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“No more blackface!”
How Can We Get People to Change Their Minds About *Zwarte Piet*?

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When Sinterklaas arrives in the Netherlands in December, he is accompanied by Zwarte Pieten made up in blackface, with afro wigs and bright red lips. Zwarte Piet, translated as “Black Pete,” has created growing controversy as a hurtful, racist caricature. Increasing voices demand change, but most of the population is opposed to altering the tradition. One way forward is to examine attitude change, and gain insight into how we can facilitate this process. This paper introduces the topic and reviews recent academic work on the controversy. Then, using autoethnographic vignettes (Humphreys, 2005), we explore our experiences with the tradition, weaving our stories together in relation to personal history, awareness, and attitude change. We provide an international perspective, as Renata is a Dutch/Cape Verdean woman born and raised in the Netherlands, and Janelle is a white woman, born and raised in Minnesota, who has lived in the Netherlands for 16 years. This approach allowed us to write together from an insider/outsider perspective (Zempi & Awan, 2017). Our stories depict attitude change from distinctive starting points, and by sharing them we hope to shed light on how attitude change can occur in relation to Zwarte Piet and broader social injustice issues.

Keywords: Attitude Change | Zwarte Piet | Racism | Social Injustice

Each year on the 5th of December, *Sinterklaas* arrives in the Netherlands in a steamboat, to great fanfare. He transfers to a horse, and roams the streets accompanied by his loyal servant, *Zwarte Piet*. Translated as Black Pete, *Zwarte Piet*'s appearance is often shocking to outsiders, as he is “dressed like a renaissance minstrel: black face, painted red lips, afro wig” (Jabbar, 2012, para. 2). *Sinterklaas* waves regally from atop his white horse, while scores of *Zwarte Pieten* throw candy to the crowds, behave like clowns and perform various antics.

The tradition is beloved by many, but not all. Starting in the 1960s, people began protesting against *Zwarte Piet* and the characteristics they found offensive. Around this time, many black immigrants from the Caribbean colonies began settling in the Netherlands, and their welcome was tarnished by the Dutch comparing their appearance with *Zwarte Piet*'s (Duurvoort, 2014; Rocha, 2015).

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As the years went on, some of the most dramatic characteristics disappeared, but protests increased, as did the backlash from the mainstream (Tharoor, 2014). In 2013, the United Nation’s Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent (WGPAD) concluded that *Zwarte Piet* was racist: “The character and image of Black Pete perpetuates a stereotyped image of African people and people of African descent as second-class citizens, fostering an underlying sense of inferiority within Dutch society and stirring racial differences as well as racism” (Millington, 2013, para. 10). Geert Wilders, an anti-immigrant populist whose party came in second in the 2017 Dutch elections, tweeted that he would rather eliminate the UN than *Zwarte Piet* (“Is Zwarte Piet Racism?”, 2013). Dutch citizens spoke up in the international press: for example, Harriet Duurvoort wrote a piece in the New York Times about her attitude change toward the tradition (Duurvoort, 2014).

Despite some positive modifications (Geurts, 2016) the majority of the country is still pushing back. In late 2016, a video of Sylvana Simons, a famous TV-presenter-turned-politician went viral: It pictured her face super-imposed on the hanged bodies of victims of a lynching. This was the backlash after she began speaking out against racism in the Netherlands, including the use of *Zwarte Piet* (Holligan, 2016). The foundation *Nederland Wordt Beter* (The Netherlands Is Getting Better) recently filed a case against broadcaster NTR, town halls and retailers like Hema, Blokker and Albert Heijn for using *Zwarte Piet* to sell merchandise or in broadcasting (Pieters, 2017). In June 2017, an Amsterdam court ruled that companies cannot be prosecuted for their use of *Zwarte Piet* (Pieters, 2017). Changes aren’t fast enough for opponents, and the debate has certainly revealed an ugly underbelly of Dutch nationalism and racism in a country known for its tolerance.

