Proud to be Dutch? Intangible Heritage and National Identity in the Netherlands

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This paper builds on the distinction between three key stakeholders with regard to the preservation of heritage in general and intangible heritage (hereafter ICH) in particular. In particular, these are the source community itself, local and national authorities and heritage professionals. In the Netherlands, the debate surrounding ICH is rather recent. The 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage has stimulated discussion among professionals, but in a limited sense. In the last few years, however, the topic has been addressed by politicians and, as a consequence, ICH has entered public debate. In some ways, more than tangible heritage, ICH has become the focus point of a national debate on identity. The instrumentalisation – ie the political use – of ICH and the role of the three stakeholders in the Netherlands are discussed using the St Nicholas festivities (an old Dutch tradition) and the celebration of the abolishment of slavery (a new shared tradition) as two examples.

National identity as political issue

Francis Fukuyama argued in The End of History and the Last Man (1992) that the progression of human history was complete. The struggle between ideologies ceased as a result of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the end of the Cold War, when political and economic liberalism would triumph. In reality, one ideology replaced the other. Throughout Europe, the last decade of the 20th century ushered in a remarkable revival of interest in national identity that is reminiscent of late 19th-century nationalism. At the very start of the 21st century, public debate on national identity in the Netherlands was provoked by the journalist Paul Scheffer. In his essay ‘Het multiculturele drama’ (approximate translation: ‘The multicultural disaster’), Scheffer reflected on multiculturalism and the impact of immigration within the Netherlands (Scheffer 2000). Even though Scheffer is a prominent member of the Partij van de Arbeid (Labour Party, the main socialist party in the Netherlands), his ideas found resonance in right-wing circles.

Scheffer’s main argument focused on the idea that ethnic minorities are over-represented in statistics concerning unemployment, poverty, criminal activity and school drop-out. He claims multicultural policy has made politicians blind to this fact. Indeed, the idea of a multicultural society has proven to be a failure. The culture of tolerance, and meeting its limits, works alongside a self image that is no longer authentic. A farewell to the cosmopolitan illusion in which many would-be intellectuals wallow is necessary. Scheffer’s essay can be considered as a reaction to a strongly felt social and political insecurity stemming from the increasingly multicultural composition of Dutch society. In essence, traditional values have been viewed as challenged by these recent societal transformations. In this atmosphere, new populist political parties have
emerged: *Leefbaar Nederland* (1999) and *Lijst Pim Fortuyn* (2002). Even though their lifespan was short (both parties were dissolved in 2008), their political impact was enormous. The issue of national identity – and with it ICH as the expression of norms and values – entered the political arena, a process that was fuelled by events such as the attacks on the World Trade Center (New York, 11 September 2001), the assassination of film maker Theo van Gogh (Amsterdam, 2 November 2004) and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In this political debate, not just the (assumed) political ideology of the Muslim community in the Netherlands but also their cultural traditions of wearing headscarves, shaking hands between men and women, and ritual slaughter, to name the most contested, were at stake.

The social and political debate on multiculturalism and national identity culminated in the foundation of two new political parties: the *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (2005) and *Trots op Nederland* (2007). Both parties were founded by dissident members of parliament of the *Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie* (People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy), a traditional conservative–liberal party. The *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (Party for Freedom) was founded by Geert Wilders, and *Trots op Nederland* (Proud of the Netherlands) was founded by Rita Verdonk. Both politicians created a distinct profile for themselves as a nationalist and populist right-wing political movement with an assimilationist stance on the integration of immigrants, particularly Muslims, into Dutch society. Both politicians advocate a national identity based on so-called indigenous traditions, avoiding a critical reflexive attitude towards Dutch history and associated ICH. Specifically, both politicians tend to instrumentalise ICH by appropriation and rejection, introducing the dichotomy between ‘us’ and ‘them’.

