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## Bingo! Holy play in experience-oriented society

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# Bingo! Holy play in experience-oriented society

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## Abstract

What place is there for holy play in experience-oriented society? Is it possible and useful to make analytic distinctions between the liturgical quality of events? I explored these questions by doing research on the boundaries between the religious field and the field of leisure. Fifty site visits to public events in the Netherlands (2006–2014) resulted in a collection of ethnographic data. I used the concept of play as introduced by the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga and the tools of ritual studies to explore whether these could help to produce an account of the liturgical quality of ritualized meetings. Holy play might be found in unexpected places, such as in a bingo hall. Huizinga's broad diagnosis of modernity may be outdated, but the tools he introduced remain useful to distinguish the elements that constitute late-modern meetings as more or less playful – even when this involves combinations that seem contradictory from Huizinga's own point of view.

## Keywords

Huizinga, liturgy, play, popular culture, ritual studies

## Résumé

Quelle est la place du « jeu sacré » dans la culture contemporaine? Est-il possible et utile de faire des distinctions analytiques entre la qualité liturgique des événements? J'ai exploré cette question en faisant des recherches anthropologiques sur les frontières entre le champ religieux et le champ du loisir. Cinquante visites d'événements publics aux Pays-Bas (2006–2014) ont abouti à une collecte de données ethnographiques. J'ai utilisé le concept de jeu tel que présenté par l'historien néerlandais Johan Huizinga et les outils d'études rituelles pour déterminer si ceux-ci pouvaient aider à produire un décompte

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de la qualité liturgique des réunions ritualisées. Le jeu sacré peut être trouvé dans des lieux inattendus, comme dans une salle de bingo. La définition de la modernité d’Huizinga peut sembler obsolète, mais les outils qu’il a introduit restent utiles pour distinguer les éléments, plus ou moins ludiques, qui constituent le lien dans la modernité avancée, même quand les résultats opposent les propres opinions d’Huizinga sur la modernité.

### **Mots-clés**

culture populaire, études des rituels, Huizinga, jeu, liturgie

## **Introduction**

What would remain of culture if humans did not have the capacity to play; to do things that are not directly useful in terms of getting water, food, sleep and offspring, but which they do nonetheless? According to the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga (1955 [1940]), there is a more or less common understanding of ‘play’ in most modern European languages. His definition still draws attention to important key elements:

[...] play is a voluntary activity or occupation executed within certain fixed limits of time and place, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding, having its aim in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy and the consciousness that it is ‘different’ from ‘ordinary’ life. (Huizinga, 1955 [1940]: 28)

In the late 1930s, Huizinga wrote *Homo Ludens* out of concern. ‘Play’ in its pure form, he argued, was threatened in Western contemporary society. Mass culture drives out the ludic elements: devotion, dignity and style. Yet, there can be no culture without play.

Following Plato (*Laws*), Huizinga (1955 [1940]: 15–27) also regarded the ritual act, or liturgy, as play – as ‘sacred play’. Thus, liturgy, a ‘pointless, but significant’ act (Guardini, 1959), mirrors Plato’s idea that living beings are ‘the playthings of the gods’. Huizinga uses this metaphor to criticize the reduction of people to objects of business, propaganda, or warfare. My starting question is: What place is there for sacred or holy play in today’s Western culture? First, I will discuss the value of the concepts of play and liturgy for the study of culture in late modernity, introduce a typology of events and describe how I conducted my fieldwork. I will then present and interpret the four cases I selected. In the concluding section, I will come back to Huizinga and related authors, evaluate the usefulness of the typology and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of my data. The aim of this article is to show that it is possible and useful to make distinctions with respect to the liturgical quality of events.

## **Playing the holy game in contemporary society**

### *The experiential imperative*

The German sociologist Gerhard Schulze (1992) characterized late-modern West Germany as a society divided into subcultures where the orientation towards experience

was all-pervasive. At the same time, he perceived the tendency in every subculture to think in terms of means and ends as goal rationality. Schulze has a point: instrumental rationality dominates, even within experiential culture. ‘How do I get to heaven?’, ‘What is the road to happiness?’ and ‘What is the purpose of my life?’ (Warren, 2002). The obvious way of phrasing and answering these questions has become a rational approach, in the sense that it is about the most efficient means to accomplishing a predetermined goal. This is the first type of rationality sociologist Max Weber (1976 [1922]: 12–13) discerned: goal-rationality. The second type, value rationality – reasoning on the basis of a given principle, for example, about what is right and what is wrong – has become less convincing. Modern minds may find it awkward or backward, rather than rational, to divide the visible world into pure and impure, permissible and taboo (although these divisions might re-appear under the guise of health and medical arguments). Weber’s third type of rationality is also not very convincing nowadays: to call upon old habits to justify a particular way of acting or thinking (although the suggestion of ancientness may add considerable marketing value to a product). Instead, the suggestion of evidence-based methods is popular (Morrell, 2008).

