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*Negotiating Dutchness and racism in the struggle over 'Black Pete'*

Schols, H.

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# Keeping things *gezellig*

Negotiating Dutchness and racism  
in the struggle over 'Black Pete'

Heleen Schols

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Heleen Schols  
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# Keeping things *gezellig*

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# Part 1

INTRODUCTION





# Chapter 1

A tradition in dispute



## 1.1 ‘Don’t let them get into your head. You are not a racist’

In the run-up to the 2018 Dutch municipal elections, an official promotion video of the conservative-liberal VVD party posed two rhetorical questions. In white capital letters, against an orange backdrop and flanked by the national flag, the first question read: ‘Being ashamed of your traditions?’ This was immediately followed by an answer: ‘Don’t let them get into your head. You are not a racist if you celebrate *Sinterklaas* in a *gezellig* fashion’<sup>1</sup>. The word *gezellig* roughly means ‘cosy’ or ‘merry’, but is often said to be untranslatable as it conveys a uniquely Dutch notion (‘Introduction in Amsterdam’, 2018; ‘Gezelligheid’, 2018). The *Sinterklaas* winter holiday tradition centrally involves performances of *Zwarte Pieten* (Black Petes), comical and acrobatic figures who tend to be enacted by White<sup>2</sup> people with blackened faces, red lips and curly, black wigs. At the time the promotion video came out, the tradition had already been the object of massive public debate in the Netherlands for a number of years. Those who criticise the tradition argue that *Zwarte Piet* is a racist ‘blackface’ character, a caricature of a Black person. However, mainstream opinion continues to hold *Zwarte Piet* as a beloved figure and an important part of an innocent tradition; a far cry from anything racist. In this regard, the juxtaposition between ‘racist’ and ‘*gezellig*’ in the VVD campaign video is telling, as well as the connection made between symbols of Dutchness on the one hand, and the tradition on the other.

In continuation, the promotional video features footage of party leader and Prime Minister Mark Rutte in conversation with a group of people on the campaign trail. Superimposed on these images is the second rhetorical question: ‘Who engages with the *real* problems?’ The answer is offered in the form of two ballot options: the ‘doer’ or the ‘stickler’. The message about the VVD party’s voters getting their priorities straight is driven home when the former option is highlighted orange, both the national colour and that of the VVD party (VVD, 2018).

That the controversial tradition was deemed an appropriate topic for the election campaign of the VVD party illustrates the high stakes of the *Zwarte Piet* debate. The tradition had become a tool of political campaigning, whereas, a few years prior, Prime

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1 Original Dutch text: ‘Je schamen voor je tradities? Laat je niks aanpraten. Je bent geen racist als je gezellig Sinterklaas viert. Wie houdt zich met de échte problemen bezig? Doener/Drammer’.

2 I capitalise White and Black to signal I do not use these terms to refer to colours or to refer merely to a certain type of skin pigmentation, but rather to socially constructed categories that are associated with certain experiences, ideas of ‘race’ and cultural heritage. While it is common to only capitalise ‘Black’ and not ‘White’, I choose to follow authors such as Hilll (2008) and P.N. Cohen (2012) and capitalise both words in recognition of the fact that each is constructed rather than an objective or ‘natural’ term. For more on the construction of ‘race’, see Chapter 4.

Minister Rutte had famously remarked that '*Zwarte Piet* is not a matter of state. ... It is a societal debate. Politicians should stay far away from it'<sup>3</sup> ('Rutte: *Zwarte Piet* geen staatsaangelegenheid', 2015). This was in response to a United Nations report advising the Dutch government to change the appearance of *Zwarte Piet*, noting that 'even a deeply-rooted cultural tradition does not justify discriminatory practices and stereotypes' (CERD, 2015, p. 4). While some protest against the figure has existed for at least eight decades (Helsloot, 2005, 2012), most of this went unnoticed by the wider Dutch public until an outburst of public debate in the early 2010s. Suddenly and rapidly, the dynamics of contestation around *Zwarte Piet* shifted, turning it into a political problem. This involved both an increased public presence of people protesting the figure, and, in response to that, public outcry by those who saw this as 'a clear attack on our culture' ('Een regelrechte aanval op onze cultuur', 2012) and as 'crazy political correctness'<sup>4</sup> (Chatterjee, 2011).

At first sight, the controversy revolves around disagreement regarding the acceptability of the *Zwarte Piet* figure. The focus of this study, however, is not on the figure of *Zwarte Piet* itself.<sup>5</sup> The aim of my investigation is not to resolve the question whether the appearance of *Zwarte Piet* should change. I am interested in the debate because it offers a window into the ways issues of national identity and racism are understood in the Netherlands. This thesis explores how people's participation in the debate can also be viewed as affirmations, claims or propositions about who is allowed to have a say about this, what kinds of arguments are legitimate and how and where the discussion should take place. Such implicit 'rules of the game' are not necessarily uniform between settings and over time. When each participant acts in ways that others expect of them, the guidelines and assumptions underlying their actions can remain implicit. However, the debate about *Zwarte Piet* knew many moments of disruption. In this book, I trace the boundaries that people enforce or contest during such disruptions and thus bring into view norms that may otherwise remain unnoticed. To this end, I present a detailed analysis of three pivotal disruptive events, examining the *Zwarte Piet* controversy as an arena for negotiating the rules and boundaries of debate about racism in present-day Dutch society.

The norms structuring our communication make meaningful interaction possible. At the same time, they also present limitations. As I will discuss in more detail in the following chapters, research suggests that prevailing norms tend to reflect the interests and worldviews of dominant groups in society. This means that trying to

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3 Original Dutch text: '*Zwarte Piet* is geen staatsaangelegenheid. ... Het is een maatschappelijk debat. De politiek moet daar ver van blijven'.

4 Original Dutch text: 'knettergekke politieke correctheid'.

5 For analysis focusing on the *Zwarte Piet* figure, its origins and meaning, see for example Boer-Dirks, 1993; Brienens, 2014; Smith, 2014; Van Trigt 2016.



challenge the status quo while speaking from a marginalised position presents a double task: that of expressing alternative points of view while faced with interaction norms associated with the status quo. However, how this plays out in practice in the *Zwarte Piet* debate is an empirical question. In fact, it is the central question that my research pivots around:

*How are prevailing norms of interaction contested in public discussions around Zwarte Piet, and does this differ across institutional settings and over time?*

Image 1. Two screenshots from a 2018 promotion video of the VVD party



This research question is divided into four subquestions:

1. What understandings of racism and of collective identities are articulated in public discussions around *Zwarte Piet*?
2. What are recurrent patterns in the ways prevailing norms of interaction are contested, and in the responses to those challenges?
3. In what ways do different institutional settings enable or constrain particular modes of interaction?
4. Are there changes over time concerning norms of interaction in public discussion around *Zwarte Piet*, and how can these be understood in relation to the understandings of racism and collective identities that are articulated in those discussions?

## 1.2 The winter holiday tradition of *Sinterklaas* and *Zwarte Piet*

The figure of *Sinterklaas* is stately, a wizened White man with a red cape. Dutch children are told that he lives in Spain and travels to the Netherlands by boat each November. About three weeks later he leaves again, having presented children with gifts and playful poems on 5 December, the eve of his name day. In 2013, the 75<sup>th</sup> arrival of *Sinterklaas* was celebrated in Amsterdam, but the tradition goes back much further, having undergone many smaller and bigger changes over the years. For at least the last 80 years, *Sinterklaas* has usually been accompanied by many *Zwarte Pieten*, dressed in colourful costumes with tights, frilly collars and a hat with a large plume, whose blackened faces are complemented with red lips, golden hoop earrings and black, curly wigs. This tradition is immensely popular in the Netherlands. Thousands of people gather to greet *Sinterklaas* and the *Pieten* at their arrival in the Netherlands, which tends to be staged as a big event, including a festive parade through the city in which the event takes place and a public welcome speech by the city's mayor. Apart from this televised national welcoming parade, smaller parades are staged across the country, in nearly all other cities. From early November until shortly after 5 December, homes and shops all over the Netherlands are decorated with *Sinterklaas* and *Zwarte Piet* adornments. National television airs daily updates about the adventures of *Sinterklaas* and the *Zwarte Pieten* in the children's mock newscast *Sinterklaasjournaal*. Primary schools usually incorporate stories about *Sinterklaas* and *Zwarte Piet* in their educational programmes, and it would be hard to find a shopping street where a substantial part of the shops do not sell sweets and other items associated with the festival.

*Zwarte Piet*'s blackened skin is the characteristic most often referred to in discussions about the acceptability of the figure. Common explanations of why the blackened skin should *not* really be considered a problem include that the blackness is caused by the soot of the chimneys that *Piet* goes down to deliver presents and that the blackness is not meant to be reminiscent of people of African descent. Often, those who see the tradition as innocent bolster their argument by drawing attention to specific groups of people who share this opinion. For example, some defenders of the tradition contend that people impersonating or enjoying performances of *Zwarte Piet* do not think of *Zwarte Piet* as a caricature of a Black person, and that the practice is therefore not racist. Similarly, another frequently used argument is that many dark-skinned people in the Netherlands do not find the tradition problematic. A third common argument puts children centre stage, asserting that change to the figure will confuse them or that only adults experience it as a problem, whereas children are innocent and do as such not think in terms of racism. Other arguments

for maintaining the controversial features of the figure of *Zwarte Piet* focus on the significance or triviality of the tradition. Some present the issue as unimportant: why worry about *Zwarte Piet*, when there are so many causes more worthy of our concern? Take, for example, the case of a university lecturer in social psychology, who, in a newspaper interview, referred to

the pure ridiculousness of the discussion. We think *Zwarte Piet* is the opposite of serious. The phenomenon means nothing at all. Perhaps it contains traces of Germanic figures of terror, but that has long ceased to be relevant. It is simply something fun that carries no connotation for anyone.<sup>6</sup> (as cited in Algra, 2013).

Image 2. *Sinterklaas* and a *Zwarte Piet*



Both figures wave to the crowds as they arrive in Gouda by boat, 2014. Photo: ANP- Remko de Waal

In contrast, another common line of reasoning presents the tradition as being of supreme importance by tying it to national identity. For example, members of Parliament for the nationalist and right-wing populist PVV (Freedom Party) asserted that '[t]he Dutch

6 Original Dutch text: 'de pure belachelijkheid van de discussie. Wij vinden Zwarte Piet het tegendeel van serieus. Het fenomeen betekent helemaal niets. Er zitten misschien sporen in van Germaanse gruwelfiguren, maar dat is allang niet meer relevant. Het is gewoon iets leuks waar niemand enige bijgedachte bij heeft'.

*Sinterklaas* tradition is part of the national identity and an attack on *Zwarte Piet* is much more than a subtle adjustment of a tradition: it is an attack on Dutch identity<sup>7</sup> (M. Bosma & Wilders, 2014). Seen from this point of view, changing *Zwarte Piet* is unthinkable since the tradition is both very beloved and quintessentially Dutch. It has been quite common to see this kind of argument coupled with a calling into question of the Dutchness of anyone expressing a wish to change *Zwarte Piet*: ‘This discussion is complete nonsense ... Just go live somewhere else, in Africa for example<sup>8</sup>’ (Greven & Bosveld, 2012; see also Duyvendak, 2015; Schinkel, 2016).

On the other hand, those wishing for change have put forward arguments that place *Zwarte Piet* in a context of colonialism, slavery and their legacies. A prominent example is the activist group Kick Out Zwarte Piet (KOZP), which maintains that

*Zwarte Piet* ... symbolises a more deep-seated racism that has its roots in a violent history of slavery and colonialism. ... The Netherlands likes to see itself as a hospitable and tolerant country, with the *zwarte piet* debate we break the taboo of being silent about the colonial past and its heritage.<sup>9</sup> (KOZP, 2015a)

Arguments in favour of change usually call attention to the ways *Zwarte Piet* confirms to stereotypical and exaggerated depictions of the perceived characteristics of Black people. Often, such arguments emphasise how similar figures, such as golliwog-dolls, are now frowned upon in other countries while, in the Netherlands, *Zwarte Piet* is still highly popular. Arguments against *Zwarte Piet* also tend to include an analysis that goes beyond the figure’s skin colour, additionally pointing to characteristics such as the curly hair, exaggerated red and large lips, golden hoop earrings, physical strength and acrobatic skills, the often funny, goofy behaviour, lack of intelligence, the unequal relationship between a White master and Black servants and to similarities between the colourful *Zwarte Piet* costume, and the costumes that servants and enslaved Black people can be seen wearing in famous 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch paintings. Other common arguments used by proponents of change revolve around the effects of the tradition, for example recounting how Black children and adults in the Netherlands are made to feel uncomfortable as they are called ‘*Zwarte Piet*’, jokingly or as an insult. The arguments for and against *Zwarte Piet* thus touch on fraught discussions around Dutch national identity, including major

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7 Original Dutch text: ‘De Nederlandse sinterklaastraditie is onderdeel van de nationale identiteit en een aanval op Zwarte Piet is veel meer dan een subtiele aanpassing van een traditie; het is een aanval op de Nederlandse identiteit.’

8 Original Dutch text: Deze discussie is volledige onzin ... Ga anders lekker ergens anders wonen, in Afrika bijvoorbeeld.

9 Original Dutch text: ‘Zwarte Piet staat ... symbool voor dieper liggend racisme dat stamt uit een gewelddadige geschiedenis van slavernij en kolonialisme. ... Nederland ziet zichzelf graag als gastvrij en tolerant land, met het zwarte piet debat doorbreken wij het taboe om het koloniale verleden en de erfenis daarvan te verzwijgen.’

issues around power, history and racism (for a review of many of these arguments, see for example Felix, 2017; Rodenberg & Wagenaar, 2016; 'Zwart of niet zwart, dat is de vraag', 2014).

The debate about the figure not only involves arguments for and against change, but also more specific proposals for adaptations. Since the figure's blackened skin is the most prominent point of contention, many attempts at solutions have focused on this characteristic. Proposals for change have not only been put forward, but have, in some instances, also been put into practice. These include *Piet* characters with soot smears on their faces, and proposals for replacing *Piet* with other figures, such as clowns. Another alternative that has been enacted a few times already in different parades are *Kleurenpieten*, 'Colour Petes', whose faces are painted bright colours such as green, purple or blue. This is one of the proposals that has been received relatively well, although it has received its share of criticism on several accounts, ranging from '[u]ndisputed nonsense to change a centuries-old tradition'<sup>10</sup> (Greven & Bosveld, 2012, p. 31) to artist and activist Quinsy Gario's comment during the 2014 Moving Traditions conference in Amsterdam, that giving *Pieten* different colours does not solve the problem since it does not question the relationship between a White master and a non-White servant: 'making Black Pete Coloured Pete is actually giving Sinterklaas a bigger range'. Further proposals include the 'Cheese Petes' and 'Waffle Petes', with yellow faces and faces with a diagonal 'waffle-print' on them, respectively. A few such figures participated in the 2014 national *Sinterklaas* parade in Gouda, a city known for its cheese. Interestingly, these changes still associate *Piet* with items commonly thought of as typically Dutch – cheese and treacle waffles. Proposals such as those outlined above often include suggestions for changing other aspects of the figure's appearance, such as changing the outfit, ceasing to use the hoop earrings and replacing the black, curly wigs with other colours and other hair structures. The relationship between *Sinterklaas* and *Zwarte Piet* itself has also been subject of discussion and proposals for change include ideas to present *Zwarte Piet* as more serious and wise, having a Black person assume the character of *Sinterklaas* or simply doing away with the idea that *Sinterklaas* needs to be accompanied at all. But, although the debate has led to some changes in the enactments of *Sinterklaas* parades, especially in the larger cities of the densely populated 'Randstad' area, these remain exceptions to the rule.

The historical background of *Sinterklaas* and *Zwarte Piet* has been subject of quite some debate as well (Booy, 2014; Knip, 2017). Typically, the *Sinterklaas* character is said to be based on a historical figure, a 4<sup>th</sup>-century catholic bishop from Myrna, in what is now Turkey. Common stories about this bishop include his penchant for secret gift giving. Some argue that the figure *Zwarte Piet* is in no way racist since its roots are to be found in an old Germanic figure, a companion of the god Wodan. Similar old Germanic roots

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10 Original Dutch text: 'Aperte onzin om een eeuwenoud feest te gaan veranderen'.

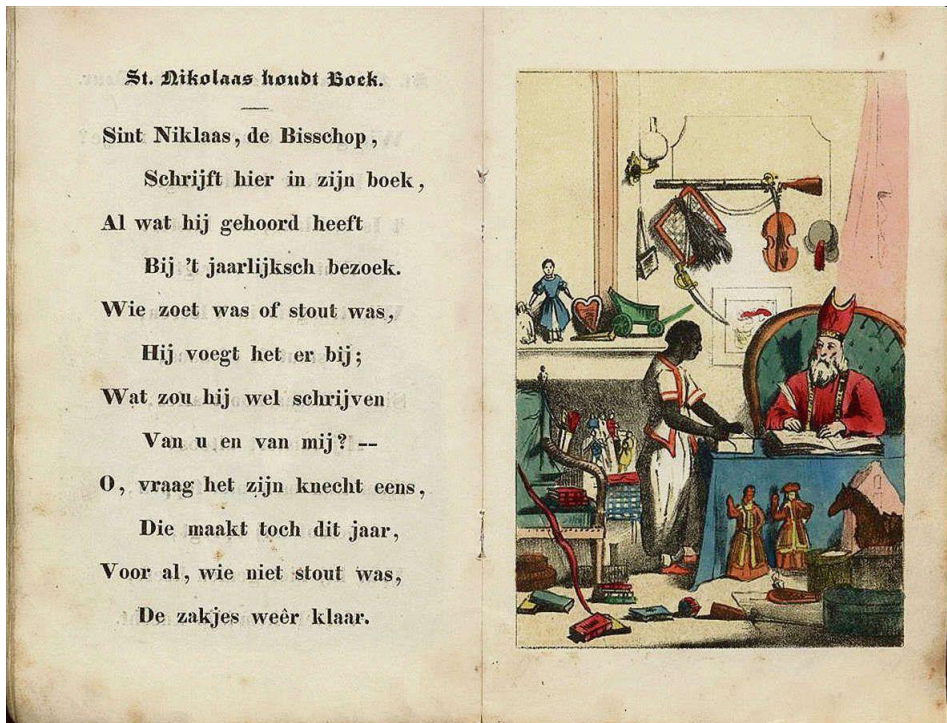
have been claimed for the devil-like figure *Krampus*, who accompanies Saint Nicholas in a number of regions including Austria. More typically though, the historical background of the black colour of *Piet*'s face is said to lie in the soot-stained faces of the once quite common Italian chimney sweeps. However, other accounts explicitly link *Zwarte Piet* to the history of racial hierarchies in the Dutch context. For instance, such accounts place *Zwarte Piet* in the tradition of the theatrical genre of the 'minstrel show', with White actors in blackface (Takken, 2018; Koning, 2018), and highlight that the first appearance of the *Zwarte Piet* character in something close to its present form happened in 1850. At this time, the process of industrialisation in Western countries fuelled ideas about the backwardness of colonial countries and their populations, including enslaved Black people. Also, increasing industrialisation provided a material basis for the abolition of slavery since slave labour ceased being as profitable as before; some connect the creation of *Zwarte Piet* to anxieties in Dutch society due to debates about these upcoming changes in racial relations (Nederveen Pieterse, 2009, pp. 57–63; see also Nederveen Pieterse, 1991, 1992).



### 1.3 The *Zwarte Piet* debate: an overview

The first mention of the *Sinterklaas* figure being accompanied by a Black person was in 1850, when schoolteacher Jan Schenkman published the book *Sinterklaas en Zijn Knecht* (*Sinterklaas and His Servant*). In this book, *Zwarte Piet* is depicted as a dark-skinned Black African man of small stature.

Image 3. Page from the book *Sinterklaas and His Servant*



The book by Jan Schenkman was originally published in 1850.

However, it would still be a number of decades before the *Zwarte Piet* figure with the blackened skin became ubiquitous at the *Sinterklaas* parades. For example, footage of parades and photos of gatherings in 1924, 1925 and 1935 in Amsterdam and Tilburg shows *Sinterklaas* accompanied by White aides without face paint – in some cases *Pieten*, in other cases heralds. Some of these sources show *Zwarte Piet* characters with black face paint as well; apparently, the White *Piet* was to bring presents, while the *Piet* with black face paint was to instil fear (Nederlands Instituut voor Beeld en Geluid, 2013; Vermeer, 2015).



Historical sources mention that, in 1934, Surinamese sailors participated in the parade as *Zwarte Piet* characters (Euwijk & Rensen, 2017; Van der Zeijden & Strouken, 2014). That the *Zwarte Piet* character was associated with Blackness as a racial position is also evident from interviews with Black people who lived in the Netherlands in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. For example, the Surinamese – and presumably Black – Frans de Vroom remembered that, in the 1930s, it was commonplace for him to be followed around by a string of children shouting '*Zwarte Piet!*' (Helsloot, 2005, pp. 252–253). Reports of court cases and Black individuals' complaints to police and other authority figures in the 1920s and 1930s about being called *Zwarte Piet* form an additional source of information about the ways people in the Netherlands linked the figure *Zwarte Piet* to Black people. An example is the 1927 complaint by a Black port labourer, who reported continually being called *Zwarte Piet*: 'even police officers laugh at us'<sup>11</sup> (Euwijk & Rensen, 2017, p. 79).

The debate, protest and attempts at performing alternatives in the Netherlands have been initiated mostly, although not exclusively, by Black people. One of the earliest examples concerns a 1945 newspaper article reporting African American soldiers from the allied forces taking offence when the recently liberated Dutch population included a White person with a blackened face in their *Sinterklaas* festivities. The article reports that the soldiers were assured the performance was only 'a most innocent joke'.<sup>12</sup> However, the local population was also informed 'that there are jokes that others cannot take as innocent, no matter how well they are meant'.<sup>13</sup> In the end, the soldiers received the promise that, while Black soldiers were in the country, no parades with White persons in blackface would take place ('*Zwarte Piet* steen des aanstoots', 1945). Despite this promise to the American soldiers, a key question in this early example – whose experiences and opinions count in deciding the acceptability and innocence of the tradition – has remained controversial and unresolved to this day.

In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, protests against the figure of *Zwarte Piet* became more common. An example from the beginning of this period is the 1963 initiative by the principle of a primary school in the town of Wanroy to change the figure into a White deacon ('*Schoolhoofd in Wanroy*', 1963). Moreover, this new figure was to appear without the traditional rod and with a transparent plastic bag in which the sweets would be clearly visible. These proposed changes were in line with a broader movement in the 1960s to make the tradition less frightening to children. Other initiatives from this period include a 1968 attempt by Riet Grünbauer, a White Dutch woman, to introduce a 'White Pete'. In an interview, she explained this idea by stating that, while slavery had been abolished for over a century, 'we still keep plodding on' with the tradition of representing Black people

11 Original Dutch text: 'zelfs politieagenten staan ons uit te lachen'.

12 Original Dutch text: 'een hoogst-onschuldige grap'.

13 Original Dutch text: 'dat er grapjes zijn, die anderen met den besten wil van de wereld niet onschuldig kunnen opvatten, hoe goed ook bedoeld'.

as slaves, adding: 'The powerful White Master sits on his white horse or on his throne. Pete has to walk or carry heavy bags and is allowed to sit on a stool at his boss's feet'<sup>14</sup> (Helsloot, 2005). Another example of protest from this period is a political café in 1971 featuring the performance of a Black *Sinterklaas* while the *Piet* character was enacted by a Black person wearing white face paint (Helsloot, 2005).

While, in the 1980s, the figure of *Zwarte Piet* was temporarily banned in Surinam as a colonial symbol, in the Netherlands, criticism remained incidental and at the margins of the celebration of the festival. However, since the Black population of the Netherlands was growing significantly, protests by Black people, mostly from Surinamese communities, increased. What was probably the first formal initiative in this context was a 1981 action by the Solidariteits Beweging Suriname (Solidarity Movement Surinam), under the name 'Sinterklaas vieren zonder Zwarte Piet' (Celebrating *Sinterklaas* without *Zwarte Piet*). Collective protest of the figure continued throughout the 1980s, with strategies including the distribution of information through flyers and booklets. Significant examples of this trend in the following decades include the action committee *Zwarte Piet = Zwart Verdriet* (Black Pete = Black Sorrow) founded in the early 1990s, a 2003 petition to the Parliament by the Dutch chapter of the Global African Congress and the Landelijk Platform Slavernijverleden (LPS; National Platform Slavery Heritage), the Organisatie Pressie Omhoog and the Committee Piet op de Zwarte Lijst (Pete on the Blacklist). Under the name Read the Masks. Tradition is Not Given, the Van Abbe Museum of modern and contemporary art announced a 2008 exhibition that would be accompanied by a performance using slogans and banners that had been used in the past to protest against *Zwarte Piet*. However, the museum received such threatening responses that this part of the programme was cancelled due to security concerns.

While the threats and security risks associated with this performance and exhibition foreshadowed later occurrences, it still took a few years until the public debate finally and quickly swelled to proportions never seen before. An early key event was the arrest of two young Black artists during the 2011 *Sinterklaas* parade in the city of Dordrecht. Quinsy Gario and Jerry Afriyie were standing along the route of the parade wearing T-shirts with the text '*Zwarte Piet* is racism'<sup>15</sup> when police officers forcibly removed both men, forcing them to the ground citing 'disturbance of public order', an occurrence that was later denounced by the National Ombudsman (Nationale Ombudsman, 2014).

Some observers responded critically to the suppression of protest, as reflected in several newspaper articles by Meershoek for instance (2012a, 2012b, 2012c). However, research suggests that most people in the Netherlands continued to see the figure as

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14 Original Dutch text: 'blijven wij maar doorsukkelen'; 'De machtige Blanke Meester zit op zijn schimmel of op zijn troon. Piet moet lopen of zware zakken sjouwen en hij mag naast de troon op een krukje zitten aan de voeten van zijn baas'.

15 Original Dutch text: 'Zwarte Piet is racisme'.

acceptable. For example, 89% of respondents to a 2013 national survey indicated they did not want *Zwarte Piet* to undergo any changes (EenVandaag, 2017). But, even if most of the population did not agree with criticism of the figure, the public debate had reached such intensity that the controversy around *Zwarte Piet* had become common knowledge. A major catalyst in this process was the appearance of Gario in the prime-time current affairs talk show *Pauw en Witteman* in early October 2013. Having been arrested at the 2011 Dordrecht parade, Gario had chosen another strategy, making it known publicly that he had filed a complaint against the Municipality of Amsterdam regarding the decision to grant a permit for the 2013 *Sinterklaas* parade including *Zwarte Pieten*. Shortly after Gario's talkshow appearance, a Facebook 'Pete-ition'<sup>16</sup> went online defending the figure of *Zwarte Piet*, gathering more than 2 million 'likes' in a matter of days – a very high number, considering that the Netherlands counts just under 17 million inhabitants. However, other people followed Gario's example, filing similar complaints against the Municipality of Amsterdam. The subsequent public hearing, which I examine in depth in Chapter 5, became a key event garnering massive media attention. Nevertheless, in November 2013, the mayor of Amsterdam communicated his decision not to revoke the permit, and thus the parade took place, although with the presence of some silent protesters and sparking national and international media coverage ('Urenlang zwijgen zij, tegen Piet', 2013).

Image 4. Gario (left) and Afriyie (right) at the 2011 Dordrecht *Sinterklaas* parade



This image was captured shortly before the arrest of both Gario and Afriyie. Photo by Mimi Young.

<sup>16</sup> Original Dutch text: 'Pietitie'.

By this time, people from all walks of life were speaking out publicly as discussions on social media abounded, many letters to the editor were printed in national as well as local newspapers and opinion pieces were published online. This created a situation in which it was impossible to escape the debate. Numerous public figures became involved, sometimes at their own initiative and, in the case of politicians, often willy-nilly, being asked about it by reporters and answering to the effect that it was a non-issue, or at least not something for politicians to concern themselves with (see for example ‘Ook op nucleaire top verslikt Rutte zich in Zwarte Piet’, 2014; ‘Rutte: Piet is nou eenmaal zwart’, 2013; ‘Rutte krijgt vraag over Zwarte Piet’, 2014; ‘Zwarte Piet. Rutte: Antillianen blij met Sinterklaas’, 2014). Many people still felt that the issue was too silly to merit serious attention, but attempts to make light of it sometimes backfired, such as when an Amsterdam city council member referred to Nelson Mandela as ‘*Zwarte Piet*’ in a controversial tweet about his passing away on 5 December 2013 (‘GroenLinks-bestuurder biedt excuses aan’, 2013). Celebrities who became involved in the discussion in 2013 and early 2014 included singer Anouk, who received large numbers of abusive messages on social media in response to her public stance denouncing the *Zwarte Piet* character as racist and outdated. Television personality Paul de Leeuw also defended the position that *Zwarte Piet* should change, and presented all members of the Dutch Parliament with a copy of the book that had influenced him in forming his understanding of racism: the memoir *Twelve Years a Slave*, originally published by Solomon Northup in 1853 (Northup, 1968).

In the wake of these events the debate did not let up the following years, even when the *Sinterklaas* weeks in late November and early December were still months away. Thinkers and activists, primarily Black people and other people of colour, shared their thoughts in online articles and videos (Miss Kitty Show, 2014; Devika, 2015; H, 2014; Martina, 2014; Warsame & Sno, 2015; Zeefuik, 2015); students chose *Zwarte Piet* as a research topic (see for example Mangelsdorf, 2016; Roos, 2017; Schoonewille, 2017; Sikma, 2015; Slagter, 2014; Wouters, 2014); student organisations organised debates; and a mother took the board of a primary school in Utrecht to the Council for Human Rights because of their refusal to comply with her request to discontinue the use of *Zwarte Piet* in school celebrations. Various chain stores announced their plans to either change or stick to their use of *Zwarte Piet* figures, although the criticism following such an announcement sometimes caused them to slightly change course again (Dirks, 2014). A case in point was a decision by Albert Heijn, the country’s largest supermarket chain, to only use *Pieten* without a blackened face. This caused an uproar; #boycotAH quickly became a trending topic and, within a few days, the supermarket chain took out a full-page advertisement in various newspapers, publishing a *Sinterklaas*-style poem meant to assure the reader, through its form as well as its content, that Albert Heijn had not banned *Zwarte Piet*: ‘We love you in black and other colours, but leave the choice up to everyone in the Netherlands

themselves'<sup>17</sup> (Van Meerten, 2014). Meanwhile, the script writers of the children's mock newscast *Sinterklaasjournaal*, which is aired in November and December, had prepared storylines they hoped would constitute a positive contribution to the debate. In short, the debate had become a fully-fledged social and political problem.

A name that suddenly became familiar to many was that of Verene Shepherd, the chair of the United Nations Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent. Criticism of the *Zwarte Piet* figure was included in the 2015 report of this working group (Human Rights Council, 2015). The attention for the report included coverage by international press (Attiah, 2017; Bin Sharifu, 2014; Gillman, 2014). However, the involvement of an international organisation was reason for many to defend the tradition as uniquely Dutch. Especially Shepherd's reported reference to *Sinterklaas* as a second 'Santa Claus' (Bloem, 2013) was taken by many as proof that she did not properly understand Dutch folklore and thus was in no position to judge it. Closer to home, the Dutch Centre for Folklore and Intangible Heritage (Centrum voor Volkscultuur en Immaterieel Erfgoed, VIE)<sup>18</sup> produced various publications (Booy, 2014; Kozijn, 2014; Strouken, 2013; Van der Zeijden & Strouken, 2014). This included a June 2014 proposal by the VIE for a new version of the *Zwarte Piet* figure, with straight rather than curly black hair, and a slightly lighter tone of brown face paint. The VIE presented its contribution to the debate as appropriate by underscoring that the new *Piet* was designed after conversations with 19 people 'who are an important voice in the *Sinterklaas* community, including enthusiasts and critics'<sup>19</sup> (Kozijn, 2014, p. 8). The new incarnation of *Piet* did not prove popular however: comments abounded that the new *Piet* still resembled a person of colour, even if the hair texture and skin tone had been altered, the lips were less bright red and the golden hoop earrings had been discarded. For example, in response to an article about the proposed change, an internet user referred to the new wig as a 'weave', a type of hair extensions often used by people with Afro-textured hair (Esmerald, 2014).

Simultaneously, many lovers of the tradition resented the change, and the VIE received thousands of hate mail by people wishing to keep things as they were ('Duizenden haatmails', 2014). In fact, hate mail and death threats to people campaigning for change, such as Gario and others, were becoming a common occurrence, which would continue in the years to follow (see for example Feenstra, 2015). What is probably the most prominent case of such threats and harassment concerns television presenter Sylvana Simons, a Black Dutch woman of Surinamese descent. In a 2015 broadcast of the primetime

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17 Original Dutch text: 'Wij vinden je in zwart en andere kleuren reuze, maar laten aan heel Nederland de keuze'.

18 In 2015, the name of this institution was changed to Dutch Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage (Kenniscentrum Immaterieel Erfgoed Nederland).

19 Original Dutch text: 'die een stem van belang zijn in de sinterklaasgemeenschap, bestaande uit liefhebbers en critici'.

television talkshow *De Wereld Draait Door*, she called another guest, Martin Šimek, out on his use of the word ‘*zwartjes*’ (blackies) to refer to asylum seekers attempting to cross the Mediterranean. While Šimek insisted his choice of words was appropriate and discussion of such minor matters of semantics could wait ‘until *Sinterklaas*’;<sup>20</sup> Simons argued the term ‘blackies’ merited reflection. An enormous backlash towards her ensued, including a barrage of threatening and demeaning content on online forum discussions, in videos and on Facebook pages dedicated to ‘waving goodbye’ to Simons, a phrase typically used to refer to ‘waving goodbye’ as the *Zwarte Pieten* and *Sinterklaas* leave the country after 5 December. These online sources included photoshopped images depicting Simons as a monkey, and messages about murder and rape. In an interview (Bos, 2016), the initiator of a ‘waving goodbye’ Facebook events page with tens of thousands of comments, explained that neither the page nor his motivations were racist. Rather than having any connection with ‘skin colour or background,’<sup>21</sup> he saw the page as an expression of his patriotism. Although this was the beginning of the end of Simons’s media career, she did still appear in numerous programmes, now specifically in order to contribute to discussions about racism. This included discussions in which she criticised the figure *Zwarte Piet*. In 2016, she joined a political party and later founded a new party based on ‘radical equality’;<sup>22</sup> which has also issued statements calling for changes to the *Zwarte Piet* tradition.

Other significant occurrences in 2014 include behind-the-scenes discussions between various key actors, including Amsterdam’s mayor, board members of the Amsterdam *Sinterklaas* Committee, and the head of the VIE (Blokker, 2014; Broer & Van Weezer, 2014; Nederland Wordt Beter, 2016) and the organisation of ‘Municipal Debates’ about *Zwarte Piet* in various cities. While these talks took place, others opted for enacting the situation they were striving for. For example, Leefbaar Rotterdam, the largest political party in their city, chose to leave *Zwarte Piet* dolls strapped to hundreds of lampposts. According to the party leader, this was to be taken as a signal that ‘you don’t call this beautiful tradition into question. If we bow down so easily to the squabbling of a few clowns, we will have to review or cast doubt on everything that characterises our culture in no time’<sup>23</sup> (*‘Zwarte Pietjes veroveren Rotterdam’*, 2014). A minority of observers saw the attempt to put across this message as highly inappropriate because of the way it visually echoed the disturbing history of lynch parties leaving Black bodies suspended from trees (*‘Leefbaar Rotterdam’*, 2014). At the national level, the PVV proposed a law to prohibit any non-black *Piet* character (M. Bosma & Wilders, 2014). The proposal failed, but garnered quite some media attention.

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20 Original Dutch text: ‘dat komt wel met Sinterklaas’.

21 Original Dutch text: ‘afkomst of huidskleur’.

22 Original Dutch phrase: ‘radicale gelijkwaardigheid’.

23 Original Dutch text: ‘deze mooie Nederlandse traditie stel je niet ter discussie. Als we zo gemakkelijk buigen voor het gekrakeel van een aantal kwibussen, kunnen we straks alles dat onze cultuur kenmerkt herzien of in twijfel trekken’.



Image 5. Traditional and alternative *Zwarte Piet* figures



On the right, the traditional *Zwarte Piet* with golden earrings, large red lips, dark brown face paint and a black, curly wig. On the left, the Piet presented by the VIE in 2014. In the middle, another alternative, proposed by activist and media personality Anousha Nzume. Photo: ANP.

Those pushing for change also manifested themselves publicly in a variety of ways, including a dance flash mob in an Amsterdam shopping street, demonstrations in public squares, pickets at department stores and festive parades without *Pieten*, headed by a 'new *Sinterklaas*' who was a Black man. In November 2014, the protests culminated in a highly publicised demonstration and arrests during the national *Sinterklaas* parade in the city of Gouda. These arrests, which I discuss in more depth in Chapter 7, were overwhelmingly seen as a logical consequence of people protesting at an unsuitable time and place. The arrests also led to juridical procedures that would drag on for years. In dozens of cases, protesters eventually received financial compensation as a number of police reports inexplicably went missing and charges were dropped (Bergman, 2016; Jebbink, 2016; Kompagnie, 2016). For others, the juridical procedures continued. A striking example is the case of artist and activist Jerry Afriyie, who, over the years, was involved numerous court cases related to *Zwarte Piet*, including the one related to his arrest in Gouda in 2014.

In terms of audiovisual material, two things deserve special mention. Firstly, in late November of 2014, a critical documentary premiered about *Zwarte Piet* titled *Our Colonial Hangover* by Sunny Bergman, one of the 20 people who had joined Quinsy Gario in filing a complaint against the Municipality of Amsterdam in 2013. Secondly, the 2014 *Sinterklaasjournaal*, although it featured only traditional *Zwarte*

*Pieten*, included a surprising plot twist. The last episode of the year ended with two figures riding away into the distance, side by side. They are *Sinterklaas*, riding away on a black horse, accompanied by a *Zwarte Piet* riding a white horse. Both men wear the red robe and other garments associated with *Sinterklaas*. The plot twist is that *Opa Piet* ('Grandfather Pete') will be taking over responsibilities from *Sinterklaas*, who is getting too old to handle these by himself. Appraisals of the plot twist were worlds apart. In an interview, editor-in-chief and scriptwriter of the *Sinterklaasjournaal* Ajé Boschhuijzen stated, 'Wonderful, isn't it? He looks just like Bishop Tutu!'<sup>24</sup> For others, his delighted remark that the dressed-up fantasy figure with a blackened face resembled a highly revered South African anti-apartheid and human rights activist added insult to injury. To them, the suggestion that *Opa Piet* looked like Bishop Tutu constituted further proof that *Zwarte Piet* is indeed a caricature of Black people, and that much work is needed to change the figure as well as the mindset of people who reproduce it.

On the one hand, there are clear indications that the debate of the last several years has led to more favourable attitudes towards changing aspects of the *Sinterklaas* tradition. For one thing, opinion surveys indicate a shift towards acceptance of changes to the figure. In 2013, 89% of respondents to a national survey thought that the figure should not be changed. This dropped slightly to 83% in 2014, and to 80% in 2015. By 2017, the percentage of people opposing change, while still constituting an overwhelming majority, had dropped to 68%. In the 'Randstad' area, opinions are more favourable to change than in the more rural areas. Other factors associated with openness to change included higher levels of education, and certain immigrant backgrounds including Ghanaian, Moroccan, Antillean and Surinamese backgrounds (EenVandaag 2014; EenVandaag, 2015; EenVandaag, 2017; Greven & Bosveld, 2012). For example, a study carried out in Amsterdam in 2012 showed that 26% of people categorised as 'Dutch' regarded the figure as discriminatory; a high percentage, compared to national averages in later years. Yet, this number still seems low when compared with respondents categorised as 'Surinamese': 77% of these respondents saw the figure as discriminatory in 2012 (Greven & Bosveld, 2012).

For an illustration of the practical manifestation of these changing attitudes, we can look at the area of primary education. Most changes have been concentrated in the larger cities in the Randstad area, such as the decision of 33 primary schools in Utrecht to organise festivities without *Zwarte Piet* in 2015 (Nu.nl, 2015). Also, over time, a number of prominent actors have left the *Sinterklaasjournaal*, citing their discomfort with the persisting depiction of the *Zwarte Piet* characters as the reason (Oomen, 2016; 'Verandering bij het "Sinterklaasjournaal"', 2016). Even Dieuwertje Blok, the presenter

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24 Original Dutch text: 'Prachtig, toch? Hij lijkt net bisschop Tutu!'



of the mock newscast since it began in 2001, has voiced criticism of the *Zwarte Pieten*. In a 2015 interview in *Trouw* newspaper, she links her own Jewish background with the importance of taking others' concerns into account and states, 'gradually, I'm also starting to think: it's time we get rid of that strange blackface character'<sup>25</sup> (Maliepaard, 2015). In response, in a newspaper interview (Oomen, 2015), scriptwriter and editor-in-chief Ajé Boschhuizen criticised the 'poor timing' of Blok's statement, which was released on 13 November. Boschhuizen explained: 'I want to safeguard the programme from this drama during the period in which it airs.'<sup>26</sup>

At the political level, too, some change can be observed. While, in the early 2010s, one would have been hard pressed to find any politician speaking out on the topic, with Amsterdam Deputy Mayor Andrée van Es as a notable exception, in August 2015, Deputy Prime Minister Lodewijk Asscher stated: 'Yes, I think it's a good thing that *Zwarte Piet* changes'<sup>27</sup> (Asscher, 2015). This Facebook post by the deputy prime minister constituted a bigger endorsement for change than most politicians have been willing to make, before or since. On the other hand, the manifestations of objection to change are also evolving. Some of the actions by political parties have already been mentioned. Other developments include groups of people dressing up as *Zwarte Piet* in (semi-)public spaces with the express purpose of promoting the tradition. People who are in favour of a *Zwarte Piet* with blackened face have also organised actions at and near the yearly national *Sinterklaas* parades, with tactics ranging from handing out little flags in 2013, to blocking a motorway in 2017. So far, the largest and most visible protests at the *Sinterklaas* parades have been those of the people campaigning for change – although this balance appears to be shifting: in 2018, large gatherings of counter-protesters, often football supporters, were successful in intimidating and shutting down anti-*Piet* protests in various cities. Repeatedly, anti-*Piet* protests have been responded to by local authorities with mass arrests, which were applauded by many but also prompted denouncements by the National Ombudsman and human rights organisation Amnesty International, amongst others. As I will discuss in more depth in Chapter 7, the national parades thus have become a yearly focus point of highly visible strife, involving evolving strategies and tactics of a variety of groups, including protest and counter-protest groups, the police, local authorities, organising *Sinterklaas* committees and the NTR, which produces and broadcasts the *Sinterklaasjournaal*. An illustration of recent turns of event in this

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25 Original Dutch text: 'ik begin zo langzamerhand ook te denken: van die rare blackface moeten we maar eens af'.

26 Original Dutch text: 'slecht getimed... ik wil het programma tijdens de periode dat het loopt juist van dit gedoe vrijwaren'. Dat is een goede vraag. Dat weet ik nog niet. Daar moeten we het, als alle drukte voorbij is, nog maar eens uitgebreid over hebben'.

27 Original Dutch text: 'Ja, ik vind het goed dat Zwarte Piet verandert'.

respect is the letter that the national public broadcasting agency NTR, in early 2018, sent to the Dutch Association of Mayors. For the first time in the 'national television tradition of 66 years', not a single municipality had volunteered to host the *Sinterklaas* parade that was to be broadcast live on national television (Boschhuizen, 2018). The predictable yearly enactment of national parades, which for so long had appeared normal, now seemed precarious. However, within days of this news becoming public, various municipalities had stepped forward to host the event, due to take place in November 2018. While developments such as these are uneven and often paradoxical, it seems clear that the norm – of smoothly organised parades and of accepting *Zwarte Piet* as unproblematic – cannot be taken for granted anymore.

## 1.4 The *Zwarte Piet* debate as a prism

The above contains just a small selection of the many places, moments and ways in which the controversy around *Zwarte Piet* has played out over the best part of a century – with a sudden intensification over the last decade. Still, it gives an impression of the increasing intensity of the debate, the high stakes and sometimes contradictory developments. While there have been changes to the public manifestations of the tradition, as well as to the dynamics of the debate, these are far from straightforward. Partly, this is because occurrences in the course of the debate often result in unintended and unexpected consequences. Interestingly, this has repeatedly meant that attempts to preserve the status quo have led to changes to this status quo. This is distinctly illustrated by the chains of events in which protest during parades have led to arrests, which in turn have led to denouncements by human rights organisations.

A major shift has been in the ways in which, in public debate, the controversy around *Zwarte Piet* has been linked to broader issues of (racial) inequality in Dutch society. Over time, it has become more common to see *Zwarte Piet* mentioned in the context of a wide-ranging discussion about underlying tensions in Dutch society rather than as a standalone issue. To give just a few of countless examples, this includes articles about *Zwarte Piet* in relationship to the treatment of refugees and social exclusion (Guadeloupe, Wolthuis, De Weever, Emanuelson, & Halfman, 2015); events and publications engaging with questions around ‘black identity, Dutch citizenship and representation’<sup>28</sup> (NiNsee, 2017, p. 22); debates in various venues on racial identities, racism, norms and deviance (happyChaos, 2018; Kaulingfreks & Ponte, 2014; ‘Skin Deep’, 2017–2019); and contributions foregrounding Whiteness as a racial position involving specific practices and social norms (Duurvoort, 2015; Nzume, 2017). *NRC Handelsblad*, generally considered a leading quality newspaper, chose to feature articles and analyses about the topic of racism during the 2017 *Sinterklaas* period (Vlasblom, 2017).

In the midst of these fraught debates, however, one thing seems to be shared by all: the notion that racism is bad. This both goes for activists who chant ‘*Zwarte Piet* is racism’ and for people who passionately defend the tradition, arguing that it is quintessentially Dutch and nothing short of *gezellig*. But, while all participants distance themselves from racism, the underlying ideas of what actually constitutes racism and what might be useful ways to combat it vary enormously. The widely diverging assessments of the plot twist in the *Sinterklaasjournaal*, with Grandpa *Piet* looking ‘like Bishop Tutu’, form an apt illustration of this. The controversy about *Zwarte Piet* is thus not so much a conflict over whether racism is acceptable, but rather about what racism actually means, and who gets to have a say in that.

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28 Original Dutch text: ‘zwarte identiteit, Nederlands burgerschap en representatie’.

A desire to better understand the possibilities for deepening practices of democratic debate in contexts of inequality was what prompted me to start this research journey. Examining the debate about *Zwarte Piet* opens a window into the struggle about the symbolic order in which the figure is embedded. The controversy about the figure gathers and refracts a number of central issues in Dutch society about belonging, identity and racism. As the 2018 VVD election video indicates, the debate has become symbolic of other fissures dividing Dutch society into ‘us’ and ‘them’. A close look at how the debate plays out in practice thus offers an opportunity to trace what social categorisations are involved in addressing *Zwarte Piet* as a problem or a non-issue in relation to racism. Through an in-depth analysis of interactions in three widely divergent contexts, I use the *Zwarte Piet* debate as a prism to examine how, in recent years in the Netherlands, notions of national identity, belonging and racism are negotiated in practice.

The book is structured as follows. In the next two chapters, I first develop my theoretical approach and then discuss the methodology and practices that I have used to apply this theory to the analysis of empirical material. After that, Chapter 4 provides a more solid background to debates about racism and difference in the Dutch context. This chapter contains two parts. First, I discuss how issues of racism and exclusion have historically been understood in Dutch society. Secondly, I situate my approach to these topics in relation to various bodies of scholarship, developed over the course of more than a century. Having provided this background, the next three chapters contain the case studies that form the heart of this book. A public hearing, explicitly designed to be neutral and non-partisan, forms the context of the interactions that I discuss in Chapter 5. The next chapter takes a close look at the 2014 national *Keti Koti* gathering in Amsterdam, during which the abolition of slavery is commemorated and celebrated. The third case study focuses on the 2014 national *Sinterklaas* parade in the town of Gouda. In each of these three case studies, I dissect what norms of appropriateness define how people should act within that situation, and how these norms help or hinder addressing *Zwarte Piet* as an issue in relation to racism. Specifically, when disruptions are followed by a partial restoration of the status quo, I parse out what mechanisms make this return to the status quo possible. Having examined challenges to the status quo on the one hand, and mechanisms preserving and reproducing that status quo on the other, in the final chapter I draw together the lessons from the different case studies and discuss what this means for the ways in which, in Dutch society, we understand and debate issues around racism.







# Part 2

CONCEPTS & METHODS







# Chapter 2

Contesting patterns of  
meaning and power in interactions



## 2.1 The norms of public discussion: talking as equals?

Since the early 2010s, the dispute about *Zwarte Piet* has become especially heated, involving mass arrests, lawsuits against various individuals and institutions, and protests at parades, which are promoted as festive events for children. In the midst of this, people have taken various sides. Some argue that *Zwarte Piet* is essentially a non-issue, while others present the issue as being of prime importance. Those who criticise the tradition tie *Zwarte Piet* to racism and a necessity for Dutch society to come to terms with the legacies of colonialism. Others see this relationship between *Zwarte Piet* and Dutchness rather differently; for example, the PVV argued that

the grimness and that people are absolutely insensitive to Dutch culture were emphasised when anti-*Piet* protesters disrupted the arrival parade of *Sinterklaas* in the Netherlands, a day after the [Charlie Hebdo] attacks in Paris. Many felt that carrying on with the demonstrations was in bad taste.<sup>1</sup> (Tweede Kamer Der Staten-Generaal, 2016)

As I have brought to the fore in the previous chapter, surveys show that public opinion is gradually swaying towards support for change of the controversial figure of *Zwarte Piet*. On the other hand, resistance to such a change appears to have hardened as well, while those who vociferously protest against the figure remain a minority. A case in point was the blockade of a motorway, in November 2017, by people who wanted to prevent critics of *Zwarte Piet* from holding a protest in the northern town of Dokkum, where the national *Sinterklaas* parade was to take place. Two busloads of anti-*Piet* protesters on their way to the site were stopped mid-highway by a number of cars that suddenly came to a halt to block their way, causing physical injuries to some of the protesters, who were thrown head first into the wind screen of their bus. When, almost an hour later, the police had dissolved the counter-protesters' blockade, the protesters were escorted further north but were eventually told they were not allowed to continue to Dokkum, on account of their being 'late'. The blockade aroused both indignation and empathetic reactions: the state secretary for the Interior and Kingdom Relations stated that he 'understood the emotions' and the prime minister expressed a dislike for the idea of protesting at a *Sinterklaas* parade, urging the people involved to, 'act a bit normal ... What you don't want is for children to be confronted with angry protesters'<sup>2</sup> ('Premier Rutte over Zwarte Piet-discussie', 2017).

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1 Original Dutch text: 'de grimmigheid en dat men totaal ongevoelig is voor de Nederlandse cultuur werd onderstreept toen anti-Piet-actievoerders de intocht van Sinterklaas in Nederland verstoorden, een dag na de aanslagen in Parijs. Velen vonden het doorgaan van de demonstraties smakeloos'.

2 Original Dutch text: 'een beetje normaal doen ... Wat je niet wilt, is dat kinderen geconfronteerd worden met boze demonstranten'.

In observing these developments, two things stand out. Firstly, despite the unremitting criticism of *Zwarte Piet* as a racist caricature, it remained controversial whether or not *Zwarte Piet* merited any discussion at all in relation to racism. Secondly, the minority who insist that *Zwarte Piet* is a problem are often criticised for calling attention to this point of view in inappropriate ways. A key example is the protest at the 2014 *Sinterklaas* parade in the city of Gouda, which I scrutinise in Chapter 7. The response of Gouda's mayor to this protest succinctly captured the reigning sentiment that the protesters had chosen neither the right time, nor the right place, nor had the appropriate background for their action: 'it is a shame that groups of adults from outside the city have found it necessary ... to enact a protest. I am disappointed they disgrace a children's celebration in that way'<sup>3</sup> ('Negentig aanhoudingen', 2014). Thus, the style, place and time of the debate have become objects of struggle. Understanding the debate demands examination of the relationship between these two dimensions: the arguments about whether or not *Zwarte Piet* is problematic, and the norms regarding the *way* this issue is to be broached. Discussion norms, which I conceptualise here as the informal understandings of appropriate behaviour for people who engage in discussions, define who can speak with influence. Therefore, these norms centrally involve issues of power and inequality. To trace how power and inequality relate to the content of the *Zwarte Piet* debate, it is thus crucial to examine how these norms are reproduced, challenged and adapted.

In order to bring into clearer view what is at stake in the *Zwarte Piet* debate, a theoretical framework is needed that aids in mapping these interlinkages between *what* is to be discussed and *how* it is to be discussed: between content and form. This is the purpose of this chapter. To start, I will provide a background of political theoretical work about the role of public debate in a democratic society, and the challenges posed by power differences. Specifically, I will focus on scholarship that grants a central role to issues of inequality and contention. Then, I will present the framework of 'interaction logic' as a tool for analysing how norms of discussion are connected to wider societal power inequalities and their repercussions in concrete interactions. In the last section, I summarise my approach.

### Deepening democracy – on whose terms?

Since the 1990s, scholars from a variety of traditions have focused on deliberation – people coming together to discuss issues of mutual concern – as crucial in improving the quality of democracies (Florida, 2017). Against the background of the crisis of democracy, this scholarship focuses on the importance not of political decisions or the provision of services

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3 Original Dutch text: 'Het is jammer dat groepjes volwassenen van buiten de stad het nodig vonden om ... te betogen tussen de kinderen. Ik vind het teleurstellend dat ze een kinderfeest daarmee ontsieren.'

as such, but rather the public debate that precedes or surrounds such outcomes. When people talk together in public as equals about issues that concern them, this is expected to lead to a shift 'from bargaining, interest aggregation, and power to the common reason of equal citizens as a dominant force in democratic life' (J. Cohen & Fung, 2004, p. 24). Hence, deliberative democracy is often positioned in contrast to the standard account of representative democracy with its 'thin understanding of political will formation' and its emphasis on political parties, pressure groups and electoral processes, suggesting that 'political judgments are, in effect, aggregated preferences' (Urbainati & Warren, 2008, p. 392). However, this raises questions such as how deliberations are to sidestep power and what 'the common reason of equal citizens' means in practice.

A key point of reference in the debates about deliberative democracy is the philosophical work of Jürgen Habermas, which gives centrality to the notions of communicative rationality and power-free dialogue. In his scholarship, these notions form the idealised horizon for deliberation and decision-making. Central in this approach is the concept of an 'ideal procedure' for ethico-political discourse based on universal guidelines for rational exchange. This procedure is to create a level playing field by shielding people from the biases of norms and ideas that are specific to a community, time or place. However, embracing an ideal of a unitary public sphere based on certain standards of rational deliberation runs into problems on two counts. Firstly, it risks overlooking the ways in which this unitary public sphere may exclude certain identities and interests. Secondly, it can lead to a disregard of other public spheres. In this respect, Habermas's earlier work (1989) on public discussion in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in particular has been criticised for idealising a liberal, bourgeois public sphere. In contrast to this, there is a growing recognition by scholars that the public sphere might be more usefully thought of as a number of partially overlapping spheres, instead of as a single unitary one (see for example N. Fraser, 1990). Furthermore, Habermas's proposed strategy for creating conditions for a 'reasonable' public debate implies that power inequalities can and should be kept outside the discussion, in order for people to participate in the deliberation on an equal footing. In this conceptualisation, the resulting debate can focus purely on the content and the argumentative correctness of the respective claims, leading to a consensus based on reason rather than outcomes based on power. This focus on consensus, rational argument and neutral norms has been met with criticism from those who contend that this view of deliberative democracy lacks sensitivity to the complex ways in which structural inequalities operate in deliberative arenas. This strand of research draws attention to the reasons societal inequalities cannot be counterbalanced by ideal procedures based on rationalism and universalism.

Iris Marion Young, for one, foregrounded the manifold ways in which formally equal processes of deliberation can be *de facto* arenas for group domination (Young, 1990, 1997, 2000, 2001). Advancing a poststructuralist critical theory, the focus of Young's work is

on the inclusion of subdominant groups in deliberative democracy. She critiques the notion that, in deliberative processes, power differences should be 'bracketed' in the sense of setting these aside as irrelevant to the interaction at hand. Young's scholarship calls attention to ways in which 'bracketing' can function as a Trojan Horse, bringing in structural inequalities unintentionally. For example, internalised ideas about one's entitlement to speak cannot be 'bracketed', and neither can the (often implicit and unconscious) devaluation of some styles of speech and elevation of others that exhibit culturally specific characteristics of 'articulateness' or 'reasonableness'. Thus, Young argues, norms of deliberation are everything but neutral. Presenting them as such means shielding the resulting inequalities from view. From this follows her conclusion that there is a need for an expanded conception of democratic deliberation, in which non-mainstream forms of communication, such as rhetoric and storytelling, have their place beside what is generally recognised as a 'rational' argument. Similarly, the work of Jane Mansbridge has focused on the importance of minority representation and of alternative spaces in which those who lose out on the never perfectly level playing field of mainstream debate can share and 'rework their ideas and strategies ... deciding in a more protected space in what way or whether to continue the battle' (Mansbridge, 1996, p. 47). Drawing attention to the role that such partial and conflicting spaces can play for minorities, she argues that these spaces are a necessary complement to both formal deliberations at the level of government and to mainstream public discourse. While this work challenges the idea of a unitary and inclusive public sphere, it echoes the Habermasian notion of public sphere deliberation as a counterweight to the sphere of formal politics. Such 'counter-democracy', in Rosanvallon's words, serves to reinforce the 'usual electoral democracy as a kind of buttress, a democracy of indirect powers disseminated throughout society ... which complements the episodic democracy of the usual electoral-representative system' (Rosanvallon, 2008, p. 8). However, while such 'counter-democracy' is valuable for exercising oversight and protest, it remains on the margins. It is geared towards compensating for shortcomings in mainstream democratic processes rather than towards changing the notions of what these mainstream democratic processes could or should be.

The marginal role assigned to contention points to another aspect of deliberative democracy scholarship such as Habermas's that is deeply problematic. The emphasis on consensus as a goal for deliberative processes presents conflict as something to be avoided or contained. For example, Rawls argues that people with a different moral outlook can come to a consensus based on reason as long as 'unreasonable' points of view are contained 'like war and disease – so that they do not overturn political justice' (Rawls, 1993, p. 64). A priori definitions of certain points of view as unacceptable in public debate on the basis of their 'reasonableness' imply it is possible to decide, from

an objective and neutral position, which arguments are 'reasonable' and which ones are not. However, empirical work in a range of national and institutional contexts reveals how seemingly senseless and impolite acts can constitute legitimate criticism on a society's status quo (see for example Kaulingfreks, 2013, on the 'unruly politics' of Dutch and French youth, and E. Anderson, 2010, on segregation and the civil rights movement in the US). As Fennema and Maussen (2000, p. 287) point out, excluding people from deliberations based on such an alleged lack of 'reasonableness' can easily turn into the silencing of opponents who are represented as a 'contagious disease'.

Against this background, I would like to clarify my usage of the word 'deliberation'. While I have so far followed the conventions of most academic writers by using this word, conceptual clarity demands that I regard this concept more critically. The word 'deliberation' implies an appropriate democratic practice. Therefore, I find it useful to distinguish between 'deliberation' and 'communication'. While the former is prescriptive regarding the type of interaction, the latter is descriptive and can be used to denote a wider range of communication, including instances that are not generally viewed as legitimate parts of the repertoire of democratic practice. In drawing this distinction, I take my cue from a distinction made by Hajer (2005, p. 631). He takes discussion to be 'the empirical object of analysis' and sees deliberation as 'a good discussion (i.e., a particular normative quality discourse)'. My distinction is similar, although I introduce 'communication' instead of 'discussion' so as to explicitly allow for the inclusion of non-verbal aspects. Another important distinction is between the terms mentioned so far and the concept of 'discourse', which I use as a term reserved for something the analyst finds. To be more specific, by 'discourse' I mean 'an ensemble of notions, ideas, concepts, and categorizations through which meaning is ascribed to social and physical phenomena, and that is produced in and reproduces in turn an identifiable set of practices' (Hajer, 2009, p. 64).

The discussion above shows why power differences in wider society cannot be kept separate from the people and processes involved in making such an assessment about the content of statements being 'reasonable'. Consequently, relying on a supposedly universal 'reasonableness' for maintaining a 'proper' deliberation risks leaning heavily towards maintaining the status quo by sidelining contentious contributions. This touches on a central characteristic of the discussion about *Zwarte Piet*, which is disagreement about what arguments and what ways of voicing them are appropriate. For more insight on how to understand what is at stake in the Dutch debate about *Zwarte Piet*, I therefore turn to scholarship that, rather than theorising a 'power-free' deliberative arena, takes as central the complex relationship between communication norms and power differences, examining how this relates to the possibilities of challenging a societal status quo.

### Agonistic pluralism

The inevitability as well as potential fruitfulness of conflict takes centre stage in the scholarship of political theorists Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau (Butler, Laclau, & Laddaga, 2008; Laclau, 1995; Laclau & Mouffe, 2014; Mouffe, 1999, 2000, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2013). In their poststructuralist and post-Marxist work on agonistic pluralism, Mouffe and Laclau have developed the idea of a radical democracy in which contention plays an important role in constantly challenging identities and power relations, since social order is a product of discourses that change and require correction. While I draw from the scholarship of both these authors, Mouffe's emphasis on the importance of respect for 'particularistic interests' is a defining feature that makes her work especially relevant for the questions I want to explore (see for example Wenman, 2003 for a more thorough discussion of the differences between Mouffe's approach and that of Laclau).

Mouffe and Laclau's theory of discourse advances a poststructuralist approach in which the concepts of hegemony and antagonism are central. This approach recognises that, rather than an ultimate truth or essence of things existing 'out there', any such truth or worldview is created by contingent fixation of meaning in organised patterns. This does not mean there is *nothing but* discourse, but it does mean we can only know the world *in* discourse. For example, whether the spherical object I encounter is an object for artistic contemplation or a projectile depends on how I view it (Laclau & Mouffe, 1987, pp. 82–83; Torfing, 1999, p. 45). Even if my way of viewing the object does not alter its physical characteristics, I still can only know these characteristics in terms of the concepts, categories and other patterns of meaning with which I make sense of the world.

Since there is an infinite number of possible meanings, and possible configurations of these in specific discourses, the fixation of meaning – 'articulation' in the vocabulary of Mouffe and Laclau's scholarship – means there is always an excess of meaning that could potentially be mobilised. Society can be envisaged as

the product of a series of practices whose aim is to establish order in a context of contingency. ... Every order is the temporary and precarious articulation of contingent practices. Things could always have been otherwise and every order is predicated on the exclusion of other possibilities. (Laclau & Mouffe, 2014, p. 135)

This 'excess of potential meaning' also means there is always the possibility of challenge to the hegemonic status quo. In the words of Laclau and Mouffe, hegemony emerges in a field 'criss-crossed with antagonisms' (Laclau & Mouffe, 2014, p. 137; Mouffe, 2008) and thereby entails potential for change and contestation of the social order. This includes the articulation of social identity. In their poststructuralist update of the Gramscian concept of hegemony, Mouffe and Laclau no longer conceptualise identity as a bringing together of political forces around fundamental class interests constituted elsewhere. Instead, 'political-hegemonic articulations retroactively create the interests they claim to represent' (Laclau & Mouffe, 2014, p. xii). The articulation of social identities is thus part



and parcel of hegemony rather than prior to it. This means that identity, while remaining a central concept, ceases to be the starting point of politics. Rather, its centrality rests on its conceptualisation as inherently political: it is in political struggle that identities are constructed, reproduced or transformed (cf. Torfing, 1999, p. 82). Specifically, the articulation of identities takes place through the establishment of chains of equivalence and difference. This means that identities are constructed by a definition of characteristics that one shares with those who belong to the same group and that set one apart from others. All social identities are thus placed at an intersection between the logic of equivalence and the logic of difference, be it regarding gender, class, 'race', nationality or other constructions. However, overdetermination means that people may sometimes be faced with contradictory interpellations stressing different aspects of their identity, which may be at odds with each other. In the 'new social movements',<sup>4</sup> the reproduction and challenge of such categories and their meaning in relationship to inequality are objects of intense struggle. In this sense, my study of interactions in the debate about *Zwarte Piet* aims to contribute to the scholarship on these 'new social movements'.

Even if articulation results in discourses that appear merely natural and common-sense, their fundamental 'undecidability' is a central insight of Mouffe and Laclau's theory. The pre-established discourses within which objects, actions and persons make sense to us are not ahistorical or unmoveable. Their structuration is contingent and subject to changes over time under the influence of empirical events. However, the contingency of such fixation of meaning recedes to the background when the resulting pattern becomes hegemonic, being generally accepted as logical or instinctive. The status quo and the common sense that comes along with it are thus a 'result of sedimented hegemonic practices' (Mouffe, 2008). Hegemony is as such conceptualised as a discursive phenomenon: it is the organisation of consent in a context of contingency. People do not tend to go about their day existentially questioning all aspects of the organisation of their societies, daily life and interactions. In other words, while people's decisions and actions are taken within the context of an ultimate undecidability, they also take place within a context of taken-for-granted practices, institutions and ideas: within a context of hegemony. Thus, while challenge to this hegemony is possible, it is also 'conditional upon sedimented institutional structures that possess a certain strategic selectivity' (Torfing, 1999, p. 154). This observation highlights the element of path dependency that provides a relative stability within the wider context of contingency.

Rather than being formalised in clearly defined sets of rules, this reproduction of

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4 The term 'new social movements' is used in scholarship seeking to explain the plethora of new movements that have come up since the mid 1960s and that focus on issues related to human rights and social change rather than having more narrow, economically defined goals. Examples include the women's movement, the environmental movement, the Occupy movement and the Black Lives Matter movement.

power through habits or conventions can easily appear as commonplace or innate: the 'natural' way of doing things. In fact, when the mechanisms reproducing the status quo are so routine that they do not require actors to consciously follow them, this is what lends them force. They provide yardsticks for measuring appropriateness of behaviour while these yardsticks appear so natural and common-sense that the measuring can remain implicit. This is what Foucault (1977) referred to as the 'microphysics of power'. The microphysics concept refers to power in its 'capillary forms in everyday practices and habits' (Oksala, 2015, p. 475). For instance, the convention of distinguishing between married and unmarried women by addressing them with 'Miss' or 'Mrs', while men are simply addressed as 'Mr', establishes marital status as a relevant issue when referring to women, but not men. While this is just one example, all social practices reproduce or modify common ascriptions of meaning. These articulations constitute the social in ways that exclude other possibilities. All our actions are thus contingent articulations with an inherently political character. This implies a broadening of the category of 'political' from the usual, narrower focus on formal politics, such as elections and government debates. Insisting on the fundamental contingency or undecidability means that relatively routine actions and decisions, too, happen within this context of structural undecidability. A consequence of this is that an element of 'the political' can be found even in what, at first sight, appear to be the rule-governed decisions and actions of routine social life. It is thus in the political sphere in a broad sense, including its overlaps with formal politics, that the existence of an excess of meaning provides an opportunity for challenging the status quo by questioning hegemonic articulations. As such, Mouffe and Laclau's insistence on the element of undecidability, and therefore the political nature of any interaction, makes an insightful connection between Gramscian attention to the macro level of institutions and societies on the one hand, and Foucauldian insights about the micro level of reproduction of power in everyday practices on the other (Kreps, 2016b, p. 2, see also 2016a).

If the first key concept of Mouffe's and Laclau's work is hegemony, the second one is antagonism. While these authors' view of hegemony highlights the productive face of power, it still implies the involvement of force and repression. Hegemonic articulation involves the negation of alternative meanings and options, as well as negation of those whose identity depends on them. This means all differences between the excluded discursive elements that form the 'constitutive outside' are collapsed into the only relevant one: the threat they pose to the discourse in question. The constitutive outside is thus defined merely by what it is not. This results in social antagonism, the tension created by the fixation of meaning in the context of fundamental undecidability. In the words of Mouffe (1994, p. 107),

once we have understood that every identity is relational and that the affirmation of a difference is a precondition for the existence of any identity (i.e. the perception of something 'other' than it which will constitute its 'exterior'), then we can begin to understand why such a relationship may always become a terrain for antagonism. Hegemony necessarily involves such antagonism, since the contingent and partial fixation of meaning implies that some discursive elements remain excluded from the hegemonic articulation. Mouffe and Laclau therefore call attention away from the consensus-seeking aspects of deliberation, instead exploring the tension between the 'ensemble of practices and institutions whose aim is to organise human coexistence' in the status quo and the surrounding 'terrain of conflictuality' that might yield challenges to that status quo (Mouffe, 2013, p. xii). In their terms, the former is 'politics', contrasted with the latter 'ontological dimension of agonism' known as 'the political' (Mouffe, 2013, p. xii). For this reason, they propose a focus on agonistic political activity, as this can draw attention to issues and processes that hitherto have remained hidden, and transform what formerly seemed 'noise' (Rancière, 1999) into an intelligible discourse. This also unveils the contingency of the otherwise seemingly unmoveable order. Hence, it is in the details of situated practices that the hegemonic order is reproduced, but also that people can capitalise on the inherently polysemous nature of communication in order to shift meanings. Laclau and Mouffe thus insist on the fundamentally political character of any articulation and thus the inevitability of contention. This does not frame the aim of democratic institutions as the eradication of power or an establishment of rational consensus, nor does it mean that the pluralism envisioned by Mouffe and Laclau is unlimited. In fact, 'any reflexion on modern democratic citizenship must recognize the limits of pluralism. ... all differences cannot be accepted' (Mouffe, 1992, pp. 11–13). The reason for this is that not all articulations are simultaneously possible. More specifically, there is a tension between the values of equality and liberty that cannot be resolved in any neutral or non-political way. Since contention is inevitable, the aim is to create conditions within which we can envisage our necessary struggle not as one of hostility against enemies to be destroyed, but as one between adversaries to be opposed. In the words of Mouffe (1994, p. 106): 'the prime task of democratic politics is not to eliminate passions, nor to relegate them to the private sphere in order to render rational consensus possible, but to mobilize these passions, and give them a democratic outlet'. As adversaries, we share a common allegiance to the liberal-democratic principles of liberty and equality. However, the fundamental tension between principles of liberty and of equality also means that adversaries may disagree about their interpretation.

I draw on Mouffe and Laclau's vital insights on antagonism, hegemony and challenge of the status quo for my research on the debate about *Zwarte Piet*. However, this scholarship has a metatheoretical character: its concepts and arguments are set at a high level of abstraction. This means they are not suited for unmediated application

to empirical studies exploring how issues of power and inequality in debates play out in practice, especially when it comes to the minutiae of interactions (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002; Torfing, 1999, pp. 185–241). A next step is needed in order to bring Mouffe and Laclau's insights to bear on detailed empirical analysis of interactions in the 'actually existing' Dutch public sphere. In the remainder of this chapter, I therefore develop a framework that enables me to examine how issues of power, identity and inequality – so meticulously developed by Mouffe and Laclau conceptually – play out in the details of actual interactions. In constructing this framework, I take a multiperspectival approach, meaning I draw from various social scientific concepts and approaches, identifying the insights that each can provide in the issues I want to examine, and adjusting the approaches according to these considerations (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 4). In this way, I aim to respond to the call, voiced by many democracy scholars, 'to be more inductive and less deductive, and to attend to the way that democracy is actually performed rather than be driven entirely by ideal models' (Parkinson, 2012, p. 9).

