

The Shifting Definition of Racism

White Dutch Citizens' Perceptions and Emotions in the Face of the
Political Discursive Shift on Institutional Racism

For my parents, who have taught me to always ask why before forming an opinion.



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Abstract

This thesis delves into the complexities of defining Dutch identity, the evolving understanding of racism, and the experiences of young Dutch right-wing voters regarding governmental interventions in the Netherlands. The participants perceive the recent political discursive shift regarding the recognition of institutional racism as a threat to their understanding of Dutch identity and the national ideal. The emotions elicited by these changes include fear, hopelessness, anxiety, and a refusal of shame. The participants' understanding of racism shapes their perception of political actions, leading to a rejection of the concept of institutional racism and criticism of measures aimed at addressing it. These findings provide insights into the complex dynamics surrounding the recognition of institutional racism and its impact on the emotions and perspectives of white Dutch citizens.

Keywords: Dutch identity, racism, multiculturalism, anti-racism discourse, emotions, fear, national shame

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Introduction

After the murder of George Floyd by an US police officer on May 25, 2020, Black Lives Matter protests against institutional forms of racism were organized worldwide, including in the Netherlands¹. These demonstrations, held in various Dutch cities, attained much media and political attention. As a result of the increasing public discussion on this, Dutch prime minister Mark Rutte acknowledged the existence of systematic racism in the Netherlands in June 2020²³. The issue of racism has also become a prominent topic in the national public discourse, particularly concerning the Dutch acknowledgement of its historical involvement in slavery and the subsequent formal apology. On the first of July 2021, the mayor of Amsterdam has offered a formal apology for the role of the city of Amsterdam in the history of slavery. Following this, the Ministry of Internal Affairs has officially stated that the Dutch state should pursue in the same line of action⁴. While in the realm of politics the issue of institutional racism has been seemingly taken more seriously, not all Dutch citizens agree about its urgency nor its foundation. For instance, according to a survey conducted by I&O Research (2021), 55% of the Dutch citizens opted against a formal governmental apology for the country's involvement in the slave trade.

Despite numerous political efforts towards acknowledging Dutch history with slavery, there are still political figures and parties that espouse racist views. In September 2022, during a council debate, several councillors walked out of the council chamber when Sebastian Kruis from the Party for Freedom (PVV) attacked council member Martijn Balster from the Party for the Animals (PvdA)⁵. Kruis proposed using an African name to refer to Balster, as Balster had previously commented that The Hague councils were "too white." Another far-right party, Forum for Democracy (FvD), received national media attention when racist WhatsApp messages from the party's leader became public. In one conversation, their leader Baudet

¹ <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/george-floyd-black-lives-matter-impact/> last visited on 27-9-2022.

² though he has stated he would prefer to avoid the use of the term itself to not alienate parts of the population in the debate.

³ <https://www.ewmagazine.nl/nederland/achtergrond/2020/06/rutte-steunt-zwarte-piet-niet-meer-maar-gaat-verandering-niet-afdwingen-760222/> last visited on 27-9-2022.

⁴ <https://nos.nl/artikel/2387523-excuses-voor-slavernijverleden-van-amsterdam-volgt-nederlandse-staat> last visited on October 10th, 2022.

⁵ <https://www.telegraaf.nl/nieuws/2107130683/haagse-raadsleden-lopen-zaal-uit-na-aanval-pvv-er-op-wethouder> last visited on October 10th, 2022.

wrote, "Do you want your sister to come home with a Negro?," to which another FvD member, Van Meijeren, responded, "Hell no." ⁶

