

Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

Heerhugowaard, 31-08-2015

Dear Members of the United Nations,

While you are walking around in the Netherlands during the months November and December you will notice something very special. As this is the time of the year when the Dutch tradition of Sinterklaas takes place. Sinterklaas and Zwarte Piet are the main characters of this feast. Santa Clause, well known by you, is derived, amongst others, from the Dutch Sinterklaas. The Zwarte Piet is unknown to most of you.

We would like to elaborate and emphasize a few issues. The image of people of African descent is not the origin of Zwarte Piet and comparing Zwarte Piet to the American Blackface is historically incorrect.

It's understandable that because of the way Zwarte Piet was sometimes portrayed, because of numerous historical reasons on which we will elaborate in this letter, the opposition came with objections. And sometimes, there still are a few Zwarte Piet interpreters that could improve in that area.

We agree in that area with the Human rights committee, that in those cases, on some points, there could be a point of a negative stereo type. However, not on the points the Human rights Committee mentioned, which would be that Zwarte Piet is dumb, servant and black, but on the elements which were transferred into a ruling by a judge during a trial in Amsterdam on July 3rd 2014. For example, Surinam 'crooked Talk', and exaggerated fat lips.

Even though the trial and ruling were declared null and void by the high court, in which the "Pietengilde" were involved, we will not ignore those elements.

We, as the Sint and Pietengilde, are very busy to implement improvements where they are necessary. So, where the Dutch government implies to facilitate initiatives to change Zwarte Piet into an 'acceptable' Piet, the Sint and Pietengilde have actually worked on those improvements.

However, we would like to specifically emphasize the fact that the vast majority of the Zwarte Piet interpreters have been playing their role of this mystical fairytale character in the correct manner for years, en keep afar from issues, that in addition to the black color which Zwarte Piet simply has, could be offensive.

They have portrayed an 'acceptable' Piet in this manner for years, free of the possible elements of negative stereotype casting. And, as will be explained in this document, the black color, or the name 'knecht' (servant) does not give a negative image of the black race. It has nothing to do with it. Neither has the 'dumb' character of Zwarte Piet, as far as this is existent in the portrayal of the figure, there are historical reasons that have everything to do with Zwarte Piet, and nothing to do with colored people.

We, as advocates of Zwarte Piet , as well as more than 90% of the Dutch population, want to keep the figure of Zwarte Piet as an important cultural heritage for the Netherlands.

The Sinterklaas tradition, in combination with the (predecessors of) Zwarte Piet has always been important for the Netherlands and this festivity has , even when there was resistance ,endured the centuries.

Some may think that Zwarte piet is being changed quickly because of the discussion surrounding this figure, however, we have noticed that the opposite is true. We have noticed that the Dutch have become more and more resistant because of the attack on their tradition and that the evolution of Zwarte Piet following a natural course from within the Dutch community (which is the only way to let a tradition evolve), because of this attack, will slow down or come to a standstill.

You, as members of the United Nations have been approached by people , whom, unjustified, have created the impression that we celebrate a racist tradition, or at least, celebrate a tradition with racist elements. Even now, in the present.

Because of these allegations, you as a committee, came up with some well meant advice about how we should change or adapt this tradition. This, because of the false impressions some of you have developed regarding this tradition.

Some of you have even asked out loud why we need to have two "Sinterklazen" in our "Dutch Christmas", which is a completely different tradition altogether, where Sinterklaas makes room for Santa Claus as a completely different character in a completely different tradition.

Also , we are told by you, that because the tradition is hurtful to some people in the Netherlands, we should, one way or another, abandon the figure of Zwarte Piet, regardless of the true origin or history of Zwarte Piet.

With utmost amiability, we ask you, as members of the United Nations, and also, others whom have not studied our tradition in the correct manner, not to make blunt statements like that. These statements make it all too clear to the advocates of Zwarte Piet that you have not taken the time to educate yourselves about the tradition, the vision and points of view of the advocates of Zwarte Piet. Even worse, the advocates of Zwarte Piet are being put down as secretive racists. As advocates of Zwarte Piet we state that we do not recognize ourselves in these statements.

As for the pain some people might experience about this subject, that should be something that should not escape your attention.

Dear members, please realize that it is clear from the advice, rapports, comments and publications that most of you do not know enough about this tradition to pass judgement. And also realize that the manner in which Zwarte Piet has been presented to you up till now, is not the complete picture and contains many , many inaccuracies. Most of all, we would like to explain in this document why the Sinterklaas tradition with Zwarte Piet in a mystical role, is not just a beautiful family festivity, which is

mostly enjoyed by children, but is also an important cultural tradition to the Dutch people. A heritage that goes back to its origin by many centuries.

We will also explain how the Sinterklaas tradition obtained an extra dimension as a symbol of national unity and gave moral strength to the Dutch population in a heavily wounded and demoralized nation after the war.

There are many aspects like these of which you have very little or no knowledge. Therefore we can justifiably state that the responsible UN members probably do not realize the consequences of their well meant advice for the Dutch society.

Therefore we would like to kindly request that they omit these well meant advisory statements and to leave the Dutch society to decide for themselves how they want to deal with this issue. The unjustified pressure you have put on our government, whereby our government cannot decide anything about our national feast, very likely sabotaged a good solution.

