuring the organization. In his 2015 interview, the new CEO announced that the company’s future policies had to rest to a considerable degree on the demands of ‘King and Queen Customer’.²

That van der Ent used this specific metaphor is interesting, not because the CEO was minting a new slogan, but because an old one was being given back its initial meaning in its focus on freedom and high levels of service. From the 1960s onwards, the metaphor had increasingly been taken up by actors who aimed at undermining the political and economic status quo. In 1968, for instance, Piet Reckman, proponent of the fair trade movement and prominent member of the Dutch Labor Party (*Partij van de Arbeid, PvdA*), explicitly interpreted and legitimized his actions by referring to the role of the customer as king. According to him, every consumer of the commodities of world trade such as sugar and cacao was able to make a difference. As ‘the customer is king’ implied, consumers had the power to ‘demand’ products that were excluded from the European markets as a result of import tariffs and subsidies.³ A few years earlier, the socio-democratic VARA broadcasting company had premiered a critical consumer rights show entitled *King Customer*.⁴

Studies on the twentieth century economic history of the Netherlands have not systematically examined narratives about consumption and the consumer, placing weight on macroeconomic developments and the rise of

1 We would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for *Low Countries Historical Review* and the guest editors at the journal for their thought-provoking comments on earlier versions of this article. Hermione Giffard was so kind to assist us in editing the text.

2 Marcel van Roosmalen, ‘De ideale vrouw van de v&d-topman bestaat niet’, *NRC Handelsblad* (12 May 2015).

3 See Van Dam’s contribution to this special issue. See also: James J. Ferrell, *The Spirit of the Sixties. The Making of Postwar Radicalism* (London 1997) 215-216; Piet de Rooy, *Ons stijpe op de wereldkaart. De politieke cultuur van Nederland* (Amsterdam 2014) 249, 259.

4 ‘VARA start rubriek voor de consument’, *Het Vrije Volk* (8 October 1965).

a welfare state instead.⁵ In addition, accounts of Dutch political and social history have emphasized the importance of a post-war boom in consumption, yet have hardly explored its consequences in day-to-day lives as far as cultural dimensions were concerned.⁶ In his landmark study on twentieth century European history, historian Konrad Jarausch concluded that a profound transformation of economic structures, a rise in prosperity, and a spread of consumption from the early 1950s onwards tended to decrease social differences in both reality and perception. The mass consumption of all kinds of products resolved discrepancies when it came to dress and appearance, and markers of social status shifted towards subtle variances in style. Furthermore, employment patterns changed, access to education dramatically increased, and individual social mobility rose to unprecedented levels. In the opinion of Jarausch, such transformations eroded well-established social hierarchies, and changed the image and self-image of individuals as consumers in modern society.⁷

As people make use of narratives on morality and secularization, for instance, to define who they are and who they want to be or become, we argue that an analysis of narratives about consumption enriches the existing historiography of the modern Dutch consumer society.⁸ In order to better understand the influence of narratives on consumption in general and the consumer in particular, we propose a cultural conceptualization of these narratives. This approach ties in with recent historical research in which the socioeconomic conceptualization of consumption, which revolved around statistical evidence, has been complemented by a conceptualization encompassing a wide field of processes, historical actors, institutes, techniques, and actions.⁹ We hope to build on this field of research by

5 Maarten Prak and Jan Luiten van Zanden, *Nederland en het poldermodel. Sociaal-economische geschiedenis van Nederland, 1000-2000* (Amsterdam 2013); Jan Luiten van Zanden and Richard Griffiths, *Economische geschiedenis van Nederland in de 20e eeuw* (Utrecht 1989). The same argument applies to important studies on the advertising industry in the Netherlands: Robert van Rossum, *Van advertentiekruier tot reclameadviesbureau. De ontwikkeling in Nederland, Duitsland en de Verenigde Staten* (Amsterdam 2012); W. Schreurs, *Geschiedenis van de reclame in Nederland* (Utrecht 2001).

6 Cf. Remieg Aerts, 'Auto's, sport en de last van de historische canon. Een pleidooi', in: Bert Roest (ed.), *De last der geschiedenis. Beeldvorming,*

leergezag en traditie binnen het historisch metier (Nijmegen 2013) 18-31.

7 Konrad Jarausch, *Out of Ashes. A New History of Europe in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton 2015) 544.

8 Cf. Chris Dols, 'Of Religious Diseases and Sociological Laboratories: Towards a Transnational Anatomy of Catholic Secularisation Narratives in Western Europe, 1940-1970', *Journal of Religion in Europe* 9 (2016) 107-132; Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain. Understanding Secularisation* (London 2001).

9 Kerstin Brückweh, 'Perspectives for a History of Market Research, Consumer Movements, and the Political Public Sphere', in: Kerstin Brückweh (ed.), *The Voice of the Citizen Consumer. A History of Market Research, Consumer Movements, and*

recounting the historical journey of one of these narratives of consumption within the Dutch borders: the customer is king.

In the following, we will examine when and in what historical context the king customer narrative was introduced in the Netherlands, and how this narrative changed against a backdrop of international and national political and economic shifts. We will demonstrate that it was first promoted in the interwar years as an Anglo-American advertising industry effort to co-opt democratic aspirations for the market, with the Ford Motor Company operating as a trailblazing force. The narrative was soon adopted by an emerging Dutch retail industry. In the 1960s, especially, it was however reinterpreted in a politicizing fashion. The time was marked by growing popular advertising literacy and the Dutch social-democratic party's views regarding consumer advocacy media, civil society, and polity organizations. In the mid and late 1970s, in contrast, the narrative moved towards depoliticization. This article also explores the political and cultural consequences of different meanings attributed to the king customer narrative over time, underlining its 'discursive hollowness' and analyzing accounts of the desired definition of the customer's kingship.¹⁰

The dynamics of modern consumerism

Historians have dated the birth of the modern consumer society to the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The arrival of electric light, the dissemination of newspapers, and the development of the advertising business opened up new perspectives on 'hidden persuasions'. In the twentieth century, the ascent of photography and the normalization of new media such as radio and television improved the chances of reaching a large audience. It has become accepted that the decades following the Second World War marked the emergence of mass consumption, notwithstanding the fact that different (sub)periods and patterns of consumption on the national and regional levels should be discerned.¹¹

In the Netherlands, the years from 1870 until the economic depression of the 1930s were critical to the rise of a modern consumer society. Generally speaking, this was a period in which production and real wages grew gradually despite multiple reverses. Transformations in international trade

the *Political Public Sphere* (Cambridge 2011) 3-26, there 12-14; Hartmut Berghoff and Uwe Spiekerman (eds.), *Decoding Modern Consumer Societies* (Basingstoke 2011); Lawrence Black, *Redefining British Politics. Culture, Consumerism, and Participation, 1954-1970* (Basingstoke 2010).