Academic research has also tackled the issue. Scholars have approached the topic from a variety of theoretical and methodological perspectives. Why does this tradition persist in the Netherlands, even as blackface is considered taboo in most other Western societies? Helsloot (2012) used the concept of cultural aphasia to analyze an incident related to the arrest of *Zwarte Piet* activists, where two black Dutchmen were arrested for wearing a t-shirt with the message “*Zwarte Piet* is racism”. Cultural aphasia is a “cultural ‘inability to recognize things in the world and assign proper names to them’, especially in matters relating to the colonial past in Western societies” (Helsloot, 2012, p. 1). Using this concept, Helsloot (2012) argues that when people criticize or question the existence of *Zwarte Piet*, their position is perceived as an attack on Dutch national identity. Using a distinctive but related theoretical approach, van der Pijl and Goulordava (2014) argue that the tradition of *Zwarte Piet* is a “white Dutch habitus” that ignores or denies a colonialist history of slavery in the Netherlands. Drawing on a theoretical framework of heritage and cultural contestation, Rodenberg and Wagenaar (2016) reconstruct *Zwarte Piet* narratives related to appearance and identity, producing rich descriptions such as the “pan-European and pre-Christian celebration” narrative (p. 720-721) and the “feast for children” narrative (p. 722).

Another strand of literature has tackled media representations of *Zwarte Piet* as well as social media responses from supporters and opponents to the tradition. In terms of more traditional media, Wouters (2014) looked at how the Dutch media play a role in Dutch identity and the discourse about *Zwarte Piet*. In particular, she analyzed articles in three Dutch newspapers: *NRC*, *Het Parool* and the *Limburgs Dagblad*. Starting with the commonly held assumption that the Netherlands sees itself as highly tolerant of public

discourse, her analysis showed how *Zwarte Piet* opponents critique this supposed tolerance and employ intertextuality to resist the tradition (Wouters, 2014).

Researchers have also focused on the popularity of social media in understanding the issue, with a particular interest in how Facebook has mediated the discussion. Examining discussions on three Facebook pages popular in the debate, namely, *Pietitie*, *Zwarte Piet is Racisme*, and *Anouk*. van Es, Van Geenen & Boeschoten (2014) found that Facebook discussions can widely diverge per page, resulting in distinct spaces of participation. Hilhorst & Hermes (2016) qualitatively analyzed pro-*Zwarte Piet* posts on Facebook to expose a growing nationalism and an exclusion of non-white Dutch sentiment. In essence, they found “the passionate defence of national heritage appears to be built on a sense of [White] suffering, which simultaneously excludes the possibility of non-White suffering” (Hilhorst & Hermes, 2016, p. 218).

In a broader effort, a team of academics and media practitioners created a mainstream glossy that aimed to explain and depict how the tradition is changing and can still change. The team did this via interviews with well-known Dutch people who are against the tradition and descriptions of many projects ranging from educational to media to commercial initiatives (Awad et al., 2015).

All of these efforts have supported the cause, but the most difficult challenge is, and still remains: *How can we get people to change their minds about Zwarte Piet?* This is the question we address in this paper, which utilizes autoethnography as an alternative approach to gaining insight into how to reach the most difficult to convince: Those who grew up with a nostalgic impression of *Zwarte Piet*. The next section details how autoethnography addresses this gap in existing literature.

Method

Academic research has brought insight but Dutch society seems deadlocked on this topic. For us, a positive way forward is to better understand how people change their minds about this issue, and gain insight into how we can facilitate this process in others. We have chosen to take a less traditional approach to exploring the topic, turning to autoethnography, and in particular, co-constructed autoethnographic vignettes, to add our voices to the discussion.

Autoethnography “seeks to describe and systematically analyze (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*)” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p. 1). Autoethnography represents both a research method and a way of writing, and can therefore be seen as both process and product. Autoethnographic texts should demonstrate knowledge of past research and a desire to contribute to furthering this existing knowledge, but it also aims to create a reciprocal relationship with its audience in order to compel a response (Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2016). This is also referred to as evocative autoethnography, an attempt to “form a personal connection between author and audience, which is rare in academic prose” (Bochner & Ellis, 2016, p. 81).

