Contents

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Re-articulating critical awareness about racism in public discourse: Changing one's mind on the Black Pete debates in the Netherlands

1. Introduction

To engage in a public debate requires a metapragmatic ability to deal critically with the discursive elements and practices that constitute social relationships in the public sphere. It is possible to think of debates in terms of relatively isolated speech events. We can think of presidential candidates interlocked in a televised event or of social scientists debating questions of subjectivity at a symposium. Debates may centre on questions of validity of specific arguments, practices and institutions. They involve struggle over the meaning(s) of particular (sets of) signifiers, identities and practices. There is not a single 'correct' way to perform a debate. When engaging (with)in debates, we draw upon the full range of discursive resources and strategies provided by our ability to engage reflexively with the structural objects of adaptability (see Verschueren and Brisard 2009) provided by linguistic and non-linguistic discourse.

Those who engage in public debates need to produce arguments, perform their identities, (re-) frame the discourse of their opponents and engage in a myriad of strategies that allow them to restructure contextual reality as they see fit. To take a stance on a particular issue implies that one (re-) articulates and performs one's sense of self in relation to a whole set of norms, values, identities, practices and institutions with varying degrees of salience. Even though we *can* think of debates as relatively isolated events, it often makes more sense to consider them in terms of social and political phenomena that take place across multiple speech events and language games. When we talk about 'the' migration

debate or the debates about austerity, we refer to fuzzy and permeable sets of discursive acts, arguments and struggles through which social and political relationships are negotiated. Debates are struggles over symbolic and material resources that can be used in order to restructure the public sphere. They do not merely take place *within* a public sphere, they are the very stuff such things as public spheres are made of.

When we publicly change a particular idea, attitude, belief, norm, value or opinion, this has implications across multiple aspects of subjectivity and discourse. Consequently, the phenomenon of subjectivity and the processes through which we mark subjectivity in observable ways cannot be traced back to a single moment in time, space and/or discourse. This can be illustrated very clearly with reference to the way social actors rearticulate their opinions and stances in the context of large-scale social and political debates. Subjectivity is a process. As such, indicators of subjectivity and critique are frequently scattered across utterances and topics that constitute particular speech events. Markers of stance and subjectivity are also distributed among the different speech events and contexts through which we move as subjects while we try to maintain some degree in our dealings with the world.

In the upcoming sections, I will argue in favour of an understanding of debates as dynamic and inter-discursive networks in which actors rearticulate, challenge and negotiate their subject positions in attempts to fix the meanings of practices, abstract categories, norms, values, identities, histories and spaces that shape their relationships towards themselves, each other and the public realm(s) through which they move. The articulation of a (change in one's) critical attitude with respect to a contested issue in the public realm requires metapragmatic discursive acts distributed along large stretches of discourse at varying levels of discursive structure (Zienkowski 2012, 2014, 2015, Howarth 2005). Many of these acts can be analysed in terms of the vocabulary provided by studies of evaluation, stance and/or positioning (Jaffe 2009b, Bednarek 2006, Haddington 2007, Harré et al. 2009).

In order to explore the relationships between critique, stancetaking and the metapragmatic implications of changing one's mind in a society-wide debate, I will focus on a debate marked by a relatively high degree of repetition and/or circularity: the debate on the allegedly

racist character of the popular folkloristic figure called Black Pete in the Netherlands. In the upcoming sections, I will first provide some contextual information on the Black Pete debate as it has developed in the Netherlands. I will then move on to present a discourse analysis of the way in which a blogger constructs two radically different stances in relation to the Dutch Black Pete debates. In this analysis, I will focus on the metapragmatic strategies that allow this blogger to rearticulate her stance towards Black Pete as well as to the various voices that constitute the Black Pete debate in the first place.

2. Contesting Black Pete in the Netherlands

Some debates have a rather repetitive or even circular character and are characterized by entrenched positions and repetitive arguments rather than by a process of critical self-examination and rational persuasion. Such debates testify to the ritual and performative functions of debate rather than to the rational and persuasive dimension of public stance-taking. We can think of so-called 'ethical' debates in which – frequently underspecified – national norms and values are debated. For instance, in debates about euthanasia or welfare, it is highly predictable what actors will come up with what arguments. Likewise, debates about migration and integration flare up in highly predictable ways.

In Europe, debates about Muslims and Islamic practices in the public sphere have been almost ritualized. For instance, debates about Islamic veiling or about the ritual slaughtering of animals at the end of Ramadan can be thought of in terms of trench wars that offer very limited possibilities for manoeuvrability and critical examination of discursive stances and positions. Talk about migrants and Muslims, their supposed lack of integration and the so-called failure of multi-cultural society perform important roles in contemporary banal and explicit forms of nationalism propagated more explicitly by right-wing populist actors in Europe. Such anxieties inform a besieged sense of national culture and identity in many European countries (Ekman 2015, Farnham 2012, Sunier 2005, Yilmaz 2012, Vellenga 2008, Wodak and

Boukala 2015). This can be illustrated with reference to the Black Pete debates in the Netherlands. Black Pete, the black-faced helper of Saint Nicholas, has become the object of an internationally observed nationwide discussion in the Netherlands and in Flanders (Belgium). In the sections below, I will first try to give an impression of the way the festivities surrounding the birthday of Saint Nicholas are traditionally celebrated in the contemporary context of the Netherlands. I will then move on to a brief discussion of some critical interventions that address the allegedly racist and colonial dimension of Black Pete representations and practices made by Dutch artists, activists and public figures. A more detailed analysis of this debate and its historical background can be found elsewhere (Koops, Pieper, and Boer 2014, van der Pijl and Goulordava 2014, Van der Zeijden 2014, Maraval 2009, Mcculloh 1979, Smith 2014, Zender 1984).

2.1 On Black Pete and Saint Nicholas

Who is this black-faced figure that causes so much trouble in the Netherlands? Some basic facts about the festival of Saint Nicholas may help answering this question. In the Netherlands and in Flanders, Black Pete is the contemporary sidekick of Saint Nicholas, a.k.a. *Sinterklaas* or *the Sint*. The story goes that every year in December, Saint Nicholas and his Black Petes travel by steamboat from Spain to the Dutch speaking part of the world (Flanders and the Netherlands) in order to hand out gifts and sweets to children that behaved well over the year.

Like Santa Claus, Saint Nicholas wears a white beard and a red robe. But the garment of Sinterklaas is a Bishops robe. He is a rather skinny figure that rides a horse instead of a sled. This distracted, kind and solemn old man breathes a very different personality than his louder cousin living at the North Pole. In the Netherlands and in Flanders, *the Sint's* helper or servant is called Zwarte Piet or Black Pete. Today, Saint Nicholas has many Black Petes with specialized tasks who help him out. Reminiscent of the Smurfs, there is a Black Pete for any activity one can imagine (e.g. a Main Pete, a Packaging Pete, a Captain Pete). He is enacted by white people in blackface who sport afro-wigs, earrings and exotic page-like costumes. He has accentuated red lips and

his general appearance clearly resembles stereotypical depictions of a black person.

Pictures 1–3. Saint Nicholas's Petes on the steamer coming from Spain; Saint Nicholas on his horse Amerigo accompanied by Black Petes; Saint Nicholas welcomed into town.