10 Cf. Peter van Dam, *Staat van Verzuiling. Over een Nederlandse mythe* (Amsterdam 2011).

11 Frank Trentmann, 'The Long History of Contemporary Consumer Society. Chronologies, Practices, and Politics in Modern Europe', *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 49 (2009) 107-128.

politics and the abolition of British protectionism after the 1840s allowed the Dutch economy to align itself with that of the leading industrializing countries – England, Belgium, Germany – in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. New strategies of investment and risk-taking replaced the defensive approaches that Dutch entrepreneurs had often pursued in the years up to 1870. Infrastructural changes literally paved the way for the shaping of national and international consumer markets in addition to local and regional ones. Leaders of newly established companies such as Philips (1891) influenced these trends by expanding their enterprises in the first decades of the twentieth century. More and more, they wished to reach out directly to potential customers. Local shopkeepers also saw their positions affected as a result of the establishment of department stores.¹²

The Dutch economy particularly flourished between 1923 and 1929, with a steady 3 percent annual growth rate. In the immediate aftermath of the Wall Street crash of October 1929, however, economic growth in the country came to an almost immediate stop. The ensuing depression hit the economy hard, and one year later, the Dutch government started support-payments in order to reduce the potential of mass uprisings among farmers. This did not prevent unemployment from rising to unprecedented levels. Between 1933 and 1936, roughly one fifth of the Dutch labor force was jobless.¹³

In the wake of World War II, a new socio-political order emerged in the Western world on the basis of widely shared belief that society was in desperate need of a new set of political and philosophical norms. Convinced that political forces should have power over economic ones, this order sought to recreate social unity by constraining market freedom in the name of public interest. Following the economic recipes of John Maynard Keynes, in particular, state intervention and planning came to form the cornerstone of economic policies. Government spending was on the rise all over Europe, with an increase from 26.8 percent of the gross domestic product in 1950 to 45.5 percent in 1973. Whereas enduring hardship had been one of the few solutions to poverty before the Second World War, after 1945, an uncompromising faith in individualism was countered by trust in group action and participation. ‘The dogma of the invisible hand’, English Labor politician Anthony Crosland wrote in 1956, ‘failed to survive the Great Depression’.¹⁴

12 Prak and Van Zanden, *Nederland*, 248-263; Auke van der Woud, *De nieuwe mens. De culturele revolutie in Nederland rond 1900* (Amsterdam 2015).

13 Friso Wielinga, *Nederland in de twintigste eeuw* (Amsterdam 2009) 112-113; Piet de Rooy, *Republiek van rivaliteiten. Nederland sinds 1813* (Amsterdam 2005) 181-182, 184.

14 Quoted from: Tony Judt, *Ill fares the land* (New York 2010) 48-49. On government spending: Tony Judt, *Postwar. A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York 2005) 361. See also: A. Offer, *The Challenge of Affluence. Self-Control and Well-Being in the United States and Britain since 1950* (Oxford 2007) 7; S. Berman, *The Primacy of Politics. Social Democracy and the Making of Europe’s Twentieth Century* (New York 2006) 7-8.

In the Netherlands, these new economic policies, which were financially underpinned by American dollars flowing into Europe via the Marshall Plan, had a significant impact on prosperity. The years between 1951, when the repair of war damages was completed, and 1973, when the oil crisis hit, marked a period of profound economic growth. The Netherlands' gross national product grew 4.5-5 percent annually. Both real wages and consumer spending were on the rise, and the possession and utilization of durable consumer goods and luxury goods increased spectacularly. The proportion of households owning a refrigerator climbed from 3 percent in 1957 to 88 percent fifteen years later. The use of tobacco and alcohol increased, and meat became a vital part of the daily meal in more and more families. Possession of audio-visual appliances among Dutch citizens expanded from the late 1950s onwards. The traditional radio, which had been owned by 77 percent of families in 1951, was joined by an increasing number of record players and television sets. Perhaps even more stunning was a rapid growth of car ownership. Cars, like the growing number of telephones, enabled Dutch families to widen their horizons.¹⁵

Because these changes effected a great majority of the population, consumption and especially consumer rights became a major topic in political and societal debate. During the 1950s, Dutch governments reluctantly started to become aware of what they considered to be their responsibility for guarantying the quality of consumer products and services. Various organizations took up the issue of consumer rights instead, and through these organizations, the idea of consumer protection gained support.¹⁶ In the Netherlands, the Dutch Housekeeping Council (*Nederlandse Huishoudraad*) was established in 1950. Aiming at stimulating the efficiency of housekeeping business and representing consumer interest, it had close ties with a particular section of the consumer population, and heavily relied on the financial support of organizations working in the realm of housekeeping. Its focus therefore remained limited.¹⁷ The Dutch Consumer Association (*Nederlandse Consumentenbond*), in contrast, which was officially founded in January 1953, sought to represent all Dutch consumers. The association's mission statement read that the institution was an independent and private organization which intended to supply consumers with information on both the quality and prices of goods and services, foster a general awareness of costs, and

15 Kees Schuyt and Ed Taverne, 1950: *Prosperity and Welfare* (Assen 2004) 41, 245-260. For similar patterns in other Western European countries, see: Judt, *Postwar*, 337-353.

16 Sheryl Kroen, 'A Political History of the Consumer', *The Historical Journal* 47 (2004) 709-736, esp. 728-733; Matthew Hilton, 'Consumer

Activism. Rights or Duties?', in: Brückweh, *The Voice of the Citizen Consumer*, 99-116 DOI:10.1017/S0018246X04003929.