For our focus on *Zwarte Piet*, autoethnography allows us to incorporate our own experiences with the tradition and simultaneously draw on the insights we’ve gained in conducting research on the topic. Autoethnography can take many forms (Bochner & Ellis, 2016). In this piece, we co-construct autoethnographic vignettes (Humphreys, 2005) to explore our own experiences with the tradition. Vignettes are “...stories about individuals,

situations and structures which can make reference to important points in the study of perceptions, beliefs and attitudes” (Hughes, 1998, p. 381).

Our writing provides an international perspective on the issue, as Renata is a Dutch/Cape Verdean woman born and raised in the Netherlands, and Janelle is a white woman, born and raised in Minnesota, who has lived in the Netherlands for 16 years. This approach allowed us to write together from an insider/outsider perspective (Zempi & Awan, 2017). Our stories depict attitude change from our distinctive life journeys, and by sharing them we hope to demonstrate how attitude change can occur in relation to *Zwarte Piet* and broader social injustice issues. This aim is also in line with the tenants of autoethnography, which sees the process of doing research as a political and socially-conscious act (Adams & Holman Jones, 2008).

The original idea for this article began with the thesis work of the second author (Rocha, 2015). Through qualitative analysis of interviews with Dutch citizens, Renata uncovered a process of attitude change toward *Zwarte Piet* which consisted of five stages. These included an initial positive attitude, existing personality, awareness, acknowledgement and attitude change. In September 2016, we discussed how to best modify the presentation of these stages to mirror our experiences, for example by merging existing personality into personal history. These vignettes were written between October 2016 and June 2017. We constructed them from memory, our emails and notes written throughout the initial thesis-writing process, and from discussions we’ve had since the thesis was completed. In order to produce the vignettes and the concluding dialogue, we used systematic sociological introspection, “the process of thinking about thinking and feeling about feeling in a focused way in order to examine the lived experiences of the self” (Ellis, 2008, p. 853) and emotional recall (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) to recollect our experiences with the issue of *Zwarte Piet*. We wrote the vignettes individually, and then decided together how to best present them in the text. This decision-making process took place via email, several in-person meetings, and by collaboratively editing the text. In the next section, we weave our personal stories together in relation to personal history, awareness, and attitude change.

Personal history

Renata

Born and raised in the Netherlands, I consider myself pretty Dutch. A Dutch mix that is, since my mother is white Dutch and my father is black Cape Verdean, born on the Cape Verdean Islands in West-Africa. Some see my mother as the epiphany of a Dutch woman, with her blonde hair and blue eyes.

I’ve always felt quite different. We grew up in multicultural Rotterdam, yet, mixed race children were not the norm. In my surroundings, children were either entirely Dutch or entirely Cape Verdean, full-blooded Surinamese or 100 percent Moroccan. I always felt like an outcast: too tall and white among my Cape Verdean peers and not white enough with weird curly hair among my Dutch peers. Feeling like an outcast was reinforced by my classmates. They would say something negative about someone with white ethnicity and then add “Oh, but your mom is different.” Or, they would say something negative about a person with black ethnicity and say “Oh, but your dad is different.”

One incident stands out where I remember being simultaneously proud and heartbroken. We were always close with our neighbors, and I always felt safe and like I belonged. Everybody knew my father as an honest, but strict man. One day he came home and reprimanded a Dutch boy and his cousin about kicking a ball at parked cars. The neighbor boy, knowing my father, agreed and stopped. But his cousin started yelling at my father, telling him he had to mind his own business being “all black and all.” He continued, saying my father should go back to his own country and exclaiming about how my father had the audacity to reprimand a white boy “with his black ass.” I had never seen my father so furious. This incident was the first time I realized that my father was hated for the color of his skin, even within my multi-cultural neighborhood. Although my father had always taught us to be pro-white, almost to the point of denying our Cape Verdean heritage, this experience woke me up. From that moment, I embraced my darker skin and curly hair, and felt proud to say that I was a Cape Verdean-Dutch mix.