Although these racist statements are often met with significant criticism from the media, these parties continue to hold considerable influence in the Dutch parliament. During the Dutch parliamentary elections in March 2021, far-right parties PVV and FvD secured a total of twenty-five seats, accounting for over 16 percent of the parliamentary representation. This meant an increase of three seats (2 percent) compared to the previous election in 2017⁷. Unlike other Dutch political parties, these far-right groups do not acknowledge racism as a institutional issue and tend to oppose inclusive and anti-discriminatory measures proposed by progressive parties. For example, the FvD's 2021 election program expressed opposition to the idea of "forced diversity" and emphasized the evaluation of individuals based on their qualities rather than (presumed) group characteristics. Similarly, the PVV's party program defended the Dutch tradition of Black Pete, stating, "Hands off our traditions: Black Pete must stay." The FvD's election slogan, "Vote the Netherlands back," also reflected their critical stance towards progressive ideologies. Thus, it can be argued that the current Dutch political climate regarding racism is divided into two opposing discourses.

There is a rich scholarly critique on the entanglements between politics, national identity, racism, and emotion (Appadurai 2006, Ahmed 2004, Wekker 2016, Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002). To start, Arjun Appadurai (2006), argues that nationalism is produced by the ongoing processes of othering. He explains national identity formation through the categorization of *we* versus *them* (50-51). This "we" identity is often self-proclaimed as the national identity, and based on certain characteristics such as race or religion. In this process of national identification, racial hierarchies thus play a significant role and, therefore, lead to national identities being racialized. Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller (2002) have also addressed this process and argued that the naturalization of a national identity is often challenged by the existence of migrant people (309). A key figure in literature on the Dutch national identity and its intertwinement with race is Gloria Wekker (2016). She explains that, in the case of the Netherlands, the national identity is regarded as white. Moreover, she

⁶ <https://www.ad.nl/politiek/geheime-appjes-zouden-bewijzen-dat-baudet-zich-racistisch-uitliet~a34ff51f/> last visited on October 10th, 2022.

⁷ <https://www.verkiezingsuitslagen.nl/> last visited on October 10th, 2022.

argues that the Dutch self-image of innocence has led to the rejection of the notion of systemic racism in the country.

With the affective turn, more scholars have been concerned with the way such processes of national identity making are mediated by emotions⁸. For example, in her book, "The Cultural Politics of Emotions," Sarah Ahmed (2004) explores the relationship between shame, national identity, and the formation of an ideal self. She argues that shame can be experienced both individually and collectively, with national shame arising from external judgments or internal recognition of historical wrongdoings, and it can either disrupt or reinforce the sense of belonging to a fixed national identity (Ahmed 2004). In the case of the Netherlands, as is stated by Halleh Ghorashi (2020), this Dutch national identity has partly shifted from the innocent colourblind, as described by Wekker (2016), to a growing recognition of the country's issue with institutional racism. Finally, Ghorashi states that this increase of acknowledgment of the issue of racism has resulted in an unsettling of the country's status quo (2020, 4). These authors all point to the intricate relation between emotional responses and the political approaches to the issue of racism in a national framework. In this thesis, I also take into consideration the relation between emotion, national identity, and racism. The research focuses on six white, right-wing citizens' and their perceptions of the political shift regarding the recognition of institutional racism and the emotions that are elicited because of this shift. The main research question is as follows:

How do white Dutch citizens perceive the recent political discursive shift regarding the recognition of institutional racism, and what are the emotions elicited by these changes?

To address this research question, the study will explore the following sub-questions:

How do the research participants understand the relation between race and national belonging?

⁸ Affect is theorized by certain authors as being different from emotion as it is not socially mediated. Therefore, affect could be regarded as embodied before it is mediated. However, scholars also stated that it is impossible to account for affect as that what takes place before it becomes intelligible. Therefore, while the distinction between affect, feelings and emotions holds for certain scholars, in this thesis, I use them interchangeably.

How do the participants perceive recent political actions and discourses addressing (institutional) racism and in which way does their own understanding of racism shape this perception?

What emotions are elicited by the perceived changes brought about by the increasing recognition of institutional racism in the political discourse?