Saint Nicholas celebrates his birthday on the 6th of December. The story goes that on the eve of the fifth of December, he rides children's rooftops on a white horse called Amerigo. He is accompanied by Black Petes who throw and / or carry gifts down the chimneys of children who have behaved well. In return, Flemish children and kids living in the Southern part of the Netherlands will leave behind a shoe filled with a carrot and some sugar for Amerigo. They will leave these shoes at the hearth or at its modern-day equivalent (e.g. a radiator). On the next morning they find that the carrot and the sugar are gone and have been replaced with chocolate, cookies and toys that Saint Nicholas and his Black Pete helpers have given them. In most of the Netherlands however, children receive their gifts on the eve of the fifth of December. After hearing some noise in front of the door or in some other chamber of the house, they will find a bag filled with sweets, chocolate, cookies and gifts. Also, in the Netherlands, adults traditionally exchange small (sometimes self-made) gifts and read slightly critical or teasing poems to each other (Pleij 2014: 92, Raboteau 2014: 145).

Saint Nicholas is to be distinguished from Santa Claus. The latter is often seen as an Anglo-American import product. In the Netherlands, the celebration of Sinterklaas is considered to be a children's festival that is just as 'Dutch' as tulips or windmills. Christmas has a more religious and/or family oriented connotation and is not linked that strongly to a sense of national identity. The national dimension of the contemporary celebration also shows in the preparations for Saint Nicholas's arrival (Helsloot 1996: 262, 275–279).

In the weeks before the festival takes place, the imagery of Saint Nicholas and his Black Petes becomes omnipresent. The Saint and his helper appear on television and they visit children everywhere. They drop by in schools and make appearances in toyshops and super markets. In the Netherlands, children can even watch a special *Sinterklaas* news broadcast. Toy companies produce a mass of folders that are distributed by mail across the country. Bakeries and supermarkets sell little cookies, chocolate coins and chocolate versions of the saint and his helper.


Pictures 4–6. The Sinterklaas news broadcast; Sinterklaas and Black Pete in toy shop; Sinterklaas cookies, chocolate letters and chocolate figures.

The arrival of Saint Nicholas is also a performed event. In Flanders, there is a traditional arrival in Antwerp. In the Netherlands, Saint Nicholas arrives in Amsterdam. Last year, six hundred male and female Black Petes paraded through this city. In both cities, Saint Nicholas receives an official welcome from the mayor into the country. These arrivals are broadcasted nationally in both Belgium and the Netherlands and afterwards other cities can start to welcome their own Saint Nicholas and their own Black Petes as well (van der Pijl and Goulordava 2014, 263).

Historically speaking, Saint Nicholas (270–343) was a bishop in the Turkish town Myra. One of the oldest stories about him tells us about his generosity as an anonymous bearer of gifts. He is said to have anonymously gifted dowries to three maidens living in Myra by throwing money through their windows, thus saving them from a life in prostitution. Other stories tell us about: the way he stopped innocents from an unjust execution; the way he saved sailors at sea while giving a sermon in his home town at the same time; and the way he resurrected three cannibalised students who were slaughtered in their sleep by the owners of an inn where they spent the night. As the stories about his

person grew and diversified throughout history, he would become the patron of thieves, prisoners, scholars, seamen, merchants, butchers and young women seeking a husband or a child (Boer 2014: 17–21).

The historical background of Black Pete is more contested and informs a great deal of the current controversy. Black Pete imagery is often traced back to a children's book called *Saint Nicholas and his Servant,* published in 1850. The book sports a black servant thirteen years before the Netherlands became among the last European nations to abolish slavery. However, Saint Nicholas had other helpers before this period in other parts of the world. Even today, Saint Nicholas appears with the following characters in other parts of Europe: a sooty and mean farm-hand named Ruprecht (Germany); an evil butcher called Père Fouettard (Wallonia and France) or Housécker (Luxemburg); or a brown-faced and brown-robed child-beating kidnapper named Schmutzli (Czech Republic and Slovakia). Raboteau states that Black Pete seems to be a variation of this binary opposition whereby a domesticated devil (and polar opposite of Saint Nicholas) is replaced by a black man with African stereotypical and colonial attributes (Raboteau 2014: 144–145). However, Dutch sources do not depict him with a helper at all before 1850.

2.2 Critical interventions into the Black Pete debates

There is nothing stable in the history of the practices and imagery associated with Saint Nicholas. The contemporary claim that there is a stable and orthodox way of celebrating the 6th of December rests upon essentialist claims that make no sense from a comparative or historical point of view. In fact, history shows that the stories (Boer 2014), songs (van Benthem 2014), rituals (Pleij 2014), roles (Koops 2014) and images associated with this festival have always been subject to change, mutation and adaptation.

Challenges to so-called orthodox ways of celebrating the festival are neither new nor stable either. During the Reformation, Protestant policy and doctrine (always critical of the worship of saints) transformed Saint Nicolas from a public carnival event to a more cosy experience celebrated in the family context. Popular stories and superstitions came

to be criticized by Enlightenment thinkers and by Protestants alike and would force the saint and his helper to go underground in the private sphere (Boer 2014, 29–33, 38). From the late middle ages until the 17th century, public Saint Nicholas festivals included role reversals between children and adults that temporarily suspended – but ultimately confirmed – social order. They also played a role in so-called *charivari* whereby youngsters played judge and jury in fake trials by comically humiliating older men or men from outside of town who married 'their' girls. Men who 'did not wear their pants at home' or who acted as proverbial 'doormats' were led around town seated backwards on a donkey. When Saint Nicholas disappeared from public life during the Reformation, he would acquire a new pedagogical role. (Pleij 2014: 99–100, Koops 2014). The saint would carry a book that contained all little sins and transgressions of children. He would use this book in order to check whether a child had behaved over the past year and deserved a gift or a punishment instead. Over time, Saint Nicholas would delegate his punitive role to Black Pete who could abduct children in his bag or beat them with his bushel of twigs. This moral or punitive idea would give way to a 'softer' version of both characters under the influence of changing attitudes with respect to education and pedagogy in the sixties (Koops 2014, 57–61).

Today's anxieties about the festival of Saint Nicolas have to be understood in the context of banal and populist neo-nationalism. The Saint and his helper are thereby commonly experienced as cherished treasures of national culture. In the Netherlands, the Anglo-American Santa Claus is often experienced as a pushy commercialism and a globalised excess of consumerist culture that constitutes a threat to the cherished figure of Sinterklaas (Smith 2014, Berg 1996, Helsloot 1996). Even though both characters are spin-offs of the bishop of Myra, Sinterklaas is commonly seen as the 'authentic' thing in Flanders and in the Netherlands. The debate at the end of the last century tended to focus on the rivalry between Santa Claus and Sinterklaas. For instance, discussions centred on the temporal delineation of both festivals. When does Sinterklaas start and when can shopkeepers put up Santa Claus imagery? However, public debate has increasingly shifted towards a discussion of Black Pete as a potentially colonial and/or racist figure

(Helsloot 2014, Raboteau 2014, van der Pijl and Goulordava 2014, Van der Zeijden 2014, Helsloot 2012).

Jan Schenkman's book *Saint Nicholas and his servant* (Dutch: *Sint Nicolaas en zijn knecht*) was highly innovative in 1850. Schenman introduced Black Pete and the idea that the saint comes from Spain on a modern steamboat. The white horse Amerigo can be attributed to Schenkman as well. A great deal of the contemporary imagery in the Netherlands can be traced back to this book. In 1850, there was no debate about Pete's skin colour. His attributes and general appearance were most likely inspired by paintings that included black pages and servants. These servants ere also present in Dutch daily life (Boer 2014: 40–44).