## 2.2 Understanding power inequalities in communication: an analytical toolbox

The central puzzle I want to address is what is at stake in the Dutch debate about *Zwarte Piet*, which involves heated disagreement not only about *Zwarte Piet* as a (non-) issue in relation to racism, but also about what arguments and what ways of voicing them are acceptable – the norms of interaction. Placing this against the background of Mouffe and Laclau's insights about hegemony and antagonism directs attention to the ways in which meaning is fixed in order to create the identities and notions within which arguments about *Zwarte Piet* make sense and come across as appropriate. Specifically, it calls attention to the articulations that result in the establishment of interaction norms as legitimate and common-sense, and points to a need for deconstruction of the notions that make up the clashing ideas about *Zwarte Piet*. Much valuable poststructuralist discourse analytical research has produced insight in the reproduction of hegemonic discourses, for example the reproduction of societal racism (I. Fairclough & Fairclough, 2011; Van Dijk, 1987; Wodak & Matouschek, 1993). However, taking my cue from Mouffe and Laclau's emphasis on the contingent nature of hegemony, and the way it is 'criss-crossed with antagonism', I choose to move my focus away from the broader thrust of hegemonic structures when it comes to the debate about *Zwarte Piet*. Rather, I am interested in examining how power and challenges to it are manifested at the micro level of interactions. Emphasising the contingent nature of articulations does not mean an assumption that any small disruption by itself necessarily causes a major structural change. However, it does point to the need for an approach that is attentive to the consequences of smaller hitches and shifts in the details of interactions, both in terms of what people do and accomplish in their discussions about *Zwarte Piet*, and in terms of how this relates to structural and institutional aspects of the context in which their interactions take place. A crucial element of this approach is an assessment as to what interactions are most likely to yield useful knowledge regarding these issues.

### Where to look? Critical moments and counterpublics

In their theorisation of the way that hegemony can be challenged, Laclau and Mouffe (2014, p. 122) use Gramsci's concept of 'organic crisis' to describe a condition where social and political identities become precarious and 'as a result there is a proliferation of floating elements available for hegemonic constitution' (Rustin, 1988, p. 161). A way of making these general assumptions about the relations between discourse and power more tangible and suited for social scientific research on interactions around *Zwarte Piet* in the 'actually existing' Dutch public sphere is by studying 'crisis points'

(Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 125) as a window into understanding the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in public debate. Situations in which well-known patterns of interaction are deranged are especially relevant in this regard. When an interaction does not unfold in the way people expect, this disruption of the expected flow creates a situation in which it is temporarily unclear how the situation is to be understood, and what should happen next. This creates the need for the actors in that situation to work towards re-establishing a logical flow. In such moments, the lack of clarity on what rules apply means an opportunity to renegotiate these. Disruptions therefore merit attention; they provide a chance to examine the implicit rules that structure the interaction and ordinarily remain tacit. For the analyst, such a moment thus constitutes an opportunity to examine competing notions of appropriateness: those governing the status quo, and the emerging alternatives.

I call the openness caused by the disruption a 'critical moment'. Critical moments have been theorised as turning points in which a significant shift takes place in the flow or direction of the events at hand (Donohue, 2004). However, I use this notion in a slightly different way, since I do not assume *a priori* that such a shift takes place unequivocally. In fact, in line with authors such as G.M. Green and Wheeler (2004) and Leary (2004), my interest lies in the ways various actors may try and re-establish some kind of order. I leave open the possibility that such attempts of different actors to create an order may be partial or even contradictory. The concept of 'critical moment' echoes Laclau and Mouffe's 'organic crisis' in the sense that it refers to a situation in which meanings that had seemed stable now appear precarious. Laclau and Mouffe refer to this seeming stability of the status quo as 'hegemony'. Their use of this concept connects it to wide-ranging societal structures of meaning and power across various institutions. As such, it is too broad to be used in my focus on specific interactions. For this reason, I use 'dominance'<sup>5</sup> to refer to the interaction norms structuring a situation that appear stable and common-sense until a shift occurs in a critical moment. When previously dominant norms are called into question, I denote them by using terms that are even less absolute, such as 'main', 'prevailing' or 'central'.

This focus on critical moments highlights the importance of understanding in detail what happens during such moments; how notions of appropriate communication are reproduced and challenged; and how this is linked with the bringing across of points of view as authoritative and legitimate. As discussed earlier, the insight that hegemony is 'criss-crossed with antagonism' and that all articulations are fundamentally unstable makes it clear that even seemingly routine decisions and actions can contain moments of openness allowing for change and contestation of

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5 Here, I use 'dominant' in its meaning of 'predominant, reigning', as opposed to Mouffe and Laclau's (2014, p. 138) use of the term in the sense of 'illegitimate' in their concept of 'relations of domination'.

the social order (Butler, 1997, 2010; Chadderton, 2013; Du Gay, 2010; Laclau & Mouffe, 2014). It is common for minor hitches to occur in interactions, such as arriving late to a meeting, forgetting an acquaintance's name or mishearing what someone just said. In most cases, these hitches are smoothed over relatively easily. Most people are quite skilled in finding the right words and non-verbal cues to iron out such small glitches by quickly picking up the expected rhythm of the interaction again. However, the opportunities for tracing the contestation of dominant norms can be enhanced by following Robert Asen's (2000, p. 427) call to focus on 'episodes of controversy, debate and contestation' and, additionally, by seeking out interactions that key observers and participants characterise as constituting a disruption.

How should we identify those who challenge hegemonic meanings in debate? Asen contends that this is best studied by paying attention to recognition and articulation of exclusion in discourse norms and practices: 'these norms link up with similarly reified, already established notions of the common good to function as complementary exclusionary mechanisms that restrict discursive engagement and undermine the interests of oppressed groups' (Asen, 2000, p. 425). An important concept in this regard is the idea of 'counterpublics', which was developed in a critical reading of Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, notably by Nancy Fraser (1990). Following up on this concept, Asen argues that the 'counter' in counterpublics should not be sought in persons, topics or places, but rather in the discursive quality of a public. In order to understand how issues of exclusion play out through societal norms for deliberation, it is important to look at the *ways* people contribute to an interaction rather than stopping short after noting people's membership to some group. Asen's aim is to

orient scholarship to the communicative qualities of counterpublics, to the articulation of alternative standing in setting oneself and one's associates against another. Proceeding in this manner draws critical attention to emergent collectives constituted neither necessarily nor exclusively by actually or potentially excluded individuals, but formed by participants who recognize exclusions in wider public spheres and resolve to join together to overcome these exclusions. (Asen, 2000, p. 444)

Recognising that the 'counter' in counterpublics should be sought in the heteronomous discursive quality of a public rather than in specific people does not mean that identity categories, such as 'Dutch', 'Black' or 'Jew', cannot carry significant weight. Rather, it means that analysis of interactions should focus on alternative norms and practices of communication, and how these enable the recognition and articulation of exclusion. This means that references to identity categories such as the ones mentioned should be examined as part of these processes of recognition and articulation of identity and exclusion. Furthermore, if one views persons or groups as belonging to a stable, bounded (counter)public, one risks losing sight of ways in which

relationships between persons and between publics may shift. This may result in an overly simplistic binary of public against counterpublic. In Asen's words:

The movement toward multiplicity in public sphere theory belies such boundaries. Theorists and critics would do well to seek out relations among publics, counterpublics, and spheres as advocates in the 'actually existing' public sphere construct these relationships through discursive engagement. (Asen, 2000, pp. 444–445)

Having established the importance of an analytical focus on critical moments and counterpublics, a further analytical framework is needed to carry out the analysis of this type of moments and interactions. To this end, I have developed the framework of interaction logic.

### **A framework for analysis: interaction logic**

The insights discussed above point to the importance of getting into view the often implicit rules and assumptions structuring social interactions. My aim is to make this interaction logic visible by drawing out the mechanisms of this reproduction or challenge of power. My framework for analysis combines an interactionist focus on how people's discourse is oriented towards social action in specific contexts with a poststructuralist interest in the ways in which these discourses construct subjects and objects. It addresses how people discursively construct their and others' identities in specific settings by behaving in ways that fit expected patterns of behaviour. This approach builds on the insights of the linguist John Austin on speech acts, showing how people 'do things with words' (Austin, 1962). In his famous collection of lectures, Austin explored ways to understand communication beyond the then standard approach in philosophy of language. This view assigned language a 'neutral' role as a tool with which the individual could describe facts to communicate with others. Austin was interested in the ways in which utterances go beyond stating facts, and actually constitute actions. He showed how, by talking, a speaker simultaneously accomplishes three types of things: utter a sentence with a specific meaning, utter it with a particular force, and bring about a certain effect. In his terminology, these would be locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary aspects of the utterance, respectively. Austin initially focused on a specific subcategory of perlocutionary acts, the 'performatives'. These are 'speech acts' in which language explicitly accomplishes an action, such as promising or baptising. However, he later developed an understanding that all utterances in some way 'do' something beyond simply describing something 'out there'. Even a very simple statement that 'the sky is blue' necessarily means *performing the act* of stating. Additionally, even stating something seemingly obvious means calling attention to *that* obvious thing, and not another. It suggests a specific focus and is in that sense not 'neutral'. Furthermore, Austin explored what conditions need to be fulfilled in order for the words to accomplish their intended effect – in his terminology, for the speech act to



be *felicitous*.<sup>6</sup> In order to explain the felicitousness of speech acts, Austin examined how they fit 'accepted conventional procedures'. He described four aspects of such procedures: they include the uttering of certain *words* by certain *people* in certain *circumstances*, geared towards a certain *effect*. The success of the procedure, or its 'felicity', depends on whether it is executed correctly: are the persons and circumstances appropriate for the procedure, is the procedure executed correctly and completely, and do the participants have the appropriate thoughts, feelings and intentions? When any of those questions are answered in the negative, the speech act is infelicitous. This can happen in two ways. In case of a *misfire*, there is a hitch or mistake, as when an utterance is not heard by the person it was directed at. In case of an *abuse*, one deliberately uses an utterance in an inappropriate way, such as by placing a bet with an animal. With these insights, Austin's scholarship offered a highly social view of language. He showed that using language necessarily means performing actions, thereby having an effect upon the world and upon oneself as part of that world. It provides an important stepping stone for analysing language as not merely mirroring our society and culture back to us, but as 'actually doing things, as supplying tools and weapons, resources that benefit or harm' (McConnell-Ginet, 2012, p. 741). Sociologists and sociolinguists have since built on these insights by analysing how the words and symbolism that are commonly used shape the way people understand issues ranging from drunk driving policy (Gusfield, 1981) to poverty and inequality (Edelman, 1977). Importantly, whereas Austin assumed actors who shared a familiarity with the norms relevant to the situation, other authors have since called attention to the fact that people who are interacting with one another may be unsure about this, or employ different notions of the situation they find themselves in and the behaviour that would be appropriate (Laws, 2001). This insight underscores the importance of the step prior to recognising felicitous or infelicitous performance: establishing the meaning of the situation at hand.

My research is indebted to this scholarship. Specifically, my concept of interaction logic displays some similarities to Austin's 'conventional procedure'. However, I am interested in understanding the performance of dissent, and thus focus on what happens when felicity conditions are not fulfilled and the flow of an interaction is disrupted. Starting from the assumption that hegemony exists through its contingent reproduction in situated practices, the framework of interaction logic directs attention to the concrete ways this happens. In order to allow for a detailed performative analysis of communication, it proposes an analytical separation of an interaction into four interrelated aspects. A smoothly run interaction involves combining the appropriate

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6 An alternative, although not widely shared, view is that Austin has been misunderstood and never intended to produce a theory of speech acts (Millgram, 2015). Regardless of how one stands in this debate though, Austin's writings on felicity and the ways in which speech is action still offer useful insights and concepts, and form the basis of much subsequent scholarship.

(types of) communication, with the appropriate (types of) people, in the appropriate (types of) circumstances, towards the appropriate (types of) effect. By focusing on these four aspects, it is possible to examine the behaviour of the different actors as proposals about the interaction norms and practices to be applied to the situation at hand. In the next sections, I turn to scholarship rooted in conversation analysis, ethnomethodology and dramaturgical approaches, which provide me with the conceptual tools needed for empirical analysis of the four aspects of an interaction logic.

### ***Analysing performances***

Taking a poststructuralist approach to discourse means rejecting ‘the distinction between the discursive and the non-discursive, and insist on the interweaving of the semantic aspects of language with the pragmatic aspects of actions, movements and objects’ (Torfing, 1999, p. 94). Since I am interested in both bringing into focus the features of normative communication that are so commonplace that they may not leap to the eye, as well as examining non-normative communication, I want to avoid an a priori exclusion of certain types of communication. In fact, authors who choose to focus narrowly on language usually grant that non-verbal aspects of communication are of importance as well, and there is a rich body of literature by scholars examining the performative dimension of communication (Butler, 2010; Goff, Thomas, & Jackson, 2008; Goffman, 1974). As part of the ‘cultural turn’ of the 1990s in social movement studies, performative approaches have been applied in analyses of the links between culture and political protest (Fuentes, 2015; Juris, 2014). I also make use of a broad definition of symbolic communication, using ‘performance’ to refer to a variety of ways in which people communicate to others, including non-verbal communication such as the type of clothing people wear, their facial expressions or how they move through a space. Specifically, I draw inspiration from the work of Alexander, who has developed a model for analysis of social action as cultural performance (Alexander, 2004, 2006, 2011; Alexander, Giesten, & Mast, 2006). In this model, performance is understood as ‘the social process by which actors, individually or in concert, display for others the meaning of their social situations’ (Alexander, 2004, p. 529). What is crucial in this approach is not the actors’ conscious or unconscious beliefs or intentions, to which the researcher is agnostic (cf. Potter, Edwards, & Wetherell, 1993, p. 387). Rather, what is crucial is whether the performance comes across as ‘true’, as authentic and plausible. Incidentally, the parallel with Austin’s concept of ‘felicity’ is not a coincidence, as he is one of Alexander’s sources of inspiration (Alexander, 2004). Austin paid close attention to the ‘circumstances’ or interactional context of a speech act. However, the felicity of a performance depends on more than the interaction norms that are specific to the ‘circumstances’ at hand, to use Austin’s terms. Whether and to whom a procedure makes sense depends on the wider cultural background in which it is embedded. As such, whether an actor’s performance is received as ‘true’ depends on how

it connects with systems of collective representation. In relation to this, Alexander uses the concept of 'scripts', the 'action oriented subset of background understandings', guiding actors towards the actions they are to take, given assumptions about the social meaning of the situation at hand. Thus, example of scripts might be those structuring a 'wedding ceremony', 'political rally' or 'buying a loaf of bread at the bakery'. Of course, the word 'script' is taken from the theatrical world and is used metaphorically by Alexander. Whereas the actors in a play know what script they are to follow, the 'actors' outside the theatre infer how they should act from clues in their surroundings, including the behaviour of the other actors. Therefore, in real life, the meaning of a situation, and people's appraisal of what is appropriate behaviour within that situation, can shift from moment to moment, often in subtle ways and sometimes more dramatically. From this it follows that the analytically distinct categories of pragmatics and semantics are in fact interrelated: the meaning of words, and how they are used, cannot be understood separately. This insight shows why analysing performance and possibilities for challenging the status quo implies more than a narrow Austinian focus on 'compliance with a procedure', as people may have different understandings of what cultural background is relevant to an interaction. Highlighting a cultural background text that is different from the dominant one may therefore result in a shift in the meaning that people assign to the situation at hand. This potential multiplicity of meaning is why I choose not to borrow directly from the theatrical vocabulary by using 'role' or 'script' to refer to the prestructuring assumptions that shape felicity conditions, thus enabling or limiting communication options. I prefer to use the concepts of positioning, genre and repertoires, which imply a less static approach. Below, I discuss these concepts in more detail.

People may invoke background texts in very explicit ways, such as by mentioning the date and place of an earlier occurrence that they discursively connect to the interaction at hand. However, such intertextuality usually takes less explicit forms, such as merely referencing or echoing aspects of other situations or identities (N. Fairclough, 1992; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 151; Worton & Still Worton, 1991). An analysis of the more subtle ways in which 'all communicative events draw on earlier events' (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 73) demands of the researcher to have recourse to knowledge of potentially relevant terms, events and concepts in order to read 'analytically "across" the experienced reality of the situation under study' (Yanow, 2006b, p. 80).

### ***Analysing actors' positioning***

Positioning is the process in which actors assert who they are and how, as a consequence, they and the people they interact with can and should behave. It is important as a mechanism that helps produce social order, since it provides cues for acceptable behaviour based on shared patterns of expectation. Positioning theory has therefore been put forward as a promising avenue to explore the connections between micro and macro

level processes (Harré & Van Langenhove, 1999; Zelle, 2009). It is a strand of discursive psychology, the approach to communication that starts with studying psychological phenomena as things that are constructed, attended to and understood in interaction. The approach aims at drawing out the normative frames within which people carry on their lives: the implicit standards of correctness they apply to their behaviour (Harré, Moghaddam, Cairnie, Rothbart, & Sabat, 2009). Within this framework, the word 'position' is used to signify a cluster of beliefs about how rights and duties are distributed in a particular interaction. Actors' positions are formed by their rights and duties to use what Harré and colleagues (Harré et al., 2009, p. 8) call 'the available and relevant discursive tools'. For example, if someone is positioned as a dependent, their cry of pain is likely interpreted as a plea for help. But, if the person is positioned as dominant, that same cry might be heard as a protest or reprimand (Harré & Van Langenhove, 1999). When people undertake positioning acts, this implies they claim to be endowed with the right or even the duty to assign or ascribe positions to others. For example, if someone presents themselves as 'the police officer', it follows that they will have the right to position another person as 'the detainee'. This means that there are higher and lower order positionings. First order positioning concerns the initial assignment or staking out of a position, roughly sketched in terms of, for example, character traits or a label such as 'police officer', 'witness' or 'teacher'. Second order positioning is the more stable phase in which positions are acknowledged and acted upon. Third order positioning refers to the subsequent responses that an actor receives, which reinforce the position they have assumed. For example, if I am talked about by others as a 'victim' in a certain situation, this is first order positioning. If I act in accordance with this label, this is second order positioning. Third order positioning can be observed when others act in accordance with the position I have assumed, for example by extending help. Thus, what someone can intelligibly say or do in a certain situation depends on the position they have in that situation. The reverse is true as well: what position a person acquires depends upon how they behave. In the words of Harré and Van Langenhove (2010, p. 108): 'the social force of an action and the position of the actor and interactors mutually determine one another'. In contrast to analysis of interaction in terms of concepts such as roles, the concept of positioning implies a sensitivity to the fact that a reigning order always contains an element of instability. As positions are momentary and contingent upon context, or, as Harré and Van Langenhove (1999, p. 2, p. 39) phrase it, 'ephemeral', any positioning act can be challenged. This means that a person, who is positioned in a certain way by others within an interaction, may challenge this state of affairs by responding with counterpositioning.

Using the concept of positioning to analyse who participates in an interaction also brings the situatedness of that interaction into view. After all, the catalogue of positions that exist here and now will not necessarily be found at other places and

times. In so far as the content of a position is defined in terms of rights, duties and obligations of speaking with respect to the social forces of what can be said, and these 'moral' properties are locally and momentarily specified, positions will be unstable in content as well. (Van Langenhove & Harré, 1999, p. 29)

These insights thus draw attention to the ways micro level interactions are rooted in, and made possible by, wider societal structures. As Potter and Wetherell (1987, pp. 28–29) put it:

[w]hen language is conceptualized as a form of action performed in discourse between individuals with different goals we are forced to take the social context into account, likewise, with the notion that a web of felicity conditions or a system of distinctions is required for language to be used meaningfully. These things are not the property or creation of individual persons but are of necessity shared across collectivities.

Whether and to whom a positioning act makes sense thus depends on the cultural background in which it is embedded. This insight shows why analysing performance and its felicity implies more than a focus on a narrowly understood Austinian 'compliance with a procedure', as there may be different understandings of what cultural background is relevant to an interaction – both between individuals and over time. Thus 'what it is that has been said evolves and changes as the conversation develops' (Davies & Harré, 1999, p. 34) and static or neutral descriptions of the past should be abandoned in favour of a hermeneutical *Wirkungsgeschichte* (Gadamer, 1989), which understands history as 'a stream in which we move and participate, in every act of understanding' (Palmer, 1969, p. 117).

### **Relating situations and people to categories: repertoires, settings and genre**

We expect people's communication to follow patterns. Of course, these patterns may vary from person to person and between situations. However, such variation tends to fall within certain parameters, which lends coherence and predictability to social situations and makes it possible for us to anticipate what might happen. Unconventional changes to the 'gestures, tone, type of vocabulary, figures of speech or other aspects' (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 149) of people's communication tends to cause confusion or upheaval. Such expected patterns can be understood and studied through the concept of interpretive repertoires. This concept was developed by scholars in discourse analysis, notably Margaret Wetherell and Jonathan Potter, whose emphasis is on discourse as social practice, on the context of use and thus on the act of discursive instantiation. This work departs from the poststructuralist insight that we cannot know things *through* language: we can only know them *in* language (Wetherell & Potter, 1992, p. 63). Their focus is on the ways in which the sense of language is derived from its situated use rather than its abstract meaning. Therefore, rather than trying to label statements as either true or false, and 'confusing the study of ideology with the study of false ideas' (Wetherell & Potter, 1992, p. 58), this scholarship aims analysis at what language *does* in interactions.

For instance, this translates to analysis of legitimation as a process, happening through language, rather than focusing on legitimacy as a result.

The scholarship addressing interpretive repertoires is situated broadly in the field of discourse analysis. More specifically, it draws on work in the tradition of ethnomethodology and conversation analysis, both research traditions that emphasise that talking is a category of action that helps construct social worlds. As such, this approach differs from studies that focus on ‘speech acts’ in the more narrow sense, and from work on ‘discourse processes’ such as story grammars. Adapting Potter and Wetherell’s (1987, p. 149) definition to explicitly include a wide range of communicative features, I define interpretive repertoires as ‘recurrently used systems of terms, gestures, tone, type of vocabulary, figures of speech or other aspects of people’s verbal or non-verbal communication used for characterising and evaluating actions, events and other phenomena’. Study of such repertoires allows uncovering what language *does* in interactions. It thus allows a view into the processes through which claims ‘become communicated as “fact” and empowered as “truth”’ (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 34; Wetherell & Potter, 1992, p. 59).

In light of the insights discussed above about our worlds existing *in* language, rather than being knowable *through* language, the concept of performance should not be taken to imply that dramaturgy is an apt metaphor for democracy; rather, it is a tool to examine how interactions really do unfold in dramaturgical fashion (Hajer, 2009; Hajer & Versteeg, 2005; Parkinson, 2012). This also directs attention to the physical and social context in which such an interaction takes place, and how these may limit, as well as enable, certain types of performance. Following Hajer (2009, p. 67), I will use the word ‘setting’ to refer to ‘the physical and organisational situation in which the interaction takes place, including the artefacts that are brought to or found in the situation’. Part of what it means to describe people’s actions in terms of ‘performance’ is to trace the relationship between people’s behaviour and the situation in which they find themselves. As Hajer (2009, p. 54) puts it: ‘To employ terms like “enactment” or “performing” means to constantly try to relate categories to situations and situations to categories’. Some passers-by who observe a large gathering of people shouting slogans might construe it as an ‘illegal riot’, others as a ‘political rally’. In other words, the exact meaning of the situation is not predetermined, and in order to understand the interaction and people’s positioning within it, it is crucial to consider what type or category of event is invoked by the actors. This is what Wodak and Reisigl (2001, p. 36) refer to as ‘genre analysis’:

it is recommended that a very general ‘genre analysis’ of the genres involved in a discourse precedes the detailed analyses of the selected, concrete linguistic tokens, for example, texts. In order to be able to identify the idiosyncratic peculiarities of a specific singular text, one has to know something about the general features and structures of the semiotic type, that is to say, of the institutionalised, codified pattern of linguistic (inter)action to which the concrete text belongs.

While these authors focus on language, their insights about speech and genre can be usefully applied to a wider range of symbolic communication.

Of course, actors do not start from scratch when they construct such categories. For example, a situation such as a leaders' debate during an election campaign already carries some meaning, allowing people a basis for communication. However, the exact meaning of the event is 'being constructed right there in the context of the interaction, and that serves some kind of purpose' (Horton-Salway, 2001, p. 179). To continue with the example of a leaders' debate: those positioned as 'audience members' could make use of any of a range of very different behaviours, such as applauding or booing different speakers, which infuses the situation with very different flavours. The different behaviours also imply a movement towards different outcomes, such as a specific candidate winning elections, or an unpopular proposal being taken off the table. This is how a focus on setting and genre, which informs the aspect of the interaction logic pertaining to 'appropriate circumstances', ties in with the fourth aspect of an interaction logic. This aspect concerns the goal that the interaction should be geared towards.

When people interact, their communication can be analysed as being an enactment of broader ideas about what course of events the interaction is part of, including the results the interaction should yield. Inquiry into communication through such 'stories' has been developed in the context of narrative analysis more broadly, which uses a variety of texts including interviews, journals, photos and more as units of analysis to investigate the way people make sense of complex experiences by understanding them within story structures (Bruner, 1991; Gubrium & Holstein, 1998; Shenhav, 2004, 2006, 2009). Using a basic, 'thin' definition, narrative refers to 'the representation of at least two real or fictive events or situations in a time sequence, neither of which presupposes or entails the other' (Prince in Shenhav, 2005, p. 79). It consists of three components, namely the 'story' involving two or more connected events, the communication process known as 'narration' and the spoken, written or otherwise communicated discourse known as 'text' (Shenhav, 2005). Thus, the 'story' tells us how events are related to each other. These 'stories' often follow customary structures, such as that of the hero overcoming a foe. Analytically disentangling such stories from the broader process of narration allows for zooming in on the fourth aspect of the interaction logic, the *goal* of an interaction (Gubrium & Holstein, 1998, p. 165).

## 2.3 Conclusion: tracing interaction logics in the debate about *Zwarte Piet*

The central question guiding my research is: *How are prevailing norms of public discussion challenged around Zwarte Piet, and what are differences across institutional settings and over time?* This question touches on a crucial tension. Counterpublics attempting to challenge dominant meanings cannot do this within an ‘ideal speech situation’ from which inequalities are bracketed. After all, the networks of meaning that make up our social worlds extend into the contexts in which interactions between counterpublics and dominant groups take place, resulting in an uneven playing field. Importantly, the reproduction of unequal power relations is not dependent on actors’ conscious decisions to commit explicit acts of repression. Rather, commonplace and taken-for-granted concepts and practices form the ‘micro mechanisms’ through which power is reproduced. That these micro mechanisms do not stand out is exactly what makes them effective. However, the insight that any hegemony is ‘criss-crossed with antagonisms’ points to the possibility to seize upon the polysemous character of communication to challenge and shift meaning. This dissertation focuses on the often seemingly insignificant details of interactions, aiming to trace what micro mechanisms are at work in the reproduction of the dominant order in the debate about *Zwarte Piet*, and what happens when this order is challenged. A situation can be infused with an alternative meaning by highlighting or building upon a specific selection of the myriad ways in which it echoes aspects of previous communicative events. For example, actors can mobilise a certain selection of a variety of possible meanings by interpellating a specific aspect of their or other people’s identity. In order to unveil how struggles over dominant and alternative ways of seeing things play out in the ‘actually existing’ Dutch public sphere, I investigate how meaning is negotiated in interactions in which the figure of *Zwarte Piet* is debated. Of course, the public debate about *Zwarte Piet* most noticeably concerns questions such as whether aspects of the figure can legitimately be considered offensive, and what changes to the figure might be made. This dissertation explores how these concerns link up with broader notions about what type of participation in these debates is appropriate, and for whom. Through a detailed analysis of interactions using the framework of interaction logic, I parse out how, in a timeframe spanning four years and within different institutional contexts, notions of appropriate behaviour are negotiated in concrete interactions. In doing so, I trace how these notions enable or constrain the construction of *Zwarte Piet* as a (non-)issue in relationship to racism. In this way, I use empirically rich and contextualised information on this vital debate in Dutch society to examine how struggles around power and meaning manifest themselves in the minute details of interactions, and what mechanisms are at play in the restoration of order when the reigning interaction norms



are disrupted. This opens up a window to examine how loaded notions such as racism, belonging, traditions and history are negotiated in practice, and with what consequences.

In the previous pages, I have outlined my approach to engaging with this puzzle. To recap, I pursue a multiperspectival approach (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 4) by combining Mouffe and Laclau's understanding of the role of conflict in democracy with more applied insights and methods from the research traditions of ethnomethodology, conversation analysis and dramaturgical analysis to fill my conceptual toolbox. With my research, I aim to contribute to filling a gap that Marzano (2012, p. 76) has pointed to, between conflict theories and methods focusing on empirical analysis at the interaction level. Marzano notes that, generally,

scholars belonging to the European Marxian and Weberian traditions have ... centred their analytical interests on the theme of conflict and power, but they have largely studied them ... using the tools of macro-analysis and historical sociology, and therefore in more abstract and general terms. For their part, interactionists and ethnographers, especially American, have closely and efficaciously studied society at the elementary level of micro-interactions and everyday life; but they have often (with some exceptions) underestimated the weight and importance of conflicts and power. (Marzano, 2012, p. 76)

Critical moments form my analytical entry point into understanding the dynamics of contention in the *Zwarte Piet* debate. Such moments, in which the expected flow of an interaction is disrupted, can offer a view on interaction norms that otherwise remain below the surface. Disruptions create confusion about how the interaction will and should unfold, creating the need for the actors in the situation to work towards re-establishing a flow to the situation that makes sense to them. In such critical moments, the lack of clarity on what rules apply implies an opportunity to renegotiate these. For the analyst, such a moment thus constitutes an opportunity for the examination of competing notions of appropriateness: those governing the status quo, and the emerging alternatives. Furthermore, I situate my approach to studying communication within the field of discourse analysis. More specifically, it draws on work in the tradition of ethnomethodology and conversation analysis. I am most interested in the 'action orientation' of discourse, meaning the ways in which the sense of language is derived from its situated use, rather than its abstract meaning. This means that I am not concerned with asserting the truth value of statements, but with understanding what social worlds are created through language. Looking at how people position themselves by using different repertoires in the performance of democracy means exploring the tension between people's agency and the constraining structures within which this agency is exercised. Attention to cultural background texts means bringing into view both the positive (communication-enabling) and the negative (limiting) impact of the prestructuring assumptions that shape felicity conditions, and making them an explicit object of my analysis. After all, it is in the details of situated practices of language-in-

action that the hegemonic order is reproduced, but also that people capitalise on the inherently polysemous nature of communication to shift meanings. Communicating a stance in a way that is intelligible and legitimate within the status quo while, at the same time, challenging that status quo is a conundrum. The debate about *Zwarte Piet* provides an excellent opportunity to explore how this type of conundrum plays out within the context of debates about racism in contemporary Dutch society. This is why I have chosen to study the dynamics of exclusion in concrete interactions in which counterpublics attempt to challenge *Zwarte Piet*.

To review the framework of interaction logic with its four aspects, please see Figure 1 on the next page. Leading scholars in both political theory and empirical research conclude that a vibrant democracy ‘requires more than open and vigorous talk; it requires also a willingness to scrutinize and possibly alter the norms of appropriate talk’ (Polletta & Lee, 2006, p. 720). Using the framework of interaction logic, I intend to examine how people use, contest or negotiate such norms in concrete instances in the debate about *Zwarte Piet*.

Figure 1. Interaction logic framework

Aspect of the interaction logic	Main concepts	What to look out for empirically
Who should participate?	A <b>position</b> is a cluster of rights and duties to use the available and relevant discursive tools in a particular interaction. The distribution of rights and duties, and therefore positions, is not static but can be defined and negotiated in the interaction. <sup>7</sup>	Actors’ statements about their and others’ rights and duties, for example by using terms, clothing or gestures associated with certain rights and with others’ complementary rights and duties.  The construction of groups by emphasising certain shared characteristics as relevant and/or by flattening ‘irrelevant’ differences between people.  Determination of these differences and shared characteristics through invocation of cultural background texts, for example through use of intertextuality.

<sup>7</sup> As mentioned before, this definition is based on work in positioning theory; see for example Harré et al., 2009.

Figure 1. Continued

What communication is appropriate?	A <b>repertoire</b> is a broadly discernible cluster of terms, descriptions and figures of speech as well as gestures and other non-verbal forms of communication. <sup>8</sup>	Recurrent use of terms, gestures, tone, type of vocabulary, figures of speech or other aspects of people's communication.
In what kinds of circumstances?	A <b>genre</b> is the type or category of event that is invoked by the actors. It regards the general features and structures of the semiotic type, that is to say, of the institutionalised, codified pattern of (inter)action to which the concrete text belongs. <sup>9</sup>	<p>Explicit statements about the type of situation in which actors find themselves.</p> <p>Background information on the type of knowledge and forms of expression that are generally legitimised in this genre.</p> <p>Use of repertoires or positions that are associated with a certain genre. Partly determined by the cultural background texts that are invoked, for example through use of intertextuality.</p>
	A <b>setting</b> is the physical and organisational situation in which the interaction takes place, including the artefacts that are brought to or found in the situation. <sup>10</sup>	<p>Characteristics of the physical and organisational situation such as the distribution of objects and persons, the timetable of events, presence of microphones or background noise. Determination of these through invocation of cultural background texts, for example through use of intertextuality.</p>
Towards what objective?	The <b>goal</b> of an interaction refers to the outcome that it should produce and that actors should strive towards.	<p>An interaction's stated or implied aim or purpose. May be stated or implied by actors in presenting the interaction as part of a 'story'; a chain of events that may follow customary structures. Partly determined by the cultural background texts that are invoked, which supply customary story structures.</p>

8 As mentioned before, this is an adaptation of Potter and Wetherell's (1987, p. 149) definition of a repertoire.

9 As mentioned before, this definition of genre is an adaptation of Wodak and Reisigl's (2001, p. 36) definition of 'genre analysis'.

10 As mentioned before, this is based on Hajer's (2009, p. 67) definition of a setting.





# Chapter 3

Methodology and research practices

books should be read  
not as new truths  
but as interventions in  
an ongoing conversation

(Stoler, 2013b, p. xi)

### 3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the process by which I have conducted my research. The first part of the chapter contains methodological reflections on the research project, which is characterised by a social constructionist, critical and interpretive point of departure. The second part of the chapter is dedicated to a discussion of my gathering and analysis of empirical data, which consisted primarily of video material, complemented by documents, interviews and fieldwork. Throughout the research process, I have engaged with the ethical implications of my work, striving to make sure my research does not only comply with standards of quality in a narrow academic sense, but is also ethically sound in the sense that it is respectful of the people and issues that are involved. The last section of this chapter is dedicated to bringing together and elaborating on these considerations. I reflect on the complexities of my position as a researcher and my relationships with the persons and questions central to my research topics. Since my research engages questions around 'race', racism and national belonging, I pay special attention to the ways my position as a researcher is connected with these issues.

My research follows in the tradition of scholarship that regards social reality as intersubjectively constructed. Specifically, my methodology is grounded in the interpretive research paradigm (Adcock 2003; Yanow, 2006a; Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2006a). Within this paradigm, a wide range of research methods can be used, including but not limited to participant observation, case study analysis, interviews and dramaturgical analysis. I make use of all the methods just mentioned. A central characteristic of interpretive research is its departure from the positivist approach to studying the social. Rather than assuming that research offers a privileged view to an objective reality 'out there', research in the interpretive paradigm focuses on examining or 'interpreting' the 'multiplicity of meaning as constructed in language and actions' (Avelino, 2011, p. 24). For example, I have discussed why common-sense, rational arguments in deliberative democracy should not be taken at face value since 'the very categories of thought underlying rational analysis are themselves ... defined in political struggle. They do not exist before or without politics, and ... can have multiple meanings' (Stone, 2002, p. 7). This epistemological foundation is not limited to the interactions I examine in my case studies. Similar to the text and talk I study, my work is also a situated knowledge practice (cf. Prins, 1997, p. 334). In fact, my writing and other research acts lend themselves to the same types of analysis that I have carried out on the communication that I study (cf. Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 49). After all,

analysis is entextualization – a term pointing towards processes of lifting text out of context, placing it in another context and adding metapragmatic qualifications to it, thus specifying the conditions for how texts should be understood, what they mean and stand for, and so on. (Blommaert, 2001, p. 18)

For every question asked and approach chosen, however defensible, many other questions are not asked, and other approaches are not chosen. This inevitable limitation of any research project is not necessarily a weakness, but it is an important characteristic that bears reflection and clarification of the researcher's choices.

Both the interpretive and positivist approaches share an understanding of scientific research as grounded in 'an attitude of doubt, and a procedural systematicity' (Yanow, 2006b, p. 9; see also Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2006b, p. xvi). The difference between the two paradigms can be found in the ways these notions are put into practice. Within the positivist tradition, the quality of research is judged in terms of 'falsifiability', 'internal and external validity', 'objectivity' and 'generalisability'. In contrast, the evaluative criteria deemed relevant within an interpretive approach include notions such as 'thick description', 'triangulation' and 'reflexivity' (Schwartz-Shea, 2006). Rich, detailed description is a central characteristic of the way I present the case studies in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. Such 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) is intimately connected with my method of research, which focuses on examining the subtleties of meaning and tracing their consequences and implications. A detailed and context-sensitive analysis is necessary to parse out these constructions of meaning, such as the difference between a blink and a wink, in Geertz's famous example. An additional purpose of this rendering of a thick level of description is related to the transparency and revisability of the research. Providing this level of detail puts the reader in a position to ascertain whether the researcher's interpretation is supported by evidentiary data (cf. Lincoln & Guba, 2002, p. 208 on 'corroboration'; Schwartz-Shea, 2006, p. 101). Similarly, my inclusion of original Dutch texts and transcripts as well as the English translations forms an invitation to the reader to participate in the process of triangulation. The evaluative criterion of triangulation refers to the practice of conducting a study with a combination of analytical tools. There are multiple ways of practising triangulation, such as the use of various data sources, various researchers and reliance on more than one research paradigm (Schwartz-Shea, 2006; Wodak & Reisigl, 2001, pp. 40–41). However, it usually refers to the use of diverse methods of access to data. I make use of triangulation in this sense, by relying on audiovisual data as well as interviews, observations and documents. The purpose of this is to paint a more detailed and balanced picture by tracing regularities as well as differences between the various standpoints and sources of data.

As mentioned, a third key evaluative criterion of interpretive research is reflexivity (Stoeltje, Fox, & Olbrys, 1999). This involves grappling with and answering for my interdependent relationship with the issues and persons involved in my research, including the ethical aspects of these relationships. This forms a connecting thread throughout the various steps and aspects of the research process and, therefore, throughout this chapter. As mentioned, I have dedicated the last section of the chapter to a discussion of these considerations.



## 3.2 Data collection and data analysis

### Overall research design

The research design can roughly be divided into three phases of conceptual development. The first, exploratory phase involved familiarising myself with both the academic literature and empirical study of a broad spectrum of practices and ideas around democratic deliberation and ‘citizen participation’ while paying specific attention to discussions of *Zwarte Piet* and racism. I also collected some of my first data during this phase. The second phase involved putting the knowledge and tools that I had gathered to use for the collection and preliminary analysis of the bulk of the empirical data used for this study. The third phase consisted of refining my analytical tools and conducting the final analysis. In the sections below, I will provide more detail on what these phases entailed in terms of the concrete research steps of case selection, the practices involved in compilation of video material, interviewing, fieldwork and other aspects of data collection and analysis. Figure 2 below provides a visual representation of the parallel and consecutive steps regarding three dimensions of the research (cf. Avelino, 2011, p. 27): the conceptual, the empirical and the methodological.

Figure 2. Overview of research steps

	Conceptual	Empirical	Theory & instruments
2013	Exploring	Primary data collection	Developing interaction logic framework
2014			
2015	Applying	Analysing data (phase I)	Refining interaction logic framework
2016		Additional data collection	
2017		Analysing data (phase II)	
2018	Re-examining		

### Case selection

It is hardly a new argument that prevailing norms tend to reflect the interests and worldviews of dominant groups in society, and that trying to challenge the status quo while speaking from a marginalised position thus presents the double task of expressing alternative points of view while faced with interaction norms associated with the status quo. However, as I observed in Chapter 1, how this may play out in practice in the *Zwarte*

*Piet* debate is an empirical question. In Chapter 2, I have discussed why an elaborate parsing out of details of communication and understanding them in the context of a specific interaction is needed to trace the micro mechanisms of power that may be at play – not only in terms of words spoken, but including the non-verbal cues that can be studied with dramaturgical analysis. My research methodology is geared towards a detailed understanding of a limited number of pivotal cases in which a disruption takes place, as the confusion during critical moments offers an opportunity to trace interaction logics that otherwise remain implicit.

The term ‘case study’ implies that the object of investigation is a case *of something*. Of course, this invites the question *what* it is a case of. I approached the events I studied not only as cases of interactions in which civil society actors as well as state representatives are involved and *Zwarte Piet* is debated – more importantly, I have studied these events as negotiations of the appropriate ways to discuss *Zwarte Piet*. A comparison of different cases is useful as ‘in many cases we can only recognize alternatives by looking at players in other settings, to see how they have done things differently’ (Jasper, 2006, p. 171). Apart from adding to the empirical richness, including several cases thus also allows for conceptually exploring the implications of performance and counterperformance in institutional contexts connected to widely diverging genres. For this reason, I have chosen to conduct an in-depth study of a number of emblematic cases, which constitute a significant break from business as usual and which the actors involved designated as pivotal moments. Furthermore, I selected cases taking place in a variety of institutional contexts. In technical terms, my case selection is thus information oriented, of the maximum variation type and informed by criteria of both their ‘critical’ and ‘paradigmatic’ character (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Furthermore, I decided to focus on public events. There were two reasons for this. A first reason lies in the conceptual significance of events that are explicitly presented as accessible to the public, that involve state representatives, and are considered as being of broad societal significance. My interest in understanding dominant institutions and practices informed my decision to shine a light on the dynamics of power within the *Zwarte Piet* debate rather than, for example, present a behind-the-scenes view of the dynamics within and between the groups involved in the struggle against *Zwarte Piet*. The second reason for focusing on public events is an ethical one. Focusing on events that were already public and in which people engaged voluntarily was one of the ways in which I could analyse interactions in detail without unduly compromising people’s privacy. In these events, actors can be assumed to be aware that their behaviour can be seen and discussed by anyone. In fact, this is often part of the reason people participate in such public events.

The cases that I study are part of longer streams of interaction, which, for analytical purposes, I have chopped up in bounded sequences of continuous interaction that I call ‘events’ (cf. Tilly & Tarrow, 2007, p. 36 on ‘episodes’). I dedicate a chapter each to three

institutional contexts, tracing how, in every one of them, a series of events follow upon and influence each other. In order to provide a thorough dramaturgical analysis, I provide an in-depth examination of one specific event per context that presents a clear disruption from the usual flow of things. To offer a detailed view of the way power struggles are manifested in the minutiae of interactions, I further carry out a micro analysis of one or two fragments per episode. My first case study focuses on a 2013 public hearing in Amsterdam, placed in the context of a larger string of juridical procedures. Zooming in further within this case study, I conduct a detailed analysis of two dialogues between a complainant and the chairperson of the complaints committee. Then, Chapter 6 presents a case study of the 2014 *Keti Koti* commemoration in Amsterdam, as part of a larger string of *Keti Koti* events in the years 2014–2016. Within this case study, I conduct a detailed analysis of the moments of disruption when a group of activists gave a speech. To finish, the last case study is that of the 2014 national *Sinterklaas* parade in Gouda, which I place in a wider context by including the discussion of the national parades of the two subsequent years. Within this case study, I provide a detailed analysis of the moments in which a one of the protest leaders was arrested.

## Videos

The primary data I use are videos of the events I study. To facilitate analysis, I have transcribed these videos using orthographic transcription, meaning I follow the spelling conventions of the language in question rather than, for example, phonetic transcription. It is important to note that, in this research, as in any, the 'bare data' do not really exist as such: a video is already an artefact, and my transcription involves choices that imply theory (Weiss, 1994). For this reason, in the 'data' section of each chapter, I address the particularities of the videos I have used, such as the cut-off points and camera angles, and their implications.

## Interviews

My conversations with people involved in the interactions I have studied have allowed me to gain insight in the ways *they* represent the events and their part in them, and the links *they* make between different events and meanings. In this sense, the interviews were not so much geared towards 'fact checking' or establishing the objective accuracy of people's accounts. Rather, these conversations allowed me, to paraphrase the title of Robert Weiss's famous 1994 book about qualitative interviewing, to 'learn from strangers' about how they construct issues, positions and versions of events. Talking with various key actors thus constituted opportunities to contrast and compare different accounts (Schwartz-Shea, 2006, pp. 103–104). I would start these semi-structured interviews by asking people to recount to me the events they had been part of, the events leading up to them and their aftermath. However, more towards the end of the conversation, I would also share

Figure 3. Overview of the three case studies

Chapter	Chapter 6		
Genre	Legal procedure		
Event	Amsterdam 2013	A'dam 2014	The Hague 2014
Detailed analysis of fragment	Dialogue 1	Dialogue 2	

points of my analysis and invite my interlocutor to respond to this. These conversations thus also served as an avenue for ‘member checking’ (Schwartz-Shea, 2006, p. 104). This means they provided ways to shine a light on my own meaning making by comparing it to the notions, images and repertoires in which the events that I studied are expressed and explained by the people involved in them. As Schwartz-Shea (2006, p. 104) puts it, Going back to ‘others’ is more than the journalistic practice of ‘fact-’ or ‘quote checking’ (which implies that there is a singular social reality that can be captured by the reporter); it is a fuller recognition that what ‘others’ have to offer may be quite complex, for example, their tacit knowledge, insider vocabularies, and/or positioned understandings of an event, organization, or policy, any of which the researcher may or may not have grasped. The charge is not to take members’ meanings for granted, as well as to guard against projecting contemporary meanings onto the past or personal meanings onto another group.

Since the conversations involved back-and-forth communication rather than a one-way delivery of information, I use ‘conversation’ interchangeably with ‘interview’ throughout the text (cf. Kaulingfreks, 2013, p. 64).

Appendix 3 contains an overview of the persons I have interviewed for this study. These persons were selected on the basis of the central parts they played in the interactions I studied. In most cases, this regards the interactions that are the focus of my case studies. In two cases, I selected interviewees based on their involvement in semi-public interactions that do not form part of the three case studies, but which I examined as part of my broader immersion in the ‘field’. A majority of the people I spoke with had participated in protests of some sort against *Zwarte Piet*. The primary reason for talking with a relatively high number of people with this background is that this allowed me to obtain more information on the ideas and ways of speaking that were marginalised within the interactions I studied. An additional, practical reason for not

	<i>Chapter 7</i>			<i>Chapter 8</i>		
	<b>Keti Koti commemoration</b>			<b>Sinterklaas parade</b>		
	Adam 2014	Adam 2015	Adam 2016	Gouda 2014	Meppel 2015	Maassluis 2016
	Intervention by protesters			Arrest of protest leader		

including interviews with some key actors such as politicians, is that various persons declined or were no longer able to respond to my request.

Most of the conversations took place in Dutch. In addition to the English translations, I also provide the original Dutch transcripts in footnotes. In the case of the few conversations that took place in English, no footnotes are added.

### **Fieldwork**

The research involved an immersion in the debates regarding *Zwarte Piet* between September 2013 and December 2018, with the heaviest focus on the period between October 2013 and December 2015. In the course of this five-year period, I kept close track of debates by following a range of media, including newspapers, television, websites, Facebook and Twitter. Some of these media sources are used in the text; references are provided in the bibliography following the conventions of the sixth edition of the American Psychological Association manual (APA, 2006). I also observed and participated in numerous activities including public lectures, activist meetings, protests, court hearings, dialogue meetings and public debates. Please see Appendix 3 for an overview of the events I attended. A relatively high number of key events took place in Amsterdam. However, tracing the repercussions of these events and the subsequent actions of the key actors led me to extend my fieldwork to various other Dutch towns and cities. The fieldwork allowed me to collect empirical material in the form of photos, video and audio recordings, field notes and other items such as flyers and buttons. In addition to these physical, offline events, I immersed myself in online and media debates in newspapers, on television and on social media. Equally as important as the collection of this empirical material, however, the immersion in the ‘field’ allowed me to obtain an overview of actors and events and develop a deepened understanding of the complex interweavings of meanings involved in the debate about

*Zwarte Piet*. This broad immersion has been important for me in regard to what is a crucial aspect of interpretive research, which is the ability to read

analytically ‘across’ the experienced reality of the situation under study (whether rendered in literal texts or, analogously, in acts and/or physical artifacts, in historical or current ones), drawing on prior knowledge of terms and concepts and theories that may usefully inform that reading. (Yanow, 2006a, p. 80)

While my choice to perform an in-depth study at the micro level of interactions means the number of case studies I present in this book is limited, the broader scope of my fieldwork was important in that it enabled me to grasp the significance of events in relation to ideas about history, racism, belonging and social struggle.

### **Analysis of the empirical material**

The overview of the research presented at the beginning of this chapter should not be taken to mean that this process was laid out beforehand in its entirety as a series of pre-defined, separate steps. Rather, the interpretive research design can be characterised by its circular character. It involved an ‘interplay between an overall understanding of the material and closer analysis of selected aspects of the material using specific discourse analytical tools’ (Stone, 2002, p. 7). In broad strokes, my analysis was based upon the chronological order of the events in the case studies. Informed by the scholarship and conceptual tools discussed in the previous chapter, I started my analysis of the empirical material with an examination of the 2013 public hearing, and later on started working on the July 2014 *Keti Koti* ceremony and the November 2014 *Sinterklaas* parade, respectively. Applying a grounded theory approach, the initial stages of analysis of the public hearing involved a transcription of the video and several rounds of coding of the audiovisual material using Atlas.ti, from which emerged various clusters of debate topics as well as of notions of appropriateness regarding the way the debate was to be conducted. The insights emerging from this preliminary analysis led me to refine my analytical instruments and develop the interaction logic framework. This is the analytical framework I used for the subsequent analyses of the public hearing and the other two case studies. Please see page 51 for an overview of this framework, including a definition of each of its concepts and the elements of the empirical material that it points the researcher’s attention to.

My study on the basis of this framework made use of writing as a fundamental part of my analytic method rather than simply as a vehicle for the reporting of findings (Yanow, 2006a, p. 72). To start, I divided the videos and the corresponding transcripts in very short excerpts of several seconds. Per excerpt, I wrote out four analyses, each corresponding to one of the four aspects of the interaction logic framework. Frequently, some overlap was observable between the four analyses due

to the interrelationship between these four aspects. For example, when someone positions themselves as a descendant of Black freedom fighters, this suggests that a different repertoire is appropriate for them than when that person is positioned as 'Dutch' without any reference to racial identity. In other words, what aspect of an actor's identity is constructed as relevant (aspect 1 of the interaction logic) has consequences for the type of behaviour that is seen as appropriate for that person (aspect 2 of the interaction logic). Elements such as someone's verbal reference to their ancestors, that person's choice of clothing or a raised fist can thus be connected to more than one aspect of the interaction logic. Elaborately parsing out such details and their connection to the different aspects of the interaction logic resulted in long swaths of cumbersome text in the initial analysis. However, it served the purpose of allowing me to refine my understanding of the material at hand, especially when it came to the significance of details, such as the terms and gestures referred to above. In turn, my developing insights into the material helped hone my analytical focus. This is what I refer to when I state that my analysis was not purely linear: it involved 'weaving rather than marching' (Wetherell & Potter, 1992, p. 87). Through several rounds of this type of analysis, I developed the insight and close familiarity with both the material and the analytical tools that I needed to present the main points of my analysis in a more condensed form. This meant that, for the third case study, the initial stages of analysis were less time-consuming thanks to the further development of my analytical framework.

Let me illustrate this description of the process with a concrete example. When I initially coded the audiovisual material from the public hearing, this included several codes pertaining to references to the timing of occurrences past and present, with different moral overtones. Examining the connections between remarks with similar codes and tracing how they related to other aspects of the dynamics of the interaction helped me develop a sensibility for the ways specific constructions of history are implied in positioning acts. In my subsequent analyses of the material of the three case studies, paying special attention to the constructions of history led me to identify a pattern throughout the case studies. This resulted in my identification of a mechanism I have named 'context definition'. Comparing and contrasting the case studies made it possible for me to pinpoint how opportunities for positioning were connected to characteristics of the different settings. For example, the presence of large groups of Black people at a *Keti Koti* ceremony is more readily seen as appropriate, whereas, during the *Sinterklaas* parade in Gouda, it was viewed with suspicion by the authorities, diminishing opportunities for the Black people in question to be accepted as legitimate participants in the interaction at hand. The process of analysis thus involved complementing the linear, chronological breakdown with a back-and-forth between the cases and between the insights gained through the different analytical tools.

### 3.3 Pursuing reflexivity and negotiating tensions: my position as a researcher

The dilemma of the researcher themselves being part of discourses while aiming to deconstruct these is common to all social constructionist research approaches. Therefore, I have made it a priority in my research to develop reflexivity, an ‘attitude of attending systematically to the context of knowledge construction, especially to the effect of the researcher, at every step of the research process’ (Malterud, 2001, p. 484; see also Burawoy, 1998; Jackson, 1998; Stoeltje et al., 1999; Stone, 2002; Yanow, 2006a).

On the one hand, foregrounding my positionality as a researcher can bring quite practical method related matters into focus since who I am and how I am perceived impacts the options and strategies available to me. For example, when I participated in the demonstration organised against the inclusion of *Zwarte Piet* figures at the national parade in Meppel in 2015, I was pregnant and therefore wanted to avoid the kind of rough shoving and pulling that had been part of my experience in Gouda the year before. However, I reckoned that, as a blonde White woman, in case of physical altercations or, more specifically, signs that police officers were to start using physical force, it would be possible for me to leave the group and find a quieter spot. Moreover, I had teamed up with another White person, who, if necessary, would be able to help me navigate that space without attracting unwanted attention based on being racially different from most people attending the parade. My assessment of my and that person’s ability to blend into the crowd was central to my appraisal of my options in this situation and the risks associated with them, and informed my decision to be a participant observer at the protest (cf. Sanghera & Thapar-Björkert, 2008).

However, the significance of the researcher’s positionality goes beyond narrowly defined practical issues such as those regarding access to events and sites. As Stuart Hall (1984, 1994) emphasised, an essential element of reflexivity is foregrounding the specificity of the position from which we speak. It means letting go of the misguided notion of a natural, universal speaking position (Procter, 2004, p. 119). Our personal biography and experiences in life profoundly affect the knowledge, assumptions and attitudes with which we approach the world, including our research. For example, part of the sources I drew from to formulate my strategy in carrying out participant observation at the 2015 national *Sinterklaas* parade were my previous experiences, not only in the context of research but also of my personal engagement with social and economic justice activism. Failure of the researcher to recognise their own positionality brings with it the risk that their knowledge, assumptions and attitudes will become the implicit norm in the research process, leading to an uncritical reliance on stereotypes, and a misguided application of cultural norms (cf. Van Stapele, 2014).



Self-reflection allows researchers to be more sensitive to the often hidden power relations at play in fieldwork. In my research, I have aimed to minimise my own blinders in this regard, following authors who reject ‘practices in which researchers detach themselves from the research process, particularly when they reject their racialized and cultural positionality in the research process’ (Milner IV, 2007, p. 388).

Particularly relevant for me in my aim to conduct research while taking into account my own possible partialities and blinders as a researcher was the need to deepen my understanding of issues of ‘race’ in general but also specifically, as it relates to who I am and how I navigate social realities. In addition to immersing myself in academic studies of these topics, I have therefore made it a priority to do more personal study, both individually and in group settings.<sup>1</sup> This illustrates that any ‘effect of the researcher’ is not a unilateral process whereby the researcher impacts their surroundings. As a researcher, I am impacted by the research process as well (cf. Yanow, 2009, p. 278 on the ‘relational character’ of research). Reflexivity therefore also means doing justice to this interdependence. In technical terms, this emphasis on preparing myself for dealing with the epistemological and moral issues related to my research can be seen as a form of virtue ethics (Wiles, 2012, p. 15). Learning more about both others’ experiences and perceptions and my own taken-for-granted truths has helped me make better-informed decisions in the complex terrain of personal and academic ethics and practices. In doing so, I am inspired by thinkers such as Walia (2012), who posits that ‘a willingness to decenter oneself and to learn and act from a place of responsibility rather than guilt are helpful in determining the line between being too interventionist and being paralyzed’.

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1 These efforts to better understand issues of ‘race’, racism and the ways my personal history, identity and choices are affected by these have included various activities. On an individual level, it has included study of my family history going back to my great-grandparents. Speaking with family members and studying personal journals, letters, photos and official documents of various family members allowed me to reflect on the ways that the opportunities and choices of people in my family were inflected by various aspects of their identities, including class, racial and national identities. This, in turn, allowed me to get a clearer view of the ways my own racial identity, my sense of self, my opportunities and my choices have been informed by this history. Other sources I have drawn from to help me develop a better understanding of the ways understandings of ‘race’ have shaped my life and sense of self have included blogs, videos and other materials developed by thinkers and activists addressing racism and Whiteness, especially in a Dutch context.

My work in group settings has included attending and, in one case, co-organising dialogues, debates and lectures about ‘race’, racism and Whiteness in the Netherlands. Additionally, between September 2015–April 2016, I participated in a self-organised study group by and for White activists in the Netherlands. Activities of the group included reflection and debate on our positions, strategies and work as White antiracist activists (which, for me, included my research) through monthly meetings as well as by email.

In this context, a salient aspect of who I am that has played an important role in the research process is that I identify as White and am readily categorised as such by others. Furthermore, I am of Dutch descent, *autochtoon* (autochthonous) in Dutch parlance, born and raised in the Netherlands in an upper-middle-class family, thus positioning me squarely at an intersection of dominant identities in the Dutch context (cf. McIntosh, 1988, 2012). Occupying these positions grants me privileges, which have also played a role in my academic and professional trajectory, putting me in a position where I could undertake a largely self-funded PhD research project. To me, an implication of this is that I bear the responsibility in choosing to what end I use these privileges (cf. Hunter & Polk, 2016). As has become clear from the above, I do not take my social constructionist point of departure to absolve myself from ethical and political commitments. Rather, I agree with Wetherell and Potter (1992, p. 68) that emphasis on the “interested” nature of discourse and scientific description, ... has the reverse effect. It should intensify and clarify the demand for these things’. Consequently, I position myself in line with authors who argue that ‘social constructionist research, including discourse analysis, inevitably is, and *should* be, a critical enterprise’ (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 176). I use the word ‘critique’ to refer to ‘the unmasking of dominant, taken-for-granted understandings of reality’ (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 176). As this renders tacit knowledge explicit and brings silenced discourses to the fore, it necessarily engages questions of power (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2006b, p. xx).

One of my aims has been to use my position within a prominent academic institution as an opportunity to make a scholarly contribution to the discussion and understanding of issues around democracy, ‘race’, exclusion and national identity and belonging. In doing so, I do not aim to speak ‘on behalf of’ anyone or claim the role of a public intellectual who raises the voices of marginalised people. As Dadusc (2017, p. 96) has noted, researchers who ‘position themselves as an empowering subject of the voice-less, risk to reduce social movements to merely vulnerable and marginal populations, rather than analysing the relations of power producing vulnerability and marginality’. My aim in conducting this research has been to shine a light on these power relations by ‘researching up’ or ‘researching back’<sup>2</sup> (Agboka, 2014; Neal & McLaughlin, 2009), seeking to unveil what norms are at play in constructing *Zwarte Piet* as a (non-)issue in relation to racism.

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2 With ‘researching up’ or ‘researching back’, I refer to an approach that problematises structures of power that produce marginality. It seeks to examine dominant institutions and practices in ways that avoid invisibilising the agency of marginalised people.







# Chapter 4

Understanding racism  
and exclusion in the Netherlands



## 4.1 Introduction

This chapter has two purposes. Firstly, it provides a backdrop to the present-day debates about *Zwarte Piet* by sketching historical trends in how Dutch society has dealt with questions around Dutchness, racism and the presence of those categorised as not belonging to the nation. Secondly, since racism is a central topic in this dissertation, I will discuss the various ways in which racism has been approached and understood. I do this through a discussion of the main currents of scholarship on racism, staking out my own position vis-à-vis these approaches and the authors associated with them. This means that, on the one hand, I explain what work I draw from and aim to build on, and, on the other, why some currents of scholarship are less closely related to or in tension with my approach.

I start by sketching the ways racial difference, racism and exclusion have historically been dealt with in Dutch society, focusing on the period after the Second World War, when demographic shifts related to immigration started to follow each other in rapid fashion. As I outline key events in Dutch history around migration and the presence of ethnic/racial ‘Others’, the terms and concepts used to categorise outsiders and insiders form a connecting thread through these sections. At the time they were introduced, such terms tended to be perceived as neutral, as simply expressing an objective reality. One of my aims in this chapter is to show how these terms construct the social world in specific ways, creating and emphasising divisions and commonalities between people. In the words of one author, ‘by emphasizing bounding processes – rather than categories that appear fixed and finalized – scholars can demonstrate that particular framings that rely on exclusive categories are not as immutable as they often appear’ (R. Jones, 2009, p. 186; see also Yanow, 2014). Thus, by placing the words to refer to insiders and outsiders in their historical context and focusing on the process of categorisation rather than only on the categories themselves, I aim to shed light on how and for whom terms and concepts were useful at specific points in time, and how this relates to the development of ideas about belonging and identity in Dutch society.

This focus on terms for categorisation also means I have no ‘neutral’ terms at my disposal myself. For clarity in my analysis of the shifting and ambiguous meanings of terms and categorisations, it is especially important that I am precise in delineating how and why I use the various terms. In some cases, this means that I use words in different ways from what was common at the time that I write about, or that I use different words. An example is my use of the word ‘race’ in inverted commas, a choice that I explain below. Similarly, my use of ‘ethnic’ does not follow its common ‘technical’ meaning. Technically, the

notion of ethnicity emphasizes that what matters in group identity is not any objective presence of real physical or cultural similarities or differences, but rather a group’s acknowledgement of perceived similarities or differences, and the willingness to consider these meaningful. Ethnicity here means nothing more or less than the collective acceptance of a shared self-image. (Leerssen, 2006, pp. 16–17)

However, the word often has come to be used as a euphemism for 'race'. And, while 'race' and racism are closely linked terms that easily bring one another to mind, there is no parallel term, no '-ism', related to 'ethnicity' (Hill Collins & Solomos, 2010a, p. 3). The term 'ethnicity' thus invokes 'race' without immediately being associated with the much more negative concept of 'racism'. So, although the word 'ethnic' was originally coined to provide a more neutrally descriptive alternative to the word 'national', its use tends to be much more ambiguous and complex. When I use the word, I mean to include these connotations, except when I explicitly state that I refer to the 'technical' meaning of the term. Another example is the choice to use the word 'Black' rather than the n-word, although the latter was common in the Netherlands up until recently. Similarly, I choose to use the term 'White' even though, in Dutch, it is more common to use the term '*blank*', which carries connotations of 'pure' and 'unblemished'. Since I focus on racialised difference in the Dutch context, an important distinction is between the majority of the population, who are categorised as White, and those who are not. In today's vocabulary, this latter category would be 'people of colour', a category that includes Black people. There are problems associated with using 'people of colour' as a blanket term since rendering everything into the two general categories of 'White' and 'Other' can veil important distinctions within these larger groups (Janani, 2013). For this reason, I use various terms including specific regional, religious or racial identities, depending on the issue I want to draw attention to. However, there are points in my analysis where it is precisely the broad distinction between 'White' and a generic 'Other' of colour that I want to draw attention to, and, in those cases, I find it appropriate to use these terms.

In the sections following my outline of recent Dutch history, I provide an overview of the ways 'race' and racism have been conceptualised in academia. In order to provide structure to this discussion of a vast amount of scholarship, I have organised the overview into eight main approaches, devoting a separate section to each. Focusing on one approach at a time allows for a better understanding of the differences between these currents of research. However, this does not mean that all the approaches are mutually exclusive, so I also discuss overlap and interrelationships between them. While this overview includes authors from and analyses focusing on all inhabited continents, I pay special attention to the reception of the various scholarly traditions in Dutch academia and by authors focusing on the Netherlands. This leads to the final section of the chapter, in which I link this to the methodology I have defined in Chapters 2 and 3 and discuss how my research is meant to build on and contribute to the scholarship as well as the pressing societal questions raised in the previous sections.



## 4.2 Otherness and racism in the Netherlands: shifting viewpoints

The Netherlands: a small nation characterised by its proud history of seafarers and merchants and its progressive social attitudes – a country in which ‘race’ does not matter? Many Dutch as well as outside observers would subscribe to the view that liberal, pragmatic and inclusive attitudes are defining characteristics of Dutch culture and history. In scholarly discussions, too, it is often assumed that ‘the Netherlands has represented the ideal type of a European form of institutional and normative multiculturalism’ (see for example Bertossi, 2011, who criticises this view). While this take on the Netherlands still leaves room for questioning the inconsistencies or limits of the country’s progressiveness, it takes it as a given that the characterisation itself is apt. Although, in recent years, the Netherlands has lost a bit of its reputation as ‘a guiding country of tolerance’ (Maussen & Bogers, 2010, p. 2), the Dutch identity tends to be performed as liberal, expressive, plural and outspoken (Van Reekum, 2014). The Dutch cultural imagination of the Netherlands is distinctly progressive (Mepschen, Duyvendak, & Tonkens, 2010) and Dutch people tend to be proud to be Dutch (CBS, 2015, p. 86; SCP, 2004, p. 68), with helpfulness and friendliness assumed to be national characteristics (Robyn, 2005, p. 163). In line with these notions, the dominant discourse holds that ‘the Netherlands is and always has been colour-blind and anti-racist’ (Wekker, 2014b, pp. 159–160; see also K. Davis & Nencel, 2011; Prins, 2004; Wekker & Lutz, 2001). However, as I will discuss in this chapter, this appraisal has historically not been unanimous, and research shows that immigrants and their children feel increasingly pessimistic about their place in Dutch society (SCP, 2017).

The first part of this chapter discusses key events and demographic figures regarding the presence of racial ‘Others’ in the Netherlands, as well as tracing the development of the categorisation of and policy responses to these ‘Others’. Generally, these ‘Others’ are perceived to have their roots elsewhere than the European territory of the Netherlands. As such, migration into the Netherlands is usually understood as happening in the context of decolonisation (1950s–1970s), labour migration (1960s–1970s) and refugee programmes (1970s onwards), with family reunification and family formation following from these last two types of migration.

### Colonialism and postcolonial migration until the 1950s

In the late 1930s, the Dutch Kingdom counted approximately 70 million inhabitants, about 9 million of whom lived in the European territory of the Netherlands. Approximately 60 million people lived in the Indonesian archipelago, and Surinam and the Netherlands Antilles added another 248,000 people (Grever & Ribbens, 2007, p. 76). The population of what was known as the Dutch West Indies was mostly of African descent, due to the large numbers of enslaved Africans who had been forcibly taken there in the transatlantic

*driehoekshandel* or triangular trade. The Dutch shipped approximately 600,000 Africans to the Americas and Caribbean, which is about 6 percent of the estimated 12 million people that the Europeans traded as slaves between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. Although the exact figures are contested, depending on issues such as whether or not to include smuggling ships (Fatah-Black & Van Rossum, 2015; Postma, 1972), it is clear that this trade in human beings constituted a massive, systematic and persistent practice. This resulted in the untimely deaths of many Africans during the middle passage, and in life in conditions of slavery for many more people of African descent over the generations, in what was then called the Dutch West Indies as well as elsewhere. Slavery was legally abolished in the Dutch Kingdom in 1863, although colonial authorities had stipulated that the formerly enslaved would still have to perform labour for the 10 years following the legal abolition of slavery, which, they argued, would serve educational purposes. For this reason, the significance of the year 1863 is contested by those who argue that the year 1873 more accurately symbolises freedom from slavery as experienced by the formerly enslaved.

The Dutch had won Surinam from the British in 1667, and, already in the 1700s, the first people from Surinam could be found in the Netherlands. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, hundreds of enslaved people were taken to the Netherlands yearly to work there. This was followed by self-chosen migration for educational purposes in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, primarily by elite members of the ‘creole’ group (Van Amersfoort & Van Niekerk, 2006, pp. 333–334). The Netherlands Antilles, consisting of six islands in the Caribbean basin, share with Surinam their history of colonisation and Dutch domination since the 1600s. While the colonial societies in both the East and the West Indies were ruled by small White Dutch elites, there were important differences between the territories in terms of citizenship. In 1892, a law was enacted aimed at assimilating the population of the Dutch West Indies through granting full Dutch citizenship, whereas, in the Dutch East Indies, there was an ‘apartheid-like’ division between an overwhelming majority of Dutch subjects and a small elite who possessed Dutch citizenship (G. Jones, 2012, p. 31).

Although the Netherlands received immigrants for centuries, and although Dutch society has been influenced by cultures from abroad, this has generally been invisibilised by ‘nationalising’ elements that were once considered exotic (Kuijpers, 2005; WRR, 2007, p. 81). This type of process has also been noted to take place in an inverse form, where groups of White people with Dutch roots came to be categorised as outsiders who did not belong to the imagined community of the Netherlands. From the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century up until well into the 1950s, economically disadvantaged people who were deemed ‘anti-social’ were placed outside or at the margins of society, sometimes literally through forced housing in designated ‘educational neighbourhoods’. These were meant to produce ‘properly kept’ households. As Dutch thinking on these ‘anti-socials’ was influenced by eugenics, assumptions about the biological roots of ‘improper’ behaviour were common (Rath, 1991, p. 150). The way the dominant Dutch society viewed

these poor people, with the assumption that the moral and biological inferiority of these groups made them unfit to be fully-fledged members of the Dutch imagined community, foreshadowed ways in which immigrants such as workers from Mediterranean countries were to be viewed in later decades (Rath, 1991, p. 146 ff.). The history of these so-called 'anti-social' groups illustrates the blurriness of the boundaries between categorisation as 'socially different and inferior' and 'biologically different and inferior'. It also shows that, even if labels and categories are constructions that can change over time, they still have material consequences. These two points – the blurriness of the boundaries between social and biological, and the significance of labels and categories – are recurrent themes in this chapter's account of the presence of racial 'Others' in the Netherlands.