To answer these questions, I first elaborate on the main theoretical concepts that frame this thesis: (national) identity, nationalism, racism, and emotion. This discussion is rooted in scholarship dedicated to post-colonial perspectives on race, specifically on post-colonial Netherlands and the country's issue with institutional racism. Second, I discuss the methodological approach of the thesis which is based on a qualitative research design. I describe how I collected the data with the use of semi-structured interviews and how the data was coded and interpreted. Furthermore, I provide more insight into the ethical considerations and circumstances that this research was conducted in. Following, the research population will be introduced to the reader. Thereafter, in the first analysis chapter, I analyse participants' perceptions of the Dutch national identity and the Dutch racism debate. Next, the second analysis chapter explores the impact of the Dutch racism debate on participants' lived experiences and emotions, focusing on two key areas. The first being the fear of change of the Dutch national identity, particularly in relation to Dutch traditions. Secondly, the chapter discusses the participants' perceptions regarding the feeling hopelessness and shame because of the experience of judgement based on their right-wing ideology. Lastly, the conclusion provides a descriptive answer to the research question. It discusses the research's contributions to academic debates, address its limitations, and explore potential avenues for future research.

Chapter One – The exploration of theories on racism and emotions in the context of Dutch national belonging

The diverse ways in which the discourse on racism in the Netherlands is perceived and emotionally experienced is central to this research. These processes are furthermore placed within the larger process of national identity making, namely the making of the Dutch white national subject. The process of identity formation and the creation of social categories have been widely discussed by scholars in cultural studies and anthropology. First, this chapter engages with postcolonial theories about identity formation, and how the process of identity-making is influenced by dominant representations. Next, I discuss how national belonging is structured according to the fixed ideas about Dutch citizenship. Specifically, I discuss how the figure of the migrant challenges such relations between nation-state building and national identity. Finally, I elaborate on the relation between emotion, race, and nation-making. National identity politics and emotions of shame, fear, and the feeling of innocence are brought together to better understand the emotions that have risen because of Dutch public discussion on institutional racism, which is challenging the notion of national belonging.

Identity formation and racialized differences

Cultural Studies scholar Stuart Hall (1993) explains that the sociological meaning of identities originates from the process of people giving meaning to themselves and their surroundings. Moreover, identity is not something we are born with, but should be regarded as a process influenced by dominant representation. This production of identity is both self-directed and focused on giving meaning to the identity of others. As a result, we can speak of both given and self-created identities (Hall 1993, 275-276). Moreover, anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, similarly to Hall, discusses identity as a process in the encounter between a 'we' and a 'them' identity. He states that majority and minority identities are created by people. As we tend to categorize people, who are similar to ourselves based on certain characteristics, into a group identity we produce what Appadurai calls the 'we' identity. To make sense of the meaning of this 'we' identity, a different identity to contrast with is needed. This creates the need for an 'other' which Appadurai calls the 'them' identity. People who do not fit into the categorization of the 'we' identity will be regarded to as the 'them' identity (Appadurai 2006, 50-51). Moreover, Appadurai also links this process of identity formation to nationalism as he argues that the 'we' identity is often self-perceived as the national identity of a country. He

states that the construction of a 'we' identity in a nation is based on a collective feeling of belonging (2006). In addition, Hall states that we need to be critical of the understanding that national belonging is perceived of as belonging to a dominant culture (1993). He describes the postcolonial identity as heterogenous. Considering the impact of (colonial) migration flows, the concept of (national) belonging cannot be regarded as fixed. As previously explained, Hall states that national identity is not something one is born with but should be understood as a process influenced by dominant representation (Hall 1993). Following this argument by Hall, being Dutch in post-colonial society should therefore be approached through a fluid understanding of identity.

Race, nation making and national belonging.