However, as the British cultural sociologist Colin Campbell (1987: 78–93) suggests, this rational climate does favour the experience of the extraordinary, the attribution of special gifts and the feeling of being lifted up from everyday life. The appreciation of special experiences responds perfectly to the discontent with the dominant Western worldview. During the 1960s, beatniks and hippies embraced spirituality, nature and authenticity in what seemed like a rebellious response to mainstream culture. At the end of the twentieth century, their notions became a crucial part of consumerism. The discomfort with rational Western culture is now supplemented with a romantic counterculture that has gone mainstream (Campbell, 2007). This is why advertisements for commercial products, such as beer and shampoo, sometimes refer to magic and the mystical, why foods and lifestyles promise access to nature and the authentic self and why celebrities are popular. They represent an imagined world that escapes the strict boundaries of a world driven by instrumental rationality (O’Neill et al., 2014). Thus, extraordinary experiences are accessible for everyone. The presumptions of the ordinary world are not contradicted; consumers are only invited to enjoy the projected promises, fictions and fantasies. They do not really have to *believe* a certain creed (or engage with a particular community) in order to experience something that transcends everyday life. The Dutch sociologist Stef Aupers (2015) uses the concept of ‘myth’ to explain this, described in Campbell’s (1987: 78) words as ‘an illusion which is known to be false but felt to be true’. In doing so, Aupers introduces the concept of irony. This may be helpful in explaining consumer culture, but I would suggest that, more generally, a playful attitude is common.

### *The concept of play*

The great advantage of the concept of play is that it does not work with the truth-versus-false opposition, which reflects an interest of modern science rather than of everyday life (Knibbe and Droogers, 2011). The ‘postmodern turn’, the British anthropologist Victor Turner (1982: 86) suggests, reappraises the playful ‘as if’ (Cusack, 2013). This attitude

opens up options for holy play (in the words of Huizinga) or liturgy: the space in which those present are bound together as a collective subject open to communication with the sacred (Lukken, 2005: 320–333).

In an earlier project, I used this definition to design an operational distinction between liturgy and theatre (de Groot, 2012). It may seem inappropriate to use the word liturgy as a general analytical term. Liturgy, however, is not a word that can be claimed by Christianity. It does not even originate exclusively in the religious sphere. In antiquity, liturgy (*leitourgia*) referred to the festivities of the polis, by and for the people and dedicated to the gods (Kreinath et al., 2006). It also referred to the taxes raised to pay for these festivities. Christian scholars took over the term to designate their own rites (Bell, 1997: 218). Often, following Aristotle's *Poetica*, liturgy is regarded as a collective ritual to invoke or celebrate the presence of god (*anamnesis*) (McCall, 2007). As I am interested in the prevalence of liturgy (in a broad sense) in contemporary culture, I translate this definition into general terms that build up my heuristic concept. The designation of liturgy, then, would fit to the extent that the event involves a community and to the extent that the sacred is happening, which, in an experience-oriented culture, would involve the experience of it. The central question is therefore: To what extent is community created horizontally, i.e., between those present, and vertically, i.e., with the sacred? This involves two dimensions: the enhancement of a sense of community (horizontal) and the transparency towards a sacred sphere (vertical).

One may object that these dimensions are not independent from each other, as the sociologist Émile Durkheim (1999 [1912]) argued that the sacred originates in the social order. I do not adopt this particular ontological position about the social nature of the sacred, but take the sacred as a special sphere of reverence and awe, marked by boundaries. In this respect, I follow Durkheim's and Huizinga's more descriptive use of the term (Pickering, 1984: 126) and regard sacrality as 'a particular form of cultural signification in which symbols, objects, sentiments and practices are experienced as expressions of a normative, absolute reality' (Lynch, 2011: 15). The focus of my research is on particular forms of the sacred, rather than on the sacred as an ontological source. On the one hand, it is possible for an event to invoke a sacred sphere without creating a sense of community. I would not use the term liturgy for a gathering where people are watching others perform sacred acts without becoming involved. The gathering may be invested with a special dignity, whereas those present are merely spectators and not bound together into a community. On the other hand, a group of people may be heavily involved in a collective activity without a sense of the sacred being present. Although it is difficult to access, it is important to distinguish sacred atmospheres from non-sacred atmospheres – or rather, degrees of sacredness – and communal activities from situations in which the separation between individuals remains intact.