I’ve always been quite sensitive. I inherited my mother’s caring and sensitive characteristics: she would always place others before herself and wanted to help everyone in need. That is why my mother became a social worker when my sister and I went to high school. Being different, sensitive and very susceptible to other’s words, I was bullied throughout elementary school. Being bullied made me even more sensitive; I was always considering other people’s feelings. When I felt someone was treated unfairly, I would listen to her or him and really stand up for that person, more so than I was able to do for myself. As I grew older these feelings of empathy became stronger, also towards racism and historical events like the Holocaust and slavery. Whenever I hear something I feel is unjustified, I feel the need to speak up and defend the person who is treated wrongly. I believe that making the world a better place starts with ourselves.

Janelle

I grew up in a suburb of Minneapolis, Minnesota, in the United States. I am a white North American, and was raised surrounded by other white North Americans. Racism was something that was practiced rather than discussed. Ethnic minorities were few and far between, and were regarded with a healthy dose of skepticism. I went to a private Christian school until I was 12, and attended services three times a week at a Baptist church. Both environments were almost totally white. The only exposure I remember having to African Americans was through second-hand anecdotes supplied by my grandmother. She was a real estate agent and would often complain about the black people to whom she showed houses, how they were unreliable and lazy.

Another incident: As a small child, I remember being in the city with my mother. We were walking toward a black man on the sidewalk. I remember the urgent pressure of my mom’s fingers digging into my arm, slowly pressing me away from him as we passed. She never said a word but I could feel her fear and apprehension.

There were a few non-white children in my private religious school. One girl in my third-grade class was adopted from Peru. I remember her dark skin and her long black hair. We were friendly but not close. One day, we got in an argument at recess. I was seething inside, raging against her, and I remember thinking the “N” word. How I even knew that word, or knew it was a derogatory term, I don’t know. Did my grandmother use it? I honestly don’t remember. But I do know that it was the most painful thing I could direct at

her, even if it was only in my mind. I didn’t develop an awareness about racial injustice until I was an undergrad in Madison, Wisconsin. That was my privilege, to remain ignorant in a nearly all white environment.

My childhood was overwhelmingly religious, and the church stressed the importance of a moral compass. Now I separate my morality from this upbringing – I am no longer religious, and when I reflect on the way I was raised I find quite a number of those practices to be hypocritical. Still, there was a great emphasis on the teachings of Jesus: love your neighbor as yourself, be compassionate and understanding. When I went away to university I learned about the shameful history of colonialism and of the United States itself, which was glossed over in my elementary education. I became outraged by this injustice, and disillusioned with the way I was raised. I began a serious attempt to take the perspective of those less fortunate than myself. At the age of 23 I chose to move to the Netherlands to expose myself to new perspectives, and rewrite my education.

Awareness

Renata

When I was a child we celebrated *Sinterklaas* every year. *Sinterklaas* and his *Zwarte Pieten* even visited us at our house. My sister, cousins and I would sit on *Sinterklaas*’ lap and receive lots of presents. Despite their popularity, I was never a fan of the *Zwarte Pieten*. I found them scary with their black-painted skins and red lips.

Beyond my fear, there were instances when I became aware that there were other aspects about *Zwarte Piet* that were unsettling. When my aunt started dating a Surinamese man with large lips and very dark skin, the first thing I said when she asked me if I liked him, was that he “looked like *Zwarte Piet*.” My aunt laughed loudly and uncomfortably, and back then at the age of 7 or 8, I already knew that this resemblance was not a nice thing to point out. That’s when I began to realize that those black-painted figures we celebrated every year actually looked like real people. I never had these thoughts before, because my father had brown skin with dreadlocks; in general, Cape Verdean people were much lighter than those from Suriname, which is a more common ethnicity in Rotterdam.

Another incident occurred when my father came home from work and told us that an excited, young boy had been yelling and pointing at him, “Mama, mama, look... *Zwarte Piet*! Look, look!” while his red-faced mother pulled him away. As my father told the story I remember feeling horrified that a child, a white child, thought of my dad as *Zwarte Piet*. He didn’t resemble him in the least. I’d often heard that white people thought “all black people look alike,” and this experience confirmed that belief.