Appadurai (2006) describes how feelings of belonging to a national identity are often linked with specific visible or invisible characteristics of someone's identity, i.e., skin-color or religion. Following the fixed understanding of identity, these characteristics would, therefore, influence who is regarded as belonging to the national identity and who is not. In addition, he states that an important example of a visible identity form on which national identities are often based upon, is someone's skin-colour. The meaning of race finds its origin in the period of colonialism during which humankind used the colour of someone's skin to differentiate them. Therefore, he links the processes of othering based on race to the formation of national identities (Appadurai 2006, 7). Corresponding to Appadurai, Frederik Barth (1969) states that race can be regarded as one of the categories through which identities are constructed and, furthermore, explains that through the influence of identity formation, specific racialized categories have been linked with certain social connotations. These associations to specific racialized identities have created certain prejudices based on visible characteristics like the colour of someone's skin. As a result of the influence of negative preconceptions of certain races, the origin of racism can be found in the process of identity making (Barth 1969).

Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller (2002) have written about the relation between nation state building and migration. In their article they have written about the *container model of society*: "*in nationalist doctrine as well according to the container model of society, immigrants must appear as antinomies to an orderly working of state and society.*" (2002, 309). The researchers argue that migrants are perceived as foreigners to the community and as such, their national belonging is questioned with arguments such as their

loyalty to another nation state and their lack of assimilation to the national culture. Moreover, the existence of migrants within a country challenges the notion of a naturalized overlap between the citizens and their nation. Likewise, Wimmer and Glick Schiller explain how the existence of migrants with a different skin-colour challenges the possibility of the racialized categorization of a national identity, as explained by Appadurai (2006) and Barth (1969). This challenge of the fixed understanding that a skin-colour could be a way to define the national identity is made visible through the immersion of ethnic minorities '*into the national body through a politics of forced assimilation and benevolent integration*' (2002, 309-310). Through this adjustment of the national body, this fixed understanding of the national identity becomes unsettled. This unsettlement can also be recognized through the shift from civic national belonging to a racialized and ethnic one, which is seen especially within the colonial imperial project, during which racism supported its legitimacy. As Wimmer and Glick argue

"National chauvinisms and racisms legitimated both the colonial empire building of the period and the culmination of this competition in the First World War. It was in the context of this competition and of the salience of ideas about nation and race that nation-state builders, including elites, political leaders, state officials and intellectuals, initiated systematic efforts to erase, deny or homogenize the internal cultural and national diversity" (2002, 314)

Philomena Essed (1991) explains that racist national belief systems can create a more institutional form of racism in which forms of racism are inherently part of the institutional acts of a country, leading to structural forms of racism. Essed focusses on the Netherlands as a case study as she discusses how institutional racism is often not understood as a structural issue but regarded as a mere individual mistake (2002). Following the work of Essed, Gloria Wekker (2016) also focusses on the issue of racism in the Netherlands. In her book, she discusses the formation of the Dutch identity in which process of identity formation can be linked to the country's division between *alloctonen*, people who live in the Netherlands but came from elsewhere as their parents or grandparents were not born in the country, and *autoctonen*, those people who supposedly are from the Netherlands and whose parents and grandparents were born in the country (Wekker 2016, 15). Even though these terms have

officially been dispensed by the government in 2016⁹, this division between “us” and “them” is still inherent part of the Dutch self-identity (Wekker 2016). Wekker explains that the Dutch understanding of the “them” identity can be related to those who have not been born in European Netherlands¹⁰, have a black skincolour or to, as she states, to *the islamic other*. It is important to note that alongside race, religious identity thus also plays a role in this distinction. This also applies to the Dutch context, where religious differences are taken into complex processes of racialization. Whichever form of identity is taken, the general Dutch sense of *us* is always white (2016, 15).