*Us and them*

This dichotomy is clearly illustrated by the speech delivered by Rita Verdonk on the occasion of the official launch of the *Trots op Nederland* party in April 2008. During this speech, Verdonk marked the difference between ‘us’ and ‘them’ by stating that “we” are proud of the Netherlands and “they” propagate a “down-with-us” mentality. ‘Our culture’, Verdonk continued, ‘originates from a year-long battle of our ancestors, of citizens of the Netherlands, who sometimes have sacrificed their lives for our liberties, the richness which we enjoy today, and our democratic values [...]. By nature, the Dutch do not discriminate! For ages we are a welcoming people’ (Verdonk 2008). Moreover, these values are being threatened by, according to Verdonk:

> A strong down-with-us movement which for years tries to convince us that our culture does not exist, and which considers our values and norms to be inferior in comparison to other cultures. They even call into question the St Nicolas festivities. And, everywhere they want to erect monuments about slavery to portray us as bad. (ibid)

This speech highlights a great reluctance to reflect on colonialism, slavery and racism as intrinsic parts of Dutch heritage. Being ‘Proud of the Netherlands’ (and its history) evidently does not include the creation of monuments to draw attention to slavery and its heritage. At the same time, this pride seems to include the neglect of controversial elements of the age-old tradition of the celebration of the name day of St Nicolas. Interestingly, it is precisely the connection between the transatlantic slave trade and the St Nicolas festivities that Verdonk chooses to deny.

Before discussing the two heritage phenomena referred to by Verdonk, it is necessary to
focus on the dichotomy between ‘us’ and ‘them’ in relation to the process of heritage creation. In most discussions about ICH, an emphasis is placed upon the ‘communities, in particular indigenous communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals, [who] play an important role in the production, safeguarding, maintenance and re-creation of the intangible cultural heritage, thus helping to enrich cultural diversity and human creativity’ (UNESCO 2003, Preamble). However, the Convention does not provide any further definition of these particular groups and individuals. Accordingly, this issue was dealt with at a recent meeting organised by the Intangible Heritage Section of UNESCO and the Asia/Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO in Tokyo, in March 2006 (Cang 2007, 49). At this meeting participants agreed on the identification of five interest groups. These distinctions serve to clarify the roles and positions of various actors in the ICH field. The defined interest groups are:

- **Individuals within or across communities with distinct skills, knowledge, experience or other characteristics**
- **Groups of people within or across communities who share characteristics such as skills, experience and special knowledge, and thus perform specific roles in the present and future practice, re-creation and/or transmission of their intangible cultural heritage**
- **Specific communities as networks of people whose sense of identity or connectedness emerges from a shared historical relationship**
- **Society as the totality of the population of a country**
- **Multinational or scattered communities, who relate to a single heritage that is not limited to one geographical area or country** (Cang 2007, 49–50).

The discussion about heritage usually focuses on the actors defined as Group 3. This focus is discussed by Emma Waterton and Laurajane Smith in their introductory paper in a special issue on ‘Heritage and community engagement’ of the *International Journal of Heritage Studies* (Waterton and Smith 2010). Waterton and Smith have shown that the heritage sector ‘is dominated by a particular notion of community, one that overlooks the fact that representation of reality can have powerful effects on any group under construction’ (ibid, 9). They conclude that ‘real life communities are not only misrecognised but misrepresentations of identity become institutionalised in the heritage process’ (ibid, 12). The present paper follows this line of thought by discussing the interaction between Group 2 and Group 3, in particular between politicians and heritage professionals (as groups of people that perform specific roles) and specific communities with shared historical relationships. On all levels, processes of inclusion and exclusion can create ‘us’ and ‘them’ dichotomies, but Verdonk’s instrumentalisation of this dichotomy illustrates the point made by Waterton and Smith and emphasises the necessity to study the interaction between interest groups.

**Source communities, politicians and professionals**

The 2003 Convention identifies three categories of stakeholders. Apart from the communities as mentioned above, the Convention refers to national governments (the States Parties) and professionals. The Convention requires states to foster the ‘creation or strengthening of institutions for training in the management of the intangible cultural heritage and the transmission of such heritage through forums and spaces intended for the performance or expression thereof’
Léontine Meijer-van Mensch and Peter van Mensch (UNESCO 2003, article 13). The 1989 Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore, a precursor of the current Convention, is even more explicit on the role of professionals and professional institutions in the conservation of heritage. The Recommendation mentions archives and museums, as well as ‘collectors, archivists, documentalists, and other specialists in the conservation of folklore’ (UNESCO 1989, article C).