Many aspects regarding the Sinterklaas tradition have not been documented, also regarding the history, opposite visions exist. We are very busy to document everything and have started special projects to facilitate this. Of course it speaks for itself, that we, as guardians of the tradition, including Zwarte Piet, are against racism. This however, does not mean that we are giving up on our heritage. Both subjects are dear and important to us.

The restricted view of many opponents of Zwarte Piet, in which they are not willing to accept the explanation as to why the Dutch are holding on to the most part of their tradition as it is, stands in the way in the discussion when it comes to comprehend each others point of view. Especially when they claim that the other way round should be seen and understood.

The pain is being fed by what they attach and relate to Zwarte Piet themselves. We acknowledge that people can feel hurt by the Sinterklaas tradition, based upon (in our view, wrong) interpretation that Zwarte Piet is racism. We would like to point out the pain of the Dutch population, whom are being confronted by the fact that a centuries old tradition, which plays an important role in their family life, and has a role as a national symbol, is being scrutinized and attacked, sometimes viciously by the media and opponents. More and more often, small children fall victim to the harsh actions by the opponents. And the unjustified accusation of racism hurts the people that love and cherish this tradition.

We, as the Sint and Pietenguild are asking for your attention on this underexposed side of the discussion, and are also asking you for acknowledgement of the Sinterklaas tradition as cultural heritage of the Dutch people, just like other similar cultural heritages in other countries are being acknowledged and protected by the United Nations.

In the addendum we hope to provide you with more information concerning the historical background of the Sinterklaas tradition, as well as the character of Zwarte Piet. Also we hope to convey to you what this festivity and the fairytale character means to a large part of the Dutch population, and why more than 90% of the Dutch people would like to keep this tradition, including Zwarte Piet.

Best regards,

The Sint and Pietenguild.

1. Historical summary of the Sinterklaas celebration

Who wants to write about the history of the Sint Nicolas feast, will encounter the fact that there are multiple figures unto which Sint Nicolas can be traced back.

His helper Zwarte Piet, also apparently has different roots in his origins.

When you look at the history of the Sinterklaas tradition you cannot evade the figure of Sinterklaas. Most of the historians see the Holy Nicholas of Myra in Sinterklaas.

This Nicholas has been worshipped in the East since the sixth century

(Janssen,15). In the course of the centuries this worship spread to Italy by monks whom established themselves there. His body was brought to Bari in Italy in 1087 to protect it from possible violation by moslims. From there the worship spread to the rest of Europe. There is a persistent rumor that he was erased from the Sacred Calendar from the church of Rome, but this entirely does not meet the truth. 'Saint Nicholas was a bishop and was never erased from the calendar (Janssen) From there his worship spread over all of Europe.

The first record about the holy Nicholas in the Netherlands can be found in Utrecht in 1883. http://www.rkk.nl/katholicisme/encyclopedie/n/nicolaas_van_myra The first record of the name "Sinterklaas" can be found in 1283, from the sale of *senter cloes bunre* or a "Sinterklaasbunder" (a piece of land in Rijkhoven, (Limburg B)) l)) [1283; VMNW *senterclaesbunre* the proceeds were likely used to set up a Sint Nicholas Altar .] <http://www.etymologiebank.nl/trefwoord/sinterklaas>

The oldest church which is dedicated to Saint Nicholas in The Netherlands, dates from 1307 and can be found in IJsselstein. The first record of the Sinterklaas feast can be found on a city bill dated 1360 in Dordrecht, on which the delicacy's are listed which were ordered for the celebration of a Sint Nicolaas feast.

The customs used around the date of death of the Holy Saint Nicholas, december 6th, can be separated into three scenario's, according to Louis Janssen. The first is for school children, where a school bishop let himself be accompanied by devils during a begging spree through the town or city. The second, for the older youths, concerns a masquerade , and is, even if he rejects a direct connection to Wodan, to the Wild Hunt to which myth Wodan is definitely connected by Meissen. The third, is the nightly visit to the young children.(Janssen)

This is where we come upon an interesting part of history, because even though not directly supported by documents, a connection can be made based upon prominent points between the old Germanic religion en the Sinterklaas feast in the present day. The oldest figure to which Sinterklaas can be connected is the Germanic god Wodan. There are many similarities between both figures, an important one is the similarity in which Wodan uses his ravens Hugin and Mugin, to listen at the smoking hole , just like Zwarte Piet listens at the chimney to pass on information to Saint Nicholas.

Different authors point out the black figures in the army of death, the wild hunt and Oel, Wodan's son and servant. Other similarities between Wodan and Saint Nicholas

are the hay- en carrot offering and the magical travelling through the air by Sint Nicholas on his horse, just like Wodan did on his horse , Sleipnir.

Elements like putting a shoe at the chimney stuffed with hay and carrots, the rambling of the chains, the throwing of pepernoten and other sweets, the letters and the giving of fruits, here and in other parts of Europe, and even in similar feasts in other parts of the World, refer to a very old origin of the feast.

Even though some historians do not agree, Janssen points out that there are sources that point out a connection between the mythology and the Sinterklaas feast as we know it in the present. (Janssen,17) This point of view regarding the Sinterklaas tradition can be found in the whole of Europe and has many interesting aspects that are worthwhile. The material that has been collected with this theory in mind, certainly deserves our attention. It could provide new insights regarding the history and has already done so.

