

Anthropology Colloquia

Winter 2014

Sarah Bakker Kellogg
Visiting Scholar, UC Berkeley

The Ethics of the Singing Subject: Music, Multiculturalism, and the Middle Eastern Christianity in the Netherlands

Syriac Orthodox Christians are among those marginal, lesser-known religious minorities of the Middle East for whom there is no hyphen between “ethno” and “religious”—at least not yet. In the global diaspora of the 21st century, Syriac Orthodox elites work hard to persuade the rest of their community to imagine the possibility of such a hyphen. The diaspora is wracked by an emerging ethnic politics—but this is a politics turned inward towards reformulating the theological ethics of Christian community. The effort to produce a legibly secular ethnic identity is mediated through the sung liturgy, a ritual and aesthetic formation inextricably entangled with intimate kin relations.

In the Dutch corner of the global diaspora, the liturgical politics of sound encounters an explicit state project to integrate *allochthones*, minority citizens of Middle Eastern and North African descent. Driven by debates over multiculturalism, tolerance, and the ethics of citizenship, Dutch integration policy targets for transformation the very connective tissue between religious identity and kinship with which Syriac Christians are otherwise occupied in their liturgical practices.

In this talk, I explore how second- and third-generation Dutch-Syriac women and men creatively negotiate the tensions presented by their global and their national audiences. Drawing on multisensory ethnography and Foucault’s understanding of ethics as the reflexive practice of freedom, I show how they use the sound of their voices to refashion their sense of what it is to be Middle Eastern Christian in Europe. Thus, I argue, sound itself becomes an ontologically plural technology for reconfiguring self and community in relation to multiple social worlds and conflicting political pressures.



Monday, February 3
3:30-5:00 pm
261, Social Sciences 1