The identification of the three categories of stakeholders is not without importance. Reporting on a conference on signification, organised by the Instituut Collectie Nederland (Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage) and the Rijksdienst Cultureel Erfgoed (National Service for Cultural Heritage) in November 2009, Frans Schouten concluded that the dynamics of the interaction between the three ‘players’ was hardly an issue in the professional debate. During the conference, the discussion was dominated by professionals, claiming a natural and exclusive right to ‘pass objectified, informed and verifiable judgments upon the value of heritage’ (Schouten 2010, 36). Schouten strongly criticised one of the propositions expressed at the conference considering ‘value judgments as being independent from decision making processes’. This position of heritage professionals has been described by Laurajane Smith as the ‘Authorised Heritage Discourse’ (Smith 2007, 5). In this discourse, heritage is the thing rather than the cultural values or meanings that the material thing may symbolise (see also Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004). To Smith ‘all heritage is intangible, and may usefully be viewed as a cultural process of meaning and value production’ (ibid, 4). As a consequence, Smith’s definition of heritage is ‘a cultural process or performance that is concerned with the production and negotiation of cultural identity, individual and collective memory, and social and cultural values’ (ibid, 2).

The Authorised Heritage Discourse refers to the dichotomy between ‘we’ as professionals and ‘them’ as the source communities. Smith’s definition of heritage can also be seen to represent contemporary practices of ‘liberating culture’ from this discourse (Kreps 2003). In this light, the New Heritage Discourse advocates co-creation and co-curatorship. Kreps contends that ‘by identifying and naming the material and non-material elements that constitute their environment, people realize their right to their world and gaining control over it’ (ibid, 10). In museology, this approach had been labelled new museology, community museology, people’s museology, or sociomuseology (Van Mensch 2005). One of the foundations of this participative paradigm is the 1976 Recommendation on Participation by the People at Large in Cultural Life and their Contribution to It (ibid, 181). According to this Recommendation, ‘participation by the greatest possible number of people and associations in a wide variety of cultural activities of their own free choice is essential to the development of the basic human values and dignity of the individual’ (UNESCO 1976, Preamble). Here, participation takes the form of ‘an assertion of identity, authenticity and dignity’ (ibid). This assertion ‘should not result in the formation of isolated groups but should, on the contrary, go hand in hand with a mutual desire for wide and frequent contacts, and that such contacts are a fundamental requirement’ (ibid).

The participative paradigm involves a new view on professionalism. Behind this view is the conviction that the process of attributing heritage values (musealisation) is not exclusively a responsibility of heritage professionals. It is primarily a responsibility of the source community itself. In effect, the role of the professional can be defined as facilitator rather than authority (Meijer and Van Mensch 2008, 6). However, at the same time, the professional contributes to a critical reflexive discourse. In participative projects the core role of the heritage professional should centre upon the mediation between the source community and the institution in the process of attributing value. One risk often encountered in participative projects is the romantici-
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Safeguarding, or nostalgification, of heritage, where negative or sad meanings tend to be omitted by the heritage institution (Meijer-van Mensch 2009, 108). Therefore, the heritage professional should reflect critically on these nostalgic tendencies during heritage-making. Indeed, this element of nostalgia is a driving force behind the instrumentalisation of heritage espoused by politicians such as Rita Verdonk.

In terms of ICH, the relationship between professionals and source communities is a sensitive one (Alivizatou 2008). By definition, the ‘safeguarding of intangible heritage means measures aimed at ensuring its viability’ whilst respecting its dynamic nature (UNESCO 2003, article 2.3). In the 1989 Recommendation, an interesting distinction was made between ‘conservation’ and ‘preservation’ in order to define the two perspectives on ICH: the professional versus the community. While the evolving character of ICH cannot always be directly protected, heritage that has been fixed in a tangible form could very well be conserved by professional institutions. Preservation of living heritage, on the other hand, requires measures be taken to guarantee the status of and economic support for such traditions (UNESCO 1989, articles C and D). Kreps uses the term ‘preservation’ in a similar way, as opposed to traditional conservation (Kreps 2003, 14). The term preservation is used here in the same sense as the term ‘cultural conservation’ is used by, for example, the Smithsonian Institution’s Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. To the Center, ‘cultural conservation is a scientific and humanistic concern for the continued survival of the world’s traditional cultures’ (ibid, 13). By introducing the term indigenous curation, Kreps emphasises that this ‘scientific and humanistic concern’ should not be limited to professional institutions. Indigenous curation is a means for the safeguarding of ICH, but is simultaneously a form of ICH itself (Kreps 2009, 199).