17 'Huishoudelijk initiatief', *Leeuwarder Courant* (28 March 1950).

expose deals made between industry and sellers that could have negative repercussions for the consumer.¹⁸

Despite a strong argument in favor of this newly established organization, which Labor Party Member of Parliament Harry Peschar articulated during a debate on the budget for the Ministry of Economic Affairs, as well as a positive response by State Secretary Gerard Veldkamp, the foundation of the Consumer Association proved to be rather difficult. A request for a government grant of 30,000 guilders to fund it failed due to severe resistance by Confessional and Liberal parties. According to one Member of Parliament, the Consumer Association had enough members to fund itself, and it did not represent the entire Dutch consumer population.¹⁹ In its 'frank commentary', Catholic daily *De Tijd* suggested on 22 November 1954 that the Consumer Association was too inexperienced to be able to manage such a large amount of money. In addition, it argued, Parliament should prevent the organization from becoming a conglomerate of 'masterminds' who would prescribe 'what kind of toothpaste we all should use'. Not only was such 'paternalism' believed to be unacceptable to Dutch consumers, it was also asserted that it would not serve their interest.²⁰

Yet, despite this resistance, in the years to come, significant attempts to promote education and protection in order to steer consumers towards what was defined as 'the right choice' would come to be at the heart of new consumer movements in the Netherlands. The question at stake here was whether these customers acted as actual kings with true power, or whether companies and advertising industries were the ones in charge. It was at this time that the initial meaning of the king customer metaphor, as someone who had the right to choose and receive sound service, started to become critically scrutinized.

King customer and the quest for the favor of the consumer

The roots of the metaphor can be traced back to the United States at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, when social critics increasingly considered the consumer an important economic factor. In the early 1920s, liberal political thinkers in particular worked these ideas into new economic policies.²¹ From 1914 onwards, Charles Coolidge

18 'Nu ook in Nederland een consumentenbond', *De Tijd* (01 June 1953).

19 *Handelingen van de Tweede Kamer der Staten Generaal* (hereafter *HTK*), 1953-1954, 3249, 3289; *HTK*, 1954-1955, 3057-3102. Cf. 'Geen subsidie voor consumentenbond', *De Telegraaf* (20 November 1954).

20 'Subsidie consumentenbond vindt geen genade in Kamer', *Het Vrije Volk* (20 November 1954); 'Vrijmoedig commentaar', *De Tijd* (22 November 1954).

21 Kroen, 'A political History', 720-721; Kathleen G. Donohue, *Freedom from Want. American Liberals and the Idea of the Consumer* (Baltimore 2003).

Parlin and other market researchers started to picture the marketplace as a ‘democracy of goods’ in which consumers could ‘vote’ and should perceive themselves as kings.²² The king customer metaphor gradually made its way into popular culture – on both sides of the Atlantic. Julius Elias, president of the British Advertising Association, contended in a public speech in 1938 that the largest value of advertising to society was ‘that it proclaimed the customer as king’. According to Elias, advertising constituted democracy since it offered to the marginalized ‘advantages denied even to kings and princes in the past’.²³

In the Netherlands, the king customer metaphor entered the advertisement landscape in the 1920s. As an examination of the collection of digitized newspapers of the National Library of the Netherlands indicates, the metaphor appeared for the first time in a regional newspaper (see p. 102).²⁴ Headed by the words ‘Ford=service’ and footed by the stock phrase ‘the customer is king’, the advertisement ensured readers that the car company held dear the principle of maintenance, and thus the problem of car trouble was minimized. The Ford-owner was to rely on the ‘expertise’ and ‘willingness’ of numerous Ford employees throughout the country. Ford’s employees fixed technical failures swiftly and cheaply in their Ford Service Stations, and used nothing but genuine parts. More so, he received the ‘highest value’ for his money, as Ford service ‘guaranteed’ user-friendliness and comfort. The Ford Motor Company departed from the conviction that it was impossible to do any business without customers. Since they gave the company its right to exist, the advertisement explained, Ford ‘always and everywhere foregrounds the interests of the customers’.²⁵

In the economic context of selling and buying products, the Ford Motor Company attempted to increase its share of the Dutch consumer market by referring to potential Dutch customers as kings whose words were laws, and describing itself as the subordinate party. In its advertisements,

22 Stefan Schwarzkopf, ‘Consumers, Markets, and Research. The Role of Political Rhetoric and the Social Sciences in the Engineering of British and American consumer society, 1920-1960’, in: Kerstin Brückweh et al. (eds.), *Engineering Society. The Role of the Human and Social Sciences in Modern Societies, 1880-1980* (Basingstoke 2012) 252-272, there 253-260 DOI:10.1057/9781137284501_13.

23 Ibidem.

24 The digitized newspaper collection of the Dutch National Library is publicly accessible via the

online search engine Delpher (www.delpher.nl). Between January and July 2015, the following search terms were used: “Koning Klant” and “Klant is Koning”. For some methodological considerations, see: Maarten van den Bos and Hermione Giffard, ‘The Grapevine. Measuring the Influence of Dutch Newspapers in Delpher’, *Tijdschrift voor Tijdschriftstudies* 38 (December 2015) 29-41.

25 ‘Ford=Service’, *Middelburgsche Courant* (21 June 1924).

Ford =

SERVICE

en wat deze beteekent voor de
bezitters van Ford automobielen,
trucks en tractors.

SERVICE.

De Ford Motor Company verstaat onder Service, dat de Ford bezitters zooveel mogelijk overal en ten allen tijde de hulp van kundige en bereidwillige vaklieden zullen vinden, en dat de door deze te verrichten diensten steeds vlug en tegen redelijke prijzen zullen worden verricht, zoodat moeilijkheden voor Ford bezitters tot een minimum beperkt zullen zijn.

OFFICIAL DEALERS.

35.000 Official Ford Dealers en Official Ford Service Stations maken deel uit van deze internationale Service organisatie. Zij allen hebben een werkplaats te hunner beschikking, ingericht om reparaties aan Ford wagens snel en tegen lagen prijs te kunnen verrichten, terwijl zij bovendien de echte Ford onderdeelen in voorraad hebben, waarvan de prijzen in vergelijking tot den totaalprijs van den wagen lager zijn dan die van eenigen anderen automobiel ter wereld.