Janelle

I moved to the Netherlands in the summer of 2001. A few weeks later, 9/11 happened, and in my student circles there was a great focus on politics and terrorism. But *Sinterklaas* still came along, and in November I remember walking by a bakery in Amsterdam and stopping, shocked at what I saw. There were cookies in the window in the shape of black figures. The black figures had wild eyes and huge red lips. To me they closely resembled the images I had seen of minstrel shows. I was very surprised, and offended. The United

States is known for its political correct climate –racism definitely exists, my university education had made that abundantly clear to me - but overt depictions like this were completely taboo.

As days went on it became more and more common to see these black-faced creations everywhere. For some reason, the baked goods stick in my mind the most. Something about putting out a plate of black-faced cookies for people to consume seemed particularly barbaric. Then, *Sinterklaas* visited the weekly student drink organized by the International Student Network. And he didn't come alone: Two *Zwarte Pieten* accompanied him. I was shocked – if this happened in the U.S. there would be outrage. That's what I remember thinking. How can they do this?

Attitude Change

Renata

The incident between my neighbor's cousin and my father made me, at a young age, acknowledge that racism exists in the Netherlands. I still hadn't connected the acknowledgement of racism to the presence of *Zwarte Piet*.

As an adult, this acknowledgment took a whole new turn after some Facebook friends spoke out about *Zwarte Piet* and how the tradition should change. About seven years ago I came across some Facebook posts that really spoke to me. They were from a male friend of Surinamese origin, born and raised in the Netherlands. He wrote about the racist features of *Zwarte Piet* and how he didn't feel comfortable living in the Netherlands because of the tradition. My Dutch-Surinamese friend posted that he restricted his young son from going to school around the 5th of December. He said he did not want his son taught that it was okay to dehumanize black people through these portrayals. Secondly, the boy's father did not want his child to be put in the position where others would refer to him as *Zwarte Piet* just because he had black skin. At first, I thought his posts were exaggerated. They ignored the joyful characteristics surrounding the holiday: What's the harm in indulging children with gifts and candy for an annual celebration?

But then, I started reading the comments. I was shocked: So many racist remarks, so many affiliations being made between *Zwarte Piet* and black people living in the Netherlands. I had been under the impression that racism did not exist anymore in tolerant, multicultural Netherlands where so many different ethnicities live together. The enormous number of reactions to Facebook posts from a small number of people against *Zwarte Piet* made me realize that I was not able to support a Dutch tradition that brought so much hatred to the surface. This tradition did not allow for a joyful celebration for every child.

More and more horrifying reactions would come up, also within my own group of white, black and mixed peers. That is when I realized that eliminating racism still has a long way to go in the Netherlands and how deep-rooted racism is in people's mind.

Thinking about racism more and more, I decided to write my thesis about *Zwarte Piet*. I decided to look at the role the social network played in helping others to change their attitudes. This is when I really acknowledged that we, as a Dutch society, have to change in so many ways in order to stop racism. It starts with our educational system, with embracing every skin color and not indoctrinating small children with a black-faced helper like *Zwarte Piet*. I'm a mother now and I already see how quickly my own children

embrace this tradition. At home, we don't watch anything that involves *Zwarte Pieten*, my 3-year-old remembers everything he sees on the streets and at daycare. Luckily, he does not talk about *Zwarte Pieten*, but about *Pieten* (a version of the character that does not use blackface any longer) which for me shows that change is coming.

When I told people in my surroundings - black and white family members and friends – about my thesis topic, most of them did not acknowledge the problem and thought I was exaggerating. That's when my role as an activist began, because I really had to convince people about the importance of the issue in Dutch society. The most resistance came from my father who felt I had to just “go with the flow” and “stop whining”.

To me, this is the biggest underlying problem: the first generation of black people coming to the Netherlands came to work in order to send money home, and they felt they just had to blend in. That first generation had children, like me, who were born here and grew up here and live here, not as “working visitors”, but as Dutch members of society. While my father really feels it's better to remain quiet, accept and co-celebrate, I know I have a say in the matter as a vibrant member of Dutch society. Although the color of my skin is not the same as most Dutch people, I'm just as Dutch as any other. A figure like *Zwarte Piet* keeps undermining that reality: Rather than embracing the many beautiful faces Dutch society has to offer, it points out the differences between people. If we can't speak out, where do we – children from immigrants born in the Netherlands, not speaking the native language of our foreign-born parents – fit in otherwise?

