



Sint versus Santa

How the debate about Christmas traditions in the Netherlands between 1960 and 1980 meant more than just criticizing Santa.

Master Thesis Cultural History Tutorial Public Debate

Name student:	Matthijs Blatter
Student Number:	3838560
Thesis supervisor:	Jochen Hung
Date:	June 27, 2016
Word count:	11.059

Content:

Introduction.....	2
1. Americanization as discourse, accepted, rejected or adapted?	5
1.1. Americanization as a process	5
1.2. Anti-Americanism	8
1.3. Americanization as a discourse and the role of the media.....	11
1.4. Newspapers and the discussion about Americanization and anti-Americanism	12
2. Changing Christmas, a debate about America or the Netherlands?.....	14
2.1. Saint versus Santa.....	14
2.2. Christmas, Dutch tradition or Americanized?	17
2.3. Consumerism and the core values of Christmas in the Netherlands	21
Conclusion	29
Abstract.....	33
Bibliography:	34
Literature:.....	34
Articles:	34
Newspaper articles:	35

Introduction

The traditions that surround Christmas have always been the subject to change and the Netherlands were no exception to this. These kind of changes can be positively received, but at the same time regarded with great criticism. The personification of the holiday in the form of Santa Claus for instance, was met with a lot of critique since the mid-nineteenth century in the Netherlands. Even in the second half of the twentieth century the changing Christmas traditions were still a topic of public debate. This research focuses on how the changing of Christmas traditions were discussed by the Dutch public and if this debate can be interpreted as an attempt to discuss some greater social changes in the Dutch society in the period between 1960 and 1980.

During the period between 1960 and 1980 the Dutch traditions regarding Christmas changed drastically. People started to realize that the Christian holiday became more materialistic and commercially focused. This initiated a public debate about American influences and the changing traditions around the holiday period. According to John Helsloot, people broke with the conventional traditions that were linked to Christmas in the late fifties and the early sixties. The conventional traditions became a topic of the public debate and a considerable part of the Dutch society felt the need for renewal, change and thus also new traditions. This resulted in the organization of new, more public traditions in the mid-sixties that became quickly popular amongst a large audience. These gatherings were mostly organized by laymen, which consisted largely of a rather young group. Examples are the gatherings in large industrial halls where people sang Christmas songs together (Volkskerstzang) and the so called 'Kerst-Inns', public gatherings with open access for everybody. What is remarkable is that these sort of public celebrations of Christmas disappeared rather quickly halfway during the seventies.¹ These changes and the opinion of the Dutch public about them can be traced back to the Dutch press. This thesis will focus on how people talked about these changes of Christmas traditions, how they interpreted these changes and if these changes were accepted within the Dutch society. Many of the changes were perceived as American influences on the Dutch traditional Christmas

¹ J. Helsloot, 'Sinterklaas en de komst van de kerstman. Decemberfeesten in postmodern Nederland tussen eigen en vreemd', *Volkskundig Bulletin* 22 (1996, no.3) 279 – 283.

celebration. The introduction of Santa Claus as patron for the holiday is an example of one of these influences. This personification of Christmas was met with a lot of resistance in the Dutch society. The character was often associated with the United States and thus perceived as un-Dutch and foreign, according to Helsloot.²

The debate about the changing Christmas traditions in the Netherlands is the central topic of this thesis. This thesis argues that the media, and in this case newspapers, act as a social actor that has influence on the construction of a discourse. From the early fifties onwards the commercialization, the introduction of Santa Claus and the growing materialistic character of Christmas were all perceived as typically 'American' and started a discussion about the core values of this holiday in the Netherlands. In addition to these topics the Protestant community was mainly focused on the Christian core values of the holiday due to this growing commercialistic character of Christmas. At the beginning of the sixties this was their main focus point, but at the end of the seventies they started to accept these developments regarding Christmas and took a more pragmatic position in the discussion. The discourse is mostly judgmental, but since discourse is constructed by a social actor, it tells us more about the ones who constructed it. The discussion in Dutch newspapers about American Christmas traditions thus tells us something about the Dutch society itself. What is precisely meant by discourse and the role of the media regarding this topic will be further explained in the first chapter of this thesis. This thesis will state that the debate about the changing Christmas traditions in Dutch newspapers between 1960 and 1980 was an attempt to deal with bigger social changes within the Dutch society. This discussion was also linked to the more global debate about Americanization and thus this thesis states that the discussion about America was also used to discuss the social changes within the Dutch society itself. Therefore, this thesis will look into the changes in tradition that occurred in this period and how these changes were perceived, interpreted and discussed in newspapers and the public debate. It will also look into the perception of the United States of America in Dutch newspapers, what the public's opinion was about the United States of America and how this was represented in the news. To be able to do this it is necessary to look into what these influences exactly were according to the public, what

² Helsloot, 'Sinterklaas en de komst van de kerstman', 276.

effect these influences had on the changing Christmas traditions and which of these were accepted and assimilated with the Dutch culture.

There already exists an extensive body of research about how America has been perceived by the Dutch people and about cultural American influences on Christmas. This existing research on the global cultural influences of Americanization is mainly focused on the cultural influences of Americanisms. Rob Kroes states that the discussion about America in the Netherlands tells us more about how the Dutch society defined themselves, I agree with his approach, but I will also look into how the public debate about changing Christmas traditions is a part of a discourse on Americanization and in what way this discussion can be interpreted as a way to talk about the social changes in the Dutch society.³ The hypothesis of this thesis is that the discussion about these changing Christmas traditions changed during the period from 1960 until 1980 from an anti-American dominated discourse to a more mediated and assimilated view on the development of Christmas traditions in the Dutch society. What does this mean for the Dutch society itself? Did they accept the American influences more openly or did the traditions change because society itself became more open instead of the divided society between different religious communities? Thus how can the discussion about Christmas be interpreted as a debate about social changes?

To analyze this public debate regarding Christmas traditions this thesis will be using articles from several different Dutch newspapers. The selection exists out of eleven different newspapers from different social groups within Dutch society, this is important because even in the sixties the Dutch society was still divided in four main pillars, namely: the social-democratic, the liberal, the Catholic and Protestant pillar. Each pillar had their own newspaper, radio-station, broadcasting agency, they even had their own sport clubs. It is necessary to select newspapers from each of these communities to analyze the differences in discourses on Christmas. The choice of these newspapers will be further explained in the following chapter.

³ R. Kroes, 'Imaginary Americas in Europe's public space', in: A. Stephan, *The Americanization of European Culture. Culture, diplomacy and anti-Americanism after 1946* (New York 2007) 338.

1. Americanization as discourse, accepted, rejected or adapted?

This chapter will further elaborate on important concepts, theories and themes that are discussed in this thesis. The first part will explain what is meant by the term Americanization and how this process was perceived in the Netherlands. The next part will pay attention to the trend that resisted the cultural influences of America, anti-Americanism, and explains how this discourse developed in the Dutch society. The third part will explain what is meant with the term discourse and why newspapers are relevant in this analysis. And finally, the last part will explain the selection of source material.

1.1. Americanization as a process

According to the Dutch cultural historians Rob Kroes and Mel van Elteren the influences of America are a broad and complicated topic. Because of the complexity of this topic Mel van Elteren is convinced that multiple disciplines are necessary to create a complete theoretical framework that describes the influences of America as a cultural center that influences other nations.⁴ But first, it is necessary to explain what is meant with the concepts 'Americanization', 'America' or something 'American'. The term 'Americanization' is the most common description to discuss the influences of the United States of America abroad in the current field of research. Due to this broad definition the main focus will be on the cultural aspect of this process. 'Americanization' will refer to the cultural influences of the United States of America, instead of political or economic influences for the purpose of this research paper. As Van Elteren describes, in regard to the study of the influences of the U.S. we speak of 'Americanization' while we refer specifically to the impacts of the United States for which 'United Statesianization' or 'USAmericanization' would have been more precise descriptions, but neither of these terms are widely accepted.⁵ Because of this, the terms Americanization, Americanism and anti-Americanism will be used in this research as shorthand references to the United States of America, and not the continent as a whole. Likewise, the terms 'America' and 'American' are used throughout this thesis as terms referring to the United States of America. The use of these

⁴ M. van Elteren, *Americanism and Americanization. A critical history of domestic and global influences* (Jefferson 2006) 2.

⁵ Van Elteren, *Americanism and Americanization*, 2.

terms does not mean that this thesis intends to overlook the differences between the countries and cultural differences that exist within the Americas, nor that it wants to attribute specific characteristics of the whole continent to the United States alone.