Until recently there was a general consensus among researchers that Zwarte Piet was a personal creation of Jan Schenkman. A recent find by John Helsloot challenges this idea. In an 1884 document, the catholic man of letters Jozef Alberdingk Thijm (1820–1889) remembered attending a Sinterklaas celebration in the house of a wealthy Amsterdam merchant as an eight-year-old kid. During this celebration in 1828, Saint Nicholas entered the room in the company of "*a curly-haired negro*" who acted as the saint's servant. In spite of the official prohibition to own slaves on Dutch soil, the Netherlands was deeply involved in the slave trade and slavery did exist in its colonies. But what is even more telling in this context is the fact that freed slaves and free blacks hired themselves out as domestic servants in the late 18th and early 19th century within the Netherlands. Schenkman's editor – Jacob van Lennep (1802–1868) employed such a man in his country house near Haarlem. There is no direct proof that Schenkman modelled his Zwarte Piet after this man, but it is very likely that Black Pete was modelled after such an individual. Moreover, his representation is without a doubt inspired by role patterns and imagery that could not have existed without the Dutch involvement with slavery and colonialism (Helsloot 2012: 8–10).

Early protests against Black Pete came from white activists in the sixties. From the eighties on it would be mostly black activists who tried to convince other Dutch that the figure of Black Pete was offensive. In the following decades several action groups and committees

called for a reconsideration or abolishment of Black Pete, his appearance and/or his behaviour. The conflict intensified when some groups announced that they would try to disrupt the festivities from 2000 on. In 2008, as part of a long-term exhibition called *Be(com)ing Dutch*, two artists – Petra Bauer and Annette Kraus – invited their audience to partake in an artistic performance that took the form of a protest march meant to voice critique against the phenomenon of Zwarte Piet. Their project was called *Read the masks: tradition is not given*. Participants were to carry signs with slogans such as *Black Peter doesn't exist any more* or *Black Pete – a white man's construction*. The public outcry was enormous. The artists and the museum received such threatening emails that the march was cancelled. The emails included death threats. Three years later, the debate would intensify even more when two other artists – Quinsy Gario and Jerry Afriye (a.k.a. Kno'ledge Cesare) aimed to provoke discussion by holding up a banner with the message that *Zwarte Piet is racism* coupled to a slogan that *The Netherlands can do better* during the nationally broadcasted arrival of *Sinterklaas* and his helper in Dordrecht. When the police asked them to lower their banner, they were initially permitted to quietly display their *Black Pete is racism* T-shirts instead. Later on, some officers took offence and the two were asked to remove their T-shirts. When they refused to do so, they were both arrested together with a Danish anthropology student and a journalist accompanying them. An online video shows Quinsy Gario being dragged away by uniformed and undercover police and being kept violently to the ground for several minutes. The debate would not subside anymore. The next day, the protest was copied by a number of black men and women in Amsterdam (Helsloot 2014: 79–80, 2012: 6).

During the last few months of 2013 the Black Pete debate would dominate newspapers, radio and television for days. Activists took legal action in order to ban the official welcoming of Sinterklaas and Zwarte Piet in Amsterdam. Moreover, members of the Platform of Dutch Slavery Past wrote letters of complaint to the UN about Black Pete and his link to slavery and racism. When the chairman of the UN Working Group on Human Rights on People of African descent presented her personal opinion that Black Pete was "definitely racist", the debate exploded. A petition in favour of Black Pete raised two million votes

in two days (Van der Zeijden 2014: 350). The year 2013 was also a year in which several public figures, politicians, celebrities and scholars took a stance against Zwarte Piet, sometimes receiving death threats in response. Their voices oppose the voices of those who reiterate "a 'wilful' or 'smug ignorance' (Smith 2014, Essed & Hoving 2014) regarding race issues in the popular celebration, as well as a massive defence against discussing it and fierce refusal to find compromise". As a case in point, van der Pijl and Kariina Goulordava refer to the Prime Minister Mark Rutte who said that "Black Pete is black and I cannot change that […] because the name is Black Pete" (van der Pijl and Goulordava 2014: 264–265).

Those who defend Black Pete often deny any link with racism or colonialism and even deny that he has a black skin colour. Instead, he is supposed to be black because he travelled down the chimney (which does not explain his stereotypical red lips, the afro-wig, the earrings or the exotic clothes he is wearing). Sometimes, Black Petes are considered to belong to a 'species' of their own that has nothing to do with black Africans – in this interpretation they are much like elves, gnomes or other mythical figures. Moreover, many people argue that he is loved rather than feared in contemporary celebrations and that he has never been a slave (Helsloot 2014: 80–82).

A 2012 opinion poll among Amsterdam citizens showed that even in today's climate an overwhelming majority of Amsterdam people does not associate Zwarte Piet with discrimination. Only 7% of all respondents (across ethnicities) considered Black Pete to be discriminatory. However, these figures rank much higher among minorities. For instance, 27% of the Surinamese population and 14% of the Ghanese population consider the character to be discriminatory. In 2014, a national poll showed that 83% opposes changes to Black Pete and that only 23% could understand that people with a darker skin colour could find this figure offensive (Greven and Bosveld 2012, Van Mossevelde 2014).

Until now, propositions to change the appearance of Black Pete or to abolish him altogether have never been implemented on a large scale and it is very likely that this debate will continue to be waged in the years to come. On the 28th of August, the UN Commission for the

Elimination of Discrimination (CERD) stated that the Dutch government should be more pro-active in preventing racism. It recommended that the Dutch government should actively work to get rid of negative stereotypes in the depiction of Black Pete as this figure is "experienced by many people of African descent as a vestige of slavery". Prime Minister Rutte did not feel inclined to do anything about it. In a response to the presentation of the UN recommendations he stated that it was not the government's task to shape folklore: "Guys. Folk traditions, come on. What Christmas songs you should sing, how you celebrate Christmas and Easter – this isn't what politics is about" (Bahceli 2015).

2.3 Critical analyses of the Black Pete debates

Invoking essentialist, traditionalist and neo-nationalist understandings of culture, advocates of Black Pete depict this saint and his servant as equals and as innocent children's friends. It is often said that these characters cannot be racist because they are not meant to be racist and do not mean to be racists either (supposing these mythical figures have intentions of their own). It is a common feature of Dutch discourses on racism to frame racism as a matter of good or bad intentions. Discourses that are not meant to be racist cannot be racist. Consequently, minority grievances, experiences and histories are easily cast aside as politically correct, misguided and/or irrelevant arguments in discussions about discrimination (Raboteau 2014: 80–82, Helsloot 2014: 80–82, Essed and Hoving 2014a).

Van der Pijl and Goulordava point out that advocates of Black Pete defend the tradition more and more by making a direct link between "popular tradition, a national sense of pride and Dutch identity (and the fear of losing them), the latter being fuelled by reactionary, controversial politicians like the former Minister of Immigration and Integration Rita Verdonck". Verdonck's 2008 political program explicitly suggested that Dutch native culture and "our traditions" were under siege. Likewise, the leader of the islamophobic Party for Freedom of Geert Wilders tweeted in 2013 that he would rather eliminate the UN than Black Pete. But as I mentioned before, mainstream politicians like

Prime Minister Mark Rutte have refused to reconsider Black Pete as well (van der Pijl and Goulordava 2014: 265–268).

At first sight, this refusal to reconsider tradition may seem striking in a country that claims tolerance as one of its core values. But there are strong arguments that Dutch tolerance is a rather passive tolerance that borders on passive intolerance (Essed and Hoving 2014b, 16). Activists, artists and other public figures that have sought to question the Black Pete tradition have often received death threats, just like the artists performing in the museum in Eindhoven in 2008, the members of the UN commission and artists Quinsy Gario and Jerry Afriye. One explanation for the highly emotional ways in which the Black Pete debates in the Netherlands are being waged can be found in the renewed importance of banal nationalism in Europe. There is more to be said about the ideological structure of this debate. In fact, a number of studies show that the denial of racism is an inherent part of a hegemonic white habitus in the Netherlands (van der Pijl and Goulordava 2014: 262–273).