Janelle

For many years, I mostly tried to ignore the tradition. I was disgusted by it, and it made me feel alienated from Dutch society, because any Dutch person I tried to discuss it with was defensive and angry. They also quickly attacked my own nationality, pointing out how I should concentrate on the problems in my own country. Given the world events happening at that time (like the war in Iraq) I didn't feel empowered to speak out. The issue became a yearly tradition that made me uncomfortable, but not much else.

Acknowledgement that racism exists in the Netherlands? This was also not a new realization for me, but my understanding of it was quite theoretical before. My attitude change about *Zwarte Piet* evolved from “being offended for the sake of being offended” to realizing that the problem was not simply an offense to my liberal values: It was the harm the tradition causes to people of color in the Netherlands. Once I became more involved in the topic I started hearing their stories. How a little boy would point at a man of color on the bus and say “*Zwarte Piet!*” Or how children of color were teased in school for not having to paint themselves black to be *Zwarte Piet*. These stories broke my heart and fueled my anger. This was not some political show put on by left-wing activists. This was a response to real human suffering.

In the meantime, I'd also had a child. Another boost to my activism was when my son was two years old. Having mostly forgotten about *Sinterklaas* for the past years, I realized that my son would probably enjoy watching *Sinterklaas* arrive in our city. I had really forgotten about *Zwarte Piet*, or I didn't understand the role he played in the ceremony. When we reached the harbor, it came rushing back – there were scores of black faced *Zwarte Pieten* on the ship, waving, and later throwing *peppernoten* (candy) at us on the street. Most disturbing of all were the young children who had come to see *Sinterklaas*,

and whose parents had painted their faces black. I was horrified, especially with the realization that I had a child now, who was growing up culturally Dutch. In just a few years he might also want to paint his face.

Then it was 2013, and my son was three years old. He would get excited for *Sinterklaas*, of course, it makes sense – it's a very popular celebration in the Netherlands, and there is so much hype. And I began to explain why I didn't like *Zwarte Piet*. I said, *Zwarte Piet* makes some people feel bad. And wouldn't it be nice if we could make *Sinterklaas* a celebration that everyone enjoyed and felt happy about? It was really that simple, something you could explain to a three-year-old. The time had come to speak out, and that's what I've done ever since. I could not in good conscience not take a stand on this issue. I needed to speak out, for the sake of my child and how I want to raise him, and for the sake of everyone who is hurt by the tradition.

Discussion

The discussion depicts a conversation between Renata and Janelle, and contains our reflections throughout the writing process and our experiences of writing up this piece and finalizing it for publication. The text as it appears here was produced during an all-day meeting in July 2017, where we simultaneously discussed our experiences with the topic and the writing of vignettes, and simultaneously produced, edited, and finalized the text together in Google Docs. We chose to co-write this discussion rather than audio-record our conversation to better match the written format of this piece. Our decision to end with a discussion between authors rather than a traditional discussion reflects our collaborative, co-constructed approach to autoethnography (e.g., Chang, Ngunjiri, & Hernandez, 2012; Speedy & Wyatt, 2014). Together we have constructed stories about the process of attitude change toward the figure of *Zwarte Piet*.

Janelle: I was surprised to see how we have very different life experiences and yet ended up experiencing this issue in a similar way. It all started with you as my thesis student. Do you remember our first conversation about this issue? I know it was in 2014 and it was after you saw the proposed topic about how Facebook users engage with the *Zwarte Piet* debate.

Renata: That was the only topic that was interesting to me. I wanted to look further into the debate. I was also thinking about my son, who had just turned one...his increasing awareness of his surroundings made me realize the social importance of this project. With the debate increasing in intensity every year, the importance of change in our society and our educational system was urgent. Personally, it was even more important because my son was a part of that. I was really passionate about the topic. Luckily you accepted me!