In the years after the Second World War, the first large group of immigrants arriving in the European territory of the Dutch Kingdom was from the Indonesian archipelago. Most of this migration took place in the years between 1945 and the mid 1950s, during which the Indonesian struggle for independence took place, leading to the official Dutch recognition of Indonesian independence in 1949. The Dutch colonial war against the Republic of Indonesia was euphemistically called 'politieele acties' (police actions) by the Dutch state and general public, although this did not prevent the exodus of many people associated with the Dutch colonial regime. This group, called 'repatriates' at the time, was ethnically diverse, all belonging to minority groups within the Indonesian context. The large majority of these immigrants from Indonesia were categorised as Europeans. In other words, they had been part of the privileged minority in the colonial society that had Dutch citizenship, which was available to those deemed to be of Dutch ancestry, and to only a few thousand persons from those populations labelled 'indigenous' (U. Bosma, 2012a, p. 8). Although most 'repatriates' were of White Dutch ancestry, others were visibly 'different' from the general population in the 'still almost entirely white' country they moved to (Oostindie, 2011, p. 28). This was the case for those of mixed Dutch and Indonesian ancestry, as well as for people from various other minority groups, mostly Moluccans, Chinese and Papuans. However, public debate about these groups did not tend to use the word 'race'. In fact, 'race' was been marked by its absence as a topic of conversation in Dutch society or public debate. As the Second World War and the Shoah loomed large, explicit racial references were viewed with suspicion in the Netherlands (Essed, 1986, p. 4; Essed & Trienekens, 2008; Hondius 2009, 2010; cf. Wodak & Reisigl, 2001, p. 5; for a critical analysis of the relationship between holocaust memory, 'race' and decolonisation, see Rothberg, 2009). In fact, as two senior researchers at the Dutch Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies (NIOD) noted a few years ago (Ribbens & Captain 2011, p. 4), 'the historical and political importance ascribed to the war is still remarkably wide-ranging in the Netherlands'. Furthermore, this is closely associated with the holocaust (Mager, De Beer, & Gutter, 2015), which functions as the 'a moral-historical compass ... viewed as an ultimate evil' (Confino, 2012, p. 19). While this

understanding of the Second World War and the holocaust is prominent throughout the West (Confino, 2012, p. 6), the Netherlands is one of the countries in which these views were taken up most quickly and radically (Van Vree, 2009, p. 34).

The word 'race' itself, and associated words such as 'White' or 'Black', are still usually avoided, although recent years have seen a shift towards more discussion around these terms, including criticism of the term *blank* to refer to White people. Generally, however, less obvious racial terms tend to be employed, such as 'bicultural', 'ethnic', or people 'with a little colour' (cf. Hondius, 2014).

In the 1950s, large numbers of 'repatriates' still migrated to the Netherlands from newly independent Indonesia. After the Dutch army in colonial Indonesia (Koninklijk Nederlandsch Indisch leger, KNIL) was dissolved, approximately 12,500 Moluccan KNIL soldiers moved to the Netherlands in 1951. By the end of the 1970s, the number of Moluccans would rise to an estimated 32,000 (WRR, 1979, p. x). Although they were initially housed in camps meant as a temporary solution, they would never move back (Grever & Ribbens, 2007, p. 76; Lindo, 2000, p. 127). While migration from the former Dutch East Indies was substantial, there was little migration from the Caribbean colonial territories. In this light, Dutch citizenship of people from Surinam and the Antilles was seen as unproblematic, and their right to migrate to the Netherlands was not questioned (G. Jones, 2012, p. 40).

Other groups of immigrants in this period hailed from Mediterranean countries – initially, these were mostly workers from Italy and Spain, although they would be far outnumbered by workers from Turkey and Morocco in later decades. In fact, speaking of 'immigrants' is an anachronism since the Dutch authorities or society did not consider the Netherlands an immigration country until halfway through the 1970s. Rather, the newcomers from Mediterranean countries were called 'guest workers' (Bruquetas-Callejo, Garcés-Masareñas, Penninx, & Scholten, 2005, p. 4), implying both that their stay in the Netherlands would be temporary, and that the labour they performed was their key characteristic (cf. Mandel, 1989, pp. 28–29). However, not everyone was equally pleased with the prospect of Mediterraneans coming to work in the Netherlands. For instance, the arrival of some of the first Italian workers to the province of Limburg in the late 1940s had been met with warnings from a local labour union, couched in terms that implied biological differences between the locals and newcomers, who were described as 'warm-blooded, easily excitable idlers' (Lindo, 2000, p. 127). However, by the second half of the 1950s, when Italian workers were arriving not by the hundreds but by the thousands, this was met with few objections. By this time, joblessness had become low and the Dutch population had become less keen on low-paid, unskilled jobs (Lindo, 2000, p. 127).

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1 Original Dutch phrase: 'met een kleurtje'.

### **Labour migration in the 1960s and 1970s**

By the mid 1960s, migration from Indonesia had more or less ceased. In a few successive waves, some 300,000 people had relocated from the former colony to the Netherlands (U. Bosma, 2012b). The Euro-Asian Dutch who moved to the European Dutch territory were regarded as a successful model of integration (Witte, 2010, p. 53). However, the increased migration from the West Indies starting in the 1960s was accompanied by growing concerns about the numbers of immigrants and the ethnic or racial make-up of the Dutch nation, even though, in the late 1960s, 96 percent of people living in the Netherlands were considered to be of Dutch descent and the migration from the West was still small compared to the migration that would happen in the following decades. For example, in 1963, members of Parliament expressed concern about the 8,000 Surinamese then residing in the Netherlands, and about their 'Surinamese workers culture' that, they supposed, did not fit with the 'Dutch way' of doing things (G. Jones, 2012, pp. 40–41; Prins, 1997, pp. 112–113).

The 1960s also saw episodes of conflict and violence between the White Dutch majority and postcolonial or labour migrants. For example, in the early 1960s, there were so-called 'riots' between workers of Italian and Spanish descent and the local population in the east of the Netherlands. A few years earlier, a conflict between native Dutch young men and men with an Indonesian background in The Hague was commented on in more than 20 articles in a variety of national newspapers. However, the occurrences in the east of the country as well as those in The Hague were generally represented as 'incidents' and 'conflicts over girls'. In these articles, the possibility of 'race' or ethnicity playing a role in the conflict was either not mentioned at all, or downplayed by putting terms such as 'race discrimination' and 'apartheid' between inverted commas and emphasising the occurrences were incomparable to the truly appalling situations elsewhere, such as in the United States (Groenendijk, 1990; Laarman, 2012; Witte, 2010).

A large number of legal changes in the Netherlands was prompted when the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination entered into force in 1969. While this was not accompanied by an official recognition of racism as structural or institutional (Witte, 2010), the 1970s did see an important change in Dutch official attitudes as the first steps were taken to formulate 'minority policy' for the groups that were starting to be called 'ethnic minorities'. Key elements of the welfare state policy approach of this era included the fight against inequality in the areas of work, housing and education and financial support for migrants' organisations and cultural and social services catering to the needs of specific groups. Consistent with the logic that racial inequality should be tackled by having minorities conform to the standards of the dominant racial group (cf. Nkomo, 1992), this 'minority policy' was explicitly geared towards those groups that were seen to be 'lagging behind'. For example, people with a Chinese background were not included as a target group.

Although the volume of research into the situation of immigrants was very modest compared to what would follow in the 1980s, some influential work was done in this period. Important in this regard were two reports by state agencies published in the late 1970s (ACOM, 1979; WRR, 1979). These reflected the realisation that many of the 'guest workers' in the Netherlands would not be returning to their countries of birth. A change in policy was thus deemed necessary. A different type of publication in this period that asserted 'guest workers' needed to be granted more opportunities to strengthen their position in Dutch society was a doctoral dissertation (Theunis, 1979). This study provided an extensive documentation of organisational and cultural issues, aiming to contribute to social justice for – principally – Moroccan and Turkish workers in the Netherlands by giving insight into their situation (see also Bovenkerk, 1980).

Even after the 1973 oil crisis had put a halt to the active recruitment of foreign labour, relatively few of the 'guest workers' returned to their countries of origin and immigration from Turkey and Morocco continued. While the size of the Southern European immigrant group stabilised around 1974, and that of the Spanish even declined, the years between 1977 and 1981 saw a significant growth in the Turkish and Moroccan migrant groups as a result of family reunification. Furthermore, immigration flows to the Netherlands swelled in the years around 1975, when Surinam gained independence after nearly four centuries of colonial rule by the Dutch (Lindo, 2000, p. 127; Prins, 1997, p. 113; Scholten, 2011, p. 88). Due to concerns about their future prospects in a newly independent Surinam, many left the country. Whereas, in the years after the Second World War, there had only been a few thousand Surinamese living in the Netherlands, this number had risen to around 104,000 in 1975. This amounted to a third of the population of the South American country (Grever & Ribbens, 2007, pp. 76–77). This immigration was objected to within the Netherlands much more strongly and explicitly than had been the case with the Indonesian immigrants, a discussion that tended not to include explicit racial arguments nor much attention to the diversity within the immigrant group, with various class, ethnic and cultural backgrounds represented. Around half of the population of Surinam at the time was of African descent; other large groups in terms of geographic background and perceived 'race' were those of British Indian origin, and those from Java. The migration to the Netherlands was fairly representative of the general Surinamese population in this respect (Oostindie, 2011, p. 34).

By this time, the postcolonial Indonesian migration was fast disappearing from view in the societal and political debate about 'minorities' (Oostindie, 2011, p. 34). Migrants from Indonesia were generally regarded as a case of successful integration, and categorised as 'European' rather than, for example, 'Asian', or, in the terminology that would become common in the 1980s, 'non-Western allochthonous'. However, events such as two hijackings of trains by Moluccans in the late 1970s in a struggle for an independent Moluccan state and frictions between Surinamese organisations and the Dutch state were illustrative

of the willingness of some immigrants to counter official Dutch interpretations of their relationship with the state and ‘convinced the government that certain groups in Dutch society would maintain patterns of identity formation distinct from mainstream Dutch society’ (U. Bosma, 2012b, p. 19).

### ***Allochtonen and Dutch belonging in the 1980s and 1990s***

When Surinam won independence, the six colonised Caribbean islands remained part of the Dutch Kingdom. After much political and societal negotiation and change in the decades that followed, the situation as from 2010 is that the so-called ‘Dutch Antilles’ no longer exist as a political entity. Curaçao, Sint Maarten and Aruba are independent countries within the Dutch Kingdom, while the other islands have the status of ‘special municipalities’ of the Netherlands. However, it is beyond the scope of this chapter to recount the history of (migration from) these islands in depth. As such, I will limit myself to sketching it in broad strokes, noting that, behind the term ‘the Antilles’, there is a nuanced history of different political struggles and arrangements in the six islands over time. Similarly, there is much more diversity in the Antillean population than I can go into, so I will limit myself to noting that a majority of Antilleans is of African descent, Christian, and Papiamentu speaking. Immigration by Antillean people to the European territory of the Netherlands initially consisted mainly of people with relatively high educational attainment and socio-economic status and a strong command of the Dutch language, and later of people from more marginalised segments of Antillean society (U. Bosma, 2012b, p. 12; Oostindie, 2011, p. 37).

While the immigration from the Antilles was the last to occur and has remained the smallest in size of the three postcolonial migrations, it continued for a longer time and has been met with much political and public debate, most of it negative in tone. From 34,000 people in 1984, the population of Antilleans in the European territory of the Netherlands had swelled to over 90,000 by the early 1990s and had grown to about 100,000 in the year 2000 (Grever & Ribbens, 2007, pp. 76–77). In 2018, the Dutch population designated by Statistics Netherlands (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, CBS) as being a first or second generation migrant from Aruba or the (former) Dutch Antilles is roughly 157,000. (CBS, 2018).

The policy outline that was published in 1983 under the title ‘Memorandum on Minorities’ (Minderhedennota) focused on ‘integration with the preservation of culture’ (Minister van Binnenlandse Zaken, 1983; Prins, 1997, p. 114), in view of the 1979 reports about migrants not heading back to their ‘home countries’. Public opinion did not easily accept this realisation, and events such as the rise of xenophobic politicians – Hans Janmaat comes to mind – and a number of ‘race’ riots can be taken as both symptoms and further causes of discontent under the dominant White Dutch population with the situation (Oostindie, 2011, p. 41). In the summer of 1983, a fifteen-year-old Black

boy called Kerwin Duinmeijer was murdered on the street in Amsterdam by a White Dutch sixteen-year-old sporting a '100% blank' tattoo. The murder caused shockwaves, and amongst the reactions was a demonstration against racism led by the mayor of Amsterdam. Not everyone agreed: a spokesperson of the Anne Frank foundation said the murder was an 'unfortunate incident', and the court ruled that racism had not been a main motif for the murder (Witte, 2010, pp. 84–85). The murder, as well as a rising number of reports of racist incidents, contributed to putting racism on the public agenda in the first half of the 1980s, with a growing anti-racist movement and the organisation of Anti-Discrimination Bureaus in several municipalities. These bureaus still exist today and provide education as well as support for people with complaints about discriminatory practices.

The official state recognition that many of the 'fellow citizens' from former colonial territories and the 'guest workers' from Mediterranean countries were in the country to stay prompted a striking growth and institutionalisation of 'minorities research'. Up until the 1980s, there had been little research in the Netherlands on post-migratory processes. In 1978, the Advisory Committee on Minorities Research was formally established by the ministry of Culture, Recreation and Social Work to inform Dutch government decisions on research coordination and funding (Scholten, 2011, p. 80). Since the 1980s, the number of such studies has increased significantly, often financed by government bodies. As I will discuss in more detail further on in this chapter, researchers, policymakers and others using the paradigm of 'minorities research' tend to frame racial inequality as questions of 'integration and assimilation of racial minorities into the mainstream of a consensus-based society' (Nkomo, 1992, p. 492). The policy solutions that tie in with this approach tend to focus on removing barriers so that minorities can achieve similar conditions to the dominant societal groups. Solutions such as affirmative action tend not to be supported within this framework.

In 1989, the Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy (Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid, WRR) published a second report on the topic (WRR, 1989), the title of which referred to the new concept of *allochtonen*, which I will discuss in the next paragraph. Arguing that the framework of rights on the basis of group membership should be left behind in favour of an approach in which the responsibilities of the immigrant citizens rather than those of the state take centre stage, the report pointed to a change in focus.

The term *allochtoon* (allochthonous) became popular after the 1989 report, which, in turn, drew from work by sociologist Hilda Verwey-Jonker. Since words such as 'guest worker' or 'foreigner' had come to carry negative connotations, she proposed the term as an alternative. Another reason she felt a need to introduce a new collective term for the Chinese, Ambonese, Antilleans and other groups in Dutch society was because of their special position in Dutch society, due to their recent immigration; the fact that they were



the subject of government policy; and because their 'looks and specifically their skin tone' made them stick out (Verwey-Jonker, 1971, p. 7). The terms *autochtoon* and *allochtoon* assign people to the respective categories of those who are 'from Dutch soil' or 'from other soil'. This categorisation is regardless of citizenship: in official census data, those who have at least one parent who was born outside the Netherlands are categorised as *allochtoon* (WRR, 2007, p. 55).

While the terms seem clean-cut and precise at first glance, the everyday use of the term is much messier. As K. Davis and Nencel (2011, p. 480) note, 'in the national imaginary, being Dutch means being White'. *Autochtoon* is the unmarked category, which goes accompanied with characteristics such as a certain accent and White skin. *Allochtoon* is, in practice, mostly used to describe people who are seen to be non-White and non-Western, regardless of where they or their parents were born. As the WRR remarked in a 2007 report on Dutch national identity and belonging, the claim to Dutchness by citizens of immigrant heritage tends to be perceived as shaky because their 'claim to the Dutch nationality/ethnicity can be called into question'<sup>2</sup> (WRR, 2007, p. 171). The report cites research that shows a tendency in Dutch society to see a 'White, secular and liberal' identity as homogenous and at odds with non-Dutch 'other ethnic and/or religious identities'<sup>3</sup> (WRR, 2007, p. 197). The 'seemingly neutral policy and administrative term' thus has been criticised for carrying pejorative connotations (Yanow & Van der Haar, 2012, p. 229). In 2012, the then Council for Societal Development<sup>4</sup> (Raad voor Maatschappelijke Ontwikkeling, RMO) issued a report urging to cease using the term (Raad voor Maatschappelijke Ontwikkeling, 2012) and many (semi-)governmental organisations have heeded the advice.

In the early 1990s, 15.6 percent of the population were categorised as being of non-Dutch descent (Prins, 1997, pp. 112–113). In the term favoured at the time, this part of the Dutch population was 'allochthonous'. Although the previous section has made clear that the meaning of the word 'allochthonous' is by no means straightforward, the fact that a sizeable percentage of the population was categorised as such nevertheless points to important societal fault lines.

In the national elections of 1989, an extreme right-wing party led by Hans Janmaat had won a seat, and, in the municipal elections a year later, two such parties won a total of 15 seats. Furthermore, the early 1990s saw a wave of racist violence in which people were attacked and buildings such as mosques, refugee centres and migrant organisations' offices were damaged (Witte, 2010, p. 106). As such, the early 1990s saw a renewed interest in racism in public debate (Witte, 2010, pp. 97–98), while the topic had disappeared

2 Original Dutch text: 'hun claim op de Nederlandse nationaliteit/etniciteit wél ter discussie gesteld kan worden'.

3 Original Dutch text: 'seculier, blank en liberaal'; 'andere etnische en/of religieuze identiteiten'.

4 Now known as the Council for Health and Society (Raad voor Volksgezondheid en Samenleving, RVS).

somewhat into the background in the late 1980s. Relatedly, the mid 1990s saw a growing interest in public debate about national identity. However, in contrast to the broader range of voices that would join the public debate about a decade later, participants in this debate at this time were mostly public intellectuals (WRR, 2007, p. 87). This debate was a response by the established political parties to the rise in support for the extreme right, in the Netherlands as well as abroad (Witte, 2010, pp. 99–100).

While there was no drastic change at the policy level, the way immigration was spoken about, for instance in terms of causal stories and categories, did alter significantly in the early 1990s (Scholten, 2011, p. 74). Due to the insight that immigration would most likely be a continuous phenomenon, individual socio-economic adaptation to autochthonous Dutch norms in institutions such as education, labour and welfare was emphasised. This stood in contrast to the emphasis on group belonging and collective identity connected to the ‘integration with the preservation of culture’ approach of the minorities policy of the 1980s (Duyvendak & Rijkschroeff, 2004; Penninx, 2016). Also, the earlier emphasis on immigrants’ rights made way for an emphasis on their responsibilities (Scholten, 2011, p. 75; Vasta, 2007, p. 733; Witte, 2010, p. 99). In 1997, the National Minorities Consultation platform (Landelijk Overleg Minderheden, LOM) was created, providing a centralised platform for dialogue between the Dutch state and the officially recognised co-determination bodies for various ethnic minority groups. Even if state support was limited to the financing of an office for each of the constituent groups (Oostindie, 2011, p. 42), it reinforced the notion that representation based on ethnicity was relevant – in contrast to the 2011 government decision to terminate the LOM since it deemed ethnicity-based representation ‘not of this time’<sup>5</sup> (Van Walsum, 2017; see also Van de Bunt Adviseurs, 2016).

### **Turns in Dutch thinking about belonging, Otherness and identity from the 2000s onwards**

Towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, immigration by refugees, mostly from Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran and Somalia, was followed by immigration from these same countries on the basis of family reunification policies. More recent years have seen an increase in the number of refugees from Syria and Eritrea (CBS, 2016, p. 9). In the decade since 2006, there has been an increasing net migration into the Netherlands, mostly due to immigrants from the new European Union countries. Since 2007, labour migration has become the most important motive for immigration, displacing family migration at the top. The Polish form the largest immigrant group, although changes in immigration policy have also led to more immigration by people from Bulgaria and Romania (CBS, 2016, p. 7; WODC, 2009, p. 176).

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5 Original Dutch text: ‘niet meer van deze tijd’.

As in the preceding years, it was still Europeanisation and the multicultural society that led to the debate about national identity in the early 2000s. However, there were also important differences with the years before. As the WRR noted in its 2007 report about national identification (WRR, 2007, p. 87), the discussion about integration and identity made a ‘sharp turn’<sup>6</sup> around the year 2000. Issues related to culture and religion became regarded as central, with a focus on Islam as allegedly incompatible with ‘Dutch norms and values’. As Scholten (2011, p. 78) neatly summarises it, ‘rather than social-cultural emancipation being a condition for social-economic participation (as assumed by the minorities policy) or social-economic participation being a condition for social-cultural emancipation (as assumed by the integration policy), the new causal story stated that social-cultural differences could form an obstacle to social-economic participation’. This time, the debate was not limited to public intellectuals communicating mostly in print media. Rather, politicians, as well as larger sections of society, became involved, and nationalism became a much more accepted sentiment, while the notion of a multicultural society lost a lot of its appeal. In 2004, the Dutch government officially renounced multiculturalism as a normative ideal (WRR, 2007, p. 89) in an ‘assimilationist turn’, which took place in many other European countries at the time as well (Scholten, 2011, p. 17). The debate became increasingly characterised by a harsh tone, with relatively little focus on nuance or (scientific) substantiation of claims (Pels, 2005; Prins, 2004; WRR, 2007, p. 89). Xenophobic and chauvinist forms of nationalism, while not new, became normalised (Kesic & Duyvendak, 2016) and right-wing populist politics gained strength. The new anti-establishment right-wing populist LPF party led by maverick Pim Fortuyn headed for a win in the tumultuous 2002 national elections on a platform that aimed to put a halt to the ‘Islamisation’ of the Netherlands. The sentiment that, finally, people should feel free to ‘tell it like it is’ was not limited to the political arena; another prominent public figure in this regard was publicist and filmmaker Theo van Gogh (see for example Simons, 2004 about the polemic short film he produced with politician Ayaan Hirsi Ali about women’s treatment in Islam). That said, these developments were uneven: for example, in the same year that the LPF party gained strength, a national *slavernijmonument* or ‘slavery monument’ was unveiled in Amsterdam. This was made possible by years of campaigning by descendants of enslaved Africans seeking more public ways to commemorate slavery and its legacies, in addition to the commemorations in more private circles (Small, 2012). However, as I will discuss in more detail in the next chapter, the fact that masses of Black people were held at bay while many White dignitaries attended the opening ceremony is telling of the fraught and conflicting understandings of this history and its relevance.

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6 Original Dutch text: ‘een scherpe draai’.

An important catalyst for the public debate on national identity and belonging was Paul Scheffer's (2000) influential opinion piece titled 'The multicultural drama'<sup>7</sup>, which was welcomed by some as useful criticism on multiculturalism, while it was condemned by others as an attack on immigrants, especially Muslims (see for example Lucassen & Willems, 2006; 'Drama en daden', 2000). Other books about integration by opinion makers in this same period also focus on the more recent immigration by people with a Muslim background; postcolonial migration seemed to have disappeared from view. This was made possible in part by the fact that Muslim immigration in the Netherlands does not tend to be linked to colonialism, since 'the overwhelming majority of Dutch post-colonial immigrants is Christian and about 90 per cent of the immigrants from Indonesia were designated as Europeans – not as indigenous – in colonial times' (U. Bosma, 2012b, p. 8). This fits well with the dominant idea that it is Muslims themselves who are hindering their integration into Dutch society rather than the dominant attitudes in Dutch society being a problem (Oostindie, 2011, p. 43). Further catalysts of the debate include the events of 11 September 2001 in the United States, as well as the politically motivated murders of the two Dutch public figures I just mentioned, Pim Fortuyn and Theo van Gogh, in the years that followed. A mere nine days before the 2002 national elections, Fortuyn was assassinated. Two years later, Dutch society was shaken up by the murder of filmmaker Van Gogh. While Fortuyn had been killed by a White, 'autochthonous' Dutch environmental and animal rights activist, the person who murdered Van Gogh was a Dutch Muslim citizen of Moroccan descent, who was explicit about his religious motivations for the murder. The prominence of various populist right-wing politicians in the years that followed, most notably Geert Wilders with his 'Freedom Party', is often viewed as a legacy of Fortuyn (Hendrickx & Hoorn, 2006; Pels & Oosterwijk, 2015; Van Soest, 2008; 'Zes jaar na de moord', 2008).

The Netherlands Institute for Social Research (Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, SCP) ceased using the terms 'allochthonous' and 'autochthonous' in 2009. In 2016, a motion was passed by the Second Chamber of Parliament to carry out a 'revision' of these terms. In this same year, the WRR issued a study stating that the terms 'autochthonous' and 'allochthonous' should be replaced by 'inhabitants of Dutch descent' and 'inhabitants of migration descent'.<sup>8</sup> In the study, the WRR argues that the terms 'allochthonous' and 'autochthonous' are not useful for describing the increasingly complex and diverse groups and identities related to immigration into the Netherlands. Moreover, the authors of the report note that, since 2008, official documents of larger municipal organisations and at state level had tended to avoid the terms (Bovens, Bokhorst, Jennisen, & Engbersen,

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7 Original Dutch text: 'het multiculturele drama'.

8 Original Dutch terms: 'inwoners met een migratieachtergrond' en 'inwoners met een Nederlandse achtergrond'.

2016). This advice was followed promptly by the CBS and taken up by the minister in his response to the parliamentary motion (CBS, 2016).

Questions of immigration and national identity have since continued to play a central role in Dutch politics. What is different in the 2010s when compared to the decades before is that issues around diversity, difference and racism have become a topic of heated debate in a variety of contexts and media, online and offline. On the one hand, it is now common amongst opinion leaders to 'tell it like it is' and argue that immigrants should conform to 'our' norms. On the other hand, a shift can be seen amongst self-defined 'progressive' observers towards more acknowledgement of racism as a problem (see for example Wijnberg, 2016). Official reports continue to be published that point to the problems of racism and exclusion, such as the Council of Europe recommending in a recent report that the state and politicians step up their active involvement in the struggle against xenophobia and racism (ECRI, 2013); a study by Amnesty International on ethnic profiling and its racist and discriminatory effects (Amnesty International, 2014); a report on multiplicity in history (Grever & Ribbens, 2007); and a study by the Social and Economic Council of the Netherlands (Sociaal-Economische Raad, SER) on the participation on the labour market by 'migrant youth', highlighting higher unemployment amongst these groups – which, incidentally, in the report are still categorised as 'non-Western allochthonous' (SER, 2013). But, while these statistical and quantitative data play a part, another notable change is a stress on concepts such as Whiteness, everyday racism and the importance of language in the reproduction of racism (Elibol & Tielbeke, 2018; Hoedeman & Jongejan, 2016; Kleinpaste, 2016; Modest & Lelijveld, 2018; Nourhussen, 2017; Weber, 2015), issues that had hardly been discussed in Dutch public debate up until recently (Witte, 2010, p. 16). In this new surge of anti-racist thought, it has also become more common to find the personal accounts and analysis of Dutch people of colour in a variety of contexts, including events, opinion pieces and other publications. A prominent example is Anousha Nzume's 2017 book *Hallo Witte Mensen* (Hello White People), which has garnered much attention. This book and many other contributions cite the debate around *Zwarte Piet* as pivotal in these recent changes, which makes it all the more crucial to gain insight into the puzzle that my research addresses: what is at stake when people go against reigning interaction norms for addressing the issue of *Zwarte Piet*?

### 4.3 Understanding racism and exclusion: scholarly approaches

Constant and rapid changes in the study of racism and ‘race relations’, and the increasingly interdisciplinary approach to it, make presenting an overview of the whole field a major challenge, as even the editors of a recent 700+ page volume on the topic remark (Back & Solomos, 2009a, p. 19). Thus, the purpose of this chapter is not so much to provide a conclusive summary of academic work on ‘race’ and racism.<sup>9</sup> Rather, I aim to sketch how various currents of scholarship have contributed to the development of the understanding of ‘race’ and racism, and situate my research in relationship to these by discussing how I aim to draw from and contribute to the insights they provide.

#### Biological racism

In the words of Agnew (2007, p. 11), racism is a ‘loaded and ambiguous term that has a long history’. Up until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, studies of racial issues understood the existence of human ‘races’ as a biological reality and propagated a notion of ‘races’ with different hereditary characteristics fitting into a natural hierarchy. This so-called scientific racism sought to explain differences between these ‘races’ to justify slavery and, later, segregation. For in-depth studies of scientific racism, see for example Tucker (1994), Smedley and Smedley (2005) and Eze (1997). Especially since 1945, explicit scientific racism has lost a lot of influence since discussions about racial issues became very much influenced by the attempts in Nazi Germany to create a ‘racially pure’ society. Although the study of racism and race relations has tended to be carried out separately from examinations of anti-Semitism (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994), the atrocities committed by the Nazi regime helped warn against the consequences of racist thought and political mobilisation. This is not to say that, since then, there have been no attempts to link differences in societal position to racial categories as a biological reality. A well-known example is *The Bell Curve*, a 1994 study linking racial differences in IQ scores to racial categories as a biological reality (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994). The controversial book prompted much debate, with many denouncing it as racist and drawing attention to methodological shortcomings (see for example S. Fraser, 1995; Heckman, 1995; Korenman & Winship, 1995).

Although the paradigm of scientific racism was dominant for a long time, it is important to note that there likely have been many more critical social analysts of racial-ethnic matters than those who are known now (Feagin & O’Brien, 2010). This

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9 For more elaborate overviews, see for example Back & Solomos, 2009b; Boxill, 2001; M. Bulmer & Solomos, 2004; Hill Collins & Solomos, 2010b; Holloway & Keppel, 2007; Ratcliffe, 2001; Smedley & Smedley, 2005; Tucker, 1994.

is due to the fact that ease of access to academic institutions and to the tools of writing, publishing and communication has historically been linked to membership of the dominant White group, as well as other socially relevant categorisations such as gender and class. The barriers encountered by non-White and antiracist thinkers must be taken into account when putting any scholarship, and particularly that on 'race' and racism, in historical perspective. Even so, marginalised discourses have sometimes come to the fore, challenging the mainstream view of 'race'. Shifts in power dynamics have come accompanied by greater freedom of expression as well (Hill Collins & Solomos, 2010a, p. 2). Influential early anti-racist voices of people of African descent in 19<sup>th</sup>-century United States include David Walker and Fredrick Douglass, who developed and published strong analyses against the dominant scientific racism. From the late 19<sup>th</sup> until well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, social scientist W.E.B. DuBois was a leading critical thinker regarding racial issues in the United States. The first African American to gain a doctorate from Harvard, his analyses of the structural and economic foundations of racial inequality set his publications apart from the mainstream work being done in the academy during his time. In the Dutch context, important early critical works about racial inequality and the related oppression and exploitation are denouncements of colonialism. A prominent example is Anton de Kom's *We Slaves of Surinam* (De Kom, 1975), which recounts the history of Surinam from a decolonial point of view, tracing how slavery and other forms of oppression have long-lasting material and psychological effects, and countering the idea that people of African descent and other marginalised groups in Surinam would be inferior to White Dutch people. It became a key publication, despite the fact that, as a foreword in the first publication in 1934 mentioned, 'the publishers have deemed it necessary, in order to assure the undisturbed distribution of the book, after consultation with the writer, to make some changes to the text'.<sup>10</sup> Most likely, this self-censorship refers to text that would have been deemed too radical or communist, such as calling for armed resistance (Boots & Woortsma, 2009, pp. 168–192; Ramsoedh & Sanches, 2010, p. 12)

However, most of the academic work seeking to understand 'race' as a social and political construction rather than a biological reality has been published from the 1960s onwards. Such research understands racism to be

an ideology of racial domination based on beliefs that a designated racial group is either biologically or culturally inferior and the use of such beliefs to rationalise or prescribe the racial group's treatment in society, as well as to explain its social position and accomplishments. (Hill Collins & Solomos, 2010a, p. 2)

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10 Original Dutch text: 'achtten de uitgevers het noodzakelijk, ten einde de ongestoorde verspreiding van het boek te verzekeren, om, na overleg met de Schrijver, enkele wijzigingen in den tekst aan te brengen' (cited in Boots & Woortsma, 2009, p. 187).

This acknowledges the social and political importance of racial classifications of physical characteristics such as skin tone, hair structure and facial features even if it recognises that ‘race’ is a construction without a biological basis. In order to problematise the concept of ‘race’ and draw attention to its constructedness, many authors place the word between inverted commas, as I have done.

### **Migration studies: diversity and integration**

Since the 1960s, in the aftermath of the social transformations around questions of ‘race’ that took place during that decade, there has been a noticeable growth of interest in the theorisation of ‘race’ and racism and, more generally, what is called the ‘sociology of race relations’ (Back & Solomos, 2009a, p. 5). During this time, social reforms struggled for by the civil rights movement, the development of Black power ideas and urban violence and unrest formed the backdrop of changing views and attitudes regarding ‘race’ in the United States and elsewhere (Back & Solomos, 2009a).

In Great Britain, a defining influence on the focus of ‘race relations’ research were the implications of migration in the post-war period (Knowles, 2010). Since then, migration has remained a central topic of the scholarship on racial and ethnic issues. In the 1960s and 1970s, scholars using a Marxist or Weberian approach produced research on ‘race relations’ mostly concerned with social structures. These examinations of access and allocation in fields such as housing, work and education produced knowledge about inequality in forms that were relatively easy to translate into targets for social policy.

In the Netherlands, the 1960s and 1970s saw comparatively little research into immigrant groups and/or what were called ‘ethnic minorities’. Those who did investigate these issues were mostly anthropologists interested in the culture of those newly arrived, or social geographers interested in settlement patterns (examples of such early work include Berg-Eldering, 1979; Essed & Nimako, 2006; Rath, 2001; Van Amersfoort, 1973). However, this changed spectacularly from the early 1980s onwards. As explained in the section titled ‘*Allochtonen* and Dutch belonging in the 1980s and 1990s’ (pp. 72–75), the 1980s saw a surge in research interest in post-migratory processes, caused by the state’s official recognition that many of the ‘fellow citizens’ from former colonial territories and the ‘guest workers’ from Mediterranean countries were in the country to stay. This led to efforts to formulate new policies for the integration of these groups, as well as an impressive growth and institutionalisation of ‘minorities research’. In line with trends elsewhere, the research mostly dealt with issues around access and allocation and emphasised education, health, housing and employment, producing valuable numerical evidence of differential access. As Rath (2001) reports, many thousands of research projects were undertaken, to an average of almost one daily in the period 1980–2001. The rapid institutionalisation of this



strand of research is illustrated by, for instance, the official recognition of the 100+ member study group for the Social and Cultural Studies of Ethnic Minorities in 1988, and by the 1985 launch of the specialist journal *Migrantenstudies*, which remained in press until 2011.

As will be described in the following sections, various other approaches to ‘race relations’ have come to the fore in the decades since this first burst of academic interest in ethnic minorities and discrimination. At the same time, research focusing on the integration of immigrants and ethnic minorities has continued to bloom internationally as well as in the Netherlands. A recent example of this type of scholarship is the research network on International Migration, Integration and Social Cohesion in Europe (IMISCOE), the largest of its type in Europe. Since 2015, the network includes a research group on discrimination in cross-national perspective, the aim of which is to provide insights in the way

immigrants and their descendants, and more generally ethnic and racial minorities, face specific obstacles to participate to the mainstream societies, for example in terms of labour market participation, access to housing, education career, access to services or interaction with police and justice. (IMISCOE, 2017)

As reflected in this excerpt as well as in terms and titles such as ‘Studies of ethnic minorities’, this current of research is especially suited to describing and explaining the disadvantaged position of those who do not belong to the dominant group. Thus, this type of research has been instrumental in showing the scale and relevance of (racial) inequality, and putting this on the map as a policy issue. The advantage of this research’s relatively easy applicability to policy goals comes with the flipside that it has generally produced results that are less geared towards shedding light on the lived realities of people, or on social interaction in commonplace social contexts (Knowles, 2010). Also, its emphasis on ‘integration’ means it tends to be less focused on producing insights into the role and agency of people belonging to the dominant populations, or to understanding the processes of immigration and asylum policymaking (Bruquetas-Callejo et al., 2005, p. 5). Thus, my interest in norms regarding the ways we do or do not address ‘race’ implies a different focus from this research tradition, even though the information produced within the ‘migration studies’ approach provides an important backdrop for my investigation.

### **Social psychology: individual personality and faulty perceptions**

The approaches to racism and exclusion I have discussed so far tend to focus on ideologies and their basis in political and economic relations. A very different take on racism can be found within the academic field of psychology. This tradition seeks to understand racism and exclusion by focusing on the individual, or the links between the individual and their social context. As such, it suits the analysis of prejudiced attitudes and racist behaviour rather than the structural political and economic mechanisms of racism. In sketching the

work on racism within psychology research, I make grateful use of the excellent overview of the field by Wetherell and Potter (1992 pp. 34–57; see also Nkomo, 1992, pp. 492–494). These authors give a clear and concise introduction to the three main approaches within social psychology that I want to discuss, nicely summarised in their chapter title: ‘Cognition, identity and personality’. While a plethora of research avenues on racism exist within the field of psychology, most can be adequately grouped into one of these three approaches.

Research focusing on social cognition seeks to understand racism and exclusion as a matter of faulty perceptions. These, in turn, are caused by universally shared cognitive heuristics, which bring the positive attributes of in-group members into much sharper relief than those of people who are seen to belong to an ‘out-group’. This leads to the creation and persistence of negative stereotypes of people who are perceived as ‘different’. While social cognition researchers understand human perception and thought as constructed, they also distinguish between perceptions that are correct and those that are faulty. This places the researcher before the difficult task to determine the boundaries between appropriate and mistaken perceptions.

The second type of psychology research I want to draw attention to emphasises social identity. Researchers who take this approach share the focus of social cognition researchers on biased and stereotypical perceptions. Specifically, they seek to explain racism and exclusion by investigating how a natural tendency to prefer one’s own group may lead to a series of discriminatory consequences. Prominent researchers associated with this approach include Henri Tajfel and John Turner (1979). Scholars in this tradition stress a distinction between interpersonal and intergroup interactions in order to understand acts such as the preferential allocation of resources to people’s ‘own’ group. For example, many investigations have probed the connection between individual self-esteem and positive perceptions of the own group.

Historically, the first psychological approach to prejudice and racial discrimination sought to explain these by examining the link between ideology and personal motivation. This so-called ‘authoritarian personality’ account was developed shortly after the Second World War by Theodor Adorno and colleagues, in an attempt to understand the atrocities committed during this war, in particular the Jewish holocaust. It probes into individual differences in order to explain why antidemocratic, conservative, anti-Semitic and otherwise racist political ideologies are more persuasive to some people than to others. Concepts such as repression and projection of needs and fears, often rooted in childhood, play a central role in this tradition, showing its indebtedness to neo-Freudian thought. The research procedure employed by Adorno and colleagues involved, as Wetherell and Potter (1992, pp. 50–51) note, assessing an individual through clinical interviews, projective tests and questionnaire responses and then deducing from these a set of motives, sometimes deeply repressed, which dictated the surface ideology expressed in the talk ... The links with broader social relations come through the process of later identifications with authority figures.

Thus, this approach understands people's talk as symptomatic of underlying individual characteristics and needs, which in turn can be traced back to childhood experiences.

While each of the three approaches sketched above focuses on a different aspect of psychological processes, they share an assumption that discourse can be taken as representative of people's state of mind or attitude. Much social psychological research is carried out in a strictly regulated laboratory setting, designed to control and eliminate external influences and thus shine a light on the relationship between people's acts and their internal psychological processes. This type of research yields results that, when applied to a real-world setting, can usefully suggest what kind of circumstances or policy might be conducive to better group relations. However, the reverse is not true: that one can take a specific real-world setting and, based on research assumptions, trace people's talk or other acts back to objective truths regarding to what they 'really' feel or think. In the previous chapters, I have explained in more detail why I do not take such a positivist approach. What this means for my research is that I will take the understandings of racism developed within the field of psychology as relevant concepts that people may employ in their talk. Furthermore, as Wetherell and Potter (1992, p. 57) note, 'the major advantage of the authoritarian personality analysis, and the other perspectives reviewed ... is that they force the discourse analyst to confront questions of identity, the conceptualization of motives and the methodological procedures for reading these in discourse'. However, my approach differs fundamentally from the three reviewed above in that I aim to investigate the *effects* of communication rather than attempting to uncover what other psychological processes the communication may be a symptom of.

### **Neo-Marxist approaches: racialisation of class differences**

From the early 1980s onwards, scholars working from feminist, postcolonial and neo-Marxist perspectives formulated fundamental criticisms of the work in the field up until then, seeking to generate more politicised analyses of 'race' and racism. This resulted in an expansion of academic work on 'race relations'. A key scholar in the field at this time was Robert Miles, whose approach holds that it is racism that needs to be analysed rather than 'race'. His examination of racism in the context of capital accumulation and class relations in capitalist societies forms an important contribution to reclaiming the study of racism from apoliticised sociological frameworks (Miles, 1982, 1987a, 1987b, 1989; Miles & Phizacklea, 1979, 1984). Central to his work is the assertion that 'race' is a construct, created in the context of social and political regulation. In his analysis of the relations between racism, power and the state, he thus focuses on racialisation as a historical development. In contrast to Benedict Anderson, whose massively influential 1983 book *Imagined Communities* held that racism and nationalism are two separate issues (B. Anderson, 1983; see also McCleery & Brabon, 2007), Miles analysed how the two can be co-constitutive. However, for Miles, it is ultimately class differences rather than racial ones that are the basis of social conflict and can be at the basis of progressive

politics (Miles, 1993). In his view, class differences are shaped by economic relationships, although these are sometimes obscured by processes of racialisation. Even though feminist scholarship inflected by Marxism existed at the same time, which aimed at laying bare how categories such as 'race', class and gender can be mutually constitutive (notably A. Davis, 1981; for more information, see also Fregoso, 1999), the approach centring the racialisation of class differences became very influential.

In the Dutch context, an influential scholar to take up this type of approach was Jan Rath. References to his work have already been made in the section on migration studies because of his examination and criticism of Dutch 'minorities research'. His 1991 book titled *Minorisation* examines why so-called 'ethnic minorities' are known as problem groups, concluding that this is due to circular reasoning. Rath argues that the very definition of certain categories of minorities is based on their socio-economic status. As reflected in the title of his book, he argues that it is therefore more fruitful to look at minorisation as a process rather than minorities as a static category. Rath emphasised the importance of structural societal racism in explaining inequalities, but saw class rather than 'race' as the ultimate determinant. As he put it (1991, p. 321): 'the socio-cultural characteristics of all people in the Dutch nation-state are measured and evaluated against an imagined middle class standard. The deviance of particularly the lower classes is thereby problematized'. In his view, it is due to their class status that immigrants from, for example, Germany or Japan tend not to be seen as 'minorities'. He does not see racialisation as being a primary determinant in this context. In his words, 'as an ideology, minorisation is theoretically comparable to racialisation ... But in contrast to the experience in Britain, the signification of phenotypical features is not the predominant process in the Netherlands. Here racialisation is of secondary importance' (Rath, 1991, pp. 321–322).

The approach of scholars such as Miles and Rath has played an important role in politicising the research into 'race relations' and placing questions of power at the centre of the research, as I also intend to do. Another vital contribution of this work is its focus on the process through which social categories are constructed rather than taking these as given. However, this approach has also been criticised of running the risk of a class reductionism, which could limit 'the scope of theoretical work on conceptualising racism and racialised social relations' (Back & Solomos, 2009a, p. 9). As I will discuss in the following sections, a recentring of 'race' in analyses of structural inequalities was key to the scholarship in what would become known as critical race studies, starting with a hard look at the law and legal institutions.

### **Representation as a reproduction mechanism of racism**

Another important current of research emerging from the early 1980s onwards also often draws from neo-Marxist approaches, but can be distinguished by its focus on processes of representation in the reproduction of racism. A key example is the book *The Empire*

*Strikes Back*, collectively produced in 1982 by scholars connected to the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), including John Solomos and Paul Gilroy (CCCS, 1982). The authors of this volume were concerned with examining the multifaceted processes by which the construction of 'race' is socially contested rather than only regulated by the state. One of the major influences on this approach is the work of cultural theorist, political activist and sociologist Stuart Hall (1971, 1980, 1985, 1997, 1999; Procter, 2004), who, in turn, had been inspired by neo-Marxism as well as film studies. Hall was one of the founding figures of the school of thought that is now known as British cultural studies. The work of Hall and others such as Solomos and Gilroy prioritised doing justice to the complexity of identities, going beyond the simplified ideas of a monolithic 'Blackness' that had been common up until then. Still, it has also been criticised for being concerned with representation and discourse to the detriment of attention for actual 'raced bodies, lives, social practices and social inequalities' (Knowles, 2010, p. 26). When discussing the importance of processes of symbolic representation in the reproduction of unequal power relations, the work of French sociologist, anthropologist and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu quickly comes to mind. However, I do not engage with Bourdieu's scholarship further here as his contributions were not focused on 'race relations', and are thus less directly relevant for the overview I want to give in this chapter. In fact, his work has received sustained criticism for its (lack of) discussion of such matters (Connell, 2006; Free, 1996; Wieviorka, 2004; but for a different opinion, see Go, 2013).

Inspired by the scholarship in British cultural studies, the critical study of discourse was taken up by authors such as Ruth Wodak, Norman Fairclough and others (see for example N. Fairclough, 2001; Wodak & Matouschek, 1993; Wodak & Reisigl, 2001). One of the main Dutch proponents of this focus on representation as an important reproduction mechanism for racism is Teun van Dijk (1993). Having started in 1981 with an investigation of the role of the Dutch media in the reproduction of racism, one of Van Dijk's ongoing research interests is the discursive reproduction of racism, especially by 'symbolic elites', such as journalists and politicians. Incidentally, the author carries out this type of analysis on the figure of *Zwarte Piet* in his contribution to a book edited by leaders of the campaign *Zwarte Piet is Zwart Verdriet* (Black Pete is Black Sorrow) (Helder & Gravenberch, 1998). Another prime example of research into the discursive reproduction of racism, which was also informed by Miles's scholarship and Hall's work on the 'politics of representation' and 'definitional slipperiness', is that of Potter and Wetherell. As discussed more thoroughly in Chapters 2 and 3, these authors' approach is especially suited to understanding what language does in everyday discourses such as casual conversations, newspaper articles and popular histories. A strong aspect of their work is its consistent focus on what is *achieved though* language rather than on trying to determine its truth value. For my research, too, this focus is most productive, since we can only know things 'in the context of some historically specific and socially contingent account' (Wetherell & Potter, 1992, p. 63). For

example, in their 1992 book *Mapping the Language of Racism*, Wetherell and Potter discuss excerpts from interviews with a broad group of Pakeha (White) New Zealanders, showing how even attempts to voice liberal arguments tend to support Pakeha dominance. Their analysis is incisive and provocative, although its empirical basis in the book remains limited to short fragments of interview material.<sup>11</sup>

This section has focused on language and, more broadly, representation as a reproduction mechanism for racism. A form of expression and reproduction of racism that has been the focus of much research attention is hate speech. The inherent tension between freedom of speech, hate speech and hate speech legislation has been examined in the study of law, ethics, political science and other academic disciplines (see for example Bleich, 2011; Maussen & Grillo, 2014; Modood, Hansen, Bleich, O'Leary, & Carens, 2006). Most of the research dealing with hate and hate speech has examined the practices and discourses of hate groups and hate crimes, generally taking a legal-normative approach and addressing questions such as the applicability of specific laws or ethical considerations regarding racist expression and its prohibition. A smaller segment of hate speech research focuses on the socio-political contexts that shape and, in turn, are shaped by hate speech and its regulation, thus opening up issues of power and contestation. Also, since there is no clear-cut division between the legal-normative and the socio-political approaches, it is possible to straddle both positions. However, my interest is in exploring how actors present their points of view, rather than in assessing to what extent these points of view might qualify as hate speech. For that reason, my research cannot be situated within the hate speech scholarship tradition. Instead, it is more in line with critical race studies; a tradition in which scholars have combined legal-normative information with a keen eye for racial differences in the ways legislation plays out (Lee, 2001, p. 185).

### **Critical race studies: beyond colour-blindness**

Since the mid to late 1980s, the current of scholarship known as critical race studies has gained traction. This approach originates from the United States, with roots in the critical social thought of African American, Latinx and Native American thinkers (for an overview of the key foundational texts of this intellectual movement, see Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995). The approach was first developed by legal scholars in

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11 As Hatch (1994) notes, 'one wishes they had done more ... both to delve more deeply into discourse and to explore its effects'. I aim to build on the valuable insights discussed above, in particular the approach developed by Potter and Wetherell. In order to be able to 'delve deeply' and explore social practices related to inequalities and raced bodies, I adapt Potter and Wetherell's approach by placing this within the interaction logic framework I have discussed in length in Chapters 2 and 3. This will allow me to profit from many of the strengths of the scholarship discussed in this section while grounding my empirical analysis in relatively long fragments of naturally occurring interaction including, but not limited to, speech.

the United States in response to the work then being done in critical legal studies. While critical race scholars supported the emphasis on 'race' within this civil rights scholarship, they were concerned about the commitment to a 'colour-blind' perspective. Critical race theory questions claims of tolerance based on colour-blindness, examining how patterns of racist exclusion and oppression continue under the guise of such neutrality (Bell, 1980, 1992; Williams, 1991, 1997). Scholars working in this tradition foreground slavery, discrimination and official segregation as key themes in Western history. The work of early critical race scholars such as Derrick Bell, Patricia Williams and Richard Delgado was path breaking not just for the arguments and analysis put forward about racial matters, but also for their innovative presentation styles. They would weave 'legal precedents, social science research, dialogues between fictional characters and personal experiences with discrimination together to provide deep analyses of contemporary racism and visionary proposals for its eradication' (Feagin & O'Brien, 2010, p. 59). The critical race approach has led to a prolific field of study analysing ways in which the construct of 'race' plays a part in institutions such as the law and education, looking at the position of various racialised groups (Atwood & López, 2014; Bernal, 2002; Crenshaw et al., 1995; Hernandez-Truyol, Harris, & Valdes, 2006; Hill, 2008; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Spears, 1999; Stefancic, 1997; Vaught & Castagno, 2008). While this academic tradition started in the United States and most of its research focuses on that society, it has later looked at other societies as well (see for example McLaughlin & Whatman, 2011; Möschel, 2011). In the Netherlands, an important although short-lived hub for critical race scholars was the Center for Race and Ethnic Studies (CRES) at the University of Amsterdam. During the second half of the 1980s, this became a key place for scholars in the Netherlands to address issues around 'race' and racism. Many of the scholars affiliated with the CRES identified with the approach of critical race theory. This group of scholars included Kwame Nimako and Glenn Willemsen, with their work on typologies of minority policy; Teun van Dijk, whose work on racism and discourse has been discussed in the previous section; and Philomena Essed, whose intersectional work on 'everyday racism' I discuss in more depth below.

Critical race studies constituted an important step forward in the study and theorisation of institutional racism, emphasising how a colour-blind approach can contribute to inequality and oppression rather than social justice. However, critical race studies itself also received its share of criticism. Feminist authors, while sharing critical race scholars' commitment to anti-racism, drew attention to its tendency to ignore other aspects of identity or social positioning, such as gender. In Great Britain, contributions by Hazel Carby and Pratibha Parmar to *The Empire Strikes Back* (Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1982) would prove important early contributions in the development of debates about the interrelationship between sexism, class relations and racial and gender inequality. Together with authors such as bell hooks and Angela Davis in the United States, they emphasised the need for a black feminist analysis. In their critique of either

‘race’ or gender-blind analyses, these authors argued for what would later become known as an intersectional approach.

The term *intersectionality* was coined by critical race scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989). The concept refers to the process of interaction of different systems of social categorisation, which ‘operate in tandem to produce and maintain the unequal distribution of power and privilege’ (Simien, 2007, p. 264). Crenshaw introduced the term in her work examining the ways in which the combination of their gender and racial positionings lead to specific forms of exclusion and oppression of women of colour. It is important to note that Crenshaw’s scholarship built upon and was preceded by that of other thinkers, even if they did not use the term ‘intersectionality’. In addition to the scholarship discussed above, two often cited examples of intersectional works *avant la lettre* are that of the Combahee River Collective in the 1970s and Sojourner Truth’s famous 1851 speech titled ‘Ain’t I a woman?’, in which she critiqued essentialist notions of White femininity, drawing on her life experiences as a former enslaved person (Brah & Phoenix, 2004). But, although such earlier work exists, intersectional analysis has gained much traction since Crenshaw’s landmark publication in the late 1980s. Since then, many scholars have underlined the need to ‘consider the crosscutting nature of dominations and oppressions within all modern societies’ (Freedman, 2001, p. 295). Scholarship on intersectionality has been called one of the most important contributions that women’s studies and related fields have made (M.T. Berger & Guidroz, 2009; McCall, 2005). Importantly, the approach examines the relationship between various identity categories and positionings with specific attention for the ways in which they are mutually constitutive rather than separate. For example, the category ‘woman’ carries different meanings, depending on what other socially relevant positionings the person in question occupies, for instance along axes such as ‘race’ or class. The ways in which being positioned at a specific ‘intersection’ of identity categories is related to differential opportunities and outcomes has been studied in a wide variety of settings. Examples include studies about treatment in the legal system (Cossins, 2003; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008), participation in informal care work (Mattis et al., 2008) and the asylum process in the United States (S.A. Berger, 2009). While all intersectional research is geared towards understanding intersecting mechanisms of oppression, this can be done in a variety of ways, policy analysis being a prominent one (see for example Verloo, 2006). Most relevant for my research, however, is work that shines a light on mechanisms of oppression at the interaction level.

A key publication in this regard is Essed’s influential and pioneering 1984 book *Alledaags Racisme (Everyday Racism)*. This study examined how racism operates in gendered ways in the everyday lives of African-American women in California and Afro-Surinamese women in the Netherlands. In this and later work, including her doctoral thesis published in 1990, Essed adopts a ‘standpoint theory’ approach, favouring the expert knowledge based on the lived experience of those at the receiving end of racism (Essed, 1984, 1986,



1990; Essed & Trienekens, 2008). Introducing the concept of 'everyday racism', she focuses attention on the ways in which racism is present not just in conscious, wilful acts of bigotry, but also in less explicitly intolerant practices and symbols in everyday exchanges. Essed's work triggered much response, ranging from a warm welcome to indignation and accusations of having a 'victim mentality' (for discussions of this reception, see for example Prins, 2004, p. 45; Wekker, 1994). A thorough critique can be found in Baukje Prins's acclaimed 2000 book on 'Dutch minorities discourse', based on her doctoral thesis (1997). Prins objects that the logic of standpoint theory risks leading to circularity and essentialism, when an aspect of someone's identity becomes the decisive criterion for the validity of their claims about social reality (Prins, 1997, p. 33). While I concur with Prins on the existence of these risks, and do not adopt a standpoint approach, my research is still highly indebted to Essed's pioneering focus on the everyday manifestations of racism, as well as her strategy of bringing marginalised points of view and experiences to bear on hitherto unexamined dominant structures.

Although the field of critical race studies has bloomed internationally, there are now relatively few scholars working from this approach in the Netherlands, as is remarked by Hondius (2009), who investigates, amongst other subjects, the history of the concept and experience of 'race' in the Netherlands. She observes that scholarly attention remains mostly focused on minorities' migration and the degree to which they succeed in attaining social, economic and political integration in the Netherlands. Research on 'race' and racism as factors in perpetuating inequality remains relatively rare (Essed & Nimako, 2006; Vink, 2007), and with this book I aim to make a contribution to the filling of this gap.

### ***Focusing on Whiteness***

Most of the scholarly approaches to 'race' and racism discussed in this chapter focus on the position of those racialised as non-White, the effects of processes of exclusion and domination on these people, and their resistance against these processes. While this focus has produced much valuable insight, it tends to leave the racially dominant positions relatively unexamined. When unexamined, power can easily appear normal, natural and unquestionable. In the words of Steve Garner (2007, p. 47), Whiteness is the 'Greenwich Mean Time of identity' against which others are measured: identities, situations and practices associated with Whiteness are seen as normal, natural and desirable – other practices and identities are deviant from this norm.

From the early 1990s onwards, critical race scholars such as Ruth Frankenberg, bell hooks and Vron Ware sought to problematise the unquestioned and unmarked position of Whiteness. Rather than emphasising subordination and disadvantage, their work focused on the ways racial privilege and dominance are sustained. This strand of research is now known as critical White studies and looks at the role of Whiteness as a societal ordering

mechanism. It is especially suited to bring to the fore the implicit and hidden ways that racial power inequalities are maintained. Scholarship in this tradition encompasses psychological, historical and sociological work and often aims to take an intersectional approach.<sup>12</sup> Researchers in this tradition examine Whiteness as a social construct that has developed historically, impacting all members of society since ‘we are all raced and ethnicised, so the systems of advantage and disadvantage that produce race implicate everyone’ (Knowles, 2010, p. 29). In the words of one of the foundational authors, ‘white people *and* people of color live racially structured lives. In other words, any system of differentiation shapes those on whom it bestows privilege as well as those it oppresses’ (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 1). Potentially, highlighting how the ‘unmarked and unnamed’ practices and ways of viewing the world associated with the dominant racial position are constructed has a powerful effect of placing these under scrutiny and critique.

However, the recent growth of scholarship in critical White studies has led to concerns about reifying Whiteness rather than attempting to understand it in its context. For example, investigations into Whiteness have mostly focused on the United States and Great Britain, and it is important to take into account the different ways in which Whiteness has been constructed in different societies (see for example Essed & Trienekens, 2008; M.J. Green & Sonn, 2006; M.J. Green, Sonn, & Matsebula, 2007; Standfield, 2004). A related concern is with work that foregrounds narratives of individual White people without connecting this to a more structural analysis of systems of power (Back, 2010; Garner, 2007). As various authors have noted, to avoid the risk of a ‘narcissistic’ or ‘anxious’ interest in Whiteness for its own sake, the focus of analysis should be the relationship between Whiteness and racism (Ahmed, 1997; Back, 2010). In this context, Back (2010, p. 447) argues for an analysis of the ‘dramaturgy of racism’, for paying attention to Whiteness as part of a choreography of action. Resonating with this, my framework of interaction logic is geared towards analysis of interaction patterns. Importantly, the structural character implied by the metaphor of ‘choreography’ does not limit it to predictable and linear interactions; Back (2010, p. 447) emphasises that the ‘dance of power’ may also stumble or miss a step, which is exactly what I aim to explore by focusing on critical moments.

The foundational texts of the subdiscipline point to the importance of a nuanced and intersectional understanding of White identities, as well as linking the (inter-)personal to the societal level of analysis. Frankenberg argues that Whiteness needs to be understood as a set of linked dimensions. The word Whiteness refers to a ‘location of structural advantage, of race privilege’, as well as to a ‘standpoint’, a way of viewing the world from

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12 Back, 2010; K. Davis & Nencel, 2011; Essed & Trienekens, 2008; Frankenberg, 1993; Garner, 2007; M. J. Green & Sonn, 2006; hooks, 1992; Ignatiev, 1995; McCreary, 2011; McIntosh, 1988; Preston & Chadderton, 2012; Ware, 1992; Warren & Hytten, 2007.

that position. The third dimension that Frankenberg (1993, p. 1) distinguishes is that of Whiteness as a 'set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed'. Thus, the concept of Whiteness can be helpful in understanding interactions at the interpersonal level, as well as shining a light on White supremacy as a societal ordering mechanism encompassing but going beyond the interpersonal (Mills, 1994). For example, seeking to understand the various ways in which people talk about and 'do' racial difference, Frankenberg proposes a distinction between essentialist, colour- and power-evasive, and race-cognisant discourses. As I will discuss further in the final section of this chapter, the colour-blind perspective is a power-evasive approach to racial difference, and has been extensively analysed by scholars such as Carr (1997) and Bonilla-Silva (2006).

I aim to build on the approaches discussed in this section by dissecting ostensibly 'normal' and 'natural' dominant practices and tracing how they are linked to specific notions of the ways 'race' relates to identities, histories and power inequalities. My dramaturgical approach means I examine how this plays out in social interactions, looking at the ways various institutional settings provide opportunities for actors to position themselves through their verbal and non-verbal communication. Such positioning may, for instance, include racial ones and their inflections with other aspects of identity such as interpellations regarding national belonging. As part of this, attention to Whiteness and its relationship to racism will form a connecting thread in my analysis.

### **Decolonial approaches: tracing the historical roots of racism into the present**

Another significant current of scholarship on 'race' and racism builds on anti-colonial and postcolonial critical theory. The nexus between anti-colonial and postcolonial studies and the topic of 'race' has a rich history. In fact, postcolonial theory has been instrumental in laying bare the role played by ideas of racial hierarchies in justifying imperialism.

The work of authors such as Edward Said, Albert Memmi and Frantz Fanon nowadays still provide important points of reference for this strand of research. Fanon (1967) conceptualised racism as a pathological condition for both the colonised and the coloniser. His thinking was, in turn, influenced by ideas developed in the *négritude* movement, a literary and political philosophy developed by francophone African public intellectuals in the 1930s. A central theme in much of the research indebted to Said and Fanon is how images of the 'Other' were constructed by the colonisers in the interplay between colonialism and imperialism. The word 'interplay' is key here, as an important contribution of the research in this tradition has been the foregrounding of the ways in which racism and imperial domination and colonisation emerge in different ways in different times and places. The images of the colonial 'Others' were not the products of a singular, one-way process. Rather, in order to understand a specific historical configuration, one has to take into account various processes and social relations. For example, research in this tradition has shed light on the role of notions of sexuality in constructions of the colonial

‘Other’. Thus, a central contribution of research on colonialism, ‘race’ and processes of ‘Othering’ has been to show the importance of context and nuance in understanding the relationship between colonialism and the articulation of racial ideologies. Without that, one risks a simplistic view of colonialism, racism and the ‘Other’ as unchanging. More insight is gained when taking into account the ‘chameleonic’ (Goldberg, 1990, p. ix) nature of racism, adapting to different times and places.

An important, while unlikely, influence on the postcolonial research on ‘race relations’ has been Foucault. Although his work has been criticised for being Eurocentric (see Grosfoguel, 2015), his colossal contributions to understandings of power as generative rather than just repressive have been useful for scholarship on ‘race’ and Otherness in a variety of fields, including postcolonial studies, technology studies, philosophy, queer theory and anthropology (for more on this, see for example Corbey & Leerssen, 1991; Rangan & Chow, 2013, p. 6). Contrary to the goal of presenting neutral facts, decolonial researchers call attention to the way knowledge is situated and partial and produces specific effects. For example, decolonial scholars have pointed out that scholarly attention tends to focus on Dutch slave trade, thus foregrounding notions such as transactions and profit margins rather than addressing the process of enslavement and the conditions of slavery and how these relate to racism (Nimako, Abdou, & Willemsen, 2014).

Despite the example mentioned above, and ‘whereas the postcolonial condition has been extensively discussed in the Anglophone and Francophone countries, hardly anything of this has resonated in the Netherlands’ (U. Bosma, 2012a, p. 7). When understanding ‘(post)colonial’ in the narrow descriptive sense of research into the period either during or after official colonial rule, examples are easy to find in many academic disciplines. However, except for the work of a small group of researchers, there has been a tendency to not combine the study of Dutch history in the European territory and that of the societies in the colonial territories overseas. While the histories of these places are interlinked, the historical record is mostly ‘untangled’. As a telling example of this, Bhabra (2012, p. 1105) points to the successful book *The Embarrassment of Riches* (Schama, 1987), which examines the impact of wealth on Dutch culture during the so-called ‘Golden Age’ between 1580–1670. The 700+ page book hardly discusses the fact that an important factor in amassing this wealth was the trade in enslaved Africans.

However, a relatively small group of researchers aim to study coloniality and its effects in ways that are postcolonial beyond the temporal or demographic sense of the word, examining the material as well as immaterial legacies and ‘debris’ (Stoler, 2013a) of colonialism and decolonisation.<sup>13</sup> A closer look at key authors and their work immediately

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13 See for example Bhagwanbali, 1996; Gouda, 1995; Guadeloupe, 2013, 2014; Guadeloupe et al., 2015; Heilbron, 1992; Hira, 2015; Hondius, 2009, 2014; G. Jones, 2012; Nimako, Abdou, & Willemsen, 2014; Small, 2012, 2014; Small & Hira, 2014; Stoler, 2013a, 2013b; Van Stipriaan, 2014; Wekker, 2014b, 2016; Zunder, 2010.

brings to the fore the complexity of the terms ‘postcolonial’ and ‘decolonial’ and the disparity between various approaches favoured by authors all claiming a postcolonial or decolonial position. Crucial differences include the authors’ stance on the role of researchers as activists or as neutral observers, and the role of ideology in academia.

Authors such as Gloria Wekker, Frances Gouda, Sandew Hira and Alex van Stipriaan, while producing very different scholarship, all take an explicitly decolonial approach, strongly denouncing past colonial practices as well as bringing to the fore continuities in the way colonialism has shaped and still shapes racial ideologies and practices. Wekker combines this with an intersectional analysis, focusing on gender, class and sexuality as well as ‘race’ in her work, which is broad in scope, using a wide variety of material, from personal experience to historical texts and contemporary popular culture. Gouda’s focus, in her book *Dutch Culture Overseas* (1995), is on colonial culture rather than the more common focus on policy. She examines Dutch Orientalism and, more specifically, the way Dutch colonial rulers understood and promoted their activities in the Indonesian archipelago. Hira’s position tends to be that of a contributor from outside the more widely recognised academic institutions, even though he has collaborated with, for example, Stephen Small, extraordinary professor of History of the Dutch Slavery and its Legacy (Small & Hira, 2014). Hira’s approach is intimately linked with anti-racist and decolonial activism and is characterised by a strong denouncement of the White establishment in the Netherlands, which has, for example, led him to criticise authors such as Van Stipriaan for contributing to the downplaying of crimes against humanity’ (Hira, 2015). A clear illustration of the marked differences in understanding is that this same Van Stipriaan is disapprovingly characterised by Oostindie (2011, p. 156) as an ‘activist’. Van Stipriaan’s engagement with the nexus between academia, policy and activism is visible in, for example, his work on a report for the Municipality of Amsterdam on slavery (Van Stipriaan, 2014). Oostindie explicitly distances himself from decolonial researchers, citing ‘serious concerns about the use of what I consider to be idiosyncratic jargon and the moralizing, heavily politicized character of, and lack of empirical research inherent to, much of this branch of academia’ (Oostindie, 2011, p. 17). If one imagines Wekker, Van Stipriaan and Oostindie on a scale from markedly decolonial to moderately postcolonial researchers, one could position Piet Emmer (2000), a well-known historian who has often appeared on talk shows as an expert on issues of migration, much further along the scale. His analysis of colonial processes and their present-day repercussions has often been met with strong criticism for its ‘overly mild and relativising tone’<sup>14</sup>, its emphasis on Africans as co-responsible for slavery and its representation of some aspects of slavery as relatively humane. In turn, he regards his work as important in bringing objective truths to the fore, in contrast to some

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14 Original Dutch text: ‘overdadig milde en relativerende toon’.

decolonial work, which he has denounced as ‘pamphlet-like’<sup>15</sup> (Van Casteren & Vermaas, 2000; see also Ten Broeke, 2003). It is precisely the highlighting of such questions around the ideological dimension of academic work that has been one of the key contributions of decolonial authors. A recent key example of this in the Dutch context can be found in the edited volume *Smash the pillars. Decoloniality and the imaginary of color in the Dutch kingdom* (Weiner & Carmona Báez, 2018), which features contributions from scholar-activists who, together, embody ‘a decolonial call for pluriversalism’ (Weiner & Báez, 2018, p. xx). In this book, discussion of the status of different types of knowledge, as well as a discussion of the *Zwarte Piet* figure, forms a connecting thread throughout most of the chapters.

Another fundamental contribution of decolonial scholarship lies in the way in which the temporally and spatially ‘colonial’ has been consistently linked back by many of these authors to metropolitan and current-day Dutch culture and society. One of the ways I have aimed to build on these insights is by engaging explicitly with my positionality as an academic, as discussed in more depth in Chapter 3. I regard it as impossible and therefore misguided to aim for a ‘neutral’ position, and intend to question taken-for-granted categories such as racial and national identities, rather than use them as neutral analytical tools. Also, since language plays a powerful role in reproducing social worlds, using language that some might experience as ‘idiosyncratic jargon’ makes sense to me when this expresses more accurately what I want to say, such as my placing ‘race’ in inverted commas.

### **Present-day research currents: understanding racisms in a ‘non-racist’ era**

The concern with understanding particular manifestations of racism in their context rather than stopping at a simplistic conceptualisation of racism as homogenous has been taken forward in much of the research produced roughly since the turn of the century. Recent years have seen efforts to develop an interdisciplinary approach to the study of ‘race’ and racisms. Much of this research emphasises why it is useful to use the plural form, since racisms are historically situated and changing. As Back and Solomos argue, ‘the meanings of race and racism need to be located within particular fields of discourse and articulated to social relations found within that context’ (Back & Solomos, 2009a, p. 24; see also Modood, 2001). More specifically, this type of research emphasises the need to take into account ‘the significance of social texture, social relationships and social practices’ (Knowles, 2010, p. 29) when researching issues around ‘race’ and racism. This includes but goes beyond an acknowledgement that ‘race’ is socially produced. It means specifying *how* this happens, concretising the workings of representation, symbols and discourses. After all, as M’Charek (2013, p. 420) puts it, ‘the boundary between the “biological” and

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15 Original Dutch text: ‘pamfletachtige [literatuur]’.

the “social” is not given or stable but one that is enacted in practices’. In this regard, conventional sociological concerns pursued by, amongst others, Erving Goffman have been identified as useful for understanding the way people’s routine action makes use of social distinctions in such a way that it reproduces ‘race’ and racial inequality.

Much current-day research examines how expressions tend to be coded in a language that helps avoid accusations of racism. Research in this vein looks at the way terms such as ‘difference’, ‘identity’ and ‘culture’ have come to take the place of some of the older language of ‘race’ (Back, 2010; Back & Solomos, 2009a, p. 21; Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Roediger, 2009). This ‘new racism’, or ‘racism without races’ (Balibar & Wallerstein, 1991), tends to be ostensibly non-racial and hinges on the supposition of insurmountable cultural differences. The term ‘new racism’ was originally coined by Marxist Professor of Film Studies Martin Barker (1981), in an analysis of the depiction of immigrants as a threat in the context of Thatcherism. Especially since the events of 11 September 2001, the construction of the Muslim and/or Arab Other in the context of the ‘clash of civilisations’ discourse is of central significance in the theorisation of ‘new racism’.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, much contemporary work in the field explores the interconnections between ‘race’, religion, national identity and patriotism.

In terms of recent influential research on ‘race’ and racism in the Netherlands, I have already mentioned some of the publications that aim to combine an analysis of racism in the Netherlands with a decolonial perspective and attention to the dominant racial position, rather than focusing exclusively on those at the receiving end of racism. This scholarship tends to analyse Dutch tolerance as an explicit but passive rejection of racism rather than active anti-racist work and investigation (Hondius, 2014; Van der Pijl & Goulardova, 2014, p. 270; Weiner, 2014). As an additional example, the contributions to the edited volume *Dutch Racism* (Essed & Hoving, 2014) analyse how avoidance, denial and institutionalised ignorance are reproduced with the effect of maintaining the positive self-image of the Netherlands as a colour-blind, anti-racist nation. Wekker’s book *White Innocence. Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race* (2016) grapples with the question how the White Dutch self-image of innocence is accomplished and maintained. In a chapter dedicated to ‘The case of Zwarte Piet/Black Pete’, Wekker analyses the ‘voluminous hate mail bombardment’ (Wekker, 2016, p. 143) in 2008 from the general public against persons and organisations that had brought up critical questions about the *Zwarte Piet* figure. She discerns 10 themes that the correspondents bring up, and argues that these ‘paint a thick picture of the White Dutch self in the first decade of the twenty-first century’ (Wekker, 2016, p. 143). In her reading, postcolonial melancholia plays an important part, backed up by self-presentations in which innocence, smallness

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16 For a critical view on the novelty of this ‘new racism’, see Hill Collins & Solomos, 2010a; and for an example of an early analysis of this type of denial of racism in the Dutch context, see Van Dijk, 1992.

and defencelessness are central. These conclusions are confirmed by other authors who posit that '[t]he idea that Dutchness does not or ought not to include racism remains firmly intact. Between taboo and discrimination, the ideal of a post-racist Dutchness is reiterated' (Van Reekum, 2014, p. 96).