Rob Kroes defines the process of Americanization more as a discourse that is used by Europeans to discuss what is actually European culture.⁶ This discourse originated from a long tradition of Europeans thinking about what is actually American. Through comparing America's culture and traditions with the European standards, they believed that America was intrinsically different. This 'Otherness' is an essential part of this discourse, even today the America is perceived as completely different from Europe, thus also from the Netherlands.⁷ According to Kroes, America as a country found itself at the periphery of a Eurocentric world until the twentieth century and was influenced by Europe.⁸ However, in the twentieth century America moved towards the cultural center and traded places with Europe, which meant that Europe moved towards the receiving end of the global cultural influences. This resulted in America becoming an inseparable aspect of our daily life and according to Kroes, it is part of our imagination, culture and media. The same applies to our discourse of everything American according to Kroes: 'We have acquired a set of cultural codes that allow us to understand American cultural products, to appreciate them, to consume them as if we were Americans'.⁹ This does not mean that American influences are blindly accepted. Kroes states that these American influences underwent a process of mediation and became Dutchified. A new term has been coined for this process of Dutchification: *Vertrossing*.¹⁰

When discussing Americanization as a historical process, the term itself is used as an umbrella term that first appeared in the early nineteenth century and combines many features and different processes of American influence according to Van Elteren.¹¹ In this process there are two important notions that need some explanation. First, the term Americanism, this term is used to describe everything that is perceived as something American. Van Elteren makes a

⁶ R. Kroes, *If you've seen one, you've seen the mall* (Chicago 1996) 169.

⁷ R. Kroes, *If you've seen one, you've seen the mall*, 168 – 169.

⁸ *Ibidem*, 166.

⁹ *Ibidem*, 172.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, 176 – 178.

¹¹ Van Elteren, *Americanism and Americanization*, 1.

distinction between the positive and the negative interpretations of this concept. In the positive sense Americanisms refer to the American ideals that are an inspiration to non-Americans abroad. But if regarded negatively, Americanisms refer to everything that is not European, this is also referred to as anti-Americanism. The other important concept in his book, Americanization, is deliberately defined very broadly, that is, as a process in which economic, technological, political, social, cultural and socio-psychological influences are noticeable in societies across the globe.¹²

Regarding the term Americanization Rob Kroes focuses, just like Van Elteren, on the cultural transmission and reception of what is experienced as 'American'. Both Van Elteren and Kroes are using a cultural approach, but are still critical about the use of the term Americanization. According to the latter, Americanization is a problematic term because it simplifies the complex process of cultural mutual influences to a definite black and white contrast. Kroes states that the notion of Americanization implies a process of cultural influences in which America is the only source of power that influences others without being influenced itself. According to him, the term Americanization should be taken as a shorthand reference to cultural transmission and reception to be used for analytical purposes.¹³ He also notes that America has irresistibly moved towards the center stage, while Europe finds itself on the receiving end of American cultural influences.¹⁴ Through the process of globalization America has never been closer to Europe. According to Kroes, there is an area, what he calls public space, in which American mass culture has a great deal of influence on the European continent. He states that American popular culture has openly advertised itself in this public space through different types of media such as advertisements, movies, television, radio and the national press. They therefore have contributed to a European concept of 'America' as an invented realm for an ideal society filled with iconic heroes, desirable trends, thus setting standards for European culture.¹⁵

The process of Americanization does not mean that these influences were blindly

¹² Van Elteren, *Americanism and Americanization*, 102 – 103.

¹³ R. Kroes, *If you've seen one, you've seen the mall*, x – xi.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, 171.

¹⁵ R. Kroes, 'Imaginary Americas in Europe's public space', 347.

accepted. Although Kroes states that any degree of Americanization implies an equal degree of de-Europeanization and American influences are clearly noticeable, but that does not mean that it has become an identical copy of American culture. In the process of globalization there is a selection process of which certain aspects of the cultural influences are agreed upon and after some change incorporated in the local society. For this process of selection Kroes lends the term *creolization*. This term was coined by the Swedish cultural anthropologist Ulf Hannerz to discuss the cultural influences of globalization. It refers to the process of linguistic influences of languages from 'center cultures' on the creole languages in the former colonies and thus can be used as a metaphor for cultural influences from center to periphery. Kroes uses this theory about the changes that languages undergo when they have to serve as the means of communication among groups of diverse geographical and cultural origins to explain the adaptation of American culture abroad in the process of Americanization.¹⁶ This also means that the influences that were accepted were altered by the Europeans, and thus also within Dutch society, so that we can speak of a process of mediation, or as Kroes puts it: 'an act of cultural appropriation, an experiment in creative identification with their admired examples.'¹⁷

1.2. Anti-Americanism

We can conclude that some American influences were transformed into new cultural concepts that fit within the European cultural sphere. If we interpret this embracement as a form of acceptance, we can see many signs of rejection at the same time according to Kroes.¹⁸ He states that in the long period in which Europe came into contact with American mass culture there have been many different voices that have been expressing their concerns about the negative impact of these Americanisms. They feared for the European cultural standards that would become eroded by American cultural influences that were more consumerist in style and aimed at the mass market.¹⁹

The roots of this anti-Americanism can be traced back to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century according to the Dutch cultural historian Jan Willem Schulte Nordholt, who

¹⁶ Kroes, *If you've seen one, you've seen the mall*, 162 – 163.

¹⁷ Kroes, *If you've seen one, you've seen the mall*, 173.

¹⁸ Kroes, 'Imaginary Americas', 351.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, 351.

specialized in the history and culture of North America. He stated that these opinions about America were mostly based on prejudices and emotions by the Europeans, rather than on personal experiences. 'America was not only, and not even in the first place, a reality, but a myth, an invention.'²⁰ This discursive approach of America is also confirmed by Kroes, as earlier mentioned, but also by the American cultural historian Richard Pells. He has a more specific approach towards the European discussion about Americanization. He states that the process of Americanization is a myth, 'a powerful and enduring myth, often cherished by the Europeans themselves because they can use it to explain how their societies have changed in ways they do not like, but a myth nonetheless.'²¹ The image of America is thus constructed by Europeans themselves according to Pells. These images are used to describe unwanted changes within their own society through examples from America.

Schulte Nordholt describes the tradition of anti-Americanism in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. In this period America was perceived by the Romantics as unnatural and lacking a historical foundation. America was perceived as young, childish and uncultured, while Europe was old, wise and experienced. The idea existed in Europe that in America everything was determined by money and property, social stratifications had no value; which created a sharp contrast with Europe in this period. According to Schulte Nordholt the Romantic movement defined the themes of anti-Americanism and gave them a specific cultural aspect.²² Rob Kroes agrees with this view on America as an image, a 'myth'. He states that the concept of America is a construct of the mind; it is an image that is based on cultural trends that are linked to America as a country and culture.²³ This tradition of anti-Americanism does not imply a total rejection of America as the name suggest, but according to Kroes, there are two different kinds of anti-Americanism. The first mainly rejects American cultural trends, while still admiring the energy, innovation and ideology of the country, while the other trend tends to dismiss just those principles that are identified as American and perceived as imperialist and oppressive, but

²⁰ J.W. Schulte Nordholt, 'Anti-Americanism in European culture. It's early manifestations', in: R. Kroes and M. van Rossem ed., *Anti-Americanism in Europe* (Amsterdam 1986) 7.

²¹ R. Pells, *Not Like Us. How Europeans have loved, hated and transformed American culture since World War II* (New York 1997) xiv.

²² Schulte Nordholt, 'Anti-Americanism in European culture', 8 – 16.

²³ R. Kroes, 'The great satan versus the evil empire anti-Americanism in the Netherlands.', in: R. Kroes and M. van Rossem ed., *Anti-Americanism in Europe* (Amsterdam 1986) 37.

willingly adopts American culture from its high-brow to its pop-varieties. In the twentieth century the view on America changed depending on the period. During the interbellum the cultural anti-Americanism was mostly a conservative position, but during the postwar years political anti-Americanism typically occurred on the left wing.²⁴ This thesis will focus on the development of the public debate about the cultural anti-Americanism. During the first two decades after the Second World War the relation towards America was mostly positive and throughout the fifties the anti-Americanism point of view was that of a minority group in the Netherlands. During the sixties and seventies however, this anti-American perspective became more common. Kroes attributes this mostly to the impact the Vietnam war on the Netherlands. This can be clearly traced in the Dutch press since almost all of them were pro-American at the beginning of the sixties and halfway through the seventies nothing was left of this positive attitude towards the United States.²⁵

John Helsloot describes this resistance against these American influences in the discussion about the changing Christmas traditions. He focuses mostly on the growing popularity of Santa Claus in the Netherlands as a threat towards the other popular December-holiday in the Netherlands: *Sinterklaas*. Helsloot states that after the Second World War, Santa was mostly accepted in the Dutch society, but that this changed in the early fifties due to an active anti-Santa campaign by the Catholic Church in the Netherlands. The fact that Santa Claus gained a more prominent role in the Dutch celebration of Christmas was not the only factor that played a part in the changing Christmas traditions according to Helsloot. Paradoxically, the fact that people became more aware of their traditions and that these became more intensely celebrated caused them to break with the old traditions and create new ones, a need for change and innovation emerged.²⁶ But how were these innovations regarded in the public debate? What impact had American influences have on these changes and were they positively perceived, or is the discourse determined by anti-Americanism? And what does this discussion tell us about the social changes in the Dutch society in the period between 1960 till 1980? These questions will be the focus of the next chapter of this thesis. It is also important to define the

²⁴ Kroes, 'The great satan versus the empire', 41.