The collection of articles in *Dutch racism* (Essed and Hoving 2014a) shows how Dutch racist discursive practices are marked by an active evasion and denial of accusations of racism and colonial attitudes. Essed and Hoving argue that dominant discourses "*miss* historical explanations and *dismiss* the connection between present ethnic humiliations and the brutality of colonization, slavery and anti-Semitism". They also note that the absence of shared knowledge about the way racism is rooted in an ideology of European cultural superiority. There is a general ignorance about the way discourses of culture and progress have been deployed in racialized understandings of civilization that humanized some and dehumanized others. Moreover, the editors note that there is a general "sense of self-satisfaction and smugness about ignoring the issue – racism is seen as an out-dated topic that has no relevance in the 21st century" (Essed and Hoving 2014b).

Not only do many Dutch people deploy a very narrow notion of racism which makes it possible to deny that slurs such as 'shit- Moroccans' or 'dirty Turk' (frequently shouted during football matches) are racist. The reasoning is that such slurs were not *meant* to be racist and

that those who shout them would not act accordingly. The acceptability of overt racism in public discourse has increased in the past two decades. Populist Dutch politicians have contributed to this process by developing and supporting a mode of racism that has been described as 'entitlement racism' by Essed. We are dealing with a mode of racism in which the right to insult under the cover of 'freedom of speech' is prioritized over triggering (feelings of) discrimination (Essed and Hoving 2014b: 11, 13–16). Essed and Hoving identify this mode of racism as an ideology in which:

> Paternalism has been replaced by entitlement racism (the right to offend); the right of freedom of speech has won over the right of protection against discrimination; antidiscrimination and antiracism are off the political agenda; references to the need for tolerance, no matter how contested the principle, have disappeared; Muslim women are not objects of pity and paternalism as they were in 1980, to be liberated by the Dutch from oppressive husbands, but the target of aggression-spitting, ridicule – a form of symbolic rape, an act of violence against the Muslim community." (Essed and Hoving 2014b: 18)

Even though Black Pete is not a Muslim, the combined effect of neo-nationalist smug ignorance, an increasing tolerance for racist discourse, and the phenomenon of entitlement racism help to explain the general refusal to recognize the possibility of a racial or colonial dimension in the performance and representation of Black Pete. John Helsloot describes this problem in terms of aphasia: an inability to recognize things in the world and to assign proper names to them. He argues that the inability to connect Black Pete with issues of racism provides evidence for cultural aphasia. This mode of aphasia involves a process of active dissociation of Black Pete with racism (e.g. *Black Pete is black because of the chimney*) and a faulty articulation with essentialist notions of tradition and culture in a discourse marked by neo-nationalist or populist tropes. This shows clearly in statements of people who claim that Black Pete has been around for centuries and that this tradition therefore should remain unchanged. Moreover, a great deal of Dutch Black Pete discourse is also marked by aporia: a general indifference and a lack of empathy with those who may be offended when confronted with the figure of Black Pete (Helsloot 2012: 2, 6–8, 11).

Several authors have remarked that the stubborn refusal to consider concerns about racism and colonialism are rooted in a Dutch white habitus that is inherently oriented towards self-preservation. Van der Pijl and Goulordova argue that denials of racism are part and parcel of a Dutch habitus that has forgotten its historical roots (Essed and Hoving 2014b: 281). Essed describes this habitus as follows (Essed 1991 cited in Essed and Hoving 2014b: 282):

> Whites would not see the racism that is there. The reinforcement of their non-discriminatory self-image leads to further reluctance to deal with racism in general or to admit racism. Because the Dutch have strongly internalized the idea that they are not to discriminate, they are more reluctant to acknowledge that racism is a Dutch problem as well.

The habitus described by Essed and Hoving includes a meshing of historically grown attitudes that devalue the black body as inferior. This habitus also includes negative associations with the colour black. Bourdieu conceptualised the habitus as a product of history and as a set of dispositions that have been incorporated in the body, in daily practices and in schemes of perception and thought. As such, a habitus 'guarantees' the correctness of practices and their constancy over time. The emotional resistance of white and non-white Dutch people to the idea of changing the Black Pete tradition and the general disregard of the feelings of those who take offense with it can be explained with reference to this notion (Essed and Hoving 2014b: 280–283).

Helsloot notes that the cultural travesty of black-faced white men and women is taken to be an innocent, fun and comic situation. Moreover, the physical disgust often felt and expressed over criticism of Black Pete testifies to positive experiences associated with the Saint Nicholas celebrations that have sedimented in the body and its habitus, often in the form of love (Helsloot 2012: 11, Raboteau 2014: 150). Nevertheless, these critical analyses testify to a need for more empathy and contextualisation in the context of a conflict over an objectionable cultural practice. In the upcoming section, I will therefore turn my attention to the possibility of changing one's stance on this ideologically contested cultural practice.

3. Stancetaking in blogs and vlogs

In order to explore the implications of revising one's stance on a public issue on one's relationship to the voices and subjectivities that inform one's sense of self as well as one's relationship to the public realm, I will focus on the way one concrete video-blogger revised her opinion about Black Pete. I will therefore present an analysis of the metapragmatic strategies that allow her to construct and occupy a critical stance towards the various voices that constitute the debate discussed above. The data consist of two vlogs posted on YouTube by vlogger Pascale De Bom.[1] On her channel, she describes herself ironically as follows:

> I am a Dutch female in my twenties and I desperately try to make people like me through my videos. I try to be funny, but upon self-diagnosed failure, I just try to be likeable.
>
> I use a Nikon D5100 to film, and use Final Cut Pro X to edit. I just like filming and editing so you are literally watching what I enjoy doing when I am really meant to be doing other stuff.

On her channel *Pascale De Bom – sorta likeable*, Pascale articulates her views on a wide variety of issues. She comments frequently on popular culture and fashion, but some of her posts also deal with sexist, homophobic and racist questions. Blogging poses an interesting research object for investigators who seek to explore issues of individual and collective stancetaking and evaluation in the public realm. Research shows that blogs can perform important functions in the articulation, performance and validation of selfhood in a complex and mediated social realm (Afful and Ricciardelli 2015, Koppel, Pennebaker, and Schler 2007, Young and Burrows 2013, Zareie 2013). This observation has been both welcomed and criticised by researchers.

Greg Myers argues that the discourse of bloggers is marked by a constant concern with self-presentation. In the blogosphere there seems

1 The first vlog *Sinterklaas vs Santa Clause* can be found at: <https://www. youtube.com/watch?v=WI2R38iTkSE>. The second vlog is titled *Are we racists?* and can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HlDK aZBo8QQ>. I recommend the reader to watch both videos.

to be "a perceived need to present oneself as an individual with entitlement to an opinion" (Myers 2010: 264):

> The emphasis on individual voice and perspective makes for some engaging writing, and it may have its own beneficial political role to play but it does not have the focus on a shared social project that would be needed for deliberative discussion. It is not the same as participatory citizenship.

After a period of enchantment with the democratic potential of online media such as blogs, there is some reason for disappointment with the democratic dimension of the blogosphere. As Myers notices, only a limited number of blogs makes it to the influential A-list. Also, the blogosphere is not merely a forum for rational and democratic debate. A whole new vocabulary that includes words like 'flaming' or 'trolling' testifies to this fact (Myers 2010: 264).

By comparing salient keywords in his corpus of blogs with the general corpus of written English, Myers shows how bloggers disproportionately use cognitive verbs (e.g. 'I think', 'I guess', 'I wonder') in order to mark relations to other persons rather than to mark epistemic uncertainty. He also shows how adverbs that are used at the beginning of comments in blogs (e.g. 'really' or 'actually) frequently signal contrastive relations to previous statements. Bloggers use small conversational particles (e.g. 'hey', 'uhm', 'ooh', 'uh') in order to enact disagreement with others and with oneself by showing hesitation, surprise or self-interruption. Moreover, the frequent use of irony reinforces the conclusion that the discourse of bloggers is not so much oriented towards specific stances as to the process of stancetaking itself (Myers 2010: 273–274). Put differently, to have an opinion is at least as important as the actual opinion itself.