When two dimensions are analytically independent from each other, it is possible to use them to construct a cross table with four positions (see Table 1). There are two extreme positions. One is a liturgical meeting, which involves both community and the sacred. A show, or a spectacle, is another extreme, where there is a performance for an audience rather than an event that involves participation by the audience. Next, there are two mixed positions. A ceremony does involve a sacred sphere, but lacks the participation of a community, while a gathering does involve participation, but lacks the transparency

**Table 1.** Typology of events.

	Community (-)	Community (+)
<b>Sacred sphere (+)</b>	Ceremony	Liturgy
<b>Sacred sphere (-)</b>	Show	Gathering

towards the sacred. These four ideal types actually distinguish between different degrees of communal participation and transparency to the sacred.

My argument is that degrees in ‘sense of community’ and ‘sense of the sacred’ should be distinguished; hence the use of the plus and minus signs in the table. The aim is to discern holy play in various social contexts. As a result, unpretentious activities, such as games, may be uplifted to be viewed as interesting sites for sociological research. Holy play, or liturgy, may be linked with several forms of play. Huizinga (1955 [1940]: 46–75) made a distinction between contests and imaginary play, but included both in the play-category. Games, such as checkers and Twister, take place in the reality of the here-and-now, which is dealt with differently for the duration of the game. In imaginary play (for example, children playing house), the players step into another, illusory, world that they do not know by experience. Liturgy starts in reality and, in this way, resembles games. As two Dutch scholars in semiotics put it: it opens up reality to the mystery that is hidden in reality (Speelman, 2002; Lukken, 2005). Liturgy also resembles imaginary play since the latter has a ritual-like character and, to a certain degree, initiates the players into the world of mystery. Theatre is close to imaginary play, yet adds an audience to those playing, which changes the play. Then again, players may invite the audience to play along, which sometimes happens in contemporary theatre. As to the cultural value of games of pure chance, Huizinga (1955 [1940]: 48) held a low opinion: ‘They are sterile, adding nothing to life or the mind.’ Nevertheless, I included visits to a gambling game in my fieldwork and will discuss this *sub specie ludi*. In contrast, too, with, for example, Speelman’s approach, I do not wish to underpin the distinctiveness of ‘real’ liturgy, but to distinguish observable liturgical elements in particular events.

### Research questions and data

What place is there for holy play in experience-oriented society? Is it possible and useful to make analytic distinctions between the liturgical quality of events? For this article I selected four cases out of a collection of over fifty shows, performances, plays and events that I attended in the Netherlands during 2006–2014. All events were more or less public, with free, non-religious, open-air festivals at one end of the spectrum and publicly announced services in a church building at the other end. Both secular events, such as the opening of the local theatre season, and religious events, such as a church service in the context of a jazz festival, were included; and sometimes the secular and the religious appeared to be intertwined (van den Breemer et al., 2014). Secular events with references to religion, such as a Dionysian theatrical performance by the Austrian artist Hermann Nitsch at an international art festival, drew my attention in particular; regular religious services that were not publicly advertised were excluded.

This is an exercise in the sociology of the sacred, rather than an exercise in the sociology of religion. Not all sacred forms can be encapsulated within the concept of 'religion' and historically 'religion' has been about a lot more than just the sacred (Lynch, 2011: 5). With respect to the definition of religion versus the secular, I hold a constructionist approach. I do not impose my definitions onto the field, but investigated how events were presented and perceived by the various parties that were involved, such as organizers, the media, performers and participants. Events in the religious sphere, such as special church services, were characterized by the involvement of organizations requiring and promoting certain beliefs, rituals, behaviours and experiences. Events in the non-religious, or secular, sphere included artistic, commercial, political and civic events, each with their particular social dynamics. Since the boundaries between the fields are becoming fluid, events may be part of both the religious and secular fields (Arfman, 2014: 53; de Groot, 2008).