As this discussion of different approaches to racism has shown, questions around the structural nature of racism, as well as attention for the interwovenness of symbolic and material dimensions within these processes, have been put more firmly on the research agenda in the Netherlands too in the last two decades. I situate myself within the current of research addressing questions around racism in Dutch contexts by building on these insights of critical race studies and decolonial scholarship. Such an approach involves addressing how ostensibly 'normal' and 'natural' dominant practices and ideas of 'race', racism and identity can be unpacked to reveal how they are constructed, and to demonstrate that alternative notions and practices are possible. This is what I aim to do in my analysis of the debate about *Zwarte Piet*. I explore what social worlds are created through people's engagement in the debate. In each of the case studies in the next three chapters, I delve into an interaction that constitutes a disruption of business as usual. I analyse these events as struggles to define the situation at hand: who is to participate, in what way and to what end, and how does this relate to the tradition surrounding *Zwarte Piet*, if at all? I specifically focus on the enactment and marginalisation of dissent, parsing out how notions of 'appropriate behaviour' are rooted in specific understandings of identity, history and racism.









# Part 3

CASE STUDIES



# Chapter 5

Public hearing, 2013





## 5.1 Introduction

The room on the ground floor of the central ‘Stopera’ City Office of the Municipality of Amsterdam is overcrowded with people. All chairs are taken this autumn morning, and dozens of people stand or sit on the floor, touching elbows and knees with each other, trying to find a position from which they can see one of the television screens on the walls. Those present are overwhelmingly Black people. Most seem young, in their 20s or early 30s. There is tension in the air; everyone seems engaged and there is the occasional cheering or booing. In the corridor outside, more people are waiting, hoping to get in still.

As I will explain shortly, this is not the image most people would have of a public hearing at the Municipality of Amsterdam. Neither is it the image that was shown to those following the event live on television. On the contrary, the broadcast of the hearing showed images from another, larger conference room a bit further down the same corridor. In here, the hearing was characterised by formality and attention to procedures, rather than by a throng of people sitting crammed together on the floor. In this sense, television viewers were presented with an event that fit into the mould of what these local public hearings tend to be like: formal settings in which the complainants explain to a committee why they disagree with a decision made by the municipality. In such hearings, the complaints committee, made up of civil servants without previous involvement with the case, is cast as a neutral third party. The committee’s chairperson acts as the central figure to whom all communication is directed. This person sets the pace and tone of the hearing by explaining the procedures, asking questions and determining the turn-taking by all present. After the complainants have spoken, a civil servant clarifies the stance of the municipality regarding the issue at hand. Sometimes, other persons or organisations are invited as well on the basis of significant interest in the matter. Such hearings do not immediately result in any conclusion. Rather, it is easily weeks after the hearing that the committee formulates a written advice, based upon the meeting and additional information, such as the letters of complaint, to the municipality. As a rule, the municipal authority that made the initial decision being complained about – in this case, the mayor – is to respond within six weeks. The committee’s advice is non-binding, although the municipal authorities usually follow it.<sup>1</sup>

The public hearing on 17 October 2013, held in response to complaints regarding the mayor’s decision to grant a permit for that year’s *Sinterklaas* parade, followed the familiar pattern. It was a formal event, punctuated by the chairperson’s explanations about procedural aspects such as who was to speak, when and about what. Those present articulated many arguments to strengthen their case. As is customary in a range of formal settings, including courts and parliament, the chairperson assigned turns and speakers

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1 For more on these regulations and procedures, see Gemeente Amsterdam 2015, 2017.

tended to have their communication go through him rather than directly addressing other attendees. Even so, in crucial ways, the event presented a break from the ordinary. For one, the hearing was exceptional in the attention it garnered even before it had started. It spurred national media attention for weeks and would turn out to be a landmark event. In the words of leading activists, the hearing ‘opened up the floodgates’<sup>2</sup> (Miss Kitty Show, 2014) and led to ‘the birth of a social movement’ (Engel, 2015; Raboteau, 2014). The chairperson of the public hearing afterwards characterised it as a ‘unique gathering’ leading to a ‘catalyst effect’<sup>3</sup> (Interview chairperson, 2018). Its topic was exceptional too, since the acceptability of *Zwarte Piet* had never before been broached in such a setting. Specifically, the hearing had been organised in order to respond to the allegation that the mayor of Amsterdam had acted incorrectly in granting permission for the *Sinterklaas* parade that was due to take place in a month, since the event could be expected to include *Zwarte Piet* characters. The initial complaint had been lodged in August 2013 by activist and artist Quinsy Gario. Information about this in the media, on Gario’s website and on those of activist organisations and on social media (Gario, 2013; Westerink, 2013) had led 20 persons to follow his example within time for the hearing; an additional 29 complaints were filed at a later stage (Gemeente Amsterdam, private letter,<sup>4</sup> October 3, 2014). As I have mentioned in Chapter 1, these complaints fuelled heated debate on the national level about *Zwarte Piet* in the weeks leading up to the hearing, including a prime-time national television interview with Gario. The media attention was not limited to the lead-up to the event. On the day itself, representatives of various media outlets were present and local Amsterdam television station AT5 provided a live broadcast of the hearing. This media presence underlined and added to the exceptionality of the event. That the hearing presented a departure from business as usual was further reflected in the presence of attendees in numbers far exceeding what the municipality had made arrangements for. All chairs for the audience in the public hearing room were taken, and even the additional room with video connection provided by far insufficient seating for those wishing to follow the proceedings.

As has been discussed in Chapter 2, disruptions such as this one merit attention since they provide an opportunity to examine the implicit interaction logic that structures the interaction. Such an interaction logic has four aspects: a certain type of *communication* delivered by certain *people*, under certain *circumstances*, and geared towards a certain *goal*. The *felicity* or success of people’s communication depends on combining the appropriate forms of communication, with the appropriate people,

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2 Original Dutch transcript: ‘het hek is van de dam gegaan’.

3 Original Dutch transcripts: ‘unieke bijeenkomst’; ‘vliegwieleffect’.

4 This letter by the Amsterdam Municipality was sent in response to an information request on the basis of the Freedom of Information Act (Wet Openbaarheid van Bestuur).



in the appropriate circumstances, with the appropriate goal. This underlying logic ordinarily remains tacit, but is brought to the surface when the disruption of the expected flow of an interaction creates confusion about what is going on, and how people should act. Whether and how a recognisable pattern is re-established in the interaction depends on the behaviour with which actors respond to the disruption.

Technically, the purpose of the public hearing was unambiguous: to provide information so the committee could produce an advice to the mayor about the complaints. In keeping with this, the event involved many statements regarding *Zwarte Piet*, including personal experiences and legal argumentation. However, with their contributions to the discussion, people not only articulated their point of view on the figure of *Zwarte Piet*. When viewed through another lens, they presented affirmations, claims or propositions about the *way* this topic should be broached.

In this chapter, I aim to demonstrate that the most pressing question raised in the hearing was not whether the permit for the parade had been legitimately granted. With *Zwarte Piet* as a point of focus, the hearing also functioned as an arena for negotiating the meaning of racism in the Netherlands. By keeping the way people act and the content of the discussion distinct in my analysis, I aim to show their interplay, which is hard to unpick in detail in the course of an interaction, since form and content occur and develop together. Based on this two-part analysis, I aim to untangle how the construction of *Zwarte Piet* as either or not problematic during the public hearing was bound up with competing understandings of appropriateness and disruption. Specifically, I examine what mechanisms were at work in the response to the disruption, arguing that ostensibly neutral procedures and norms of politeness had larger consequences for the content of the discussion, amounting to a muffling of critical voices.

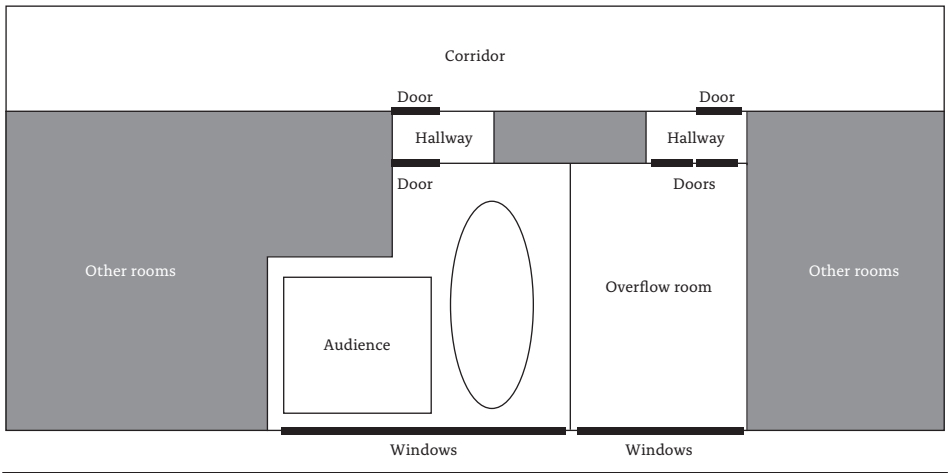
The rest of this chapter is structured as follows. Before I launch into the analysis proper, I present some visual information: a timeline of the events during the public hearing, a floor plan of the part of the municipality building in which the hearing was held, and a number of photos taken during and directly after the event. The next section discusses the empirical data I use. I then present a dramaturgical analysis of the whole of the public hearing. As part of this analysis, I delve into a detailed examination of the discussion during two key fragments, in which a disruption of the flow of the interaction is especially salient. These fragments are about three and four minutes long, respectively. Then, I briefly discuss the two court cases that the public hearing resulted in within the next 13 months. The chapter ends with a discussion of the most significant conclusions.

Figure 4. Timeline of the public hearing

People get ready in hearing hall and overflow room	Opening by chairperson	Each complainant makes statement	Representative of mayor speaks
		Exchange 1: (In) appropriate discussion of atrocities  (4 minutes)	

The total length of the hearing was approximately two hours.

Figure 5. Floor plan of the part of the municipality building in which the public hearing was held.



Exchanges between chairperson and complainant	<i>Sinterklaas</i> committee speaks	Exchanges between chairperson And complainants	Closing by chairperson	People gather outside the halls. Gario is cheered.
Exchange 2: Taking up the gauntlet  (3 minutes)				

Image 6. Audience in the overflow room



Photo by NUC.

Image 7. The oval table as seen from the entrance of the main conference room

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The members of the complaints committee are seated at the top of the table, the representative of the mayor to their left (on the right in the picture) and the complainants to their right side (on the left in the picture). In the foreground, on the right side of the picture, another complainant is seated. The representatives of the *Sinterklaas* committee are not visible in the picture, but their chairs are to the right from the complainant in the foreground. Photo by AT5.

Image 8. Audience, including members of the press, in the main conference room

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Photo by AT5.

Image 9. Gario is received with cheers as he steps into the corridor after the public hearing



Photo by Doorbraak.

### Data used

My analysis in this chapter is based on the following data. I have used a video of the public hearing, obtained from the Amsterdam TV station AT5, which provided a live broadcast of 86 minutes, covering almost the entire length of the hearing. Approximately, the first five and the last 15 minutes of the hearing were not filmed and are as such missing from the audiovisual material. To complement my transcription of this material, I have obtained the official hearing documents, including a transcription of the entire event. After checking this against my own transcription and finding it consistent, I have used the official transcript to complete the transcription I had made based on the video. All translations to English are my own; I provide the original Dutch transcript in footnotes. The audiovisual material does not provide an overview of everyone present – it focuses mostly on the speakers seated at the oval table, and the audience is shown less frequently. To complement this material, I also draw from my own observations as I attended the event in the overflow room. Additional information comes from newspaper articles, articles on various websites, interviews with actors connected to this case and a letter from the mayor to the Amsterdam City Council.

My discussion of the two subsequent court cases is based on the video registrations of the hearing at the Amsterdam Court on 22 May 2014, of the announcement of the ruling by this court on 3 July 2014, and of the State Council hearing in The Hague on 16 October 2014. This last video registration does not cover the entire hearing: some parts are missing. Additional material that I have used for this analysis are the written court verdicts of each case, newspaper articles, activists' websites and my own observations. I have attended the announcement of the ruling in Amsterdam on 3 July 2014, the State Council hearing in The Hague on 16 October 2014, and the announcement of the verdict at the State Council in The Hague on 12 November, 2014.

## 5.2 Dramaturgical analysis: questioning the ‘fairy tale’ during a pivotal public hearing

When studying the room in which the hearing took place with a dramaturgical lens, it is significant that the physical organisation of the space directed the attention of all present to those seated at the oval table in the centre of the room. Chairs for the audience were placed in rows facing this oval, with the effect that the persons seated at the table became the centre of attention. The seat at the top of the oval, overseeing the room and facing the entrance, was reserved for the chairperson. Seated on either side of him were the two other members of the complaints committee and the civil servant who took minutes of the meeting. Seated to the right of the group, as seen from the entrance of the room, were two other public servants, who were to represent the mayor. Next to them, three persons were seated who represented the organisation that had been granted the disputed permission for the parade: the *Sinterklaascomité* (*Sinterklaas* committee). The largest group seated at the table was formed by the 13 people who were present to explain their complaints. While official complaints had been lodged by 21 people, who, for that reason, had been invited to exercise their right to express their views during the public hearing, not all had chosen to be present at the occasion. Most of the people seated at the table wore smart clothes such as jackets and shirts, although one of the members of the complaints committee wore a T-shirt, and some of the complainants’ attire did not fall neatly into the category of ‘smart clothing’ either. A prominent example was the black baseball cap, embossed with ‘1873’, worn by a middle-aged complainant. One would not generally expect someone to wear a baseball cap at a formal public hearing. However, those familiar with critical views on the mainstream history of slavery in the Dutch Kingdom can read this choice of attire as a silent yet defiant reference to the 10-year period in which people of African descent were still forced to perform labour after the legal abolition of slavery in the Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1863.<sup>5</sup> By wearing the cap, the complainant thus introduced into the setting a series of notions around the history of race relations and a critique on societally dominant constructions of that history even before the hearing had officially begun.

The seating arrangement resulted in the members of the complaints committee being placed in the centre, with the complainants on their right side and the representatives of the mayor and of the *Sinterklaas* committee on the left. The committee’s physical position at equal distance from both parties was in line with the central role that notions of neutrality and fairness play in the genre of public hearings. The chairperson underlined this at various points during the hearing, for example by expressing his desire to do

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5 For more information on this, please see Chapter 2, p. 67.

justice to all sides of the issue. Other key elements in the physical setup of the hearing were the position of power implied by the central location of the complaints committee's seats, and the position of the audience as mere onlookers, while those seated at the table could more easily claim active speaking parts as enabled by the microphones that were integrated in the table, one for each person. The overwhelming majority of the audience appeared to be Black, presenting a salient visual contrast with the usual majority White audiences in the municipality, as well as with the mixed group of complainants, not to speak of the civil servants and the members of the *Sinterklaas* committee seated at the table, whom I all read as White. Racial positioning thus was a visually striking element, although its significance only became verbalised once the complainants brought it up as a noteworthy issue. In the course of the hearing, all but one of the complainants made explicit statements about their national heritage and racial identity, and how this impacted their stance towards *Zwarte Piet*.

The chairperson opened the meeting with the words 'We are the complaints committee',<sup>6</sup> followed by a short explanation about the committee's tasks in directing the hearing. Having established himself and his colleagues as key protagonists, he introduced the other groups of people seated at the table. Commenting on the fact that the complainants were seated opposite the representatives of the mayor and the *Sinterklaas* committee, he was quick to add that this was a 'coincidence' and 'absolutely not meant like this'.<sup>7</sup> He then turned to the audience in order to 'agree on some ground rules'. Some moments later, he characterised this as 'a really friendly request',<sup>8</sup> thus using a repertoire of tactful courtesy, even though the fact that stewards were present signalled the institution's ability and willingness to take less courteous steps to ensure the maintenance of order, if need be. He then asked the audience 'not to show too much encouragement, cheers, disapproval', explaining silence is needed 'so that we can simply do the hearing well together'.

Having mentioned these 'ground rules', the chairperson added some remarks regarding the 'quite unique'<sup>9</sup> presence of the press. He continued by saying that the committee had already spoken to most of the complainants, but, in case not everyone present had been spoken to, he wanted to ask again if any of the complainants had any objection to the hearing being broadcast live. In response, one of the complainants voiced a concern about his name being broadcast. The chairperson answered by emphasising that the hearing was a public event. Apparently, the presence of the film crew was not

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6 Original Dutch transcript: 'Wij zijn de bezwaarschriftencommissie'.

7 Original Dutch transcript: 'toevallig ... helemaal niet de bedoeling'.

8 Original Dutch transcript: 'ik zal ... wat huisregels met u afspreken. ... en dat is echt een vriendelijk verzoek, niet al te veel aansporingen, toejuichingen, afkeuringen te laten blijken, zodat we deze hoorzitting gewoon goed met elkaar kunnen doen'.

9 Original Dutch transcript: 'redelijk uniek'.

negotiable, even though the chairperson had introduced the topic in terms of welcoming any objection to the broadcast from any of the complainants. The complainant answered that he was 'not that happy', although it was 'a bit pointless then'. The chairperson ended this exchange by assuring the complainant he would be 'prudent'.<sup>10</sup> As was the case with the earlier 'really friendly request', the chairperson's wording had cast the situation in terms of mutual agreement, thereby downplaying any conflict, disagreement and power differences between the persons involved. These introductory remarks thus set the tone by foregrounding togetherness as a key element, characterising the hearing as a harmonious common effort accommodating all involved, presided over by the chairperson, a sympathetic, neutral authority figure. These leitmotifs fitted well with the physical setup of the hearing hall, which, as discussed, placed the chairperson and his colleagues in a position of authority and neutrality. The setting, in combination with the repertoire used by the chairperson, thus directed attention towards a specific interpretation of the public hearing. Within this dominant interaction logic, the hearing was an event in which people's position on different sides of a table did not signify conflict, but constituted a simple 'coincidence'.

Commenting on the unusually large audience presence, the chairperson stated that the committee appreciated 'that there is so much interest'<sup>11</sup> and presented the addition of the overflow room as proof of the substantial effort on the part of those who organised the hearing: 'we have done our utmost to occupy the two largest halls in the City Office ... The fact that we are here now in two halls and we have the space for that means that all of us together take this very seriously'.<sup>12</sup> In line with this, the people who attended the hearing in an official capacity, as well as the television viewers, were presented with a conference room packed to the brim with neat rows of seated audience members, as well as a few people standing. The chairperson's words did not suggest the situation in the other room to be unlike, and his comment supported the notion of the hearing as a harmonious common effort accommodating all involved. Yet, things looked rather different to the dozens of people crammed into the overflow accommodation. As the hearing was about to start, this second, smaller conference room was already overcrowded. As more would-be attendees arrived, some of the younger people gave up their chairs to people who were older, joining those already seated on the floor. Others were kept waiting in the corridor. The mismatch between the arrangements by the municipality and the influx of people, which was easily apparent to those who did not manage to get a seat in the first conference room, was not acknowledged in the

10 Original Dutch transcripts: 'ik vind het niet zo leuk'; 'een beetje zinloos dan'; 'prudent'.

11 Original Dutch transcript: 'dat er zoveel belangstelling is'.

12 Original Dutch transcript: 'We hebben nog ons uiterste best gedaan om de twee grootste zalen die het stadhuis rijk is te gaan bezetten ... Het feit dat wij hier nu in twee zalen zitten en daar ook de ruimte voor hebben betekent dat wij het ook met zijn allen heel serieus nemen'.



chairperson's comments. In an interview afterwards, I asked the chairperson about the preparations leading up to the hearing. A central element in his explanation to me was a wish to provide an appropriate platform for public discussion, even though it would have been easy to declare the complaints 'manifestly inadmissible'.<sup>13</sup> In his explanations, the chairperson displayed an acute awareness of the importance of the dramaturgy of the occasion; he referred to a wish to avoid ending up with a large but half-empty hall giving a 'chilly atmosphere', and to the sense of 'enormous distance' that could be generated in the large council hall, in which people are seated at a large distance from each other, and the commission would be seated on a raised platform, possibly creating 'a sense of authority that I absolutely did not want to create'.<sup>14</sup> A picture thus emerged that suggested careful consideration of possible effects of the physical setup, geared towards the organisation of a harmonious and inclusive platform for public debate. However, my main objective here is to analyse the dramaturgy of the situation that occurred, rather than determining whether the chairperson or anyone else was acting in good faith in avoiding other situations. And the chairperson's verbal emphasis on mutual effort and good intentions, together with the setting in which the television crew and other media had set up to document the protagonists in the orderly main conference room, invisibilised some of the very tangible inequalities that were part and parcel of the enactment of the public hearing.

Having set the tone with his introductory remarks, the chairperson explained that the complainants would each get to make a statement. The first half of the meeting was dedicated to these initial statements, punctuated by the chairperson giving the floor to the speakers in a calm and self-assured way, courteously thanking each for their contribution and checking if they had anything to add. Most started by addressing those present, using words such as 'Esteemed secretary of the complaints committee, ladies and gentlemen'. In their statements about the unacceptability of *Zwarte Piet*, racial identity and personal present-day and childhood experiences with the figure were a common theme. Seven of the 13 complainants described themselves as White, linking this racial identity to their views of *Zwarte Piet*, for example by about how they could not fully grasp the experiences of Black people, or how their Whiteness did not preclude them from being invested in an overhaul of *Zwarte Piet*. Others stated or implied their racial positioning by referring to the countries they or their parents originated from or by talking about being on the receiving end of racist behaviour. For example, a young woman talked about visiting a swimming pool as a seven-year-old, where she was spat on and told by White children to 'leave this swimming pool, you are a dirty *Zwarte Piet*'.<sup>15</sup> The statements ranged

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13 Original Dutch transcript: 'kennelijk niet ontvankelijk'.

14 Original Dutch transcripts: 'gevoel van kilheid'; 'enorme afstand'; 'een soort autoriteitsgevoel ... wat ik absoluut niet wilde creëren'.

15 Original Dutch transcript: 'ga weg uit het zwembad, jij bent een vieze Zwarte Piet'.

in length from about a minute to about six minutes. As mentioned, this was punctuated by the chairperson thanking the complainants for their explanation and giving the floor to the next person. Additional punctuation to the hearing was provided by applause by the audience and some of the complainants. There was a gradual build-up to this; the applause increased in strength as the hearing progressed. In fact, the first statement, in which Gario focused mostly on policy papers and articles of local law, was not met with any applause. The only audible response had been by the chairperson, who thanked him, checked if he had anything to add, and then thanked him again, inviting the next complainant to speak.

This second complainant to speak was Sunny Bergman, who said that the juridical aspects had already been discussed by Gario and that she would therefore talk about some personal experiences. Her emotionally charged statement was received with applause. Bergman expressed how hurt she felt about *Zwarte Piet*, illustrating this with three examples from her children's school and other contexts, such as *Zwarte Piet* being enacted as a silly character who cannot spell. She seemed nervous and distraught, losing track of what she wanted to say. Early on in her intervention, her voice broke and she appeared to be on the brink of tears. She underlined that it was important to her that she also spoke out against *Zwarte Piet*, despite being '*blank*'. As links between racial positioning and people's stance towards *Zwarte Piet* formed a recurring theme during the public hearing, it is worthwhile to examine Bergman's choice of words in some more depth. The term that Bergman used in her self-positioning – *blank* – was used by almost all White complainants at the hearing, except for the chairperson and representatives of the mayor and of the *Sinterklaas* committee, who, for their part, refrained altogether from explicitly referring to their own or anyone else's racial positioning. The non-White complainants did explicitly name such positionings, but overwhelmingly used '*Wit*' rather than '*blank*' when referring to White people. The fact that *blank* is ubiquitous as a self-description during the hearing illustrates the changes in ideas around racism, Whiteness and power in recent years in Dutch debate. The public hearing took place shortly before the Dutch public debate on 'race' and racism came to include wider criticism of the term *blank* as implying purity and therefore superiority. For example, three years after the public hearing, Bergman released her documentary film *Wit is ook een kleur* (White is a colour too). In this 2016 film, Bergman refers to herself as *wit* rather than *blank*, and part of the documentary explores the differences between these terms. The fact that, at the hearing, *blank* was the most common way White complainants referred to their own racial positioning while none of the complainants of colour used this word serves as a reminder of the way people's own racial positioning can inform their ideas of what terms are relevant and fitting when discussing racial issues. That such ideas of appropriateness can differ widely, also within a group of complainants who find themselves literally and figuratively 'on the same side' of the debate about

*Zwarte Piet*, is illustrated by the choice of words of the complainants during the public hearing, in which the complainants of colour kept in line with critical views of the term *blank*, and most of the White complainants used the term seemingly unaware of the sensitivities around it.

The speakers following Bergman talked about their personal childhood experiences as well as broader societal patterns, with one Black man arguing that the supposed ‘fairy tale’ of *Sinterklaas* means a Black child ‘knows he will never be allowed to sit on that horse’<sup>16</sup> and others calling attention to the silencing of dissent. For example, a White man called attention to the ‘quite aggressive reactions’<sup>17</sup> people receive when they attempt to address *Zwarte Piet* as a problem in relation to racism: ‘I think it is unacceptable that a part of the population in the Netherlands actually feels silenced by something such as the phenomenon of *Zwarte Piet*, but especially by the reactions of people, *blanke* people to this.’<sup>18</sup> As also illustrated by this comment, a recurring theme in all these contributions was the existence of racial differences, and the ways these differences affect people’s experiences and ideas regarding a range of issues including *Zwarte Piet*.

Racial identity was also explicitly mentioned as significant by the next speaker, who positioned herself ‘as a Dutch citizen, as an academic, as a Jew and as a mother.’<sup>19</sup> She calmly read a prepared speech, placing *Zwarte Piet* against the backdrop of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the transatlantic slavery and the ‘heyday of imperialism and scientific racism.’<sup>20</sup> Drawing a parallel between the positions of Black and Jewish people, she noted that, in those days, the stereotype of the Jew was widespread in Europe, but that

Nowadays, it is unthinkable to find a stereotype of the Jew, the greedy Jew, in a majestic children’s celebration organised with the consent of the Municipality of Amsterdam ... Not even as a funny, sweet Jew, or the greedy Jew, but then maybe without the large nose, or with the nose but without the sack of money.<sup>21</sup>

Although, by now, each speaker received applause, this time it was especially energetic, with cheers and a standing ovation by some audience members.

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16 Original Dutch transcript: ‘maar uiteindelijk weet hij dat hij nooit op dat paard mag zitten’. Incidentally, this complainant, in later years, performed an alternative to this ‘fairy tale’ and gained some fame with his public performances as ‘the new *Sinterklaas*’.

17 Original Dutch transcript: ‘nogal agressieve reacties’.

18 Original Dutch transcript: ‘ik vind het niet kunnen dat een deel van de bevolking in Nederland eigenlijk zich monddood voelt door zoiets als dat verschijnsel *Zwarte Piet*. Maar vooral dus de reactie van mensen, van *blanke* mensen daarop’.

19 Original Dutch transcript: ‘Ik sta hier als Nederlandse burger, als academicus, als Jood, en als moeder’.

20 Original Dutch transcript: ‘de hoogtijd van koloniaal imperialisme en wetenschappelijk racisme’.

21 Original Dutch transcript: ‘Vandaag de dag zou het ondenkbaar zijn de stereotype van de Jood, de gierige Jood, te vinden in een majestueus kinderfeest gehouden met de goedkeuring van de Gemeente Amsterdam ... Zelfs niet als een lieve grappige Jood, of de gierige Jood, maar dan misschien zonder de grote neus, of met de neus maar dan zonder de zak geld’.

### 5.3 Zooming in: (in)appropriate discussion of atrocities

Up until then, the complainants and audience verbally and through their physical presence centred the importance of racial differences and how these relate to viewpoints and experiences of *Zwarte Piet*, as well as to other identity categories, including Dutchness. The main interaction logic as enacted so far had not included acknowledgement, let alone centring, of these differences. However, no disruption of the flow of the interaction had yet resulted from the discrepancy between the overriding performance of the hearing as a setting for togetherness and the counterperformance of the hearing as a setting in which differences are key. This was about to change as, about 40 minutes into the hearing, another complainant made his statement. The four minutes of the exchange between this man of African descent and the chairperson is the first of the two fragments that I will analyse in most detail in this chapter. In this analysis, I show how the chairperson declares the complainant's statement out of order on procedural grounds. My analysis traces how the prevailing norms of appropriateness, although they are presented as having no relationship to the content of arguments, have direct repercussions for the kind of argument that can be made.

As many of the other complainants had done, this complainant, too, started out by introducing himself by name and greeting those present: 'Esteemed chair, members of the commission and other Amsterdammers'. He continued with a few comments that drew laughter from some audience members, mentioning he had observed that dogs bark when *Zwarte Piet* arrives in the street, but not *Sinterklaas*, who is an ordinary paedophile, since he loves children. Having set the tone with these provocative remarks, the complainant then briefly referred to the original letter of complaint that he had come to speak about. After about a minute, the complainant began to draw a parallel between the position of 'Afro-Amsterdammers' and Jewish people. He stated that, as a proud 'Amsterdammer slash Dutchman', he was ashamed of the 'racist and discriminatory addition'<sup>22</sup> of *Zwarte Piet* to the *Sinterklaas* festival. As the complainant's further remarks resulted in a disruption of the flow of the interaction, in the form of a stammered admonition by the chairperson, I will analyse the next few minutes in detail.

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22 Original Dutch transcripts: 'Afro-Amsterdammers'; 'Amsterdammer schuine streep Nederlander'; 'racistische en discriminerende toevoeging'.

## Effects and intentions

During his turn, the complainant made the following remarks, upon which he was interrupted by the chairperson:

While the Municipality of Amsterdam is rightly concerned about the security of their Jewish citizens in all kinds of areas, it is also engaged in the preparations for receiving *Sinterklaas* and *Zwarte Piet*. This reception has as a result that a large part of the Afro-Amsterdam citizens receive racist and hurtful treatment, and feel very unsafe because of it. The *Sinterklaas* celebration with *Zwarte Piet* is being considered of paramount importance under false pretences. It is an innocent children's celebration, it is a century-old tradition, and it concerns our national culture. I am ashamed of this culture. Chairperson, have you ever wondered what the descendants of Anne Frank would—would think if Chancellor Angela Merkel were to try to fool them into believing that the Shoah—that the Shoah was a German children's celebration or tradition to which the gas from Groningen simply belonged?<sup>23</sup>

The complainant's question to the chairperson about Angela Merkel making light of the Shoah was rhetorical. It implied that such statements would obviously be inappropriate. Drawing a parallel with the Shoah functioned as a shorthand for saying that *Zwarte Piet* is connected to issues of utmost gravity that do not lend themselves to be taken in jest. As discussed in Chapter 4, in dominant Dutch thought, the Second World War, and specifically the Shoah, tend to be taken as the archetypical atrocity. Bringing up the Shoah thus signals high emotional and moral stakes. Furthermore, the complainant foregrounded racism as the appropriate focus of discussion, rather than the intentions and positive background of a parade with *Zwarte Piet*, such as 'innocent children's celebration', 'century-old tradition' or 'national culture'. Suddenly, the complainant was interrupted before he could finish his speech.

It is striking that the chairperson interrupted this complainant, while he had not interrupted Schor, the complainant who had shortly before introduced herself as 'a Dutch citizen, an academic, a Jew and a mother', and who had drawn a parallel between *Zwarte Piet* and a hypothetical example involving Jewish people as well. The difference

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23 Original Dutch transcript: 'Terwijl de Gemeente Amsterdam zich terecht zorgen maakt om de beveiliging van haar Joodse burgers op allerlei gebieden, is zij ook bezig met de voorbereidingen om Sinterklaas en Zwarte Piet te ontvangen. Deze ontvangst zorgt ervoor dat een groot deel van de Afro-Amsterdamse burgers racistisch en kwetsend worden bejegend en zich daardoor erg onveilig voelt. Het Sinterklaasfeest met Zwarte Piet wordt onder valse voorwendsels hoog in het vaandel gehouden. Het is een onschuldig kinderfeest, het is een eeuwenoude traditie, en het betreft onze nationale cultuur. Ik schaam mij voor deze cultuur. Voorzitter, heeft u zich ooit afgevraagd wat de nazaten van Anne Frank ervan—ervan zouden vinden als kanselier Angela Merkel hen zou proberen wijs te maken dat de Shoah—that de Shoah een Duits kinderfeest of traditie was, waarbij het gas uit Groningen er gewoon bij hoorde?'

in response can be linked to various issues. In an interview, Schor told me she thought that her Jewish identity, as well as her position as an academic, contributed to her contribution being responded to by the chairperson as more legitimate (Interview Schor, 2018). The chairperson himself referred to other differences between the complainants when explaining the situation to me in a 2018 interview. According to him, an important difference had been that Schor had a ‘proper demeanour’.<sup>24</sup> As he explained, ‘I thought her whole speech was nuanced, and [the topic] fitted in there. And it didn’t even stand out that much ... and that gentleman in question, he started out with that. He also started out with a loud voice, with a sharp intonation ... he had also called on people to donate money to show the *blanke* elite at the municipality that things aren’t acceptable and that “we” all have to show up. So, I knew he was stirring up unrest’<sup>25</sup> (Interview chairperson, 2018).

I remember that, at the time, I also experienced the complainant’s communication style as jarring. To paraphrase the chairperson’s words, it ‘stood out’. However, my goal here is not to determine the ‘real’ reasons behind why the chairperson interrupted one complainant and not the other. What I want to call attention to is the chairperson’s reasoning, expressed during the hearing and later in the interview, that a jarring style of communication constitutes grounds for declaring someone’s contribution out of bounds. The chairperson explains his intervention in terms of neutral procedures that allow any argument, as long as it is put forward appropriately. However, this regulation of appropriate form serves to shut down the argument rather than draw it out further. In the outline of the parallel that the complainant offered, it remained unclear what the exact analogy was. It may have been between *Zwarte Piet* and some symbol for the Jewish holocaust, or between *Zwarte Piet* and the holocaust itself. The chairperson neither clarified his own concerns nor requested clarification from the complainant about the point he was trying to make. But, since the regulation was ostensibly about form rather than content, it invisibilised how such assessments of appropriateness are themselves grounded in the notions that are being debated. Whether calling on other people to attend a hearing constitutes inappropriately ‘stirring up unrest’ depends on how one conceptualises the relationship between the community in question and the municipal authorities. Additionally, whether it is appropriate to commence an argumentation about anti-Black racism by drawing an analogy with the Shoah depends on how one conceptualises those two events. What may, at first sight, appear as mere regulation of proper manners thus has an impact on the content of the arguments that are brought forward in the debate.

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24 Original Dutch transcript: ‘een keurige houding’.

25 Original Dutch transcript: ‘ik vond haar hele betoog genuanceerd en daar paste het in. En het viel ook niet eens zo heel erg op vond ik. ... En die meneer in kwestie, die begon daarmee. Hij begon ook met een harde stem, met een scherpe intonatie begon hij dat te doen. ... die had ook opgeroepen om geld te storten om de blanke elite op de gemeente even te laten zien dat het echt zo allemaal niet kan en dat “we” allemaal moesten komen. Dus ik wist dat hij ook aan het opstoken was’.

### Neutrality and respect

The chairperson responded to the complainant by attempting to interject some words while the complainant continued to speak as well. This resulted in a string of partial sentences by both men until the complainant nodded in silence and the chairperson continued, ending with an inviting hand gesture towards the complainant.

Chair: Could I—could I—?

Comp: We Dut—

Chair: Could I just a moment—could I interrupt you just a moment?

Complainant nods in silence.

Chair: I'll allow you to say what you want. But let's try—this is a rather strong comparison—[Murmuring and protest from the audience]—er, you ask me as chairp—you ask me as chairperson, you, you ask me as chairperson, you address me, you ask me, what I would think. That's what I hear you say. You are allowed to make the comparisons. You are certainly allowed to say whatever you want. I definitely don't want to deprive you of anything. But let's try to ... the most extreme comparison<sup>26</sup>—because we know for whom, and that is done with respect. And we absolutely try to regard that with respect and full conviction. But if you address me directly and come up with such an example, I feel obliged to respond to that for just a moment. That's just the message I want to give you. Because you addressed me. Go ahead.<sup>27</sup>

In this statement, the chairperson accomplished an admonition while staying in line with the idea that the hearing is a harmonious mutual effort. In accord with the prevailing interaction logic, the chairperson did not enact any confrontation: he politely asked for permission to interrupt and spoke exclusively in terms that imply harmony, such as 'I'll allow you ... you are certainly allowed to say what you want ... that is done with respect ...

26 This sentence was difficult to translate to English because, in Dutch, the utterance was not completed. The grammatical structure used in Dutch suggests that a verb should be inserted at the three dots to indicate what should be done in regards to the 'most extreme comparison'. However, the verb was missing from the utterance.

27 Original Dutch transcript: Chairperson: 'Zou ik u—zou ik u—'Complainant: 'Wij Nederlan—'Chairperson: 'Mag ik u heel even—mag ik u heel even onderbreken? U mag van mij zeggen wat u wil. Maar laten we wel proberen—dit is een hele stevige vergelijking—eh, u vraagt het aan mij als voorz—u vraagt het aan mij als voorzitter, u, u vraagt het mij als voorzitter, u spreekt mij aan, u vraagt mij, wat zou u ervan vinden. Ik hoor het u zeggen. U mag de vergelijkingen doen. U mag zeker zeggen wat u wilt. Ik wil u zeker niets ontnemen. Maar laten we wel proberen om de meest extreme vergelijking—want we weten voor wie, en dat gaat met respect. En wij proberen daar ook absoluut met vol respect en volle overtuiging naar te kijken. Maar als u mij direct aanspreekt en met zo'n voorbeeld komt voel ik mij wel genoodzaakt om daar heel even op te reageren. Dus ik geef het u alleen maar even mee. Omdat u mij aansprak. Ga uw gang.'

we absolutely try to regard that with respect'. As such, he did not voice any straightforward order or demand. On the contrary, he clarified what he did by stating: 'I definitely don't want to deprive you of anything'. As a modifier after the statement that he does not 'want to deprive you of anything', the chairperson brought 'the most extreme comparison' to the attention of the complainant as an important issue to take into account. In linguistic terms, the word 'but' between these two parts of his utterance serves as a discourse marker indicating a disjunctive relationship (Espinal, 1991; Schiffrin, 2000). It signals an opposition between 'I'll allow you to say what you want' and 'a very strong comparison', suggesting that the permission does not imply a *carte blanche* for this 'very strong comparison'.

Making it clear that he does not censor content, the chairperson presented his admonition as the flagging up of the importance of an appropriate tone. This tone should be characterised with 'respect' regarding 'the most extreme comparison', namely comparison with the Shoah. In line with his earlier positioning of the committee as a neutral party wishing to do justice to all sides, he made it clear they still regard the complainant 'with respect and full conviction'. The chairperson's comment that he felt 'obliged' to respond further minimised his agency since it presented his admonition as being caused by the complainant's actions, rather than his own ideas. Interestingly, this focus on the chairperson's feelings was at odds with the fact that the convention in settings such as these to have communication go through a central figure is meant to make the personal emotions and objections of specific individuals less prominent in structuring the debate, and ensure turn-taking is not dependent on the agreeableness of speakers' opinions.

In short, the chairperson accomplished his admonition about drawing a parallel with the Shoah while foregrounding his position as a neutral, helpful and understanding authority figure, deemphasising conflict and conforming to the idea of the hearing as harmonious. As the chairperson reduced the reference to the Shoah to poor manners, he also closed an avenue for a specific point of view regarding the way particular historical atrocities are echoed by present-day practices. However, as the next pages will show, the complainant did not comply with the chairperson. Rather, he enacted a different interaction logic, in which mentioning the Shoah was part of an appropriate repertoire because it involved crucial similarities with the cultural background text of *Zwarte Piet*: that of transatlantic slavery.

### **Challenging by complying**

Once the chairperson signalled that the complainant could continue speaking, the latter responded. Punctuated by applause and shouts of approval from the audience, he stated the following with vehemence:

I read the sentence again and I delete 'chairperson' and replace 'chairperson' with 'other Amsterdammers'. Have you ever wondered. Other Amsterdammers. Have you ever wondered what the descendants of Anne Frank would think if Chancellor Angela—if Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel were to try to fool them into believing that the Shoah



was a German children's celebration or tradition to which the gas from Groningen simply belonged? We, Dutch people of African-Caribbean descent, not negroid descent, are tired of this humiliation, already 140 slash 150 years after the abolition of the slavery holocaust. On the grounds of what has been put forward by me, the request is to, as of now, no longer grant permits for the official reception of *Sinterklaas* with *Zwarte Piet*. Free us from this aberration! And send *Zwarte Piet* on his way for good with immediate effect! I thank you.<sup>28</sup>

While the chairperson had acted and spoken in line with the idea of the hearing as a harmonious mutual effort, the complainant, with his defiant answer to the chairperson's admonition, foregrounded conflict. By explicitly leaving out the chairperson in the introduction to his argument, the complainant made sure the chairperson was no longer 'addressed personally'. He thus reciprocated the chairperson's approach in taking his interlocutor's words more literally than they were likely intended. Creating a situation in which the chairperson's reason for feeling 'obliged to respond' was no longer applicable, he harnessed the chairperson's approach to his advantage. Even though, strictly speaking, he acted in line with what the chairperson had said, his response constituted a challenge rather than acquiescence to the chairperson. The audience's shouts of protest at the chairperson's interventions and the approval of those of the complainant during this exchange attested and contributed to the agitation, as well as the complainant's tense facial expression and the vehemence in his voice.

Pushing back against the chairperson's admonition about mentioning 'the most extreme comparison', the complainant drew the parallel with the Shoah a second time. Where the chairperson had presented his admonition in light of the importance of 'respect' regarding 'the most extreme comparison', the complainant, rather than giving a prime position to either of the atrocities he referred to, foregrounded similarities between the two by talking about slavery as a holocaust. He thus challenged the view, communicated by the chairperson but common in the Netherlands in general, that the Shoah is the most significant historical atrocity. His referral to the '140 slash 150 years' since the abolition of slavery constituted another nod to the contested nature of slavery as part of Dutch history.

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28 Original Dutch transcript: 'Ik lees de zin opnieuw en ik schrap "voorzitter" en ik zet in de plaats van "voorzitter" "overige Amsterdammers". Heeft u zich ooit afgevraagd. Overige Amsterdammers. Heeft u zich ooit afgevraagd wat de nazaten van Anne Frank ervan zouden vinden als kanselier Angela—als bondskanselier Angela Merkel hen zou proberen wijs te maken dat de Shoah een Duits kinderfeest of traditie was waarbij het gas uit Groningen er gewoon bij hoorde? Wij Nederlanders van Afrikaans-Caribische afkomst, geen negroiden afkomst, zijn deze vernedering al 140 schuine streep 150 jaar na afschaffing van de slavernij holocaust beu. Op grond van wat door mij naar voren is gebracht is het verzoek om vanaf heden geen vergunning meer te verlenen voor de officiële ontvangst van Sinterklaas met Zwarte Piet. Bevrijd ons van deze dwaling! En stuur met onmiddellijke ingang Zwarte Piet voorgoed de laan uit! Ik dank u.'

The complainant's explicit positioning of himself as part of a historically continuous collective defined in terms of racial identity, nationality and geographical background – 'We, Dutch people of African-Caribbean descent, not negroid descent' – presented these types of differences between people as relevant to their understanding of *Zwarte Piet* and racism, and the hearing as a setting in which it is appropriate and relevant to explicitly talk about such differences. As such, it strengthened his argumentation for a counter-hegemonic understanding of history as well as of present-day racial relations.

Upon the complainant's closing words, 'I thank you', a standing ovation by the audience followed. The high moral stakes and tense atmosphere invoked by the previous minutes were, however, followed by an anti-climax. Apparently taking the complainant's 'I thank you' as the end of his intervention, the chairperson did not respond with the words of thanks and appreciation with which he had marked the closing of other complainants' turns. Rather, when the applause had not quite died down yet, the chairperson requested that the complainant switch off his microphone. The complainant responded he was willing to comply, but added: 'I thought I would be allowed to continue to speak'. He thus emphasised the chairperson's agency in cutting short his opportunity to voice his complaint. To this, the chairperson responded calmly, with a smile and chuckle – 'I thought you had finished' – and let the complainant know he would get another opportunity to speak later. The chairperson's counterpositioning thus implied that a neutral preset agenda determined the turn-taking, and that his request to the chairperson to switch off the microphone was a mere misunderstanding; the upbeat and matter-of-fact tone, chuckle and friendly smile were in keeping with an amusing mistake rather than an upsetting slight. In Austinian terms, this presented the hitch as a misfire rather than an abuse, and thus in line with the governing interaction logic, while, at the same time, undercutting the complainant's positioning as a person defiantly speaking truth to power.

After these few minutes of interaction, which I have analysed in much detail, the statements of the remaining five complainants mostly touched upon topics already broached by earlier speakers. Some spoke about the historical background of *Zwarte Piet*, mentioning slavery and colonialism and lamenting a lack of historical awareness in Dutch society. Personal experiences and the silencing of dissent were other prevalent topics, with some complainants sharing stories about being at the receiving end of racist treatment involving *Zwarte Piet*. In a speech touching upon all these themes, the complainant wearing the cap embossed with '1873' directly addressed the board members of the *Sinterklaas* committee as he challenged the ubiquitous explanation of *Zwarte Piet*'s blackened skin being due to chimney soot. After pointing out the figure's 'thick ... lips', he added:

all these people that you see here around you, who look a bit like me, we've been wondering for years how, in Heaven's name, it's possible that the presents remain so clean and that that collar remains so snow white.<sup>29</sup>

With this rhetorical question, he foregrounded racial identity and its connection to people's physical features, pushing the two representatives of the *Sinterklaas* committee to acknowledge these issues as pivotal in the *Zwarte Piet* debate, and linking more abstract notions of collective identity to the bodily presence of the people in the hearing room. During his statement, the camera zoomed in on one of the two persons representing the committee, a woman whose grimaces gave the impression she was far from comfortable – she repeatedly bit her lip, squinted, blinked and sucked in her cheeks and lips.

The complainant then ironically proposed staging *Zwarte Piet* enactments in contexts where they would be unlikely to be well received, such as upon a visit of president Obama, and then added 'you may add a few *Pieten* in a concentration camp with a Jew star. Because, after all, ladies and gentlemen, the Jewish holocaust as well as the transatlantic slavery have internationally been declared crimes against humanity'.<sup>30</sup> Although this complainant also referenced 'the most extreme comparison', the chairperson allowed him to finish his speech and then courteously thanked him, in keeping with the predictable flow of the event. This illustrates that, even though the specific genre and setting of a public hearing may provide much structure, it is not an all-encompassing blueprint. What communication appears acceptable depends in part on what communication is accepted, and by repeatedly including a repertoire of analogies with hypothetical holocaust festivities, the complainants established this as a regular feature within the hearing rather than an anomaly.

About 50 minutes into the hearing, all the complainants had spoken and the chairperson explained the procedure that was to follow. Again foregrounding collective effort, he emphasised that everyone would get another chance to speak if they wanted, although the representatives of the mayor would get their say first. As a disclaimer of sorts, he added that he expected the statement on behalf of the mayor to contain juridical information, and stressed that this was due to the type of information being part of the official complaint rather than to 'us not wanting to talk about what you are talking about'.<sup>31</sup> In line with this introduction by the chairperson, the first approximately five-and-a-half

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29 Original Dutch transcripts: 'dikke ... lippen'; 'al die mensen die u hier zo ziet zo om u heen, die een beetje op mij lijken, we vragen ons dus al jaren af van hoe dat in godsnaam mogelijk is dat die cadeaus zo schoon blijven en dat die kraag zo spierwit blijft'.

30 Original Dutch transcript: 'doet u er voor het gemak een paar *Pieten* erbij in een concentratiekamp met een Jodenster. Want ten slotte dames en heren is zowel de Joodse holocaust als de transatlantische slavenhandel internationaal tot misdrijf tegen de mens verklaard'.

31 Original Dutch transcript: 'Dat heeft niets te maken met dat wij niet het willen hebben over waar u het over heeft'.

minutes of the statement by the representative of the mayor were focused on aspects of the complaints that did not strictly have to do with *Zwarte Piet*. For instance, she made it clear that the permit request had in fact been made within the period required. The other people present in the hall calmly took this information in; responses were limited to an occasional nod by some of the complainants. In the last minute of her statement, the civil servant turned to what she characterised as ‘what has really been the topic of this morning; the content of the complaints against the *Sinterklaas* parade and then especially the *Zwarte Piet*-figure’.<sup>32</sup> Upon this signal that crucial information was to follow, audience members seated behind the civil servant who had been looking downwards could be seen adjusting their positions and turning their heads towards the speaker. She went on to state that ‘The mayor is aware of the sensitivities around the *Zwarte Piet*. That people can feel hurt because of the figure of *Zwarte Piet*’<sup>33</sup> and referenced earlier conversations between the mayor, Gario and other stakeholders.<sup>34</sup> Reading from a sheet of paper, she said: ‘as far as the mayor is concerned, these conversations are not finished yet. Together with people who are involved in this, he would like to look for a way in which each other’s feelings can be taken into account’. In response to this characterisation of the mayor’s goal, incredulous laughs and numerous shouts of protest could be heard from the audience, such as ‘*Zwarte Piet* needs to go’. After a short pause, the civil servant qualified her statement about the mayor’s goal by adding ‘without violating the tradition of the *Sinterklaas* celebration’.<sup>35</sup> Again, this was followed by protest from the audience, and a steward stepped forward to request calm.

Upon the audience’s loud response, the chairperson requested silence, saying that he didn’t ‘want to detract from the emotions’<sup>36</sup> while reminding the audience that the hearing afforded a context in which their ideas could be heard, which their interruption was making more difficult. The chairperson’s request cast the audience’s response as an inappropriate expression of ‘emotion’ that ought not to be part of the interaction at hand, especially in a setting geared towards a distinction between active protagonists at the table, and the audience as passive observers. By departing from the ‘agreement of ground rules’ that the chairperson formulated at the beginning of the event, the audience members defied being part of a neutral setting and asserted their agency as participants in

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32 Original Dutch transcript: ‘waar het hier vanochtend hoofdzakelijk over ging. Het inhoudelijke bezwaar tegen de Sinterklaasintocht. En dan met name de figuur Zwarte Piet.’

33 Original Dutch transcript: ‘De burgemeester is zich bewust van de gevoeligheden die er liggen rondom de Zwarte Piet. Dat mensen zich gekwetst kunnen voelen door de figuur van Zwarte Piet.’

34 Original Dutch transcript: ‘de inhoud.’

35 Original Dutch transcript: ‘wil hij graag met betrokkenen zoeken naar een manier waarop er rekening kan worden gehouden met elkaars gevoelens. Zonder de traditie van het Sinterklaasfeest geweld aan te doen.’

36 Original Dutch transcript: ‘ik wil niets afdoen aan de emoties die leven.’

the interaction, in the position of a counterpublic. By applauding, laughing and shouting responses, they communicated their stance towards the mayor's version of the 'content' so loudly that it was not to be missed, even by the people who were seated with their backs to them, such as the representatives of the mayor and of the *Sinterklaas* committee, or even the television viewers, who were mostly presented with images of the people seated at the table and only occasionally with the part of the audience that was present in the main conference room. Even though the civil servant's statement had been so appropriate to the reigning interaction logic as to be unremarkable, the counterpublic's audible response presented it as situated rather than neutral. It called attention to the existence of a competing interaction logic in which this official response could not count as felicitous.

Once the representative of the mayor had finished, some back-and-forth followed between the chairperson, some of the complainants and the representative of the mayor about the juridical framework that was to be applied to the hearing. Positioning himself as the person who was in charge of determining the topics to be discussed, the chairperson steered the discussion back towards the importance of 'content'<sup>37</sup> versus formal legal matters. He explained that the next step in the procedure was for the committee to ask further questions of those involved – the complainants, the representative of the mayor and the members of the *Sinterklaas* committee – and proceeded to address Gario. Below, I present an in-depth analysis of the interaction that followed.

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37 Original Dutch transcript: 'de inhoud'.

## 5.4 Zooming in again: taking up the gauntlet – or not

The chairperson introduced his next question by stating he was ‘intrigued’<sup>38</sup> to hear about the mayor’s point of view, and about the conversations that have taken place between the *Sinterklaas* committee, Gario and others. Looking across the table to Gario, he added:

Because, and a number of you have mentioned this already, this happens not only this year, the discussion is every year. And last year in any case there have been a number of conversations. I note that, in any case, that has not led to the effect that you wanted to achieve together. But I hear Mrs [name of civil servant] in any case say that the mayor is of the disposition that he wants to keep the conversation going. And that is now, this is a formal procedure, but it is also possible, that is how I read that and hear that, alongside this formal procedure. So that you together, with respect for each other’s interests, because that is the most important, er, can see if you can reach an agreement. And if the agreement, from your side, and from your side it is very simple, er, do not include a *Zwarte Piet* in the parade. And I hear Mrs [name of civil servant] say as well in any case that it in any case has not led to that result last year, so the mayor will want to discuss that in his conversations but apparently not want to see it at this moment, but probably in the long term. I only direct my question to the right for a moment because the mayor, if that gauntlet, simply the one that is being thrown up here for a moment will be taken up. If, to you, this is like, well, I want to continue that conversation with the mayor.<sup>39</sup>

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38 Original Dutch transcript: ‘wat mij intrigeert’.

39 Original Dutch transcript: ‘Omdat, een aantal van u heeft dat ook al aangegeven, speelt het niet alleen dit jaar, is elk jaar de discussie. En is er vorig jaar in ieder geval een aantal gesprekken geweest. Dat heeft dan in ieder geval in elk geval constateer ik niet geleid tot het effect dat u met z’n allen wil bereiken. Maar ik hoor mevrouw [naam van ambtenaar] in elk geval zeggen dat de burgemeester er zo in staat dat hij het gesprek gaande wil houden. En dat is nu, dit is een formele procedure, maar dat kan dus ook na, zo lees ik dat en zo hoor ik dat, naast deze formele procedure. En dat je dus met elkaar, met respect voor elkaars belangen, want dat is het meest belangrijke, eh, kan kijken of je tot een vergelijk kan komen. En als het vergelijk, van uw kant en van uw kant is heel simpel, ehm, doe geen *Zwarte Piet* in de intocht. En ik hoor, in ieder geval mevrouw [naam van ambtenaar] ook zeggen, dat heeft in ieder geval niet vorig jaar tot het resultaat geleid, dus de burgemeester zal dat in zijn gesprekken willen bespreken maar kennelijk niet op dit moment, maar waarschijnlijk op termijn zien. Ik vraag alleen eventjes naar rechts omdat de burgemeester, of die handschoen, gewoon eventjes die hier wordt opgeworpen wordt opgepakt. Of dat voor u is van, zeg nou, ik wil dat gesprek met de burgemeester voortzetten’.

The chairperson implicitly and explicitly proposed an allocation of tasks in which he himself explained the rules and asked questions, which Gario was to answer. In the introduction to his question, the chairperson drew attention to the difference between, on the one hand, the 'discussion' about *Zwarte Piet* that happens every year and the hearing, which he characterised as a 'formal procedure', and, on the other hand, the 'conversation' with the mayor, which he said offers possibilities to finding a solution 'with respect for each other's interests, because that is the most important'. Where Gario and other complainants had foregrounded racial identities as central to painful differences in how *Zwarte Piet* is perceived, arguing that this should be acknowledged and that the use of the figure should be discontinued, the chairperson put 'agreement' forward as a goal. The repertoire that he used foregrounded reciprocity and harmonious unity rather than difference, with repeated reference to doing things 'with each other' and 'together' towards 'the effect we all desire'. Setting aside the differences that the complainants had been emphasising made it possible to move the focus of the conversation away from the public hearing as a means to an end by presenting the informal conversations taking place *outside* the context of the public hearing as an important opportunity for moving forward. Having established an interaction logic in which the mayor has done his part to create an appropriate avenue towards 'the effect we all desire', the chairperson positioned Gario as sharing responsibility for reaching this goal by also carrying his weight, to 'take up the gauntlet'.

### **Burden of proof**

Taking up the chairperson's invitation to speak, Gario switched on his microphone and responded as follows:

Maybe a point towards a better definition of what was happening then. In 2011, I had organised an exposition in the MC theatre titled *Zwart Van Roet*.<sup>40</sup> And as a result of the arrests in Dordrecht back then but also the arrest here in Amsterdam, and as a result of responses to the exposition, we were invited. .... And the conversations that are ongoing, or that were ongoing, those have been ongoing since 1930. So, I'm not sure what an extended hand means anymore.<sup>41</sup>

The audience responded with applause and cheers, and the noise from the overflow room was loud enough to reach the official hall.

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40 English translation: 'blackened by soot'. The title is a reference to a popular song in which *Zwarte Piet* says that, although he is soot black (*zwart als roet*), he still means well.

41 Original Dutch transcript: 'Misschien een punt tot betere definitie van wat er toen gaande was. Ik had in 2011 een tentoonstelling georganiseerd in het MC theater genaamd *Zwart Van Roet*. En naar aanleiding van de arrestatie in Dordrecht toentertijd maar ook de arrestatie hier in Amsterdam, en naar aanleiding van de reacties op de tentoonstelling, waren we uitgenodigd. ... en de gesprekken die gaande zijn, of die gaande waren, die zijn als sinds 1930 gaande. Dus ik weet niet zo goed wat een uitgestoken hand nu nog betekent'.

Rather than answering the chairperson's question about his willingness to continue conversations, Gario offered unrequested information and a rhetorical statement in return. This response constituted a challenge to the allocation of tasks in which the chairperson asks questions that Gario answers. It also constituted a counterproposal about the appropriate repertoire for speaking about these matters – highlighting differences and demanding action, rather than stressing togetherness and requesting cooperation. This went hand in hand with a challenge of the content of the conversation. If Gario had limited himself to answering the chairperson's question about whether he was willing to continue talks with the mayor, then the chairperson's representation of the historical context of those talks would have remained a seemingly simple statement of fact. By taking more initiative than the chairperson had requested, Gario created discursive space to present an alternative historical context, seen not from the point of view of the mayor but rather the point of view of those who have historically opposed *Zwarte Piet*, primarily the Afro-Caribbean Dutch. Within the historical context invoked by Gario, resistance and conflict, rather than harmony, take centre stage. Thus, by challenging the chairperson's implicit proposal about Gario's position as someone who would limit himself to answering questions, he was also able to challenge the wider context that the chairperson sketched as relevant to the public hearing at hand.

Interestingly, Gario used the metaphor of 'extending a hand', which implies a less confrontational stance than 'throwing down the gauntlet', the metaphor used by the chairperson. It also opens up a different way of perceiving Gario's response: if you do not pick up a gauntlet, you are a coward, but if you do not accept an extended hand, you might be unsympathetic but it does not mean you are weak. Even so, the possible rudeness of rejecting an extended hand loses significance when seen against the historical background that Gario presented as relevant. This shifted the focus from questions about Gario's willingness to continue the conversation to a question about the likelihood that the mayor's conversations had anything meaningful to offer. Gario thus challenged the chairperson's representation of those conversations taking place *outside* the context of the public hearing as an important opportunity for moving forward, and presented the burden of proof as belonging to the mayor.

### **Individual responsibility**

While people in the audience communicated their approval with applause and shouts, the chairperson responded by switching from inquiring about Gario's ideas to giving more explicit advice, in the same calm tone he had used before:

The only thing that I know for sure about that is that it was not with this mayor, and this mayor I would in any case, well the gauntlet that he throws down, I would in any case say, pick it up and continue that conversation with this mayor at least. And only



because, what I hear from you in any case is that it is the conversation that is difficult to have outside this room with different, people who have a different point of view. So that is at least a gesture of which I think it is a very important one. That is at least the observation that I put in front of you because that is what I hear from this side.<sup>42</sup> With the words 'from this side', the chairperson gestured towards the representative of the mayor. He then continued by asking the representative about legal matters not directly related to the question of whether continuing conversations might be useful, and against what historical background they should be viewed.

Whereas Gario's statements focused on historical continuities experienced by a collective of people, the chairperson foregrounded the situation and wishes of the mayor as an individual rather than an office holder. Instead of denying or confirming Gario's statement about conversations going back decades, he presented this issue as irrelevant, since any previous conversations were 'not with this mayor'. By presenting the mayor as an individual actor disconnected from historical occurrences and the choices of his predecessors, and Gario as an individual actor rather than a member of a collective experiencing historical continuities along racial lines, he offered a context within which his advice to 'continue the conversation with the mayor' made sense. After all, having fruitful conversations about the topic 'outside this room' is not easy, and the hearing itself may not offer the right solution either since it is just a 'formal procedure', as the chairperson said earlier. Having again centred norms of individual responsibilities and willingness to continue the informal conversations, the chairperson closed this part of the hearing by turning to the representative of the mayor to ask the next but unrelated question. By thus ending discussion of Gario's disruptive counterproposal about the norms regarding informal conversations – an issue the chairperson had previously characterised as very important – he reasserted his position as the person who leads the hearing, determining what is to be discussed by whom, and to what end.

While the chairperson's intervention was ostensibly focused on ensuring appropriate manners – a repertoire of politeness and cooperativeness, striving towards the appropriate goal – closer analysis shows how these notions are not limited to the 'form' of the interaction: they have direct repercussions for the content of arguments that can be put forward as legitimate. In regards to this exchange between Gario

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42 Original Dutch transcript: 'Het enige wat ik daar in ieder geval zeker van weet is dat dat niet met deze burgemeester is, en ik zou deze burgemeester in ieder geval, nou ja de handschoen die hij opwerpt in ieder geval zou ik zeggen, pak 'm op en ga in ieder geval met deze burgemeester dat gesprek ook verder aan. En dat is alleen maar omdat, wat ik in ieder geval ook beluister bij u is dat het gesprek nou juist ook datgene is dat hier in ieder geval buiten deze zaal heel moeilijk is om met anders, mensen die er anders in staan aan te gaan. Dus dan is dat in ieder geval een geste waarvan ik denk, dat is heel erg van belang. Dat is in ieder geval een constatering die ik hierbij voor u neerleg omdat ik dat van deze kant hoor'.

and the chairperson, as well as the first fragment of the hearing that I zoomed in on, I have shown how notions of non-differentiated togetherness versus an emphasis on the relevance of racial differences and their relationship to national identities were linked with different constructions of history and racism, and thus different ideas about what communicative repertoires would be appropriate in the here and now. Presenting Gario's lack of interest in informal conversations as inappropriate thus implies the limiting of discursive space for putting forward a specific argument regarding racism and the issue of *Zwarte Piet*.

Struggles around these issues remained a recurring feature as the hearing progressed, often in the form of challenges to the chairperson. In the following pages, I will highlight several examples as I recount the rest of the hearing. For instance, after the exchange with Gario that I have analysed in detail, the chairperson asked if anyone could sketch what changes they would like to see to the parade. A few complainants complied with his request by making suggestions, such as *Pieten* in several colours. Quickly though, others challenged the assumptions behind the chairperson's question. For instance, one complainant stated that discussing possible solutions at this point forgoes a genuine understanding of the underlying problems. Another expanded the focus by arguing that the figure of a White *Sinterklaas* is problematic too. A third person voiced an objection against the choice of words of the chairperson and the representative of the mayor, who had repeatedly referred to people who 'can feel hurt by the figure of *Zwarte Piet*,'<sup>43</sup> arguing that racism should be the focus rather than the feelings resulting from it, thus linking the interaction at hand to larger societal patterns rather than individual emotional experiences. To this, the chairperson responded that the committee did not have a position on the matter yet, even though he understood what the complainant said: 'I absolutely don't want to give you the feeling that any feeling resides within me that ... I don't acknowledge that.'<sup>44</sup>

Invited by the chairperson to give a statement, the two board members of the *Sinterklaas* committee stressed that organising the yearly parade involves a lot of effort by well-meaning and unpaid volunteers, that those organising the parade have no intention to discriminate and that they themselves, although their options are limited since they have to deal with a Dutch tradition that they do not own, wish to find solutions together. The second speaker clarified this further by adding that the *Sinterklaas* committee wants to arrive at a 'golden mean'<sup>45</sup>. The first speaker commented on the difficult position she is in, and said her aim was a 'celebration for

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43 Original Dutch transcript: 'zich gekwetst kunnen voelen door de figuur van Zwarte Piet'.

44 Original Dutch transcript: '[maar ik zeg u dat] ik u absoluut niet het gevoel wil geven dat daar enig gevoel vanuit mij is dat ... ik het niet onderken'.

45 Original Dutch transcript: 'een gulden middenweg'.

everyone'<sup>46</sup>. She appeared to have a hard time finding words, and faltered and raised her hands in what seemed a gesture of helplessness as she attempted to formulate a statement regarding racism: 'well, we ehm, ehm we regret that an ehm racist, well, that racist feelings come up in people'.<sup>47</sup> From the complainant's side of the table, several 'no's' could be heard to this choice of words, and she again faltered as she continued with an anxious expression on her face: 'or that people, ehm let me express, well yes'.<sup>48</sup> Abandoning the attempt to make a statement regarding racism, she then turned towards discussion of the *Sinterklaas* committee's aim to find a solution. Her final statement, 'we can shape the future together. ... And I think that is our intention',<sup>49</sup> was met with applause. However, the statements of the board members were also met with challenges from several of the complainants. For example, one person asserted that intentions were of little relevance to the issues at hand as it is the effects that count, and another repeated that racism should be the main focus, not the feelings and experiences that result from discrimination.

Whereas the board members emphasised their limited capacity to induce change since they have no ownership of a 'Dutch tradition', the complainants wove Dutchness into their arguments in a very different way. For example, Gario stated that, '[o]n a structural level and interpersonal level, we are confronted with discrimination, with racism, ... in this country. And I talk about *our country* because *we are all Dutch* [emphasis added]'.<sup>50</sup> Thus, he presented a common Dutchness as a key argument for change. Another complainant made a similar argument, focusing on the effects of the tradition on children 'of *all of us*. Not only those of White Dutch people [emphasis added]'.<sup>51</sup> Bergman also made this type of distinction between the Dutch in general and subgroups within that category. Her comment was in response to a board member saying that it is a 'Dutch tradition that goes deep for eh, well eh, for you and that's bothersome because I talk about you and us'.<sup>52</sup> Bergman responded to this with vehemence, saying she did not want to 'identify with a you and us ... *We are all Dutch* [emphasis added]'. Then she faltered, laughed and added: 'and also *Dutch people*

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46 Original Dutch transcript: 'voor iedereen'.

47 Original Dutch transcript: 'nou ja, wij ehm ehm vinden het ehm heel vervelend dat er een ehm racistische, hè, dat er bij mensen racistische gevoelens ontstaan'.

48 Original Dutch transcript: 'Of dat mensen, ehm laat ik het me uitdrukken, nou ja goed'.

49 Original Dutch transcript: 'de toekomst kunnen we wel samen vormgeven. ... En ik denk dat dat ook onze insteek is'.

50 Original Dutch transcript: 'Op structureel niveau en interpersoonlijk niveau waar wij te maken krijgen met discriminatie, met racisme, ... in dit land. En ik heb het over ons land want we zijn allemaal Nederlands'.

51 Original Dutch transcript: 'van ons allemaal. Niet van witte Nederlanders alleen'.

52 Original Dutch transcript: 'Nederlandse traditie die heel diep zit bij eh, nou eh, bij jullie en dat is vervelend want dat ik het heb over jullie en over ons'.

are against racism and discrimination [emphasis added].<sup>53</sup> Bergman's laugh helped smooth over her awkward choice of the word 'Dutch' to mean a – presumably racial – subset in contrast to another, more inclusive 'Dutch'. This exchange is indicative of a more general difficulty that was recurrent throughout the hearing regarding the contestation of neutrality. A few minutes earlier, this type of dilemma had also come up regarding the question whether it was appropriate to talk about racism, or about feelings. This led to faltering and awkwardly worded statements by the chairperson and a board member, such as 'I don't want to give you the feeling that any feeling resides within me that doesn't want me to acknowledge that'. As discussed in Chapter 2, such minor misunderstandings or hitches are common since any communication takes place in a field 'criss-crossed by antagonisms' (Laclau & Mouffe, 2014, p. 137; Mouffe, 2008). The *Sinterklaas* committee acted in line with the mainstream opinion in Dutch society, organising a yearly event drawing thousands of enthusiastic participants. In the context of the hearing, the predominant pattern of argumentation associated Dutchness primarily with the points of view and identity of the dominant, White group in society. Part of this argumentation was an assumption that it is preferable to focus on the positive intentions behind behaviour or the negative feelings resulting from it rather than the possible racist origins of that behaviour. By contesting seemingly neutral phrasings, the complainants publicly brought these into sharper view as options and opinions rather than neutral descriptions of facts. This created discursive space for an alternative understanding of Dutchness as explicitly inclusive of different racial groups, and for focusing on racist acts or on racism as a structure rather than on the feelings of the persons at whom this racism is directed.

The hearing ended with a closing speech by the chairperson, who thanked those present and offered a final characterisation of the hearing as a harmonious mutual effort: 'at least I have experienced it in that way, that today has been constructive. The room next to this one as well as the people here have simply all listened to each other'.<sup>54</sup> He ended with 'then I thank you all for coming, and calmly homewards'.<sup>55</sup> Rather than calm, however, the moments following the hearing were full of excitement. The hallway quickly filled up with people animatedly talking to each other. As Gario exited the hearing hall, he was received with loud cheers, 'as a hero' as some sympathisers called it (Westerink & Van Bommel, 2013). There was a bit of commotion as a presenter from right-wing television

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53 Original Dutch transcript: 'ik wil me absoluut niet idenfiteren met een jullie en een ons. Wij zijn allemaal Nederlanders, het is discriminatie, en ook eh Nederlanders zijn tegen racisme en discriminatie.'

54 Original Dutch transcript: 'zo heb ik het in ieder geval ervaren dat het op een constructieve wijze vandaag is gegaan. Zowel de zaal hiernaast als de mensen hier hebben gewoon allemaal naar elkaar geluisterd.'

55 Original Dutch transcript: 'Dan dank ik u allemaal voor uw komst en rustig aan naar huis.'

show PowNews attempted to interview people and encountered energetic objection, and, for some time afterwards, people were still talking excitedly in little groups inside and outside the building.