OFFICIAL SERVICE-STATIONS.

De Official Ford Service Stations vindt men aan de voornaamste verkeerswegen en in die dorpen die te klein zijn om er Official Ford Dealers aan te stellen.

De Ford Service garandeert aldus den Ford afnemer, dat hij de hoogste waarde voor het in zijn wagen belegde geld ontvangt, niet alleen in nut maar ook in genoeg, want hij heeft de zekerheid, dat hij zijn auto, truck of tractor steeds te zijner beschikking zal hebben, omdat slechts uiterst weinig tijd voor reparaties in beslag genomen zal worden.

Uitgaande van de eenvoudige gedachte, dat zaken doen zonder afnemers niet mogelijk is, en dat dus een fabriek slechts dan reden van bestaan heeft, indien zij zich ten doel stelt, steeds bereid en in staat te zijn hare cliënten op de best mogelijke wijze te bedienen, plaatst de Ford Motor Comp., altijd en overal, vóór alles de belangen harer afnemers op den voorgrond, aldus steeds getrouw blijvend aan haar principe:

„THE CUSTOMER
IS KING!”

Ford Motor Company
OF HOLLAND



the company made it look as if its own profit was irrelevant. The customers with their choice and demands mattered first and foremost. The English phrase ‘the customer is king’ was not translated into Dutch. It might have been left in English in order to give the advertorial a kind of exotic appearance. To be sure, the English word ‘service’ was not an anomaly in Dutch advertisements at that time, but its use increased from the early 1920s onwards. This was also true of the king customer metaphor.²⁶ Yet, even though different brands and companies started to integrate it into their marketing strategies as well, many contemporaries continued to associate the metaphor with Ford.

On 27 January 1926, the English phrase seems to have been translated into Dutch for the first time. An anonymous letter to the editors of the *Rotterdamse Courant* complained about the sale of low quality products in local coffee shops. The author argued that every salesperson who sold inferior products was ignoring the English view that the customer was king. If consumers were not provided with the highest quality goods, they would not buy things. Shop-owners who disregarded the opinions and desires of their customers should simply close their shops, the letter argued, because in the end, it was only the decision of the buyer that led to profit.²⁷

From the early 1930s onwards, king customer became a common figure in the Dutch advertising landscape, appearing in newspaper advertisements for a wide variety of products including clothing, cheese, fish, catering, cigars and cigarettes, lightning, glasses, insurance, beer, watches, furniture, and cars. The central narrative of these advertorials placed customers at the heart of the economy, and underlined the necessity of excellent service. ‘YOU are the one in charge’, a 1934 Brenninkmeijer advertisement for coats stressed (see p. 103). A pointing finger emphasized the core message: the customer was treated like a king at Lampe clothing company. A Kreymborg advertisement for suits published by *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden* on 27 May 1932 was among the first advertisements to convey the new saying in Dutch, a trend continued in the post-war years, for instance in a 1952 announcement by Boston cigarettes. As an arch constructed of Boston cigarettes depicted, the customer was indeed king when being served by Boston Cigarettes, now wrapped in a handy cardboard box (see p. 103). And as the quote from v&D figurehead Van der Ent at the beginning of this article

26 In 1933, *king customer* (koning klant) and *customer is king* (‘de klant is koning’) can be found 19 times in the digitized newspaper collection. In 1959, both phrases were used 59 times, mostly in advertisements. It was only after the consumer rights show *King Customer* was premiered on

television in the 1960s that the number of hits rose spectacularly. It should be noted, though, that most newspapers contained a television guide listing the show.

27 ‘Noodtoestanden in koffiehuisbedrijf’, *Rotterdamsche Courant* (27 January 1926).



U heeft het voor het zeggen!

De klant is Koning bij ons. Zodra U binnenkomt en U zegt: „Ik wil een mantel hebben in die of die prijs”, dan toveren onze verkoopsters U een serie voor, waar ge van staet te kijken! En dan moet U niet denken, dat zij daar gauw een paar mantels van F. 50.- of F. 60.- door smokkelen! Onze klanten weten, dat zij met vol vertrouwen bij ons kunnen binnenkomen en dat wij dat vertrouwen nimmer zullen beschamen.

Onze collectie bontmantels, mantels, japonnen en hoeden is thans geheel compleet. Wij staan in voor elk stuk, wat afwerking, snit, pasvorm en kwaliteit betreft. Als ge bij ons koopt, dan is het niet voor één keer, maar voor Uw leven lang.

Natuurlijk!
Eerst kijken bij

Zó en alleen zó zien wij ons belang en daarom zeggen de dames:

„Kaagsch Modehuis” No. 59

DEN HAAG Groote Marktstraat h/Spur

HAAGSCH MODEHUIS is alléén gevestigd: Groote Marktstraat 58, 's-Gravenhaga.
Des Zaterdag tot 1.30 uur gesloten!

◀ Brenninkmeijer & Co. advertisement, *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 19 October 1934. National Library of the Netherlands, The Hague.

De Klant is Koning.
U hebt zelf gekozen!

81,3% van de Boston-rokers prefereren de „NIEUWE-KWALITEIT” SIGARET in de CARTONNEN SCHUIFDOOS.



80 CENT

Terecht heeft daarom de Boston nu de onderscheiding gekregen *Price-winner!*

ONDERVINDT 'T... **Boston** WINT 'T!