Back in the middle-ages we find the feast for the school children in which the boy bishop played a role, we also find the feast for adults in which religious ceremonies and a festive meal were the main focus. He became very important as the holy patron of trade. Especially in Amsterdam there was a large worship of this Saint, and children received money, sweets and Gifts. On December 5th purchases were made during the Nicolas market. There was a parade during the evening and the children put their shoe at the chimney'.

However, Sinterklaas also was the patron Saint of lovers as such, his role as marriage maker was important. The Zwarte Klazen, whom passed the homes of the people with the rambling of their chains to look for naughty children, would not leave the couples to themselves either.(Janssen31,32)

During the 16th century, the Netherlands was introduced to the Protestant reformation, this was a movement that opposed the abuse of power by the clergy in the church of Rome. This movement gained a lot of support , mainly in the west and north of the Netherlands, and aimed itself against the popular godliness and worshipping of the saints, and wanted to diminish the many expressions of shame giving folk culture. The Sinterklaas feast also became a target. The things which most people saw as innocent amusements, like 'putting the shoe', and ginger bread men became forbidden. It is assumed that especially mothers (both Catholics and Protestants) wanted to save the feast for their children, and therefore it has become a feast that was mainly celebrated in peoples homes. The main aspect is the giving of Gifts by the bishop to the children , who comes through the chimney, as can be seen in a painting by Jan Steen. Both the bishop and his helper are present as symbols in the painting. The gingerbread man in the form of a bishop and the switch! The children were told that Sinterklaas would come to ask them if they had been good and deserved a gift. The figure that would come by was called Klaas or Zwarte (Black) Klaas, but did not resemble a bishop in the least. Often, the figure was dressed in hideous clothing with a blackened face or mask, he would carry rattling chains, sometimes even wearing horns on his head and wearing animal hides. This folklore figure was not meant to interpret the role of the holy benefactor, but more of a

punishing role. The Black face and the chains refer to this role. The switch is also carried by this figure. It's very important to take into consideration the practicing of the feast in other European countries to come to a better understanding about how the feast is celebrated here. In other countries it is often the helper that fulfills the role described above, even though the double role exists in other countries where the Reformation was important. During the end of the 18th century, beginning of the 19th century we still hear a lot about the Zwarte Klazen, where the emphasis lies in the fact that this way of celebrating is no longer pedagogical sound. The population, according to the sources found, keep on celebrating in the way they are accustomed to. A source dated 1833 states that people are aware of the fact that there are two Sinterklazen, the legendary Sinterklaas that rides into the chimney at night to deliver Gifts and has found a magical way to shrink himself to a small size, and the folk cultural Zwarte Klaas, even though we sometimes see an amalgamation of the two. We know of just one image of this folk cultural Zwarte Klaas, made by Simon Krausz in the beginning of the 19th century.

<https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/nl/collectie/RP-P-1935-720>

At the beginning of the 19th century a "new Sint Nicolaas print" appears, in which there is a hint about the servant of Sinterklaas. As to his appearance, this image does not give a decisive answer about the way the servant looks.

<http://www.openluchtmuseum.nl/ontdek-het-museum/collectie-voorwerpen/sint-nicolaas/de-nieuwe-sint-nicolaasprint/>

During the middle of the 19th century more images appear, in Groningen for example, we can see some of the typical clothing Zwarte Piet wears. Sinterklaas has been portrayed in this manner before. The amalgamation could have been prompted by the double role of the Zwarte Klazen.

A Klaas/Pete figure 1847

<https://groninganus.files.wordpress.com/2013/11/grc-30-11-1849-b.jpg?w=590>

A poem by Bernhard van Meurs appears in 1894, in which he points out the folklore Zwarte Klaas as Pieter(baas). He writes about an event that happened in his youth, when Pieter came tumbling out of a closet carrying the chains and switch and wearing a masquerade (because eventually he recognizes his uncle by his crooked legs) and asked him about his behavior

http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/meur003krie01_01/meur003krie01_01_0037.php

Meanwhile, the booklet Sint Nikolaas and his Servant has been published in 1850, a booklet for children in which Sinterklaas appears as a bishop accompanied by a black servant. The text in this booklet only mentions the black color of the servant. The way

in which the Sinterklaas feast has been made into a more civilized celebration, fits into the pedagogical ethos of that time.

The Servant's role is an existing one in the Sinterklaas celebrations in Europe, we know of Knecht Ruprecht in Germany, a name which also appears in the Netherlands. The old servant appears to be an existing term for someone in whom we will recognize the figure of Zwarte Piet for certain, but, and this is important, also Sint Nicolaas himself when he appears in his black appearance.

Uit Niermeijer:

men. Zoo spreekt men in Duitschland van *Knecht Ruprecht* (2) en *Knecht Nikolaas*. In de oude *Knecht* ligt zekere achteloosheid en gemeenzame spotternij, en in de zegswijze: *het blijft de oude Knecht*, wanneer men over iemands onleerzaamheid of onverbeterlijkheid spreekt, en van daar over alles, waarin men steeds het oude gebrekkige blijft waarnemen, is de zoo veel weldaden rondom zich verspreidende en hulp aanbren- gende Huisgeest tot een dommen, onnutten ballast ver- nederd.