To sum up, in the preceding pages, I have shown how the public hearing can be understood as a series of proposals and counterproposals about the meaning of the hearing and the appropriateness of different ways the topic of *Zwarte Piet* is broached. Should the audience observe silently, or is it all right for them to have themselves heard? Is it unreasonable to place the mayor's invitation in a historical context of racially informed unequal power relations, or is it legitimate? I have shown how the answers to these questions depended on the way people, through their behaviour, asserted specific interaction logics. This is not to say there was not some overlap between the competing interaction logics of different actors. For example, a differentiation between complainants, chairperson and audience, as is customary within the genre of a public hearing, appeared accepted by all. However, when probing further, it becomes clear that, within this accepted genre, the exact distribution of rights and duties was contested. Within the interaction logic of complainants who talked about the hearing as part of a narrative of decades and centuries of struggle of people of African descent against White Dutch authorities, a demand to immediately put an end to *Zwarte Piet* may make sense. However, if one takes the conversations involving the current mayor as a starting point, this fits more easily with a storyline in which an agreement to further conversations is a result worth striving for. Central in these struggles over the interaction logic were the performance of harmony, neutrality and mutual effort versus counterperformances of conflict, contestation and explicit difference. By analysing the event with a dramaturgical lens in order to trace interaction logics, I have been able to obtain a clearer view of what was at stake during the public hearing. However, before summarising my conclusions and exploring their significance for wider societal developments and debates, let me situate the public hearing within the string of legal procedures that it was a part of.

## 5.5 The disruption as part of a larger chain of events: subsequent court cases

Each next step in the legal process connected to the public hearing involved an increasingly formal setting and increased technical talk about legal distinctions. It is beyond the scope of my research to analyse these interactions in the same depth in which I have analysed the public hearing. However, I will sketch some outlines in order to give wider context to the current chapter, and highlight how struggles around appropriate behaviour remained a common thread.

On 28 October, 11 days after the hearing, the complaints committee informed the mayor of their advice to regard the complaints as unfounded. As a pivotal factor in this decision, they referred to the absence of any criminal justice case in which the figure of *Zwarte Piet* had been ruled to be racist. Without such legal precedents, the committee felt it should not be left up to the mayor to decide whether or not the figure was, in fact, racist. And, as the mayor had complied with all other regulations, the complaints committee saw no reason he should revoke the decision to grant permission for the parade. Two days after receiving the letter by the complaints committee, the mayor informed the city council by letter of his decision to follow the committee's advice as well as to continue the ongoing conversations about the future and possible changes to the tradition. As the mayor put it in this letter

*Sinterklaas* is a traditional children's celebration. A fairy tale and a theatrical performance, in which nearly everyone participates. It is a sweet and beloved tradition. ... the celebration itself in its present form (usually) cannot be called racist and essentially brings people together. (Van der Laan, 2013a)

He then quoted Erik van Muiswinkel, the person who, over the previous years, had played the role of 'Head Pete' on national television. The week before, the NRC newspaper had published an opinion piece by Van Muiswinkel in which he stated that, 'of course', *Zwarte Piet* needed to stay, although it was fine to make him 'increasingly less black and less of a servant'<sup>56</sup> (Van Muiswinkel, 2013). Quoting 'Head Pete Erik van Muiswinkel'<sup>57</sup>, the mayor posited that the goal of societal debate about *Zwarte Piet* should be to adapt the figure. He added more information about the goal of the debate as he saw it in the rhetorical question 'wouldn't it be good to aim for it together that 1) a new step is taken as soon as possible, and 2) in, for example, five or 10 years, *Sinterklaas* really is a celebration for everyone?' The mayor thus combined a claim to a neutral position with an assertion of boundaries in the debate in terms of what it should lead to. He also drew these boundaries

56 Original Dutch text: 'Hij moet natuurlijk blijven ... Piet steeds minder zwart en minder knecht maken: dat kan prima.'

57 Original Dutch text: 'Hoofdpiet Erik van Muiswinkel'.

in terms of the other three aspects of the interaction logic. As for who should be involved in the debate, he wrote, this is, 'in principle, nearly 17 million people', or the entire Dutch population. However, his quoting of the 'Head Pete' about the matter highlights that particular opinion as especially relevant. As for the appropriate communication styles and circumstances, the mayor stated clearly that 'discriminating statements are obviously not permissible', but also 'disturbing the *Sinterklaas* parade ... clearly goes too far in moral terms'. The combination of these two statements implies that the *Sinterklaas* parade itself, including *Zwarte Pieten*, is not racist. 'The *Sinterklaas* celebration cannot be called racist'<sup>58</sup> was also the title of the opinion piece by the mayor that was published in the *NRC* newspaper just two days after the letter to the city council (Van der Laan, 2013b). This opinion piece consisted of the same text as the letter, minus the introductory and concluding paragraphs.

The mayor also suggested boundaries for appropriate debate in terms of timing by adding 'it would be nice if the discussion didn't ... start just before the parade and end just after. It would be better the other way around'.<sup>59</sup> In this way, he argued, the children could attend the festivities in peace. The interventions made by himself after the public hearing that went against popular opinion on *Zwarte Piet* were made behind the scenes. As such, these contributed to change without constituting public enactments of dissent. For example, in 2014, he visited a meeting of the volunteers who would be impersonating *Zwarte Piet* in the Amsterdam parade, and 'gave a brilliant speech about why he thought change was necessary',<sup>60</sup> as the chairperson of the committee recounted in a 2018 interview in *Het Parool* newspaper (Meershoek, 2018). He thus combined a claim to a neutral position in the debate with some quite explicit pointers as to how the debate should evolve. Again, these norms of appropriateness are ostensibly neutral regarding the content of the debate. However, as I have shown in this chapter, these norms have repercussions for the type of argument that can be made with legitimacy.

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58 Original Dutch text: 'het Sinterklaasfeest is niet racistisch te noemen'.

59 Original Dutch text for all quotations from the 30 October 2013 letter by the mayor to the Amsterdam City Council: 'Sinterklaas is een traditioneel kinderfeest. Een sprookje en een toneelstuk, waaraan vrijwel iedereen meedoet. Het is een lieve en geliefde traditie. ... Het feest zelf is in zijn hedendaagse verschijningsvorm (doorgaans) niet racistisch te noemen en in wezen eerder verbindend. ... Zwarte Piet moet natuurlijk blijven maar we moeten ermee doorgaan om Piet steeds minder zwart en minder knecht te maken. ... Zou het niet goed zijn om er gezamenlijk naar te streven dat 1) zo snel mogelijk een volgende stap wordt gezet en dat 2) over bijvoorbeeld vijf of tien jaar het Sinterklaasfeest daadwerkelijk een feest is voor iedereen? ... iedere partij in deze discussie, dat zijn in beginsel bijna 17 miljoen mensen ... Daargelaten wat er juridisch van gezegd kan worden, gaat het verstoren van een Sinterklaasintocht in moreel opzicht duidelijk te ver. ... Het zou hoe dan ook fijn zijn als de discussie niet, zoals nu steeds gebeurt, begint kort voor de intocht en ophoudt meteen na het vertrek van de Sint. Dat kan beter andersom. ... Discriminerende uitlatingen zijn vanzelfsprekend niet toelaatbaar'.

60 Original Dutch text: 'briljante speech gehouden over waarom hij de verandering nodig vond'.

The decision by the mayor led the complainants to take their case to the Amsterdam Court of Justice. Here, the setup did not include the symbolism of round tables. Rather, the parties were seated at rows of tables on either side of the room. Rather than facing and speaking to each other, both parties faced the judges, who were seated behind a table on a platform at the front of the room. And, rather than underlining his neutral position, the person who had served as the chair of the complaints committee now sat on the municipality's side of the isle, acting as the representative of the mayor. The complainants won this case on the basis of their argumentation that the presence of *Zwarte Piet* in public hampered their right to a private life, since the figure 'leads to negative stereotypes of Black people'.<sup>61</sup> The ruling indicated that the resulting infringement on the right to a private life, as specified in Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights, was only relevant to the Black complainants (Rechtbank Amsterdam, 2014). Although the court did not specify which of the complainants they considered to be Black, this was a point that was picked up by various activists as problematic as it put the court in the position of making statements about people's racial identity (H, 2014).

In response, the mayor took the case to a higher court, as he announced in a letter to the city council, in which he repeated that the *Sinterklaas* tradition was 'a fairy tale' and that he should not be put into the position of having to decide about the permissibility of *Zwarte Piet*. The mayor reiterated his point of view that this needed to be resolved through societal debate. As he put it, 'it needs to be avoided that the mayor interferes with the content of events and thus ends up in the position of a moralist'<sup>62</sup> (Van der Laan, 2014).

The subsequent hearing was held just about a month before the day that the 2014 *Sinterklaas* parade was scheduled to take place in Amsterdam, as well as in many other cities. I attended this hearing on 16 October at the State Council in The Hague. Upon approaching the imposing building in the centre of The Hague, I heard traditional *Sinterklaas* music and saw a group of people dressed up as *Sinterklaas* and various *Zwarte Piet* characters. They held up a banner with the name of Voorpost, an extreme right organisation grounded in 'folk nationalism',<sup>63</sup> and seeking to take action against 'the artificial multicultural society'<sup>64</sup> (Voorpost, 2018). By far the biggest portion of the banner was reserved for the words 'hands off our folk culture',<sup>65</sup> again connecting the debate about *Zwarte Piet* to broader struggles around belonging and national

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61 Original Dutch text: 'een negatieve stereotypering van de zwarte mens'.

62 Original Dutch text: 'Voorkomen moet worden dat de burgemeester zich met de inhoud van evenementen moet bemoeien en zo in de rol van zedenmeester belandt'.

63 Original Dutch phrase: 'volksnationalisme'.

64 Original Dutch text: 'de kunstmatige multiculturele samenleving'.

65 Original Dutch text: 'handen af van onze volkscultuur'.



identity, such as in the initial public hearing, when complainants with different racial identities emphasised that their views on *Zwarte Piet* should be taken into account since ‘we are all Dutch’. After watching for a while, as the *Pieten* moved stiffly to the music, I took some pictures and went inside.

Image 10. Protest by members of extreme-right organisation Voorpost



The Voorpost protest took place on October 16, 2014 outside the state court. The banner reads: ‘Hands off our folk culture’. Photo by the author.

Although the hearing was held in a large hall that could hold about a hundred people, this did not suffice for all would-be attendants and I ended up with dozens of others following an audio stream of the hearing in an overflow room. In spite of the very formal setting, here, too, the audience made itself heard with applause. Speeches by Gario and Professor Gloria Wekker (Wekker, 2014a) about institutional racism and how this relates to dominant White Dutch identities were met with enthusiastic response. However, on 12 November, just days before the scheduled *Sinterklaas* parade, the state court publicly communicated its ruling, annulling the earlier decision by the Amsterdam Court (Raad van State, 2014). The main argumentation underlying this decision was in line with the mayor’s reasoning: that it is not up to a mayor to make a decision as to the content of events. Shortly after this ruling, the national *Sinterklaas* parade took place in the city of Gouda, leading to arrests and renewed debate. I turn to an analysis of this parade in Chapter 7.

## 5.6 Conclusions

The public debate about *Zwarte Piet* most obviously engages questions such as the acceptability or unacceptability of the figure and possible changes to it. In this chapter, I have sought to unveil how the debate about *Zwarte Piet*, in the public hearing and subsequent legal procedures, also functioned as an arena for negotiating norms of appropriateness regarding how, where, by whom and with what objective *Zwarte Piet* should be discussed. By examining the event in detail, I have shown how mismatched notions are observable with a broader dramaturgical analysis as well as when zooming in on the details and word-for-word discussions that were part of the interaction. Although, for analytical reasons, it is useful to separate interaction norms and the content of arguments, I argue that tracing the ways in which they are interlinked is crucial for recognising the larger implications of what may otherwise appear to be merely neutral norms for reasonable debate. It shows how seemingly insignificant squabbles about interaction norms had direct repercussions for the content of the conversation. Ostensibly, these squabbles centred on getting people to put forward their points in an acceptable manner. However, marking certain behaviour as inappropriate or, in Austin's terms, infelicitous, in fact necessarily meant declaring specific points of view out of bounds as well. In short, in the public hearing, the enforcement of proper behaviour in order to ensure a neutral space for debate in practice came down to the policing of points of view.

Central in this struggle over the meaning of proper behaviour were performances of harmony, neutrality and mutual effort versus counterperformances that highlighted conflict and difference. The chairperson as well as the representatives of the mayor and the *Sinterklaas* committee tended to make use of terms, descriptions and non-verbal communication that centred notions of harmony and unity. This was disrupted several times by counterperformances foregrounding conflict and the pertinence of one's own and others' racial positioning. The complainants all put forward racial identity as relevant to the discussion, explicitly positioning themselves in racial terms and arguing in various ways that racial positioning factors into one's attitude towards and understanding of racism in general, and *Zwarte Piet* in particular. For example, most complainants repeatedly mentioned their own racial positioning as relevant in giving them a right or obligation to speak, and as connecting them to a larger societal and historical context beyond the interaction at hand. They used a repertoire including explicit terms for racial identities and related issues, such as 'White', *blank*, 'Black', 'Jew' and 'institutional racism'. Generally, in the Dutch collective consciousness, these are words that may evoke images of the Second World War and the Jewish holocaust as archetypical evils, and are usually avoided in favour of euphemisms. In line with these wider societal norms, the other actors refrained from referring to anyone's racial identity. At various moments this led to a clash. For example, when the representatives of the mayor and of the *Sinterklaas* committee

spoke about 'feelings', they, as well as the chairperson, were challenged by complainants insisting that racism and discrimination should be the focus of the conversation rather than 'feelings'. As such, the counterpublic linked *Zwarte Piet* to larger societal patterns rather than mere individual emotional experiences.

A recurring theme in complainants' statements was how they saw themselves as interconnected with others, in the present day as well as historically, based on their racial positioning. For example, in the two fragments that I have examined in most detail, the complainants argued that historical continuities in the experience and behaviour of their and others' – racially positioned – communities needed to be taken into account to understand the story that the hearing was a part of. In turn, this was connected with a notion of appropriate behaviour that conflicted with the principal interaction logic's emphasis on harmony and unity.

Repeatedly, voicing their arguments put the complainants in the position of communicating inappropriately in light of the prevailing interaction logic. The delegitimisation of someone's contributions on the basis of the unseemliness of the tone in which they are delivered can be categorised as what is known in feminist and anti-racist activist circles as tone policing (cf. Bybee, 2016, pp. 15–20). Prominent examples of such inappropriate behaviour were drawing an 'extreme' parallel with the Shoah or refusing an invitation to be involved in future discussions while 'respect for each other's interests' should be key. In responding to these disruptions, the chairperson and other actors who enacted the principal interaction logic highlighted the neutrality of procedures and the importance of reasonable, polite behaviour in order for the public hearing to be fruitful. In a later conversation I had with the chairperson, he also used this line of argumentation as he gave an account of what had happened. He explained that, for him as a chairperson, it is a priority to maintain a pleasant atmosphere, just as he would have in the living room of his own house. Comparing the hearing to a situation in which he would have invited people over for dinner, he argued that he had the right to say, 'but I simply don't want this argument ... because I feel that now my wife or daughter will feel a certain way when you come for dinner, like now I'm not enjoying this evening anymore'. He further explained that he was immediately alerted because 'that is, I guess, the sensitivity around the Second World War and the word gas. To me, it also felt as if things were now being unnecessarily polarised'<sup>66</sup> (Interview chairperson 2018).

However well-meant it may be, a focus on ensuring a pleasant atmosphere necessarily implies choices regarding the persons for whom the interaction needs to be pleasant; who is the 'wife' or 'daughter' to be protected, and who is the house guest needing to

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66 Original Dutch transcript: 'maar dit argument dat wil ik gewoon niet ... want ik voel dat mijn vrouw of mijn dochter zich nu hier op een bepaalde manier bij voelt als jij bij mij komt eten, van ik vind dit nu helemaal geen leuke avond meer. ... Dat is de gevoeligheid die denk ik heerst rond de Tweede Wereldoorlog en het woord gas. Ik voelde ook, wat wordt de boel nu onnodig op scherp gezet.'

be disciplined? Yet, presenting the chairperson's norms for a 'pleasant' interaction as neutral has the effect of shielding underlying inequalities from view. As I have discussed in Chapter 2 in relation to the scholarship of Iris Marion Young, disregarding differences in a presumably neutral process of deliberation can bring in structural inequalities unintentionally. The analysis in this chapter has shown how this was the case for the public hearing. The performances of conflict and difference on the one hand, and of harmonious neutrality on the other, have larger consequences as they are interlinked with the content of people's arguments about *Zwarte Piet*. For example, highlighting people's intentions and emphasising how those were not racist contributed to the performances of the hearing as a mutual harmonious effort of people who share an intention not to act in ways that are racist. The disruptions, on the other hand, highlighted consequences rather than intentions and, in a variety of verbal and non-verbal ways, connected this to the relevance of differences between people's racial positioning. A number of actions that were flagged as inappropriate, such as applause and cheers and references to historical continuities, allowed the complainants as well as audience members to communicate support for a competing understanding of racism as linked to implicit structural factors, and to effect rather than intent. These counterperformances flagged up the reigning interaction norms as situated rather than neutral. As a result, in the course of the hearing, the actors associated with the previously dominant interaction logic voiced references to 'feelings' more haltingly; the chairperson acquiesced in cutting short a conversation on practical solutions rather than problem assessments; and discursively connecting *Zwarte Piet* to historical atrocities – the transatlantic slavery as well as the Shoah – became a recurring theme rather than exception to the rule. This counterperformance was strengthened by the applause and other non-verbal performances of support that punctuated the interaction.

Seen in this light, drawing a parallel with the Shoah was not merely a breach of a guideline for respect; it constituted an argument about how we think about the relative weights of atrocities. Bringing up decades of attempts at conversations about *Zwarte Piet* by Black people did not simply communicate an individual lack of willingness to start afresh: it constituted an argument about institutional patterns and racism. Discursive moves such as these implied more than etiquette, as Gario underlined as he shared with me some of his thoughts about the use of analogies with the Jewish holocaust: 'Someone else's suffering is more important or more known so we are going to use that suffering to compare ours to and use it as a yardstick. ... if you constantly do that, you will place the specificity of your own group overboard'<sup>67</sup> (Interview Gario, 2014). This comment

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67 Original Dutch transcript: 'Het leed van iemand anders is belangrijker of bekender dus we gaan dat leed inzetten om ons leed aan te vergelijken en te maatstaven. ... als je dat constant doet zet je ook de specificiteit van je eigen groep buiten boord'.

highlights possible marginalising effects of comparisons with the Shoah, exactly *because* the comparison implies an assessment of the relative weight of atrocities. My point therefore is not that counterpublic's arguments need to remain unquestioned; what I want to draw attention to is that shutting down such 'inappropriate' remarks necessarily means closing the avenue for alternative points of view. My analysis thus shows that seemingly insignificant squabbles about turn-taking and tone function as what Foucault coined 'micro mechanisms of power'. They have implications for what ways of viewing racism, history and identity can be presented as legitimate and relevant. It is important to note that this is true regardless of whether actors' behaviour according to a specific interaction logic is intentional or even conscious. As I have discussed in more detail in Chapter 2, as a researcher I am agnostic regarding this matter. Rather, the goal of my analysis of the way people structure their communication is to its results, for example in presenting ideas as relevant and legitimate. Intent or awareness on the part of an actor are not necessary conditions for these mechanisms of power to be effective.

In order to uncover the consequences of such struggle about interaction logics, it is essential to take into account how people's behaviour happens in a specific context. This regards both the more immediate genre and setting, such as a public hearing in one of the City Offices in Amsterdam, and the wider societal norms such as the notion of the Jewish holocaust as the 'ultimate' evil, overshadowing other atrocities in the public imagination. The patterns of interaction that the actors reproduce and challenge can only be understood when bearing in mind the limiting as well as enabling characteristics of this context. All actors repeatedly found themselves in the bind of attempting to voice an argument while others objected to the repertoire they used, the storyline they invoked or the position they claimed for themselves. What appears inappropriate in the context of the dominant interaction logic may be felicitous within the interaction logic of the counterpublic, and vice versa. The significance and consequences of this can only be understood by looking specifically at the way the public hearing was structured and the power dynamics at play within it. The municipality is a powerful institution, and the mayor a powerful figure within it. The opinion, choice of words and racial positioning of the actors associated with the municipality therefore carry weight and authority, as they are associated with the dominant status quo and supported by the physical organisation of the public hearing. The physical and organisational setting strengthened the dominance of the performance of the chairperson and representatives of the mayor and *Sinterklaas* committee, who made use of similar repertoires. The setting underlined the authority of the chairperson and facilitated a dynamic in which a powerful and ostensibly neutral complaints committee presided over an interaction in which the audience were passive observers while the protagonists seated at the oval table had active roles in a harmonious exchange. From the start, this put the complainants and audience in a position of less power.

Importantly, the analysis showed that these ostensibly impartial norms for appropriate behaviour structured the debate according to ideas that are in line with the viewpoints of the White Dutch majority. Therefore, requests to behave more appropriately amounted to a muffling of dissident voices. Throughout the different steps of the legal process that was the focus of this chapter, the counterpublic's 'inappropriate' behaviour brought to the surface the implications of what might have otherwise remained implicit and unexamined norms.

Specifically, I have drawn attention to the implications that competing interaction logics had for expressing ideas about three topics: racism, identity and history. Both the reigning version of such underlying notions and the counterpublic's version tend to go unnoticed by casual observers – the former because they are usually taken as mere common sense, and the latter because they are silenced or misunderstood. Analysing the hearing by tracing competing interaction logics has enabled me to bring them into view. The conceptualisation of racism connected to the main interaction logic was primarily connected to personal emotional experiences of those at the receiving end of racism. Comparatively, the counterpublic's conceptualisation of racism gave more attention to the provenance of specific instances of racist behaviour, highlighting Whiteness as well as Blackness as relevant in broader societal and historical patterns. When it comes to identity, the conceptualisation connected to the reigning interaction logic was that of Dutch national belonging being a relevant and legitimate category while racial positioning was best left unmentioned. This conceptualisation competed with a notion of racial identity as highly relevant for understanding people's attitudes and interconnectedness with others, either or not alongside a national identity. Both the themes of racism and identity were interlinked with competing representations of history. The prevailing interaction logic featured an understanding of history in which the Jewish holocaust is the archetypical evil, in which it is disrespectful to bring it up in order to make a point about other historical atrocities or present-day situations. In this conceptualisation, it makes sense to expect individuals such as the complainants to be able and willing to start afresh. However, the counterpublic's conceptualisation of history highlighted historical continuities in the experiences and struggles of people as part of racially defined groups, thus providing crucial context information that people need to take into account when making choices about present-day behaviour. In this conceptualisation, prominent historical continuities are to be found in the struggle of enslaved people and their descendants against dominant notions of appropriateness such as ideas regarding *Zwarte Piet*, or regarding the marking of 1863/1873 as the end of slavery. Since these competing notions of racism, identity and history were connected with different views about proper behaviour within the interaction at hand, the pressure to behave more appropriately was tantamount to a suppression of alternative reasoning.

The counterpublic's disruption and the resulting manoeuvring by all actors revealed the contingency of the dominant order (cf. Azmanova, 2012). It contributed to an understanding that common-sense standpoints are not 'natural', but situated and in need of constant reproduction. Just as the standpoints of the counterpublic, the dominant understandings of the matters at hand are constructed in specific ways, with specific consequences. Drawing attention to omissions and showing our normative stances to be contingent constitutes 'the political' in Mouffe and Laclau's sense of the word: those actions that challenge the existing order. Since the reigning order is made up of its reproduction in situated practices, it is the disruption of these practices that offers a glimpse of alternative possibilities. The analysis in this chapter has shown that the counterpublic in these juridical procedures did just that: it made visible omissions in the dominant understanding of history, identity and racism, and called attention to the ways people's stances towards these issues relate to their positioning in society, especially in terms of 'race'. In Chapter 2, I have argued that enactment of dissent and contestation of interaction norms are central to a strong democracy. Seen in this light, the disruptive interactions in the public hearing and subsequent court cases constituted valuable contributions to Dutch democracy, and a close analysis of these allows for a widened understanding of democracy as a dynamic practice.





# Chapter 6

*Keti Koti*, 2014





## 6.1 Introduction

On the first of July 2014, the annual public event known as *Keti Koti* takes place in the Oosterpark, a park located in downtown Amsterdam. *Keti Koti* means ‘broken chains’ in Sranantongo, the lingua franca of Surinam. It is the name given to the yearly celebration and commemoration of the abolition of slavery in the Dutch Kingdom. For over 10 years, the Oosterpark, with its monument representing the liberation from slavery, has been the setting of the national *Keti Koti* ceremony on 1 July. Shortly after the 2014 event has commenced, then Deputy Prime Minister Lodewijk Asscher walks towards the stage to give a speech when his way is blocked by a group of protesters. One of them, carrying a megaphone, delivers a speech in the name of ‘the Black community in the Netherlands’, denouncing institutional racism as part of the enduring legacy of slavery:

The politicians barely take us seriously and do not stand up for us. After years of protest, demonstrations and dialogue against *Zwarte Piet*, Prime Minister Rutte still says: ‘*Zwarte Piet* is black, I can’t change that’. After years of dialogue, protest and a court case, the mayor [of Amsterdam] still says: ‘give *Zwarte Piet* another 10 years and then we can get used to it’<sup>2</sup> ... Our generation has stood still long enough. Standing still will not return to the Netherlands the respect and decency that has been lost through years of slavery and colonialism. ... We are Dutch just like any other Dutch person and we demand to be treated with the same respect.<sup>3</sup>

Further on in this chapter, I will examine the events in the Oosterpark of that day in greater detail. Presently, what is important to retain is how these moments connect the figure of *Zwarte Piet* to a variety of issues that came up during the 2013 public hearing as well, linking the discussion of the winter holiday tradition to debates about slavery and Dutch colonialism, as well as to discussions of power, belonging and racism in contemporary Dutch society.

The *Keti Koti* ceremony specifically focuses on the history of Dutch slavery and the societal position of Dutch people of Afro-Caribbean descent. As such, it is the kind of setting that one might expect to be a highly valued reference point for people who define themselves as Black, who are of African descent and who seek to address issues

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1 Original Dutch transcript: ‘de zwarte gemeenschap in Nederland’.

2 Original Dutch transcript: ‘De politiek neemt ons nauwelijks serieus en komt niet voor ons op. Na jaren van protest, demonstraties en dialoog tegen *Zwarte Piet* zegt premier Rutte nog steeds: “*Zwarte Piet* is Zwart, ik kan er niks aan doen”. Na jarenlang dialoog, protest en rechtszaak zegt de burgemeester nog steeds: “Geef *Zwarte Piet* nog 10 jaar en dan kunnen we eraan wennen”’.

3 Original Dutch transcript: ‘Onze generatie heeft lang genoeg stil gestaan. Stilstaan zal Nederland het respect en het fatsoen niet terug geven dat verloren is gegaan door jarenlange slavernij en kolonialisme. ... Wij zijn Nederlanders net als iedere andere Nederlander en we eisen met hetzelfde respect behandeld te worden’.

of racism and inequality in contemporary Dutch society. Likewise, one might expect the official programme to be aligned with the perspectives of individuals who consider themselves members of ‘the Black community’ in the Netherlands. Therefore, it may seem counterintuitive that the protest happened in this setting. As mentioned above, however, a group of people defining themselves in just this way chose to interrupt the 2014 ceremony to voice their dissent. To the surprise of many, they stepped forward, claiming space literally as well as figuratively, and gave a speech. Moreover, their speech put the figure of *Zwarte Piet* centre stage. This disruption caused confusion, a lengthy and noticeable deviation from the expected programme and repeated attempts by various actors to re-establish an order that would be aligned with the initial interaction logic. How can this unexpected turn of events be understood? More specifically, what role did the debate about *Zwarte Piet* play in the competing versions of ‘appropriate action’ during *Keti Keti*, and thus in the unfolding of the events?

In this chapter, I conduct a detailed analysis of the disruption, with special emphasis on the part of the interaction in which *Zwarte Piet* is mentioned. This analysis has two parts, the first of which consists of a dramaturgical examination of the way the disruption was accomplished and responded to. This will be followed by an analysis in which I look in greater detail at the verbal content of the discussion. Based on this two-part analysis, I aim to untangle how the construction of *Zwarte Piet* as a (non-)issue during *Keti Keti* is bound up with competing understandings of appropriateness and disruption. Within the interaction logic of *Keti Keti* as a solemn, pleasant and harmonious celebration of the freedom that exists for all those who fall under the non-racial category of ‘Dutch’, the uninvited contribution of the activists appeared inappropriate, and their bringing up of *Zwarte Piet* did not merit a response. However, within the interaction logic that centres historical continuities in institutional racism and the struggle against it by Black people, it made sense for the protesters to bring up *Zwarte Piet* as an emblematic issue. Furthermore, I will examine what mechanisms were at work in the response to the disruption, and what consequences these mechanisms had for the inclusion and exclusion of different perspectives in the discussion. While the possible responses to a disruption are many – including ignoring it, confronting it directly or being swayed by it – I will argue that, in the *Keti Keti* setting, the canalisation of the disruption took place through a process of suppression by inclusion. Before I launch into the analysis proper, I first provide some more background by discussing some of the history and the customary programme of the *Keti Keti* activities in Amsterdam’s Oosterpark. I then provide some photos and other visual information about the ceremony and disruption, discuss the empirical data that I use.

Contestation around the meaning and significance of *Keti Keti* is not limited to the 2014 enactment, but has surfaced both before and after the events on which I focus in this chapter. Even the chronology regarding *Keti Keti* is contested: the date for the

event had been chosen because it was on 1 July 1863 that slavery was legally abolished in the Dutch Kingdom, including the colonial territories overseas. The contention around focusing on the year of legal abolition or rather on the end of forced labour a decade later is visible during the event in 2014 through the black buttons some people had pinned to their clothes, which had '1873' printed on them in white. The question whose point of view should be privileged in enactments of *Keti Koti* had already led to problems during the inauguration ceremony for the *slavernijmonument*, or slavery monument, on 1 July 2002. The monument was established after years of descendants of enslaved people pressing for political action. The ceremonial opening of the monument was a very tense and, for many, disappointing and even insulting event. White dignitaries, including the queen, figured prominently at the ceremonial opening while considerable numbers of Black people were kept at a distance behind metal fences covered with sheets of black plastic. This resulted in Black people trying to tear away the plastic and push down the fences and White mounted police attempting to keep them at bay through physical force (Bootsma, 2001; Van den Heuvel, 2013; Van der Kaaij, 2013; Van Stipriaan, 2014, p. 17). Further examples of contention are the fact that *Keti Koti* has not been granted the status of an official national holiday, and that there has not been an official apology for slavery by representatives of the Dutch state, although some officials have used words such as 'regret and remorse'.<sup>4</sup> Presenting an apology, many claim, is avoided because it would invite unwelcome demands for reparations (Bootsma, 2001; Van den Heuvel, 2013; Van der Kaaij, 2013; Zunder, 2010). The question whether and in what way the figure of *Zwarte Piet* should be associated with the *Keti Koti* gathering had already led to some contention in 2013, when a plan to include a photobooth for enactments of alternative *Piet* figures in the *Keti Koti* programme was abandoned in favour of a discussion of the theme without any impersonations (Van Veelen, 2013).

Thus, *Keti Koti* and the slavery monument are complex sites and moments in which sensitive notions of recognition and misrecognition, remembrance, racism and colonialism are enacted in public, in a variety of verbal and non-verbal ways. This was no different in 2014. For example, a number of organisations, such as *Zwarte Piet Niet*, the *Zwarte Piet is Racisme* campaign of *Nederland Wordt Beter* and *D'HERO Movement*, called upon people to come dressed in black to express their disagreement with the way the Dutch state engages with *Keti Koti* ('Oproep herdenking slavernijverleden', 2014). During the day-long event, I saw numerous people dressed in black, providing a visual reminder of the contested character of *Keti Koti*. I myself went dressed in black to that year's *Keti Koti* festival as well.

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4 In Dutch: 'berouw en spijt', words used, for example, by Lodewijk Asscher in his 2013 speech at the *Keti Koti* ceremony in Oosterpark.

In general, however, the atmosphere during *Keti Koti* in Amsterdam is festive. The ceremony is part of the day-long '*Keti Koti* festival', known for its live music and for the abundance of typically Surinamese food and drink that is for sale. As festival organiser Yvette Forster commented when interviewed about the 2014 event by local Amsterdam TV station AT5, the plans for that year's festival included many of the same elements as in prior years ('Afschaffing slavernij', 2014). After the ceremony, thousands of people attended the festivities in the park, greeting friends and acquaintances and listening to the music performed on different stages. Mostly, these were people of African descent, although many other people of colour and White people were present as well.

Activities were organised throughout the afternoon in different marquees. As Forster explained, the Boni–Tula marquee was reserved for activities meant to add more depth to the programme. The tent was named after Boni and Tula, two leader figures in the struggle of (formerly) enslaved people during the Dutch colonial period in Surinam and Curaçao, respectively. Quinsy Gario had been given the responsibility for organising part of the programme in this tent, a contrast to the year 2011, when Jerry Afriyie and he had been standing outside on the grass with stencils to spray the words '*Zwarte Piet is racism*' (*Zwarte Piet* is racism) onto T-shirts. Both Gario and Afriyie had since figured in the official festival programme of the festival in several ways.

The ceremony constitutes the most solemn part of *Keti Koti* with speeches, attended by Dutch and foreign dignitaries, and the placing of wreaths at the monument in the park that represents the abolishing of slavery ('Afschaffing slavernij', 2014). It is during this part of the day that the disruption happened, resulting in confusion and a departure from the programme. After some time, the order of speakers was resumed with Deputy Prime Minister Asscher giving a speech, followed by the contributions of Mayor Van der Laan and others. Before turning to a more detailed analysis of the content of the various speeches, I first provide a dramaturgical analysis, focusing my attention on the disruption and the moments directly before and after it.

Figure 6. Timeline of the *Keti Koti* activities in the Oosterpark

<i>Keti Koti</i> activities in Oosterpark (approximately 8 hours)	
Ceremony (2 hours)	Festival (6 hours)
Interruption (16 minutes)	

Image 11. First moments of the disruption

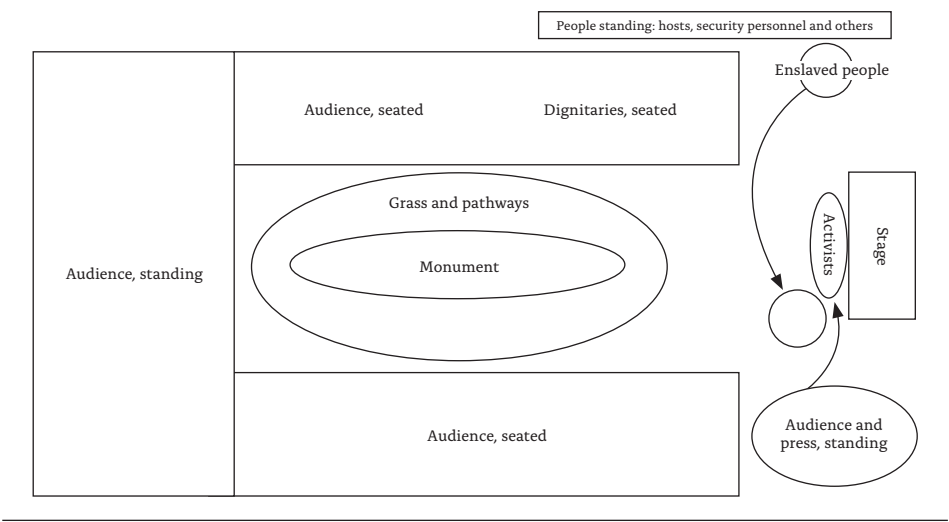


In the foreground, the black-clad protesters are gathering. In the background, on the left, the group enacting enslaved people crosses the clearing. On stage, on the right, the ceremony host looks on. Screenshot from video '*Genoeg = Genoeg, wij eisen respect*' – 141/151 *Keti Koti* 1 juli 2014 protest speech @ Oosterpark; see appendix 3.

Figure 7. Timeline of the *Keti Koti* ceremony

Ceremony (2 hours)				
Opening words Simons	Asscher walks forward	Speech by activist	Markelo and Simons speak	Speech by Deputy Prime Minister Asscher
		Interruption by activists. Responses by Markelo, Simons and Asscher directly afterwards (16 minutes)		

Figure 8. Schematic map of the *Keti Koti* ceremony





Speech by Mayor Van der Laan	Music and children's poetry	Speech by chairman NiNsee, Weerwind	One minute silence, followed by placing of wreaths	Violin music and closing
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Image 12. Activists delivering their speech



In the foreground, the activists. In the background, on the raised stage, from left to right, Winti priestess and board member of NiNsee, Marian Markelo, Deputy Prime Minister Lodewijk Asscher and host of the ceremony, Sylvana Simons. Photo by Maarten Brante.

Image 13. Markelo giving a speech, moments after the activists have left.



In the background, seated dignitaries amongst whom Mayor Van der Laan and NiNsee chairperson Weerwind. Screenshot from video *Marian Markelo na speech 'genoeg is genoeg'*; see appendix 3.

### Data used

In total, the events I focus on lasted approximately 16 minutes. My analysis is primarily based on audiovisual recordings of these 16 minutes of interaction and my transcripts of what was said. Appendix 3 offers an overview of the videos used for this analysis. Original Dutch versions of my English translations can be found in the footnotes. Within the 16-minute fragment, my main point of interest is the construction of *Zwarte Piet* as a (non-)issue.

According to the official programme, the opening and commemoration ceremony were to last around two hours. The part that I focus on in most detail includes the speeches of the activists, host Sylvana Simons, priestess Marian Markelo and then Deputy Prime Minister Lodewijk Asscher. I place this interaction within the larger context of the day-long *Keti Koti* festival in and around the park in 2014. Additional data I use for this analysis are newspaper articles, other publications and my own observations. My discussion of the *Keti Koti* gatherings the following two years is based upon video material and media sources as well as on my own observations of the 2015 gathering.

## 6.2 Dramaturgical analysis: disrupting a ceremony in 'one of the freest places in the world'

As the clock approached one o'clock in the afternoon, hundreds of people gathered for the official *Keti Koti* opening and commemoration ceremony. Rows of folding chairs were lined up on either side of the large monument near the southern entrance to the Oosterpark. All the seats were taken and, behind the rows of chairs, more people were standing. Amongst the many people gathered for the opening ceremony, a few were dressed in black, possibly in response to the call by a number of organisations. Many more people, however, had chosen to dress up in more traditional clothes. For women of African-Surinamese descent, this generally meant wearing a colourful *koto*<sup>5</sup> dress and *anisa* headscarf.

The dignitaries occupying the front row seats represented local and national politics, former Caribbean Dutch colonies, and institutions including the NiNsee.<sup>6</sup> Amongst those present that year was Verene Shepherd, president of the United Nations Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, n.d.). In a later broadcast by the Amsterdam TV station AT5 about the day's events, titled 'Slavery commemoration disrupted by protest'<sup>7</sup> (AT5, 2014), she was introduced by the voice-over as 'UN rapporteur Verene Shepherd ... She was in the news at the end of last year, when she branded the phenomenon *Zwarte Piet* as racist.'<sup>8</sup> Her presence was thus taken to symbolise a critical stance in issues pertaining to anti-Black racism in the Netherlands, particularly related to *Zwarte Piet*. In the same broadcast, her presence was again linked to *Zwarte Piet* when an interviewer asked her to comment on the issue as she left the park escorted by colleagues, press and people who looked like bodyguards. However, she declined to comment and, upon the interviewer's question whether her presence was a 'statement', she merely replied that 'it's part of our work' (*Keti Koti* in Amsterdam, 2014).

Between the front row seats and the stage, a rectangular space had been left open. To the sides of this open space, more people were standing, some with professional cameras, and others who appeared to be security personnel and hosts. Amongst them, on the left side as seen from the audience, stood a group of Black men who were chained to each other, sparsely clothed and bearing a yoke – an embodiment and visual reminder of slavery. The presence of this group had not been announced in the programme; a

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5 The *koto* is a wide and colourful dress worn traditionally by Surinamese women of African descent.

6 The National Institute for the Study of Dutch Slavery and its Legacy, based in Amsterdam.

7 Original Dutch text: 'Slavernijherdenking verstoord door protest'.

8 Original Dutch text: 'VN-rapporteur Verene Shepherd ... Ze kwam eind vorig jaar in het nieuws toen ze het fenomeen *Zwarte Piet* als racistisch bestempelde'.

representative of the NiNsee characterised it as a ‘surprise action’<sup>9</sup> by the group. Earlier in the day, this group had participated in the large and colourful parade through the city known as *Bigi Spikri*, modelled on a similar yearly parade in Surinam’s capital Paramaribo with which people in festive traditional clothing celebrate the end of slavery. Just as their solemnity and attire had contrasted with other participants in that morning’s parade, their presence also offered a stark visual contrast to the people surrounding them in the Oosterpark, especially the dignitaries seated only metres away.

The host, Sylvana Simons, is a woman of African-Surinamese descent, quite well known in the Netherlands at the time for her work as a TV presenter. She looked elegant, standing onstage in view of all, wearing hoop earrings, an *anisa* and a variation on a *koto*, teamed with skinny jeans and high heels. In her opening words, she mentioned her personal experience of having the ‘freedom to say what I want ... to wear what I want. To be who I want’, linked this to ‘those who have suffered and struggled,’<sup>10</sup> in the past, and also touched upon some practical matters related to the programme and logistics.

The opening by Simons invoked a harmonious and orderly ceremony, and she concluded by inviting Winti<sup>11</sup> priestess and NiNsee board member Marian Markelo to come forward. Markelo carried out a spiritual ceremony honouring the ancestors, during which she switched between Dutch and Sranantongo, translating and thus offering the ceremony in both languages. In a dignified, self-assured manner, using a bowl with water as an attribute, she performed the traditional libation ritual. Markelo’s performance strengthened Simon’s invocation of a harmonious and ceremonial event. As part of the ritual, Markelo implored the ancestors to make the city administration pay more attention to the position of the descendants of the enslaved (*‘Keti Koti in Amsterdam’*, 2014). As she was leaving, she was thanked by the host in both Sranantongo and Dutch. Simons commented on the ‘beautiful’ ritual, which she said should ‘set the tone’ for the day.<sup>12</sup> Thus, even though Markelo’s words implied a critical appraisal of the public administration, both women positioned themselves within the unfolding event in a way that emphasised its ceremonial, harmonious and celebratory aspects.

Next, Simons invited ‘our deputy prime minister and minister of Social Affairs and Employment’ to speak ‘regarding today’s celebration’, upon which Lodewijk Asscher got

9 Original Dutch text: ‘verrassing actie’. M. Markelo, personal communication, December 13, 2018.

10 Original Dutch transcript: ‘ik heb de vrijheid om te zeggen wat ik wil. ... om te dragen wat ik wil. Te zijn wie ik ben. ... hen die hebben geleden en gestreden.’

11 Winti is a religion that originated in South America and developed during the colonial period, which resulted in the syncretisation of the religious beliefs and practices of enslaved peoples from West Africa with Christianity and Indigenous American beliefs. Important elements in Winti are the belief in a supreme creator, the belief in a pantheon of spirits called *Winti* and the veneration of the ancestors.

12 Original Dutch transcripts: ‘prachtig’; ‘de toon zetten’.

up from his chair. A young woman, dressed in the semi-formal outfit of white trousers and dark jacket worn by the team of people working for the organisation of the event, walked up to Asscher to accompany him. However, as Asscher made for the stage, about 16 men and women, who appeared to be of African descent, suddenly walked forward as well. Most of them looked like they were in their 20s or 30s, and they were all dressed in black, with most of the women wearing *anisas*. Amongst the group were people who were relatively well known in some circles because of their work as cultural entrepreneurs, performers, radio show hosts and organisers of activist networks that had taken a critical stance on *Zwarte Piet*. At the very front of the group was Jerry Afriyie. As mentioned in earlier chapters, Afriyie is an artist and a well-known activist in the struggle against *Zwarte Piet*. He arrived at the stage a few seconds ahead of the other group members, upon which a man who appeared to be security personnel immediately pushed him against the raised platform. A second security agent joined and a scuffle followed. While this scuffle took place, Asscher reached the onstage lectern and went to stand behind it. However, he did not go through with his expected performance: the unanticipated movement of people in front of the stage put Asscher in a situation that did not allow him to act as the dignified centre of undivided attention.

Meanwhile, the other group members quickly positioned themselves centrally in front of the stage, facing the audience. As a result, the initially quite visible scuffle was quickly made less prominent since the group of people dressed in black shielded it from the audience's sight. While forcefully removing one person may have seemed feasible, the presence of the larger group was now transformed into a *fait accompli* – after a few more moments, the security personnel withdrew. A siren blaring from a megaphone helped in drawing attention to the group and made their presence impossible to ignore. The megaphone also functioned as a visual focus point, as it was held up high in the air by one of the group members, Darryl. This slim, young man, a hip-hop artist and rapper connected to the activist group *Zwarte Piet Niet*, wore an all-black outfit of trousers, a long-sleeved shirt and baseball cap. As had various other members of the group, he had a button with '1873' on it pinned to his shirt, in reference to the discrepancy between the official date of abolition and freedom as experienced by the formerly enslaved.

In the few moments following Simons's invitation to Asscher, the people dressed in black accomplished a disruption of the event as it had been invoked and carried out thus far. While Simons had seemed so clearly in charge, all of a sudden the people dressed in black provided a focus quite different from the one suggested by her, not only in terms of the visual and auditory centre of attention, but also regarding the type of event the activists were associated with. In a matter of seconds, struggle and initiative beyond protocol became central elements of the interaction, with the black clothes, the '1873' buttons and the megaphone as important non-verbal references to protest.

Simultaneously, the Black men chained together, who had been standing to the left of the open space, had started to move. Leaving their place on the margin of the field, they formed a line that slowly crossed over to the other side of the open space. Two men walking in front held up a banner bearing the words ‘Still no apologies’ and depictions of Black people tied up and hung from ropes.<sup>13</sup> Again, initiative beyond protocol was asserted as the new norm, defying the harmonious, ritualistic event enacted upon until only moments ago. The symbols of protest – a march, banners – went accompanied with an invocation of historical continuity. This was achieved by the enactment of enslavement by people who in all likelihood include descendants of enslaved Africans, as well as the text and images on the banner, which established a link between historical and present-day misrecognition and oppression, emphasising how the passing of time was not accompanied by the necessary action by the Dutch state. While, technically, ‘still no apologies’ is a statement of fact, it functioned as a denouncement. The banner implied an assertion that the absence of apologies was significant and deserved attention within the context of *Keti Koti*. As mentioned earlier, the wearing of black by the other group of activists similarly communicated disagreement with the way the Dutch state engages with *Keti Koti*.

As such, a notion of contestation was added to the orderly and pleasant celebration invoked just a minute earlier. The brusqueness of the uninvited interruption of the programme clashed with the polite taking of turns between Simons, Markelo and Asscher. Less than a minute had passed since Simons’ invitation to Asscher, and now they stood on either side of the stage, silently taking in what was happening just a few metres away. Asscher stood to the side of the lectern, with his arms crossed. In his hand, he held a sheet of paper – presumably, the text of his speech. Asscher and Simons both standing upright and being highly visible onstage was still in line with their performance as planned, but now provided an awkward contrast with the performance carried out off-stage. This was when the young man with the megaphone shouted the first words of the speech, reading from a sheet of paper in name of ‘the Black community in the Netherlands’, denouncing institutional racism in the Netherlands as part of the enduring legacy of slavery.

Many people with cameras moved around the group and the speaker in attempts to capture the scene. Meanwhile, Simons repeatedly addressed the activists through her microphone in an attempt to break off their speech since ‘there is room for that emotion. But it is not here and not now’. However, the young man carried on reading, and could finish the last two minutes of his speech uninterrupted, after which the group left of their own accord.

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13 Organisers of the group dressed in black told me later that the actions of the two groups had not been previously coordinated (Interview Afriyie, 2016; Interview Mitchell, 2016). However, my analysis is focused on the dramaturgical effects of the behaviour of the various actors, rather than on their underlying strategies.



The speaker with the megaphone and other people in his group complied with enough of the expectations for this type of event to be recognised as vying to be part of it while, at the same time, modifying its rules considerably. While the activists did not enact *Keti Koti* as orderly and pleasant, in other regards their behaviour tied in quite well with the type of situation that had been invoked so far: *Keti Koti* was still enacted as a public event during which speakers address an audience on the topic of the history of slavery and the present-day situation of Dutch people of Afro-Caribbean descent. However, the activists' actions and words implied that public speaking during this commemoration was acceptable without standing onstage or being officially invited and that, vice versa, being invited by the host did not equal having a right to speak. The gravity of the activists' choice of words, as I will show further on when I deal with larger excerpts from the speech, with phrases such as 'utmost respect', 'breath from outside' and the almost biblical cadence of 'We are standing here today...', was also still in line with *Keti Koti* being represented as a dignified event.

After the activists left, performances by Simons, Markelo and Asscher reestablished the previous order step by step by presenting the activists' behaviour as having been made possible by this order rather than being a contestation of it. The first to speak was Simons, who addressed the audience to explain that what had just happened was indicative of the freedom characterising the situation at hand. Then the Winti priestess gave an impromptu speech. Instead of standing onstage, she spoke from the rectangular open space in front of the stage where the activists had also stood. Her performance tied in with the types of authority and communication style invoked by the activists; for example, she picked the same spot, rather than choosing the more formal and literally higher position on the raised platform. She expressed her appreciation for the activists while calling on them to voice their opinion in a more appropriate way. Through the positioning of herself as sharing an identity and viewpoints with the activists while, at the same time, advising them on how things should be appropriately done, she, in effect, undermined their claim to moral leadership. Her performance had the effect of helping to smooth the way for Deputy Prime Minister Asscher's subsequent speech. In this improvised speech, he constructed the situation as special in a different way than how the activists had argued: Asscher cast the disruption as indicative of Dutch freedom and tolerance rather than an act of resistance against institutional racism in Dutch society.

This normalisation, accomplished in several steps, provided Mayor Van der Laan with a setting within which it did not appear inappropriate to give his speech as planned, bar a short remark about the unexpected turn that the interaction had taken moments earlier. After these introductory words, he simply read aloud a previously written speech in which the spoils as well as horrors of slavery are recounted from the perspective of a White slave-owner and a White observer in colonial Surinam. The mayor's speech was followed by a musical intermezzo and a speech by NiNsee chairperson Franc Weerwind, in which he reminded those present that the abolition of slavery was not that long ago, and

its effects were still being felt by some. Thus, while some verbal references to continuity were made, they happened within the re-established framework in which *Keti Koti* is an orderly event with a ceremonial character, in which harmony rather than conflict takes centre stage and talking about *Zwarte Piet* appears far from self-evident or necessary.

After the last speech, a minute of silence was observed, followed by the well-known orderly ritual of a number of dignitaries laying wreaths at the monument. After a second musical intermezzo, the opening ceremony ended and some people left. Others stayed at the park, joining different parts of the day's *Keti Koti* programme. Many of the activists who had disrupted the ceremony dressed in black gathered in the Boni–Tula tent, where the earlier disruption was recounted, celebrated and honoured. Although this meeting was public too, it was much smaller than the official opening ceremony and had a more intimate feel to it. My estimate is that the Boni–Tula tent had a capacity for about 80 people, most of whom sat in chairs facing a stage that was about half a metre high. The speech that was given earlier was read again, now by another member of the group, who finished by adding the words 'by any means...', to which many people in the audience chimed in the last word of this well-known phrase by US activist Malcolm X: 'necessary!'

Protest against *Zwarte Piet* has been criticised on the grounds that it would inappropriately judge a Dutch tradition according to a US cultural framework (Koopmans, 2015, p. 14). However, what such criticism overlooks is that, in the interaction logic as put forward by the activists, the relevant identity category is not exclusively national, but also racial. Within their interaction logic, *Zwarte Piet* is presented as an issue that exemplifies the experience of the Black Dutch minority within a society that centres Whiteness as a standpoint as well as a set of unmarked cultural practices (cf. Frankenberg, 1993, p. 1). As such, national identity as well as transnational experiences along lines of 'race' form part of the cultural background texts relevant to understanding *Zwarte Piet*. The intertextual reference to Malcolm X again placed the group and their speech against a historical background that positioned them as strong and defiant, rather than grateful or lucky. This positioning of Black people as initiators of necessary change, voiced in a repertoire that centred strength and defiance through its intertextual references, was repeatedly made explicit, such as when one of the organisers stated: 'We have shown today that you don't need to be afraid, you don't need to be afraid to stand up for yourself. You don't need to be afraid to claim your rights.'<sup>14</sup>

During the gathering in the Boni–Tula tent, the activists thus retroactively assigned meaning to what had happened earlier by placing it in a discursive context that emphasised the agency of Black people confronting societal power structures. The more sheltered setting of this tent offered a context in which what had been a temporary disruption could, for some moments, be the dominant interaction logic.

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14 Original Dutch transcript: 'Wij hebben vandaag laten zien dat je niet bang hoeft te zijn. Je hoeft niet bang te zijn om voor jezelf op te komen. Je hoeft niet bang te zijn om je recht te claimen.'



### 6.3 Zooming in: defiance as necessary – or as out of place

In the preceding pages of dramaturgical analysis, I have shown how the interaction can be understood as a series of proposals and counterproposals about the interaction logic. The smooth performance of *Keti Koti* as a calm, ceremonial and celebratory event was disrupted by a group of people who enacted *Keti Koti* as an event to which struggle and resistance are central. Subsequent attempts by various actors at canalising this disruption followed each other, minimising the impact of the disruption by including it in the dominant performance rather than emphasising competition or lack of compatibility between the two versions. Now, I will look at the same interaction in more detail to complement the dramaturgical analysis with a word-for-word examination of the content of the speeches. My aim is to explore the relationship between what was said and non-verbal aspects of communication.

#### Identity and purpose

While the group of men chained to each other were still making their way to the other side of the clearing, Darryl asserted the identity and purpose of the protesters as he began his speech through the megaphone. He started by naming people of African descent who have played leadership roles in the physical and intellectual struggle against slavery and colonialism:

We are standing here today with the utmost respect and reverence for our ancestors. We stand here in the name of Anton, Boni, Tula, Sophie, Joli-Coeur, Tata, Karpata, Toussaint, Nanny and the countless invisible fighters and victims of Dutch wealth and prosperity. We are here to make sure that no breath from outside can enter our commemoration. Minister Lodewijk Asscher represents the Dutch government: the same government that treats the Black community disrespectfully, does not want a national day of commemoration, puts UN treaties aside and does not care about the pain and worries of the Black community. We are here today to prevent Deputy Prime Minister Lodewijk Asscher, in the name of the Dutch government, from insulting our ancestors any longer with empty words. And especially not on a day that we commemorate their struggle and their suffering. Only a weak people would permit such a humiliation. And we are not a weak people.<sup>15</sup>

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15 Original Dutch transcript: 'Wij staan hier vandaag met het grootst mogelijke respect en eerbied voor onze voorouders. Wij staan hier voor Anton, Boni, Tula, Baron, Sophie, Joli-Coeur, Tata, Karpata, Toussaint, Nanny en de talloze onzichtbare strijders en slachtoffers van de Nederlandse rijkdom en welvaart. Wij zijn hier om ervoor te zorgen dat er geen vreemde adem onze herdenking kan betreden. Minister Lodewijk Asscher vertegenwoordigt de Nederlandse regering: dezelfde regering die de Zwarte gemeenschap respectloos behandelt, geen nationale herdenkingsdag wil, VN verdragen naast zich neerlegt en niets van zich aantrekt van de pijn en zorgen van de Zwarte gemeenschap. Wij zijn hier vandaag om te voorkomen dat vicepremier Lodewijk Asscher namens de Nederlandse regering onze voorouders nog langer beledigt met loze woorden. En al helemaal niet op een dag dat wij hun strijd en hun leed herdenken. Alleen een zwak volk laat zo'n vernedering toe. En wij zijn geen zwak volk.'

The content of the speech confirmed and deepened the centrality of historical continuity in the struggle of and injustice faced by Black people, which the unexpected participants in the event had already enacted and called attention to in a diversity of verbal and non-verbal ways, including their black clothing, the written references to 1873 and the sudden central visibility of the group enacting enslaved people. Within this context, racial identity was explicitly mentioned as an important concept, as the speaker stated that he acted on behalf of the 'Black community'. Furthermore, the speech stated that the *Keti Koti* event was to 'commemorate their [ancestors'] struggle and suffering'. When introducing Asscher, Simons had called the event a 'celebration', although, in her first words upon opening the ceremony, she did say 'we start with the official commemoration'. The activist only used the latter word, instead of the former with its connotations of joy and festivity. He drew attention to the 'we' that the commemoration belongs to, contrasting this to the 'breath from outside' that should not be part of it. He defined his group as being part of a larger group of people, a 'Black community', including many who had already passed away generations ago: 'our ancestors ... fighters and victims of Dutch wealth and prosperity', and 'not a weak people'. Thus, Darryl positioned the 'we' that comprises the 'Black community' – 'ancestors' and 'fighters and victims' who are 'not a weak people' – as strong and morally right, in contrast to the 'breath from outside', 'Dutch government' and 'Dutch wealth and prosperity'. This verbal self-positioning and positioning of others by the speaker was supported by those around him, who provided verbal encouragement and, at later points, also held the megaphone for him, shouting some words of the speech along.

Both the words and the non-verbal communication of the group signalled that *Keti Koti* calls for 'the Black community' to assert itself in a forceful way. This self-positioning of the group as strong and energetic was deepened by the link that was made with Black leaders in the historical struggle for freedom and emancipation. Within this construction, the activists' interruption of the programme was appropriate. In the analytical vocabulary of Austin's work on speech acts, the shift in the meaning of 'commemoration' towards centring rebellious struggle and resistance redefined the deputy prime minister's failed attempt to commence his speech as an abuse rather than a misfire: it is not that the circumstances weren't suitable for Asscher to speak, the problem was that Asscher speaking at this occasion would be 'insulting' and a 'humiliation', since he represented a government that 'treats the Black community disrespectfully, does not want a national day of commemoration, puts UN treaties aside and does not care about the pain and worries of the Black community'. Seen in this light, a speech by Asscher would have been inappropriate (in the activists' words: 'empty') even if there had been quiet and calm.

## Context

The young man then further defined a historical and present-day context for the actions of the protesters as he continued his speech with the following words:

On 1 July 1863, Dutch slavery on co—er—of co—in the Dutch colonies was abolished on paper, but, in practice, this is 1873. But the legacy is still visible. Everyday racism, discrimination and exclusion are daily occurrences and cause structural inequality on the job market and in our education. The hard figures are very clear.<sup>16</sup>

While the protester shouted these sentences through the megaphone, the audience saw Asscher quietly leave the stage in the background. Simons was still onstage, but she squatted down to talk to someone standing next to the stage for a few seconds. The young man's statement that 'the hard figures are very clear' was met with loud cheers from the audience, as well as cheers and applause from the rest of the group dressed in black. This is when Simons, who had earlier brought the microphone to her mouth without speaking, stood up again and resumed her repeated attempts to intervene. With intervals of a few seconds between each attempt, she said:

Thank you, thank you. There is—there is—there is a time and place for everything, and today we will follow the programme. I understand it very well. I understand the emotion. And there is a place for that emotion. It's just that that place is not now. The place is not now and not here. Not now and not here.<sup>17</sup>

However, the activist kept at it, encouraged by members of his group. Shouting through the megaphone, at times stumbling over his words, he elaborated on the 'hard figures', mentioning inequality and racism in different institutions including education, the labour market, the police and the law. He stressed historical continuity:

The current politics and law do not aim to change a status quo that doesn't work for us. We should not pass on to our children, Dutch children, a status quo full of unequal relations, inherited from a colonial time. Our generation will walk a new path. We will be an example to our descendants, like our African ancestors have been a militant example for us. We know what justice is, we know what equal opportunities look like and we know what needs to be repaired. Who are we still waiting for to do this for us?<sup>18</sup>

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16 Original Dutch transcript: 'Op 1 juli 1863 werd de Nederlandse slavernij op ko—eh—van ko—in Nederlandse koloniën op papier afgeschaft maar in de praktijk is dat 1873. Maar de erfenis is nog steeds zichtbaar. Alledaags racisme, discriminatie en uitsluiting zijn aan de orde van de dag van vandaag en zorgen voor structurele ongelijkheid op de arbeidsmarkt en in ons onderwijs. De keiharde cijfers liegen er niet om.'

17 Original Dutch transcript: 'Dank je wel, dank je, dank. Er is—er is—er is een tijd en een plaats voor alles, en vandaag gaan wij het programma volgen. Ik snap het heel goed. Ik begrijp de emotie. En er is plek voor die emotie. Die plek is alleen niet nu. De plek is niet nu en niet hier. Niet nu en niet hier.'

18 Original Dutch transcript: 'De huidige politiek en wetgeving zijn er niet op uit om een status-quo te doorbreken die niet voor ons werkt. Een status-quo vol scheve verhoudingen geërfd uit een koloniale tijd mogen we niet doorgeven aan onze kinderen, Nederlandse kinderen. Onze generatie gaat een nieuw pad bewandelen. Wij zullen een voorbeeld zijn voor onze nakomelingen, zoals onze Afrikaanse voorouders een strijdbaar voorbeeld voor ons zijn geweest. Wij weten wat rechtvaardigheid is, wij weten hoe gelijke kansen eruit zien en wij weten wat er hersteld moet worden. Op wie wachten wij nog om het voor ons te doen?'

By now, Asscher was standing next to the stage, accompanied by, amongst others, Mayor Van der Laan. As already mentioned, many people with cameras moved around the group and the speaker in attempts to capture the scene.

In this fragment, Simons positioned the activists as acting inappropriately, while the activists, in turn, further built their argument that it would be inappropriate to let the programme continue as planned. These two incommensurate understandings of the situation at hand were each supported by striking non-verbal communication, with both speakers standing upright and addressing the audience simultaneously, challenging the other's attempt to hold the floor.

Darryl, having established in what social and historical context the group wished to be seen, added more detail as his speech continued. Where, at first, he talked about present-day injustices only in broad terms of the 'pain and worries' of 'the Black community', he went on to deepen the understanding of a 'commemoration' as an event to which the links between past and present-day injustices are central. He drew a causal link between present-day injustices and the history of 'Dutch slavery in the Dutch colonies', thus drawing attention to the role and responsibility of the perpetrators of slavery – the Dutch. While he sounded agitated and sometimes stumbled over his words, the wording of the speech was self-assured: 'the hard figures are very clear'. Similarly, his choice of words communicated confidence as he asserted his position as having the correct interpretation regarding the controversy over what year should be taken to mark the end of slavery: 'in practice, this is 1873'.

Simons's words, however, downplayed the implications of this self-assured challenge by characterising the uninvited contribution of the group as one based on 'emotion' rather than on an analysis or opinion directly afterwards. Still, she avoided being explicitly confrontational: she expressed gratitude and repeatedly stated that she understood the speaker. By casting the disruption as inappropriate because of its timing and context, and signalling politeness and harmony, Simons positioned the group as being engaged in a misfire rather than an abuse, thus downplaying the conflict implied by the competing attempts to claim the floor.

### **Zwarte Piet**

In my description and analysis of the event, I have already zoomed in from the larger *Keti Koti* festival to the opening ceremony, and from that to the disruption itself. Since the following fragment is the one in which *Zwarte Piet* was mentioned, I will again pay more detailed attention to this part of the interaction, in which the activist spoke the following words:

The politicians barely take us seriously and do not stand up for us. After years of protest, demonstrations and dialogue against *Zwarte Piet*, Prime Minister Rutte still says: '*Zwarte Piet* is Black, I can't change that'. After years of dialogue, protest

and court case, the mayor still says: 'give *Zwarte Piet* another 10 years and then we can get used to it'.<sup>19</sup>

Here, Simons again interjected, saying: 'Thank you. Thank you. Thank you,' implying that it was time for the young man to put an end to his speech. However, he continued. Kunta Rincho, another member of the group, made his way to the front and stood next to Darryl, taking the sheet of paper from his visibly shaking hand to hold it up for him. Under Kunta's jacket, an anti-*Piet* print was partly visible on his sweater. Another man standing close to him also wore a T-shirt with a slogan against *Zwarte Piet*. In the background, Simons could be seen shaking her microphone, apparently signalling to someone outside the video frame, and then walking to the edge of the stage where she knelt to exchange a few words with a police officer standing next to the platform. Meanwhile, the young speaker's words resounded through the megaphone,

Just as the colonial government, on 1 July 1863, thought that the enslaved should wait another 10 years for their real freedom. But we don't need 10 years to teach people that they should not hurt us. We have been waiting 151 years for justice and respect; the time of waiting is over. Over. Today, we demand our respect. The transatlantic slavery has been declared a crime against humanity by the UN, fuelled by an ideology tainted with exclusion and racism and exploitation. Let the Netherlands distance itself from that publicly. And not only with apologies, but also with regret and remorse, but also with actions. And if this majority in the Netherlands is not able to fight for a harmonious society, then we as a Black community will have to do this ourselves. We have to act energetically until the Netherlands takes up the duty to give just as much attention to the shared past as to other traumatic pasts.<sup>20</sup>

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19 Original Dutch transcript: 'De politiek neemt ons nauwelijks serieus en komt niet voor ons op. Na jaren van protest, demonstraties en dialoog tegen Zwarte Piet zegt premier Rutte nog steeds: "Zwarte Piet is Zwart, ik kan er niks aan doen". Na jarenlang dialoog, protest en rechtszaak zegt de burgemeester nog steeds: "Geef Zwarte Piet nog 10 jaar en dan kunnen we eraan wennen".'

20 Original Dutch transcript: 'Net zoals de koloniale overheid op 1 juli 1863 vond dat de tot slaaf gemaakten nog 10 jaar moesten wachten op hun echte vrijheid. Maar wij hebben geen tien jaar nodig om mensen te leren dat ze ons niet moeten kwetsen. Wij wachten al 151 jaar lang op gerechtigheid en respect, de tijd van wachten is voorbij. Voorbij. Vandaag eisen wij ons respect op! De transatlantische slavernij is door de VN uitgeroepen tot een misdaad tegen de mensheid, gedreven door een ideologie besmet met uitsluiting en racisme en uitbuiting. Laat Nederland daar openlijk afstand van doen. En niet alleen met excuses, maar ook met spijt en berouw, maar ook met daden. En als deze meerderheid in Nederland niet in staat is om te vechten voor een harmonieuze samenleving, dan zullen wij het als Zwarte gemeenschap zelf moeten doen. Wij moeten daadkrachtig optreden totdat Nederland de plicht op zich neemt om net zoveel aandacht te schenken aan het geleed verleden als andere traumatische verledens.'

In this fragment, *Zwarte Piet* is presented as an emblematic issue for understanding racism in the Netherlands, linking past and present; institutional structures and individual attitudes. Specifically, the picture given of this past is one in which the points of view, agency and struggle of Black people are emphasised. The majority in Dutch society is contrasted with the 'Black community', and, as such, the categorisation 'majority' acquires a racial connotation as well. This White majority is positioned as weak, lacking insight and making bad decisions. But while the speech includes assertions about individuals' attitudes and actions, it primarily constructs racism as institutional and historically rooted. It is presented as a centrally important concept for understanding present-day situations and the attitudes of 'the majority in the Netherlands', as well as 'the shared past'.

The text of the speech proposed a dichotomous understanding of two groups of actors, emphasising the importance of the distinction between these: the speaker's own 'Black community', and a second group that included Prime Minister Mark Rutte and Amsterdam Mayor Eberhard van der Laan. Both these office holders were positioned as unresponsive to the 'Black community'. This unresponsiveness was presented in terms of actions ('do not stand up for us') as well as in terms of attitude ('hardly take us seriously'). By referencing remarks by both men – '*Zwarte Piet* is black, I can't change that'; 'give *Zwarte Piet* another 10 years and then we can get used to it'<sup>21</sup> – the speech established a sharp contrast between the initiative and bravery of anti-racist leaders of African descent invoked earlier, and the attitude of these office-holders. This difference was emphasised and broadened to a larger group, since the use of 'we' in the remark attributed to Van der Laan positioned the mayor as part of the group of people who need time to get used to changes in the figure of *Zwarte Piet*. A few seconds later, the urgency lacking from the office holders' attitude was emphasised with the explicit statement that 'we have to act energetically'. This differentiation between the two groups was placed in a historical continuity through the next words, when the speaker drew a parallel between the remark ascribed to Van der Laan and the 10-year period of forced labour following the legal abolition of slavery: 'Just as the colonial government, on July first, 1863, thought that the enslaved should wait another 10 years for their real freedom'. The juxtaposition between the remarks of the two government officials and the proactive attitude of the Black community with their 'years of protest, demonstrations and dialogue' made the remarks of the officials stand out as very laissez-faire. Further, the activist emphasised historical continuity with the words 'We have been waiting 151 years for justice and respect', which implied constancy from 1863 up until the present day.

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21 In the letter he sent to the city council informing them of his decision to follow the complaint committee's advice, Van der Laan had suggested a period of 'five or 10 years' for changing the figure of *Zwarte Piet* (Van der Laan, 2013a).

The speaker further fleshed out this particular understanding when he added ‘until the Netherlands takes up the duty to give just as much attention to the shared past as to other traumatic pasts’. The phrase ‘shared past’ is often used to refer to the transatlantic slavery. For example, an information plaque near the monument in the Oosterpark reads ‘shared past, common future.’<sup>22</sup> The ‘other traumatic pasts’ invoked by the speaker with the megaphone are the Second World War and the Shoah. As discussed in previous chapters, these tend to overshadow other histories in the Dutch collective consciousness. As such, the reference to these ‘other traumatic pasts’ in order to make a point about the significance of the transatlantic slavery echoes a discursive move we have also observed in the case study about the public hearing. It implied a demand for acknowledgement of the significance of the transatlantic slavery, thus calling attention to the mainstream construction of Dutch history as exactly that – a construction.

This brings me to the ambivalence in the ways in which the text of the speech dealt with the category of ‘Dutch’. While the speaker had earlier defined his own group as Dutch, he also cast ‘the Netherlands’ as the accused: ‘Let the Netherlands distance itself from that publicly’. In these words, the Netherlands was presented as an actor different from the speaker’s own group. Then, a subtle difference was established between the Netherlands on the one hand, and ‘the majority in the Netherlands’ on the other. This difference was established through the speaker’s remark about ‘the majority in the Netherlands’, who ‘is not able to fight for a harmonious society’. The Netherlands was the entity that should work to provide the ‘justice and respect’ and absence of humiliation that are the Black Dutch community’s due. And, if this did not occur, then this was due to a lack of ability of the ‘majority in the Netherlands’. This suggests that the Netherlands is a larger entity, which can contain a dominant majority with certain views, but does not limit itself to that majority. It left open the possibility that the speaker and his group, too, might be part of the Netherlands, which failed to undertake some necessary actions because of the ‘inability’ of a majority. Similarly, the earlier explicit categorisation of Black children as Dutch implied that Dutchness is not limited to Whiteness or to racist attitudes. Thus, *Zwarte Piet* served as a pivotal example in an argumentation which established subtle differences and overlaps between various collective identities on the basis of racial and national categorisations; it was made clear that ‘the Dutch’ as a collective identity comprises different racial groups, and that these racial identities inflect national identities. The racial group defined as ‘the Black community’ was positioned as having a right to make demands of ‘the Netherlands’, partly on the basis of the Dutchness this group shares with the White majority.

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22 The plaque offers information in both Dutch and English. The Dutch version reads: ‘gedeeld verleden, gezamenlijke toekomst’.