◀ Boston Cigarettes advertisement, *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden* 16 July 1952 National Library of the Netherlands, The Hague.

suggested, the metaphor of king customer is still being used in this way today.²⁸

Early supermarkets, which began to appear in the 1950s and swiftly replaced local grocers, highlighted not only their convenience and wide selections of products, but also the fact that the era in which someone behind the counter influenced the type of products one had to buy was over. Consumers had become able to make choices on their own.²⁹ Even though sociologists have demonstrated that Dutch consumers made fairly similar choices over the last few decades, the freedom of consumers has evolved into a key ingredient of the self-image of modern Dutch society.³⁰ According to German sociologist Ulrich Beck, consumption constitutes identities, since the availability of money allows people to escape from forms of social control, and should be regarded as a ticket to ‘the world outside’ someone’s own community.³¹

As briefly touched upon above, the particular conceptualization of the modern consumer as a king with the right to choose and receive solid service, as it emerged between the 1920s and the 1940s, was increasingly criticized from the 1950s on. Between the wars, Dutch ad-men and sales representatives had used the king customer metaphor in order to ‘empower’ the consumer, but their advertising strategies had by no means been part of a broader discussion on the societal, economic, and political role of the consumer. In the 1950s and especially the 1960s, when consumption and consumerism grew into topics of public and political debate, an emerging consumer rights movement claimed to unmask this alleged form of empowerment as a brutal strategy of maximizing profits and a deceptive manner of making uninformed citizens buy mediocre products or engage in unnecessary consumption. The first ever consumer rights show in the Netherlands, in October 1965, was meaningfully entitled *King Customer*. Journalists behind this show contended that the consumer should become a real king by getting hold of ‘objective’ information on products and services, and that proponents of the advertising industry acted as the ‘enemies of our kingship’.³² The two conceptualizations of the consumer as king not only differed in that they disagreed on the actual

28 Brenninkmeijer advertorial, *Algemeen Handelsblad* (19 October 1934); Boston advertorial, *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden* (16 July 1952).

29 The newspaper database contains 117 articles on ‘the supermarket’ published in the 1950s, mostly on the opening of new selfservice stores. Cf. Jaraus, *Out of Ashes*, 540-541.

30 Menno Hurenkamp and Jan Willem Duyvendak (eds.), *Kiezen voor de kudde. Lichte gemeenschappen*

en de nieuwe meerderheid (Amsterdam 2004); Bram Mellink, *Worden zoals wij. Onderwijs en de opkomst van de geïndividualiseerde samenleving sinds 1945* (Amsterdam 2014) 19.

31 Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization. Institutionalized Individualism and its Social and Political Consequences* (London 2002) 62.

32 VARA advertorial, *Het Vrije Volk* (08 April 1976).

status of consumers as being kings. They also outlined different avenues to becoming or remaining king.

King customer and the quest for the citizen-consumer

The ascent of consumer education and protection in the Netherlands, with the Dutch Consumer Association turning ‘the right to choose’ into ‘the right choice’ from 1953 onwards, fitted into a larger transnational development in which institutions operated as key vehicles of thought and social action: the Consumers Union (1936) in the United States, the *Union Fédérale des Consommateurs* (1951) in France, and the Consumer Association (1956) in Britain, to name a few.

A distinctive feature of the development of the consumer rights movement in Western Europe was a strengthening of bonds with social democratic politicians, particularly, in the 1950s and 1960s. As historian Lawrence Black has pointed out in the British case, Labor’s leading thinker Antony Crosland gained a detailed knowledge of consumer issues in the early 1950s, when he became closely involved with the Consumer Association (CA). This association left an imprint on his understanding of consumer politics and participatory activism. What united Crosland and CA-representatives was a firm belief that markets could be shaped to meet the preferences of consumers, and that the views of well-informed, rational consumers were to be preferred to so-called ‘paternalist’ approaches to modern consumerism.³³ Interestingly, several founders of the Dutch Consumer Association were active members of the Dutch Labor Party. And even though *De Tijd* newspaper warned against a possible paternalism within the association, too, its members were inclined to enlighten consumers rather than telling them what not to do.³⁴

According to Crosland, affluence, choice, and self-fulfillment should be the guiding principles of modern socialism. In his 1956 revisionist manifesto *The Future of Socialism*, he declared the era of traditional socialism to be over. Because traditional capitalism was ‘reformed and modified almost out of existence’, the socialist ‘finds himself pinioned by a new, unforeseen reality’. A majority of the population had gradually attained a middle-class standard of living. Consequently, Crosland held, old appeals to working-class solidarity had to be regarded as outdated. Instead, middle class values such as personal freedom and cultural endeavor were gaining political prominence. In light of a rise of prosperity and the emergence of a consumer culture, Labor’s leading

33 Black, *Redefining British Politics*, 66-73; Dominic Sandbrook, *Never had it so good. A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles* (London 2005) 54-55.

34 P. Koopmans (ed.), *Consumentenbond. 50 jaar beter kiezen* (The Hague 2003) 7-11.

thinker understood the modern world as one in which a former working class had fully emancipated.³⁵

A similar development took place in the Dutch labor party. In a 1951 report entitled *The Road to Freedom*, the party's scientific bureau argued that prevailing socialist modes of thought should be reconsidered thoroughly. According to the editor of the report, economist Joop den Uyl, new perspectives on the near future had to be opened up now that the construction of the welfare state was edging towards completion. The report underscored the role of the state in economic matters other than the distribution of goods and services. In order to guarantee universal welfare and freedom, the state had to strengthen social cohesion, moral sustenance, and cultural vitality. Old boundaries between middle and working class should be crossed, den Uyl argued, since the government had to ensure equal opportunities for all.³⁶ In his 1954 book *The Proletarian Rearguard*, influential sociologist Jacques van Doorn concluded similarly that the last remains of what once was the lower working class would soon adopt middle-class values and standards of living.³⁷

Both Crosland and Den Uyl tapped into a strong socialist tradition of reasoning: a general rise of affluence could contribute to a weakening of the competitive spirit of man, and pave the way for a more humane and respectful society. Prosperity for all, they believed, would mean that envy and competition would be less of a factor in civil life. In the late 1950s, however, discussions of affluence and consumption often took on a rather pessimistic character. Consumption was believed to lead to degeneration. In her groundbreaking work on the human condition, philosopher Hannah Arendt stated that, 'one hundred years after Marx', the fallacy of his argumentation had become clear. Instead of investing spare time and growing income into self-fulfillment through education, modern man primarily pursued maximizing consumption. The more time, the greedier and more craving his appetites.³⁸ In a similar vein, Harvard economist John Kenneth Galbraith described a postwar consumer's utopia as a fool's paradise in his 1958 book *The Affluent Society*:

35 Antony Crosland, *The Future of Socialism* (London 1956). Cf. Dominic Sandbrook, *White Heat. A History of Britain in the Swinging Sixties* (London 2006) 55-56; Jaraus, *Out of Ashes*, 545-546.