In Germany one speaks of Servant Ruprecht (2) en Servant Nicholas. In the old Servant lies embedded a certain cavalier mentality or carelessness and easy mockery, and in the saying: he is still the old Servant, when a person speaks of his unwillingness to learn or bettering himself, en over things in which this old inadequacy is visible, a very good en helping Houseghost is seen as not useful.

There are several theories about the possible ethnicity of the black servant. He is seen as someone from India or otherwise oriental, or people regard him as an African. From the historical point of view it is also understandable that this question has never been asked, simply because people did not think about that with such a mythical figure.

The origin of the name Zwarte Piet is a particular detail. It definitely does not originate from Schenkman, essentially it is an old name used for an evil spirit in the cultural beliefs of the people the same as Zwarte Klaas. Only because the Saint who played his role unseen was portrayed to children in the flesh in his bishop attire it became necessary to rename the Black Klaas. Another particular detail is the still lasting appearance of Zwarte Klazen, with or without a chain. Black Pete is also seen regularly with a chain.

From the account by Bernard van Meurs, and other sources we have to conclude a diversity of origins concerning Zwarte Piet. Origins that to this day have left their

traces in the figure and tradition. The servant from Saint Nicholas and his servant, figures wearing animal hides with horns and the Zwarte Klazen.

The origin of Saint Nicholas is the legendary Saint Nicholas combined with the magic in which he can ride on rooftops. Zwarte Piet, the folklore Sinterklaas, comes into the picture as his servant and delivers Gifts to the children, as the story goes: through the chimney. The conception that he obtains his black colour by sliding down the chimney, is being passed on to each generation by word of mouth, and is to this day, part of the figure. This explanation also appears elsewhere in Europe regarding the companions of Saint Nicholas. The black plays an important role in the nightly visits by Zwarte Piet. And the fact that he remains invisible with his black face during the night, is an important part of this tradition. It is customary for Zwarte Piet to bang on the doors of people's homes during Pakjesavond (the evening of gifts), and to leave a bag filled with gifts. The children will run to the door and are usually convinced that they saw a glimpse of Zwarte Piet disappearing into the night.

In later editions of Schenkman's booklet we notice that for the servant, whom now is being called Zwarte Piet in other booklets, the clothing transform into clothing that has already been observed for Klazen and Sinterklaas. Zwarte Piet is being dressed in, for the Netherlands, representative clothing. We should remark that this type of clothing was characteristic in children books, especially in fairytales.

During the course of time more booklets appear in which it becomes apparent that the figure is being influenced by multiple influences, something that is even more apparent in his masquerade. Sinterklaas was not dressed in red in the masquerade, but in white, the white that still appears in his Alb, beard and hair and Black Pete was still black in the way the Zwarte Klaas was.

Regrettably the figure has been depicted in those years in an embarrassing way, especially in children books and commercial displays, even though it is apparent for example by Black Pete wearing a chain that he derives from multiple origins and not just one. This fact is often overlooked and kept quiet about to make a point. However it is important to mention these facts that play a large role in Zwarte Piet and are why he is part of people's identity in a non-offensive way which needs to be taken seriously by people who judge this figure. As we said before this non-offensive way of portraying Zwarte Piet is much more apparent in the masquerade as we can see in pictures. These things are usually not taken into account and this is a shame as it explains why changing away from being black would destroy a fundamental thing about him.

An analysis of pictures from the oldest to the present time would reveal that in the Masquerade there are a lot of depictions of Zwarte Piet that are not offensive. At this moment in time these influences if ever they were there, especially in the masquerade

are practically nonexistent. It has disappeared from the children books and will, under influence of this debate, eventually disappear entirely from the merchandise.

Where Zwarte Piet still had his characteristics as a bogeyman in the 1960's , this role has been diminished by the influence of educators, sometimes even symbolically, by throwing away the switch. The bag nowadays is only being used to carry gifts, and no longer for taking the naughty children in it to Spain. These elements however are vestigial and remain so in the Sinterklaas tradition , and are recognizable as such by everyone.

The Sint and Pietenguild wants to make the sensitivities that exist regarding the figure of Zwarte Piet topic of discussion, and has already done so by starting dialogue with both adversaries and advocates of Zwarte Piet. But we would also like to point out to you, that the black color is not the only aspect of Zwarte Piet, as stated by adversaries. The color is an original feature of Zwarte Piet. To get rid of the respective influence, it is not necessary to erase Zwarte Piet as a whole. It is important to look seriously at the interpreters of Zwarte Piet whom , in the masquerade, still use elements that could be seen as negative stereotyping .By passing on the correct information and educating by giving courses, amongst others, we can achieve that there no longer will be Zwarte Pieten who use these elements. As we stated earlier, this concerns a smaller group of interpreters. The majority of Zwarte Piet interpreters no longer comply to such conceptualisation.

Why Zwarte Piet still is black and should remain so, can be concluded from the history described here.