Mia Lövheim has expressed an alternative view on the social and political functions of blogging. In her analysis of young women's blogs, she shows how the blogosphere can operate as an ethical space through which people can contribute to the expansion and negotiation of social norms and cultural values in a society. She argues that "despite the focus on personal issues, these blogs [of young women] constitute performative spaces that contribute to personal as well as public negotiations, ethics, values and norms […]" (Lövheim 2011: 338). The Youtube Channel of

Pascale de Bom provides us with a nice example of the way vlogs or video-blogs can operate as ethical spaces. As is the case with many blogs and vlogs, her posts deal with a variety of issues. Some of the titles make give an indication of Pascale's interests: 'Bikini-proof body'; 'Stop pushing abusers into The Spotlight'; or 'Birthdays Suck'.

Pascale's vlog titles suggest a common concern with the personal and everyday moral issues related to "self-confidence, relationships, looks and well-being" observed by Lövheim. Some of the more ethically oriented contributions on Pascale's channel may be seen as examples of the "individualization of public discourse" Myers warns us about. As such, some posts may indeed constitute attempts to make sense of conflicting norms, values, practices and discourses with reference to personal thoughts and experiences (Myers 2010: 274). Nevertheless, as is the case with many young women's blogs, the Chanel *Pascale De Bom – sorta likeable* cannot be reduced to a narcissistic site for personal display and performance. Blogs, vlogs and their discussion forums also function as sites for performative engagements with the wider public realm. Lövheim notes how young women use such media in order to engage with broad social, cultural and economic discourses as well as with ethical discussions about gender roles, social relations, individual freedom and body ideals (Lövheim 2011: 350–351).

According to Myers many bloggers to move away from shared arguments towards mere statements of 'I'm here'. He does acknowledge that such assertions may be political acts in themselves, but also argues that this type of self-confirmation does not necessarily imply "a broadening of the range of voices any one citizen encounters" in the online world (Myers 2010: 274).

A close analysis of the way Pascale De Bom uses multimodal and metapragmatic resources for stancetaking in her posts on the Black Pete debates in the Netherlands does not necessarily counter Myers' argument. But it does show that blogs can be just as much sites for self-transformation and the shaping of one's self, one's opinion and one's society as sites for self-affirmation. The act of taking a public stance towards a statement such as 'Black Pete is racist' is always a complex social and ideological phenomenon. It involves a relatively high degree of metapragmatic awareness.

The literature on stance and evaluation is vast and I do not seek to provide an overview in the context of this paper. Useful overviews exist elsewhere (Englebretson 2007, Jaffe 2009a, Hunston and Thompson 2000). Instead, I will rely on Du Bois who described stance as (Du Bois 2007: 163):

> a public act by a social actor, achieved dialogically through overt communicative means (language, gesture and other symbolic forms), through which social actors simultaneously evaluate objects, position subjects (themselves and others), and align with other subjects, with respect to any salient dimension of the sociocultural field.

The primary object that Pascale orients herself at in the context of the two vlogs posts under investigation is the figure of Black Pete as an allegedly racist character. In these videos, Pascale tries to explain the phenomenon of Black Pete to a non-Dutch audience. The first video was posted on the second of December 2013 and takes roughly six minutes. In this video, she argued that Black Pete is not a racist thing and that Dutch people who celebrate Black Pete are not racist either. However, in a seven-minute video posted on the sixteenth of November 2014, she revised this opinion and articulated a completely different stance on this issue.

Stancetaking and evaluation are processes through which social actors align and disalign themselves with respect to the statements, practices, objects and subjects that constitute their discursive realities. Jaffe points out that "by taking up a position, individuals automatically invoke a constellation of associated identities" (Jaffe 2009a: 8).

The phenomenon of subjectivity involves a reflexive engagement with such constellations as marked in discourse. Stancetaking therefore requires a minimal degree of metapragmatic awareness with respect to the context of enunciation and the elements of the 'stance triangle'. Du Bois argues that a stance is something we do through the triple act of positioning an object, evaluating it, and (dis)aligning ourselves with respect to the stances of others in the same act. Stancetaking is an inter-subjective language game that takes place in a polyphonic or dialogical field. As Du Bois puts it: "I evaluate something, and thereby position myself, and thereby align with you" (Du Bois 2007: 163, 169–172).

Stancetaking is a phenomenon that requires metapragmatic awareness. This mode of awareness can be described as an awareness of the choices we make when interpreting and producing discourse. In itself, awareness cannot be accessed. Nevertheless, reflexive self-monitoring does leave traces in language use that indicate at least some degree of – possibly critical – awareness of the discursive field in which social actors position each other and themselves (Verschueren 2000: 445, Zienkowski 2014).

Indicators of metapragmatic awareness that play an important role in the occupation, evaluation and positioning of social and ideological stances include all phenomena traditionally studied under meta-pragmatics: indexes; linguistic and paralinguistic contextualisation cues; speech act verbs; modal verbs and adverbs that indicate normative evaluations; and anaphoric or inter-discursive links that mark reflexive awareness of various aspects of context against which utterances should be interpreted (Zienkowski 2014, Verschueren 2011: 185). Evidentials, hedges, cognitive verbs and adverbs that express epistemic or affective evaluations of objects or other stances can be mentioned as well. Moreover, stance may be communicated more implicitly through indexical uses of style, register, dialect, value laden words, humour and/or irony (Bednarek 2006: 21-23, Gray and Biber 2012: 19-23, Myers 2010: 271-273).

The multimodal arsenal of resources people rely upon in order to articulate and mark stances in public performances and interactions is also vast. It contains linguistic and paralinguistic features of communication such as prosody, pitch, volume, gesture, gaze and other features of body language (Frobenius 2013, Haddington 2007, Johnstone 2008). Mediatized evaluative acts involve choices with respect to body language, camera-angles, visual filters, animations, sound, music and so on. Stances are defined by their metapragmatic functions rather than by their linguistic, paralinguistic and performative forms.

To take a stance on a controversial social and political issue such as Black Pete as a racist figure is an ideological act. It is also to take up social responsibility for the utterances or statements made. As Du Bois points out, stances are ultimately about social norms and values: “Social actors are accountable for how they engage and indeed reshape

the systems of social value on which we all depend". Moreover, "ownership of stance is the glue that binds the stance act together with actor responsibility and sociocultural value, so that all is linked to a social actor with a name, a history, an identity" (Du Bois 2007: 173). Nevertheless, ownership of voice is not always easy to determine.

The roles, subject positions and voices that get activated in discourse in the act of making an enunciation are not necessarily part and parcel of an individual's preferred sense of self. The voices we encounter in discourse may be enacted in order to construct a discursive space that helps us to understand the constellation of stances against which a speaker positions herself. Every utterance can be said to operate on the basis of various implicit and sometimes explicit voices that are kept more or less at bay by an author or *locuteur* (see Angermüller 2011). The voices we encounter in discourse do not always need to be attributed to the person speaking. For instance, Greg Myers notes that:

> [an] ironic utterance can be a form of stancetaking because it expresses an opinion that readers are not to take to be that of the writer. To put this in terms of Goffman's participant roles, we take the writer in the role of animator of the views attributed to others, not as the principal expressing their own views (Goffman 1981).