36 J.M. den Uyl, *De weg naar vrijheid. Een socialistisch perspectief* (Amsterdam 1951) 260; Frans Becker, 'De ideologische en programmatische ontwikkeling van de PvdA', in: Becker and G. Voerman (eds.), *Zeventig jaar*

Partij van de Arbeid (Amsterdam 2016) 127-160, there 135-136.

37 J.A.A. van Doorn, *De proletarische achterhoede. Een sociologische kritiek* (Meppel 1954).

38 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago 1998 [1958]) 133. Cf. Mark Greif, *The Age of the Crisis of Man. Thought and Fiction in America, 1933-1973* (Princeton, Oxford 2015) 255-261.

The family which takes its mauve and cerise, air-conditioned, power-steered and power-braked automobile out for a tour passes through cities that are badly paved, made hideous by litter, blighted buildings, billboards, and posts for wires that should long since have been put underground. They pass on into a countryside that has been rendered largely invisible by commercial billboards [...] They picnic on exquisitely packaged food from a portable ice-box by a polluted stream and go on to spend the night at a park which is a menace to public health and morals. Just before dozing off on an air mattress, beneath a nylon tent, amid the stench of decaying refuse, they may reflect vaguely on the curious unevenness of their blessings. Is this, indeed, the American genius?³⁹

Here, the flipside of a new consumer's utopia was highlighted, not only by contrasting expanding private wealth with a poor state of the public sector, but also by suggesting that a growth in consumption could have devastating environmental effects.

In 1963, a working group chaired by Den Uyl published a report entitled *On the Quality of Existence*, in which these ideas were incorporated. Like Galbraith, Den Uyl argued that increased consumption and production could never be the final test of social achievement. Both consumption and production had to serve the general good.⁴⁰ At the same time, Dutch economists Jan Pen and Pieter Bouwman were contemplating what they perceived as some of the serious disadvantages of economic growth. Concerns regarding the environment went hand in hand with worries about individual wellbeing. Modern consumers, they noted in 1961, were confronted with increased spending possibilities and needed to be guided through the ever-expanding maze of hidden persuasion set up by advertisers. 'Modern patterns of consumption', Pen and Bouwman concluded, posed a 'continuous challenge' for society.⁴¹ This is exactly where consumer organizations came into play. These institutions ought to shape 'citizen-consumers' by informing them so that they were able to responsibly handle the options which rising incomes and increased leisure time provided them with. It is worth noting that this idea, while seemingly promoting freedom, nevertheless contained elements of paternalism.

39 John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (Boston 1998 [1958]) 186-187.

40 Becker, 'De ideologische en programmatische ontwikkeling', 141. Crosland was inspired by Galbraith, too, claiming to be 'wholeheartedly a Galbraith man' in: A. Crosland, *The Conservative Enemy* (London 1962) 103.

41 J. Pen and P.J. Bouwman, 'Een eeuw van toenemende welvaart' (1961), in: A.N.J. den Hollander et al., *Drift en koers. Een halve eeuw sociale verandering in Nederland* (Assen 1968) 85-104, quotes on 101, 103.

Shortly after being appointed Minister of Economic Affairs in 1965, Den Uyl established the Committee for Consumer Affairs (*Commissie voor Consumenten-aangelegenheden*). In its formative years, this institution advised the Dutch government on comparative consumer testing, the labelling of products, and the transparency of the consumer market. Yet, Den Uyl envisioned the committee as playing an even bigger role in guiding citizen's consumption. In his opening address to the Committee, he stated that the new institution should research the 'true needs of the modern consumer'. Den Uyl wanted the committee to not only make consumers aware of the wide range of choices, but also advise the government on ensuring that they would make 'the right choice' in the end.⁴²

Similar, albeit slightly less paternalistic, lines of reasoning about the modern consumer prevailed within the socio-democratic broadcasting company VARA in the 1950s and at the beginning of the 1960s. As early as in the first half of the 1950s, the by-weekly radio show *De Duddalf* focused on questions regarding products, prices, and customer service. In 1959, VARA launched a radio series in which employees of the Dutch Consumer Association informed the public about certain products and services. From the early 1960s onwards, the idea of developing a television show on consumer affairs under the flag of *King Customer* took shape.⁴³ In the opinion of VARA journalists André van der Louw and Tom Pauka, who came up with the idea for the show, their broadcast company had the duty to inform the public about the 'deplorable state of affairs' in contemporary society. *King Customer* proved to be an audio-visual avenue to turning this duty into reality. As a result of an increasing variety of consumer goods available and the evolution of advertising techniques, many people were thought to have become unable to judge the price-quality-ratio of their purchases, concluded a 1962 VARA documentary on modern consumerism.⁴⁴ Gerrit Eerenberg, *King Customer's* editor-in-chief, his companion Wil van der Smagt, and the first female presenters Hedy d'Ancona, Elles Berger, and Netty Rosenfeld believed that this situation should be changed. *King Customer* built on the intellectual work of economists such as Pen, Bouwman, and Den Uyl. It had become more and more accepted that consumers should be informed and trained to be critical about consumption. This particular conceptualization of the consumer as a king corresponded with the idea of 'engaged journalism' that was broadly supported at VARA from the early 1960s onwards, and which strengthened

42 'Minister Den Uyl wil onderzoek naar de "werkelijke behoeften" van de consument', *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden* (15 July 1965).

43 Huub Wijfjes, VARA. *Biografie van een omroep* (Amsterdam 2009) 169-228, esp. 177.

44 'Kijk en luister', *Leeuwarder Courant* (16 March 1962).

VARA journalists in their attempt to act as watchdogs of truth, or trustees of the informed citizen.⁴⁵

King customer: modern consumerism or tiny problems?