Bentham, H

van http://www.henkvanbentham.nl/fileadmin/uploads/sinterklaas/Toonbeelden_Sint_2012.pdf

Böeseken-Peltenburg, J.J. (1833). Het Sint Nikolaas-Feest uit "*Geschenk voor lieve kinderen*" (pagina 5 t/m 16). Schalekamp en Van de Grampel (Amsterdam)

Janssen, Louis, 1993 Nicolaas de Duivel en de doden AMBO Baarn

Meurs, Bernhard van *Kriekske*. De Katholieke Illustratie, Den Bosch z.j. [1894]

Niermeyer, Anthony, 1840 A Wijnands, Rotterdam Verhandeling over het Booze Wezen in het bijgeloof onzer Natie

Schenkman, Jan, (1850) Sint Nikolaas en zijn Knecht Th. Bom Amsterdam

Wouters, M J Sinterklaas van A tot Z [Symbool] Becht's Uitgevers-Maatschappij, 2009

2.Zwarte Piet before 1850(Summary of the Figure before 1850)

In 1894 Bernard Van Meurs describes an event from his youth where, at his home, during the eve of Saint Nicholas, an unrecognisable figure comes tumbling out of the closet, with a chain and a switch. He refers to this figure as Pieter(baas), who we recognize as Black Pete. He states this happened during his childhood, more than 50 years ago, which dates the event 1843. But if the servant was invented in 1850, what is it that this author is writing about? The author himself was 8 years old in 1843 and was starting to lose his faith in Sinterklaas. As we stated in chapter 1 Zwarte Piet has known many influences well before Schenkman published his booklet in 1850. The conception of there not being a figure before 1850, is not supported by the facts.

The oldest connections are those that tie Sinterklaas and Zwarte Piet to the old Germanic religion. The Sinterklaas tradition contains a few specific details, like the manner in which Wodan had his ravens Hugin and Mugin listen at the smoke hole/chimney, so that they could convey information about the people to him. Also the hay offering and the fact that Sinterklaas can ride over the rooftops are seen as similarities, because of 'putting the shoe with hay for the horse, and the fact that Wodan travels by air on his horse Sleipnir. Other elements are the 'putting of the shoe' itself, the rattling of the chains, the throwing of pepernoten and other sweets, the handing out of letters (runes), these are all elements which can be found in other feasts in Europe which have a connection to Sinterklaas. These all refer to a very old origin of this feast.

Janssen points out sources that support a connection in the mythology, as well as Meissen, whom rejects a direct connection between Wodan and Sinterklaas , sees a connection with the Wild Hunt, a mythological event in which Wodan, his son and servant Oel and the army of death play an important part.

During the early middle-ages Sint Nicolaas was mostly accompanied by figures with or on a chain whom often had a blackened face. Later , during the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century we find descriptions of figures in animal hides wearing a mask or blackened face. We also find bogeyman-like figures in the Sinterklaas tradition, also called Zwarte Klazen.

Whoever hears stories about Zwarte Piet knows that he was frightening and that you had to be afraid of him. Waving his switch he would frighten you before he, when apparent you had been of good behavior, give you pepernoten and gifts. This bogeyman like aspect which can also be found separated from the Sinterklaas tradition, again is an important clue that we are dealing with both Zwarte Piet and Zwarte Klazen, they both show the same behavior , and in addition to their black

appearance, also wore a chain, a fact we know from the old stories and photographs from earlier times.

Many of the later elements of Zwarte Piet, his clothing for example, his feathers, the chain and the black color we have seen in predecessors in one form or another. All of these aspects are important in coming to an understanding and judgement about Zwarte Piet in the Sinterklaas tradition.



The Zwarte Sinterklaas from the Veluwe.(Netherlands)

3. Zwarte Piet as a cultural archetype: the trickster

Back In 2013 a pioneering article appeared in a daily newspaper "Trouw", written by journalist, tv-maker and author Arnold-Jan Scheer, whom has spend thirty years investigating the origins of the Sinterklaas tradition and similar cultural expressions across the World.

Scheer travelled to remote and isolated areas and was confronted with Pagan and often ecstatic Sinterklaas rites and came to the conclusion –supported by investigating literature- that the feast has roots that are thousands if not tens of thousands of years old.

According to Scheer, Zwarte Piet is an ancient archetype, a soot disguise, a cultural archetype that has the intention to bind , not to divide. Zwarte Piet wears many elements that refer to his older origin through which he is connected to the trickster figures. Scheer points out that the soot disguises have existed for many centuries and have no ethnic intentions. We also see this type of disguise in Afrika, but then the other way around, faces are being painted white.

Arnold –Jan Scheer states that Zwarte Piet belongs to the cultural archetype of The Trickster. <https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trickster> In the description of this cultural archetype on Wikipedia we learn that the trickster-figure prominently is a figure that the suppressed can identify with; a figure to be admired because of his better and (sometimes) supernatural skills , but also a figure who sees , because of his cleverness, opportunities to escape the pressure of the power full .

In his investigation of similar cultural rites and the origin of the Sinterklaas tradition, cq, the Zwarte Piet figure, Scheer has visited geographically diverse areas, Cornwall (UK), Catalonia, Macedonia, Germany and Hungary. He has also visited places outside of Europe, Iran for instance, where there is an important similar figure, called Hadji Firoez, an important cultural archetype whom appears in the feast of Noroiez, a feast which is recognized by the UN as cultural heritage.

<https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Noroiez>

The cultural archetype 'The Trickster' also appears in Central-Africa in the figure Eshu (who sometimes carries a switch, loves sweets and has similarities with Sinterklaas himself) . In Surinam and the Antilles we know of the mythical spider Anansi as a variant of this archetype. Forced change to these figures would naturally meet resistance.

We highly recommend the article written by Arnold-Jan Scheer and his TV-documentary "Wild Geraas" about this subject.