In view of the polarities between conservation and preservation, and between professionals and source communities, as outlined in the 1989 Recommendation, it is important to develop a method in assessing the signification of both tangible and intangible expressions of culture that is not specific to institutionalised musealisation processes only. Such a method is provided by the Collections Council of Australia, where its guide to assessing the significance of collections, Significance 2.0, refers to the ‘values and meanings that items and collections have for people and communities’. It states:

At a simple level, significance is a way of telling compelling stories about items and collections, explaining why they are important. Significance may also be defined as the historic, artistic, scientific and social or spiritual values that items and collections have for past, present and future generations. These are the criteria or key values that help to express how and why an item or collection is significant. (Russell and Winkworth 2009, 10)

It is evident that this method involves the perspectives of creators and users. In particular, it is not aimed at resolving ‘conflicting viewpoints, or determin[ing] which is right or wrong, especially where the parties have cultural or spiritual attachments to an item or collection. The statement of significance can reflect the nature and substance of multiple points of view’ (ibid, 13). Within the Netherlands, two intangible cultural expressions can be used to illustrate how a disconnect between professionals and source communities has become central to public debate. Specifically, the tradition of Sinterklaas and the commemoration of slavery are discussed in the following sections. Both case studies are selected also because of the ways politicians increasingly try to raise
their voices as self-declared defenders of the integrity of ICH, thus challenging professionals to take position in an increasingly politicised debate.

**Sinterklaas**

The celebration of the name day of St Nicholas of Myra (6 December) is a Roman Catholic feast that survived the Reformation in 16th-century Netherlands. Since St Nicholas is the patron saint of children, the festivities are predominantly focused on children and the giving and receiving of presents. The main celebration takes place on the evening before the actual name day (*Sinterklaasavond*), but festivities begin earlier in the season. On 6 December, all festivities suddenly come to an end: shopkeepers replace every reference to St Nicholas with images of Santa Claus, a legendary figure based on the same 4th-century saint.

From October each year, St Nicholas decorations start to dominate the city and in the supermarkets special candy fills the shelves. At the end of November, St Nicholas officially arrives in the country. Although, historically, he lived in Myra (now southern Turkey), Sinterklaas is supposed to come from Spain. According to tradition, he arrives mid-November by an old-fashioned steamboat, an event that is broadcast live on Dutch television. A week later, St Nicholas is officially welcomed in all major Dutch cities at roughly the same time. Despite the multitude of ‘copies’ throughout the country, there is only one national St Nicholas. During the weeks prior to his broadcast arrival, the whereabouts of the ‘real’ St Nicholas is discussed on special news programmes.

St Nicholas wears bishop’s robes, including a red cape and mitre, and holds a crosier, a long gold-coloured staff with a fancy curled top. He is accompanied by a group of black-faced assistants in colourful dresses, the so-called *Zwarte Pieten*. Their main task is to collect the wishes of the children and to distribute the presents. In the days leading up to 5 December, young children put their shoes in front of their chimneys and sing special songs. Often the shoe is filled with a carrot or some hay for the horse of St Nicholas. The next morning, they will find a small present in their shoe, ranging from a bag of chocolate coins to a bag of marbles, or some other small toy. In the evening, Sinterklaas brings presents to every child who has been good in the past year. This is often done by placing a sack of presents outside the house or living room, after which a neighbour or parent bangs the door or window, pretending to be Sinterklaas’ assistant. Another option is to hire or ask someone to dress up as Sinterklaas and deliver the presents personally.