The attribution of responsibility for stances to particular social actors in the process of interpretation is a complex metapragmatic process. In fact, it frequently requires the construction and interpretation of meta-stances: taking a stance on stance. When language users refer to the voices and stances of others they also rearticulate and reframe them. Ilona Vandergriff highlights the political relevance of meta-stancing:

> Such discourse inserts 'a new semantic intention into a discourse which already has, and which retains, an intention of its own' (Bakhtin 1981: 189). Evoking and framing a previous stance allows the speaker to evaluate the stance as an object, express (dis-) alignment and invite the audience to align with the speaker. In this way, metastancing is a public act of a political actor, used strategically to build a coalition between the speaker and the audience in the expression and manipulation of power. (Vandergriff 2012: 61)

To revise a stance on a much-debated issue such as the racist character of Black Pete is to construct a meta-stance with respect to the discourse of a previous self as well as with respect to the voices that constitute the debate in the first place. Stancetaking is part and parcel of blogging. Many of the linguistic, paralinguistic and multimodal resources bloggers rely upon in the construction of an opinion impact on the presentation and shaping of the self. Nevertheless, blogs can function as ethical spaces on condition that bloggers articulate a reflexive attitude with respect to the voices they engage with and to the extent that they reflect and try to re-shape hegemonic norms and values in a careful reconstruction of a meta-stance.

4. Rearticulating and performing a mainstream habitus

Pascale de Bom starts her first video on Saint Nicholas with a deep sigh: "Every year", she sighs, "every year there's someone that I need to explain the Sinterklaas versus Santa Claus story to". But even though she is seemingly tired of explaining this story time and time again to people unfamiliar with this Dutch and Flemish "Dutch and Belgian tradition", she does provide a systematic comparison between Saint Nicholas and Black Pete. Pascale discusses the following "differences": means of transportation (a steamer and a horse called Amerigo versus a reindeer-led sled); helpers (Black Petes versus elves); delivery of gifts (Black Petes through chimneys versus Santa Claus through magic); placement of gifts (shoes and hearth versus Christmas tree and "socks for giants"); punishment of naughty kids (beatings and kidnapping by Black Pete versus no gifts from Santa Claus); and mutual knowledge (Saint Nicholas dislikes Santa Claus versus Santa Claus who is oblivious to Sinterklaas). The first mention of racism occurs immediately after her comparison of the *Sint*'s and Santa Claus's helpers, seemingly as an afterthought.

> ↑Hel↓pers (.) Santa Claus has his elves that make the toys in the Santa Claus toy factory (.) on the North Pole ↑Sin↓ter↑klaas↓ has his black Petes we call

> them Zwarte Pieten and they? buy the toys in toy stores? (.) and then wrap them up that's like their job. ↑By↓ the way this is a huge discussion at the moment ↑Black↓ Petes are black because they need to go down chimneys all the time that is why they are black (.) basically what I'm saying is that we're not racists ↑deli↓very of gifts […]

Pascal uses prosody in the form of pitch and volume in order to structure her comparison. Stress is put on words such as "helpers" or "delivery". Key elements in the comparison are emphasized as well. When Pascal touches upon the colour of Black Pete, she uses the common explanation of his skin colour in terms of soot from the chimney. Pascal is very clear about why she mentions this and articulates her intentions metapragmatically: "Basically what I'm saying is that we're not racist". She does so without any significant changes in pitch, tempo or volume. Throughout the interview, stress is systematically put on those aspects of the "story" that highlight the differences between Saint Nicholas and Santa Claus.

At first sight, Pascal seems to present a comparison between the material aspects of both traditions. Nevertheless, in the middle and at the end of the vlog, we see that the wider context of the Black Pete debate provides the background against which video was made. As such, the entire comparison takes on an apologetic character and an indirect engagement with a voice that does claim that Zwarte Piet is a racist figure. We can see this clearly in the way Pascale concludes her first video in the following transcription:[2]

> I think that this is enough of the story to understand sort of what is happening in this country (.) and also possibly most of this in Belgium (.) If there's anything to take away from this story it's that we're not racists it's not racist we're not (.) racists

In the excerpt above, Pascal metapragmatically delineates boundaries for interpretation. In order to understand the festival of Saint Nicholas and the role of Black Pete, it is sufficient to consider the practices

2 I will make use of the following symbols:↑ and ↓ indicate shifts in especially low or high pitch; (.) indicates a brief pause; underscoring indicates various forms of stress such as pitch and/or amplitude; ? indicates a rising intonation; CAPITALS mark exceptionally loud discourse; and (…) indicates an exceptionally long pause (see Jefferson 2004).

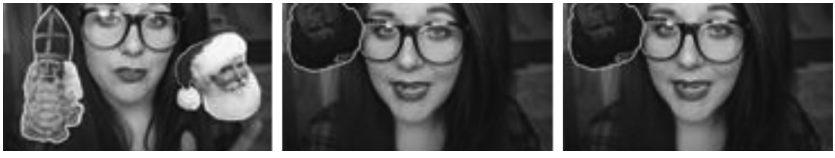
and imagery associated to the tradition as it is lived today. Historical or sociological considerations of racism, colonialism and/or slavery do not enter the picture at any point. Overall, the excerpts above provide us with a good example of the way in which concerns with racism are being trivialized in the Netherlands. "We" [Dutch people celebrating Sinterklaas] are not "racist" because there is no intention to be racist. Rather, we are dealing with an innocent tradition that finds itself on an equal footing with other traditions such as those associated with Santa Claus. Black Pete is defended with reference to a concern with tradition. The complete lack of historical perspective and the dismissal of accusations of racism are typical elements of hegemonic Dutch discourse on racism.

It is not the case that we are faced with a case of "entitlement racism". Pascal does not argue in favour of a right to insult. But there is no true engagement with minority grievances and experiences either. In fact, the entire video does not contain a single explicit rearticulation of a minority voice critical of the Black Pete tradition. Consequently, there is no discursive space or need for empathy. The only way in which we come to know about the existence of critical voices is through the dialogical play of denial through negation in the utterance that "we are not racists".

Pascal provides us with a nice illustration of the cultural aphasia described by Helsloot and the habitus that gives rise to it. Her prosodic patterns mark a high degree of emotional investment in the Sinterklaas tradition. All in all, Pascal enacts a white habitus that is marked by an ideologically limited reflexivity with respect to the historical and sociological roots of the Black Pete festivities. Her annoyance with the repetitive dimension of the debate – recall the sigh at the beginning of the interview and the repeated denials of racism – betrays a frustration with public voices that force her to re-affirm "the story" about Saint Nicholas and Black Pete again and again.

At first sight, the stance towards Black Pete himself seems to be neutral. His black-faced head pops up in the video footage during Pascale's description of the Saint Nicholas celebration just like other images of Saint Nicolas and Santa Claus, the horse Amerigo, an elf, Sinterklaas' steamer and Santa Claus' reindeer and sled. Almost in all instances when these figures are named, an image appears that helps the reader to identify the characters. The same goes for the other figures

and props of these two myths that appear throughout their comparison, including for Black Pete. For example, at the beginning of her comparison, Pascale De Bom explains, "there are differences between Santa Claus or Father Christmas and Sinterklaas". Making use of both imagery and gestures that present both characters, Santa Claus and Saint Nicholas appear next to each other, so Pascal can start to compare their features (see images below).



Pictures 7–9. Pascale de Bom's vlog 'Sinterklaas vs Santa Claus' with animated images of Saint Nicholas, Santa Claus and Black Pete.

Images such as these appear as resources that help the viewer to distinguish between Santa Claus and Saint Nicholas related stories and practices. They support the comparison Pascale makes and help the viewer to identify the narrative structure of the vlog. Black Pete is presented as merely one point of comparison. Whereas Santa Clause has elves, Saint Nicolas has Black Petes. Except for when the issue of racism is addressed directly, Black Pete appears as an aspect of an objective description of features of Santa Claus and Saint Nicholas traditions. All of this results in a stance that bypasses a direct engagement with the voices critical of this figure and frames him as part and parcel of a tradition on a par with other Christmas traditions in the US and the UK that have an aura of innocence as well.