Emotions and the Dutch anti-racism debate

In this section I elaborate on the relation between emotion, race and nation making. According to Ahmed, we can interpret only emotions as they are the only ones that are culturally intelligible. Subsequently, this research will focus on the social understanding of emotions. It is through emotions that we respond to our surroundings and at the same time, our emotions influence how we interpret our world (Ahmed 2004). In the following paragraph I will discuss connections that have been made between national identity politics and emotions of shame (Ahmed 2004), fear (Appadurai 2006) and the feeling of innocence (Wekker 2016). Through her work Sara Ahmed shows the link between the acknowledgement of institutional racism and the collective and national emotion of shame (2004). In her book, *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*, Ahmed links the notion of shame to a collective feeling which can create the formation of a national identity. To start, Ahmed explains the lived experience of shame as the experience of being seen when having done something bad. It is important to note the relevance of who the spectator is and to think about when something is regarded as “bad.” The distinction of what is “bad” can be found within the specific socio-cultural definition which someone has concerning the “ideal self.” About this Ahmed states: *‘If we feel shame, we feel shame because we have failed to approximate “an ideal” that has been given to us through the practices of love’* (Ahmed 2004, 106).

Following this definition of shame, Ahmed states that the notion of *national shame* brought about both upon the nation by others or by the nation itself. Shame placed upon the

⁹ <https://www.metronieuws.nl/in-het-nieuws/2016/11/overheid-stopt-met-allochtoon-en-autochtoon/> last visited on 22-11-2022.

¹⁰ European Netherlands is used as the definition as their understanding of Dutch belonging does not include people born in Dutch Caribbean.

nation by those who are considered as not belonging to the national identity can be linked to the earlier mentioned notion of fear of small numbers by Appadurai (2006). This link between fear and shame can be recognized within the possibility that the *them* identity can influence the national ideal which, consequently, can disrupt the possibility of a fixed national identity. National shame placed upon the country by itself is defined as a form of reconciliation in which self-awareness of the “bad” connotations of historical actions is expressed (Ahmed 2004). Furthermore, Ahmed explains that when national shame is placed upon the nation by the nation itself, following the social ideal would mean that one would feel ashamed to feel part of the nation. About this Ahmed writes: ‘*shame can become a form of identification in the very failure of an identity to embody an ideal*’ (Ahmed 2004, 108). With this understanding, Ahmed explains that claiming shame as a nation can be binding for those within the nation who already belonged to the majority identity (Ahmed 2004).

Following this link between national belonging and the emotions of shame and fear, Appadurai also describes the concept of *predatory identities* (2006). Predatory identities, he argues, are identities which either are, or are regarded as majority identities in a country which strives to create a form of identity singularity. In this sense, the *them* identity, regarded as a minority, is obstructing the possibility for national purity (2006, 52-53). Focusing on a more political level, Appadurai explains that political dissent of minorities within a country can create, as he calls it, *fear of small numbers*. To start, Appadurai explains that the “general interest”, which can be understood as the interest of the majority, can be threatened by the “special interest”, the interest of the minority (2006, 62). The special interest or opinion is considered dangerous when it is expressed by citizens belonging to a permanent minority within a country. When this happens, he states, there is a fear that a small number can have significant political and societal impact. In relation to this, Appadurai also explains that the predatory identity always carries the fear of becoming the minority identity (2006, 83-84).

In the context of the Netherlands, Gloria Wekker (2016) has written about whiteness and has linked this to the concept of *white innocence* and the feeling of uneasiness. White innocence, she explains, can be understood as the innocent self-image of the Dutch, which is based on their own national identification as a tolerant and colour-blind country. She explains that many white Dutch citizens view themselves as victims of their own history as a result of their history of independence - from Spain in 1581 and the German occupation in 1945 -

instead of the wrongdoers through their involvement with the history of slavery (Wekker 2016, 20). Wekker explains that the tolerant self-image of the citizens of the Netherlands has caused a denial of institutional racism in the country. She states that the confrontation with the presence of racism in the country contradicts this innocent self-image of the national identity which, thereafter, creates a collective feeling of uneasiness. It is through this innocent self-image that citizens reject the arguments that the Netherlands might have a structural and institutional issue with racism (Wekker 2016).