Commercial interests have played an important role in the survival of the St Nicholas feast. Interestingly, the same interests were the main reason why, in the 1980s and 1990s, the traditional celebration of Sinterklaas was threatened by the imported celebration of Santa Claus. Still, Santa Claus has never become a familiar guest in Dutch families. On the contrary, Sinterklaas seems to be more popular than ever in recent years. To what extent this is related to the need for traditional symbols in a rapidly changing society has still to be explained, but, as shown by the speech of the Dutch politician Rita Verdonk, the feast is considered to be a cornerstone of Dutch identity. When the *Centrum voor Volkskweek* (Centre for Popular Culture) made a list of the most popular traditions in the Netherlands, Sinterklaas ended up in first place (www.traditie.nl/top-100_67.html). And, when discussion started on the 2003 Convention, Sinterklaas was proposed as the first Dutch example of ICH to be included in *The Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity*, one of the main promotional instruments of the 2003 Convention.
The initiative to have Sinterklaas included in *The Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity* brought about a professional discourse about the necessity to define the celebration and its repertoire (Koops et al. 2009). The iconography of Sinterklaas originates from the illustrated children's book *Sint Nicolaas en zijn knecht* (Saint Nicholas and His Helper), written in 1850 by the teacher Jan Schenkman (1806–1863). This book introduced the concept of Sinterklaas delivering presents through the chimney, riding onto the roofs of houses on a white horse and arriving from Spain by steamboat (Van Melle 2009). Thus, it can be argued that, even though the celebration as a children's feast is much older, the present-day celebration is also partly a reinvented tradition with a highly standardised repertoire. When national television took control of the celebration, the repertoire was enriched by a contemporary narrative, leaving the basic iconography intact.

Based on the role that television plays, the traditional narrative became more flexible, allowing for new elements. One example can be found in the concern for the mysterious disappearance of St Nicholas on the night of 5 December, as mentioned earlier. For children with autism spectrum disorders (such as autism and Asperger syndrome), Sinterklaas, with its associated festivities and intrinsic relationship between fantasy and reality, is difficult to cope with. Moreover, it is particularly difficult to accept the uncertainty of what happens to St Nicholas after Sinterklaas emerges. Accordingly, parents of children with autism, united in the *Nederlandse Vereniging voor Autisme*, have pleaded for years for the staging of an official farewell party with a steamboat that would take St Nicholas back to Spain. In 2009, farewell parties were organised in a couple of towns. It might be possible that an 'official' farewell party will be included in the Sinterklaas news programmes on national television in 2010 as a result of these growing sensitivities.

The flexibility of the narrative and associated iconography was especially challenged by two elements: the cross on St Nicholas' mitre and the nature of the *Zwarte Pieten*. The mitre is the ceremonial bishop's head-dress. According to the standardised iconography, St Nicholas' mitre should be decorated by a cross. As such, the St Nicholas mitre is atypical compared with the historical mitres and contemporary mitres in use by Roman Catholic bishops. Nevertheless, the removal of the cross from the mitres of St Nicholas in some Dutch cities caused a considerable amount of political turmoil. In order to emphasise the religiously neutral character of the celebration, it had been decided that Christian symbolism would be abandoned. On 18 November 2009 two members of parliament belonging to the *Christen Democratisch Appel* – the main centre-right Christian democratic political party – attempted to stage a political debate on this issue. They stated that:

there is no reason why the Christian origin of Saint Nicholas and the celebration of his feast should be anxiously hidden. The arrival of many new ethnic groups with their own cultures, feasts, customs and religions cannot mean that the Christian roots of our own culture, feasts and customs will be renounced.

They then demanded that the Minister of Culture should 'stand up for the preservation of a typical Dutch feast such as Sinterklaas, with all its symbols and references'. In response, the national newspaper *De Volkskrant* asked its readers to give their opinion. Considering the progressive, intellectual, leftish political orientation of the newspaper, it is surprising that 71 per cent of the 4,100 reactions were in favour of retaining the cross on the mitre. The minister of culture (member of the Dutch Labour Party), however, did not see any legal basis to interfere. He argued
that the iconography of Sinterklaas is rooted within a 19th-century secular context and has very little to do with religious symbolism. Besides, historical images of St Nicholas up to the 19th century never show a cross on his mitre. The discussion about the cross is an example of how a tradition is hijacked by politicians to strengthen their position in the debate on multiculturalism. Both the removal of the cross, as well as its retention, express a desire for political control.