²⁵ Ibidem, 41 – 45.

²⁶ Helsloot, 'Sinterklaas en de komst van de kerstman', 279 – 280.

definition of discourse in this case and what the role of the media, specifically newspapers, is in this debate.

1.3. Americanization as a discourse and the role of the media

The concept of discourse is clearly explained by cultural theorist Stuart Hall. According to him, meaning, language and culture are connected through the concept of representation.²⁷ These representations consist out of signs that are organized into language. After the linguistic turn, language is analyzed as a system that not only concludes spoken and written words, but also as a system that exists out of signs, codes and symbols. Hall states that signs and symbols have, in the first place, no meaning themselves, they are arbitrary and receive their meaning through societal and cultural influences. Since signs and symbols are arbitrary and receive meaning from a certain cultural group their meaning can differ between different cultural and social communities.²⁸ Hall then continues by asking the next question: How do people who belong to the same culture, who share the same conceptual map and who speak or write the same language know that an arbitrary combination of letters and sounds represent a certain concept? The meaning is constructed by the system of representation, which exists out of a construction of what Hall calls *codes*. Codes fix the relationship between signs and concepts they construct meaning within different languages and cultures. This is not something that exists naturally, but something that has to be learnt and to be construction within a social or cultural community.²⁹ Thus language is a social construct in which social actors use the different conceptual systems and other representational systems to construct meaning.³⁰

Because of this social practice of social actors that define the discourse, there are power relations connected to the system of representations. Hall refers here to Foucault, by stating that '[d]iscourse is about the production of knowledge through language. But ... since all social practices entail *meaning*, and meanings shape and influence what we do – our conduct – all practices have a discursive aspect.'³¹ Foucault is more concerned with the production of

²⁷ S. Hall, 'The work of Representation', in: L. Ouellette, ed. *The Media Studies Reader* (Londen 2013) 171.

²⁸ Hall, 'The work of Representation', 173 – 175.

²⁹ Ibidem, 174 – 175.

³⁰ Ibidem, 176.

³¹ Hall, 'The work of Representation', 186.

knowledge through the construction of a discourse whereas Hall is more focused on how meaning is constructed. Foucault's research focuses on how people understand themselves within a particular culture and how our knowledge about the 'social, the embodied individual meanings' comes to be produced in specific periods.³² This knowledge is the main source of power within a discourse according to Foucault. He states that when this knowledge is linked to power the owner of that knowledge gains the authority of 'truth' and has the possibility to create this truth himself within the discourse.³³ The media is not specifically mentioned by Hall or Foucault, but with his discursive approach of power relations in social and cultural communities it can be argued that the media has a considerable influence on the construction of certain discourse, as they are the main source of information to the public. Meaning is therefore not created in equal parts of society, there are power structures that have more influence than others. It can be argued that newspapers, and newspapers especially, since they report on current events and therefore have a lot to tell, can be regarded as examples of such power structures within the public debate.

1.4. Newspapers and the discussion about Americanization and anti-Americanism

The public debate about Americanization and anti-Americanism has a long tradition as is made clear by cultural researchers as Kroes, Van Elteren, Pells and many more. It would appear that the discourse of the Americanization of Dutch Christmas traditions is still relatively new. As Helsloot states, the opinion about the influences of America started to change in the early fifties of the twentieth century.³⁴ This thesis focuses on the social changes that occurred in the period between 1960 to 1980, but to analyze the development of the discourse in newspapers on this topic it is necessary to look into a bit broader period. Therefore, this thesis discusses articles that were published between January 1950 to January 1980.

The articles that will be used in the analysis are mainly local newspapers like the Leeuwarder Courant, Nieuwsblad van het Noorden and De Friese Koerier. These newspapers are

³² Ibidem, 185.

³³ Ibidem, 188 – 189.

³⁴ Helsloot, Sinterklaas en de komst van de kerstman, 280.

valuable because they are the primary source of information for the different social groups within Dutch society as each group had their own newspaper. Because of the segregated society in the Netherlands, most people only read the newspaper that represented their own social or religious pillar. It can be argued that these newspapers fairly represent the opinion of their own social or religious groups in the Dutch society. Therefore, this thesis will seek to discuss several different newspapers to analyze the discourse on the changing Christmas traditions within the Dutch society as a whole. The next chapter of this thesis will focus on the analysis of the discussion about changing Christmas traditions as represented in the Dutch newspapers.

2. Changing Christmas, a debate about America or the Netherlands?

As stated before, Dutch Christmas traditions changed heavily during the period between 1960 to 1980. These changes, and the influences that instigated them were broadly discussed by the Dutch media. This chapter will analyze a selection of articles from this period about the public debate on this topic. The analysis will focus on three different themes that can be approached separately within this debate. First, the comparison between the Dutch holiday patron *Sinterklaas* (saint Nicholas) and the American Santa Claus is a recurring theme in this debate. The following part of this chapter will focus on the comparison between the celebrations in the Netherlands and America. How were these perceived and what do these comparisons tell us about the Dutch society itself? Last, this thesis will focus on the meaning of Christmas and the American influence on the core concepts of this holiday in the Netherlands. In what way did the Dutch Christmas traditions change in the Netherlands? How were these changes perceived and what does that tell us about the way the Dutch newspapers represented the Dutch society itself?

2.1. Saint versus Santa

Based on advertisements for Christmas gifts, John Helsloot concludes that in the period directly after the war the personification of Santa Claus as patron for Christmas was accepted by the Dutch people. In the early fifties however, there was a change of heart regarding Santa. Helsloot relates this to the fact that the Dutch people experienced the holiday in a more intense way than before, but mostly due to an active anti-Santa Claus campaign by the Catholic Church in the Netherlands.³⁵ This attitude towards Santa becomes clear when the American figure is discussed in Dutch newspapers from this period. An article in the Catholic daily newspaper *De Tijd* from December 1951 critically evaluated Dutch Christmas traditions and stated that they were to a great extent imported. The author, journalist Fred Thomas, wrote that Christmas became an later variation on the Dutch holiday celebrating *Sinterklaas* (saint Nicholas) and that immediately after his departure, the Dutch 'goedheiligman' (saintly man) was replaced by Santa Claus. Santa is perceived as a 'gloomy' foreign import and a 'tragic' figure in comparison to the

³⁵ Helsloot, 'Sinterklaas en de komst van de kerstman', 279 – 280.

Dutch *Sinterklaas*.³⁶ This discourse of *Sinterklaas* as a saint and Santa as a nonentity is indicative of the Catholic anti-Santa campaign of the early fifties. Even though this article is a clear example of the attitude towards Santa of the Catholic pillar in the early fifties, this attitude is not founded on the fact that Santa is perceived as an American influence. The French 'Père Noël' (father Christmas) and the German 'Weihnachtsmann' are seen as a total paganization of the celebration of Christmas that replaces the catholic tradition of the nativity scene.³⁷

A similar concern also defines the discussion about Santa Claus in Protestant newspapers at the end of the fifties. An article in the social democratic daily newspaper *Het Vrije Volk* from December 1958 referred to a quote from the weekly *Evangelisch Luthers Weekblad* which clearly illustrates the worries of this religious group within Dutch society: 'The sound of Santa's heavy boots sound so loudly through the silent night that the faint sound of the baby in the crib almost is not heard anymore.'³⁸ One of the main concerns was that Santa would replace the birth of Jesus as central point of the holiday. The article then continued to state that Santa 'invaded' the Netherlands during Christmas time. The Protestant newspaper thus perceived Santa as an intruder, an outsider that is taking over Christmas. From the sixties onwards, the Protestant perception of the personification of Santa focused on his Dutch origins. Santa Claus was perceived by these newspapers as an Americanized version of *Sinterklaas*. Even though Santa is a descendant of *Sinterklaas* and the similarities are obvious, like the red suit, the white beard and the fact that they both bring presents, he was still not widely accepted within the Netherlands. Both the social-democratic and Protestant newspaper perceived Santa as an American adaptation of Saint Nicholas. This perception of Santa continued in the sixties. In December 1960 Santa is described in an article in *Het Vrije Volk* as just another one of those crazy things that Americans like, but would not be successful in the Netherlands.³⁹ He is seen as yet another intrusive and rude American caricature that infiltrated Dutch society. The author of the article wondered if 'our own, strong and well-balanced Saint Nicholas was not enough anymore?'.⁴⁰ This description of the Dutch saint in comparison to the American Santa is a clear

³⁶ F. Thomas, 'Het geheim van onze kerstviering thuis', *De Tijd*, 24 December 1951, 5.

³⁷ Thomas, 'Het geheim van onze kerstviering thuis', 5.

³⁸ J. J. Buskens, 'Het gaat meer om de omzet dan om de vleeswording', *Het Vrije Volk*, 24 December 1958, 6.