Focusing on the previously discussed notion of shame in relation to the national ideal by Ahmed (2004), the concept of national shame in the Netherlands become apparent through the findings of Halleh Ghorashi (2020). Ghorashi states that, while there is an increase of the issue of racism in the Dutch public sphere, institutional racism also tends to be an increasingly prominent subject of conversation. She found that the response of white Dutch citizens to the national recognition of racism can be linked to an increase of national recognition of institutional racism. Ghorashi explains that specifically the Black Lives Matter movement has created more recognition for institutional forms of racism. As a result, structural forms of racism are addressed within both public spaces and institutions. Moreover, she states that *'the growing calls against institutional racism in the Netherlands mean unsettling the status quo and creating inclusionary spaces and practices'* (Ghorashi 2020, 4). When connecting the arguments by Ghorashi and the concept of national ideal by Ahmed, we can understand this increasing recognition of institutional racism as the new Dutch national ideal to which national shame can be brought upon.

Based on Wekker's (2016) and Ghorashi's (2020) theorizations, I argue that there are two different responses to the national recognition of racism. On the one side, the innocent self-image of the Netherlands as being non-racist (Wekker 2016). As previously explained, many white Dutch citizens have, due to their self-image as innocent and being colourblind, not been able to recognize the issue of racism. Moreover, in some cases, the uneasiness of this contradiction between the national recognition of the issue of racism and their self-image as innocent can even lead to anger (Wekker 2016). On the other side, Ghorashi (2020) states that the Dutch public opinion on racism has shifted towards an increasing recognition of the issue of institutional racism (Ghorashi 2020, 4), which challenges the innocent self-image as discussed by Wekker (2016). Based on these findings, this thesis will explore how this shift

from the innocent national ideal towards a recognition of institutional racism has increased the questioning of national Dutch innocence. If we further take the insights coming from Sarah Ahmed, then it could be argued that such shift has contributed to the increased feelings of national shame, concerning institutional racism, among the white Dutch population. For this reason, in the following chapters I explicitly engage with how my research participants perceive these public debates about racism and which tropes fear, hopelessness and shame play in it. Before that however, I will first discuss the methodological approach of this thesis.

Chapter two – Methodology

In this chapter the methodology of this research will be discussed. To start, this research is based on a qualitative research design. I believe that this approach is best suited to support the exploration of the research question because qualitative approaches, such as interviews and observations, are great tools to research people's personal ideals, perceptions, and values. Subsequently, qualitative research is mainly concerned with the understanding of people's lived realities. Like John Creswell (2014) states, qualitative research is especially applicable when examining the 'lived experiences' of people which entails "*an exploration of the meanings, interpretations, and values that people give to their experiences*" (5). In the following paragraphs I provide an overview of the methodology used for data collection and analysis. I will discuss issues of ethics, participants and reflexivity that need to be considered before I discuss the findings in the following chapters.

Data collection

Semi-structured interviews were the main method for data collection. Shulamit Reinharz and Lynn Davidman (1992) explain how semi-structured interviewing can be used to create a better understanding of the participants' own understanding of reality as there is enough space to follow the line of thinking of the participants, instead of following a list of structured interviewing questions. During the interviews I obtained data on the interconnectedness of national identity, perceptions of sociocultural concepts like racism, and participants' own experiences (Hesse-Biber 2011). Specifically, I asked about their perceptions of their own political investments and beliefs, about their point of view regarding the concept of belonging to the Dutch identity, and, finally, I focused on their understanding of racism and the anti-racism discourse in the Netherlands. During the interviews, the participants received open-ended questions focused on their own experiences or interpretations. With this, the respondents were able to explain their experiences and perceptions in their own words and, their answers were therefore less likely to be influenced by my own expectations. The interviews were conducted in the months of November and December 2023. All interviews were conducted through online video calls. To obtain most of information given during the interviews, all conversations were videorecorded. In accordance to ethical regulations, all recordings will be deleted within three months after the finalization of the thesis.