5. Changing one's mind on the racist character of the Black Pete imaginary

Pascale de Bom changed her opinion on the Black Pete issue in a second video entitled 'Are we racists', posted roughly one year after the first

one. In this video, her vlog takes on the character of an ethical space. The title of this second video already betrays a more heads-on confrontation with the question of the allegedly racist dimension of Black Pete imagery and enactments. It is not clear what events, experiences or arguments have caused her to reconsider her earlier stance towards the Black Pete tradition and the voices that structure the debate, but it is possible to investigate the way Pascale rearticulated her stance.

In order to articulate a more critical perspective on the issue, she engages rather directly with anonymous voices that constitute the debate. She also reconsiders her own previous dismissal of the racism issue. In fact, the entire video has to be understood in terms of a complex metapragmatic act through which Pascale articulates in a metastance on the object of Black Pete as conceptualized by her previous self and by the critics and defenders of the Black Pete tradition. Her reconsideration of Black Pete implies a rearticulation of her relationship towards her own voice as well as to the voices of others.

The video starts with an inter-textual link to her previous post on Black Pete and Saint Nicholas. She recommends her audience to watch this video and highlights its relevance for understanding the current post. I would like to recommend the same thing to the readers of this paper. Pascale summarizes her previous standpoint and provides a summary of the argument she used to follow:

> ↑In↓ that video ↑I↓ make a point (.) in which I say that we are not racists (.)↑and I understand why I said↓ that I meant it in the way that (.) Black Pete has never struck me? (.) as a racist thing ↑I↓ have not grown up thinking of Black Pete as a slave of Sinterklaas I actually always used to like him more because Black Pete is usually the one that (.) gives the gifts and all of the sweets (.) For the past couple of years every year around this time? there is a Black Pete discussion that the entire country just will not shut up about

Pascale's second video deals with several stance objects simultaneously. On the one hand she reconsiders her stance towards Black Pete himself as an unproblematic tradition. On the other hand, she takes a national "discussion" or debate as the object of her critique while reconsidering Black Pete as a potentially "racist thing". Recalling her previous stance that "we are not racists", she clarifies her previous stance as an impression she had at the time and highlights the status of this position as a

personal point of view. The racist dimension of Black Pete was dealt with in an offhand manner in the first video. In her second video, Pascale re-enacts parts of the debate and criticises the voices that take up the defence of Black Pete.

Pascale distinguishes her own voice from the voices belonging to a first group of people "who are very against having Black Pete in this holiday tradition because they feel like it is racist to portray a black person in this way". I will refer to this group as the 'anti-racist' voice in her discourse. On the other hand, she identifies a group that is "very against people who are against having Black People in this holiday". I will call them 'traditionalists'. This latter group feels "i's tradition and we just and it's always and it's not a racist thing because we don't mean that as a racist thing".

Pascale also articulates her own point of view. In a high pitch with a lot of stress, she admits that she "slightly changed her mind this year" and goes on to address the traditionalists directly. Note that the 'you' of the excerpt below is not directed at the same audience she addressed in her previous video. In the excerpt below, we see how Pascale articulates a meta-stance:

> ↑I↓ am of the opinion that it's okay to feel sad that people are talking about changing a tradition but you are also adults and this holiday isn't really for you (.) so shall we all get over it ↑however it is not↓ okay to put tradition ↑first↓? (.) and not care about how other people feel about certain things because believe it or not racism is still a thing even if you don't experience it no matter how forward thinking you may think that we are as a country (.) racism still ex↑ists↓ (.) I am going to tell you something and before you defend yourselves (.) hum I want you to listen (.) and than maybe if you feel like it also maybe learn.

Pascale points out that the interests of children are not served by discussions in which "adults" deplore making changes to "a tradition" that is not meant for them in the first place. Even though she considers it to be "okay to feel sad" about this, she also makes a clear hierarchy between feeling blue over the loss of tradition on the one hand and feelings with respect to racism on the other hand. Highlighting the reality of racism in the Netherlands today, she directly engages with traditionalist counter-arguments by asking these traditionalists to listen and learn.

Pascale starts by tackling typically Dutch denials of racism on the basis of intentionality. According to her, "it doesn't really matter how well your intentions are when you make a joke regarding Black Pete": "If the person on the other end of the joke feels offended by what you have said (.) your joke wasn't a joke (.) and it certainly wasn't a funny one". This point also counters any claims to a right to offend and the associated entitlement racism. But Pascale is very much aware that traditionalists rely on other discursive strategies that allow them to negate or ignore accusation of racism as well. She goes on to highlight an evolution in the debate in which "people are coming up with all sorts of reasons to silence people who are against Black Pete" and proposes to discuss a selection of the ones she came across.

At this point, Pascale starts to differentiate between different arguments and voices within the group of traditionalists. Each argument is then countered with a counter-argument of her own in a polyphonic and performative enactment. Pascale distinguishes between her own voice and the voices of the traditionalists by positioning herself in different parts of the screen. Whenever she enacts the traditionalist voice, she finds herself in the centre of the screen, tending to the right side. When she acts as a principal and takes responsibility for the stances she articulates in the context of this performance, she finds herself more at the left side of the screen. She also distinguishes between her own voice and the voices of the traditionalists by using body language. By nodding her head, using gestures and eyebrows, she is able to re-enact the dialogical structure of the Black Pete debate in the Netherlands while articulating her own stance in the process.

(R) IT'S TRADITION (.) LET IT NOT DIE
(L) just because something is a tradition (.) doesn't mean that we're not allowed to change certain things about it
(R) it's about the children (.) Don't ruin their holiday
(L) Yep yeah you're ↑right↓ it is about the children (.) It doesn't really matter what you as the adult feels should be someone's ↑skin↓ colour
(C) Black Pete is black because he goes down chimneys
(L) most houses don't really have chimneys also showers are a thing (.) also (.) wouldn't it feel right then if it was just a couple of black (.) marks and wipes because of (.) the going down the chimney thing? they don't really need full black face to be convincing (.) do they?

Pascale changes her position in the screen across shots between centre (C), left (L), centre left (CL), right (R), and centre right (CR). Neither vlog has been filmed in one go. As the animations, the background music (Sinterklaas tunes), and her shifting position in the screen demonstrate, we are dealing with a highly reflexive type of performance. The left-right positioning suggests a bipolar structure in the debate. Nevertheless, this does not mean that traditionalists speak with one voice. In the excerpt above, Pascale lists some of the reasons that traditionalists use in order "to silence people who are against Black Pete". She enacts a first traditionalist voice with a raised pitch and with an emphasis on tradition and death, thus taking a meta-stance by evaluating this traditionalist argument as excessively emotional and unreasonable. Moreover, in her counter-argument, she takes issue with the idea that traditions should inhibit people of making "certain changes". Pascale goes on and tackles the argument that altering the Saint Nicholas tradition would "ruin" the festival for "the children". Explicitly acknowledging Saint Nicholas as a children's festival and re-claiming the children's point of view, she trivializes the traditionalist "adult" stance and obsession with Black Pete's "skin color". Thirdly, the culturally aphasiac argument that Pascale articulated herself in her first video – "Black Pete is black because he goes down chimneys" – is also addressed. She does so by ironically pointing at the existence of showers and asking her traditionalist audience the rhetorical question whether some "marks and wipes" would not be sufficient "in order to be convincing".