All cases were subjected to the typology of events, which was developed during the fieldwork. This tool allowed me to compare a variety of events, either framed as secular, religious or both. Field notes were elaborated on and published in articles, blogs and columns, mainly in Dutch.<sup>1</sup> The selected cases have been described in more detail elsewhere (cf. de Groot, 2013): an evening at a local bingo hall; a special theatre show on Easter Monday; a touristic program; and an interdenominational and transnational religious service. I participated as a regular visitor, but also took notes during and, in particular, directly after the meetings, talked with other participants, collected flyers and visited websites. I did not do extensive interviews; instead, I focused on the relatively unobtrusive method of carefully observing the practice of the event at a particular time and in a particular place, rather than relying on reports by others. I relied on what I could see, hear, smell, feel and taste of embodiments of the sacred while being present. The typology presented above was used as the main interpretive tool, next to more descriptive criteria derived from ritual studies, in order to distinguish liturgical elements in cultural phenomena. I distinguished between six types of sacred games: prayer, ecstasy, blessing, memorial, sermon and sacrifice. The event is situated within the three dimensions of space, time and the people involved. The actions, or 'forms of play', are described: moving, seeing, speaking and hearing, making music and listening and being silent (Lang, 1997; Barnard and Post, 2001). Next to observation, participant observation requires participation (Grimes, 2013: 44–46). I deliberately attempted to open up to the experience of the various events, instead of taking the position of the detached outsider (Buehler, 2012). In order to value my interpretation properly, some self-disclosure might help. I, a male Dutchman, had not visited bingo halls before, but I am familiar with contemporary theatre and church services, though not with the ones reported on here.

## **Analysis**

### *An evening at the bingo hall*

Nearly every weekday, a group of fifty people, mostly elderly working-class women, gather at a simple meeting place called *Café D'n Bingo*. The hall is the former canteen of a supply company to Philips, located in a working-class area of Tilburg, a Dutch industrial

town at the Belgian border. The room, with simple neon lights on the ceiling, is filled with tables and a variety of chairs. There is a bar with deep-frying facilities and a hydraulic bingo machine.

The visitors buy tickets, order coffee or tea, talk with each other and install themselves at tables. Most of them have several tickets and bring their own markers. Some lay down personal objects like photographs of loved ones, small puppets, statues, rosaries, or other mascots. At exactly 8pm, a man says through a microphone: 'Good evening to you all'. Immediately, the volume of the conversation decreases. After a second greeting, there is complete silence. He announces the round and calls the first number. This is followed by silence, the noise of the machine, and the next number. The players look up to hear the number and bow down to check their tickets and to mark the number if it is there, resulting in a repetitive movement of heads. This monotonous chain of actions is interrupted by someone calling 'Bingo!' A buzz sounds. A woman walks to the caller and reads aloud, or rather shouts, the marked numbers. The bingo master checks the bingo balls before him and responds: 'Bingo correct.' The winner is immediately paid in cash. The following sound is the next number. This proceeds until the break, in which snacks are sold. After the break, the routine continues until, before the last number is called, the bingo master says: 'Thanks for coming. Safe journey home.' People put on their coats while checking their tickets. Someone shouts 'Bingo!' Within a few minutes, at 9.30pm, everyone has left the building or is waiting to be picked up.

The actions, which took place in a largely informal yet special atmosphere, were ritualized to a large extent. The collective action followed a strict procedure, while the participants differed in the ways they prepared and performed the playing of the game and the extent to which they made contact with others. Some helped others when they missed a number. The general attitude could be characterized as follows: 'together playing for one's own'. Some played to pass time and have fun, others for money, still others because it was a strong habit: it dominated their life.

On the basis of my visits (October 1 and 10, 2008), I would characterize the evenings at the bingo hall as regular meetings of a particular scene with liturgical qualities. The bingo evenings took place within strict boundaries and can be characterized by a sphere of concentration, tension, joy and fascination, in short, reverence and awe. This qualification does not contradict the opinion that bingo is a 'mere game'; while playing, the play was serious. The players were bound together and showed solidarity, although the community was definitely a community of individuals. Apparently, playing bingo had more effects on life outside the hall for some than for others. Further research might investigate different modes of participation.

### **Art Mass**

In theatre season 2012/2013, the fourth edition of a series of 'Art Masses' (*Kunstdiensten*) took place in the minor hall of a modern theatre (*De Verkadefabriek*) in Den Bosch, a classic provincial town in the south of the Netherlands. The project was produced by the local theatre company and was sponsored by the city council and the province of Noord-Brabant. The invitation was ludic with a slogan like 'A good Mass never misses'; expressions such as 'with a wink' and 'playful and spiritual' were used explicitly. Almost



monthly, usually on a Sunday morning, a group of between fifty and seventy visitors from a modern bourgeois background queued up to present their tickets.