### Dutchness and conflict

At what would turn out to be almost the end of the speech, the speaker offered some more explanation about the way in which the actions of the group should be understood. While the other members of the group cheered and raised their fists in the air, Asscher could be seen joining Simons onstage again, followed by Markelo. In contrast to the tense and resolute enactment taking place a few metres away, the three exchanged some words in a seemingly casual manner, even laughing a little. Then they fell silent, watching the group and, in Markelo's case, nodding occasionally as the young man in black continued to speak for just over a minute.

Our generation will not allow for others to tread on them and will not bow down, and will not abandon the Black community in the Netherlands when they need us. All generations are watching and the genera—how this generation prepares the path for the next generation. A path of justice, a path towards equal opportunities and a path towards reparations. Our generation has stood still long enough. Standing still will not return to the Netherlands the respect and decency that has been lost through years of slavery and colonialism. We are done with being treated as second-class citizens and we are totally done with only being of importance when the Netherlands thinks we're good enough. It is time to rise. Time to defend our own interests. We ring in a new era. We are Dutch just like any other Dutch person and we demand to be treated with the same respect.<sup>23</sup>

What is striking about this fragment of the speech is how it again problematised the concept of the Netherlands, but immediately went on to resolve this tension through a re-definition of national identity and belonging. At first, the Netherlands was positioned as morally weak for having lost respect and decency, and not valuing the Black community (which is 'only of importance when the Netherlands thinks we're good enough'). While the speaker highlighted the strength and agency of enslaved Africans and their descendants, he, as I already mentioned, contrasted this with the 'majority in the Netherlands', which 'is not able to fight for a harmonious society' and needs the Black community's help to regain 'the respect and decency that has been

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23 Original Dutch transcript: 'Onze generatie zal niet meer over zich laten heenlopen en zal niet meer buigen voor en zal de Zwarte gemeenschap in Nederland niet in de steek laten wanneer zij ons nodig heeft. Alle generaties kijken toe en het genera—hoe deze generatie het pad voorbereidt voor onze volgende generatie. Een pad van rechtvaardigheid, een pad naar gelijke kansen en een pad naar herstel. Onze generatie heeft lang genoeg stil gestaan. Stilstaan zal Nederland het respect en het fatsoen niet terug geven dat verloren is gegaan door jarenlange slavernij en kolonialisme. Wij zijn het zat om als tweederangsburgers behandeld te worden en wij zijn het helemaal zat om er alleen toe te doen als Nederland ons goed genoeg vindt. Het is tijd om op te staan. Tijd om voor onszelf op te komen. Wij luiden een nieuw tijdperk in. Wij zijn Nederlanders net als iedere andere Nederlander en we eisen met hetzelfde respect behandeld te worden.'



lost through years of slavery and colonialism'. Thus, this critical view established a contrast between the Netherlands and the interests of 'the Black community'. This contrast was sharpened by the statement 'it is time to ... defend our own interests'. This implies that the interests of 'the Black community' are different from those of 'the Netherlands'. Taken together, these statements established conflicting representations of the Netherlands. On the one hand, the Netherlands comprised the 'we' that the speaker is part of. On the other hand, a clear conflict of interests was invoked between the Black community and the majority in the Netherlands, who may not be able to fight for justice. However, this tension was resolved by announcing a 'new era', in which 'we are Dutch just like every other Dutch person and we demand to be treated with the same respect'. In this new era, being of importance does not depend on being deemed 'good enough'; and there will not be a second-class citizenship. Importantly, this self-definition grounds Dutchness not in sameness but in equality *regardless* of possible difference. It is a definition of Dutchness that allows for the existence of conflict and imperfection.

The effects of the group's active stance were not presented as limited to the group itself in narrow terms, but were cast as having their influence on the whole of the Netherlands: if the group stands still, this 'will not return to the Netherlands the respect and decency that has been lost through years of slavery and colonialism'. Being no longer treated as second-class citizens was presented a desirable situation not only for 'the Black community', but as a positive change for the much larger group of Dutch people, as it would help the Netherlands regain that lost respect and decency. Thus, in this fragment of the performance, the activists again interwove the themes of national and racial identity and history's influence on the present so as to present their agency as legitimate and necessary.

Meanwhile, the presence on stage and relaxed demeanor of Asscher, Simons and Markelo gave the impression they were confident they would take the floor again at any moment, and what was going on did not fundamentally challenge their position.

### **Blackness and Whiteness**

Many of the other group members joined the man with the megaphone in shouting the final words of the last part of the speech: '[we demand to be treated] with the same respect'. What followed were more shouts of 'Enough is enough', cheers and raised fists. The speaker then added some more words, which he did not read from the sheet of paper and which were not added when the speech was later published online or read by another member of the group during the event in the Boni-Tula tent later that day:

How is it possible that this is our commemoration, but our people cannot enter? How is it possible that NiNsee, the representative, that he is a White man, while he should

really be an African man? This is our commemoration, and we have a right to speak.

This belongs to us. End of story.<sup>24</sup>

Quite apart from the question who was referred to here,<sup>25</sup> it is significant that Whiteness was explicitly mentioned, and associated with less legitimacy to speak on the issues regarding the historical and current-day racial relations that are at the heart of *Keti Koti*. The commemoration was emphatically defined three times as ‘our commemoration’, belonging to ‘us’. As to what ‘our’ and ‘us’ entailed, the speaker defined his own group in various ways in the course of the speech, ranging from ‘the Black community’ to ‘our generation’ and ‘Dutch just like any other Dutch person’. Which applied here? Rather than age or Dutchness, a distinction between ‘White’ and ‘African’ was put forward as relevant. Thus, with this addition the young man with the megaphone signalled that differences between Black and White are significant, should be addressed explicitly, and can mean that White people need to take a step back. That there was no room for debate about this was made clear with the addition of ‘end of story’. As will become clear later on, this stance was markedly different from that of the other speakers. This difference was not that the other speakers put forward a competing argumentation about the involvement of Black and White people with *Keti Koti*; rather, they emphasised a non-racial unity and sameness instead of differences between groups.

### Agency and control

The end of the speech was followed by approximately a minute of some confusion, with people milling about in front of the stage, and the group leaving of its own accord. Asscher, who had already returned to the stage, again took his spot behind the lectern. Simons gave her microphone to Markelo, who then, in a video recorded from a few metres distance, could be heard saying ‘there is no sound’.<sup>26</sup> As Asscher waited behind the lectern, Markelo stepped off the stage again. Simons was the first to take control after the interruption of the programme by addressing the audience, standing at the centre of the stage. Meanwhile, Asscher looked on slightly behind her, to the side of the stage:

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24 Original Dutch transcript: ‘Hoe kan het dat dit onze herdenking is, maar onze eigen mensen hier niet naar binnen kunnen? Hoe kan het dat NiNsee, de vertegenwoordiger, dat het een Witte man is, terwijl het eigenlijk een Afrikaanse man zou moeten zijn.? Dit is onze herdenking, en wij hebben het recht om te spreken. Dit is van ons. Klaar’.

25 An activist I interviewed told me that this addition to the speech probably referred to a White member of the board of directors of the NiNsee. He also placed the remarks in the context of the limited space to attend the *Keti Koti* ceremony, resulting in the – mostly Black – would-be attendants being forced to remain standing, or not being allowed to join the audience (Interview Mitchell, 2016).

26 Original Dutch transcript: ‘er is geen geluid’.

I have sound again. Thank you. Today is a day on which we commemorate and celebrate. A day with room for everyone. For the emotions of everyone. Freedom is pre-eminently the reason that everyone can express themselves here today. Personally, I have an opinion about the way in which that happens. I keep that to myself. But I would very much like to give the floor to Marian for a moment before Minister Asscher takes the floor.<sup>27</sup>

Simons' remark 'I have sound again' implies that, up to that point, her microphone had not been functioning. This makes sense in light of her earlier gesturing with the microphone, as well as Markelo's remark to the same effect. In an interview, an activist told me that a backstage intervention in the sound system had been part of the plan (Interview Mitchell, 2018). Whether or not Simons had interpreted the technical trouble with the sound system as being connected to the activists' intervention, it is significant that she pointed to 'room for everyone' and 'freedom' as explanations for what had happened, rather than the protesters' agency in creating an opportunity to make their voices heard, possibly combined with a technical hiccup. By putting 'room for everyone' forward as characteristic for this 'day on which we commemorate and celebrate', Simons constructed the event as highly inclusive. In the activists' performance of *Keti Koti*, however, exclusion and inequality had been a common thread. Simons's characterisation of 'freedom' as the primary reason behind the protesters' actions went hand in hand with her casting doubt on the desirability of these actions. She said she had an opinion about the way the group had behaved but would not comment on it: 'I keep that to myself'. However, this statement implied that her opinion of the activists' behaviour was not positive. By refraining from making her opinion explicit, Simons communicated that it would not be proper to openly voice a negative judgement. Of course, passing explicit and negative judgement on others was exactly what the activists had just done in their speech. Through her words 'Personally, I have an opinion about the way in which that happens', Simons was able to suggest that the activists had acted improperly, while her next words, 'I keep that to myself', allowed her to avoid breaking this implicit rule herself. Additionally, the 'but' with which Simons started the next sentence serves as a discourse marker indicating a disjunctive relationship. It implied a contrast between Markelo taking the floor, and something else – although it was not made explicit whether this was the activists' intervention, Simons' own decision to 'keep her opinion to herself', or both. In any case, the announcement re-established Simons as the person who managed the turn-taking in the ceremony. This return to the interaction logic

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27 Original Dutch transcript: 'Ik heb weer geluid. Dank je wel. Vandaag is een dag waarop we gedenken en vieren. Een dag met ruimte voor iedereen. Voor emoties van een ieder. Vrijheid is bij uitstek de reden dat een ieder zich hier vandaag mag uiten. Persoonlijk heb ik een mening over de manier waarop dat gebeurt. Die houd ik dan voor me. Maar ik wil wel heel graag even het woord geven aan Marian alvorens minister Asscher het woord neemt.'

that had previously structured the interaction, with Simons as the undisputed host of the event, was strengthened by her physical positioning centre stage, her use of the microphone and her calm tone.

### Proper manners

Markelo stood by herself in front of the stage, approximately on the spot where the group of activists had gathered who had interrupted the programme. Holding the microphone, she said the following words:

Well, those who are present. *Sranan Sma*,<sup>28</sup> Antilleans. We have just seen a strong example of how people can take their freedom. And they have, the group did it. We cannot ignore this. But I think it is important that we make some agreements. If you want to do something, come to the organisation that is set up for this. We need each other. All those experts that were standing here, all those people, all those youths who have taken their freedom, I appeal to you, come join us because we also need that knowledge. That passion perhaps a bit less, we are going to channel that properly, but it is necessary. If you man the barricade like this, come man the barricade with the people who are managing the barricade.<sup>29</sup>

Markelo then continued in Sranantongo, reminiscent of the way she had switched between the two languages in the earlier part of the ceremony. She started her short speech by saying 'So, again', implying that something was about to come that she had already said before. In line with these opening words, her message in Sranantongo was very similar to the one in Dutch. Instead of using the metaphor of a 'barricade', though, she talked about a house: 'come to the house in which everything happens, and if the house isn't there, then let's build it together'.<sup>30</sup>

The subtle difference in the Sranantongo and Dutch wording of these last sentences illustrates how Markelo managed to strike a balance between the activists' interaction logic and the dominant interaction logic as previously enacted. In Sranantongo, she did not emphasise the organisers' dominance as much as in the Dutch speech, which included the phrase 'those who manage the barricade'. Rather,

28 *Sranan Sma* means 'Surinamese people' in Sranantongo.

29 Original Dutch/Sranantongo transcript: 'Goed, aanwezigen. *Sranan sma*, Antillianen. We hebben net een staaltje van, gezien hoe mensen hun vrijheid kunnen nemen. En ze hebben het, de groep heeft het gedaan. We kunnen er niet omheen. Maar ik denk dat het belangrijk is dat we met elkaar een aantal afspraken maken. Als je iets wil doen, kom naar de organisatie die ervoor is ingesteld. We hebben elkaar nodig. Al die deskundigen die hier stonden, en al die mensen, al die jeugd die zijn vrijheid genomen heeft, ik roep jullie op, meld je aan want we hebben die kennis ook nodig. Die drift misschien iets minder, dat gaan we in goede banen leiden, maar het is nodig. Als je zo op de barricade komt staan, kom ook op de barricade staan met de mensen die over de barricade gaan.'

30 Original Sranantongo/Dutch transcript: 'kom in het huis pe a sani musu pasa, te a hoso no de, laten we het huis bouwen met elkaar.'

she remained closer to the protesters' account of the situation by leaving room for the possibility that the 'house' did not exist yet and proposed a mutual effort: 'let's build it together'. More generally, throughout her intervention, she tied in with different aspects of both interaction logics, without appearing to be conspicuously in contradiction with either. In her short speech, Markelo acknowledged the protesters' agency ('people can take their freedom. ... the group did it') but signalled that there are desirable and undesirable ways of acting. However, these did not follow the same fault lines as had been proposed by the activists, who had talked in terms of racial identity and attitude towards present-day societal problems in the Netherlands. She did not explicitly contradict the activists on these points, but put forward alternative criteria for participation, restoring the centrality of unity and harmony as desirable characteristics of the process at hand: what is 'important' is to make 'agreements', and things should be done in concertation because 'we need each other'.

Markelo presented herself as part of a larger group by using the plural pronoun 'we' and 'us'. That this group was separate from that of the activists, although the activists are welcome to add themselves to it, was expressed in the words 'come join us'. In her last sentence of the Dutch part of her short speech, she again offered the image of the group of activists joining the group that she was already a part of, presumably the NiNsee: 'come man the barricade with the people who are managing the barricade', 'the organisation that is set up for this'. Even though her next sentence was 'we need each other', her speech made it clear that the activists were the ones who should make the choice to join Markelo's group, and not the other way around. That said, she also expressed that her group was also in need of the knowledge that the activists could offer: 'we need that knowledge'.

The activists had constructed themselves as members of the Black community in the Netherlands, descendants of the enslaved and specifically of those who had fought against colonialism and enslavement. Markelo referred to the protesters in ways that did not acknowledge racial identity as relevant: 'all those experts ..., all those people, all those youths'. In this way, rather than contradicting the activists' self-definition, she constructed both age and expertise as crucial characteristics of the group. This latter aspect was emphasised when Markelo stated that 'we need that knowledge'. However, she made a distinction between this knowledge and what she called the activists' 'passion', which 'we ... need ... perhaps a bit less'. In other words, she called on the activists to participate, but to do this properly, by consulting the proper authorities and showing less 'passion'. This had the effect of creating discursive space for performances that were more in line with the previously dominant interaction logic.

## Unity and harmony

After Markelo had spoken, Simons introduced Asscher by saying:

Then we will now continue with the commemoration the way we have agreed together, and I would very much like to give the floor to Minister Asscher.<sup>31</sup>

From behind the lectern, Asscher spoke as follows, acknowledging the exceptionality of the situation:

Ladies and gentlemen. I put the official speech aside for a minute. Because I think this is actually a good moment to explain why I find it so important to be present here. Why I found it important last year and why I find it immeasurably valuable now as well. As a person, but also especially as a representative of the government. Of the government of all Dutch people. And that is of immeasurable value because, we are here together, and you see the colour and the strength of Dutch society. You see that here. Young and old, each with their own conscience, their own history, their own dream for the future. But with one certainty: that future, that belongs to us together.<sup>32</sup>

The activists' unexpected behaviour had presented Asscher with a dilemma. On the one hand, trying to speak at the same time as the activists and drown out their voices would have been both undignified and would have made Asscher run the risk of being seen to commit the 'abuses', to use the Austinian term, that the activists were accusing him of: failing to listen to them, and seeking to overrule them. Additionally, standing onstage for an unforeseeable length of time while waiting for the activists to finish would have maintained Asscher as a highly visible reference point for their speech. Asscher's decision to descend from the podium had the effect of minimising these risks. Even so, complying with the activists' request not to speak would imply an agreement with their critical assessment of him. In other words, Asscher was faced with a dilemma since action was required in order to counter the activists' positioning of him, but speaking during or immediately after the activists would have clashed with the alternative interaction logic that had been tentatively established by the group of people who had staged the disruption. There was too large a gap between the interaction logic as invoked by the activists and a logic within which he would be the right person to speak. However, the way was prepared by other actors who figured in the original programme.

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31 Original Dutch transcript: 'Dan gaan we nu door met de herdenking zoals we hem met elkaar hebben afgesproken en geef ik heel graag het woord aan minister Asscher.'

32 Original Dutch transcript: 'Dames en heren. Ik leg de officiële toespraak even opzij. Want ik vind dit juist een goed moment om uit te leggen waarom ik het zo belangrijk vind om hierbij te zijn. Waarom ik het vorig jaar belangrijk vond om hier te zijn en waarom ik het ook nu van onschatbare waarde vind om hier te zijn. Als persoon, maar juist ook als vertegenwoordiger van de regering. Van de regering van alle Nederlanders. En dat is van onschatbare waarde omdat, we zijn hier bij elkaar, en je ziet de kleur en de kracht van de Nederlandse samenleving. Die zie je hier. Jong en oud, ieder met zijn eigen geweten, zijn eigen geschiedenis, zijn eigen droom voor de toekomst. Maar met één zekerheid: die toekomst, die is van ons samen.'

The improvised speeches by Markelo and Simons worked to establish a transition away from the activists' interaction logic, without appearing to challenge it directly. In at least three ways, they both presented themselves as being in a position to understand and explain what the activists were doing, and why they were doing it. Firstly, both women had already emphasised their Afro-Surinamese heritage in a number of ways, and this identity marker remained firmly established. Secondly, both offered accounts about the activists' behaviour to the audience, thus taking the position of someone who understood what the activists were talking about. In the third place, Simons even explicitly stated that she understood the activists. While positioning themselves as aligned with the activists, Markelo as well as Simons also communicated that the activists had behaved inappropriately in a number of ways. They had spoken in an inappropriate way, in the wrong place and at the wrong time, and without consulting the proper authorities. However, this inappropriate behaviour was presented as 'misguided' and part of the freedom characterising the status quo rather than as a serious challenge to that status quo. As Simons remarked: 'Freedom is pre-eminently the reason that everyone can express themselves here today'. By positioning Asscher as someone who was to perform a task that 'we have all agreed' upon and adding that she would 'very much' like to give him the floor, Simons presented him as the right person in the correct circumstances to give a speech. In this way, the performances by both women re-established an interaction logic within which it was appropriate for Asscher to be onstage again.

The importance of racial issues and racial identity that was present in the speech by the activists was downplayed by Asscher without him explicitly commenting on its (ir)relevance. He presented Dutchness as the centrally important collective identity: 'all Dutch people... we are here together... Dutch society'. However, this did not include support for either the activists' self-definition or their understanding of Dutchness. The activists had problematised the category of 'the Dutch', arguing that it was a *de facto* exclusionary term needing to be reclaimed by them. Attention to such aspects of the term was absent in Asscher's construction of Dutchness. He did signal that there was diversity to be found within this group: 'you see the colour and the strength of Dutch society. You see that here. Young and old, each with their own conscience, their own history, their own dream for the future'. The words 'strength and colour' signalled a positive appraisal: diversity is a good thing. The meaning of the word 'colour' in this context is ambiguous, since it can refer to a figurative 'colourfulness' while also calling to mind difference in racial terms. References to racial groups, however, were limited to this ambiguous allusion and not made explicit in Asscher's words. Next, Asscher emphasised only non-racial differences: 'Young and old, each with their own conscience, their own history, their own dream for the future'. Moreover, referring to the different characteristics of 'each' person positioned such differences on the individual rather than the group level – with a shared Dutchness as a binding element. This construction ran counter to that presented by the activists, who had constructed racial identities as important in understanding societal issues.

## Exceptional freedom

After his initial words, Asscher continued as follows:

And the meaning of coming together to realise that the Netherlands has a very dark page within its history, a very painful period. Of that slavery, the significance today is also incredibly large. That significance carries with it that we don't only think about the suffering that has happened, the pain that has been felt, but especially also about what that brings with it in terms of obligation for us, here, today. Under the sun, in Amsterdam, one of the freest places in the world. How free we are here. So free that it is a large good, almost touchingly good, that, here, people who feel pain, who feel anger, who feel emotion, walk forward and express their opinion, to get it off their chest. That is the freedom that we celebrate. Which is not self-evident. And I am grateful that they do this. I am grateful that they express their anger and their emotion, even if it's towards me or the government. Because I am convinced that you shouldn't be silent. You shouldn't suppress what you carry inside. And why are they angry? Not about what happened 151 years ago. But precisely because of the obligation for the future that we have also today. And that obligation entails that we realise that, also today, there is still slavery. Also in the Netherlands. That one person enslaves the other. Makes them unfree. In the sex industry, very close to here. But also outside of the sex industry. And that we realise that there is also today, also in the Netherlands, racism. And discrimination. And that we all have the obligation to do what we can to counter that. They are not angry about then, they are angry about now.<sup>33</sup>

In this fragment, Asscher positioned himself in line with the activists by explicitly mentioning his gratitude towards them. He added more depth to his characterisation of the collective

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33 Original Dutch transcript: 'En de betekenis van het bij elkaar komen om je te realiseren dat Nederland een hele zwarte bladzijde van de geschiedenis kent, een hele pijnlijke periode. Van die slavernij, die betekenis is ook vandaag ongelooflijk groot. Die betekenis die brengt met zich mee dat we niet alleen denken aan het leed dat geleden is, de pijn die gevoeld is, maar juist ook aan wat dat met zich mee brengt aan verplichting voor ons, hier, vandaag. En die verplichting voor vandaag is, je te beseffen hoe vrij we hier zijn. Onder de zon, in Amsterdam, één van de meest vrije plaatsen van de wereld. Hoe vrij we hier zijn. Zo vrij dat het een groot goed is, bijna ontroerend goed, dat hier mensen die pijn voelen, die woede voelen, die emotie voelen, naar voren lopen, en hun mening uiten. Hun hart luchten. Dat is de vrijheid die we vieren. Die niet vanzelfsprekend is. En ik ben ze dankbaar dat ze dat doen. Ik ben ze dankbaar dat ze hun woede en hun emotie uiten, ook als dat naar mij is of naar de regering. Omdat ik ervan overtuigd ben dat je niet moet zwijgen. Je moet van je hart geen moordkuil maken. En waarom zijn ze boos? Niet over wat 151 jaar geleden gebeurd is. Maar juist vanwege de verplichting die we ook vandaag hebben voor de toekomst. En die verplichting houdt in dat we ons realiseren dat er ook vandaag nog slavernij is. Ook in Nederland. Dat de ene mens de ander tot slaaf maakt. Onvrij maakt. In de seksindustrie, hier vlakbij. Maar ook buiten de seksindustrie. En dat we ons realiseren dat er ook vandaag, ook in Nederland racisme is. En discriminatie. En dat we allemaal de plicht hebben daartegen te doen wat we kunnen. Zij zijn niet boos over toen, zij zijn boos over nu.'



'we', who are present 'here, today. Under the sun, in Amsterdam'. Clearly, the main effect of the words 'under the sun' was not to inform the audience of the weather conditions. The words communicated a positive appraisal of the situation that the group found itself in, characterised by light and warmth, in contrast to the 'very dark page ... very painful period'. He then mentioned freedom as a centrally important characteristic of the situation they found themselves in: 'in Amsterdam, one of the freest places in the world. How free we are here'. As such, he presented the actions by the group dressed in black as having been made possible by this freedom: 'So free that ... people who feel pain, who feel anger, who feel emotion, walk forward and express their opinion, to get it off their chest'. This way of understanding the activists' behaviour clashes with their self-definition – they had presented themselves as active and energetic, following in the footsteps of heroic ancestors, 'fighters and victims of Dutch wealth and prosperity'. This emphasis on agency and initiative seemed much less relevant within the deputy prime minister's construction of the actors and the situation.

Asscher's words highlighted the role of emotions in explaining the activists' behaviour: 'here, people who feel pain, who feel anger, who feel emotion, walk forward and express their opinion, to get it off their chest. ... they express their anger and their emotion ... And why are they angry? ... They are not angry about then, they are angry about now'. Thus, he defined the activists' interruption as an expression of 'anger and emotion'. He presented it as positive that the activists were able to 'get it off their chest', because 'you shouldn't be silent. You shouldn't suppress what you carry inside'. Thus, the actions by the group in black were put in a positive light because of how they relieved their need to express their anger. This is quite different from how the activists had constructed their own participation, which they saw as aimed at much-needed societal change rather than a personal need for venting emotion: 'teach people that they should not offend us. ... we demand our respect! ... if this majority in the Netherlands is not able to fight for a harmonious society, then we as a Black community will have to do this ourselves'.

Asscher also signalled that the interaction at hand was one to which both the past and slavery were relevant. He did so by discussing these topics explicitly: 'the Netherlands has a very dark page within its history, a very painful period. Of that slavery, the significance today is also incredibly large'. Thus, he called attention to the magnitude ('very dark ... very painful') and importance ('the significance is also incredibly large') of slavery in Dutch history. However, when analysing more closely what 'slavery' means in the discourses of the activists and the deputy prime minister, respectively, it becomes clear that they constructed the terms differently. Asscher presented slavery as significant because of the experience of the enslaved as victims: 'the suffering that has happened, the pain that has been felt'. This is different from the construction by the activists, who had positioned the enslaved as active by highlighting their struggle and resistance, as well as the morally reprehensible attitude and actions of the Dutch enslavers. Complementary to his construction of slavery being significant because of the past, Asscher also constructed it as significant in the present.

However, in his construction, its significance did not have to do with historical continuities in the relationship between ‘the Black community’ and ‘the Dutch majority’, as the activists had argued. Rather, Asscher presented the present-day significance of slavery in terms of the obligations it implies for the collective non-racial ‘we’ that was fortunate enough to be ‘here, today. Under the sun, in Amsterdam, one of the freest places in the world.’ Thus, Asscher emphasised the difference between the positive present-day situation of the collective ‘we’, which included the activists, and the negative experience of enslaved people in the past. The message of the activists, on the other hand, was different in this regard: they communicated that the year 1863 does not accurately represent the freedom from slavery seen from the perspective of the enslaved, and that the end of slavery had not yet brought justice: ‘We have been waiting for 151 years for justice and respect’.

While the activists constructed Asscher as a ‘breath from outside’, his speech positioned him as very much an insider, who was knowledgeable and active in the struggle against slavery. Whereas, in the activist’s speech, *Zwarte Piet* and racial fault lines had been pivotal issues, Asscher primarily connected present-day injustice to sex work and interpersonal relationships, rather than *Zwarte Piet*, or collective identities: ‘And that obligation entails that we realise that, also today, there is still slavery. Also in the Netherlands. That one person enslaves the other. Makes them unfree. In the sex industry, very close to here. But also outside of the sex industry’. At the time Asscher gave this speech, he was minister of Social Affairs and Employment in the coalition government that had been sworn in on 5 November 2012. Before taking that position, however, he had been alderman in the Municipality of Amsterdam, and had been responsible, amongst other things, for a large-scale and widely publicised project to change the character and reduce the size of the city’s red-light district. Protection of women who were victims of human trafficking was often put forward as one of the main aims of this project, by Asscher himself as well as by others (Asscher & Van der Laan, 2012; Nieber, 2008; Outshoorn, 2010). Thus, by putting forward the sex industry as a site of present-day slavery and positing that ‘we all have the obligation to do what we can to counter that’, Asscher positioned himself as someone who complied with this rule; someone who fought against slavery. He positioned himself as a person for whom it was appropriate to explain the situation at hand, including the behaviour and motivations of other actors.

After commenting on slavery in the sex industry, Asscher also mentioned racism and discrimination. However, in contrast to the activists, he did not choose to elaborate on this by mentioning specific groups in society who might be involved in racism and discrimination, be it on the receiving end or as perpetrators. Asscher used the construction ‘there is’ without adding an active subject rather than a sentence with a subject and object. Referring to racism and discrimination without mentioning any person or group involved in it meshed well with Asscher’s earlier characterisation of ‘the Dutch’ as the relevant overarching and inclusive category, to which ‘race’ was irrelevant.

## Dutchness and togetherness

Asscher continued his speech, speaking from behind the lectern and looking towards the audience who were seated and standing across from him:

And their emotion, and their anger, is ours. Because lack of freedom and inequality don't belong in this country, and surely don't belong to the future that we together want for our children. And I will use all means to tackle discrimination on the labour market. I will bring legislation. But let's be honest: there is no law in the world that can banish racism and discrimination. That can only be banished when it disappears from the heart. And it only disappears from the heart when we raise our children with the awareness that people are equal [in one of the videos, a male voice can be heard at this point: 'then stop with *Zwarte Piet*!']. When we don't teach them ignorant prejudices. And that is the only point I reproach the demonstrators for. When they said this demonstration is ours only, that's where they missed the opportunity to reconcile, which also belongs to *Keti Koti*. We don't only commemorate the pain; we also celebrate the breaking of the chains. And that is the meaning of this day. For now and for the future.

We have a painful past, we have to face that. We shouldn't be silent, but if we are angry, if we are in pain, shout out. But we have to realise that our future is a shared one. And a shared future is only possible if you don't only shout, but also listen. If you enter into conversation with each other, if you have the painful conversation about the prejudices that exist, about the racism in our society. Because then we can remove it together. Thank you.<sup>34</sup>

In this last part of his speech, Asscher confirmed the positions and characteristics of actors as he had constructed them earlier. He presented a 'lack of freedom and inequality'

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34 Original Dutch transcript: 'En hun emotie, en hun woede, is de onze. Want onvrijheid en ongelijkheid horen niet bij dit land, en horen zeker niet bij de toekomst die we gezamenlijk willen voor onze kinderen. En ik zal alle middelen benutten om discriminatie op de arbeidsmarkt aan te pakken. Ik kom met wetgeving. Maar laten we eerlijk zijn: er is geen wet ter wereld die racisme en discriminatie kan uitbannen. Dat kan alleen maar worden uitgebannen als het uit de harten verdwijnt. En het verdwijnt alleen maar uit de harten als we onze kinderen opvoeden in het besef dat mensen gelijkwaardig zijn. [In één van de video's is een stem te horen die roept: 'Stop dan met *Zwarte Piet*!'] Als we ze geen domme vooroordelen meegeven. En dat is het enige punt wat ik de demonstranten verwijt. Daar waar zij zeiden, deze demonstratie is alleen van ons, missen zij de kans op de verzoening die ook hoort bij *Keti Koti*. We gedenken niet alleen de pijn, we vieren ook het verbreken van de ketenen. En dat is de betekenis van deze dag. Voor nu en voor in de toekomst.

We hebben een pijnlijk verleden, dat moeten we onder ogen zien. We moeten niet zwijgen, maar als we boos zijn, als we pijn hebben, schreeuw het uit. Maar we moeten ons realiseren dat onze toekomst een gezamenlijke is. En de toekomst die gezamenlijk is kan alleen maar als je niet alleen schreeuwt, maar ook luistert. Als je met elkaar in gesprek gaat, als je het pijnlijke gesprek voert over de vooroordelen die er zijn, over het racisme in onze samenleving. Want dan kunnen we het samen wegnemen. Dank u wel.'

as alien to the Netherlands, thus upholding the construction of unity and harmony as characteristic for a non-racial collective identity. This also tied in with his 'reproach' to the group that had interrupted the programme: 'When they said this demonstration is ours only, that's where they missed the opportunity to reconcile, which also belongs to *Keti Koti*. We don't only commemorate the pain; we also celebrate the breaking of the chains.'

Asscher stipulated that participation should take the form of a 'conversation' in which it is essential to 'listen', instead of 'only shouting'. He stated that what should be done was to 'enter into conversation with each other ... have the painful conversation about the prejudices that exist, about the racism in our society. Because then we can remove it together'. By requesting that the activists listen instead of only 'shout', and requesting that they enter into a conversation about racism, Asscher suggested that what the activists did was mere 'shouting', which cannot be deemed a proper contribution to discussing racism in the Netherlands.

Presumably, Asscher himself complied with the criteria he just put forward, engaging in a 'painful conversation' about 'the prejudices that exist, the racism that exists in our society'. He indeed mentioned racism, discrimination and different forms of slavery. However, as I have analysed above, Asscher's specific construction of these topics and their relationship to history, the present and various actors clashed with that of the activists. Specifically, he presented racism as primarily connected to the attitudes of misguided individuals rather than institutionalised patterns, thus tying in with understandings of racism developed within the field of psychology (see Chapter 4, pp. 81–83). Relatedly, Asscher foregrounded discontinuities between present-day racial relations in the Netherlands on the one hand, and the ideas and structures involved in the transatlantic slavery on the other. While, in the intervention of the activists, *Zwarte Piet* had played a pivotal role as an emblematic issue connecting individual and institutional dimensions of racism, Asscher's speech as well as the subsequent speeches lacked any reference to the figure. My aim here is not to establish the reason for this omission, but to pinpoint its effects. It communicated that *Zwarte Piet*, put forward by the activists as being of central symbolic importance, was not relevant to further discussion at *Keti Koti* about racism, Dutchness and children's education.

## 6.4 The disruption as part of a larger chain of events: Keti Koti 2015, 2016

As discussed in the dramaturgical analysis, the succession of Simons's, Markelo's and Asscher's speeches re-established the situation at hand as an orderly event with a ceremonial character, in which harmony rather than conflict took centre stage, and talking about *Zwarte Piet* appeared far from self-evident or necessary. Moreover, media attention for the disruption of the ceremony was limited compared to the two events to which Chapters 5 and 7 are dedicated: the public hearing the previous year, and the parade that would take place in Gouda a few months later. The NiNsee did not even mention the disruption in a description of the 2014 ceremony in its annual report (NiNsee, 2014). However, the fact that *Keti Koti* is attended by key actors, including state representatives and other public figures and prominent activists of African descent, still makes it a strategic setting for bringing ideas to the fore. And, even if the disruption of the interaction logic during the 2014 *Keti Koti* gathering was followed by the reestablishment of the previously dominant interaction logic, it did have significant long-term effects.

Relatively sharp political stances formed a connecting thread throughout the programme of the 2015 ceremony (Stop Blackface, 2015; Westerink, 2015). In an interview, Marian Markelo explained to me that the change in tone between the official programme in 2014 and that of the next year was the result of a deliberate step by the NiNsee to reach out to the activists in order to include them and their concerns (Interview Markelo, 2018). This change in tone was evident right from the beginning, as the first speaker was Kunta Rincho, one of the people involved in the previous year's intervention. When he went onstage, he did so in company of a group of black-clad activists, who stood behind him with fists raised as a silent reminder of their combativeness, and of the larger community in the name of whom Kunta Rincho spoke. He started out with a moment of silence to honour the memory of Mitch Henriquez, an unarmed Antillean man of colour who, two days earlier, had died due to his violent arrest by the police. The circumstances of Henriquez's death, who had been held in a chokehold and pinned to the ground by multiple police officers, had sparked days of protest in The Hague, the city in which the event had taken place. Having firmly established a link between *Keti Koti* and present-day racial tensions, Rincho held a speech that gave ample attention to the struggle against *Zwarte Piet*, parts of which matched the 2014 speech almost to the letter.

What was more, the change in tone during the 2015 ceremony was not restricted to this speech. For example, that year's host, Anousha Nzume, is known for her activism as well as for her work as a media professional. Her interventions, as well as that of other speakers and artists, included sharp denouncements of present-day situations, linking

these to the heritage of slavery. Spoken word artist Akwasi, for example, commented on the sparse attention and financing of activities related to *Keti Koti* and the heritage of slavery, compared to that of the Second World War, adding cynically that apparently 'the history of slavery is too far away'.<sup>35</sup>

However, the structure of the programme was still roughly the same, including speeches by a representative of the government, the NiNsee and the mayor of Amsterdam. In his speech, the mayor warned against connecting *Zwarte Piet* to slavery, since this could 'lead to an inflation of that horrible slave trade'.<sup>36</sup> His comments on these issues triggered some applause as well as shouts of protest. As one of the organisers of the previous year's disruption put it, 'and I found it very striking that a mayor, from such a position of power, shows up to tell an entire Black community how ... we should experience certain things'<sup>37</sup> (Interview Mitchell, 2016). Ironically though, the very fact that the mayor talked about *Zwarte Piet* during *Keti Koti*, mentioning *Zwarte Piet* and slavery in the same breath, reinforced the connection between the two issues. The disruption of the previous year had thus set in motion a chain of events that helped establish *Zwarte Piet* as a controversial figure in relation to *Keti Koti*, and, with that, more broadly to questions around historical and present-day racial oppression.

Since the 2014 *Keti Koti* gathering, both Asscher and Simons have received ample attention for publicly connecting *Zwarte Piet* to broader problems of racism. As I briefly mentioned in the introductory chapter, Simons became a household name in the Dutch debate about racism in the wake of her appearance on a talkshow in May 2015, in which she questioned another guest's use of the word 'blackies' to refer to asylum seekers attempting to cross the Mediterranean by boat. Since then, she has repeatedly expressed criticism of the *Zwarte Piet* tradition as an individual as well as in her new role as a politician. About two months after the 2015 *Keti Koti* gathering, Asscher published a declaration on Facebook in which he explicitly referred to racial identity as a category intersecting with national identity as he expressed his support for changes to the figure of *Zwarte Piet* (Asscher, 2015). He wrote:

I think more and more black Dutch people oppose *Zwarte Piet* exactly because it has become a symbol. ... Behind *Piet* as a symbol lies an uncomfortable truth of prejudices and silent racism. Often subconscious, but equally hurtful in its effects. ... when I first heard about the *Piet* discussion, in the Amsterdam city council, I belonged to the 90% [of people who thought *Piet* should remain black].

35 Original Dutch transcript: 'het slavernijverleden is te ver weg'.

36 Original Dutch transcript: 'kan leiden tot inflatie van die afgrijselijke slavenhandel'.

37 Original Dutch transcript: 'Ik vond het ook heel frappant dat een burgemeester vanuit zo'n machtspositie een hele Zwarte gemeenschap komt uitleggen hoe ... wij bepaalde dingen zouden moeten ervaren'.

Embarrassing discussion, please move on to serious problems. I see that differently now, thanks to many discussions, thanks to the debate.<sup>38</sup>

By acknowledging this indebtedness to the analysis of people who would not let up on their 'embarrassing discussion', Asscher retrospectively positioned himself quite differently in relation to Black activists bringing up *Zwarte Piet* than he had done during the 2014 *Keti Koti* gathering. That actors' positioning in the *Zwarte Piet* debate can be made to change quite drastically by discursively placing an interaction against a different cultural background text is also well illustrated by the responses that Asscher received to his declaration. One of the recurring themes in online reactions from defenders of the *Zwarte Piet* tradition was that Asscher's Jewish background was the explanatory factor for his failure to protect 'our culture and civilisation'<sup>39</sup> (Asscher, 2016a, 2016b). This changed Asscher's position from that of a racially unremarkable and thus unmarked leader of the national community, to that of a person needing chastising for his lamentable actions – abuses, in Austinian terms – caused by his inherent racial Otherness. However, in an act of counterpositioning, about a year later, Asscher (2016a, 2016b) published another Facebook post and newspaper opinion piece, sarcastically calling attention to the types of responses he had been receiving online, thus in turn recasting these as misfires and abuses.

In 2016, *Keti Koti* was once more marked by a disruption of the ceremony. Again, protesters capitalised on the sensitive and racially charged character of the setting by staging a protest and preventing the ceremony from unfolding as planned. There were marked differences, too, in the makeup of the group of protesters as well as their tactics and stated demands. This time, the disruption was enacted by a somewhat older group of people of African descent, whose action did not target any specific speaker, but rather delayed the start of the ceremony by about half an hour continued while various speakers attempted to take the stage. With pots and pans, a petition asking the mayor to intervene, shrill whistles, protest signs and shouts a group of people voiced their disagreement with the NiNsee's decision to organise the 2016 commemoration on 30 June, so as to separate it from the cheerful festival on 1 July.<sup>40</sup> This enactment over two days made sure that *Keti Koti*, which is not at all well-known amongst most Dutch people, mirrored that of the

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38 Original Dutch text: 'Ik denk dat steeds meer zwarte Nederlanders tegen zwarte Piet zijn juist omdat het een symbool geworden is. ... Achter Piet als symbool ligt een ongemakkelijke waarheid van vooroordelen en stil racisme. Vaak onbewust, maar in zijn uitwerking even kwetsend. ... Toen ik voor het eerst over de Piet discussie hoorde, in de Amsterdamse gemeenteraad, hoorde ik bij de 90 %. Gênante discussie, graag over naar serieuze problemen. Ik denk er nu anders over, dankzij veel gesprekken, dankzij het debat.'

39 Original Dutch text: 'onze cultuur en beschaving'.

40 For publicly available video registrations of these events, see AT5 (2016) and NOS (2016). For more information on the process leading up to and following from the protest at the 2016 *Keti Koti*, please see Biekman (2018, pp. 58–61).

most known national commemoration and celebration – that of 4 May dedicated to the commemoration of victims of war, with a heavy focus on the Second World War, and 5 May marking the liberation from the Nazi occupation. As such, this new setup could be expected to dramaturgically imbue *Keti Koti* with gravity and importance.

However, rather than gravity or solemnity, the protest put tension and conflict centre stage. The lengthy disruption ended only after several attempted interventions, perhaps most decisively by a well-known former soccer player of Surinamese descent, a Black man, who acted as an impromptu mediator. The 2014 protesters' speech had, dramaturgically as well as through its verbal content, connected the disruption with a broader assessment of anti-Black racism in the Netherlands, for which political leaders' attitude towards *Zwarte Piet* served as an emblematic example. In contrast, the 2016 protest made the protesters' disagreement with the NiNsee clear but did not dramaturgically establish a connection with a coherent broader argument around the meaning of *Keti Koti*, or issues around racism in the Netherlands. Rather, in 2016 it was one of the speakers who featured on the formal programme – Minister of Education, Culture and Science Jet Bussemaker – who mentioned *Zwarte Piet* in her speech. Echoing an aspect of the 2014 disruption, which had been retrospectively legitimised by inclusion of many of the same actors and arguments in the 2015 official programme, Bussemaker mentioned *Zwarte Piet* as part of a string of examples that had then recently received media attention as illustrating a pattern of racial discrimination. As such, the foregrounding of a critique of dominant notions of Dutch identity and history achieved by the 2014 disruption was more clearly taken up in the 2015 official programme than in the 2016 protest.



## 6.5 Conclusions

*Keti Koti* 2014 clearly did not go as planned. What was scheduled to be a harmonious ceremony became a complex negotiation of the norms of interaction and the very meaning of the event. The activists' disruption of the programme created critical moments in the sense that it became temporarily unclear how the situation was to be understood, and thus what ways of acting within it were appropriate. Central to the ensuing negotiation of how to enact *Keti Koti* were questions of who could speak, on behalf of whom, and what topics were appropriate. In these concluding paragraphs, I draw upon the more extensive analytical work detailed in the earlier sections to discuss the incommensurate ways in which collective identity, racism and history were enacted by the different actors. Based on this, I will show how the requests made of the activists to act in a more 'appropriate' way were inherently contradictory and therefore amounted to a silencing of the dissident voices immediately after the disruption happened.

The activists' performance of *Keti Koti* put racial fault lines in Dutch society centre stage. Their repeated and explicit naming and of Blackness, their African heritage and racism formed a stark contrast with the other actors, who referred to collective identities only in terms of nationality, emphasising a shared, colourblind Dutchness. While the activists, too, presented Dutchness as an important part of their identity, they problematised the meaning of the concept by addressing how it went hand in hand with their racial identity, and combining an assertion of Dutchness with sharp criticism of the Netherlands and the attitudes of the White Dutch majority. During the libation ritual, Markelo, too, had expressed criticism of the public administration, albeit in a far less explicit fashion. When I asked her about this in a later conversation, she readily agreed her tone had been much milder than that of the activists. She explained:

I express that same thing ... Only my tone is different. My choice of words is also different. And that has to do with the position that I take up as a spiritual person, as a Winti priest. And that has as a consequence that I make statements that are milder, about the same worthless system ... I deliver the same message to the state. But I just do it a bit differently.<sup>41</sup> (Interview Markelo, 2018)

The enactment of conflict and defiance by the activists was much more blunt, putting the criticism on the table in a way that significantly disrupted the flow of the interaction and prompted extensive discursive manoeuvring before the event could continue as planned. One of the organisers of the protest told me in an interview that this disruption of the flow of the 'elitist ritual' was central to their message (Interview Mitchell, 2016). Similarly, Jerry Afriyie stressed the importance of disrupting the usual enactment of *Keti Koti*:

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41 Original Dutch transcript: 'verwoord ik in principe hetzelfde. ... Alleen is mijn toon anders. Mijn woordkeus is ook anders. En dat heeft te maken met die positie die ik ook inneem als spiritueel mens. Als Winti-priester. En dat maakt dat ik mildere uitspraken doe over hetzelfde waardeloze systeem ... ik geef diezelfde boodschap aan de overheid. Maar alleen doe ik het ietsje anders.'

what they do each year is to tell us, chill. Everything is going to be all right. How we're going to make it all right doesn't matter you know, it's just the same old song, jingle you'll be hearing. ... we are sick of hearing the same song. And now we're going to do something about it. ... we gave a clear message that we're not going to sit back and take it like it's been going on for years. (Interview Afriyie, 2016)

Where the activists had been critical in their appraisal of the Netherlands and the Dutch majority, Asscher constructed a Dutchness that is positive, harmonious and non-racial: 'we are here together, and you see the colour and the strength of Dutch society'. His improvised speech constituted an acknowledgement of the exceptionality of the situation while, at the same time, working to present it as a special moment of another kind than what the activists had argued: it was an unusual expression of Dutch freedom and tolerance rather than an act of resistance against institutional racism in Dutch society. He presented his own contribution as both an explanation of the actions of the activists towards the audience and of why he found it important to participate in the event, especially as a 'representative of the government ... *of all Dutch people* [emphasis added]', including the activists. By downplaying the relevance of racial categories, it also became irrelevant to examine and problematise the majority or norm against which any subdominant racial group may be pitted, despite being named explicitly by the activists. In this way, this norm could remain implicit and thus difficult to contest. In the Netherlands, of course, the implicit norm group against which Black people are pitted is the numerical and social majority group of White people. As discussed in Chapter 4, Whiteness Whiteness, encompasses an ascribed racial position as well as a set of cultural practices and a way of viewing the world from a position of race privilege (cf. Frankenberg, 1993).

In an interaction logic in which racial identities are irrelevant, the symbols, attitudes and analyses related to these identities are rendered unintelligible. Rendering the activists' Black identity irrelevant and unintelligible has the effect of also making the racial connotations of the 'majority' in Dutch society irrelevant, and thus for the viewpoints and interests associated with Dutch Whiteness to remain unquestioned. Consequently, Asscher's construction of *Keti Koti* and its historical context had the effect of recentring the dominant viewpoints while presenting this as inclusive rather than racially charged. In this dominant version of *Keti Koti*, the interests associated with the racial majority were shielded from view by centring them.

With their choice of words as well as non-verbal communication, the activists referred to and aligned themselves with Black activism in ways that highlighted historical continuities, the lived experience of enslaved Black Africans and their descendants and the agency of Black people in a collective struggle for freedom and justice. Even before any word was spoken, this message was already communicated through the '1873' buttons and the wearing of black clothing – in some cases, with prints protesting the figure of *Zwarte Piet*. Positioning Black people as active protagonists against racist injustice remained a

red thread in the activists' performance, from the opening words of the speech – 'We are standing here today with the utmost respect and reverence for our ancestors. We stand here in the name of Anton, Boni, Tula, Sophie...' – to the fists raised in the air at the end of the speech. Thus, when the activists called into question the appropriateness of Asscher's impending performance as a speaker, they did this as part of a wider recasting of the historical context and present-day situation relevant to *Keti Koti*. In addition to foregrounding Black agency, the activists also called attention to the position, attitudes and responsibilities of the White majority, evidencing a clash of interests. While acknowledging the material wealth accrued by Dutch people, the activists did not depict this as positive. Rather, they called attention to the link between this wealth and the colonialism and slavery through which it had been enlarged. By explicitly and proudly stating their racial identity and turning their gaze to the economic advantages and moral shortcomings of the dominant, White majority in the Netherlands, the activists enacted a *Keti Koti* that foregrounded conflict and signalled a need for change to a much greater extent than the harmonious celebration associated with the official programme. Within their performance, attitudes towards *Zwarte Piet* served as an emblematic example of the historical continuity in state authorities' moral shortcoming and disregard for the perspective of the Black minority. *Zwarte Piet* thus symbolised important topics and fault lines regarding ways of thinking about the collective past and its connections to the meaning of racism in present-day Dutch society.

Asscher, too, mentioned racism and slavery. However, he did this in a way that undid rather than supported the activists' positioning of Black people as vigorous, active and heroic. He characterised slavery in terms of 'suffering' and 'pain', presumably of enslaved Africans, without mentioning their agency or that of the enslavers. In fact, his speech and non-verbal communication did not construct institutional patterns or historical continuities as particularly relevant, neither regarding the experiences and attitudes of Black enslaved people and their descendants, nor regarding those of mainstream Dutch society and its political leaders. Rather, the deputy prime minister juxtaposed the times of slavery with the present-day situation. In his speech, it was the 'freedom' characterising the present-day situation that made the behaviour of the activists possible: 'Under the sun, in Amsterdam, one of the freest places in the world. How free we are here. So free that it is a large good, almost touchingly good, that, here, people who feel pain, who feel anger, who feel emotion, walk forward and express their opinion, to get it off their chest. That is the freedom that we celebrate. Which is not self-evident. And I am grateful that they do this'. Thus, the activists' statements about *Zwarte Piet* were cast as springing from emotions that needed to be vented, leaving open whether they needed to be listened and responded to. This 'anger' was rendered unthreatening: the activists' behaviour was presented as slightly misguided, and facilitated by a quintessentially Dutch freedom. Against this background, the activists' performance of a powerful agency linked with

their racial identity appeared to have lost relevance. Within this logic, it makes sense that Asscher did not mention *Zwarte Piet*. Rather, it was appropriate for him to explain to the activists that they needed to listen better, instead of him needing to respond to the allegations of the activists.

Deputy Prime Minister Asscher succeeded in combining two types of positioning that did not seem to fit together at first: on the one hand, he presented himself and the activists as relatively aligned, sharing a collective identity and recognising the importance of *Keti Koti*. As a representative of the overarching and inclusive category of 'Dutch' people, he appeared to speak from a neutral position. Where the activists had emphasised historical continuities and the institutional expression of racism, Simons, Asscher and the speakers following them during the official programme emphasised differences between the past and the present. Rather than confirming the activists' assertion of him being bound up in historical and institutional patterns of racism, Asscher presented himself as active in the struggle against injustice. In his speech, racism was not so much institutional, but primarily due to people teaching each other mistaken ideas: 'racism and discrimination ... can only be banished when it disappears from the heart ... when we raise our children with the awareness that people are equal ... When we don't teach them ignorant prejudices'.

Asscher, as well as Markelo and Simons, communicated that the activists had acted in a way that was unsuitable. They had spoken in an inappropriate way, had chosen the wrong place and time and acted without consulting the proper authorities. A connecting thread throughout my analysis was the significance of either or not presenting *Zwarte Piet* as a relevant issue. This cannot be understood in isolation from other aspects of the interaction logic, such as the questions what kind of situation the actors find themselves in, who is to participate in it, and in what way. Answering these questions one way or the other implies either or not giving weight to certain voices and perspectives in defining the meaning of issues such as racism, identity and history. Whether *Zwarte Piet* is a relevant topic is interlinked with one's construction of who the Dutch are, how they have come to be who they are, what other social categorisations are relevant and whose point of view on these matters should be taken into account. The self-definition of the activists as emancipatory and forceful is interlinked with their specific construction of the history relevant to *Keti Koti*, in which they centre the viewpoint of the enslaved and their descendants, positioning them as active and forceful. It is also interlinked with their construction of historical continuity as relevant for understanding the struggle against racist oppression. On the other hand, within a logic that constructed the Dutch and the Netherlands as being characterised by unity and an absence of institutional racism, it did not make sense to talk about the Netherlands as needing to learn anything from the activists about *Zwarte Piet*. And, within a logic that constructed the present as being shaped by freedom, it did not make sense to advance an analysis of racism as historically rooted and institutionalised. In contrast, the activists had advanced a notion

of institutional and historically rooted racism, of which the persistent representation of *Zwarte Piet* was an emblematic manifestation. In Rancière's terminology, the prevailing interaction logic reduced the activists' speech, including the comments about *Zwarte Piet*, to 'mere noise'.

In short, the interaction logic dictating what behaviour is 'appropriate' cannot be understood in isolation from the issue that is being discussed. For the activists to put forward their viewpoint of the issues related to *Keti Koti*, it necessarily meant challenging many other aspects of the performance of the event. It was inextricably bound up with their alternative positionings and repertoires: walking in uninvited with their megaphone held high rather than remaining amongst the audience; wearing buttons with '1873' on them; and holding their fists up in the air. Consequently, the repeated requests to the counterpublic to voice their concerns in a more appropriate way are revealed as inherently contradictory. After all, how the group of people dressed in black performed *Keti Koti*, including their construction of *Zwarte Piet* as problematic, makes sense only in relationship to how they constructed their identity and how they positioned themselves and others in relation to a shared past as well as the present. And, while the activists were able to temporarily create a situation in which they could put forward their proposals about the interaction logic, the performances of the other actors subsequently undermined many of the counterpublic's challenges, thus narrowing the discursive space available to the activists. The request to participate in an 'appropriate way' thus amounted to a silencing of the dissident voices.<sup>42</sup>

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42 This type of inherently self-contradictory request has been studied under the analytical category of the 'double bind'. The term was first used in academic publications in the 1950s by Bateson and colleagues, who sought to describe communication problems in relation to schizophrenia (Bateson, Jackson, Haley, & Weakland, 1956, 1963). These authors explain what a double bind entails in the following way (1963, p. 155): 'there is never "a message" singly, but in actual communication always two or more related messages, on different levels and often conveyed by different channels—voice, tone, movement, context, and so on. These messages may be widely incongruent and thus exert very different and conflicting influences'. The concept of the double bind has since been further developed and applied in a wide range of contexts, for instance in analysis of intercultural communication, in analysis of power inequalities in political struggle and even on a meta-level, in analysis of the dilemmas inherent in publishing academic texts (Aman, 2015; Brummett, 2003; Parla, 2011).



# Chapter 7

*Sinterklaas* parade, 2014







## 7.1 Introduction

It is a drizzly Saturday morning in November 2014. Despite the grey weather, tens of thousands of parents and their small children have gathered in the town of Gouda to celebrate the arrival of *Sinterklaas* in the Netherlands. He is to be accompanied by 250 *Pieten*, mostly with black or brown face paint and black, curly wigs, although there has been much talk of the exceptions that are expected, such as *Pieten* whose faces are painted to resemble the treacle waffles and the cheese that Gouda is renowned for as a tourist destination (Blokker, 2015a; 'Gouda vervangt slavernijtraditie', 2014; 'Intocht', 2014). Throngs of people are waiting on the quay where *Sinterklaas*'s boat is to dock at noon, and more are waiting along the route that has been planned through the streets and along the picturesque canals of the 17<sup>th</sup>-century town centre. The crowd is also growing on the Marktplaats, Gouda's market square, the focal point of public life located in the heart of town. The former town hall stands in the middle of this square, much taller than the surrounding houses and imposing with its 15<sup>th</sup>-century grandeur. The large balcony at the back of this building is where *Sinterklaas* is scheduled to address the crowds at the end of the parade. It has been decorated for the occasion with stacks of presents and a red-and-gold throne. At the edge of the square, about 30 metres from the building, a platform has been erected for journalists to get a good view of both the spectacle on the balcony and the crowd below.

What the journalists end up witnessing on the market square, roughly an hour after the start of the parade, is the forceful arrest of dozens of people with, as one police report described it, a 'leftist and negroid appearance' (Blokker, 2015b). Against the backdrop of cheerful *Sinterklaas* songs coming from a network of loudspeakers, with many adults and children amongst the jolly, overwhelmingly White crowd singing along, dozens of police officers can be seen grabbing and pushing groups made up predominantly of Black people. Many of these people wear T-shirts and sweaters with texts such as 'Stop racism' and 'Zwarte Piet Niet' (No *Zwarte Piet*) and some of them hold a banner with the text 'Zwarte Piet is Racisme'. Moments after *Sinterklaas* steps onto the balcony to be greeted by the crowd, protester Jerry Afriyie is forced onto the ground by several police officers, who pin him down and sit on top of him as he repeatedly shrieks 'I can't breathe'. Amongst screams, other protesters are driven into the narrow streets leading away from the square. Mounted police guard the exits of the street that Afriyie is led through a few minutes later, forced to walk backwards with his shirt pulled over his face and his torso bare as he is brought to a police vehicle. That afternoon, about 90 persons are arrested on and around Gouda's market square.

In a memo published afterwards, the local authorities offered a characterisation of the events of that day as ‘a successful parade’ and ‘a real day of celebration’.<sup>1</sup> These conclusions were backed up by numbers such as the 2,415,000 viewers of the live television broadcast of the event and the over 6 million viewers of the children’s mock newscast *Sinterklaasjournaal* over the course of the week – high numbers indeed for a country with just under 17 million inhabitants. Other figures mentioned in the memo included the 25,000 to 30,000 visitors to Gouda that day, and the 250 *Pieten* participating in the spectacle (College van Burgemeester en Wethouders Gouda, 2015). The conclusion that the parade was a success was in line with the images presented by the live broadcast, which featured no discord, only happy and excited people against the backdrop of picturesque Gouda. That city marketing formed an important frame of reference to assess the success of the event was evident from comments throughout the text such as ‘Gouda has again been put into the picture’, ‘Because of the 1:1 link of this event to Gouda, the city has had enormous media exposure’ and ‘Gouda has been able to put itself into the picture with this historical parade’.<sup>2</sup>

Although, by 2014, criticism of *Zwarte Piet* had become an issue of national discussion, the protest at the parade in Gouda was the first at which dissent was enacted in a way that was publicly visible at such a large scale, resulting in dozens of arrests and immense media attention online and in print, in local and national newspapers, in newscasts and talkshows on national television. The turmoil that day in Gouda constituted a major challenge to the performance of the *Sinterklaas* parade including *Zwarte Pieten* as lighthearted and festive. Indeed, the protest became a landmark event, being included in the traditional end-of-year compilations of prominent 2014 news and referred to in interviews, news stories and court hearings for years afterwards. What are we to make of these occurrences beyond their being noteworthy? How should we interpret them? From the protesters’ point of view, their actions were a legitimate expression of dissent with a racist practice, which was met with a deeply unjust response. The authorities, on the other hand, presented the protesters as being out of line by unnecessarily disrupting a children’s celebration; after all, the mayor had let them know that protest would only be allowed at a specific location outside the town centre, about a kilometre away from the festivities on the market square (Gerechtshof Den Haag, 2017). Nonetheless, the activist group KOZP had called for protest ‘alongside the route’<sup>3</sup> rather than at a separate location (‘“Stil protest”’, 2014). Moreover, the extreme right group Identitair Verzet (2014) had called on members to show up as well, to ‘act reactively if an illegal manifestation were to be held’ (Identitair Verzet, 2014).<sup>4</sup>

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1 Original Dutch texts: ‘een succesvolle intocht’; ‘een echte feestdag’.

2 Original Dutch texts: ‘Gouda opnieuw goed op de kaart is gezet’; ‘Door de 1:1 koppeling van dit evenement aan Gouda heeft de stad een enorme media-exposure gehad’; ‘Gouda heeft zich met deze historische intocht goed weten te profileren’.

3 Original Dutch text: ‘langs de route’.

4 Original Dutch text: ‘om reactief op te treden als er een illegale manifestatie zou worden gehouden’.

The official programme that day ran from 10 o'clock in the morning until four in the afternoon, encompassing various activities, including theatrical and circus acts, surprise visits by *Sinterklaas* and *Pieten* to various locations and music and dance for children with traditional tunes. The parade was organised to be the highlight of the day, with the largest number of participants and a live national broadcast. The appearance of *Sinterklaas* on the balcony of the old town hall, where he addressed the crowds that had gathered on Gouda's central market square, formed the apex of this spectacle. In my examination of the events that day through a dramaturgical lens, I focus on the hour and a half that encompasses the arrival by boat, the parade through the city and the appearance on the balcony. Within this period, more specifically, I zoom in on the four minutes from just before *Sinterklaas* stepped onto the balcony, until just after his speech to the crowds below. As I will show in my analysis, these four minutes also contained the most physically violent and, subsequently, most discussed interactions between the protesters and the police. Based on a dramaturgical analysis, I show why the events of that day should be understood as a struggle between divergent conceptualisations of the *Sinterklaas* parade and of the societal context in which it took place. I parse out the various aspects of the interaction logic that different actors enacted, demonstrating that the demand made of protesters to voice their opinion in more appropriate ways constituted a double bind. In other words, it was a contradictory request, the fulfilling of which was unrealisable in practice.

Compared to the events discussed in the two previous chapters, this one is different on a number of counts. In the previous two case studies, the physical and organisational setup of the interactions was such that the gaze of everyone present was directed towards the main 'protagonists', who did nearly all the speaking. However, the events I examine in the current chapter were more fragmented and chaotic, involving no direct back-and-forth communication between the persons on the balcony and the protesters and police on the square. Instead, there was a lot of simultaneous talking, shouting and moving about by the police, the protesters and other bystanders and observers at the same time that the spectacle on the balcony continued. For this reason, the analysis is not ordered around a chronological transcription of a verbal interaction between the main protagonists, as was the case in the previous two chapters. To do justice to the events in this chapter, I need to give equal attention to what are quite literally different viewpoints on the same event. Therefore, I go back and forth between two points of focus in my description and analysis: the protesters and the police on the one hand, and *Sinterklaas* and the events on the balcony on the other.

Additionally, in this chapter, I dedicate a substantial part of the analysis to the discussion of the events in the media. Although the public hearing and the events at *Keti Koti* were also mediated to different degrees, their most direct repercussions were rooted in the interaction itself and the people taking part in it. In the case of the public hearing,

the interaction directly led to official decisions by the mayor and then various courts. The case of *Keti Koti* involved several key actors with decision-making power regarding the organisation of the commemoration and other issues that were discussed. Amongst these were representatives of the NiNsee, key figures from Dutch Black communities, and politicians such as the then deputy prime minister. In Gouda, however, the protesters did not directly interact with people with such decision-making power, and it is unclear whether they were directly seen by anyone in such a position. The live broadcast of the festive parade, and even the hundreds or possibly thousands of people who noticed the protest and arrests as they took place, were nothing compared to the enormous reach of local, national and international media after the events (*'Sinterklaasintocht Gouda 2014'*, 2014). For this reason, the protest at the parade in Gouda can be called a media event, not meaning an orchestrated and inauthentic 'pseudo-event' in the sense of the term as originally coined by Boorstin (1961), but in the later sense of a highly mediatised event, inviting careful scrutiny of the relationships and 'complex interweavings' between various platforms and actors (Ytreberg, 2017, especially p. 321). Since what happened in Gouda was so widely discussed, it provides an outstanding opportunity to explore the struggles and shifts involved in retrospectively assigning meaning. After conducting a dramaturgical analysis of the events of that day, I therefore add a media analysis. Drawing on material from a range of media sources, including newspapers, television talk shows and social media, I

Figure 9. Timeline of events during the *Sinterklaas* parade and spectacle

<b>Sinterklaas parade</b>	Mayor and crowd waiting on quay	<i>Sinterklaas</i> arrives, is greeted by mayor	Parade through Gouda
<b>Activists</b>	Activists arriving in Gouda	Activists arriving on Markplein	Protest and arrests on and around Markplein

The duration of the entire parade, including the gathering on the market square, was approximately 1 hour and 25 minutes.

examine how this struggle over the meaning of these events on Gouda's Marktpllein went beyond the time and place of the interaction as such. Instead, the struggle to define what happened that day is ongoing as the events are still referred to and recounted in a variety of contexts. I argue that the disruption caused by protesters was instrumental in laying bare the omissions and situatedness of an understanding of *Sinterklaas* parades, which, until recently, had been so dominant as to be generally understood as a neutral given. Because of the central role that representation through the media plays in this case study, I draw on scholarship in this area to shed light on the ways in which this has contributed to collective understandings of what happened at the parade, and how dissent should be understood.

This chapter is structured as follows. Below, I present some visual information about the parade and protest: a timeline, a map of the events on the Marktpllein, and a number of photos. The next section contains an overview of the material and sources that my analysis is based upon. Sections 7.2 and 7.3 are dedicated to a dramaturgical analysis of Gouda's *Sinterklaas* parade, focusing on the events on the market square. In Section 7.4 I zoom in on the arrest of Jerry Afriyie. The focus of Section 7.5 is on the ways in which meaning is assigned to the events in Gouda in the media in the days and years that followed. This section also provides context for the events in Gouda through a brief discussion of the events surrounding the national *Sinterklaas* parades in 2015 and 2016, which were organised in Meppel and Maassluis, respectively. Section 7.6 contains a discussion of the most important conclusions.

<i>Sinterklaas</i> arrives at Marktpllein	<i>Sinterklaas</i> on balcony	Crowd cheering 'hurray'	Banter on balcony. <i>Sinterklaas-journaal</i> ends	Spectacle on balcony ends
Protest and arrests on and around Marktpllein (Continued)				Arrestees taken by the police to be questioned
		Group of protesters is arrested; Jerry Afriyie is arrested separately (4 minutes)		

Figure 10. Schematic map of Gouda's Marktpllein on the day of the *Sinterklaas* parade

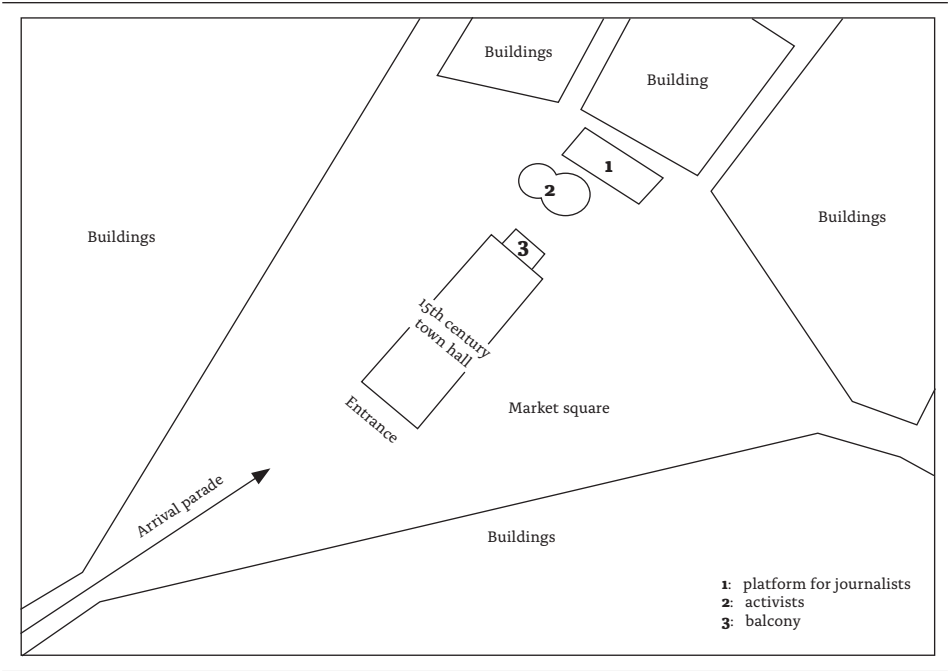


Image 14. *Pieten* at the 2014 Gouda parade



Amongst the 250 *Pieten* were exceptions to the usual image of *Zwarte Piet*, such as these two, whose faces were painted to resemble the treacle waffles and cheese that the town of Gouda is renowned for. Photo by Pim Mul.

Image 15. A child dressed up as *Zwarte Piet*



The child, with black face paint, a black, curly wig and mock golden earrings holds a 'Proud of Piet' flag. Photo by ANP- Bas Czerwinski

Image 16. Protesters on Gouda's Marktplaats



Behind the protesters, a police officer is visible and behind that, on a raised platform, press with cameras. The text on the T-shirt of the two activists seen on the left reads: *Zwarte Piet* no! – *Zwarte Piet* is not allowed – *Zwarte Piet* doesn't make sense – *Zwarte Piet* doesn't fit – *Zwarte Piet* colonial symbolism – *Zwarte Piet* is not done.<sup>5</sup> Photo by ANP.

5 Original Dutch text: 'Zwarte Piet niet – Zwarte Piet mag niet – Zwarte Piet klopt niet – Zwarte Piet past niet – Zwarte Piet koloniale symboliek – Zwarte Piet hoort niet'.



Image 17. Two people being arrested on the Marktplaen



In the background, the balcony with festive decorations and a throne for *Sinterklaas*. Photo by ANP- Bas Czerwinski.

Image 18. Group on the balcony greeting the crowd



From left to right: Clown *Piet*, Gouda's mayor, reporter for *Sinterklaasjournaal*, *Zwarte Piet*, *Sinterklaas*. Photo by ANP – Remko de Waal.



Image 19. Afriyie is led away from the market square



Afriyie's T-shirt is pulled over his head as he is forced to walk backwards through a side street. In the background, a group of protesters surrounded by police officers, some of whom on horseback. Photo by Hollandse Hoogte / Rob Huibers.

### Data used

My account of the events during the parade in Gouda is based on an analysis of several videos, including the live broadcast of the *Sinterklaasjournaal* that day. The material includes ten different video registrations that contain images filmed during the four minutes that I focus on in most depth. Individually, none of the videos provides a continuous chronological overview of both the events on the balcony and those involving the protest and arrests. However, by closely studying the multiple partial video reports of these scenes, I have been able to determine the exact timing at which various events took place, including events that happened simultaneously at several metres or even several dozens of metres away from each other. These videos were shot from very different angles, some focusing on the balcony of the former town hall and others on the interactions on the ground, but could be matched based on the shared background sounds of the *Sinterklaas* songs and several persons' banter that blasted through the loudspeakers. In addition to the video material, I have used information from interviews with four people who participated in the protest that day. Since I also participated in the protests in Gouda and was arrested there, a further source of information I draw on are my own observations, including my personal notes and audiovisual material. A list of the interviews and videos can be found in Appendix 3.

The media analysis makes use of articles, opinion pieces and visual material published in a range of newspapers, magazines, online platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, and the websites of organisations and of individual commentators.

## 7.2 Dramaturgical analysis: a 'children's celebration'

Throngs of children cheered as a merrily decorated boat docked at Gouda's IJsselkade around noon. Many of the children were dressed up in *Sinterklaas* mitres or *Piet* hats, or had their faces painted black, brown or, in a few cases, another colour such as yellow or blue. They had been awaiting the boat for some time, singing songs together with the *Sinterklaasjournaal* reporter Jeroen Kramer, a young girl acting as Gouda's 'children's mayor' and the actual mayor, Milo Schoenmaker, easily recognisable by his silver chain of office. *Sinterklaas* stepped off the boat towards this threesome, accompanied by a *Zwarte Piet* who carried the large book that is said to hold all information about children having been naughty or nice. The reporter welcomed *Sinterklaas*, addressing the white-bearded old man in red robes with the respectful 'u' rather than the more informal 'jij': 'I'm glad you're here, *Sinterklaas*.' Then, the mayor shook *Sinterklaas*'s hand and said, 'Gouda has been counting down to this day ... welcome to our town'. Meanwhile, dozens of *Pieten* walked from the quay towards the boat – as the 2014 *Sinterklaasjournaal* storyline had it, new *Pieten* had been trained in Gouda to assist *Sinterklaas*. Performers with their faces painted black predominated, but some had their faces painted to simulate soot marks or the much-discussed treacle waffles and cheese. All *Pieten* wore the usual black, curly wigs, except for one, whose face was painted white to resemble a clown's, and who wore a red, curly wig.