In the early 1970s, the idea that all human behavior rested upon rational choice and economic calculation started taking precedence over the immediate post-war view that the state and institutions also bore responsibility for protecting the rights of consumers.⁴⁶ Neo-liberal economic thinking, which gained considerable support in academia and politics in the wake of the oil-crisis in the mid 1970s and the following ‘crisis of welfarism’, put the post-war economic consensus that the state should have a role in consumption under pressure. Economists increasingly accepted consumption as part and parcel of modern life, understanding consumers as rational individuals.⁴⁷

Ideas about consumption and the consumer thus shifted from politicized towards ‘depoliticized’. Some political leaders, too, came to argue that individual citizens were best placed to assess what was good for them. In the late 1970s and the 1980s, the *communis opinio* came to hold that governments should refrain from playing any role in matters of consumption, letting the markets, and thus supposedly the consumers, take control.⁴⁸ This is not to say, however, that the rights of individual consumers were no longer deemed in need of protection. Yet, governments were told not to determine which products had to be bought, and encouraged not to perceive consumers as a group in need of affirmative action.

It is to these transformations in economic and political thinking that *King Customer* journalists had to relate their show somehow. First and foremost, the editors of the show focused on informing the consumer about ‘ill- or uninformed’ consumption and its repercussions on society as a whole. Here, the narrative on the informed consumer as an important political force dominated their work. All too soon, however, the editorial board of

45 IJla van den Broek, ‘Engagement als deugd. Politieke journalistiek tijdens het kabinet-Den Uyl’, in: Jo Bardoel et al., *Journalistieke cultuur in Nederland* (Amsterdam 2002) 68-83; Marcel Broersma, ‘From Press History to the History of Journalism. National and Transnational Features of Dutch Scholarship’, *Medien & Zeit* 26:3 (2011) 17-24, there 23-24.

46 Richard Butsch, *The Citizen Audience. Crowds, Publics and Individuals* (London 2008) 115;

Samuel Moyn, *Human Rights and the Uses of History* (London 2014) 94; Duco Hellema, *Nederland en de jaren zeventig* (Amsterdam 2012) 189-190.

47 Daniel Stedman Jones, *Masters of the Universe. Hayek, Friedman, and the Birth of Neoliberal Politics* (Princeton 2012) 132.

48 Berman, *Primacy of Politics*, 207; Hellema, *Nederland*, 194-198.

the show concluded consumerism to be more about ‘tiny daily problems’ in the lives of individual consumers. As Wim Boskoop, one of the members of the editorial board, wrote in an internal memorandum in December 1976, people had ‘finally discovered that solutions to their little irritations, which make their lives so difficult, do often exist’. *King Customer* was there to help overcome these minor problems by bringing them front and center.⁴⁹ In this way, Boskoop and his colleagues sought to downplay what they deemed over-politicized consumption.

In October 1965, *King Customer* was broadcast for the very first time. The subjects of its first show were high meat prices and advertising on laundry detergents.⁵⁰ Potential legal repercussions led the show to adopt a cautious policy, and prompted artistic director Gerrit Schilder to frequently refer to a legal specialist. Seemingly spontaneous conversations were scripted down to the smallest detail.⁵¹ In order to address basic consumer problems, and encourage the viewers as emancipated and perhaps even suspicious consumers, the overall character of *King Customer* was serious yet not didactic.⁵² Due to a limited budget, *King Customer* journalists were unable to invest money in conducting consumer research themselves.⁵³ They had in fact little other choice than to forge alliances with the Dutch Consumer Association and similar institutions. Several recurring items made the show famous throughout the country. Whereas the attention of the viewers was directed towards buying during the weekends in ‘Calculated’ (*Uitgerekend*), ‘The Bad Bargain of the Month’ (*Miskoop van de maand*) focused on consumers who had bought malfunctioning cars. In ‘Know Your Rights’ (*Ken Uw recht*), viewers learned about legal aspects of modern consumerism.

King Customer attracted some critical acclaim. In January 1975, during the International Consumer Festival in Berlin, the European Economic Community awarded a special prize to the journalists behind the show. In the Netherlands, the show won recognition as well. An internal memorandum on the period 1965-1976 suggests that viewers valued *King Customer* on average more highly (with a score of approximately 74/100) than any other informative show broadcast on Dutch television (approximately 69-

49 VARA archives, Hilversum [VARA], 233, policy dossier: memorandum by Boskoop, 08 December 1976.

50 VARA, 233, policy dossier: press announcements, 08 October 1965.

51 VARA, 233, policy dossier: memorandum by Boskoop, 08 December 1976.

52 Our analysis of the programs content rests on the logbooks resting in the VARA archives. A significant number of shows can be viewed at the

Institute of Sound and Vision in Hilversum that contains the audio-visual archive of Dutch public broadcasting. As visual aspects are beyond the scope of this article, we have not studied these materials in detail.

53 VARA, 233, policy dossier: meeting report, 25 October 1977.

70/100). The show, which normally lasted for about half an hour, attracted a considerable number of viewers. Between 1965 and 1976, it had an average viewing index of 28. This meant that on average 28 percent of all the Dutch persons aged 15 and over with a television at home watched at least half of the show.⁵⁴

According to Huub Wijfjes, the author of VARA's 'biography', *King Customer* mainly attempted to activate a general consumer awareness by providing information and advice, thereby playing a minor role in the 1960s and 1970s in civic activism, and, in the end, a structural improvement of ordinary lives. Wijfjes's conclusion built to a great extent on a comparison of *King Customer* and *The Ombudsman (De Ombudsman)*, another VARA television show. Drawing inspiration from the Scandinavian political system with its ombudsman, who was supposed to give a voice to the 'common man', this show started in 1969 by addressing the refusal of the Dutch national telephone company to install telephones in the homes of elderly people. According to presenter Marcel van Dam, such forms of 'conflict, sadness, and defeat' needed to be shown to the entire nation, in order to provoke substantial change. *The Ombudsman* grew into a combination of a pressure group and a welfare organization. Strikingly, the advisory board of the VARA called on Van Dam self-censor the show because of its widespread influence.⁵⁵ *King Customer* was indeed less dynamic and vigorous than *The Ombudsman*. And true, *King Customer* primarily sought to shape citizen-consumers by providing them with 'factual' data and advice on products and services. Still, it is important not to underestimate its impact, as it familiarized millions with a specific, critical reading of the king customer narrative. Telling on this score is that the show cropped up in political discussions, too. Even though *King Customer* did not provoke a fundamental debate on modern consumerism, it was repeatedly used in the Dutch Parliament to provide evidence of popular tendencies.⁵⁶

The programme's biggest victory in the area of civic activism seemingly was a reduction of the motorized vehicle tax for natural gas vehicles. According to presenters Gerrit Eerenberg and Letty Kosterman, driving a natural gas vehicle had three advantages.⁵⁷ Gas was cheaper than petrol. Gas hardly contained additional materials such as lead, meaning that the emission was cleaner. And gas extended the longevity of the car engine. But these advantages were not without disadvantages. In natural gas powered vehicles, both the acceleration speed and the top speed were lower.