³⁹ C. Stellweg, 'Voor die arme stakkers', *Het Vrije Volk*, 24 December 1960, 20.

⁴⁰ C. Stellweg, 'Voor die arme stakkers', *Het Vrije Volk*, 24 December 1960, 20.

example of how the image of Santa was determined by negative descriptions, while the Dutch *Sinterklaas* was the strong and good patron Saint of his holiday earlier the same month. In this same period, the Protestant newspapers focused more on the origin of Santa, an article in the *Leeuwarder Courant* in 1961 stated that after *Sinterklaas* was brought to America he underwent a transformation in a poem by Dr. Clement Moore written around 1825: 'His eyes sparkled, his cheeks were bright red, his nose looked like a cherry and laughed merrily'.⁴¹ This jolly description differs greatly from the dignified descriptions that were common when referring to the Dutch Saint. In the *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden* from December 1978, columnist Peter Hofstede confirmed this idea of Santa's Dutch origins even more. Hofstede stated that early Dutch colonists imported *Sinterklaas* to America where his holiday was moved to the end of the month and he underwent a transformation. The personification of Santa did not appear in the Netherlands until the twentieth century and was, according to Hofstede, brought back to his homeland by the Dutch middle class to sell the leftovers of the Dutch holiday earlier the same month. Hofstede states that during Christmas time you just have to add the word 'Kerst' to your old leftovers and the community will buy it as something completely new.⁴² Thus, Hofstede did not solely focus on the Dutch roots of Santa, but also stated that Santa was used as a marketing device.

Even though the Protestant community in the Netherlands kept opposing the image of Santa, his popularity grew in the period from 1960 to 1980. As early as 1954 a daily follow-up story was printed in the liberal newspaper *De Telegraaf* starring Santa Claus titled: '*De kerstman en de koning van mars*' (Santa Claus and the king of mars).⁴³ These kinds of stories appeared more often during the next two decades and form a contrast with the Protestant discourse that disapproved of Santa. They portrayed Santa as a friendly and jolly figure that also brought gifts after *Sinterklaas* left on the sixth of December. In 1967, the trading association in Veendam, a Protestant village in Groningen, decided that instead of *Sinterklaas*, Santa Claus would be festively welcomed in their town as a publicity stunt.⁴⁴ The title of the piece: 'Santa supplants

⁴¹ Unknown, 'Kerstboom', *Leeuwarder Courant*, 23 December 1961, Christmas annex.

⁴² P. Hofstede, 'Stuurman aan wal. Welbehagen', *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, 15 December 1978, 4.

⁴³ Unknown, 'De kerstman en de koning van mars', *De Telegraaf*, 7 December 1954.

⁴⁴ Unknown, 'Kerstman verdringt Sint in Veendam', *Het Vrije Volk*, 3 November 1967, 1.

Saint Nicholas' is strongly subjective for the social-democratic newspaper *Het Vrije Volk*, but adequately describes the position of the Protestant community on this topic. After a fierce discussion it was decided that Santa as well as *Sinterklaas* would be festively, but separately welcomed in Veendam.

Although there were strong opinions against the personification of Christmas in the form of Santa, he became more widely accepted in the Netherlands. The rejection of Santa specifically by the Protestant community in this period is understandable according to Gerrit Schutte. In an article of the daily newspaper *Trouw* from 1999 he states that the Protestant community accepted the original Catholic Saint, *Sinterklaas*, because his holiday was on a non-event day. But the situation is different regarding Santa, he seems to take over the Christian holiday that is based upon the birth of the messiah, the core of Protestantism.⁴⁵

The discussion about Santa is thus mostly related to the secularization of the celebration of Christmas. The anti-Santa position was firstly held by the Catholic community in the fifties, but was quickly after that taken over by Protestant newspapers from the sixties onwards. Because of the fact that celebration of *Sinterklaas* was not connected to a biblical event, they accepted this Dutch tradition, but this was different regarding the case of Santa Claus. The Protestant community saw the growing popularity of this American impostor as a threat to the most important element of Christmas, the birth of the messiah. This explains why Santa is described as loud, intruding, and an imitation and as a foreign meaningless personification, while *Sinterklaas* is described as a Saint, a holy benefactor and a dignified apparition. The debate regarding Santa Claus by the Protestant community appears to be used to protect the core principals of Christmas through creating a contrast between the Dutch tradition of *Sinterklaas* and the misdirecting personification of Santa Claus.

2.2.Christmas, Dutch tradition or Americanized?

The discussion about Santa was not the only idea about America that was discussed by the Dutch newspapers in the period from 1960 to 1980 regarding Christmas. The American

⁴⁵ J. De Bas, 'Zolang hij niet in wonderen doet, kan de kerstman' (version 22 December 1999), <http://www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/5009/Archief/article/detail/2538163/1999/12/22/Zolang-hij-niet-in-wonderen-doet-kan-de-kerstman.dhtml> (8 June 2016).

Christmas traditions were also often discussed in Dutch newspapers and these had, as is the case with Santa, certain influences on the Dutch way of celebrating Christmas. These were often materialistic as an article in *De Tijd* from 1952 stated, 'if one encounters something special, it is often imported from England, which is also evident in the price.'⁴⁶ This subchapter focuses on the perception in the Netherlands of American traditions regarding Christmas and the comparison between the traditions in the Netherlands and in America. How was America depicted in Dutch newspapers in this period? How were their traditions discussed and perceived by the Dutch public and what does this tell us about the Dutch society itself?

The commercialistic character of the American way of celebrating is one of the central topics of discussion when the American traditions were depicted in the Dutch newspapers. An article in the Catholic newspaper *De Tijd* in 1955 described the amount of effort that is put into the preparations for the holiday by the American housewives during Christmas.⁴⁷ It is striking that the article solely focuses on the materialistic aspects of the holiday itself. The article stated that the tradition of Christmas presents is of a whole different caliber than it is in Europe. The presents were always accompanied by a personally written card after which it is wrapped in expensive and richly decorated paper, decorated with different kinds of ornaments and lastly, a big curly bow on top. It is also mentioned that the night masses were well attended and that young families would attend Christmas day after the presents and in between the preparations for dinner.⁴⁸ Their visits to church were mentioned as if they were obligations, but not as the central part of the holiday, the religious traditions are something in between and not described as the most important part of the holiday. Another article from 1955, in the Protestant *Friesche koerier*, emphasized this materialistic focus of American traditions as the author stated that, according to him, Santa had been excessive with the presents in America.⁴⁹ The article also focused on the presents and the materialistic character of American Christmas. The author described the desperation of his American friend to find presents for his children as if without those presents the holiday would be ruined. This underlines the important role of the presents

⁴⁶ A. Bgl., 'De blinkende kerst-etalages lokken', *De Tijd*, 17 December 1952, 5.

⁴⁷ M. L., 'Amerikaanse huisvrouw zucht onder de Kerst-voorbereiding. Honderden pakjes met kunstige strikken', *De Tijd*, 17 December 1955, 16.

⁴⁸ M. L., 'Amerikaanse huisvrouw zucht onder de Kerst-voorbereiding', *De Tijd*, 17 December 1955, 16.

⁴⁹ Unknown, 'Amerikaanse jeugd krijgt fantastisch speelgoed', *Friese Koerier*, 22 December 1955, 2.

in the American tradition, something that is not completely understood by the author as he described it as excessive and unnecessary.

During the sixties the consumerist character of the American Christmas remained the topic of discussion in Dutch newspapers. The Protestant community in the Netherlands perceived this consumerist character of the holiday as a threat to the core Christian values of Christmas. An article in the Protestant newspaper *Gereformeerd Gezinsblad* from 1961 described the Christmas traditions in the Grand Rapids in Michigan. The article was now not solely focused on the materialistic aspect of the holiday, but more on the fact that the American people paid almost no attention to the religious side of Christmas. The article described that there was a nativity scene as centerpiece on the dinner table, but also complained that the Christmas gospel was not mentioned once and that he expected more from American Christian reformed during the holiday. 'They call themselves Christians, but in practice they share the worldly pleasures.'⁵⁰ stated the author. This was not only the case in Grand Rapids, but in the whole country according to him. He ended the article with the hope that God will protect his churches everywhere against this trend of secularism, which comes closer and closer.⁵¹ The influences of American Christmas traditions are directly mentioned by the author, he even calls them 'the claws of the anti-Christ'.⁵² The Protestant community saw the American materialistic influences as a threat to the Christian core values and regarded with great criticism. This depiction of America is also supported in an article in the liberal daily newspaper *De Telegraaf* in 1967. The article described the trend that, during the holidays, a lot of Dutch immigrants in America went back to the Netherlands because 'The mood of Christmas is unknown to most Americans', as the title of the article so justly phrased it.⁵³ The article stated that for most Dutch the holiday in America was characterized with 'emptiness, loneliness and homes-sickness' because Christmas still had a special meaning to them and was still regarded as an extraordinary event during the year. The article stated that Americans always had been 'mixed-up' regarding the holiday; it is a more excessive feast with large amounts of food and drinks, instead of a more

⁵⁰ G. R., 'Kerstfeest in Grand Rapids', *Gereformeerd gezinsblad*, 28 December 1961, 4.