A more significant issue has emerged with respect to the identity of St Nicholas’ helpers, Zwarte Piet. Zwarte Piet is of African origin in the traditional iconography, most often being depicted with black curly hair and full lips. During the first ceremonial entry of St Nicholas in Amsterdam (in 1934), Surinam sailors were asked to act as Zwarte Piet; however, Zwarte Piet is usually a white person painted black (Lakmaker 2009). In addition, it is commonly found that children are painted black as well. Nonetheless, the question remains: why black? Most frequently, the explanation that is used refers to the duty of Zwarte Piet to climb through the chimney to deliver presents to the children (Lamers 2009, 443). This seems to be a naïve explanation that serves to avoid any reflection concerning racial connotations. Another, more historically informed, explanation has Zwarte Piet as a representative of the devil, transformed into the archetypal Moor, who serves as a servant or enslaved person. Based on medieval oral traditions, St Nicolas was accompanied by a chained devil. The chains represented the triumph of good over evil and light over darkness. This tradition is still in practice in Central Europe, particularly in the alpine regions where Krampus accompanies St Nicolas during the pre-Christmas season. The character Krampus is a mythical figure with devil-like connotations, most commonly depicted with horns and a tail. Traditionally, young men dress up as Krampus and roam the streets frightening children and adults, especially young women (Peet 2008, 3). By doing so, these young men are playing with the deep-rooted archetypal female fear of the abuse of sexual power.

After the Dutch became involved in the transatlantic slave trade, the symbolism of blackness gained a new ‘realness’ with respect to the skin colour of Zwarte Piet (ibid, 3). Possible evidence for this shift from devil symbolism to representing the enslaved can be found in Schenkman’s book, noted earlier (1850). As depicted by Schenkmman, the servant is most probably influenced by the omnipresent (re)presentation of figures of African origin in 17th- and 18th-century Dutch portrait paintings (Van Melle 2009, 451). By the end of the 19th century, the image of Zwarte Piet became connected with the colonial hegemonic view of Africans as an inferior race, put forward by missionaries and scholars of the time.

From the end of the 19th century the racist dimension of Zwarte Piet has been increasingly criticised and debated. With the introduction of immigration from Surinam and the Antilles, for example, a new critical reflection emerged that focused on the role and image of Zwarte Piet as the simple and clumsy black servant. In 1994, an Amsterdam action group demonstrated in favour of ‘an anti-racist Sinterklaas’: a Sinterklaas without Zwarte Piet (Lamers 2009, 441). In later years, similar protest actions were organised ‘against degrading racist impersonations of Black people’ (ibid, 442). As a reaction, Zwarte Pieten were painted in a wide variety of colours. However, the traditionalist lobby did not surrender to these deconstructivist approaches and soon the Zwarte Pieten were painted black again. Any reference to slavery was rejected as being irrelevant, and too politically correct. Accordingly, it was maintained that a children’s feast should not be spoiled by political statements (ibid, 443).
Slavery

The contemporary discussion on Sinterklaas highlights a certain ambivalence concerning the Black perspective on Dutch history. This is also demonstrated by the way the commemoration of slavery is treated in Dutch society. In general, the memory of slavery is not perceived as intrinsic to Dutch identity. This notion has been expressed within Rita Verdonk’s speech, which contended that slavery is not ‘our’ concern, it is ‘their’ history (Verdonk 2008). Addressing the issue of ownership with regard to the heritage of slavery, Glenn Willemsen (former Director of Nationaal Instituut voor Nederlands Slavernijverleden en Erfenis), in a lecture for Reinwardt students, highlighted the use of Dutch pocket diaries. In particular, all public holidays are indicated within these diaries, including the holy days of the main religions. The diaries indicate Mother’s Day, Father’s Day and World Animal Day, to name a few; however, 1 July, the National Commemoration Date for the Abolition of Slavery, is not recognised. Even though it marks the day in 1863 when the Dutch government ended slavery in Surinam, it can be argued that this date is not part of the Dutch collective memory. Before becoming a national commemoration day in the Netherlands, the day was already celebrated as the Keti Koti Dey (Keti Koti: ‘shattering the chains’) by the Surinam community.