54 VARA, 233, policy dossier: press announcement, 27 January 1975; *ibidem*, memorandum by H.P. van Poelgeest, 20 July 1976, esp. 2-3.

55 Wijfjes, VARA, 319-320.

56 This conclusion rests on an analysis of all references (27) to *King Consumer* made in the Dutch Parliament between 1965 and 1983. Dutch

Parliamentary minutes can be key-word searched via www.statengeneraaldigitaal.nl.

57 VARA, 233, policy dossier: logbooks *King Customer* 16 May 1977; press announcement, 22 August 1977; 'Extra weging auto's met gasinstallaties vervalt', *Nederlands Dagblad* (25 August 1977).

In addition, a person driving a gas vehicle had to pay more motorised vehicle tax because natural gas fuel systems were heavier than their equivalents in petrol powered engines. As *King Customer* demonstrated in 1977, the way in which this tax was calculated did not reflect the actual weight of a vehicle, yet this was supposedly the means by which the amount of tax to be paid was determined. State Secretary Martin van Rooijen from the Ministry of Finance reacted to this by promising altered measurement procedures. This victory of *King Customer* of behalf of the ‘common man’ was celebrated in a VARA press release. The example is interesting because it elucidates the previously mentioned shift towards ‘de-politicizing’ tendencies in the king customer narrative over the course of the 1970s. That is, it demonstrates how VARA journalists increasingly made broader socio-economic and environmental arguments subordinate to a possible gain of the individual consumer.

Conclusion

In this article, we have focused on the genealogy of the king customer narrative in an attempt to enrich the existing historiography on consumption in the Netherlands. The metaphor of king customer acted as a key messenger. Disseminated by advertorials and a popular television show, it reached mass audiences from the 1920s onwards. The figure of the king led all kinds of historical actors to engage in reflecting upon the idea of trading, selling, or buying products and services – from shopkeepers, ad-men, and politicians, to journalists, market researchers, and customers – and to understand economics in terms of action, sometimes even politics.

At least two overarching conceptualizations of the modern consumer as a king aimed at persuading individuals in an era of mass consumption. In the interwar years, transnational transfer linked an emerging Dutch consumer society with developments in advertising in America. The immediate post-war years saw an increase of political awareness of consumer issues in terms of a desire to shape citizen-consumers, especially in the circles of social democrats such as Joop den Uyl, as well as a related transnational evolution of the consumer rights movement. In the Netherlands, these developments inspired VARA journalists in the 1960s to enter into the discursive field opened up by shopkeepers and salesmen in the 1920s. From 1965 onwards, they used *King Customer* as an audio-visual vehicle to warn against what they perceived as the ‘quasi-objectivity’ of the advertising industry. The journalists encouraged people to identify themselves as persons who not only had the right to choose but also the rights to be properly informed and heard, and ultimately make the right choices. Hence, king customer came to function as a crucial intellectual and narrative building block of a collective action of the consumer. Over the course of the 1970s, consumption was more and more depoliticized. VARA journalists, who

had formerly aimed at politicizing consumers, moved away from a focus on the consequences of 'ill- or uninformed' consumers for the development of society as a whole, and began to focus on 'tiny daily problems' in the lives of individual consumers.

It was a discursive hollowness that has made the king customer metaphor so attractive. Like notions such as secularization, this metaphor could be easily 'filled' with any amalgam of ideas and meanings over time. The strong behavioral implications of the metaphor, which encouraged people to question and seize actual power, explain its discursive strength to a considerable degree. To shopkeepers and salesmen, the figure of king customer proved to be appealing to make sense of consumers, consumption, and the consumer society as a whole because it enabled them to symbolically equate the economic act of consuming with the political ones of exerting power and enjoying certain privileges.⁵⁸ To early *King Customer* journalists such as André van der Louw and Tom Pauka, the king seemed to personify the tyranny of modern consumer society. And to some of their later colleagues, perhaps most notably Wim Boskoop, the modern man had to be assisted in solving his everyday problems in order to turn him into a king. By attributing such new meanings to the metaphor of king customer, transnationally traveling ideas on consumption were appropriated and re-interpreted in a distinctive national context.

Chris Dols (1985) has studied history in Nijmegen, Amsterdam, and Dundee, and gained his doctoral degree in 2014. He has authored a dozen of publications on the – often transnational – interconnections between discourses and day-to-day life. Many of these books and articles, some of which appeared in leading journals such as *Journal of Contemporary History*, addressed narratives of temperance and secularisation narratives. Recent publications include *Fact Factory. Sociological Expertise and Episcopal Decision Making in the Netherlands 1946-1975* (Nijmegen 2015) and (together with Herman Paul, eds.), *Pastoral Sociology in Western Europe, 1940-1970* (Leiden, Boston 2016). He works as an archivist at the Centre for the Heritage of Religious Life in the Netherlands in St. Agatha since 2013. Email: c.dols@erfgoedkloosterleven.nl.

Maarten van den Bos (1984) is General Secretary of the Banning Association, a platform for debate on religion, politics, and modern society. As a historian, he has published extensively on the history of Dutch Catholicism, more specifically on religious renewal in the 1960s, the Dutch branch of the international Catholic peace movement Pax Christi, and the theology of Edward Schillebeeckx. Currently, he is working on a history of religious socialism in the Netherlands. Email: mvandenbos@banningvereniging.nl.