⁵¹ G. R., 'Kerstfeest in Grand Rapids', *Gereformeerd gezinsblad*, 28 December 1961, 4.

⁵² G. R., 'Kerstfeest in Grand Rapids', *Gereformeerd gezinsblad*, 28 December 1961, 4.

⁵³ Unknown, 'Sfeer van Kerstmis is meeste Amerikanen vreemd', *De Telegraaf*, 23 December 1967, 15.

solemn and sociable family-event as in the Netherlands. Besides that, the holiday lost its religious meaning in America despite numerous efforts of church leaders to restore the Christian core values of the holiday to their former glory.⁵⁴ America is here not only used to criticize the American traditions, but also to confirm the 'right' way of celebrating Christmas as it is tradition in the Netherlands. This is also the case in a written letter to the *Leeuwarder Courant* in 1979. This letter, addressed to the children in the Netherlands, worried about the growing popularity of Christmas in comparison to the Dutch tradition of *Sinterklaas*. This was not a new topic of discussion and fit within the Protestant debate that is discussed in the previous part of this chapter, but is now more related to the difference with the American traditions. The author stated that the popularity of Santa in America is understandable, but only because the Americans do not know any better. 'They cannot help it, because they simply do not have anything else.'⁵⁵ Even the presents underneath the Christmas tree were perceived as acceptable, but only because the American people did not know any better.⁵⁶ America is perceived as essentially different and focusing on the wrong traditions. In this comparison between Christmas traditions in the Netherlands and America, the Dutch people were mostly depicted as the true Christians with the right traditions and with Christian values still held high, while America was perceived as solely materialistic and secular. An article from 1979 in *De Telegraaf* emphasized this materialistic image of America as it stated that in 1979 the Americans would celebrate Christmas more abundantly than ever before. The total of expenses prior to and during the holiday was estimated at fifteen billion dollars. The article continued by describing the most extravagant and expensive gifts that were bought in 1979 and thereby highlighting the image of American Christmas as a solely materialistic holiday.⁵⁷

The American Christmas traditions were thus perceived by the Dutch newspapers as mostly materialistic in style and with a consumerist character. According to the Dutch newspapers, the American way of celebrating the holiday mainly revolved around the festive dinners, Christmas parties, and expensive presents. The Christian values became less important

⁵⁴ Unknown, 'Sfeer van Kerstmis is meeste Amerikanen vreemd', *De Telegraaf*, 23 December 1967, 15.

⁵⁵ Unknown, 'De kleine koerier', *Leeuwarder Courant*, 13 December 1978, 17.

⁵⁶ Unknown, 'De kleine koerier', *Leeuwarder Courant*, 13 December 1978, 17.

⁵⁷ W. Kroesen, 'Amerikanen gaan er een superkerst van maken', *De Telegraaf*, 24 December 1979.

as part of the Christmas traditions and faded into the background of the holiday. The Dutch newspapers were highly critical of this materialistic and consumerist style of celebrating Christmas, but was this not also the case in the Netherlands? In multiple articles it is mentioned that the act of giving presents also became more popular in the Netherlands. The next part of this chapter will focus on the development of Dutch Christmas traditions and its growing consumerist character. Can these changes be traced back to American influences? And what does the discussion about these changes tell us about the Dutch society in this period?

2.3. Consumerism and the core values of Christmas in the Netherlands

As the discussions about Santa Claus and the image of American Christmas traditions already implied, the Protestant community in the Netherlands wanted to restore the holiday of Christmas to its former glory. The Protestant community wanted the birth of the Messiah and the Christian religion at the center of the celebrations but at the same time, the discussion was also about the growing commercial character of the holiday. An article in the *Provinciale Drentsche en Asser courant* in 1950 quoted the German theologian Adolf Keller who stated that Christmas became industrialized and that it was transformed into a commercialist business.⁵⁸ Although this statement from Keller is written in 1929, it is used by the author in this article to emphasize the changing character of the Christmas holiday, but is also used to stress the worries of the Protestant community about the diminishing role of the core values that are linked to Christmas.⁵⁹ The latter was mostly a concern of the Protestant community, while the commercialist character was a popular topic of discussion in a wide variety of Dutch newspapers.

An article in the Catholic newspaper *De Tijd* that was published in 1952 is a clear example of the discussion about the commercialization of Christmas. The article stated that Christmas is the most fun period to go shopping and several different kinds of products are mentioned. Santa was described as naturalized within Dutch society although he is still topic of discussion, 'he has definitely snuck into our shop windows' and miniatures of the jolly old man

⁵⁸ L. v. B., 'Geen plaats in de herberg', *Provinciale Drentsche en Asser Courant*, 23 December 1950, 5.

⁵⁹ The quote is from Keller's book *Auf der Schwelle. Einsichten und Ausblicke in die tiefere Wirklichkeit* from 1929.

complete with beard and small tree are for sale.⁶⁰ The focus of this article is not on Christmas as a holiday, but more on the consumerist character of the holiday. The fact that Santa is still mentioned as a topic of discussion can be explained by the anti-Santa movement of the Catholic community during the fifties, but Santa here is represented as a product and not as the personification of Christmas. This description thus receives a new meaning. Santa is no longer perceived as a threat to the tradition of *Sinterklaas*, but more as a more general change in the meaning of Christmas. It has changed from a Christian holiday to a more secular, consumerist festivity that became more focused on presents and gifts instead of the religious origins highly valued within the Protestant community.

The Protestant community in Dutch society regarded these changes with great concern. In an article published in the Protestant newspaper *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden* in 1955 the minister M. Krop described the way in which the celebrations of Christmas changed and stated that we should 'Bring Christ back to Christmas'. He considered the traditional Dutch way of celebrating Christmas as a modest and Christian tradition, but stated that this modesty, '...when even the Christmas tree was unwelcome...' was lost. Besides the Christmas tree, Krop also stated that Santa deserves no space next to *Sinterklaas* and that this space has not been given by the Dutch society, which is appreciated by Krop. This view on Santa corresponds with the Catholic view on Santa as a nonentity in comparison with the Dutch *Sinterklaas* as he is depicted in a Catholic article earlier in this chapter.⁶¹ According to the author, the Dutch Christmas traditions have a specific character of celebrating Christmas with the family, but that does not necessarily mean that it was celebrated as a Christian holiday. Krop stated that there was a certain '*Kerstsfeer*', a Christmas spirit, that was characterized by better feelings, higher ideals and even a yearly visit to the church, but that this was in appearance represented by decorations, a warm get-together and delicious food.⁶² His main objection to the development of Christmas traditions in the Netherlands is that they became more secularized which resulted, at least in the appearance, in a more consumerist celebration than a religious one. The Protestant discourse focused mainly on the fact that the Christian core values of the holiday

⁶⁰ A. Bgl., 'De Blinkende Kerst-etelages lokken', *De Tijd*, 17 December 1952, 5.

⁶¹ F. Thomas, 'Het geheim van onze kerstviering thuis', *De Tijd*, 24 December 1951, 5.

⁶² M. A. Krop, 'Brenge Christus terug', *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, 17 December 1955, 1.

became less important as a central focus point in the celebrations.

At the same time, other newspapers focused more on the growing consumeristic character of Christmas, an article in the social-democratic newspaper *Het Vrije Volk* in 1956 clearly illustrated this discussion regarding Christmas because it solely focused on the expenses of this holiday. The article focussed on several materialistic aspects of the holiday varying from the amount of alcohol consumption, to decorations, to the extra revenues and many more. Christmas is depicted as a mainly materialistic holiday and it is striking that, once again, the figure of Santa is used as a personification of this consumerist-focused discourse. The title of the article: 'What Santa buys' stated that Santa is not perceived as a personification of the holiday, but an instigator to the consumerist trend of the holiday.⁶³ The fact that the article solely focused on the materialistic side of Christmas illustrates the change in the way that the perceived by the Dutch newspapers in the fifties. Even an article in the *Leeuwarder Courant* in 1958 described these consumerist changes, and does not mention the traditional beliefs that are linked to Christmas. The article mostly focused on the realization that a growing amount of people started to give each other presents for Christmas. The modest character that was described by Krop as stated earlier is used to stress the Protestant opinion that the Dutch traditional celebration was different from the materialistic celebration in other countries. 'The gifts ... are of a different type than those in other countries'.⁶⁴ This process of othering is a part of the discourse of the Protestant community, because the article described the traditions from Germany and England as more materialistic, the gifts were more luxurious and chic clothing was seen as the standard. This comparison emphasizes the Protestant ideal of a modest and Christian holiday. While the Christmas tree was perceived as a threat to this modesty by M. A. Krop several years earlier, this article concluded with the statement that, for the time being, the Christmas tree with its decorations and candles remains as a more important symbol of the holiday than the act of giving presents to each other. The tree is thus no longer perceived as a threat to the core values of the holiday in comparison to the growing materialistic character of Christmas according to the Protestant community.