Between the 15th and 19th centuries the Netherlands was one of the greatest colonial powers of the world and deeply involved in the slave trade that operated from Africa to the Caribbean. Nonetheless, the Netherlands was one of the last countries to abolish slavery. They outlawed the slave trade in 1863, only after considerable pressure from Great Britain. Moreover, it took the Netherlands more than a century to begin a public and political debate on slavery. The absence of a community of descendants of slaves in the country itself was an important factor in the delay in commemoration. After Surinam won independence in 1975, the subsequent increase in immigration to the Netherlands rendered the memory of slavery in Dutch society more visible. The number of new immigrants reached a critical mass and, thereby, Surinam people began to organise themselves and express their ICH.

Owing to the fact that the population had reached a critical mass within the Netherlands and yet was still a minority group, the Surinam people began to pay more attention to the 1 July commemorations. In general, for this group, it is a day of social rituals. A large number of Surinam women wear an angisa, a colourful cloth wrapped and folded in special ways. Every way of wrapping and folding has a specific meaning, usually referring to the period of slavery (Stam 2006, 64). When the Centrum voor Volkscultuur made its list of the Top 100 Dutch Traditions, the Keti Koti festival was listed in 58th position (www.traditie.nl/top-100_67.html). Interestingly, the festival ranked lower than the making of Broodje Pom (53rd), a popular Surinam dish and one of the few Surinam intangible cultural expressions that have become a part of Dutch culture as a whole.

The grass-roots call for a national platform on the topic of slavery resulted in the creation of the Landelijk Platform Slavernijverleden (National Platform for the History of Slavery) in 1999. This platform, and its cooperation with the Dutch government, set in motion a chain of events with regard to a national commemoration of slavery. On 1 July 2002, a National Slavery Monument (designed by Surinam sculptor Erwin de Vries) situated in Oosterpark in Amsterdam was unveiled by Queen Beatrix and Mayor Job Cohen (this date subsequently became the National Commemoration Date for the Abolition of Slavery). On this occasion, the minister Rogier van Boxtel offered excuses for the Dutch slave trade. However, instead of it being a day of affirmation
and reconciliation, the day ended in great disappointment for the Surinam community. The presence of the queen, ministers, mayor and other high officials created a dynamic which excluded a large part of the source community. Many Surinam people felt as if their memory had been stolen from them (Van Kempen 2006, 249).

The National Slavery Monument is referred to as a ‘static monument’, as opposed to the ‘dynamic monument’ that is evolving as a result of the work of the Nationaal Instituut voor Nederlands Slavernijverleden en Erfenis, or NiNsee (National Institute for the Study and Legacy of the Dutch Slave Trade and Slavery). This institute opened its doors to the general public on 1 July 2003. Specifically, NiNsee was founded to create opportunities for the telling of the ‘other side’ of the story, referred to as the ‘black perspective’. The mission of NiNsee is ‘to develop and position itself as the national symbol of the shared legacy of Dutch slavery and the collective future of all Dutch people’ (www.ninsee.nl).

In the exhibition ‘Breaking the Silence’, NiNsee offers different perspectives on the history of slavery and represents these events for future generations as a means of fostering identification and shared memory. Although the focus of the exhibition is on oral testimonies that share the views of enslaved persons or their offspring, it also offers a historical perspective on the origins of slavery, the slavery system, the legacy of dehumanisation and the beginnings of the abolitionist movement. To contextualise these themes, the words of slave traders, the enslaved and abolitionists are used to present different perspectives on these issues. Moreover, the provocative questions used in the exhibition give the visitor a chance to understand the depths of the problematic legacy of the Dutch history of slavery. Furthermore, NiNsee has developed a guided tour along the ‘forgotten’ lieux de mémoire connected with the history of slavery in Amsterdam. The intention is to add the stories behind these places of memory to the collective memory of the city and, thereby, the country.