This start to the day's *Sinterklaas* parade set the mood for a merry day in which adults and children alike were united in their celebration, participating publicly and enthusiastically in cheering the jolly procession as it filed past and using the type of communication associated with the tradition, such as addressing the *Sinterklaas* figure with deference and singing traditional songs. This placed the situation firmly within the genre of a parade, and more specifically the subgenre of a *Sinterklaas* parade. The mayor's presence helped signal the importance of the occasion, and his greeting on behalf of Gouda presented the town's inhabitants as united in their welcome of *Sinterklaas*, and more generally in their positive attitude towards the tradition. For adults, the mayor's performance on the quay came with an additional implication. While it is customary for a city's mayor to greet *Sinterklaas* at his arrival, it would be difficult to come up with any other occasion at which it would appear appropriate or natural for a mayor to publicly sing children's songs or act deferentially towards an actor impersonating a fantasy figure. Mayor Schoenmaker's enthusiastic participation in upholding the pretence made it clear

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6 The Dutch language has two personal pronouns of the second person singular that are both translated to 'you' in English. The form 'jij' tends to be used between adults in informal situations and by adults addressing children. The form 'u' is more formal and respectful and tends to be used in formal situations, or when addressing an authority figure.

7 Original Dutch transcript: 'Fijn dat u er bent, Sinterklaas.'

that this occasion was exceptional, warranting a special effort. In terms of the implied interaction logic, this added weight to the purpose of the event as providing a pleasant experience for children by enacting a well-known fantasy play. Additionally, it put the interaction in the light of tongue-in-cheek communication, as the gravity of the official garb and deferential talk went accompanied with an unspoken understanding that this was in fact a light-hearted performance.

The addition of a sprinkling of *Pieten* with other types of face paint than the familiar black and brown versions constituted a tweak to the usual enactments of the parade. These small but conspicuous adaptations to the repertoire of the parade were a visible reminder that change to the tradition was possible, and already under way. At a closer look, however, they did not challenge how things were done in any fundamental way. The actors with the unconventional face paint fitted well within the setting of the hundreds of other cheerful and colourfully dressed *Pieten*, using the same repertoire of jolly and energetic gestures as the others. Their presence within a group consisting mostly of *Zwarte Pieten* thus supported the evocation of the parade as the same type or 'genre' of cheerful event that it had long been known for, including the notion that the purpose of the event was to please children with a joyful fantasy performance, and that *Zwarte Pieten* were an integral part of that. To sum up, the presence of the new *Pieten* meshed well with the dominant interaction logic in terms of the genre that was evoked, the type of participation that was required of everyone involved, including the repertoire of gestures and words, and the purpose of the event.

Similarly, two other unconventional aspects of the parade in Gouda also served as reminders of the *Zwarte Piet*-debate without challenging the prevailing interaction logic. Firstly, in the weeks before the parade, a group called Actiegroep Pro Zwarte Piet (Action Group Pro Black Pete) had announced actions in protest against the cheese and waffle face paint (2014), which, according to a spokesperson, were a 'disgrace' (Van Velzen, 2014). Interestingly, the organisers managed to stage their protest in such a way that it reinforced rather than challenged the dominant interaction logic. Having followed the mayor's orders by gathering in the allocated spot outside the town centre, they had brought a small caravan decorated with a drawing of a smiling *Zwarte Piet* face and the text 'Proud of *Piet*'<sup>8</sup>, against a background formed by the red, white and blue stripes of the Dutch flag. They further communicated their message by handing out items such as little Dutch flags with a *Zwarte Piet*-face on them, and by offering free black face paint to passers-by, primarily children. Some of the children amongst the crowds awaiting the parade may well have had their faces painted by people belonging to this group. These protesters' point of view about *Zwarte Piet* was in this way visibly represented for those who knew about their action while simultaneously fitting seamlessly into the enactment of the parade itself.

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8 The original Dutch text was 'www.trotsoppiet.nl'.

An additional example of an addition to the parade that blended in to the point of being invisible regards the police. For about a week, newspapers and other media had been informing the public that the police were to participate in the parade dressed up as *Zwarte Piet* figures with black or brown face paint (Domenicus, 2014; 'Gouda krijgt Zwarte Pietagenten', 2014). The heated debate about *Zwarte Piet*, leading up to what was prognosticated to 'probably become the most fraught *Sinterklaas* parade ever'<sup>9</sup> (De Graaf, 2014), was cited as the backdrop to this choice. The need for the police to blend in with the crowd of *Zwarte Pieten* was also highlighted in numerous of these publications. For example, one newspaper quoted a source as saying: 'the children should not notice anything about our deployment, because it should remain a celebration for them' (Den Hartog & Oomen, 2014). This reinforced the idea that this type of disguise was acceptable and even compatible with the position of a representative of the state, and that any involvement in the discussion about *Zwarte Piet* should blend in with the merry spectacle rather than clashing with it. While the police deployment thus did not result in visible changes to the parade, an ironic side-effect was that it put all of the *Zwarte Pieten* in a different light for those who knew they might well be police officers in disguise.

While the *Pieten* boarded the boat, the reporter for the *Sinterklaasjournaal* asked *Sinterklaas* a question, the antenna that stuck out from his backpack serving as a visual reminder of his connection to the television show: '*Sinterklaas*, now that we're here, what I'm a bit worried about – and I might not be the only one in the country in that regard – is the other *Pieten*'. This question left room for interpretation, being equally suited to one of the storylines of the daily *Sinterklaasjournaal* newscast – which involved the new *Pieten* being trained in Gouda, as well as *Pieten* on their way to the Netherlands causing trouble by accidentally drilling a hole in the boat – as to the protests against *Zwarte Piet* that had been covered by the regular news and that had resulted in the new types of *Pieten* added to the parade's usual repertoire. The reporter then placed his question in the context of the make-believe of the *Sinterklaasjournaal* plot lines by listing the names of several of the mock newscast's *Piet* characters. In his characteristic deep and calm voice, with its affable, easy laugh and posh accent, *Sinterklaas* responded reassuringly: 'Oh, but the *Pieten*, the *Pieten* in the Netherlands, people don't need to worry about that at all. ... They don't need to worry, there has been some trouble but everything will always turn out all right again by itself'.<sup>10</sup> To this, both *Sinterklaas* and the reporter laughed heartily.

9 Original Dutch text: 'wat waarschijnlijk de meest beladen sinterklaasintocht gaat worden die ooit heeft plaatsgevonden.'

10 Original Dutch transcript: 'Reporter: "Sinterklaas, nu we hier toch zo staan, waar ik me een klein beetje zorgen over maak – daar ben ik misschien niet de enige in het land over – is eh natuurlijk eh eh de andere Pieten". ... Sinterklaas: "De Pieten in Nederland hoeven de mensen zich totaal geen zorgen over te maken hoor. Daar hoeven ze zich geen zorgen over te maken, er is een beetje gedoe over geweest, maar dat komt altijd allemaal vanzelf weer goed".'

Meanwhile, the *Pieten*, new and old alike, had formed a chain on the gangway to unload presents, occasionally asking *Sinterklaas* for instructions.

A few minutes after his exchange with the reporter, *Sinterklaas* left on horseback, preceded by a local woodwind and brass band playing the usual tunes for the occasion. *Pieten* carried his staff and umbrella and jumped and skipped back and forth, offering sweets to the children waiting along the route. Despite the drizzly weather, there were happy faces all around. From atop his white horse, *Sinterklaas* greeted the crowds in a calm and distinguished fashion, waving left and right and occasionally stopping, such as when youngsters performed a dance routine or sang in a choir along the way. For people who followed the event via the live broadcast, the images described above were interspersed with the commentary of long-time *Sinterklaasjournaal* presenter Dieuwertje Blok. She was filmed in a studio, surrounded by presents and other *Sinterklaas* items. A window behind her offered a view of the market square and the town hall with its decorated balcony. Her commentary was partly directed towards the viewers, and partly a dialogue with the reporter on the ground. Their talk was tailored to the viewership of children, and a common thread through it was a storyline about the absent-minded and stubborn Grandpa *Piet* (Opa *Piet*), who was participating in the parade even though he was supposed to be in Spain to enjoy his retirement.

At the end of the parade, *Sinterklaas* arrived at the square and stepped off his horse to be greeted by an honour guard. Thousands of people had already gathered there, mostly parents with small children. Waving to the crowds, he approached the front entrance of the town hall and entered after speaking to some children, who offered rolled-up drawings as a gift. Since the journalists and protesters faced the balcony at the back of the building, he was not yet in their field of vision. Meanwhile, the *Sinterklaasjournaal* reporter had been standing on the balcony for some time, leading the crowds below in singing popular *Sinterklaas* songs accompanied by the '*Pietenband*', and talking with Blok. As minutes went by and *Sinterklaas* did not reappear, the focus of both Blok and the reporter addressing the crowds on the market square shifted away from banter about Grandpa *Piet* to anxiously awaiting the arrival of *Sinterklaas*.

As the day's programme was now well under way, the spectacle was placed firmly within the genre of the customary merry *Sinterklaas* parade nearing its culmination. The enthusiastic participation of the crowds and the tone of voice, words and gestures used by the actors who impersonated *Sinterklaas* and the *Pieten* contributed to this, as well as the physical organisation of the spectacle. Sidewalks and parts of the market square were reserved for onlookers in such a way that all gazes were directed to the fantasy figures in their colourful outfits. Elements such as the participation of the mayor with his chain of office and the culmination of the parade at the honour guard leading to the imposing former town hall added gravity to the spectacle by interlinking it with symbols that carry socio-political weight in their own right rather than being primarily associated with children's activities. The playful exchange between the reporter and *Sinterklaas* on the quay fitted within this pattern of incorporating

serious elements within a shared enactment of the fantasy. The ambiguity of their comments meant these could serve as so-called 'dog whistle' messages (Albertson, 2015; Goodin & Saward, 2005), communicated in language that was likely only to be picked up by people already in the know. Their tongue-in-cheek communication could thus bring to mind the heated debate while both men still enacted an implied agreement that the fantasy be upheld and the tone kept cheerful. The Sinterklaas character referred to the trouble as merely '*gedoe*', meaning problems of little substance. The proponents of this not-to-be-taken-too-seriously *gedoe* were contrasted with 'the country' or 'the Netherlands' as the relevant unit to identify with for an audience desiring a harmoniously enacted parade. The short chat between the reporter and *Sinterklaas* thus implicitly presented national unity and a cheerful tone as appropriate. It also positioned the impersonator of *Sinterklaas* as the appropriate person to make a judgement call on how to understand the problems.

The people who had gathered along the route and on the square, while not individually acting as main protagonists, collectively were indispensable in enacting the spectacle according to the customary interaction logic. Their participation, as well as that of actors such as the mayor, the reporter and the impersonators of *Sinterklaas* and *Pieten*, reproduced an interaction logic in which the parade was a light-hearted spectacle performed as a collective effort with the goal of pleasing children, the tone of which should always be kept playful, making use of well-known songs, expressions and generally merry behaviour. However, this is not to say that the crowd members were a homogenous group in every sense. For example, while the parade was still making its way through the town centre, a woman on the market square carrying a toddler answered an interviewer's question about the new types of face paint with a smile on her face and a cheerful 'I like it! Last year I still had to get used to it ... but I like it, I think it's an improvement'<sup>11</sup>. Conversely, a man who had come with his wife and small child confirmed that he was part of the 'somewhat more fanatical'<sup>12</sup> group that wanted *Zwarte Piet* to remain black. The differences in the way these parents talked about the *Pieten* serve to illustrate that it is possible for actors to use slightly different repertoires, but still remain well within the routine enactment of the well-known genre of '*Sinterklaasintocht*'. However, the father's next comment foreshadowed the clash between interaction logics that would play out more forcefully later on. Pointing in the direction of a group of people who had gathered a bit further along the square, made up mainly of Black people and other people of colour, some of whom wore T-shirts and hoodies with slogans against *Zwarte Piet*, he criticised them for producing a 'grim' and 'offensive'<sup>13</sup> sight. Later on, many people belonging to this group would be arrested by police and removed from the public square.

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11 Original Dutch transcript: 'vind ik leuk! Vorig jaar moest ik er nog aan wennen ... maar ik vind het wel leuk, ik vind het wel een verbetering'.

12 Original Dutch transcript: 'wat fanatiekere'.

13 Original Dutch transcripts: 'grimmig'; 'aanstootgevend'.

### 7.3 Dramaturgical analysis: 'making our well-grounded displeasure known'

Most of the protesters had gathered early that morning in Amsterdam in order to board a chartered bus to Gouda; I was amongst this group. As one of the leaders put it in a speech he delivered to everyone before we entered the bus, the group's purpose was to enact a 'peaceful protest'<sup>14</sup>. Although the mayor had designated a square outside the town centre for people wishing to voice criticism of the *Zwarte Piet* figure, the organisers had called for a protest on the Marktpllein, stating on their Facebook event page that

The National Ombudsman has judged that there ought to be room for protest at *Sinterklaas* parades. We have the right to make our well-grounded displeasure known during the *Sinterklaas* parade. ... We call on everyone to come to Gouda to let it be known in the spirit of Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela that the racist caricature *Zwarte Piet* has no place in a civilised country.<sup>15</sup> (*Zwarte Piet Niet*, 2014)

In order to avoid our bus being stopped from entering the town, we travelled to a nearby town instead and finished the journey by train. Getting off the train at Gouda's central station, I immediately noticed groups of police officers, many of whom wore riot gear, indicating readiness for physical confrontation. Breaking up in pairs and small groups, we continued our way towards the square, approximately 700 metres from the train station. I cannot say whether any pro-*Piet* counterprotesters may also have walked towards the town centre, or whether all members of that group stayed at their allotted spot the entire time. Even if some members of this group had walked into the centre or joined the multitude on the Marktpllein, it is unlikely I would have been able to identify them. After all, pale faces painted black or people carrying around *Zwarte Piet* flags would have appeared unremarkable – while, at the same time, bolstering the notion of *Zwarte Piet* as part of the appropriate routines of behaviour in enacting a *Sinterklaas* parade. However, since the counterpublic consisted mostly of Black people and other people of colour, members of our group stood out in the crowds. Already before the mass arrests that would follow, various persons were questioned by the police; some later reported the arrest of would-be protesters on their way to the centre of Gouda or shortly after arriving at the square, apparently having been singled out based on their Blackness.

Once we made it to the square, we stood dispersed in pairs and small groups at first. After some time, most of us clustered together at the back of the town hall, between

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<sup>14</sup> Original Dutch transcript: 'vreedzaam protest'.

<sup>15</sup> Original Dutch text: 'De Nationale Ombudsman oordeelde dat er ruimte dient te zijn voor protest tijdens sinterklaasintochten. Wij hebben het recht om onze gegronde ongenoegens kenbaar te maken tijdens de sinterklaasintoct. ... We roepen iedereen op om naar Gouda te komen om in de geest van Martin Luther King en Nelson Mandela kenbaar te maken dat de racistische karikatuur Zwarte Piet niet thuishoort in een beschaafd land'.



the decorated balcony and the raised press platform. Some protesters had opened their jackets to reveal T-shirts and hoodies with images or slogans denouncing *Zwarte Piet* as a racist caricature or against racism more generally. While *Sinterklaas* music came from loudspeakers and dozens of *Pieten* frolicked on the square just under the balcony, the protesters mostly stood in silence, although the group's main spokesperson, Jerry Afriyie, as well as some other protesters, gave interviews to members of the press. As recounted in the first chapter, Afriyie was one of the two artists who had been arrested for wearing a '*Zwarte Piet is racism*' T-shirt at the 2011 parade in Dordrecht. He had been a vocal critic of *Zwarte Piet* ever since, and was seen by many as one of the leaders of the movement.

The presence of the group of protesters, made up predominantly of Black people and other people of colour, with our mostly black outfits and grave expressions, formed a stark visual contrast with the jolly, overwhelmingly White crowd on the square, who were singing along with traditional *Sinterklaas* songs. This contrast foregrounded racial difference and discord around *Zwarte Piet* as important elements of the situation at hand, thus clashing strongly with the principal enactment of the parade as a cheerful celebration of togetherness and innocent fun in which Whiteness dominates but 'race' is not mentioned. However, this contrast was only visible to those who were standing relatively close by. And, while a keen *Sinterklaasjournaal* viewer could have already made out some specks of fluorescent yellow amongst the crowds, this remained a detail in the aerial shots; the camera did not zoom in and neither did the presenter or reporter mention it. A closer view would have revealed the fluorescent yellow to be part of the fabric of the uniforms of dozens of police officers, both in regular and riot gear, encircling and arresting one group of protesters after the other. These arrests caused unrest amongst bystanders; some people, predominantly those with children, moved away while others took photos or videos of the arrests with their mobile phones, joined by journalists with professional cameras. While some of the protesters complied quietly with police orders, others raised a fist as they were being herded away or shouted slogans such as '*Zwarte Piet is racism*!' and '*Amandla*' (power), triggering other protesters to respond '*Awetu*!' (to us!). While these latter words are not well known at all amongst the population of the Netherlands, to some they are a powerful reference to struggles against anti-Black racism.<sup>16</sup> As it became clear that more and more people were being arrested, many of the remaining protesters grouped further together. The scene became increasingly chaotic and small groups of White men had become visible near the edge of the square as well, keeping an eye on what

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16 Wikipedia offers the following succinct explanation of the meaning and origin of the use of these words: '*Amandla* is a Zulu and Xhosa word meaning "power". The word was a popular rallying cry in the days of resistance against apartheid, used by the African National Congress and its allies. The leader of a group would call out "*Amandla*!" and the crowd would respond with "*Awethu*!" or "*Ngawethu*!" (to us), completing the South African version of the rallying cry "Power to the people!" The word is still associated with struggles against oppression' ('*Amandla* (power)', 2018).

was going on. Some activists later reported having identified these people as members of far-right organisations. People with professional cameras attempted to capture the events; some were associated with the protesters, such as documentary maker Sunny Bergman and engaged journalist Kevin Roberson. Some of the others were identifiable by the logo on their microphones, such as Pownews and the local broadcasting agency Omroep West. One of the groups unfolded a banner with the text '*Zwarte Piet is racism*' Several White men attempted to block the text on the banner by standing before it; soon after, one of them was led away by the police. Another White man was also arrested by the police after he motioned towards a group of protesters, shouting 'get rid of those *Zwarte Pieten*!' <sup>17</sup> As he was led away, he passed a crowd of onlookers, amongst whom was a man carrying a young boy dressed up in a *Sinterklaas* mitre and cape. The crowd showed mixed reactions; some stood watching without much visible emotion while others hurried to get away. Yet others used their mobile phones to take videos or pictures of what was going on.

Within this chaotic situation, I want to zoom in on what happened during the four minutes from just before *Sinterklaas* stepped onto the balcony, until just after he finished his speech and led the crowd in cheering 'Hurray!' multiple times. What happened in these moments merits an especially detailed account. This was when the apex of the official *Sinterklaas* spectacle was spatially, visibly and audibly interlinked with the most disruptive moments of the interaction between the police and protesters, including disturbing scenes of physical altercation and mass arrest.

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17 Original Dutch phrase: 'weg met die Zwarte Pieten!'

## 7.4 Zooming in: the simultaneous apex of celebration and repression

At the beginning of these critical four minutes, the story enacted on the balcony and shown by the live broadcast was almost at its culmination point. *Sinterklaas* was expected to appear on the balcony any moment, and, to pass the time, the anxious reporter and the *Pietenband* led the crowd in singing a string of *Sinterklaas* songs. Meanwhile, on the square, a group of about 20 protesters, including spokesperson Afriyie and coordinator Kunta Rincho, stood in a semi-circle with arms linked, looking tense. I was amongst this group. We stood in silence as the journalists, who had been interviewing Afriyie, withdrew.

Suddenly, a group of police officers moved in closer, encircling the group. Afriyie responded by asking loudly: 'Can I ask what we have done? ... What have we done?'<sup>18</sup> This question positioned the officers as owing an explanation as to their actions and highlighted the absence of such an explanation. Afriyie added 'This is not a demonstration,'<sup>19</sup> implying that the presence of the group was not different in this respect to the presence of the other people on the square. As the police officers were forcibly grabbing and pushing us and we ended up squashed against others, Kunta Rincho also drew attention to the similarities between the protesters and the thousands of other people present at the Marktplaats, by stating to an officer who was pushing him: 'We have a right to stand here. We are Dutch citizens. We have the right to stand here, just like the thousands of other citizens who stand here. You have no right to try to push us away now based on the colour of our skin.'<sup>20</sup> Although his words were ostensibly directed to the police officer, he was being filmed from a close distance by Roberson, a journalist who had accompanied the group since early that morning. While the spokesperson's words had no noticeable effect on the officers, who kept forcefully moving the group towards the edge of the square, they would end up being heard by others as they were included in a video report by Roberson that would receive tens of thousands of views on YouTube.

Meanwhile, *Sinterklaas* had not yet appeared onstage, and the *Pietenband* was playing a slow-paced version of a well-known *Sinterklaas* song about receiving a wealth of presents. The reporter led the audience in singing along, and then asked them 'Well, what other songs do you know?'<sup>21</sup> As this happened, most of the protesters in our group tried to keep their arms linked with the people next to them as the police forcefully shoved and tugged us towards the edge of the square. Several of the police

18 Original Dutch transcript: 'mag ik vragen wat wij hebben gedaan? ... Wat hebben wij gedaan?'

19 Original Dutch transcript: 'dit is geen demonstratie.'

20 Original Dutch transcript: 'we hebben het recht om hier te staan. We zijn burgers van Nederland. We hebben het recht om hier te staan net als alle duizenden andere burgers die hier staan. Jullie hebben geen recht om ons op basis van onze huidskleur nu weg proberen te duwen.'

21 Original Dutch transcript: 'nou, welke liedjes kennen jullie nog meer?'

officers surrounding the group had their hands linked as well, thus forming a chain that facilitated keeping us together as a group, and preventing us from stepping away. From behind this line, I saw a White would-be protester looking on in distress at what was going on – he had been able to step away and merge with the crowd of onlookers just in time to avoid arrest. Suddenly, four officers stepped towards Afriyie and grabbed hold of him. They pulled him away from the other protesters as he repeatedly shouted, ‘Why do you need to act like this? Why do you need to act like this? ... Why? Why? Why?’<sup>22</sup> while vigorously moving his arms and legs. This was accompanied by shouts of shock and indignation from other group members and bystanders. Dozens of officers kept the crowds away and pushed the group backwards, away from the square, amongst shouts of ‘Move it!’<sup>23</sup> The superior physical force of the police was emphasised by the presence of two officers on horseback, who helped drive our group into an alley while Afriyie was pinned face down to the ground at the edge of the square by five officers. His repeated panicked shrieks of ‘I can’t breathe! I can’t breathe!’<sup>24</sup> and the punches he received from one of the officers formed a stark contrast to the cheers that were simultaneously audible from the crowd celebrating the arrival of *Sinterklaas* on the balcony right at that moment. Followed by enthusiastically waving *Pieten*, *Sinterklaas* greeted the crowd with a regal wave. After explaining his arrival onto the balcony had taken a while because they had gotten lost in the many corridors of the town hall, *Sinterklaas* asked: ‘Hello Gouda, are you up for it?’<sup>25</sup> Loud cheers from the crowd were heard in response. He then said: ‘Well, me too. And I think the entire Netherlands.’<sup>26</sup> After some more banter and hearty laughs, he led the crowd in a big cheer: ‘Hip hip hurray! Hip hip hurray! Hip hip hurray!’<sup>27</sup> By this time, the entire group of protesters had been pushed into the alley. Meanwhile, Afriyie was still held down on the ground, his continued shrieks of ‘I can’t breathe’ sounding feeble, unlikely to be heard by anyone who stood more than a few metres away. One of the officers holding him down was a Black man with long dreadlocks, the only dark-skinned officer I saw that day.

Four minutes had passed between the moment when the police had first moved in to encircle our group – while the crowd sang cheerful *Sinterklaas* songs – and the end of the speech, in which *Sinterklaas* led the crowd in cheers while Afriyie was pinned to the ground and we were driven into the alley. The apex of the spectacle having passed,

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22 Original Dutch transcript: ‘waarom moeten jullie zo doen? Waarom moeten jullie zo doen? ... Waarom? Waarom? Waarom?’

23 Original Dutch transcript: ‘Doorlopen!’

24 Original Dutch transcript: ‘Ik kan niet ademen! Ik kan niet ademen!’

25 Original Dutch transcript: ‘Dag Gouda, hebben jullie er zin in?’

26 Original Dutch transcript: ‘Nou, ik ook hoor. En ik denk heel Nederland.’

27 Original Dutch transcript: ‘Hiep hiep hiep hoera! Hieperdepiep hoera! Hieperdepiep hoera!’

*Sinterklaasjournaal* presenter Blok motioned towards images of the crowd on the square, saying that, although the live broadcast was coming to an end, 'the celebration here will continue for a bit'.<sup>28</sup>

As the banter on the balcony went on, the *Sinterklaasjournaal* cameras zoomed out in an aerial view of the Marktplaats. Meanwhile, police officers led Afriyie, forced to walk backwards with his head pushed towards his chest, his T-shirt pulled over his face and his torso bare, through an alley towards a police vehicle. This attracted much attention from the people who were close enough to see and hear what was going on: several people filmed or took pictures. Some bystanders were cheering. However, outside a radius of maybe 20 metres or so from the altercation, the attention of the crowd remained on the banter by *Sinterklaas*, the *Pieten* and others on the balcony.

After some time, the other protesters were also made to board police vehicles, including people who had been arrested after the four minutes I have just discussed in detail. As the boarding of police vehicles took place in narrow side streets away from the square, it did not produce an immediate visual contrast to the merry *Sinterklaas* spectacle – which by then had already passed its high point, prompting spectators to leave the square. Even so, the boarding of the police vehicles had a somewhat public character, as a sizeable group of onlookers had gathered behind the police cordon. Many yelled and jeered at us as we queued up for the police to lead us in pairs to the large bus with tinted windows, outfitted with cramped holding cells. I do, however, also remember a lone Black man I had not seen before amongst the Gouda crowd, nor during other events. From the other side of the police line, he silently raised his fist, wearing a solemn expression on his face.

The festivities in Gouda went on for some time afterwards, including music performances, games for the children and visits by *Sinterklaas* and *Pieten* to various places. It also included a press conference that had the mayor and *Sinterklaas* sitting side by side at a table to receive questions. When asked about 'problems', *Sinterklaas* responded that 'actually, the mayor has resolved all problems very adequately'<sup>29</sup>, adding information about a *Sinterklaasjournaal* storyline about problems that needed solving. Meanwhile, the people who had been arrested were taken to police facilities for questioning – most in nearby The Hague, although in contrast to the treatment of the larger group of protesters, Afriyie was taken to a police station in Gouda. He later reported having been stripped of most of his clothes and held in a cell. By the evening, he was sent on his way, as were the rest of us. By this time, a spokesperson for the public prosecutor's office had already made it known that the arrestees would be fined 220 euros per person.

28 Original Dutch transcript: 'hier gaat het feest nog even door'.

29 Original Dutch transcript: 'eigenlijk heeft de burgemeester de problemen zeer adequaat opgelost'.

In relation to the actors associated with the predominant performance of the parade – the local municipal authorities, the police, the local committee organising the parade, the *Sinterklaasjournaal* and the tens of thousands of people participating as audience members – we, as protesters, thus remained a counterpublic throughout the events. Our interaction norms and practices remained a disruptive departure from widely shared norms of appropriateness. While the ‘Proud of *Piet*’ counterprotesters handing out flags and applying black paint to children’s faces were able to have the results of their handiwork blend in seamlessly with the cheerful parade as enacted within the reigning interaction logic, T-shirts with anti-racist slogans were viewed as undesired departures from a neutral norm.

Still, the protest at the culmination point of the parade resulted in a visual and audible interlinkage of the official spectacle with enactments of dissent and violence, foregrounding ‘race’ as a relevant societal fault line. Even though the events did not unfold on the counterpublic’s terms, our actions provided a new and critical background for the references to harmonious unity that were ubiquitous in the repertoire used by the actors associated with the planned parade. Similarly, the shouts of ‘*Amandla awetu!*’ and the references to Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King placed the events against the background of worldwide struggles, mostly by Black people, for racial justice. The protest further highlighted tensions in the relationship between national and racial identities in various ways, including the claim by the organisers of the protest that ‘the racist caricature *Zwarte Piet* has no place in a civilised country’ and the questioning of differential treatment of the protesters and the other people present on Gouda’s Marktplaats. Thus, the disruption caused by the protest, including the response by the police, revealed the situatedness of the dominant enactment of the parade and highlighted the power relations in which it was embedded.

## 7.5 The Sinterklaas parade and protest: media analysis

The day after the events in Gouda, the local parade in Amsterdam took place. At the apex of this relatively smoothly enacted spectacle, two *Zwarte Pieten* unrolled a banner that read '*Makkers staakt uw wild geraas*' ('Friends, cease your wild noise'), a line from a well-known *Sinterklaas* song, and a reference to the 'wild noise' of the heated debate around the tradition. Later that evening, the mayor of Amsterdam called attention to the 'wonderful' message of this banner as he discussed the parades in Amsterdam and Gouda during an interview on the nationally televised talk show *Jinek*. He explained: 'the *Sinterklaas* committee in Amsterdam has done something wonderful. After the speech by *Sinterklaas*, a banner was shown and it said, "Friends, cease your wild noise". And that's exactly it. ... as reasonable Dutch people, we have to tell the extreme ones.'<sup>30</sup> By expressing his approval of the banner that had been dropped by the *Sinterklaas* committee, the mayor confirmed the positioning of protesters as troublemakers who had acted inappropriately and needed to be told how to behave.

In spite of the text on this banner and the mayor's advice, the discussion did not die down – in fact, in the following days, months and even years, the media coverage of the event in Gouda was extensive, and each of the national *Sinterklaas* parades since Gouda has been surrounded by controversy. As the above example illustrates, the protest in Gouda became a significant part of the cultural background text against which subsequent events were placed.

In this section, I explore how the representation of what had taken place in Gouda can be examined as a struggle about the interaction logic that is – retrospectively – applicable to these events. My analysis builds on the scholarship discussed in Chapter 2, which considers the relevant context for democratic debate to be best conceptualised as multiple, partially overlapping public spheres (Asen, 2000; Ferree, Gamson, Gerhards, Rucht, & Jun, 2002; N. Fraser, 1990; Hajer, 2009, p. 67). For this reason, I use examples from a range of sources including the so-called 'new media', which offer a variety of options for audiences to interact with and produce content. Even if access to mass media is often still of vital importance, the barriers to cultural production and circulation are much lower in new media, offering an alternative platform to people with little access to traditional media outlets and facilitating 'a movement away from civic and political engagement that turns around issues and activities defined and structured by elites and state institutions and toward a range of more direct forms of lifestyle and expressive politics' (Kahne, Middaugh, & Allen, 2015, p. 38).

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30 Original Dutch transcript: 'Vandaag heeft het Sinterklaascomité in Amsterdam iets schitterends gedaan. Na de speech van Sinterklaas kwam er een spandoek en daar stond op, 'Makkers staakt uw wild geraas'. En zo is het net. ... moeten wij als redelijke Nederlanders nu eens zeggen tegen de extremen.'



Image 20. Banner that was unrolled at the apex of the 2014 *Sinterklaas* parade in Amsterdam

Photo by ANP.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, this means that the dataset for this section differs from the one used for the dramaturgical analyses I have carried out thus far. While those were largely based on video material complemented by personal observations, the examination in this section can be situated in the tradition of frame analysis (Bacchi, 2009, 2010; Goffman, 1974; Rein & Schon, 1977; Schon, 1979). This means that I focus on the ways media material – be it a tweet, an internet meme or a newspaper article – construct what issues are involved, what the problems are that need to be solved and who is to be involved in this (Bacchi, 2009, 2010; cf. Nelson, Oxley, & Clawson, 1997, p. 221). My analysis is geared towards exploring the interaction logic that is retrospectively applied to the events in Gouda, thus focusing on the ‘politics of meaning’. Starting from the observation that the meaning of *Zwarte Piet* and the *Sinterklaas* parade are contested, with different actors putting forward competing understandings of the event, I conduct a close reading of texts in order to parse out their grounding assumptions about the four aspects of the interaction logic. Furthermore, my approach in this section is indebted to scholarship in media studies and sociology that explores the tension between the ways in which audiences are receptive and audiences’ agency in interacting with the media – in other words, the tension between audience-as-outcome and audience-as-agent (cf. Webster, 1998). As Stuart Hall (1980) has pointed out, although texts are imbued with



meaning, this does not mean that signification is static. The participation of a person, organisation or other communication source in the debate about 'Gouda' necessarily meant they foregrounded certain occurrences within the whole of the chaotic interactions over the course of that afternoon. Highlighting these as 'text' implies leaving other aspects as mere context, as less worthy of examination. Furthermore, the insertion of these 'texts' into new contexts alters their meaning by suggesting against what background they should be understood. The association of these texts, be they linguistic or otherwise, with a new context suggests a new 'preferred reading' (Blommaert, 2004, p. 12) for them, thus altering their meaning. Presenting a convincing account of how events should be interpreted also means generating legitimacy for the subsequent course of action to follow (Hajer, 2009, p. 55). Thus, this struggle over assigning meaning has potential significant effects. This is why my focus in this section is on the ways in which meanings are negotiated and shifted, this time not within the interaction, but in the debate about it afterwards. I highlight key examples to show how accounts of the events as given by authority figures and influential mass media render the content of the protesters' message illegible – 'wild noise', to quote the banner that was unrolled at the Amsterdam parade the following day. However, I also demonstrate how, in a variety of contexts including the new media and court procedures, this interpretation of the events was challenged by accounts bolstering the counterpublic's interaction logic. In addition to that, I discuss how, in the wake of this discursive struggle, references to what had happened in Gouda became a common feature of discussion of national *Sinterklaas* parades in later years, thus incorporating dissent as a relevant notion in relation to the tradition.

During the press conference that took place in Gouda in the afternoon of the parade, first *Sinterklaas* and then the mayor reflected on the parade; images from this conference were used in various television broadcasts. When asked about 'the problems', *Sinterklaas* answered breezily and in the same general terms that he employed when the reporter for the *Sinterklaasjournaal* posed a similar question at his arrival on the quay, thus staying in line with the overriding interaction logic enacted so far. Leaving it to the listener to infer what events he was referring to, he said: 'the only problems have been solved very adequately by the mayor ... I've mentioned it on the quay too; there has been much *gedoe* but *Sinterklaas* always says, everything always turns out totally all right'.<sup>31</sup> These remarks were subsequently quoted in the press (see for example 'Negentig aanhoudingen', 2014; Tempelman, 2014). In the interview that took place afterwards, the mayor was more explicit in his assessment of the events earlier that day. He stated:

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31 Original Dutch transcript: 'De enige problemen, die zijn ongelooflijk goed opgelost door de burgemeester ... Ik heb het op de kade ook even gezegd; er is een hoop *gedoe* geweest, maar Sinterklaas zegt altijd: het komt vanzelf helemaal weer goed.'

Beforehand, we had been told the demonstrations would be peaceful. Then we would not have had such a problem. But well, things did become a bit heated and then it's necessary to act. Because the instructions that we had given were crystal clear and absolutely clear-cut and everyone who was not going to adhere [to them] ran the risk of being arrested.<sup>32</sup> These statements focused attention on the clarity of the instructions and the disobedience of the protesters rather than the content of the instructions or the reasoning behind them. That protest should not take place at the Marktplaats was presented as a given, as an obvious truth. The arrests appeared inevitable – 'it is necessary to act' – rather than the result of a choice by individuals embedded in organisational and political power structures. In an interview that same day, which was broadcast on the evening news as well as in other programmes, the prime minister called the events 'very sad' (Blokker, 2014; Posthumus, 2014) and similarly sketched a situation in which protest and debate are acceptable, but only within certain obvious limits, which the protesters had crossed in Gouda:

very, very sad. Everyone can enter into debate with one another. We can endlessly take each other to task in the Netherlands about the colour of *Zwarte Piet*. But you do not disturb a children's celebration like that. My call to everyone in the Netherlands would be: let's make *Sinterklaas*, and December 5<sup>th</sup>, again a fantastic, brilliant children's celebration.<sup>33</sup>

Similarly, when Mayor Van der Laan was interviewed on late night talk show *Jinek* the evening of the parade in Amsterdam and a day after the events in Gouda, he characterised the events in Gouda as follows: 'of course it's terrible to ruin a children's celebration, and that is what happened yesterday. ... of course, the reactions were highly damning'.<sup>34</sup> Remarks like these helped set the tone of the discussion about the events in Gouda, as such remarks were subsequently quoted in print and included in news programmes such as the evening news and the end-of-year news compilations.

The events in Gouda made front page news of several leading national newspapers in the days that followed, generally with articles conveying the sense that the protesters had been far out of line for disturbing a children's celebration. Arguably the most iconic image that circulated those days was that of two young children

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32 Original Dutch transcript: 'Vantevoren hadden we meegekregen dat het vreedzame demonstraties zouden zijn. Dan had je niet zo'n probleem. Maar ja, toch is het wat opgelopen en dan is het nodig om op te treden. Want de aanwijzingen die wij hadden aangegeven waren glashelder en volkomen duidelijk. Iedereen die zich er niet aan zou houden liep het risico aangehouden te worden.'

33 Original Dutch text: 'diep, diep triest. Iedereen mag met elkaar discussieren. We kunnen eindeloos elkaar in Nederland de maat nemen over de kleur van Zwarte Piet. Maar je gaat toch niet een kinderfeest zo verstoren. Mijn oproep zou zijn aan heel Nederland: laten we van Sinterklaas de komende weken en van vijf december opnieuw een fantastisch mooi kinderfeest maken.'

34 Original Dutch transcript: 'het is natuurlijk vreselijk om een kinderfeest te verstoren en dat is gister gebeurd. ... de reacties waren natuurlijk vernietigend.'

wearing *Piet* hats, accompanied by their mother and surrounded by the police. The picture, originally made for Dutch news agency ANP, was shared on Twitter and used in a plethora of offline and online publications (see for example ‘Hoe houden we het gezellig?’, 2014; ‘Negentig aanhoudingen’, 2014; ‘Pietverdriet’, 2014; Wit, 2014). Below are images of the front pages of *De Telegraaf*, the Dutch newspaper with the largest readership, and the *AD* (*Algemeen Dagblad*), which each used a slightly different version of the image.

Image 21. Front pages of *De Telegraaf* and the *AD* newspapers



Both front pages show two children and their mother with *Piet* outfits and hats surrounded by the police. This image was shared and commented on widely on social media, and versions of it were used on the covers of *De Telegraaf* (left) and the *AD* (right) newspapers. The image became the symbol of the ‘ruined children’s celebration’. *De Telegraaf* headline reads ‘Deeply sad. Children’s celebration ruined forever’. The *AD* headline reads ‘How do we keep it *gezellig*?’. The photos are by ANP / Bas Czerwinski. The image of the two front pages is from Meindersma (2014).

The children’s troubled faces meshed well with the headlines. *De Telegraaf* headline echoed the prime minister’s assessment: ‘deeply sad’. The byline stated ‘Children’s celebration ruined forever’. The *AD* headline was ‘How do we keep it *gezellig*?’. As explained in Chapter 1, this last word roughly means ‘cosy’ or ‘convivial’, but is often said to be untranslatable, since it conveys a specific ‘Dutch quality’. Thus, the headline

echoed the idea held by the majority of Dutch people that the parade is and always has been *gezellig*, and presented the question of how to keep it that way as the most pressing problem arising from the events. This juxtaposition of a *gezellige*<sup>35</sup> tradition, its innocence symbolised by young White children, and the presence of 'grim' protesters was quite common. For example, the byline to an *NRC* article read: 'Everything in Gouda is *gezellig*, until demonstrators against *Zwarte Piet* appear on the Market'<sup>36</sup> (Schreuder, 2014). Such headlines associated those who enjoyed the *gezellige* parade with a quintessential Dutchness, positioning those who 'disturb' or 'ruin' these festivities as intruders or outsiders. The racial connotations of this juxtaposition remain implicit, although they are hinted at in metaphors such as *de Volkskrant* headline 'A *gezellige* day with a black lining'<sup>37</sup> (Tempelman, 2014).

Even coverage that could be characterised as more sympathetic towards the protesters reproduced the assumption, shared by the majority of Dutch people, that the parade is essentially *gezellig* and that the objective of dealing with dissent should be to keep things that way. For example, the Monday after the parade, the Amsterdam-based *Het Parool* newspaper ran the headline 'Amsterdam showed how it should be done', summarising as follows how Amsterdam had set the example: 'Ninety arrests in Gouda, one in Amsterdam. The *Sinterklaas* parade in both cities offers considerations for a good workshop on crisis containment'<sup>38</sup> (Meershoek, 2014a, 2014b). The article went on to describe how it would have been wiser on the mayor of Gouda's part to have allowed the protesters to have their voices heard on the market square rather than on an irrelevant spot outside the city centre:

Practically all 90 arrests were not done because the protesters were at each other's throats or tried to ruin the parade, but because the municipal authorities, possibly impressed by the heated discussion about *Zwarte Piet*, had simply stipulated that no protesters were to be on the Markt.<sup>39</sup>

The article contrasted this with the situation in Amsterdam, where the protesters had been allowed to stand right near the route of the parade: 'thanks to the courage to follow that recipe, Amsterdam could look back at the end of the day at a soaking wet but

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35 *Gezellige* is the inflected form of the adjective *gezellig*.

36 Original Dutch text: 'In Gouda is alles gezellig, totdat demonstranten tegen Zwarte Piet op de Markt verschijnen.'

37 Original Dutch text: 'een gezellige dag met een zwart randje.'

38 Original Dutch text: 'Amsterdam liet zien hoe het wel moet. Negentig arrestaties in Gouda, één in Amsterdam. De sinterklaasintocht in beide steden biedt stof voor een goede workshop crisisbeheersing.'

39 Original Dutch text: 'Vrijwel alle negentig aanhoudingen werden niet verricht omdat de demonstranten elkaar aanvlogen of de intocht probeerden te verzieken, maar omdat het gemeentebestuur, mogelijk onder de indruk van de verhitte discussie over Zwarte Piet, nu eenmaal had verordonneerd dat er op de Markt geen demonstranten mochten staan.'

nonetheless old-fashioned *gezellige* parade'.<sup>40</sup>

However, most coverage commended the Gouda authorities for their actions. For example, a front page *NRC* article described the events in Gouda as 'riots', applauding the authorities for dealing with them effectively by separating the "'professional" protesters"<sup>41</sup> from the larger group of people willing to discuss things 'reasonably'.<sup>42</sup> The characterisation of protesters as 'professional' had been employed earlier by Gouda's mayor in an interview ('Negentig aanhoudingen', 2014). The *NRC* article went on to argue that

the riots in Gouda may turn out to have been very instrumental for defusing the threat of *Zwarte Piet*. Those riots were so unreasonable that the reasonable ones on both sides distance themselves from it. Because who wants to take the side of a grown man who calls a toddler with a mitre a 'racist'?<sup>43</sup>

The article did not mention the content of the protesters' messages, but focused on the inappropriateness of their actions. Since these were so 'unreasonable', the appropriate goal to strive for was to 'isolate' these protesters. As in the articles in *de Volkskrant*, *De Telegraaf* and the *AD* quoted above, this *NRC* article positioned the protesters as deviant, as having acted in ways that were outside the realm of normal and acceptable attitudes and behaviour. Positioning a group as deviant delegitimises it and thus constitutes a powerful form of social control, which is

exerted in the face of an apparent norm infraction and aims at revenge, restitution and/or deterrence. In the context of protest action, social control is the process of labelling and treating dissenters as deviants. This process will be referred to as criminalization. (Wilson, 1977, p. 470)

In this case, the criminalisation was reinforced by announcements that the arrestees would be fined 220 euros each. The storyline about the reasonable authorities faced with deviant protesters who were ruining a friendly spectacle for innocent children was further strengthened through the presentation of anti-racist and right-wing protesters as essentially similar. This type of reasoning, also known as the 'horseshoe theory', considers extreme positions on different sides of a spectrum to resemble each other (see for example Immerzeel, Lubbers, & Coffé, 2016; Lekakis, 2017). This draws attention to these groups'

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40 Original Dutch text: 'dankzij de durf om dat simpele recept te volgen kon Amsterdam aan het einde van de dag terugkijken op een weliswaar kletsnatte maar ook ouderwets gezellige intocht'.

41 Original Dutch text: "'professionele" actievoerders'.

42 Original Dutch text: 'in alle redelijkheid'.

43 Original Dutch text: 'Altijd zijn er mensen bereid om in alle redelijkheid over het probleem te praten. ... Voor gezagshandhavers is het essentieel om zogeheten "professionele" actievoerders, mensen die op een confrontatie uit zijn, af te zonderen. ... de rellen in Gouda kunnen wel eens heel instrumenteel blijken te zijn geweest voor de bezwering van het gevaar-Zwarte Piet. Die rellen waren zo onredelijk dat de redelijken aan beide kanten er afstand van nemen. Want wie wil nou partij kiezen voor een volwassen man die een peuter met een mijter uitscheldt voor "racist"?'.

shared deviance from a norm rather than to an examination of the content of their arguments in their own right, or scrutiny of the supposedly reasonable norm.

The comment in the *NRC* article quoted earlier about the toddler referred to another iconic photo taken on Gouda's Marktplaats, in which a little boy in a *Sinterklaas* outfit and the man carrying him in his arms look on as a protester is being escorted away by the police at probably no more than a few metres distance. This picture had been shared on Twitter by Dominique Weesie, the founder of right-wing news and opinion website *GeenStijl* and broadcasting agency *PowNed*. His caption read: 'This little boy (3) with mitre is being called a racist by demonstrators. Father in tears. Speaking of having lost the way'. This tweet, implying the man being arrested had called the little boy a racist, ended up being shared over 2,000 times, much more than the original tweet with the picture, which had been shared roughly two hours earlier by another journalist with the comment '*Pro-Pieten* arrested in Gouda as well'. The *NRC* article and many Twitter users took over Weesie's account of the situation.

The thrust of most media coverage was thus that the protesters had been out of line, their actions highly inappropriate and the police response adequate. In the margins of the Dutch media landscape, some commentators and activists put forward a different view of the events. For example, some pointed to the differences between the original and Weesie's later caption, as well as to inconsistencies in Weesie's account, including the fact that, from other photos and videos, it was clear that the White arrestee was a counterprotester rather than part of the group denouncing racism ('Dominique Weesie', 2014; Meindersma, 2014; Oudenampsen, 2014).

Three days later, on 20 November, *NRC* published a rectification stating that the *PowNews* audiovisual material did not show a grown man calling a toddler a 'racist' ('Correcties en aanvullingen', 2014). However, while the initial article had been front page news, the rectification consisted of a succinct three-sentence statement on page 9. Similarly, while the photo of the two children with their mother was overwhelmingly used in ways that emphasised the unfortunate and sad experiences of innocent children caused by inappropriately grim behaviour, there were also publications questioning this storyline. For example, a commentator reported on her blog that she had spoken to the mother in question, according to whom the children were glum because of the rain rather than the protests (Meindersma, 2014). This relatively insignificant blog was not the only source of this type of analysis. For example, *NRC* published an article with a similar gist in their media supplement on 19 November (Kleppe, 2014), four days after the parade. However, these notifications remained marginal compared to the predominantly indignant front-page headlines. Even years afterwards, the photo of the mother with the children was still used to illustrate the negative impact of protest at the parade, for example in articles discussing future parades ('Sint-intocht zonder demonstraties lonkt', 2017).



Image 22. Two different tweets using the same photo of an arrest on the Marktplaatsplein



The two tweets ascribe different meanings to the image. Left: a reporter for NOS writes, 'Atmosphere becomes grim. Pro-Petes arrested in Gouda as well #parade'. On the right: PowNews founder and reporter Dominique Weesie writes, 'This little boy with mitre is being called a racist by demonstrators. Father in tears. Speaking about having lost the way'. Image of the two tweets side by side from Dutch Review (Van Leeuwen, 2014).

In the dominant portrayals by public authority figures and mass media journalists in the days after the parade, the arrests were thus presented as inevitable consequences of the disorderly behaviour of deviants, who had chosen an inappropriate time and place to protest. This matches the predominant interaction logic enacted during the parade: the parade is essentially an innocent children's celebration, the fairy tale character of which should be protected by adults and not marred by overt discussion of serious matters. Yet, protesters subsequently incorporated the media coverage in the analysis they put forward on blogs, in interviews and other contexts of the events as part of structural racism in various societal institutions ('Arrestaties Gouda gemanipuleerd', 2014; 'NRC rectificeert Powned-verzinsel', 2014; Esajas, 2014; Van den Berg, 2016). Comments that, in their original context, had been heard by perhaps only a handful of people, or were written down as a routine task by police officers, hereby gained a new relevance. The protesters thus harnessed the close scrutiny by politicians, media professionals and even international observers prompted by the disruptiveness of the events to call attention to speech acts that would otherwise have been unlikely to receive attention beyond the immediate context in which they were produced, making them 'relevant by later re-

entextualizations' (Blommaert, 2001, p. 19). Take, for example, the statements by Kunta Rincho as the police were pushing and pulling at members of the group he was a part of. He contrasted their treatment with that of other people present on the square. While, at that moment, his words were heard by only a few, they were later included in a video report that was viewed by thousands, and referenced as proof of unequal treatment (Esajas, 2014).

Another example is the meme pictured below, which was circulated in the wake of the Charlie Hebdo attack in France in January 2015, and the subsequent outcry and solidarity protests in the Netherlands. The meme features distressing pictures of the arrest of spokesperson Jerry Afriyie (right) and coordinator Kunta Rincho (left) during the Gouda protest, contrasting their treatment with the expressions of sympathy and solidarity by 'Je suis Charlie' protesters with a banner protecting freedom of speech.

Image 23. Meme shared on social media juxtaposing photos of protesters



The photo above shows a protest on Amsterdam's Dam square in the wake of the Charlie Hebdo attacks. Below: treatment of protesters in Gouda against *Zwarte Piet*. The person pictured on the right is Jerry Afriyie, the person on the left is Kunta Rincho. The text reads: 'We are pro freedom of speech! Except when you oppose *Zwarte Piet*....' Meme taken from website KOZP (2016).



This placed what happened in Gouda squarely into the context of racial identity and difference. Another prominent example is the police report in which officers had written down how the presence of people with a 'leftist and negroid appearance' on the market square had given them an 'uneasy'<sup>44</sup> feeling (Blokker, 2015b; Hogeling, 2015; 'Negroïde uiterlijk', 2015). This report was included in the court files when Afriyie was prosecuted for resisting arrest and for assault.<sup>45</sup> While there was scant discussion of racial identity and its interlinkages with the police as an institution in the national newspapers just after the parade, coverage of the Afriyie case repeatedly including the wording of this police report (see for example Bahara, 2016a; Blokker, 2015a; Hogeling, 2015). This coverage provided visibility to an analysis of racism as institutional; for example, when Afriyie was asked to comment on the fact that one of the officers who arrested him was Black, he responded to the effect that institutional racism can also affect and be perpetuated by people of colour (Bahara, 2016a). Various articles about the legal proceedings quoted parts of Afriyie's speech in the court room, thus serving as a podium for the dissemination of ideas linking *Zwarte Piet* with a broader analysis of institutional racism. One of these links, also mentioned in the previous chapter, was between Afriyie's treatment and that of Mitch Henriquez, an unarmed Black man who had died the summer of 2015 in the Netherlands after having been put in a chokehold by the police. As Afriyie put it during a 2016 court hearing: 'if he would have survived his violent arrest, he would stand trial here too for assault and resisting arrest'<sup>46</sup> (Bahara, 2016b; see also KOZP, 2016). The parallels between the two cases were also discussed by journalists and other commentators in the mainstream media in the years that followed, using the intertextual references to different instances of police violence on unarmed men of colour as part of an argumentation linking *Zwarte Piet* with anti-Black institutional racism (Blokker, 2016; Februari, 2016). Afriyie's case thus implied continued scrutiny of the events in Gouda, which then became part of the background against which subsequent national parades and other events were presented. Contrasting and drawing parallels with

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44 Original Dutch text: 'onrustig'.

45 Specifically, Afriyie was accused of having pinched an officer's thigh while he was being arrested. Following a court hearing, the judge considered the pinching proven, but also ruled the arrest itself unwarranted. Furthermore, the court characterised the physical force with which the arrest had taken place as disproportional. According to the court, Afriyie's 'mortal fear' during this treatment meant he could not to be held responsible for his actions. However, the public prosecutor appealed against this decision and, after the appeal hearing, Afriyie was sentenced to a payment of 500 euros compensation, plus a conditional fine of the same amount ('Anti-Zwarte Piet-activist Jerry Afriyie', 2017; 'Boete geëist', 2016). Apart from this official sentence by the judge, another consequence of Afriyie's arrest was that, pending the case, his permit was revoked to carry out his job as a security guard.

46 Original Dutch text: 'Als hij zijn gewelddadige arrestatie had overleefd, zou hij hier ook terecht moeten staan voor mishandeling en verzet bij arrestatie'.

key reference points of political struggle demonstrated that these events need to be seen as instances of structural patterns of institutional racism rather than isolated incidents. For example, in an interview in the *Volkskrant* newspaper (Vuijsje, 2015), Afriyie narrated that, during his arrest, the image of Eric Garner flashed before him, an unarmed African American man who had died on 17 July 2014, after having been put in a chokehold by the police during his arrest. Garner had also repeatedly screamed ‘I can’t breathe’, which has since become a sentence often used by the Black Lives Matter movement to denounce racist police brutality.

Another example of the ways activists emphasised intertextuality between their struggle to change *Zwarte Piet* and other movements racial justice led by Black people is the public statement in which KOZP called for a demonstration at the national *Sinterklaas* parade in Meppel the year after (KOZP, 2015b). This protest was announced under the name ‘Freedom ride to Meppel’, citing the ‘Freedom Riders’ and, more generally, the civil rights movement in the United States as its inspiration, thus drawing connections to present-day struggles of Black people of African descent in the United States (KOZP, 2015b):

The Freedom Riders have shown that large changes can be effectuated by small steps taken by brave people. ... KOZP is in contact with activists from the American #BlackLivesMatter movement, we stand in solidarity with each other’s struggle against racism and see the connection between our activities. ... With the Freedom Ride we want to demand attention, by way of nonviolent resistance, for the racist element in this Dutch tradition and for racism in Dutch society.<sup>47</sup>

The statement also referenced the police report about people with a ‘negroid appearance’ as part of the argumentation linking *Zwarte Piet* to broader racist structures in Dutch society. In Meppel in 2015, the year after ‘Gouda’, the protesters were given a spot along the route of the parade, although not at the central square where the largest crowd would gather to attend *Sinterklaas*’s speech. At this designated spot, we held signs and shouted as the parade passed. These fleeting moments of protest – carried out as announced and expected – were thus encapsulated if not incorporated into the dominant enactment of the parade. However, when one of the organisers of the protest posted a selfie of himself and fellow activists on Facebook, he rapidly received over 10,000 vitriolic and openly racist responses. In response, anti-racist activists incorporated this into their broader argumentation about institutional racism in Dutch society, as well

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47 Original Dutch text: ‘De Freedom Riders lieten zien dat grote veranderingen kunnen worden gemaakt door kleine stappen genomen door moedige mensen. ... KOZP heeft contact met activisten uit de Amerikaanse #BlackLivesMatter beweging, we staan in solidariteit met elkaars strijd tegen racisme en zien de verbinding tussen onze activiteiten. ... Met de Freedom Ride willen we door middel van gewelddoos verzet aandacht opeisen voor het racistische element in deze Nederlandse traditie en racisme in de Nederlandse samenleving.’

as specifically challenging the notion of the parade as primarily a children's celebration with no connections to 'race' or racism. The subsequent court procedures and conviction of some of those who had commented on the selfie also caused some media attention (Beukers, 2017; Esajas, 2015; 'Lelystedeling voor de rechter', 2017; 'Primeur', 2017).

Another retrospective shift in the meaning assigned to protesters' actions, and thereby to the *Sinterklaas* parade in general, regarded the legal status of arrests and their related fines. Rather than being fined, many of those arrested in Gouda ended up receiving financial compensation a bit over a year later (Bergman, 2016; Jebbink, 2016; Kompagnie, 2016). Similarly, after the arrests of nearly 200 persons in Rotterdam in 2016, charges were dropped ('Demonstranten anti-zwarte piet-protest', 2018; 'Tegenstanders Zwarte Piet', 2018). In the runup to that year's national parade, to be held in Maassluis, KOZP had publicly called on people to join buses from Amsterdam and Rotterdam to travel to Maassluis. The mayor of Maassluis had announced that everyone wishing to enter the city centre would need to pass police checkpoints, and that protest outside the designated spots along the parade – one for protesters against *Zwarte Piet*, one for those in favour of the tradition – would not be tolerated. However, official agreements had not been struck between the parties, and it was unclear how the authorities were going to decide who would be allowed to pass the checkpoints, and what would be considered a protest – wearing a T-shirt with a slogan against racism? Doing this by oneself, in pairs, in larger groups?

As it turned out, the groups of protesters against *Zwarte Piet* never even arrived in Maassluis. Upon making a stop in nearby Rotterdam to pick up people, police prohibited the buses with protesters from continuing their journey. After some confusion and debate, we started walking to the Rotterdam city centre, where we knew a local parade was being held. Several hundred metres from the site where the Rotterdam parade was to culminate, groups of protesters were surrounded by the police and detained. Videos depicting the violence with which some of these nearly 200 arrests were carried out sparked outrage amongst some. For many others, what stood out most was the shameless nerve of the protesters' attempt to approach the square where the *Sinterklaas* spectacle was to take place. The arrests were first denounced by human rights organisation Amnesty International and later also defined as unlawful by Rotterdam's complaints committee (Amnesty International, 2016; 'Noodbevel Aboutaleb', 2018; 'Sinterklaasintocht Rotterdam', 2018).

Another example of such a struggle in which a shift of meanings can be observed regards the deployment of police officers dressed up as *Zwarte Piet*. While some commentators maintained that police at the 2014 Gouda parade dressing up as *Zwarte Piet* was not problematic, others incorporated these events in their accounts questioning the neutrality of the rules and procedures applied by the local authorities (Domenicus, 2014; 'Gouda krijgt Zwarte Pietagenten', 2014; Van der Wal, 2014; Verbogt, 2014). In the following

years, it happened repeatedly that pictures of officers dressed up as *Zwarte Piet* were shared by the police on their official social media accounts (see for example Berkelder, 2016a, 2016b; Kroezen, 2017; 'Rotterdamse politie verwijdert tweet', 2016). A recent example was the publication by the Arnhem police in 2017 of a photo of nine smiling *Zwarte Pieten* on Facebook, dressed up to participate in an event for children of the police workforce. After receiving criticism, the Arnhem police deleted the picture with the comment, 'in hindsight, it wasn't smart of us as the police to publish a photo on the basis of which you could infer that we would pick sides'<sup>48</sup> (Kroezen, 2017; see also 'Excuses politie Arnhem', 2017; 'Politie verwijdert 'onhandige' zwartepietenpost', 2017). As a news article stated dryly: 'according to the police, there were also two *blue Petes*, but those were apparently not featured in the picture'<sup>49</sup> ('Politie Arnhem', 2017). This example illustrates how questions around the neutrality of *Zwarte Piet* garb are now seen as legitimate enough to put the police in a position where they need to publicly reflect on their practices with regards to the figure. In some cases, this scrutiny and reflection has led to changes in policy, such as the Amsterdam police issuing a guideline to include *Pieten* of different colours in their events for personnel ('Politie Amsterdam', 2015; see also ('Politie mag niet', 2017). The debate around the police associating themselves with *Zwarte Piet* thus illustrates how the protest and the response to it has put the dominant enactment of the parade as a harmonious, innocent celebration in a different light, making visible the power relations which help reproduce the status quo as well as the possibility of change.

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48 Original Dutch text: 'Achteraf gezien is het niet handig geweest om als politie een foto te plaatsen waaruit je zou kunnen opmaken dat we partij zouden kiezen.'

49 Original Dutch text: 'Volgens de politie waren er ook twee blauwe pieten, maar die stonden blijkbaar niet op de foto.'

## 7.6 Conclusions

The 2014 national *Sinterklaas* parade in Gouda shows us that a major disruption of a dominant enactment can take place even while the preset programme is being carried out. The wizened *Sinterklaas*, energetic and comical *Pieten*, laughter and light-hearted tongue-in-cheek chats, the songs and the arrival of the fantasy figures on the balcony – all these crucial ingredients were there, in a setting supported by weighty symbols of power and respect. However, the juxtaposition of those ingredients with the protesters' presence and the police response to it placed the entire situation in a very different light. It called into question the authoritativeness of the dominant interaction logic by making it clear that there was no consensus within Dutch society on the appropriateness of the routine enactment of the parade with *Zwarte Pieten*. The struggle for assigning meaning to what happened went far beyond the time and place of the events, continuing in public debate and media to this day. For example, in 2018, the National Ombudsman published a report expressing concerns about the tendency to curb the right to protest, specifically in relation to *Zwarte Piet* and the *Sinterklaas* parades (Huisman, 2018; Nationale Ombudsman, 2018).

In this section, I recap the main conclusions from my analysis of the events and their discussion in the media to show how the demands made of the protesters to act in a more 'appropriate' way amounted to a silencing of the dissident voices. However, I also show that this silencing was neither absolute nor necessarily permanent. After all, the voicing of dissent, as well as the reproduction of the notions associated with the status quo, happened against changing cultural background texts, of which protests, including the events in Gouda, have now become an undeniable part.

Within the interaction logic enacted by the presenter and reporter of the *Sinterklaasjournaal*, the mayor, the *Sinterklaas* and *Pieten* and most of the audience, the parade was just another example of the well-known genre of the merry *Sinterklaas* parade, in which adults are united in sticking to the familiar repertoire in order to perform a happy, innocent fantasy for children. Disruptions of this enactment were either perceived as undeserving of serious consideration ('*gedoe*') or wicked and dangerous ('threat', 'unreasonable riots'). However, my dramaturgical analysis in the first part of this chapter shows how the events during the parade in Gouda in 2014 can be understood as enactments of competing interaction logics. The counterperformance by the protesters placed the reigning enactment of the parade against a cultural background text in which racial dynamics are centrally relevant. This made it possible to present the parade as yet another manifestation of the racism that Black people in various national contexts have historically struggled against. Within the counterpublic's interaction logic, the serious facial expressions, the T-shirts with slogans, the raised fists and the shouts of '*Amandla Awetu!*' made sense. The use of this repertoire of powerful gestures and words connected

to Black people's struggle against racism contributed to the presentation of their actions as belonging to this broader genre of protest rather than an isolated misfire or even abuse. Within the counterpublic's interaction logic, the police were positioned as acting unjustly. This positioning was reinforced by actions such as the questions addressed to the police officers by various protesters while the police moved in on the group and as people were grabbed and pushed or pulled away. Afriyie's cries of 'I can't breathe' established a powerful connection between his forceful arrest and the arrest and subsequent death of Eric Garner in the United States, thus placing his arrest within the genre of racist police brutality and discursively connecting the protest in Gouda with the international Black Lives Matter movement.

Against the background of the main interaction logic, however, the protests 'at a children's celebration' appeared highly inappropriate. The news that protesters would receive a stiff fine reinforced our criminalisation, positioning us as people who were out of line for having crossed borders of appropriate behaviour. In line with what happened during the 2013 public hearing (Chapter 5) and the 2014 *Keti Koti* gathering (Chapter 6), criticism towards the protesters tended to focus on the ways in which we had expressed our opinion rather than the opinion itself. As the mayor of Amsterdam had said: 'If you don't like *Zwarte Piet*, fine. But please let that be known at other times of the year rather than during the festivities'. However, positioning protesters as having acted infelicitously because of the manner of communication, necessarily entailed that the substance of their message was declared out of order too. In other words, it constituted a suppression of debate, cloaked as a guarantee of neutral interaction norms. The prevailing interaction logic, not only in Gouda itself but also in the subsequent events in the media, presented the use of a repertoire of 'grim' or defiant words, gestures or facial expressions as simply improper. Within this logic, protesting in ways that call into question the innocent and *gezellige* character of the 'children's celebration' by juxtaposing it with counterperformances is clearly inappropriate. Importantly, such judgement of protest as inappropriate renders invisible how such 'inappropriate' elements of communication, including gestures, facial expressions or timing, were interlinked with analyses and points of view and cannot be separated from those. The demand made of protesters to express opinions in more appropriate ways thus constituted a double bind: it was a contradictory request, the fulfilling of which was unrealisable in practice.

The activists' dissent did not make sense through the lens of the prevailing interaction logic. In Rancière's (1999) term, it was just 'noise'. In the terms used on the banner that was hung from the national theatre in Amsterdam the day after the parade in Gouda, it was even 'wild noise' ('wild geraas'). However, this is only the case if one accepts the premises of the principal interaction logic. And, although, the protesters were not able to turn their interaction logic into the dominant one on Gouda's Marktplaats, the disruptive actions as well as the response to them did call attention to the situatedness of the dominant

enactment of the parade and the notions of appropriateness that upheld it. Or, as one of the organisers of the protest summarised it in a conversation with me, paraphrasing a saying in Sranantongo, ‘all the rubbish came floating to the surface’<sup>50</sup> (Interview Miss Kitty, 2018). Even though, for many people, the confrontation on Gouda’s Marktplaats did the opposite of rousing sympathy for the protesters, it did call attention to the omissions within the dominant notions of the meaning of the parade, demanding attention for the fact that there is no consensus about the spectacle being fun or it being for ‘everyone in the Netherlands’. This struggle around notions of appropriateness and neutrality happened not only during the interaction as it took place. As many of my interviewees stressed, the way it was taken up in the media afterwards was crucial. Different media expressions contextualised (parts of) the interaction differently, retrospectively presenting them as fitting within different interaction logics. This discursive struggle is still ongoing: every year since 2014, the national *Sinterklaas* parade has been debated and scrutinised (inter) nationally. By now, a common point of departure in these debates is a recognition – sometimes in the form of a lamentation, sometimes in the form of an acclamation – that the *Sinterklaas* parades and the figure of *Zwarte Piet* have lost their aura of innocence. The fact that it has by now become common practice to discuss *Sinterklaas* parades – past, present and future ones – in relation to notions of racism, national identity and freedom of expression shows that ‘history’ exists by the grace of its construction by specific actors in the here and now rather than being equivalent to an objectively defined, immutable ‘past’.

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50 Original Dutch transcript: ‘alle troep is boven water komen drijven’.







# Part 4

CONCLUSIONS



# Chapter 8

Debating *Zwarte Piet*,  
negotiating Dutchness and racism



Black & brown activists have argued forever  
[that] calls for 'unity' without seriously  
engaging the reality of difference are really  
just a way of incorporating the people  
you actively oppress into frameworks that  
continue to oppress them. Ending racism is  
about transformation, not inclusion.

—Menon, 2016

## 8.1 Introduction

This study has shown how debates about the traditional winter holiday figure *Zwarte Piet* encompass much broader struggles and questions around national identity, belonging, history, power and 'race'. Detailed study of the 2013 public hearing, the 2014 *Keti Koti* ceremony and the 2014 *Sinterklaas* parade has taken us far beyond arguments about the acceptability of *Zwarte Piet*'s blackened face, red lips or curly wig. It brought into view how, by participating in these events, people enacted and challenged notions of who can speak with authority, about what topics, in what ways, and to what ends. I developed the interaction logic framework to analyse what is at stake in these struggles around interaction norms. Using disruptions of the flow of interactions as an entry point, my analysis of critical moments in the three case studies allows us to understand how the details of communication, which can easily go unnoticed, in fact structure the debate and determine what arguments can be voiced convincingly.

In this concluding chapter, I first look back on the insights gained from each of the three case studies. In Section 8.2 I then discuss the micro mechanisms of power involved in the disruption and reestablishment of dominant interaction norms. Each of these micro mechanisms is linked to one of the four aspects of the interaction logic framework. The following two sections discuss the relationship between the policing of form and content of the debate and the apparent paradox that change in the interaction norms regarding the debate about *Zwarte Piet* is observable over time, even though, within none of the case studies in the previous chapters, the people criticising *Zwarte Piet* managed to have the other actors endorse their point of view. In Section 8.5 I conclude by discussing the insights this study can offer to public debate in the Netherlands, arguing that controversies such as these can serve as opportunities for deepening our understanding and practices of democratic debate.

At first blush, the public hearing that took place on 17 October 2013 in Amsterdam was a harmonious and collaborative event on neutral terrain, in which it was reasonable to expect that people, as individuals, would display a willingness to seek solutions that would not cause discomfort to anyone. This notion was confirmed by key aspects of the physical and organisational situation, such as the orderly arrangement of the main conference room, with its oval table outfitted with a microphone for each of the officially recognised protagonists. Additionally, it was communicated by verbal as well as non-verbal cues given by the civil servants and the board members of the *Sinterklaas* committee, for example through friendly smiles and chuckles and the frequent use of words such as 'together', 'respect' and 'all of us'. As the chairperson said, calling attention to the overflow room that the municipality had provided: 'all of us together take this very seriously'. This predominant stockpile of terms, descriptions, figures of speech, gestures and other forms of communication, which I have called a *repertoire* in the interaction logic framework, lacked any mention of racial positioning.

However, the people who had come to express their criticism of the *Zwarte Piet* tradition used an altogether different repertoire. While they still behaved in ways that were recognisable as belonging within a public hearing as an event in which complaints are discussed – in this case, complaints against the granting of a permit for a parade including *Zwarte Piet* characters – the complainants and most of the audience challenged the notion of harmony being a central structuring element. By failing to comply with the reigning norms of interaction, they positioned themselves as what Asen (2000) has called a counterpublic. They drew on the physical and organisational setup of the hearing in ways that emphasised the relevance of difference and conflict, specifically calling attention to racial positioning. For instance, the overwhelming number of Black people in a space in which Whiteness tends to be the unremarkable, unquestioned norm provided a stark visual reminder of the significance of racial differences and thus constituted a silent counterweight to the reigning interaction logic in which ‘race’ was not constructed as a relevant category.