Data-analysis

Because the interviews were videorecorded, I was able to fully transcribe the answers the participants have given. After all interviews were transcribed, I started with the coding process. Coding, according to Judith Holten (2010), concerns the development of categories that emerge from the data because of reviewing the data for concepts and patterns. With substantive coding, I first used the method of open coding. After the process of open coding, I focused on core categories that came up and moved onto selective coding. During this process I compared self-created categories to the newly gathered data until I found no more new data within these categories, which can be understood as saturation (Holton 2010). Due to limits of the scope of this thesis, complete saturation has not been achieved. After achieving a basic form of saturation, I reassembled the data and reconstructed the categories into themes, theories, and main concepts. After reassembling and structuring the data, I interpreted it within the context of the theoretical framework. Last, the data was coded in NVIVO, a program designed for the analysis of qualitative data. Because the interviews were held in Dutch, the quotations that are referenced to in this thesis have been changed into an English translation that is as close as possible to the original Dutch text.

Ethics

As the discussions on racism in the Netherlands tend to be linked with many emotions of frustration or anger by my target group (Wekker 2016), research on this topic required a careful approach. To gain my participants' trust and build enough rapport for truthful answers, I made sure to disclose the purpose of the interviews beforehand. To my respondents I stated that their participation in the research can be seen as an opportunity for them to make their opinion on this matter known. Before the start of the interviews, I asked my participants for verbal agreement for the use of the collected data and made sure the agreement was recorded. A verbal agreement was also made from my part concerning the eradication of the recorded footage within three months after the completion of the thesis. Finally, all participants were informed that the thesis will be completely anonymous as I am using pseudonyms for all participants names. In addition, all informants were made aware that they could always withdraw from the research, should they change their minds about wanting to participate.

Research population

As this research was conducted within a limited time span, I focused on finding participants through my personal network. One of my key respondents is Stijn, a personal contact of mine. Stijn shared my call for informants in a WhatsApp group with many right-wing voters through which four other participants responded. The sixth and final participant is someone I knew through a friend. Therefore, most of my participants were found through access of a WhatsApp group dedicated to politically engaged young adults. As a result, all participants are between 18 and 25 years old. Five participants are male and one of the participants is female. Moreover, all the participants are politically engaged at the time of the research. Some state to be politically active as they are interested in politics and consider this an important part of their daily life. Others described their active interest in politics as being directly related to their previous engagement in right-wing organisations or parties. Some of them are even considering their candidacy for the coming elections.

All participants are white, with the Dutch nationality and born in the Netherlands. With one exception, all participants were students at the time of the research. Four participants live in cities in the province of Zuid-Holland, Overijssel, Noord-Holland and Twente. The other two participants live in rural areas in the province of Zuid-Holland and Drenthe. Whereas most of the participants live in cities, several also mentioned how formerly living in rural areas has shaped their political views or even their identity. While, considering the purpose of the research, all my participants were selected based on their affinity with right wing parties, it is important to mention that their political affiliations differ. The participants of this research have stated that they have or will soon vote for the following parties: BVNL, Forum, JA21, PVV, Code Oranje, and the BBB. While these are all considerably controversial and right-wing parties, they do differentiate themselves through different perspectives on, for example, political organisation, issues of Dutch migrant flows or the Dutch livestock industry.

Reflexivity

As explained by Lorraine Nencel (2014), reflexivity should be part of the epistemological and the methodological part of an ethnographic research. Through reflexive analysis a researcher can consider the complexity of the methods they use as well as reflect on their subjectivity. Correspondingly, Adrienne Rich's (1984) "politics of location" foregrounds the situatedness of knowledge production and the importance of accountable

research practices. Nencel for example writes about “situated reflexivity”, which she describes as a critical reflexivity on the researcher, research subject, their relationship, and the context in which the research is conducted (Nencel 2014, 80-81). Next, I describe my own critical reflections on the research process and the knowledge produced in this thesis.