Preview Wild Geraas: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vx1ptSLzJws>

4. The Influence of Jan Schenkman.

As mentioned in chapter 1, there has been an influence on the Sinterklaas tradition by the Amsterdam teacher and author/poet Jan Schenkman, whom published a booklet in 1850 titled Sint Nicolaas and his servant. This was a booklet for children in which Sinterklaas appears as a bishop accompanied by a black servant.

Only in the text in there is mention of the fact that the servant is black. The way in which the Sinterklaas tradition is being made respectable, fits in with the pedagogical mind frame of that time. The word 'knecht' or servant has, in the Dutch language, the meaning of employee. Someone who is employed by someone else, and is receiving a salary for their rendered services. This in addition to the meaning it has in the folk cultural beliefs explained in chapter 1. (Niermeijer)

From the historical point of view regarding the Zwarte Klazen and other figures with hides and horns that were already present in the Sinterklaas tradition, the question regarding ethnicity is not relevant.

Wherever this question is being asked, we can assume a diversity in interpretation exists.

<http://www.meertens.knaw.nl/cms/nl/over-het-meertens-instituut/oud-medewerkers/142467-johnh> and Sinterklaas from A tot Z p. 20 (M J Wouters)

When talking about the meaning of the servant in this booklet, it would be a good thing to take into account the facts we know about the author, Jan Schenkman.

He was aged 44 when he wrote the booklet, taught private school and was, next to being a teacher and publicist, also a prominent member of the 'Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen', an association that was involved in social issues on many levels, including being opposed to the slave trade and slavery. It was a very progressive association during that time, and they spoke out explicitly against this in a debate that increased in intensity around that time. It is not plausible that Schenkman would abandon this opinion when he wrote the booklet Sinterklaas and his servant. An (regrettably anonymous) historian pointed this out in this document.

https://voxullus.files.wordpress.com/2013/11/zp_hist_context_draft4.pdf

Schenkman however, did not write his booklet led by his fantasy. He was aware of the black figures in the tradition and had experienced these in his own childhood. His story is also written build on elements that have been a part of the sinterklaas tradition for a long time, as well as that people were aware and had knowledge of the feasts celebrated in other countries, Germany for example, where Knecht Ruprecht (note the term 'knecht'!) already was an important element in the feast. He has transitioned the figure into a power full black young man in stead of the frightening figure he was before. The fairytale setting makes it unlikely that the figure refers to a human figure. Even though the figure serves Sinterklaas, there is no indication that he is forced to do so. In the booklet the servant also appears on a horse.



Different people have already noted and pointed out that the figure of the servant is portrayed higher than the Sinterklaas. In the remainder of the booklet we also see the equality in the lineups. The fact that the Sinterklazen (most likely also the black versions in their double role, where Zwarte Piet finds his origins), rode around on a horse was fairly common, as we can see in the descriptions of the Reverend hanewinkel, but also in other images and stories about Sinterklaas.

Because of the double role it is not always clear whether the reference is to the legendary or folklore Sinterklaas. The fact that the servant is portrayed on a horse can be connected to this. In Germany we know Knecht Ruprecht rides on a horse as being one of the 'Schimmelruiters" . (A Schimmel is a white/gray horse.) Sinterklaas rides one of these nowadays. His horse was black in Schenkmans book.



Often the statement is made that Zwarte Piet lost his horse during in the course of time. Photographs of the entrance parades show that Zwarte Piet has kept his horse during the years. This shows that the source on which the masquerade of Zwarte Piet

is based, certainly consists of multiple sources and not just the one. Other elements also refer to a diversity in origin of Zwarte Piet, as pointed out in chapter 2.

As we emphasized in chapter 3, the figure of Zwarte Piet is connected to the worldwide famous archetype 'The trickster', whom most likely is not compatible with the elevated figure of the servant Jan Schenkman had in mind. This is the reason why he has kept his own role in peoples imagination in folklore.

The figure created by Schenkman plays a much smaller part than some people claim, because they fail to mention the other influences on this figure. The fact that Schenkman made the legendary bishop appear in person was probably of greater importance than his servant. In his book however it is the bishop who punishes with his servant helping him by listening to the kids and reporting to Saint Nicholas. In Folklore however people kept with their former figures and so they kept the bag and the switch and also the chain in het hands of the black figure that they now renamed Zwarte Piet. (Schenkman's figure was just referred to as knecht and didn't have a specific name.) and the legendary bishop in his white robes (note the difference here also with Schenkman's portrayal of the figure!) also makes it clear that in folklore the roles of these figures were already established and the influence by Schenkman on these figures is much smaller than assumed. Study of these figures proves this.