During the public hearing, challenges to this leading interaction logic were not explicitly opposed or prohibited. When, in the two dialogues that I studied in most depth, the chairperson cut the contributions of the complainants short or recommended they change their mindset, this was legitimised by invoking neutral procedures that were not so much about the content of what anyone was allowed to say, but about preserving a pleasant atmosphere and promoting cooperative attitudes. In light of the reigning interaction norms, making people uncomfortable appeared highly inappropriate, and the chairperson’s interruption of a complainant’s statement about the Shoah merely constituted an intervention to make sure an agreeable atmosphere could be preserved. However, by defiantly resuming his statement after having been interrupted by the chairperson, the complainant called into question what cultural background text was relevant to the situation at hand, and how different historical atrocities should figure within that. Similarly, when another of the complainants was asked how he felt about continuing talks with the mayor and responded that ‘the conversations ... have been ongoing since 1930’, the chairperson advised him to ‘take up the gauntlet’, since the conversations the complainant referred to had not been ‘with this mayor’. This response made sense within the established interaction logic since the complainant failed to comply with a crucial norm of cooperativeness: he did not exhibit an individual willingness to start afresh. However, within the alternative interaction logic, the complainant’s response made sense, too, since he drew upon notions of racism as institutional and historical continuities that are important in understanding the racialised dynamics of the debate. Attempts to alter the terms of the debate, which appeared as mere squabbles about norms of politeness and proper effort, thus actually constituted struggles to voice arguments regarding the lens through which we should look at history, whether racism needs to be understood as institutional and the ways in which racial and national identities intersect.

A similar struggle could be observed during the 2014 *Keti Koti* gathering on 1 July in a park in downtown Amsterdam. This commemoration of the abolition of slavery was invoked as a harmonious and ceremonial event by that year's host. The young Black activists who interrupted the programme literally and figuratively claimed a space by making use of a repertoire that roughly fitted within the genre of a public commemoration. They stood together solemnly, facing the audience, and delivered a speech. However, the way in which they enacted *Keti Koti* caused a disruption and shifted the meaning of the event by drawing on powerful symbols of difference and struggle specific to that setting. Their defiant stance, with fists raised, as well as their verbal invocation of the struggle of their ancestors, constituted a compelling enactment of historical continuity in part since it drew on the meaning and history of the nearby national monument symbolising the process of gaining freedom from slavery. That this happened only metres away from a group of people enacting the role of enslaved Africans, who solemnly walked forward and stood next to the protesters as these gave their unexpected speech, added to the weight of the moment. In this way, the activists' intervention temporarily converted the ground in front of the raised platform from a mere passage to the stage into a centrally important spot where those in a marginalised position speak truth to power about racism in Dutch society, of which *Zwarte Piet* served as an emblematic example. The heroism of freedom fights by ancestors of African descent was echoed by the dramaturgy of the bold interruption, which left the authority figures standing onstage looking on awkwardly from above. Eventually, the actors who played a role in the official programme deemphasised this visual contrast by stepping aside, thereby both literally and figuratively ceding space to the activists. It was thus by drawing on the symbolism as well as the physical distribution of the space that the disruption of the official programme was accomplished. Once the activists had left, the people associated with the official programme did not express disagreement with their message. Rather, they commented on the *way* the activists had *delivered* the message, which they characterised as an expression of 'the freedom that we celebrate' in 'one of the freest places in the world', although it needed to be 'properly channeled'.

How differently did a disruption of a public gathering play out during the national *Sinterklaas* parade in the city of Gouda later that year. There, the disruption by people who protested against the inclusion of *Zwarte Piet* characters in the parade was responded to by mass arrests and criminalisation. In this setting, the activists did not manage to successfully draw legitimacy from associating themselves with historical examples of Black-led anti-racist struggle or shared notions of the trauma of violence perpetrated on behalf of White powerholders. The activists' drawing of attention to the difference between their treatment and that of people welcoming *Sinterklaas* on the public square did not resonate sufficiently with the police or bystanders to cause a response in line with the activists' interaction logic. Neither did the anguished cries of 'I can't breathe'

by the activists' spokesperson, Jerry Afriyie, as he was forced to the ground by police. After all, within the prevailing logic structuring the interactions, the would-be protesters were unnecessarily disturbing a cosy – or, to use the Dutch word, *gezellige* – celebration. Activists campaigning for maintaining the figure of *Zwarte Piet* had been able to communicate their message by painting children's faces black and handing out flags, thus blending in seamlessly with the repertoire used in the overriding enactment of the *Sinterklaas* parade. However, the 'leftist and negroid' people campaigning for change stood out to police officers like a sore thumb, legitimising their removal and arrest. Analysis of the subsequent media coverage of the events showed that, also retrospectively, the interaction logic applied to the events positioned these activists as 'unreasonable', 'hooligans' and completely out of line. Seen in this light, removing the protesters from this public space while leaving the other visitors to their business of merrily joining the *Sinterklaas* spectacle was disconnected from any argumentation about *Zwarte Piet* or racism. It was simply a common-sense response triggered by inappropriate behaviour.

The third of the five subquestions of my research was 'In what ways do different institutional settings enable or constrain particular modes of interaction?' Contrasting the ways the three widely diverging institutional contexts – each manifested through its specific physical location, temporal organisation, an expected distribution of actors' rights and duties and so forth – enabled and hindered the challenging of the dominant interaction norms shows us that context matters a great deal for what can be said about *Zwarte Piet* with influence, and by whom. For instance, while Blackness could be drawn upon as a source of legitimacy for speaking out on racism during *Keti Koti*, and the presence of overwhelming numbers of Black people posited 'race' as an issue literally not to be overlooked during the public hearing, in Gouda protesters' Blackness informed officers' assessment of the situation as inappropriate. The debate about *Zwarte Piet* includes many different enactments of it, and taking into account how the various actors drew on the widely diverging physical and organisational situations at hand is essential for understanding how these struggles played out.

This is not to say that setting dictates interaction. While settings structure opportunities for communication, this communication, in turn, can shift the meaning of a setting by discursively connecting it with new notions and signs. By invoking specific symbols and concepts, which then become associated with the situation at hand, actors contest and shift the meaning of a setting. In the case of the public hearing and the *Keti Koti* gathering, the counterperformances were at least temporarily successful in altering the flow of the interaction and presenting as legitimate questions around intersections between national and racial identities; historical continuities in experiences of oppression and acts of resistance of enslaved Black people and their descendants; and institutional racism as a context in which to understand *Zwarte Piet*. The *Sinterklaas* parade, however, offered fewer opportunities to the protesters to shift the meaning of the setting in this



way. In fact, as the Municipality of Gouda noted afterwards, 'Gouda has organised ... a wonderful national *Sinterklaas* parade. ...many people have not noticed the arrests at all'<sup>1</sup> (College van Burgemeester en Wethouders Gouda, 2015, p. 1). Activists themselves confirmed this assessment. 'Ruben', for example, stated that the interaction in which he and other activists were involved 'took place on a stamp-sized space, so to say, in comparison to the rest of the crowd ... beyond that space, people did not even notice'<sup>2</sup> (Interview 'Ruben', 2018). In the remainder of this chapter, I reflect further upon the tension between mechanisms reproducing existing power relations in the *Zwarte Piet* debate on the one hand, and the counterpublic's push towards change on the other.

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1 Original Dutch text: 'Gouda heeft ... een geweldige landelijke Sinterklaasintocht neergezet. ... veel mensen hebben niets gemerkt van deze aanhoudingen.'

2 Original Dutch transcript: 'Dat van ons speelde zich af op een postzegel zeg maar, vergeleken met de rest van de mensenmassa ... daarbuiten hadden mensen het niet eens door.'

## 8.2 The micro mechanisms of curbing dissent

As I have discussed in Chapter 4, scholarship on discourse analysis as well as decolonial anti-racist academic work points to the importance of understanding the productive face of power in sustaining unequal racial relations, especially in a time when explicit racism is frowned upon. Drawing on these academic traditions, in this study I have analysed the assumptions structuring the flow of interactions in three pivotal events. Using the interaction logic framework with its four aspects<sup>3</sup> allowed me to dissect the dynamics and subtle mechanisms of disruption and of reinstatement of dominant interaction norms, thus answering the second subquestion: ‘What are recurrent patterns in the ways prevailing norms of interaction are contested, and in the responses to these challenges?’ Below, I discuss the micro mechanisms of power that contribute to reproducing a status quo when it comes to each of the four aspects of interaction logics: who should participate, what communication is appropriate, in what kinds of circumstances and towards what objective?

### Defining default identities

An analysis of the distribution of rights and duties to act in certain ways – in my conceptual vocabulary: actors’ positioning – informs us of the first aspect of an interaction logic: who should participate. In all three case studies, the overriding interaction logic foregrounded Dutchness as a centrally relevant identity category. The ways in which this was accomplished included emphasising the national character of the *Sinterklaas* tradition and putting forward the whole population of the Netherlands as stakeholders, with repeated explicit characterisations such as ‘all Dutch people’ and ‘Dutch society’. Specifically, this centrally important Dutchness was discursively connected with notions of harmony and unity, to which differences in racial positioning were not relevant. This connection was established through the use of positively phrased characterisations such as ‘one of the freest places in the world’ during *Keti Koti*, the repeated use of key phrases such as ‘together’ and ‘all of us’ during the public hearing and Gouda’s mayor bidding *Sinterklaas*, who was supposedly arriving from abroad, welcome on live national television while wearing his chain of office. This construction of Dutchness implied it was important to remain *gezellig* and cooperative, to be willing to enter into dialogue in ways that are ‘respectful’ and to not disturb the pleasant atmosphere of a public hearing, the ceremonial and harmonious character of a *Keti Koti* gathering or the *gezellige* ambiance of a *Sinterklaas* parade.

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3 Please see Chapter 2, page 51 for an overview of the interaction logic framework and its associated concepts.

This notion of a shared, harmonious Dutchness provided the overriding definition of the actors who were to participate in the interactions at hand, making it difficult to problematise the ways in which Dutchness intersected with membership of other collectivities. Emphasising office holders' personal willingness to enter into dialogue, or their personal discomfort at the Shoah being mentioned, thus functioned as a mechanism that limited discursive space for considering possible historical continuities in the racialised dynamics of interactions between those criticising *Zwarte Piet* and Dutch authorities. This dominant conceptualisation of Dutch identity reinforced Whiteness as what Garner (2007, p. 47) has called the 'Greenwich Mean Time of identit[ies]'. After all, promoting a pleasant atmosphere is not possible in abstract terms and does not happen in a vacuum. Rather, the case studies showed that it came down to prioritising the comfort and points of view of some over that of others, in ways that tended to follow racial fault lines. That the often friendly and subtle turns of phrase and use of symbols in these interactions can lead to very physical acts of boundary drawing between those who fit within this implicit idea of a default identity and those who do not was most clearly visible when the 'leftist and negroid' appearance of the would-be protesters in Gouda contributed to their removal and arrest. In contrast, the protesters at the 2014 *Keti Koti* gathering managed to successfully invoke their Blackness as a source of legitimacy. They created discursive space for an understanding of Dutchness as intersecting with racial identities. Although security personnel intervened when Afriyie stepped forward, they retreated as soon as it became clear that he was part of a larger group of people. The forcible removal of this group would have been impossible to accomplish rapidly or without causing a major disruption, which would have called to mind the disturbing and racially charged histories specific to that setting. Thus, the protesters managed to literally and figuratively claim a space to denounce institutional racism in a way that disrupted the harmonious dominant enactment of *Keti Koti*. This goes to show that there is no demarcation line between the discursive and the physical. Rather, they are co-constitutive, which means that the symbols and metaphors with which we construct the social world have powerful material consequences.

### **Tone policing**

When it comes to the aspect of the interaction logic that stipulates what type of communication is appropriate, the dominant interaction in all three case studies logic foregrounded harmony and unity. For example, in the principal enactments of the *Sinterklaas* parade, references to dissent were only made in a joking, tongue-in-cheek fashion. However, the protesters used harsh and explicit messages such as '*Zwarte Piet is racism*'. Their predominantly black clothing underlined the seriousness of these messages. This clashed with the cheerful demeanor of the rest of the crowd, in which the predominant enactment of the parade appeared natural and mere common sense. I

have used the term tone policing (cf. Bybee, 2016, pp. 15–20) for this delegitimisation of the counterpublic's contributions, based on the unseemliness of the tone in which they were delivered. In the case studies focusing on the public hearing and the *Sinterklaas* parade, actors associated with the dominant interaction logic explicitly stipulated in advance what behaviour would be appropriate. Such anticipatory ordering established a context in which it became possible to subsequently curb certain contributions to the interaction by referring to the breaking of allegedly neutral rules. Examples include the chairperson emphasising the importance of harmonious interaction 'so that we can simply do the hearing well together' and Gouda's mayor making it clear that he had assigned protesters a space outside the town centre. The counterpublic's mere presence on Gouda's market square thus positioned them as uncooperative and 'unreasonable'. In the case of the *Keti Koti* gathering, the stipulation of harmony and ceremoniousness as key norms of interaction was mostly accomplished implicitly, although the host did explicitly voice a wish that the 'beautiful' libation ritual at the beginning of the ceremony would 'set the tone' for the interactions to come. In all three case studies, the dominant interaction logic presented the use of a repertoire of 'grim', 'sharp' and otherwise disruptive words, gestures or facial expressions as improper, rendering invisible how these expressions necessarily constitute analyses and points of view and cannot be separated from those.

### **Context definition**

When it comes to the third aspect of interaction logics – defining the circumstances that provide the necessary context for acts to be carried out successfully – we have seen that, at various times, dissent was constructed as unsuitable due to being expressed at the wrong time and in the wrong place. More specifically, these mechanisms of context definition established what kind of situation the actors found themselves in: a 'children's celebration', 'one of the freest places in the world' or a harmonious and pleasant public hearing. As my analysis has shown, such context definition of an interaction as falling into a particular genre has implications for the other aspects of the interaction logic, such as the type of communication that is allowed or the physical objects that count as acceptable to bring into the situation. For example, within the prevailing interaction logic on the day of the parade in Gouda, it made sense to follow the mayor's instructions about staging protests outside the town centre. After all, according to this interaction logic, the parade is a friendly festivity, merely aimed at pleasing children. Juxtaposing it with performances of dissent would not be appropriate. The 'Proud of *Piet*' protesters, however, managed to introduce elements of their protest repertoire into the leading enactment of the parade, since the flags they handed out and the faces they had painted black were not considered inappropriate signifiers of a contested point of view in the town centre, but rather fitted in seamlessly with the behaviour and appearance of the crowd.

Similarly, tension ensued when the counterpublic enacted the public hearing as a setting for confrontation and the speaking of difficult truths, and when the young activists enacted *Keti Koti* as an occasion that demanded an emphasis on the defiance of Black people against White structures of power rather than as a celebration of the end to unfortunate suffering. The ways in which these different understandings were enacted were often subtle. The instances I have discussed in the three previous chapters include colour and style of dress, choice of words, gestures and facial expressions. Yet, these aspects of people's communication discursively connected the situation at hand to concepts that cast doubt on the prevailing notions structuring the interaction, such as the idea of harmony being of paramount importance in the public hearing, or the routine association of the *Sinterklaas* parade with innocence.

### **Delegitimising extreme positions**

When it comes to the fourth aspect of an interaction logic – the question of the goal towards which the interaction should be geared – we have seen that argumentations based on the horseshoe theory present straying from received wisdom as inappropriate, since 'extreme' views are necessarily suspect. This type of argumentation pivoting around the inappropriateness of 'extremes' presents received wisdom as sensible by definition, removing from view its supporting notions and the fact that it is equally as constructed as its alternatives. Obvious examples are the chairperson's exhortations to move towards a 'middle ground' and avoid 'the most extreme comparisons,' but more implicit and subtle references to the desirability of embracing moderation also contributed to a dominant interaction logic in which continuing friendly conversations was a prime goal to be pursued. Similarly, the dismissal of dissent as *gedoe* – or, in English, 'some trouble' – during the *Sinterklaas* parade, and the repeated rejection of 'extremists on both sides' afterwards, constructed the counterpublic's ideas as nonsense while, at the same time, avoiding engagement with the actual content of these ideas. The question whether extreme positions are acceptable removes from scrutiny the standard against which some contributions to the debate appear 'extreme.' For instance, this resulted in a struggle over whether or not it was acceptable to draw an analogy between transatlantic slavery on the one hand, and the 'most extreme' historical atrocity on the other. However, in what ways and in whose eyes the Shoah might be more terrible than other historical atrocities, whether it makes sense at all to rank atrocities in this way, and who is to decide about this, are all issues that remained out of focus. As one of the complainants in the public hearing emphasised in a conversation with me (Interview Schor, 2018), what is thus most important to realise about these mechanisms of delegitimation of extreme positions is thus what they focus attention *away* from.

By tracing how the success of specific enactments of the public hearing, *Keti Koti* and the *Sinterklaas* parade are linked to particular viewpoints on Dutch (colonial) histories, particular notions of national and racial identities and particular understandings of

racism, this study reveals ostensibly common-sense interaction norms as mechanisms for the active reproduction of a status quo, involving situated constructions and omissions. Each of the micro mechanisms is primarily connected to one of the four aspects of the reigning interaction logic, and thus deviations from these norms are easily responded to as misfires or abuses, to use the Austinian terms, rather than as arguments to be considered.

As discussed in Chapter 4, decolonial and critical race scholarship on issues around 'race' and racism in the Netherlands have highlighted the currency of a 'power-evasive' discourse in the Netherlands, linked to notions of the Netherlands as a progressive and 'innocent' nation (see for example Carr, 1997; Frankenberg, 1993; Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Hondius, 2014; Van Reekum, 2014; Weiner, 2014; Wekker, 2016). This study offers a contribution to this scholarship by tracing how, in the public debate about *Zwarte Piet*, notions of Dutchness and of racism are reproduced and challenged through the often subtle details of communication, thus offering insights in what is at stake in these discussions.

### 8.3 Feel free to participate, but please don't be disruptive

Ostensibly, objections against the protesters focused on the *ways in which* they had expressed their opinion rather than on the *content* of their argument. The responses to counterperformances, which I have parsed out according to the four aspects of interaction logics, each had the effect of making dissent appear as a violation of common-sense interaction norms. Consequently, the resulting contention was understood as an instance of inappropriate timing or behaviour – ‘please, not here, not now’; ‘hooligans’ – rather than expressions of fundamental differences of opinion demanding examination or rebuttal. As the chairperson of the public hearing argued, ‘I don’t judge the content’<sup>4</sup> (Interview chairperson, 2018). However, my analysis using the interaction logic framework has shown that branding protesters as out of line based on their style of communicating amounted to declaring the content of their message out of order as well. By examining ostensibly ‘normal’ and ‘natural’ notions of appropriateness, I was able to trace how these imply specific meanings of Dutchness, specific ways of viewing history and specific understandings of racism – thus answering the first subquestion of my research, ‘What understandings of racism and collective identity are articulated in public discussions around *Zwarte Piet*?’

Throughout the three case studies, when racism was referred to at all within the prevailing interaction logic, this was within an understanding that foregrounded the personal sphere and people’s intentions, attitudes and emotions, with considerations regarding institutional reproduction of racial inequality taking a back seat. Within this interaction logic, people at the receiving end of racism tended to be positioned as victims of the misguided ideas of individuals. Comparatively, the counterpublic’s conceptualisation of racism gave more attention to the institutional provenance of such specific instances of racist behaviour, discussing racial issues as relevant to broader societal and historical patterns. This involved highlighting not only the oppression of Black people and other people of colour, but also placing under scrutiny the usually unmarked practices and ways of viewing the world associated with Whiteness as a racially dominant position. When it comes to Dutchness, the conceptualisation connected to the main interaction logic was that of a national belonging in relation to which racial positioning is best left unmentioned. This conceptualisation competed with a more complex understanding of Dutchness as a category that intersects with racial positioning. This latter emphasis on racial fault lines foregrounded racial identity and positioning as highly relevant for understanding people’s attitudes and their interconnectedness with others. This implied both a reclaiming of Dutchness for Black people and critique of the

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4 Original Dutch transcript: ‘Ik oordeel niet over de inhoud’.

ways in which Dutch national identity is interwoven with Whiteness as an ostensibly neutral and innocent norm. Both the themes of racism and identity were interlinked with competing representations of history. In the case studies on the public hearing and *Keti Koti*, the reigning interaction logic included an emphasis on differences between past and present when it came to racism, connected to a responsibility of actors to start afresh. In the case study of the *Sinterklaas* parade in Gouda, racism simply did not figure as a relevant notion in the dominant enactment of the parade. However, in all three cases, the counterpublic's conceptualisation of history highlighted historical continuities in the experiences and struggles of people who are part of racially defined groups, thus providing crucial background texts informing the present-day attitudes and behaviour of both the activists and the people they interact with. In this conceptualisation, prominent historical continuities are to be found in the struggle of enslaved people and their descendants against dominant notions of appropriateness, such as ideas regarding *Zwarte Piet*, or regarding the marking of 1863/1873 as the end of slavery. Since these competing notions of racism, identity and history were connected with different views about proper behaviour within the interaction at hand, demands to behave more 'appropriately' were tantamount to a suppression of the counterpublic's point of view. The recurring reassurance that everyone was free to express themselves, granted they did so in an appropriate fashion, thus constituted a double bind as it amounted to 'voice your concern, but on terms that do not allow for formulating the type of argument you are making'.



## 8.4 Understanding change over time: intertextuality and shifts of meaning

How is it possible that, over time, the counterpublic's challenges to the reigning interaction logic still bore fruit even though, in none of the three interactions I studied, the counterpublic's way of expressing their opinion became the dominant interaction logic? The struggle around criticism of *Zwarte Piet* involved advancing a specific understanding of the interactions at hand by discursively connecting them with other events. As the three case studies showed, actors' repertoires included gestures, words and dress items that called into mind other interactions or accounts of history. This included relatively subtle and matter-of-fact communication, such as the wearing of pins and caps asserting 1873 as the year marking the abolition of slavery in the Dutch Kingdom, and a complainant informing the chairperson of the public hearing that conversations about *Zwarte Piet* 'have been ongoing since 1930'. It also included more evidently dramatic interactions such as Afriyie's anguished cries of 'I can't breathe' as he was put in a chokehold, in a scene eerily reminiscent of the deadly and highly debated arrest of Eric Garner in the United States only months earlier, as well as the violent arrest and death of Mitch Henriquez in The Hague the following year. Both these occurrences have sparked protest under the slogan 'Black Lives Matter'. In many cases, the claims implied in these intertextual references were countered by a reassertion of the dominant interaction logic. At the public hearing, an insistence on the neutrality of procedures played a key role in this; during *Keti Koti*, this happened through a process of suppression by inclusion; and, at the *Sinterklaas* parade, this was accomplished through the criminalisation of the protesters. However, I have shown how the discursive manoeuvring – accomplished verbally, spatially or otherwise – that happened in response to the challenge to the dominant interaction logic had the side effect of laying bare the situatedness of the status quo. My analysis of these developments thus corresponds to the fourth subquestion, 'Are there changes over time concerning norms of interaction in public discussion around *Zwarte Piet*, and how can these be understood in relation to the understandings of racism and collective identities that are articulated in those discussion?'

For example, while the violent removal of protesters at *Sinterklaas* parades made sense when one understands the parade as essentially an innocent and merry festivity for all Dutch children, an ironic effect of these arrests is that they put into question this very construction of the parade as *gezellig*, illustrating how suppression of alternative points of view is part and parcel of the reproduction of the status quo. My analysis of the Gouda parade as a media event shows that the violent enforcement of behaviour in line with the dominant interaction logic had, in the long term, the effect of associating the parade with conflict and racial fault lines, thus putting centre stage some of the issues that the activists had attempted to raise. This shift was not only observable in the discussion of

the *Sinterklaas* parades that took place in the years since the 2014 parade. Over time, it became evident in the interaction logic that was retroactively applied to the events in Gouda as well. The moments of tension, mass arrests and public outcry have become part of the cultural background texts against which parades – past and present – are now understood, thus troubling the previously dominant notions of innocent, *gezellige* parades.

The enactments of defiance and the responses to disruptions thus became building blocks for further counterperformances criticising *Zwarte Piet*. This was illustrated by the protesters' speech during *Keti Koti*, which called into mind 'years of protest, demonstrations and dialogue', and by the ways in which the 2014 *Sinterklaas* parade became part of activists' accounts regarding the need for further protest. As an activist told me, the collaboration between different groups for the protest during the 2014 *Keti Koti* was what these to keep working together and form the Kick Out *Zwarte Piet* alliance' (Interview Mitchell, 2016). This shows how enactments of challenge to the status quo can serve as powerful elements in the discursive construction of demarcation lines identifying shared characteristics and goals between groups. The protests thus far may not have succeeded in eliminating the *Zwarte Piet* figure from public life, but they have led to a change from *Zwarte Piet* as a private problem of mostly Black people to *Zwarte Piet* as a political problem involving a range of positions on what would be the best way forward. In the course of a few years, it has become widely seen as a matter of conflict and controversy in the arena of public action, with various agencies and movements attempting to work towards what they saw as an adequate resolution (cf. Gusfield, 1981, pp. 4–5). Importantly, the debate has also contributed to putting on the agenda broader issues around history, Dutchness and racism – whether or not in relation to *Zwarte Piet*. As Afriyie (2018; see also Zeefuik, 2018) recently put it, in a sense the struggle 'is not about *Zwarte Piet*. Of course. ... The idea that you need to have been born and raised here and need to have White skin in order to denounce injustice in the country, is taking things too far for me. I'll be "not *gezellig*" if that's what it takes'.<sup>5</sup>

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5 Original Dutch text: 'Het gaat niet over zwarte piet. Uiteraard. Het idee dat je hier geboren en getogen moet zijn én een witte huidskleur moet hebben om je uit te kunnen spreken over misstanden in het land, gaat mij een stapje te ver. Dan ben ik maar 'ongezellig'.

## 8.5 Concluding remarks

My study of struggle around *Zwarte Piet* in a variety of institutional contexts has provided a window into the multilayeredness of this conflict, showing that ostensibly neutral interaction norms for debate about the topic are enmeshed with specific notions of history, racism and national belonging and identity. What position does one need to have in order to speak with authority? In what ways does one need to dress or speak? The competing logics of interaction imply different constructions of the boundaries outside of which someone's behaviour appears inappropriate. As Oksala (2015, p. 475) argues, 'being a subject, a socially recognized individual with intelligible intentions, desires, and actions, is only possible within the power/knowledge networks of a society'. In other words, criticising *Zwarte Piet* as involving racism implies a larger task: presenting as intelligible and legitimate the broader notions in relation to which such a position about *Zwarte Piet* would make sense at all.

But, while the case studies show that this is a daunting task indeed, there is another way of understanding this inherent tension. The debate about *Zwarte Piet* provides opportunities for deepening practices of democratic debate since it facilitates scrutiny of notions and 'sedimented hegemonic practices' (Mouffe, 2008) that might otherwise seem so common-sense as to appear immutable. Recognising as constructed a social reality that may be as familiar to us as water is to fish is a first step to reaching what Hannah Arendt calls an 'enlarged mentality' (Arendt, 1968; see also Moynagh, 1997). Reaching an enlarged mentality involves two stages: a prereflective and a reflective one. The first one can be characterised as 'knowing of' and the second as 'knowing'. In this sense, public debate, such as the debate about *Zwarte Piet*, can serve two goals: making visible omissions or silences, and showing the ways in which our normative stances are informed by our position in society. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, a vibrant democracy 'requires more than open and vigorous talk; it requires also a willingness to scrutinize and possibly alter the norms of appropriate talk' (Polletta & Lee, 2006, p. 720). The protest against *Zwarte Piet* constitutes an opportunity to expand practices and notions of democratic debate in the Netherlands, as well as for critical reflection on important themes. The debate about *Zwarte Piet* formed an arena for problematising the common notion of racism as primarily related to individual attitudes and interpersonal dynamics, and as external to Dutch identity. Instead, counterpublics asserted a notion of racism as institutional, historically rooted and intimately connected with reigning ideas of Dutchness. In turn, this problematisation of Dutchness and the ways it intersects with racial identities allowed for a visibilisation of Whiteness as a racial position that functions as the 'Greenwich Mean Time of identity' (Garner, 2007, p. 47).

This study thus suggests that we would do well to engage with the content of disruptive contributions to public debate, rather than simply branding counterpublics' behaviour as inappropriate and out of place. For this reason, the relatively widespread condemnation of some of the counterprotests by pro-*Piet* activists that took place at

various 2018 *Sinterklaas* parades should be viewed with caution. Where these disapproving responses to protesters who want *Zwarte Piet* to remain black were accomplished by simply referring to persons or behaviour as ‘uncivilised’, ‘racist’ or ‘hooligans’, they reproduced the effect of removing from scrutiny the norms against which these protests were implicitly measured. In other words, the importance of parsing out the implications of someone’s communication, rather than simply sticking a label on it, goes for counterpublics regardless of their political ideology. For example, one could look at pro-*Piet* protesters and argue that organising a demonstration in which people blacken their faces and dress up as *Zwarte Piet* is best viewed as the expression of a political point of view. I would agree with such argumentation. The communicative acts I just mentioned *are* in fact best understood as expressions of specific points of view. As such, I would argue that people who wish to deepen democracy should engage them as such – as political statements. Rather than blanket refusals or acceptance of certain types of communication depending on whether at first sight they strike us as ‘appropriate’, it is useful to make this reasoning explicit and place under scrutiny the standards according to which specific communicative acts are either or not permissible.

My point is as such not that counterpublics necessarily occupy a more ‘authentic’ or morally superior position. My point is that, when conventions of communication associated with a specific group are taken as standards of appropriateness, this removes the underlying differences of viewpoint from scrutiny. It renders invisible the constructions that make it possible to differentiate between the ‘capable’ and the ‘incapable’, or the ‘reasonable’ and the ‘unreasonable’. This closes important avenues for public debates. Yet, such debates are crucial for making informed decisions about the ways our societies deal with the fundamental tension between principles of liberty and of equality. Since no neutral standards are available to us, decisions regarding these matters are fundamentally political and should be placed under scrutiny as such. The communicative act, as well as the response to it, implies specific notions of collective identity, of racism and of the historical background that can usefully inform our understanding of what is at stake. Rather than depoliticising these notions, I argue that placing them under scrutiny offers a better chance at deepening our understanding and strengthening our practices of democratic debate.

For many, *Zwarte Piet* is a symbol – of racism, of *gezelligness* or of a national identity under siege. Criticism of the figure has so powerfully touched a nerve that the *Zwarte Piet* debate now serves as a prism, gathering and refracting a number of central issues in Dutch society around belonging, identity and racism. As this study has shown, criticism of *Zwarte Piet* has had this profoundly disruptive effect because it necessarily involved upsetting the discursive order in which the figure is embedded. The struggle has been so significant that, over the years, the *Zwarte Piet* debate *itself* has become a symbol for certain types of controversies, and is by now often mentioned in public debate about a host of issues – from

the former Dutch colonial rule of what is now Indonesia, to prominent Dutch historical figures such as Michiel de Ruyter, to LGBTIQ+ rights and gender inclusive language – as a shorthand to refer to minorities’ communication of their points of view upsetting a previously taken-for-granted status quo. That the debate has taken on this additional significance adds to the urgency of understanding and documenting its dynamics. As a society, we have much to gain from understanding how and why the changes I have traced in the previous chapters were not won by merely observing unexamined standards of politeness. They required active resistance. Especially since harmony, tolerance and avoidance of ‘extremes’ are recurrent notions structuring debates about racism and making up the dominant Dutch self-image, it is important to keep a clear view of the struggles involved in the *Zwarte Piet* debate as it develops. And, if one of the lessons of the *Zwarte Piet* debate is that discursive space is needed to acknowledge the multiplicities of history, this also goes for the histories of this particular debate.





# Part 5

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# Appendix 2

Index of abbreviations



## Index of abbreviations

ACOM	Adviescommissie Onderzoek Minderheden
AD	Algemeen Dagblad
APA	American Psychological Association
ANP	Algemeen Nederlands Persbureau
CBS	Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek
CCCS	Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies
CRES	Center for Race and Ethnic Studies
EFA	European Free Alliance
IDFA	International Documentary Festival Amsterdam
IMISCOE	International Migration, Integration and Social Cohesion in Europe
KNIL	Koninklijk Nederlandsch Indisch Leger
KOZP	Kick Out Zwarte Piet
LGBTIQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer
LOM	Landelijk Overleg Minderheden
LPF	Lijst Pim Fortuyn
LPS	Landelijk Platform Slavernijverleden
NiNsee	Nationaal Instituut Nederlands Slavernijverleden en Erfenis
NIOD	Nederlands Instituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie
NOS	Nederlandse Omroep Stichting
NUC	New Urban Collective
OM	Openbaar Ministerie
PVV	Partij voor de Vrijheid
RMO	Raad voor Maatschappelijke Ontwikkeling
RVS	Raad voor Volksgezondheid en Samenleving
SCP	Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau
SER	Sociaal-Economische Raad
VIE	Centrum voor Volkscultuur en Immaterieel Erfgoed
VVD	Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie
WRR	Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid
ZPN	Zwarte Piet Niet





# Appendix 3

Research material





## Videos

The analysis of all three case studies is based primarily upon videos. Most of these are publicly available online; additionally, video material was put at my disposal for research purposes by a broadcasting company, and I have gathered audiovisual material myself at some of the events that I attended.

Number	Reference information	Length	Publicly available
<b>Public hearing, 17 October 2013 Amsterdam</b>			
1	AT5. (2013, October 17). Live broadcast of public hearing. Video material made available to me for research purposes.	01.26.22	-
<b>Further court procedures</b>			
2	AT5. (2014, May 22). Raw footage of court hearing. Video material made available to me for research purposes.	02.22.24	-
3	AT5. (2014, June 3). Raw footage of the verdict of the Amsterdam court. Video material made available to me for research purposes.	00.21.02	-
4	AT5. (2014, October 16). Raw footage of the state court hearing. Made available to me for research purposes.	49.57.09	-
<b>Keti Koti, 1 July 2014 Amsterdam</b>			
5	AT5. (2014, July 3). <i>Slavernijherdenking verstoord door protest</i> [Video file]. Retrieved from <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UaAZWElyvq6U&amp;index=12&amp;list=WL">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UaAZWElyvq6U&amp;index=12&amp;list=WL</a>	00.02.20	✓
6	AT5. (2014). Raw footage of <i>Keti Koti</i> ceremony on July 1, 2014. Video material made available to me for research purposes.	00.26.04	-
7	MsBronwater. (2014, July 1). <i>Protest bij herdenking slavernijverleden Oosterpark Amsterdam</i> (Full Length Version) [Video file]. Retrieved from <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kAIXG8ojvCE">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kAIXG8ojvCE</a>	00.05.37	✓
8	New Urban Collective. (2014, July 2). <i>'Genoeg = Genoeg, wij eisen respect' - 141/151 Keti Koti 1 juli 2014 protest speech @ Oosterpark</i> [Video file]. Retrieved from <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BX3N5ICuj8k&amp;t=55s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BX3N5ICuj8k&amp;t=55s</a>	00.05.50	✓
9	Patrick Mathurin. (2014, July 2). <i>Speech Asscher Keti Koti 2014 - Deel 1</i> [Video file]. Retrieved from <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GKYI5uPhBQo">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GKYI5uPhBQo</a>	00.00.30	✓
10	Patrick Mathurin. (2014, July 2). <i>Speech Asscher Keti Koti 2014 - Deel 2</i> [Video file]. Retrieved from <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-U7QCgbgPKc">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-U7QCgbgPKc</a>	00.03.36	✓
11	Patrick Mathurin. (2014, July 2). <i>Lodewijk Asscher onderbroken op Keti Koti 2014</i> [Video file]. Retrieved from <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OrEUH9z4_14">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OrEUH9z4_14</a>	00.05.56	✓

12	Patrick Mathurin. (2014, July 4). <i>Marian Markelo na speech 'genoeg is genoeg'</i> [Video file]. Retrieved from <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9sjjsWHQSYQ">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9sjjsWHQSYQ</a>	00.02.11	✓
13	Schols, H. (2014, July 1). Own video of activities in <i>Boni-Tula</i> tent during <i>Keti Koti</i> festival.	01.16.58	-
<b>Keti Koti, 1 July 2015 Amsterdam</b>			
14	AT5. (2015, July 1). Live broadcast of <i>Keti Koti</i> ceremony and additional audiovisual material of the <i>Keti Koti</i> festival. Made available to me by AT5 for research purposes.	01.31.05	-
15	Schols, H. (2015, July 1). Own video of <i>Keti Koti</i> ceremony, Oosterpark, Amsterdam	01.10.01	-
16	Schols, H. (2015, July 1). Own video of <i>Keti Koti</i> festival activities, Museumplein, Amsterdam	00.46.10	-
<b>Keti Koti, 30 June 2015 Amsterdam</b>			
17	AT5 (2016, June 30). <i>Nationale herdenking slavernijverleden 2016</i> [Video file]. Retrieved from <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4euyGghalI&amp;t=502s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4euyGghalI&amp;t=502s</a>	02.42.23	✓
18	NOS. (2016, June 30). <i>Herdenking slavernijverleden</i> . [Video file]. Retrieved from <a href="https://www.npostart.nl/nos-herdenking-slavernijverleden/30-06-2016/POW_03234198">https://www.npostart.nl/nos-herdenking-slavernijverleden/30-06-2016/POW_03234198</a>	00.29.47	✓
19	Schols, H. (2016, June 30). Own video of the <i>Keti Koti</i> ceremony and protest [filmed at my request by another observer]. Oosterpark, Amsterdam	01.20.45	-
<b>Sinterklaas parade, 15 November 2014 Gouda</b>			
20	GeenStijl. (2014, November 15). <i>GSTV. VanLeeuwen aan het front van de Sintoct</i> [Video file]. Retrieved from <a href="https://www.geenstijl.nl/4203541/gstv_vanleeuwen_in_de_loopgrav/">https://www.geenstijl.nl/4203541/gstv_vanleeuwen_in_de_loopgrav/</a>	00.05.46	✓
21	Kevin. P. Roberson. (2014, November 20). <i>Intocht Gouda verstoord door politie en rechts extremisten</i> [Video file]. Retrieved from <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xROSIRG6UVo&amp;t=311s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xROSIRG6UVo&amp;t=311s</a>	00.13.49	✓
22	Kevin. P. Roberson. (2014, November 24). <i>Dutch Sinterklaas parade disrupted by police and right extremists</i> [Video file]. Retrieved from <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GhjG7zuI_oJo">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GhjG7zuI_oJo</a>	00.08.53	✓
23	MailOnline. (2014, November 15). <i>Angry scenes at arrival Black Pete yuletide character</i> [Video file]. Retrieved from <a href="https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2836013/Police-arrest-60-protesters-Dutch-Christmas-festival-disturbances-traditional-Black-Pete-clowns-blacked-faces.html#v-3893390268001">https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2836013/Police-arrest-60-protesters-Dutch-Christmas-festival-disturbances-traditional-Black-Pete-clowns-blacked-faces.html#v-3893390268001</a>	00.01.53	✓
24	NTR. (2014, 15 November). <i>Intocht Sinterklaas 2014</i> [Video file]. Retrieved from <a href="https://www.npostart.nl/intocht-sinterklaas-2014/15-11-2014/VPWON_1221938">https://www.npostart.nl/intocht-sinterklaas-2014/15-11-2014/VPWON_1221938</a>	01.12.13	✓

25	Omroep Powned. (2014, November 17). <i>De intocht in gouda verliep bepaald niet vlekkeloos</i> [Video file]. Retrieved from <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5daWAmQ2UUI&amp;t=122s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5daWAmQ2UUI&amp;t=122s</a>	00.03.49	✓
26	Piet Zwart. (2014, November 15). <i>Mislukkelingen verzieken Sinterklaasintoct Gouda</i> [Video file]. Retrieved from <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3DYRNi9Hr_I&amp;t=61s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3DYRNi9Hr_I&amp;t=61s</a>	00.11.34	✓
27	ralph wagemakers. (2014, November 15). <i>Waar is ons feest</i> [Video file]. Retrieved from <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UoNgwWUwUQk">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UoNgwWUwUQk</a>	00.02.38	✓
28	Riemer Kramer. (2014, November 16). <i>Over de ruggen van de kinderen. Aankomst Sinterklaas 2014</i> [Video file]. Retrieved from <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NHTyflE1eo&amp;t=15s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NHTyflE1eo&amp;t=15s</a>	00.09.47	✓
29	RTV Gouwestad. (2014, November 18). <i>Intocht Sinterklaas Gouda 2014</i> [Video file]. Retrieved from <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xmQ6prVPAqE&amp;t=11s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xmQ6prVPAqE&amp;t=11s</a>	00.05.44	✓
30	Schols. H. (2014, November 15). Own video of arrest of various persons	00.01.1	-
31	Zoomin.tv Nederland. (2014, November 15). <i>Ongeregelgheden bij Sinterklaasintoct Gouda</i> [Video file]. Retrieved from <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fnBtXVVbjDM">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fnBtXVVbjDM</a>	00.01.11	✓
32	Zoomin.tv Nederland. (2014, November 15). <i>Sinterklaas merkt niks van onrust tijdens intoct</i> [Video file]. Retrieved from <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vpf2IyZFYi4">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vpf2IyZFYi4</a>	00.01.10	✓

## Interviews

Interview number	Name	Position	Year of interview	Cited in chapter
1	Anonymous	Politician, Amsterdam	2014	-
2	Anonymous	Activist	2014	-
3	Anonymous	Activist	2014	-
4	Q. Gario	Complainant in public hearing	2014	5
5	Anonymous	Civil servant, Amsterdam	2014	-
6	Anonymous	Activist	2015	-
7	Anonymous	Activist	2015	-
8	J. Afriyie	Co-founder and co-organiser KOZP	2016	6
9	Mitchell	Co-founder and co-organiser KOZP	2016	6,8
10			2018	6
11	Miss Kitty	Former co- organiser KOZP	2018	7
12	'Ruben'	Activist	2018	8
13	Ewout	Activist	2018	7
14	P. Schor	Complainant in public hearing	2018	5
15	R. Osterwald	Chairperson public hearing	2018	5
16	M. Markelo	Winti priestess, board member NiNsee	2018	6

## Observed events

The list below contains events that I observed and participated in as part of my fieldwork.

	<b>Event</b>	<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Locality</b>	<b>Date</b>
1	Public hearing	Amsterdam municipality	Amsterdam	17.10.2013
2	Demonstration against <i>Zwarte Piet</i>	ZPN	Amsterdam	16.11.2013
3	Protest at national <i>Sinterklaas</i> parade	ZPN	Amsterdam	17.11.2013
4	Presentation and discussion about <i>Zwarte Piet</i> , during a meeting for civil servants	Amsterdam municipality	Amsterdam	2013.12.17
5	Anti-racism demonstration	Comité 21 maart	Amsterdam	22.03.2014
6	Van Zwarte Piet tot de Bosman-wet: Perspectieven in de strijd tegen racisme. Public debate during Marxism Festival	Internationale Socialisten	Amsterdam	03.05.2014
7	<i>Memre Waka</i> : Start <i>Keti Koti</i> month, including speeches at mayor's residence	NiNsee	Amsterdam	01.06.2014
8	Public debate in Boni-Tula tent at <i>Keti Koti</i> festival	Various activists and groups	Amsterdam	01.07.2014
9	Verdict Court about permit for <i>Sinterklaas</i> parade in Amsterdam	Amsterdam court	Amsterdam	03.07.2014
10	How Far How Near – Opening exposition. Including performance 'A village called Gario' by Quinsy Gario	Stedelijk Museum	Amsterdam	18.09.2014
11	Anti-racism demonstration	Comité Samen Tegen Racisme	The Hague	20.09.2014
12	Hearing regarding complaint about <i>Zwarte Piet</i> in primary schools	College voor de rechten van de Mens	Utrecht	15.10.2014
13	Municipal dialogue evening about <i>Zwarte Piet</i>	Utrecht in Dialoog	Utrecht	15.10.2014
14	Hearing at the State Court	State Court	The Hague	16.10.2014
15	Public debate Haarlem 'De toekomst van Zwarte Piet'	De Pletterij, Wijnand Stomp	Haarlem	22.10.2014
16	Het Grote Racisme Debat	R'dam Talks/Denken over Links	Rotterdam	23.10.2014
17	Demonstration '5 december voor iedereen'	Utrecht in Actie	Utrecht	01.11.2014
18	Conference 'Moving traditions: The story of Zwarte Piet'	Amsterdam United, Graduate School of Social Sciences	Amsterdam	05.11.2014
19	Pronunciation verdict in case about permit for 2013 <i>Sinterklaas</i> parade in Amsterdam	State Court	Amsterdam	12.11.2014
20	Protest at national <i>Sinterklaas</i> parade	KOZP	Gouda	15.11.2014

	<b>Event</b>	<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Locality</b>	<b>Date</b>
21	Anti- <i>Zwarte Piet</i> demonstration	KOZP	Amsterdam	16.11.2014
22	Premiere screening and Q&A documentary <i>Wit is ook een kleur</i> at IDFA festival	IDFA	Amsterdam	27.11.2014
23-33	Closed meetings between activists engaging in struggle against <i>Zwarte Piet</i>	Various activist groups	Amsterdam	2014–2016
34	Demonstration against film <i>Michiel de Ruyter</i>	Actiegroep Michiel de Rover	Amsterdam	26.01.2015
35	Demonstration 'Samen tegen racisme en Islamofobie'	Comité 21 maart	Amsterdam	21.03.2015
36	De burgerrechtenbeweging in Hollywood – Reflecties op <i>Selma</i> , by Mitchell Esajas. Presentation as part of the Marxism Festival	Internationale Socialisten	Amsterdam	17.05.2015
37	<i>Memre Waka</i> : start <i>Keti Koti</i> month, including speeches at mayor's residence	NiNsee	Amsterdam	01.06.2015
38	Dialogue about labour market discrimination Afro-Caribbean youth with Deputy Prime Minister Lodewijk Asscher	IZI Solutions	Amsterdam	24.08.2015
39	<i>Keti Koti</i> festival, including programme in Boni–Tula tent	NiNsee	Amsterdam	01.07.2015
40	Protest at national <i>Sinterklaas</i> parade	KOZP	Meppel	14.11.2015
41	Nederlands slavernijverleden: Van excuses tot herstel. Lecture by Kenneth Donau as part of the Marcism Festival	Internationale Socialisten	Amsterdam	21.05.2016
42	Book launch: 'White Innocence' by Gloria Wekker	Tropenmuseum	Amsterdam	27.05.2016
43	<i>Keti Koti</i> ceremony (attended at my request by another observer)	NiNsee	Amsterdam	30.06.2016
44	Court hearing Jerry Afriyie	Court The Hague	The Hague	22.09.2016
45	Protest at <i>Sinterklaas</i> parade	KOZP	Rotterdam	12.11.2016
46	Presentations and discussion 'Stadsgevoel 2: Het nationaal monument slavernijverleden'	Imagine IC	Amsterdam	20.06.2017
47	Debate 'Skin Deep' about skin colour, racism and inequality	Rode Hoed	Amsterdam	13.03.2018
48	<i>Keti Koti</i> ceremony	NiNsee	Amsterdam	01.06.2018
49	<i>Keti Koti</i> festival, including programme in Boni–Tula tent	NiNsee	Amsterdam	01.07.2018







# Summaries

English summary

Nederlandse samenvatting





## Summary in English

This thesis is about the controversy surrounding a Dutch winter holiday tradition involving the figure of *Zwarte Piet* or 'Black Pete'. Typically, this figure is enacted by White people using black face paint and black, curly wigs. While some protest against the figure as a racist 'blackface' character has existed for at least eight decades, most of this went unnoticed by the wider Dutch public, who experience the tradition as *gezellig*. The word *gezellig* roughly means 'cosy' or 'merry', but is often said to be untranslatable as it conveys a uniquely Dutch notion. An outburst of public debate in the early 2010s suddenly and rapidly shifted the dynamics of contestation around *Zwarte Piet*, turning it into a political problem. At first sight, the controversy revolves around disagreement regarding the acceptability of the *Zwarte Piet* figure. This thesis explores how people's participation in the debate can also be viewed as affirmations, claims or propositions about who is allowed to have a say about this, what kinds of arguments are legitimate and how and where the discussion should take place. Through a detailed analysis of interactions in three widely diverging institutional contexts, this study shows how debates about the traditional winter holiday figure *Zwarte Piet* encompass much broader struggles and questions around national identity, belonging, history, power and 'race'.

The first chapter offers an overview of the *Zwarte Piet* debate, giving an impression of the increasing intensity of the discussion, the high stakes and sometimes contradictory developments. In the second chapter, I develop the framework of 'interaction logic' as a tool for analysing how norms of discussion are connected to wider societal power inequalities and their repercussions in concrete interactions. I draw on political theoretical work about the role of public debate in a democratic society, and the challenges posed by power differences. Specifically, I build on scholarship that grants a central role to issues of inequality and contention. An important concept in this regard is the idea of 'counterpublics' challenging dominant viewpoints. Crucially, the 'counter' in counterpublics does not refer to specific persons, topics or places, but rather to the ways people contribute to an interaction. As such, my analysis of interactions focuses on alternative norms and practices of communication, and how these enable the recognition and articulation of exclusion. A central insight from this scholarship is that counterpublics attempting to challenge dominant meanings cannot do this within an 'ideal speech situation' from which inequalities are bracketed. After all, the networks of meaning that make up our social worlds extend into the contexts in which interactions between counterpublics and dominant groups take place, resulting in an uneven playing field. Communicating a stance in a way that is intelligible and legitimate within the status quo while, at the same time, challenging that status quo, is a conundrum. The debate about *Zwarte Piet* provides an excellent opportunity to explore how this type of conundrum plays out within the context of debates about racism in contemporary Dutch society.

My approach is multiperspectival, as I combine the above with more applied concepts and methods from the research traditions of ethnomethodology, conversation analysis and dramaturgical analysis. This means I focus on the ‘action orientation’ of discourse: I am not concerned with asserting the truth value of statements, but with understanding what social worlds are created through language. I make use of a broad definition of symbolic communication, using ‘performance’ to refer to a variety of ways in which people communicate, including non-verbal communication such as the type of clothing people wear, their facial expressions or how they move through a space.

In the third chapter, I discuss the process by which I have conducted my research. The first part of this chapter contains methodological reflections on the research project, which is characterised by a social constructionist, critical and interpretive point of departure. The second part of the chapter is dedicated to a discussion of my gathering and analysis of empirical data, which consisted primarily of video material, complemented by documents, interviews and fieldwork. Throughout the research process, I have engaged with the ethical implications of my work, striving to make sure my research does not only comply with standards of quality in a narrow academic sense, but is also ethically sound in the sense that it is respectful of the people and issues that are involved. The last section of this chapter is dedicated to bringing together and elaborating on these considerations.

Chapter 4 provides a more solid background to debates about racism in the Dutch context. This chapter contains two parts. I start by discussing how issues of racism and exclusion have historically been understood in Dutch society. Then, I position my approach to these topics in relation to various bodies of scholarship, developed over the course of more than a century. I situate myself within the current of research aiming to deconstruct ostensibly ‘normal’ and ‘natural’ dominant practices and ideas of ‘race’ and racism by building on the insights of critical race studies and decolonial scholarship. These research traditions point to the importance of understanding the productive face of power in sustaining unequal racial relations, especially in a time when explicit racism is frowned upon.

Having established the historical, theoretical and methodological context, the next three chapters contain the case studies that form the heart of this book. Critical moments form my analytical entry point into understanding the dynamics of contention in the *Zwarte Piet* debate. Such moments, in which the expected flow of an interaction is disrupted, can offer a view on interaction norms that otherwise remain below the surface. Using the interaction logic framework, I trace the boundaries that people enforce or contest during such disruptions in three pivotal events. A 2013 public hearing about the permissibility of the *Zwarte Piet* figure, explicitly designed to be neutral and non-partisan, forms the context of the interactions that I discuss in Chapter 5. The next chapter focuses on a disruption of the 2014 national *Keti Koti* gathering in Amsterdam, an event which traditionally commemorates and celebrates the abolition of slavery. The third case study

takes a close look at the 2014 national *Sinterklaas* parade in the town of Gouda, where protest was responded to with dozens of arrests and immense media attention. In each of these three case studies, I dissect what norms of appropriateness define how people should act within that situation, and how these norms help or hinder addressing *Zwarte Piet* as an issue in relation to racism. By examining seemingly 'normal' and 'natural' notions of appropriateness, I trace how these imply specific understandings of Dutchness, history and racism. Throughout the three case studies, when racism was referred to at all within the prevailing interaction logic, this was within an understanding that foregrounded the personal sphere and people's intentions, attitudes and emotions, with considerations regarding the institutional reproduction of racial inequality taking a back seat. Within this interaction logic, people at the receiving end of racism tended to be positioned as victims of the misguided ideas of individuals. Comparatively, the counterpublics' conceptualisation of racism gave more attention to the institutional provenance of such specific instances of racist behaviour, discussing racial issues as relevant to broader societal and historical patterns. This involved highlighting not only the oppression of Black people and other people of colour, but also the placing under scrutiny of the usually unmarked practices and ways of viewing the world associated with Whiteness as a racially dominant position. When it comes to Dutchness, the conceptualisation connected to the main interaction logics was that of a national belonging in relation to which racial positioning was best left unmentioned. This conceptualisation competed with a more complex, alternative understanding of Dutchness as a category that intersects with racial positioning. This latter emphasis on racial fault lines foregrounded racial identity and positioning as highly relevant for understanding people's attitudes and their interconnectedness with others. This implied both a reclaiming of Dutchness for Black people and critique of the ways in which Dutch national identity is interwoven with Whiteness as an ostensibly neutral and innocent norm. Both the themes of racism and identity were interlinked with competing representations of history. The dominant understandings of history put forward in the first two case studies highlighted differences between a past in which inequalities played a larger role, and a present characterised by freedom and opportunities. In the third case study focusing on the *Sinterklaas* parade, dominant understandings of the past construct it as primarily *gezellig* good old times without unwelcome racial tension. In contrast, in all three cases, the counterpublic's conceptualisation of history highlighted historical continuities in the experiences and struggles of people who are part of racially defined groups, thus providing crucial background texts informing the present-day attitudes and behaviour of both the counterpublics and the people acting according to the dominant interaction logic.

In the concluding chapter, I discuss four micro mechanisms of power involved in the reestablishment of dominant interaction norms, following a disruption: defining default identities, tone policing, context definition and delegitimising extreme positions.

Each of these micro mechanisms is linked to one of the aspects of the interaction logic framework. In this final chapter, I also discuss the relationship between the policing of form and content of the debate. At first blush, objections against those criticising *Zwarte Piet* focused on the *ways in which* they had expressed their opinion rather than on the *content* of their argument. The responses to counterperformances had the effect of making dissent appear as a violation of common-sense interaction norms rather than expressions of fundamental differences of opinion demanding examination or rebuttal. However, my analysis using the interaction logic framework shows that branding protesters as out of line based on their style of communicating amounted to declaring the content of their message out of order as well. The recurring reassurance that everyone was free to express themselves, granted they did so in an appropriate fashion, thus constituted a double bind as it amounted to 'voice your concern, but on terms that do not allow for formulating the type of argument you are making'. However, over time, change is observable in the interaction norms regarding the debate about *Zwarte Piet*. This seems paradoxical since, within none of the case studies, the people criticising *Zwarte Piet* managed to have the other actors endorse their point of view. I explain this by demonstrating that the enactments of defiance and the responses to disruptions became part of the 'background text' against which the *Zwarte Piet* debate is viewed. As such, they provided discursive building blocks for further counterperformances criticising the tradition.

My study of struggle around *Zwarte Piet* in a variety of institutional contexts thus offers a window into the layeredness of this conflict, showing that ostensibly neutral interaction norms for debate about the topic are enmeshed with specific notions of history, racism and national belonging and identity. This means that criticising *Zwarte Piet* as involving racism implies a larger task: presenting as intelligible and legitimate the broader notions in relation to which such a position about *Zwarte Piet* would make sense. But, while the case studies show that this is a daunting task indeed, there is another way of understanding this inherent tension. I contend that the protest against *Zwarte Piet* constitutes an opportunity to make better-informed decisions about the ways our societies deal with the fundamental tension between principles of liberty and of equality. Since no neutral standards are available to us, decisions regarding these matters are fundamentally political and should be placed under scrutiny as such. The debate about *Zwarte Piet* can facilitate examination of dominant notions and practices that might otherwise seem so common sense as to appear immutable. Rather than depoliticising such notions, I argue that closely examining them offers a better chance at deepening our understanding and strengthening our practices of democratic debate.



## Nederlandse samenvatting

Dit proefschrift gaat over de controverse rond de Nederlandse traditie van de figuur Zwarte Piet. Hoewel er al zeker acht decennia geïnteressaard wordt tegen Zwarte Piet als racistische ‘blackface’-figuur, bleef deze kritiek vaak onopgemerkt bij het grootste deel van het Nederlandse publiek. De meeste mensen vinden de traditie gezellig – een woord dat vaak onvertaalbaar wordt genoemd omdat het een uniek Nederlands begrip zou uitdrukken. Een uitbarsting van publiek debat in het begin van de jaren 2010 heeft de dynamiek van het debat rond Zwarte Piet plotseling en snel veranderd, waardoor het een politiek probleem werd. Op het eerste gezicht draait de controverse om meningsverschillen over de aanvaardbaarheid van de figuur Zwarte Piet. In dit proefschrift wordt onderzocht hoe de deelname van mensen aan het debat ook kan worden gezien als bevestigingen, claims of stellingen over wie hier iets over mag zeggen, welke argumenten legitiem zijn en hoe en waar deze discussie moet plaatsvinden. Aan de hand van een gedetailleerde analyse van interacties in drie heel verschillende institutionele contexten laat dit onderzoek zien hoe debat over Zwarte Piet veel bredere strijd en vragen omvat rond nationale identiteit, geschiedenis, macht en ‘ras’.

In het eerste hoofdstuk staat een overzicht van het Zwarte Piet-debat, en het geeft een indruk van de toenemende intensiteit van de discussie, de hoge inzet en soms tegenstrijdige ontwikkelingen. In het tweede hoofdstuk ontwikkel ik het analytisch kader van de ‘interactiologica’. Dit is een manier om te onderzoeken hoe discussienormen zich verhouden tot grotere maatschappelijke machtsongelijkheden en welke gevolgen dat heeft in concrete interacties. Ik put hiervoor uit politiek-theoretisch werk over de rol van publiek debat in een democratische samenleving, en de uitdagingen die machtsverschillen met zich meebrengen. Daarbij bouw ik specifiek voort op auteurs die een centrale rol geven aan ongelijkheid en conflict. Een belangrijk concept hierbij is het idee van *counterpublics* of ‘tegenpublieken’ die dominante standpunten aan de kaak stellen. Cruciaal is dat ‘tegen’ in tegenpublieken niet verwijst naar specifieke personen, onderwerpen of plaatsen, maar naar de manier waarop mensen bijdragen aan een interactie. Mijn analyse van interacties richt zich dan ook op alternatieve communicatienormen en -praktijken, en hoe die de herkenning en articulatie van uitsluiting mogelijk maken. Een centraal inzicht uit deze academische stroming is dat tegenpublieken – in dit proefschrift voornamelijk de mensen die zich uitspreken tegen Zwarte Piet – die dominante betekenissen proberen te bevragen, dit niet kunnen doen binnen een ‘ideale spraaksituatie’: een situatie zonder ongelijkheden. De netwerken van betekenis die onze sociale werelden vormen, strekken zich namelijk uit tot de contexten waarin interacties tussen tegenpublieken en dominante groepen plaatsvinden. Het gevolg is een ongelijk speelveld. Het communiceren van een standpunt op een manier die binnen de status quo begrijpelijk en legitiem is en tegelijkertijd diezelfde

status quo ter discussie stelt, lijkt een paradoxale opgave. Het debat over Zwarte Piet biedt een uitgelezen kans om te onderzoeken hoe deze paradox in de praktijk uitpakt in de context van publiek debat over racisme in het Nederland van nu.

Mijn aanpak behelst verschillende perspectieven, omdat ik het bovenstaande combineer met meer toegepaste concepten en methoden uit de onderzoekstradities van etnomethodologie, gespreksanalyse en dramaturgische analyse. Dit betekent dat ik me richt op de 'actiegerichtheid' van een vertoog: Het gaat mij er niet om te bepalen of wat iemand zegt ook 'waar' is, maar om te begrijpen welke sociale werelden door middel van taal worden gecreëerd. Ik maak gebruik van een brede definitie van symbolische communicatie, waarbij het concept 'performance' verwijst naar verschillende manieren waarop mensen met anderen communiceren. Hier valt ook non-verbale communicatie onder, zoals het type kleding dat mensen dragen, hun gezichtsuitdrukkingen of hoe ze zich door een ruimte bewegen.

In het derde hoofdstuk bespreek ik hoe ik mijn onderzoek heb uitgevoerd. Het eerste deel van dit hoofdstuk bestaat uit methodologische reflecties op het onderzoeksproject, dat zich kenmerkt door een sociaal-constructief, kritisch en interpretatief uitgangspunt. Het tweede deel van het hoofdstuk behandelt het verzamelen en analyseren van empirische data. Dit was voor het grootste deel videomateriaal, aangevuld met documenten, interviews en veldwerk. Tijdens het hele onderzoeksproces heb ik me beziggehouden met de ethische aspecten van mijn werk, waarbij ik ervoor probeerde te zorgen dat mijn onderzoek niet alleen voldoet aan nauw gedefinieerde ethische kwaliteitsnormen, maar ook ethisch verantwoord is: respectvol naar de mensen en kwesties die erbij betrokken zijn. Het laatste deel van dit hoofdstuk wijd ik aan het samenbrengen en uitwerken van deze ethische overwegingen.

Hoofdstuk 4 biedt een gedegener achtergrond van debatten over racisme in de Nederlandse context. Dit hoofdstuk bestaat uit twee delen. Ik behandel eerst de geschiedenis van de manier waarop racisme en uitsluiting in de Nederlandse samenleving worden begrepen. Vervolgens bespreek ik mijn benadering van deze onderwerpen tegenover verschillende wetenschappelijke benaderingen, ontwikkeld in de loop van meer dan een eeuw. Ik plaats mezelf daarbij binnen de stroming die ogenschijnlijk 'normale' en 'natuurlijke' dominante praktijken en ideeën van 'ras' en racisme wil deconstrueren door voort te bouwen op de inzichten van *critical race studies* en dekoloniale benaderingen. Deze onderzoekstradities wijzen op het belang van het begrijpen van het productieve aspect van macht, in tegenstelling tot een begrip van macht als onderdrukking, bij het in stand houden van ongelijke rassenverhoudingen. Juist in een tijd waarin expliciet racisme wordt afgekeurd, is dit belangrijk.

Na de historische, theoretische en methodologische context te hebben besproken, staan in de volgende drie hoofdstukken de casestudy's die de kern van dit boek vormen. Kritieke momenten zijn mijn analytisch uitgangspunt om de dynamiek in het Zwarte

Piet-debat te begrijpen. Zulke momenten, waarin het verwachte ritme van een interactie wordt verstoord, kunnen een blik bieden op interactienormen die anders onder de oppervlakte blijven. Aan de hand van het analytisch kader van de interactiologica ga ik in drie centrale praktijkvoorbeelden op zoek naar de grenzen die mensen tijdens zulke verstoringen behouden of bevechten. Een openbare hoorzitting in 2013 over de toelaatbaarheid van Zwarte Piet, speciaal ontworpen als neutraal en onpartijdig, vormt de context van de interacties die ik in hoofdstuk 5 bespreek. Het volgende hoofdstuk gaat over een verstoring van de nationale *Keti Koti*-bijeenkomst in Amsterdam in 2014, een evenement waar traditioneel de afschaffing van de slavernij wordt herdacht en gevierd. De derde casestudy gaat in op de nationale Sinterklaasintocht van 2014 in Gouda, waar op protest werd gereageerd met tientallen arrestaties en enorme media-aandacht. In elk van deze drie casestudy's ontleed ik welke normen bepalen hoe mensen zich in die situatie moeten gedragen en hoe deze normen het mogelijk of juist onmogelijk maken om Zwarte Piet te bekritisieren als racistisch. Aan de hand van ogenschijnlijk 'normale' en 'natuurlijke' ideeën van wat gepast is, herleid ik hoe deze ideeën specifieke opvattingen over Nederlandschap, geschiedenis en racisme impliceren. In de drie casestudy's geldt dat, wanneer racisme überhaupt binnen interactiologica van de dominante groep werd genoemd, dit gebeurde op een manier die de intenties, houdingen en emoties van mensen op de voorgrond plaatste. Overwegingen die gaan over de institutionele reproductie van racisme en ongelijkheid speelden hierbij een ondergeschikte rol. Binnen deze interactiologica werden mensen die racisme ondergaan vaak gepositioneerd als slachtoffers van de misplaatste ideeën van individuen. De tegenpublieken besteedden in hun conceptualisering van racisme juist meer aandacht aan de institutionele herkomst van zulke specifieke gevallen van racistisch gedrag. Ze bespraken raciale kwesties als relevant voor bredere maatschappelijke en historische patronen. Er werd niet alleen de nadruk gelegd op de onderdrukking van Zwarte<sup>1</sup> mensen en andere mensen van kleur, maar ook op het onder de loep nemen van de gewoonlijk onopvallende praktijken en zienswijzen die worden geassocieerd met Witheid als een raciaal dominante positie. Wat Nederlandschap betreft, was de conceptualisering die samenhangt met de dominante interactiologica die van nationale saamhorigheid, waarbij de raciale positionering onvermeld bleef. Dit idee stond tegenover een complexer, alternatief begrip van Nederlandschap als een categorie die overlapt met raciale positioneringen. Deze laatste nadruk op raciale breuklijnen benadrukte raciale identiteit en positionering als belangrijk voor het begrijpen van de houding van mensen en hun verbondenheid met anderen. Dit hield zowel het claimen van Nederlandschap voor Zwarte mensen in, als kritiek op de manier waarop de Nederlandse nationale identiteit verweven is

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1 Wanneer ik Zwart en Wit met een hoofdletter schrijf, is dit om te benadrukken dat ik niet verwijst naar kleuren (als in 'een witte kat') maar naar ideeën over 'ras' en raciale identiteit.

met Witheid als een ogenschijnlijk neutrale en onschuldige norm. Beide thema's van racisme en identiteit waren verbonden met verschillende ideeën over geschiedenis. De dominante historische opvattingen die in de eerste twee casestudy's naar voren kwamen, benadrukten de verschillen tussen een verleden waarin ongelijkheden een grotere rol speelden en een heden dat zich kenmerkt door vrijheid en kansen. In de derde casestudy, over de Sinterklaasintocht, construeren dominante opvattingen over het verleden de intocht als iets wat hoort bij een gezellige goede oude tijd zonder ongewenste raciale spanningen. In alle drie de casestudy's legde de conceptualisering van de geschiedenis door het tegenpubliek juist de nadruk op een historische lijn in de ervaringen en de strijd van raciaal gedefinieerde groepen. Deze alternatieve definitie van geschiedenis maakte het mogelijk ook de hedendaagse houding van mensen en hun gedrag op een andere manier te duiden. Dit gold zowel voor de houding en het gedrag van de tegenpublieken als die van de mensen die handelden volgens de dominante interactiologica.

In het afsluitende hoofdstuk bespreek ik vier micromechanismen van macht die een rol spelen bij het herstel van dominante interactienormen na een verstoring: het definiëren van standaard-identiteiten, het bewaken van de 'juiste' toon, contextdefinitie en het delegitimeren van extreme posities. Elk van deze micromechanismen is gekoppeld aan één van de vier dimensies van het analytisch kader van de interactiologica. In dit laatste hoofdstuk bespreek ik ook de relatie tussen het bepalen van de vorm en van de inhoud van het debat. De bezwaren tegen de critici van Zwarte Piet waren vooral gericht op de manier waarop ze hun mening hadden geuit, in plaats van op de inhoud van hun argumentatie. Door de reacties op protest leek het of protesteerdere eerder verstandige interactienormen hadden genegeerd, dan fundamentele meningsverschillen hadden geuit die om onderzoek of weerlegging vroegen. Mijn analyse aan de hand van het kader van de interactiologica laat echter zien dat het buiten de orde plaatsen van protesteerdere op basis van hun stijl van communiceren, ook neerkwam op het buiten de orde plaatsen van de inhoud van hun boodschap. De steeds terugkerende geruststelling dat het iedereen vrijstond zich uit te spreken, als dit maar op gepaste wijze gebeurde, vormde dus een 'dubbele binding', omdat het neerkwam op 'je mag best kritiek uiten, maar alleen onder voorwaarden waarbinnen jouw type argument niet geformuleerd kan worden'. In de loop van de tijd is echter een verandering te zien in de interactienormen die in het debat over Zwarte Piet worden gehanteerd. Dat lijkt paradoxaal, want in geen van de casestudy's is het de critici van Zwarte Piet gelukt om de andere partijen te laten instemmen met hun standpunt. Ik verklaar dit door aan te tonen dat de uitingen van verzet en de reacties op verstoringen onderdeel zijn geworden van de 'culturele achtergrondtekst' waartegen het Zwarte Piet-debat wordt bekeken. Daarmee leverden ze discursieve bouwstenen voor het verder bekritisieren van de traditie.

Mijn onderzoek naar de strijd rond Zwarte Piet in verschillende institutionele contexten biedt zo een blik op de gelaagdheid van dit conflict, waaruit blijkt dat ogenschijnlijk neutrale interactienormen voor het debat over het onderwerp verstrengeld

zijn met specifieke opvattingen over geschiedenis, racisme en nationale verbondenheid en identiteit. Dat betekent dat het bekritisieren van Zwarte Piet als racistisch een grotere taak met zich meebrengt: het als begrijpelijk en legitiem presenteren van de bredere ideeën waarin zo'n stellingname over Zwarte Piet zinnig is. De casestudy's laten zien dat dit een enorme onderneming is. Maar er is ook een andere manier om dit spanningsveld tussen de status quo en vernieuwing te benaderen. Ik betoog dat de onenigheid over Zwarte Piet gelegenheid biedt om beter gefundeerde beslissingen te nemen over de manier waarop onze samenlevingen omgaan met de fundamentele spanning tussen principes van vrijheid en gelijkheid. Omdat we hiervoor niet over neutrale normen beschikken, zijn besluiten over deze zaken wezenlijk politiek van aard. Ze verdienen het dus om als zodanig onder de loep worden genomen. Het debat over Zwarte Piet kan het mogelijk maken om dominante begrippen en praktijken te onderzoeken die anders vanzelfsprekend en onveranderlijk lijken. In plaats van deze te depolitiseren, stel ik dat juist kritische bestudering een betere kans biedt om ons begrip en onze praktijken van democratisch debat te verdiepen en te versterken.





This study concerns itself with the controversy surrounding the Dutch winter holiday tradition *Sinterklaas*, which involves the figure of *Zwarte Piet* or ‘Black Pete’. At first glance, the struggle revolves around whether or not *Zwarte Piet* is a racist ‘blackface’ character. However, this thesis explores how people’s participation in the debate can also be viewed as affirmations, claims or propositions about the norms of discussion themselves – who is allowed to have a say, what kinds of arguments are legitimate and how and where should the discussion take place?

Through a detailed analysis of interactions in three widely diverging institutional contexts, the author traces how ostensibly neutral interaction norms for debate about the topic imply specific understandings of history, racism and national belonging and identity that go beyond the question whether or not the holiday tradition carries any racist elements. This reveals how protest against the figure of *Zwarte Piet* can function as an opportunity to deepen the understanding and expand the practices of democratic debate in the Netherlands.