On Easter Monday, April 8, 2012, a band called 'Faith, Hope, Love' played an opening tune on a non-elevated stage with a few chairs, next to a lectern. Then, the hostess of the evening welcomed the visitors and delivered a speech about the fundamental meaning of small things. (A collection of earlier speeches were for sale afterwards.) The format of the 'Art Mass' was a talk show: the hostess interviewed guests, a writer and a musician, about life, death and religion. In between, the band played. Some hummed or sang along. During a break, cookies were passed by way of 'communion'. There was an offertory for payments in addition to the standard fee of €9 for the ticket. One part of the show was called 'confession'. Here, the guests kneeled and were interviewed in this position; they were not questioned about their sins, but invited to talk about their lives and to give an opinion about religion.

I would characterize the Art Mass as a talk show with references to a church service. Unlike in a play, the fourth wall was absent, but this did not imply this was an example of liturgy. The label of the show, the band and a few other elements explicitly referred to a Roman Catholic church service. The logo and the collection bag even contained the sign of the Cross, which may have expressed both an attitude of parody and melancholy. The speech paralleled the sermon in form and content. Yet, the extent of ritualization was limited and the atmosphere was informal. There were moments, for example, at the end of the opening speech, when a sense of awe may have been provoked and through the aesthetical distance produced by all the irony, the involvement of the audience might have been aroused. Yet, the lightness of the talk show formula prevailed. The format facilitated casual talking about existential topics. A solemn atmosphere was avoided; participation of the audience was low.

### *A touristic trip to the Chapel of St. Catherine*

On Sunday morning, October 28, 2008, the inhabitants of Den Bosch and its surroundings were invited by the 'Bureau Time Travel' [*Bureau Tijdreiziger*] to take part in a cultural daytrip with a ludic title, translated as 'Get in Touch with Religious Heritage' [*Religieus erfgoed erg goed*]. The trip included a visit to a chapel, a synagogue and a mosque. An introduction to Byzantine liturgy had been given earlier in the week. The Byzantine religious service in the Chapel of St. Catherine in Den Bosch was the same service that was organized by a volunteer community and was arranged every week in the chapel at the same hour. This was the Divine Liturgy, according to the Eastern rite, except that the texts were not in Church Slavonic, but in the vernacular. As a result, the gathering consisted of churchgoers and visitors, in addition to a choir, the priest, the deacon and a host.

Thus, the usual liturgy was performed in a context of tourism (Swatos, 2006). The Byzantine liturgy usually implies a flood of movements, gestures, formulae, images (icons) and scents (incense). This time, a host explained through a microphone what was happening in front of and behind the iconostasis and what was expected from the participants during the Holy Communion. Everyone was invited to participate, yet only a minority did. With almost one hundred participants and one priest distributing bread and wine, the ritual took a while. Many left, others preferred to watch. At the end of the service, all participants were

invited to come forward to kiss the Cross. About thirty visitors followed the guide to the next part of the daytrip: a speech and a concert in a synagogue.

The Byzantine liturgy is in itself a religious service with a strong ceremonial character. Active participation of the attendants is largely restricted to saying 'Amen' at the right spots and to participation in the Eucharist. Options for passive participation, however, are plenty: listening to the songs, recitations and sermons; being silent while sitting; walking; smelling the incense; and viewing the interior of the building and the icons. In this case, the service was embedded in an event that was organized under the heading of tourism. This involved a division between participants in the liturgy and an audience witnessing a ceremony. The voice-over promoted witnessing the liturgical event as a ceremony.

### *Prayer for unity*

On Sunday morning, January 20, 2008, I visited the Rehoboth Church in Tilburg, attracted by an announcement in a free local newspaper. In those days, the Indonesian Protestant Church (Geredja Kristen Indonesia Nederland) held its services in this mainline Protestant church building. Because of the Prayer for Unity on this day, the congregation celebrated together with the neighbouring Roman Catholic parish and the Maluku Evangelical Church (Geredja Indjili Maluku).<sup>2</sup> As a result, the small church was crowded with people of all ages, predominantly Dutch-Asians and a few elderly white women. People talked with each other exuberantly before the service.

