

"FOR FATHER": RITUALS AND THE POLITICS OF MOURNING THAI KING BHUMIBOL

PUBLIC LECTURE
PROF. IRENE STENGs



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Abstract

To the eye of the world, the farewell for King Bhumibol consisted of royal ceremonies of splendour, pomp and pageantry, interlaced with close-ups of kneeling and crying people, dressed in black and holding portraits of the king. This presentation will focus on other rituals organized throughout the year of mourning between the king's death and his cremation. My argument is twofold. First, these rituals were part of a well-orchestrated effort to implement a policy of mourning, intended to present the Thai nation with an image of itself as unified in grief and love for their great monarch. In this image, there is no place for the conflicts that deeply divide Thai society. Second, the mourning period and its rituals served as a substrate on which the new reign could manifest itself in public space. The new royal presence, as I will show, unfolds itself in a subtle manner, using a moral aesthetic of innocence and cuteness as if to veil the militaristic power behind it.

Irene Stengs

Irene Stengs is Professor by Special Appointment in Anthropology of Ritual and Popular Culture at the Vrije Universiteit. She is also tied to the Meertens Instituut in Amsterdam and has been the chairman for the Onderzoeksraad for the past years. She does most of her research in Thailand and in The Netherlands. Her researches are mainly focussed on commemorative rituals. She also focusses on processes of heritage formation. In her work, Irene Stengs tries to showcase the interconnectedness of rituals, media and popculture. She is also very interested in the culture of everyday life and how this is connected to broad social issues and developments.

AALS

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