⁶³ W. Polak, 'Wat de kerstman koopt', *Het Vrije Volk*, 24 December 1956, 8.

⁶⁴ Unkown, 'Geschenken of geen geschenken: Kerstboom blijft symbool bij ons kerstfeest', *Leeuwarder Courant*, 20 December 1958, 15.

The discussion about Christmas as a materialistic holiday was also widely used by different newspapers in the sixties. An article from 1966 in the liberal newspaper *Algemeen Handelsblad* stated that Santa became real competition for the Dutch *Sinterklaas*. The rest of the article is more of an advertisement because of its suggestions for Christmas presents that are perceived as 'appropriate for Christmas'. The article stated that in the Netherlands *Sinterklaas* was still celebrated, but there should also be presents under the tree during Christmas time that are more expensive and serious compared to the gifts of the Dutch saint.⁶⁵ Another article from this same newspaper a few days later emphasizes the growing consumerist aspects of the holiday. It stated that the revenues of December 1966 would surpass those of the previous years. The article depicted clearly a growing materialistic trend that surrounded Christmas during the sixties because of the growing wealth of the Dutch people. According to the article, most of the profit was earned during the festivities surrounding *Sinterklaas*, but because of the growing wealth, Christmas revenues became more important for stores as extra income.⁶⁶ This notion actually demonstrated a development in the debate about Christmas. *Sinterklaas* was already perceived as a materialistic holiday that was mainly about the presents. Christmas on the other hand, was traditionally perceived as a modest Christian holiday. During the sixties however, Christmas gradually became more associated with presents, gifts and revenues despite the attempts of the Protestant community for a revival of the core values of the Christian holiday.

The discussion that focused on the materialistic side of Christmas was also used by the left-wing liberal weekly *De Groene Amsterdammer*, but with a slight difference. In December 1969 they asked the Dutch youth about the function of Christmas for their opinion page *Mensen van Morgen* (People of Tomorrow). The age of the contributors differed from eighteen to twenty-one years old, but represented a similar discourse with slight differences. They also focused, like other newspapers in the period, on the materialistic and consumerist character of Christmas, but were more critical on the holiday and its Christian values. According to the eighteen-year-old Rudie Doves the Dutch society was divided in four different groups during

⁶⁵ Unknown, 'Onder de kerstboom', *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 16 December 1966, 15.

⁶⁶ Unknown, 'De December-Feesten N.V.', *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 24 December 1966, 14.

Christmas time. He stated that there was only a small group who still saw Christmas as a pure Christian holiday, another group was solely focused on Christmas as a feast. The third group was more pragmatic and thus combining the materialistic festivities with certain traditional elements like Christmas songs and mass after which they had a festive meal. The last group, what Rudie called the nihilists, see nothing of value in the holiday, maybe just two days off, but nothing more.⁶⁷ Other contributors saw the holiday as a excessiveness of the growing wealth in the Dutch society and blame the marketing industry for the commercialization of Christmas. They were also highly critical towards the origins of the holiday. These young contributors to the debate were in addition to their critique on the consumerist character of the holiday also sceptic about the origins of the holiday and the core values. Christmas is not perceived as a Christian holiday, but as a much older festivity that exists of multiple pagan traditions that were combined and transformed by Christianity to celebrate the birth of Christ. Christianity was for the youth no longer the central theme during this holiday. The youth were highly critical of the old traditions and stated that the current Dutch society imposed a consumerist meaning onto Christmas that had nothing to do with the holiday.⁶⁸ The whole discussion of the youth insinuates a desire for change of the traditions. The criticism on the role of the Church and the stress on the pagan origins and consumerist character of the holiday made it clear that the youth were done with the old traditions. This discussion is not further mentioned in other articles from the sixties or seventies, but the opinions of the contributors of this article presented a clear and critical viewpoint of the Dutch youth regarding Christmas.

The fear of the Protestant community about the loss of the Christian core values of Christmas seemed to be a genuine one in the seventies. In an article by Cl. Stam in the Protestant daily *Nederlands Dagblad* from 1974, he acknowledged the fact that the Dutch society became more secularized and he even wondered if the churches should be directly involved in the celebration of the holidays in the Netherlands. He stated that the traditions were given a different meaning through secular and worldly influences as a result of globalization.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ R. Doves, 'Schuldgevoel', in: Unknown, 'Mensen van morgen. Jongeren over de functie van het kerstfeest', *De Groene Amsterdammer*, 20 December 1969, 12.

⁶⁸ P. Fliipsen, 'Weinig overgebleven', in: 'Mensen van morgen. Jongeren over de functie van het kerstfeest', *De Groene Amsterdammer*, 20 December 1969, 12.

⁶⁹ Cl. Stam, 'Feest bij u thuis? Feestdagen, kerk en gezin', *Nederlands Dagblad*, 24 December 1974, 6.

The secularization of the Dutch society is explicitly mentioned here by Stam as he stated that the Dutch Christians attended mass at a diminishing rate.⁷⁰ Stam stated that the worldly and secular version of the holiday became a caricature of the 'true celebration of Christ', The modest and pure tradition that was heavily promoted by Krop in *Het Nieuwsblad van het Noorden* in 1955⁷¹ is according to Stam the reason that secular attributes like Christmas trees, Christmas stars and food gained their prominent role in the holiday. He argued that the religious community should gather during the Christmas holiday at services at Church, and that it was the responsibility of the parents to attend these services as a family to emphasize the religious importance of the holiday. These services, organized by the churches for the different religious communities, were the solution to restore the religious character of the holiday according to Stam.⁷² Thus, just like in the fifties, the Protestant discourse was mainly focused on the restoration of the religious core values against the growing consumerist character of the holiday. It is remarkable that, while Stam stressed the importance of the religious character of the holiday, he also admitted that the secular sentiment that became associated with Christmas was meant to attract people and therefore also attracted devoted Christians. According to Stam, it was acceptable and understandable that devoted Christians gave in to these new secular traditions as long as they kept in mind that religion and the birth of Christ remained at the center of the holiday.⁷³ Stam took a more pragmatic position regarding the growing materialist and secular character of Christmas as he stated that, if well balanced, it is acceptable to combine the religious aspects of the holiday with the growing materialistic trend of the celebrations. The materialistic and consumerist character of the holiday was thus slowly accepted by the Protestant community during the seventies. This moderate form of acceptance that is characteristic for the Protestant discussion about the consumerist character of Christmas is reaffirmed in an interview with pastor Albert van den Heuvel in *Het Vrije Volk* in 1978. When asked if Christmas has not become a disgusting feast of a holiday, the pastor answered that on

⁷⁰ In 1960 24 percent of the Dutch population identified themselves as non-religious, this percentage rose to almost 50 percent of the population in 1980. The regularly attendance at Church lowered from 67 per cent in 1970 to 50 percent in 1980. Source: J. Becker and J. de Hart, 'Godsdienstige veranderingen in Nederland. Verschuivingen in de binding met de kerken en de christelijke traditie.' *Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau* (The Hague 2006) 37 – 45.

⁷¹ M. A. Krop, 'Brenge Christus terug', *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, 17 December 1955, 1.

⁷² Cl. Stam, 'Feest bij u thuis? Feestdagen, kerk en gezin', *Nederlands Dagblad*, 24 December 1974, 6.

⁷³ Cl. Stam, 'Feest bij u thuis? Feestdagen, kerk en gezin', *Nederlands Dagblad*, 24 December 1974, 6.

the outside that might be true, but that when you look deeper and past that first impression, it still is the same holiday celebrated by nice people. He stated that alternative celebrations and attempts to restore the holiday to its religious origins were all with the best intentions.⁷⁴

Regarding the discourse on the growing consumerist character of Christmas there is a clear distinction between the topic of discussion within the Protestant newspapers and the more common topic discussed by other newspapers. The latter mostly focused on the materialistic and consumerist trend that was generally associated with the holiday. Christmas was no longer perceived as a pure religious and Christian holiday and became more related to secular matters as food, decorations, presents and advertising. This development was the cause that the Protestant community started to promote the restoration of the traditional modest way of celebration and to restore the Christian morals as the core concept of the holiday.⁷⁵ They perceived the secular influences as a threat to the, according to them, originally Christian Holiday. This was contradicted by the Dutch youth in the same period. They became more critical of the holiday by emphasizing the pagan origins and the abuse of the holiday by the Church to remain in their prominent position within the Dutch society. They stressed the fact that a larger part of the Dutch people solely perceived Christmas as a consumerist holiday and focused mainly on the festive meals instead of the religious aspects. They explained this due to the growing wealth in the sixties.⁷⁶ The net income increased with an average of 3,7 percent per year in the period from 1950 till 1960 and during the following decade with 3.5 percent per year on average.⁷⁷ Because of this growing prosperity people were able to spend more on luxurious products and thus also on gifts. The traditions of gifts in the Netherlands gained slowly some popularity, an article in *De Telegraaf* in 1969 stated that 18 percent of the Dutch people gave presents during Christmas. *Sinterklaas*, remained the biggest benefactor, because 87 percent of the Dutch public gave presents during this holiday.⁷⁸ This growing popularity resulted in a more consumerist character of the holiday, no longer only in the states, as the previous subchapter

⁷⁴ J. H. de Groot, 'Kerst is anti-wanhoopsfeest', *Het Vrije Volk*, 23 December 1978, 23.