> (CR) There have been more white slaves than black slaves ever in the history of the world
> (L) Doesn't matter (.) Doesn't matter at all (.) What matters is that right now in this present day and time (.) black people are the ones that experience racism (.) People of colour are oppressed (.) not white people (.) That's what's important
> (CR) If we're going to change things to make people more comfortable we should also ban gay marriage again (.) because that makes people in Russia and Poland feel uncomfortable
> (CL) ↑Someone↓ said that to me someone in my own family (.) said those words (.) to me (…) I mean (…)

In addition to the voices that we already identified in our literature study, Pascale mentions some other voices she came across. Some traditionalists rely on the statement that there have been "more white

slaves than black slaves every in the history of the world", this utterance is accompanied by an on-screen clarification which says that "people are literally sending an article about this to each other to show people they are not racist". Pascale disqualifies this 'historical argument' by re-contextualizing racism as a contemporary problem in which the "experience" of "black people" or "people of colour" is what matters. The last traditionalist argument she engages with tries to cling onto the Black Pete tradition in its current form through an ironical usage of a cultural relativism. By putting the feelings of people critical of Black Pete's current appearance on a par with the feelings of homophobe Russians and Poles, this voice seeks to discredit the stance of people who feel "uncomfortable" with the current shape and form of the Saint Nicholas tradition. In a country that considers its progressive attitude towards LGBTQ communities as part of its nationally acclaimed 'tolerance', this equation is clearly unacceptable. After having rearticulated this last voice, Pascale turns directly to her audience, admitting that someone in her own family actually said these words to her.

Pascale returns to the dialogical structure of her argument and engages with these traditionalist voices by criticizing a hegemonic understanding of normality that results in an unequal treatment of people who are not "Caucasian", "straight" or "without any disabilities". Claiming "equality" and equal treatment as her central value, she disqualifies the idea that the concerns of minority groups (e.g. black or homosexual) can be equated with the concerns of homophobes in countries such as Russia or Poland.

Throughout the performance and rearticulation of the Black Pete debate in her second vlog, Pascale constructs an ethical space in which she takes a meta-stance on the voices and arguments that seek to challenge and define this tradition. In her second video, she disaligns herself with the traditionalists and moves closer to the anti-racist evaluation of Black Pete. But at the same time, she does not claim the anti-racist voice for herself. Rather than relying on anti-colonial or anti-racist arguments articulated by scholars and activists such as Quinsy Gario, her critique is first and foremost articulated through a claim for "equality" and through implicit and explicit appeals for more empathy.

The critical analyses of the Black Pete debate discussed above pointed at a need for more empathy with minority concerns. Pascale

does not present us with a discourse in which she articulates a strong sense of colonial history. In this respect, both videos are rather alike. But she does move away from the typically Dutch dismissal of minority feelings and concerns with respect to racism and grants the critical voices with a legitimacy they did not get in her first video. This can also be illustrated with reference to the way she metapragmatically articulates her vlog with the wider debate. Every statement relies on prior and/or future statements in order to trigger sense-making processes. This can be illustrated with reference to Pascale's dialogical rearticulation of the Black Pete debate. But in her second video, Pascale also embeds some critical voices into her vlog by integrating an excerpt from a critical documentary about the Black Pete tradition by Dutch journalist Sunny Bergman.[3]

The excerpts of the documentary edited into her vlog show us a couple of scenes in which Sunny Bergman walks around the streets and parks of London dressed up as Black Pete. Accompanied by Sinterklaas and another Black Pete, she engages with some Londoners who take offense with her appearance. One white Londoner angrily asks her if she is "fucking taking a piss"; a black Londoner tells her that she "cannot put this in the face of people who have been slaves" and "then say that this is what we think of you". The video also shows white comedian Russell Brand saying that "in this country [United Kingdom] we think of Holland as a very advanced nation with advanced social principles" and that he is surprised seeing "this kind of tradition" being celebrated over there. When Sunny Bergman enacts her Black Pete role by saying that she merely came to visit in order to bring gifts to the children, Brand labels the Black Pete tradition as "a colonial hangover".

Pascale does not fully identify with the voices in the video at any point. But she does construct an ethical space that grants them a legitimacy they did not get in her previous vlog. This space is realized through a careful construction of a meta-stance by means of a metapragmatic reframing of the voices that constitute the debate. Pascale introduced the video-excerpts as follows:

3 Sunny Bergman's documentary *Zwart als roet* (*Black as soot)* can be viewed integrally on Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IVahza47h7c>.

> I would like to show you a short clip of a video that was posted online (.) in which three people dressed as Sinterklaas and two Black Petes (.) went into London to see what people would have to say about our Dutch (.) traditions in this country (.) the video is made by someone who is very against Black Pete? so you might argue that this isn't a very reliable video to watch (.) however I feel that the reactions that people give (.) are their genuine reactions and it doesn't really matter who made the video? but you can be the judge of that (embedded video starts)

In the excerpt above it is unclear who is Pascale's prime audience. The 'you' addressed here potentially addresses traditionalists and people unfamiliar with the debate alike. Pre-empting the argument that the excerpt from Bergman's documentary would be unreliable because of Bergman's personal stance on Black Pete, Pascale explicitly states that she feels that "the reactions the people give [of the Londoners in the video] are genuine reactions". This does not mean that Pascale necessarily agrees with everything said, but she does align herself with the anti-racist and anti-colonial voices on the basis of a respect for the feelings of those who feel offended by the Dutch Black Pete tradition. As such, she concludes her video with the rhetorical question "what is so bad about making sure that everyone feels good and safe and comfortable when we celebrate Sinterklaas in this country". "Everyone is important", she says, "we are all people" and "we all matter". In the context of the contemporary Dutch polarization around this issue, this is by no means a trivial conclusion.

6. Conclusion

To reconsider a stance taken on a public issue such as Black Pete requires a complex rearticulation of one's relationship to the social actors and voices that constitute public debate. It also requires a reconsideration of one's relation to the social norms, values and practices associated with them. It is for this reason that complex acts of stancetaking are distributed and performed across long stretches of discourse rather than in a single utterance such as 'I consider Black Pete to be a racist

representation of Black People'. The markers of stance that allowed Pascale to rearticulate her subjectivity in a way that aligns more with anti-racist stances on the Black Pete issue take many forms. Pascale relied on intertextual references, cognitive verbs and speech act verbs, non-verbal and paralinguistic communication, as well as on complex metapragmatic statements that help her to contextualize the voices she enacts. All of this required a critical and metapragmatic engagement with the language games she encounters in the public realm and that constitute her own sense of self.

If mediatized debates are to involve more than ritualized confirmations of entrenched ideological positions, the kind of reflexivity displayed in Pascal's second vlog is to be welcomed – all the more so in a context where anti-racist activists are faced with death threats and other acts of intimidation. It is always possible to criticize Pascale's vlog as being marked by a lack of historical contextualization, but if contemporary racism in the Netherlands is marked by aphasia and even aporia, the meta-stance constructed here does create an ethical space for such critiques to be articulated. In her vlog, Pascale certainly emphasizes her individual voice. But she does so in order to call for a wider reconsideration of the Black Pete issue that takes the feelings of people who feel offended by this tradition into account. It might be argued that medium – or more accurately – the genre of video-blogs favours individualized engagements with public discourse rather than common or collective projects, but this does not pre-empt this medium from all critical and politicizing potential.

Pascale's vlog does not breach with the typical genre conventions of personal vlogs or blogs. Most of the typical pseudo-conversational markers can be identified in the excerpts above and there is certainly a strong emphasis on the act of taking a personal stance on this issue. Nevertheless, the claim that the discourse of bloggers and vloggers is not so much oriented towards specific stances as to the process of stancetaking itself does not hold for the case under investigation. We are rather dealing with a vlog understood as an ethical space in which a vlogger engages reflexively and metapragmatically with a societal discourse and with the norms, values and practices that shape seemingly banal nationalist understandings of racism and tradition in the Netherlands.

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