The service was led by two ministers and a priest. Each had his own performance style. The Indonesian minister had a robust posture and a strong voice; the Maluku minister used humour; the Roman Catholic lay ecclesial minister had an elegant appearance. The attention was mainly focused on the liturgical centre, but the attendants packed in the pews listened attentively, sang, prayed and exchanged signs of peace.

After the service, coffee was served followed by Indonesian food. Most attendants belonged to the Indonesian or Maluku community by birth or marriage. Some had to travel quite a distance, since the congregations had a regional function, stretching out to Flanders. People carpoled and invited one another to their homes for supper afterwards.

The interdenominational religious service was dominated by transnational congregations. The celebration was embedded in a broader communal life. Meeting one another was very important: it was hard to distinguish this from the importance of contact with the sacred in the liturgy. The 'sacred' part of the meeting did not appear very sacred: religious discourse seemed self-evident. The 'profane' part appeared special, joyful and communal. Fundamental to the whole meeting was the social fact that the community present received its identity from being a religious transnational congregation. Perhaps this was as much a gathering of a pre-existing community, as it was a community which was created by celebrating liturgy.

### **Discussion and conclusion**

Seldom are a popular gambling game and a church service interpreted from the same perspective, namely, play. This approach proceeds by delving into the tricky questions on the enhancement of a sense of community and the transparency towards a sacred sphere.

In doing so, it cuts through the usual discourses, describing bingo evenings solely in terms of leisure, or addiction and church services in terms of the sacred. A fresh anthropological approach reveals that holy play may be found in unexpected places. It shows that events that could otherwise be ignored can show the social enactment and experience of the sacred. In order to move beyond the level of 'thick description' these findings should be explained by relating them to social institutions. Further research might delve into the relation between the popularity of bingo, the cultural context of calculating rationality and the industrial past and present of the local community.

My site visits suggest that the categories derived from Huizinga and others are useful. Had it not been possible to distinguish between more or less sacred events, or more or less involving meetings, the value of the typology would be reduced. The added value would be minor, too, if all religious events had appeared as sacred and all secular events as non-sacred. Instead, the interpretive framework helps to perceive parallels and differences between the various cases. The typology serves to distinguish how – in reality – different types of play interfere. Bingo, a gambling *game* within a particular scene appeared to have liturgical qualities. A public theatre *show* took up functions equivalent to a religious service. Including the Byzantine Liturgy in a touristic program produced a mixture between taking part in a religious service and watching an exotic *ceremony*. The *gathering* of the transnational communities appeared important, next to the openness to the sacred in the church service. Thus, nuanced characterizations of a variety of events could be made.

The suggestion to pay attention to ludic elements helped to discern the materials that build a sacred sphere and a sense of community. According to Huizinga, play requires dedication, but apparently there is room for aesthetic distance as well. The ironic attitude Aupers describes was present in theatre and in the touristic trip. In two other cases, the bingo hall and the Prayer for Unity, a full engagement with the game and the congregation was presumed. Holy play is not absent in late modernity, but might be found even in a hall devoted to a popular gambling game. Huizinga's broad diagnoses of modernity may be outdated, but the tools he introduced remain useful to distinguish the elements that constitute late-modern meetings as more or less playful – even when this involves combinations which seem contradictory from Huizinga's own point of view.

The cases discussed here are grounded in exploratory research on a small scale. The sceptical reader may object that the characterizations presented above are merely in the eye of the beholder. How is 'sacredness' measured? On what ground can 'a sense of community' be determined? Indeed, the robustness of these findings would have been stronger if the cases had been selected more systematically, if several researchers had observed and reported the same meetings, if interviews had been conducted, if the meetings had been recorded on video and if more instances of the same events had been visited. This would require a project on a larger scale and one that should avoid becoming too obtrusive or limiting to the capacity of the researcher to participate.

With respect to my research, the merits lie in the diversity of the cases observed, the focus on practice rather than text, the simplicity of the interpretive framework and in the transcendence of biases which prevent witnessing the sacred in a bingo hall. Contemporary studies of spirituality, for example, run the risk of duplicating the discourse of the participants: a certain vocabulary then promotes the perception of the respondents as

being ‘spiritual’. This disregards the importance of practice. Events are momentary, but other researchers are invited to replicate similar case-studies and compare their results with mine.

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### Notes

1. See <http://www.nieuwwij.nl> and <http://www.godschrift.nl> (accessed: 11 August 2016).
2. Maluku refers to an eastern archipelago of former Dutch India, which came under the rule of the Indonesian government.

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