⁷⁵ M. A. Krop, 'Breng Christus terug', *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, 17 December 1955, 1.

⁷⁶ Unknown, 'Mensen van morgen. Jongeren over de functie van het kerstfeest', *De Groene Amsterdammer*, 20 December 1969, 12.

⁷⁷ C.J.M. Schuyt and Ed Taverne, *1950. Welvaart in zwart-wit* (Den Haag 2000), 272.

⁷⁸ Unknown, 'Steeds meer kerstbomen', *De Telegraaf*, 14 January 1969, 7.

stated, but also in the Netherlands. This was not the only sign of a changing view on Christmas traditions in the Netherlands. As the Christmas tree was perceived as an unwelcome distraction from the Christian origins of the holiday according to the Protestant community⁷⁹, it gained a lot of popularity over the years. In 1969 as much as 70 percent of the Dutch people had a Christmas tree in their homes, a growth of 13 percent with 1963. According to an article in *De Telegraaf* from 1969, this was an example of the growing prosperity of the Dutch society. It also stated that 70 percent of the Catholic community had a tree and even 45 percent of the Protestant community put a tree in their homes.⁸⁰ This reaffirmed the change in position of the Protestant community, traditions that were heavily debated directly after the Second World War, became more adapted during the sixties and the seventies. Thus even the Protestant community adopted a more pragmatic position in the discussion about Christmas traditions. They compromised by stating that the consumerist character became part of the holiday, but at the same time stressed the importance of attendance at mass and to celebrate the core Christian values that were still linked to the holiday. The Dutch people had to look for the 'right balance' between Church and festivities according to Stam in the *Nederlands Dagblad* in 1974.⁸¹

⁷⁹ M. A. Krop, 'Brenge Christus terug', *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, 17 December 1955, 1.

⁸⁰ Unknown, 'Steeds meer kerstbomen', *De Telegraaf*, 14 January 1969, 7.

⁸¹ Cl. Stam, 'Feest bij u thuis? Feestdagen, kerk en gezin', *Nederlands Dagblad*, 24 December 1974, 6.

Conclusion

The conventional traditions that were associated with Christmas changed in the Netherlands during the period from 1960 to 1980. As stated in the previous chapter, the holiday became more materialistic and consumerist in character at the cost of the traditional Christian meaning of Christmas. These changing Christmas traditions were often discussed in Dutch newspapers from the period and therefore showed a development of how these changes were perceived within Dutch society. This thesis states that these discussions about the changing Christmas traditions can be however interpreted as an attempt to discuss the social changes that took place in the Netherlands from 1960 until 1980.

This thesis focused on a specific development of certain traditions within the Netherlands during a period of substantial social changes in the Dutch society. The main focus was on the discussion about these changes in newspapers, therefore a further in-depth analysis of cultural developments is needed to put this discussion in a broader historical context. Also the time-frame of this thesis is limited, the discussion about the growing popularity of Santa in comparison to the Dutch *Sinterklaas* continued and became more heated until the end of the nineties, thus even though the discussion about changing Christmas traditions developed towards a more pragmatic point of view at the end of the seventies, the discussion was far from over. The availability of sources was limited for the analysis of this thesis due to the restrictions of the online database of the *Koninklijke Bibliotheek* in The Hague, further research into other newspapers is needed for a further and clearer image of the development of Christmas traditions in the Netherlands between 1960 and 1980. The possibilities for further research on this topic are broad and deserve more attention.

As the previous chapter stated, the discussion in Dutch newspapers can be divided in three major themes. The discussion about Santa as an American adaptation of the Dutch *Sinterklaas* and the comparison between the two; the image of American Christmas as represented in Dutch newspapers and last, the discussion about the development of Christmas traditions within the Netherlands itself. These three discussions should not be interpreted as separate from each other as they are all three connected. The discussion about Santa, for example, created an image that supported the representations of American Christmas traditions

by the Dutch newspapers which contributed to the idea of Santa as an Americanized imposter of the Dutch *Sinterklaas*. This discussion about Santa versus *Sinterklaas* changed from a heavy Catholic-based anti-Santa viewpoint in the fifties that was taken over by the Protestant community from the sixties onwards. The discourse focused on descriptions of *Sinterklaas* as saintly and a benefactor while Santa was described as an embodiment of the consumerist American style of celebrating Christmas, a tool that was used for advertising purposes solely. This argument against Santa was taken over by the Protestant community. Their main focus was not on Santa as an embodiment of the commercialization of the holiday, but more on Santa as a threat to the most important part of the holiday, namely the birth of the messiah. This view on the changing Christmas traditions defined the Protestant discourse as they saw the consumerist trend in the Netherlands also as a threat to the Christian origins of the holiday and described the American way of celebrating the holiday as empty and meaningless.⁸² Regarding the image that was constructed of the American way of celebrating Christmas, there was more of a consensus. The American traditions were mostly focused on parties, festive dinners and expensive gifts in comparison to the meaningful and extraordinary event of Christmas as it was celebrated in the Netherlands.⁸³

But what does this tell us about the Dutch society itself? According to Rob Kroes the discussion about Americanization creates a discourse that is used by the Dutch newspapers to define which of the traditions that are associated with Christmas are actually Dutch. Based on newspaper articles from the period, the Christmas traditions changed over time, a development that was broadly discussed within the Dutch newspapers of the period. The several different groups within the Dutch society perceived these developments differently. The liberal and social-democratic newspapers for instance described the development of the growing consumerist character quite objectively, they only criticized American influences as these were perceived as 'strange' and 'would not fit within the Dutch society' of the time.⁸⁴ America was thus still perceived as 'the Other' whose traditions were perceived as fundamentally different and criticized while the growing consumerist character of the Dutch Christmas celebrations

⁸² L. v. B., 'Geen plaats in de herberg', *Provinciale Drentsche en Asser Courant*, 23 December 1950, 5.

⁸³ Unknown, 'Sfeer van Kerstmis is meeste Amerikanen vreemd', *De Telegraaf*, 23 December 1967, 15.

⁸⁴ C. Stellweg, 'Voor die arme stakkers', *Het Vrije Volk*, 24 December 1960, 20.

became undeniable. The fact that an increasing part of the Dutch public purchased more during the Christmas period is reflected in the growing revenues of the Dutch stores of every December. Although the Dutch celebration of *Sinterklaas* was still the most important explanation of this growth, during the seventies the act of giving presents became more popular amongst the Dutch public. This growing consumerist was not only accepted by the liberal and social democratic population in the Netherlands, but also by the Catholic community. The fact that Christmas was described as the 'most fun time to go shopping' in the Catholic newspaper *De Tijd* as early as 1952.⁸⁵ Even though this community was highly critical of the Americanized Santa during the fifties, they were not as critical about the consumerist character of the holiday. The critical point of view against Santa and the growing consumerist character of the holiday were taken over by the Protestant community in the sixties. They perceived these developments as a threat to the Christian origins of Christmas because they distracted the true believers of what was important during the holiday, namely the birth of the savior Jesus Christ. They feared that the growing consumerist character and the personification of Santa would take over the Christian holiday, therefore remained highly critical of these development during the sixties. At the end of the seventies however, they seemed to accept these developments and promoted a more balanced way of celebrating Christmas in which elements of both secular and religious traditions were combined.⁸⁶ But the question remains, what does this tell us about the Dutch society itself?

In the period from 1960 to 1980 the discourse in Dutch newspapers remained critical regarding the American way of celebrating Christmas, as it was depicted as consumerist, commercial, non-religious and meaningless in comparison to the Dutch traditions. Nevertheless, growing commercialistic and consumerist tendencies were evident within the Netherlands in this period. The growing popularity of Santa and the diminishing religious character of the holiday were critically regarded by the Protestant community, but at the end of the seventies they eventually started to take a more pragmatic point of view as they promoted a right balance between the secular aspects of the holiday and the religious traditions associated with

⁸⁵ A. Bgl., 'De Blinkende Kerst-etalages lokken', *De Tijd*, 17 December 1952, 5.

⁸⁶ Cl. Stam, 'Feest bij u thuis? Feestdagen, kerk en gezin', *Nederlands Dagblad*, 24 December 1974, 6. And J.H. de Groot, 'Kerst is anti-wanhoopsfeest', *Het Vrije Volk*, 23 December 1978, 23.