Stephanus Hanewinckel (1800). *["Reize door de majorij van 's Hertogenbosch in den jaare 1799 \(in brieven\)" \(pagina 170/171\)](#)*. Saakes, Anthony Bernard (Amsterdam)
<http://www.delpher.nl/nl/boeken/view?identifier=dpo%3A8302%3Ampeg21%3A0190&objectsearch=gebak&coll=boeken>

5. The developments after Schenkman until WW2

After Schenkman, many booklets were published with stories about the Sinterklaas tradition. However we should not forget that the folk culture had another form of spreading. Namely oral tradition (from grandparents to grandchildren for instance spanning quite a lot of years!), of which we know quite a bit, but which is often not taken into consideration when describing history. Odd things such as the black from the chimney story are passed on through time this way and prove the age of old elements in the Sinterklaas celebration. Unlocking the archives shows that in the masquerade and celebration, that the old blackening of the face tradition of the Zwarte Klazen, is being sustained in Zwarte Piet. Also the fact that the switch, the bag and the chain are being held by Zwarte Piet proves a more diverse origin than the booklet of Jan Schenkman and other authors. Old photographs and films and facts that support this are still being discovered. The diversity was great because of the fact that everyone interpreted the figure with whatever was available depending also on what he was taught. This age is not that far behind us, the people that are involved in the dialogue about the tradition have had these stories passed on to them by this group. A face painting tradition has been passed on that, to this day, does not comply to the elements that are being criticized and scrutinized. It would be wise to be aware of this. It definitely is possible to come up with embarrassing examples, however what is more important is the fact that this is not the only source available and shouldn't be generalized as being what Zwarte Piet portrays. Zwarte Piet knows a diversity of influences and study of this material is important, if not essential.

We find Zwarte Piet with the chain well into the 1950's

http://denboschpubliek.hosting.deventit.net/detail.php?nav_id=1-1&id=14614807&index=42

This Photo dates from 1930. Notice the chain at the bottom of the picture and the other elements. Many people that grew up in that time are thinking about the tradition nowadays, back then the black was put on by means of a cork and it was quite a job to get the black on in a decent manner. Other examples are also available in which many names were mentioned. Next to the Zwarte Klazen, and the figures that were portrayed next to Sinterklaas. They also had a different name to differentiate between them and the legendary Saint. The fact that the chain (and later on the switch) have disappeared, has everything to do with pedagogical reasons, en are therefore not proof of a different origin.

In 1910 we see Sjaak Sjoer http://neon.pictura-hosting.nl/sfa/sfa_mrx_bld/thumbs/500x500/upload/upload_536/SFA008002385.jpg

From Nieuw Weerdinge in Drente we know the Zwarte Piet from the oral tradition. So there is no picture.

The next photo's offer an impression regarding the appearance of Zwarte Piet and what he means.

In 1948 we see Zwarte Piet in West-Kapelle:

https://www.google.nl/search?q=Zwart+Piet+west-kapelle&biw=1581&bih=766&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0CAYQ_AUoAWoVChMI1LihpKDBxwIVCz4UCh0MmgBA#imgrc=WbKwYbe3ERIOfM%3A

A beautiful Zwarte Piet from Nijmegen, recognizable and based upon the old painting of the face tradition and with a switch.

<http://www.noviomagus.nl/OudNijmegen/091/cwdata/909-Sinterklaas.html>

Many more examples can be found .

6. The Sinterklaascelebration as a symbol of the nation (1945-1970)

During World War II Sinterklaas was not celebrated in its usual way. In the hunger winter of 1944 there wasn't even an entrance parade.

The fact that the entrance parade in 1945 and afterwards was bigger than ever before has to do with the presence of the Canadian Army, that on May 8th 1945 made a triumphant liberation parade in Amsterdam (route via the Berlagebrug and the Amstelstraat, now Vrijheidslaan (Liberation Lane)). After that the Canadian military leadership played a role in the administration of the post-war Netherlands.

It was the Canadian Colonel Tom Gilday that thought of the idea to make a big happening from the Saint Nicholas entrance parade. His original plan to have 16 Saint Nicholas's however was polite but firmly rejected by the Dutch administration, but the idea of a big parade with lots of Black Peter's fitted perfectly with the fact they wanted to boost morale in those post-war days. Saint Nicholas and his Black Peter's drove with military jeeps in a convoy through Amsterdam.

In 1945 the Netherlands was battered. The economy was shattered, a lot of people were dirt-poor and the youth was demoralised. It was therefore important for authorities to help boost morale with nationbuilding.

For outsiders it is important to realise that the Netherlands during the social-religious compartmentalization (ca. 1850-1950) <https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Verzuiling> was a nation strongly divided along different lines: the Protestants, the Roman-Catholics, the socialistic and liberal compartments. Social life and the media were divided along these compartments as well. Symbols of national unity were few. One could think of the Royal Family, KLM airlines that in its pioneer days made people's hearts pound and.... The Saint Nicholas celebration.

We also notice that in the period of Reconstruction after WWII <https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wederopbouw> the entrance parade in Amsterdam reached a high popularity. From 1952 it was also aired on TV (with only a few viewers) and in the Polygoonnews in the cinema's. From far and wide people came to Amsterdam for the entrance parade, in the first years spectators were in the 750,000 to 800,000's. (Amsterdam, 1955)

It is important to mention here that the Royal Family played a prominent part at these entrance parades with their attendance, which strengthened the effect of nationbuilding and symbolized much-needed feelings of unity. See for example this picture of the entrance parade in 1952 with Queen Juliana in between the people.



In this picture we see the Queen and Princesses greeting Sinterklaas. The person in attendance is not Zwarte Piet but a Spanish Herald or Guard.

Also leading figures from the Netherlands and abroad were present at the entrance parade as was the former secretary-general of the United Nation Tygve Lie, who was standing next to Queen Juliana on the quay.