Janelle: Yes, I did! I could see your passion. It turned out the Facebook activism angle wasn't all that compelling to you, even though at the time it seemed an important thing to explore in getting the tradition to change. Instead the thing you were most interested in was understanding how people change their minds about *Zwarte Piet*.

Renata: Yes, mostly because I used myself and the people in my surroundings as an example. To me Facebook is mainly a tool, though an important tool to get the conversation going. But it isn't the main solution for the underlying problems of racism in the Netherlands. It was also not a solution to only focus on activists (like those involved with *Zwarte Piet is Racisme*). Activists have already gone through their attitude change and can get wrapped up in a world where everyone thinks in a similar way. To understand the role *Zwarte Piet* played in Dutch society I thought we had to understand how “regular” people changed their minds. The issue of *Zwarte Piet* is rooted deep. In the Netherlands there's no escaping the tradition, because we were brought up with it. It encompasses every part of our lives, from home to school.

Janelle: For me it was an eye-opener. Like you said, in my years of being active with this topic I'd only been in touch with activists who wanted to change the tradition, but they'd never talked about their own experience of growing up with it to ultimately seeing it in a different light. In the end that's what you focused on - talking to “regular” people - like you! - who had fond memories but as time went on saw it in a different light.

Renata: Yes, exactly! You are an American who came to the Netherlands as an adult, and seeing *Zwarte Piet* was probably horrifying. But to many of us who were brought up here, *Zwarte Piet* also holds some positive memories as a children's party. That's what makes the issue of changing the tradition so complicated. The intention of many people celebrating *Zwarte Piet* and even dressing up like *Zwarte Piet* may not be actively racist, but in reality, the tradition is established in stereotypical appearances and deep-rooted institutional racism.

Janelle: You wrote this thesis, and had all these fascinating conversations with people who poured their hearts out to you about the issue. We talked as the months went by, and it seemed more and more interesting to highlight this aspect of the topic: That outsiders do have a very different perspective than those who grew up in the Netherlands, and both sides need to understand each other. And at the same time, as we demonstrate in our writing above, we can end up having the same perspective about the issue.

Renata: It was really interesting to talk to you about it, particularly in having to explain the importance of attitude change as a whole. It helped me understand myself better and get a better grip on the topic of *Zwarte Piet*. Besides, your fierceness about blackface not being okay, strengthened me in the last stages of my attitude change towards activism; you acknowledged my frustrations and feelings that were boiling up inside of me.

Janelle: Dialogue is very important, that much is clear. I remember I was also really keen to work with someone who wanted to publish something afterward, to help a broader audience understand the topic. And here we are.

Renata: I felt doing research about attitude change and *Zwarte Piet* really mattered to Dutch society. And by publishing it, we might be able to help change the mindset of others. At least that was what I wanted to aim for at the time. I always felt I wanted to do something about the underlying racism in the Netherlands, but didn't quite know how. I saw this thesis

as a way to use my voice and the voices of my participants. What made you decide to work with my idea and broaden the focus of the thesis?

Janelle: The thesis was a solid piece of academic work, but it forced both of us to work within a strict academic interpretation of your results - theory, method, findings, conclusion. At the same time one of the most insightful things about our process were the conversations we had during our thesis meetings, and the personal insights we both had when sharing perspectives. You gave me so much insight into this topic - I learned as much about it as you did through the process. It made sense to try to articulate these insights in a paper, using the structure you uncovered about attitude change in your thesis. Since we both agreed we wanted to reach a broader audience this also seemed to be a logical step.

Renata: Our conversations forced us to dig so much deeper into ourselves than we could have expected in the beginning. That's what we want to know after all, and that is the research question we focus on in this paper: *How can we get people to change their minds about Zwarte Piet?* Although it will be a long process in the Netherlands, "change is gonna come" when people with different backgrounds really go into conversation about the topic. What it really boils down to is the willingness to understand - in this case - the other perspective, and to answer the question: In the Netherlands, who belongs?

Author Notes

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