In recent years, the professional canonisation of Dutch history and heritage has begun to incorporate the memory of slavery. After discussions in parliament about the basic knowledge of Dutch history and culture, the minister of education, culture and science initiated the design of a historical and cultural Canon of the Netherlands during 2005, which was published in 2006 (Van Oostrom 2007). The minister was inspired by the emphatic conviction that there exist significant deficiencies in the knowledge of today’s young people of Dutch history and culture. Moreover, this knowledge should be viewed in the context of growing tensions about national identity. To a certain extent, the Canon is an implicit definition of what it is to be Dutch. Most significantly, slavery is one of the 50 topics (Van Oostrom 2007, 162–3). Reference is made to the National Slavery Monument and NiNsee, although none is made to the Keti Koti Dey.

Another more recent project can be viewed as the Dutch equivalent of Pierre Nora’s Les Lieux de mémoire (1984–1992). This initiative, which is academic in nature, is based on discussions between Pierre Nora and Dutch historians (Wesseling 2005, 17). Throughout the four volumes the remembrance of slavery is mentioned several times, referring to places in the Netherlands as well as in South Africa, Surinam and the Caribbean. By focusing on places, the approach of Plaatsen van herinnering is different from that of Les Lieux de mémoire. Thus, by neglecting the ICH dimension of remembrance, professional involvement tends to exclude source communities from the process of signification and appropriation. At the same time, professional involvement has the additional danger of reducing living heritage to historical monuments.
Discussion

More than ever, national identity has become a key concern within the Netherlands and with this has come an interest in the meaning of heritage, and particularly ICH. Indeed, tangible heritage has hardly been a subject of public debate in recent years; this is probably because tangible heritage has a long tradition of professionalised and institutionalised care. In contrast, safeguarding ICH is less professionalised and institutionalised, making it vulnerable and open to political instrumentalisation. In this political instrumentalisation professionals play an ambivalent role. On the one hand, professionals create meaning and visibility. Traditions are being identified as both nationally and internationally important, as well as being selected for the national Canon. Sinterklaas, as well as Keti Koti Dey, appears in the list of the Top 100 Dutch Traditions. Currently, Sinterklaas is being considered as a possible candidate for The Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Slavery is included in the national Canon and in the list of key places of memory.

These two case studies are examples of the complex relationship between ICH and society as the totality of the population of a country. In the public debate on the Sinterklaas celebration it is often assumed that the celebration is national heritage. Even though the celebration shows a remarkable flexibility in significance and repertoire, it is only reluctantly accepted, or even blatantly rejected, by immigrant communities. The Keti Koti celebration is still very much community-specific heritage. Even though the history of slavery is considered to be part of the nation’s collective memory, Keti Koti Dey is hardly accepted as national heritage nationwide. The case studies show that, in the interaction between specific communities and society as the totality of the population of a country concerning ICH, politicians as well as heritage professionals play an important role.

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In the Netherlands, the debate surrounding ICH is rather recent. The 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage has stimulated discussion among professionals, but in a limited sense. In the last few years, however, the topic has been addressed by politicians and, as a consequence, ICH has entered public debate. You live outside the Netherlands or in the Netherlands Caribbean with a residence permit. The Netherlands Caribbean consists of Aruba, CuraÃ§ao and Sint Maarten and three special municipalities: Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba. Becoming a Dutch national is not something you should do lightly. It is a very important decision. You must think carefully about what it means for you to become a Dutch national, as becoming a Dutch national has certain advantages and disadvantages. Read more about the advantages and disadvantages of becoming a Dutch national. Who can apply for option. You can prove your identity and nationality with valid documents. You are not a danger to the public order or national security of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Intangible Heritage and National Identity in the Netherlands. (pp. 125-136). Léontine Meijer-van Mensch and Peter van Mensch. This paper builds on the distinction between three key stakeholders with regard to the preservation of heritage in general and intangible heritage (hereafter ICH) in particular. In particular, these are the source community itself, local and national authorities and heritage professionals. In the Netherlands, the debate surrounding ICH is rather recent. The 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage has stimulated discussion among pr