In this film of the Polygoonnews from 1954 one gains an insight in the atmosphere during the entrance parades and the big enthusiasm and happiness that this brought to the Dutch people that more often than not lived in very difficult circumstances. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h8BPgQop0WQ>

It is important to realise that the Sinterklaas celebration and especially the entrance parade of Sinterklaas in the 50's and 60's grew to be of national importance, because of airing it on TV (and in the cinema's at First) This is still the case.

This feeling about the Saint Nicholas celebration, built up during this difficult time in which the country was in shatters because of WWII, has been passed on to their children and grandchildren.

It is because of this that the Sinterklaas celebration is for most of the Dutch not only an important family feast where children are central and security in the family is celebrated based on an age-old cultural tradition, but it has also become an important symbol of national unity.

7. From 1963 until now

As we saw, in the last chapter, the focus in the 1950's was mainly on the parade in Amsterdam. It was considered the national parade. From 1963 onwards. The NTS broadcasting company separated the national parade (that was aired on TV) from the one in Amsterdam. This happened before once in 1960 as well, when the NTS selected the parade in Rotterdam to be aired on TV, even though there was a big parade in Amsterdam that year and has been ever since.

Saint Nicholas's birthday as it is called has been aired since the 1950's on television, the first time on december 5th 1952. In those years the role of Saint Nicholas was played by the vet Jan Gajentaan from Amsterdam. (He played the role from 1950 until 1962). The Saint and his Black Petes arrived in an open carriage in Studio Irene in Bussum where a group of children welcomed him under the supervision of Mies Bouwban.

With only a few exceptions "Little Miss Bouw" as the "Goodholymen" called her, would welcome Sinterklaas until 1973. The happend (and is still happening during the entrance parade in November, at first in Amsterdam but later on in another harbour somewhere in the Netherlands. Since 1964 the entrance parade is shown live on national TV. From 1956 until 1985 the role of Saint Nicholas was played by Adrie van Oorschot.

With the growing amount of airtime available the Saint appeared in other television shows as well and this made Adrie van Oorschot the one and only "TV Saint Nicholas personality". There were special broadcasts mad as well such as the childrens musical "A house in a shoe". In the 1980's it seemed that interest in the Sinterklaas celebrations were waning. There were no more TV specials and the Saint, played by Bram van der Vlugt, celebrated his birthday only on Sesamestreet. But around the millenium there was an increase in interest. With special programmes in the week Saint Nicholas was in the Netherlands. The Saint Nicholas News, The Club of Saint Nicholas and Sinterklaas in various school TV programs.

As such the Institute for Regional Sinterklaas Promotion, founded in 1998 produces a Sinterklaas movie every year. At first for regional broadcasting companies, but later on for cinema's as well. Also other producers, among which the NTR (the former NTS), followed suit because of the unprecedented interest in these movies. Saint Nicholas and his Zwarte Pieten are also warmly welcomed by the commercial broadcasting companies. A special mention here for the Sinterklaas soap "The Club of Saint Nicholas" which was immensely popular on tv. They come out with a cinemaproduction in the same style almost every year. But also our public broadcasting system was in on the fun with a new idea: since 2001 from the entrance parade until the eve of December 5th a newsbroadcast is aired daily in which a

newsreporters shows everything that is going on with Saint Nicholas and his black Petes. Every year the kids are kept in suspense: where will Saint Nicholas arrive this year and will everything go smooth?

Saint Nicholas's entry parade is celebrated throughout the country in larger and smaller cities, with the first record of such a parade found in 1888. With a different location for the national entrance parade broadcasted nationwide every year. It is a true celebration for young and old and next to the traditional Kings day (used to be the Queens day) one of the few days in the year in which the Dutch will gather in the streets in an atmosphere of party joy and national unity. In the evening a lot of people will gather in their homes for "Pakjesavond" on which occasion Zwarte Piet will drop off the presents in a bag, knocking fiercely on the door, usually remaining invisible, as was explained in chapter 1.

It is important to mention here that in the last decades it is actually the Zwarte Piet figure who gained a lot of popularity with the kids. This is because he gradually became more friendly and the kids love him. Oftentimes Zwarte Piet is more popular than Saint Nicholas, who has gotten a less prominent place in the roleplaying and is often forgetful and needs his Black Petes very much to help him. Black Pete has developed into a role model for kids and he is the hero they once hope to become themselves with his wit and magic possibilities. Children dream of going to the "Black Pete academy" in the school kids try out for their "Pete certificate" to come closer to this goal. He is an important role model who also explains to them what's right and what's wrong.

Without Black Pete, with his black mask (because that is what it is), the Saint Nicholas celebrations wouldn't have the meaning and value that it has now. The chance is there that it will retreat to the homes instead of bringing large groups of people together. A celebration that will be held with Zwarte Piet in the homes. However it will lose its popularity and its moving spirit without the beloved Zwarte Piet. Perhaps going back to a more mythical existence as has been the case in history but not disappearing. This figure has stood the test of time and will do so in the years to come.

People that hold the Sinterklaas celebrations dear are found with people from a variety of backgrounds. These people enjoy the way it brings them together. The role of Black Pete (and sometimes the role of Sinterklaas as well) is played by people from different backgrounds and with different skin colors. It is an inclusive festivity and most people are in favor of the way it is celebrated now.



Entrance Parade Amsterdam 2013, picture by: Ada Nieuwendijk