Christmas. The growing materialistic and consumerist character of the holiday was mostly discussed in the newspapers in comparison to the American traditions. These developments towards a more commercialistic celebration of Christmas and the loss of its religious meaning can thus be perceived as American influences on Dutch society, but it is important to notice that these were clearly not blindly accepted within Dutch society. These changes also illustrate a secularization of the Dutch society, this was stressed by the Protestant community but was also recognized by the Dutch youth when they discussed the Christian holiday.⁸⁷ The Dutch society became more secularized during the sixties and seventies which influenced the Dutch traditional way of celebrating Christmas. This thesis argues that the debate about the changing Christmas traditions not only referred to the discussion about Americanization and the American influences on the Dutch holiday, but also discussed the inner social changes in Dutch society. This is mostly recognizable in the Protestant discourse and fear of losing the Christian values, but can also be found in the acceptance of other social groups of the commercialistic character of the holiday. The Dutch discourse in newspapers can be interpreted as a form of what Rob Kroes calls 'Vertrossing', which meant that not all cultural influences are accepted by the receiving culture, but actually are transformed to fit in with the local traditions.⁸⁸ The discourse developed thus from a more anti-American Christmas to a more mediated discourse that still supported the Dutch way of celebrating Christmas, but at the same time was influenced by Americanisms. These were critically perceived as part of the American traditions of celebrating the holiday, but despite the criticism in Dutch newspapers they became also evident in the Dutch society at the end of the seventies. As Santa became more accepted within Dutch society, according to the Dutch newspapers, so did the materialistic trend of Christmas, but the Dutch way of celebrating Christmas cannot be described as purely 'American', as it holds on to its own 'modest' traditions by searching for a right balance according to the Dutch newspapers.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Unknown, 'Mensen van Morgen. Jongeren over de functie van het kerstfeest', *De Groene Amsterdammer*, 20 December 1969, 20.

⁸⁸ Kroes, *If you've seen one, you've seen the mall*, 176 – 178.

⁸⁹ Cl. Stam, 'Feest bij u thuis? Feestdagen, kerk en gezin', *Nederlands Dagblad*, 24 December 1974, 6.

Abstract

The Christmas traditions within the Netherlands underwent multiple significant changes during the twentieth century. These changes were often associated with the process of Americanization and thus explained through American cultural influences. This thesis focuses on the public debate about these changing Christmas traditions in Dutch newspapers during the period from 1960 till 1980 and if this discussion can be interpreted as an attempt to discuss larger social changes within the Dutch society in this period. This thesis then states that the discourse within the Netherlands changed from a highly critical point of view towards these changes to a more mediated and pragmatic position in this discussion. The discussion is divided in three major themes within the discussion, these are not completely separated from each other and thus interfere with one another. The major themes are the discussion about the Dutch *Sinterklaas* in comparison to the American Santa Claus in which the Dutch Saint was described as the original Dutch benefactor and Santa is perceived as an American imposter that is solely used for commercial reasons. The second theme focuses on the comparison between the American way of celebrating the holiday in comparison to the Dutch traditions. The American way is mostly perceived by the Dutch newspapers as materialistic, consumerist and empty, while Christmas in the Netherlands was still perceived as a special event with significant meaning. This image is somewhat contradicted by the third theme of the discussion, namely the commercialization of Dutch Christmas traditions. Here it becomes clear that in the Netherlands too, Christmas became more materialistic and consumerist in character, thus stating that there were some American influences on the Dutch way of celebrating the holiday. In short, this thesis states that the discussion about the changing Christmas traditions are an example of what Rob Kroes calls 'Vertrossing', a process in which several cultural influences are adapted and included by a receiving culture through a process of mediation as the Dutch society became more secularized in the period, thus more open to commercial and materialistic ways to celebrate the, originally, Christian holiday.

Bibliography:

Literature:

- Burke, P. *Cultural Hybridity* (Cambridge 2009)
- Elteren, M. van, *Americanism and Americanization. A Critical History of Domestic and Global Influence* (Jefferson 2006).
- Hall, S., “Encoding/Decoding”, in: Marris, P., and Sue Thornham ed., *Media Studies. A Reader* (Edinburgh 1996).
- Kroes, R., *If you’ve seen one, you’ve seen the mall* (Chicago 1996).
- Kroes, R., Rossem, M. van, ed., *Anti-Americanism in Europe* (Amsterdam 1986).
- Pells, R., *Not Like Us. How Europeans have loved, hated and transformed American culture since World War II* (New York 1997).
- Schuyt, C.J.M. and Ed Taverne, *1950. Welvaart in zwart-wit* (Den Haag 2000), 272.
- Stephan, A., *The Americanization of European Culture. Culture, diplomacy and anti-Americanism after 1946* (New York 2007).

Articles:

(Source: <http://www.delpher.nl>)

- Becker, J., and Hart, J. de, ‘Godsdienstige veranderingen in Nederland. Verschuivingen in de binding met de kerken en de christelijke traditie.’ *Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau* (The Hague 2006).
- Hall, S., ‘The work of Representation’, in: L. Ouellette, ed. *The Media Studies Reader* (Londen 2013) 171 – 196.
- Helsloot, J., ‘Sinterklaas en de komst van de kerstman. Decemberfeesten in postmodern Nederland tussen eigen en vreemd’, *Volkkundig Bulletin* 22 (1996, no.3) 262 – 298.
- Kroes, R., ‘Imaginary Americas in Europe’s Public Space’, in: A. Stephan, *The Americanization of European Culture. Culture, diplomacy and anti-Americanism after 1946* (New York 2007) 337 – 359.

- Kroes, R., 'The great satan versus the evil empire anti-Americanism in the Netherlands.', in: R. Kroes and M. van Rossem ed., *Anti-Americanism in Europe* (Amsterdam 1986) 37 – 50.
- Schulte Nordholt, J.W., 'Anti-Americanism in European culture. It's early manifestations', in: R. Kroes and M. van Rossem ed., *Anti-Americanism in Europe* (Amsterdam 1986) 7 – 19.

Newspaper articles:

- B., L.V., 'Geen plaats in de herberg', *Provinciale Drentsche en Asser Courant*, 23 December 1950.
- Bas, J. de, 'Zolang hij niet in wonderen doet, kan de kerstman' (version 22 December 1999),
<http://www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/5009/Archief/article/detail/2538163/1999/12/22/Zolang-hij-niet-in-wonderen-doet-kan-de-kerstman.dhtml> (8 June 2016).
- Bgl., A., 'De Blinkende Kerst-etalages lokken', *De Tijd*, 17 December 1952.
- Buskens, J. J., 'Het gaat meer om de omzet dan om de vleeswording', *Het Vrije Volk*, 24 December 1958.
- Groot, J. H. de, 'Kerst is anti-wanhoopsfeest', *Het Vrije Volk*, 23 December 1978.
- Hofstede, P., 'Stuurman aan wal. Welbehagen', *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, 15 December 1978.
- Krop, M.A., 'Breng Christus terug', *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, 17 December 1955.
- L., M., 'Amerikaanse huisvrouw zucht onder de Kerst-voorbereiding. Honderden pakjes met kunstige strikken', *De Tijd*, 17 December 1955.
- Polak, W., 'Wat de kerstman koopt', *Het Vrije Volk*, 24 December 1956.
- R., G., 'Kerstfeest in Grand Rapids', *Gereformeerd gezinsblad*, 28 December 1961.
- Stam, CL., 'Feest bij u thuis? Feestdagen, kerk en gezin', *Nederlands Dagblad*, 24 December 1974.
- Stellweg, C., 'Voor die arme stakkers', *Het Vrije Volk*, 24 December 1960.
- Thomas, F., 'Het geheim van onze kerstviering thuis', *De Tijd*, 24 December 1951.

- Unknown, 'De kerstman en de koning van mars', *De Telegraaf*, 7 December 1954.
- Unknown, 'Amerikaanse jeugd krijgt fantastisch speelgoed', *Friese Koerier*, 22 December 1955.
- Unknown, 'Geschenken of geen geschenken: Kerstboom blijft symbool bij ons kerstfeest', *Leeuwarder Courant*, 20 December 1958.
- Unknown, 'Kerstboom', *Leeuwarder Courant*, 23 December 1961,.
- Unknown, 'De December-Feesten N.V.', *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 24 December 1966.
- Unknown, 'Onder de kerstboom', *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 16 December 1966.
- Unknown, 'Kerstman verdringt Sint in Veendam', *Het Vrije Volk*, 3 November 1967.
- Unknown, 'Sfeer van Kerstmis is meeste Amerikanen vreemd', *De Telegraaf*, 23 December 1967.
- Unknown, 'Steeds meer kerstbomen', *De Telegraaf*, 14 January 1969.
- Unknown, 'Mensen van morgen. Jongeren over de functie van het kerstfeest', *De Groene Amsterdammer*, 20 December 1969.
- Unknown, 'De kleine koerier', *Leeuwarder Courant*, 13 December 1978.