To start, my thesis focusses on themes of identity, race, nationality, and emotion. Therefore, I stayed conscious and reflective of my personal interpretation of these concepts. As a gender studies student with political preference for left-wing parties it is important to note how my own position influenced the research. Even though, as explained above, my position was made clear to the participants before the interview was conducted, my own political views influenced my work on the thesis. At times during the interviews, the participants stated opinions with which I very much disagreed. As a result, at certain times, I was more focused on not showing what I believed and felt, than fully concentrating on the process of interviewing the participant. Furthermore, at certain times during the analysis, I felt distressed by rereading the answers of the informants several times as they had shared very biased, and at times even racist perceptions. The distress was further enhanced through my role as researcher in which I was not able to respond or explain my personal understanding of the themes discussed. Therefore, I was not able to contest the answers that were given.

As argued by Amy Best (2003), I also want to note that, as the interviewer, I was specifically conscious of my own ways of constructing race during my interviews on concepts like whiteness and race. Therefore, during the interviews, I aimed to be reflective on my personal understanding of race. Moreover, when conducting the interviews as well as during the analysis of the data, I was very conscious of the impact of my whiteness in relation to the interviews as it is likely this influenced the course of the interview as well as the outcome. When discussing the subject of belonging to the national identity, my personal visible identity as a white Dutch woman has influenced their sense of safety during the interview, as I was regarded as one of them. When discussing the Dutch identity, answers were often given in the understanding that I would already know what they meant, being Dutch myself. Furthermore, as explained, I had made sure my personal position as a gender-studies student was well known to all my participants. During the interviews, this knowledge sometimes impacted the way the participants formulated their answers. In many of the interviews, the participants formulated their answers by adding comments like *‘as you probably know’*, *‘I’m not like other*

right-wing people' and, during several interviews, this tension of my academic background even become the topic for conversation when I felt the need to emphasize the fact that I would not judge their answers and that I just wanted to understand their experiences. Moreover, taking the cue from Nencel's conceptualization of feminist reflexivity approach of "radical empathy", which she describes as a being a researcher who highly values the needs of their participants (2014, 81-82), I will aim present the experiences of the participants through a form of relatedness and compassion. I will use my own position, even as I might not always agree with the subject, to create a compassionate understanding of the thoughts and experiences of the research subject.

Moreover, I also want to acknowledge that my whiteness has also greatly influenced my personal experience of the research. Even though, as explained above, the research did impact my personal state of mind, I want to acknowledge that this might have been more intense if I had not been white, like my participants. Due to my own whiteness, the answers given were often not associated with my personal being. When discussing my data with a good friend, who is a person of colour, I realized that I had been able to distance myself from the participants' dispositions quite easily whereas my friend was emotionally very triggered. Although this position has also been the reason why I was interested in understanding their experiences, it has surely also influenced the subjectivity of my research findings.

Chapter three – Blurred definitions between individual and institutional racism

This chapter will focus on the perceptions of my research participants about Dutch identity, racism, and governmental interferences in relation to the anti-racism discourse in the Netherlands. Drawing from interviews, this chapter uncovers varying viewpoints on these topics, highlighting the participants' sense of belonging, their definition of the Dutch national identity, and their understanding of racism and its manifestations. Additionally, the participants' opinions regarding governmental interferences in addressing racism reveal nuanced perspectives on the effectiveness and necessity of such measures. Lastly, the chapter will explore the participants' rejection of the national ideal concerning institutional racism and examine how this rejection can be seen as a refusal to accept national shame regarding institutional racism.

Migration as an interference on Dutch belonging

To start, almost all participants state that they find it complex to describe one specific Dutch identity, as this might differ per person. In relation to their sense of belonging, all the participants confirm that they do have a strong feeling of belonging to the Dutch nation. Dutchness for them can be defined in terms of being born in the Netherlands, speaking the language, and following Dutch customs, traditions, and holidays like Sinterklaas¹¹. The most claimed aspects of belonging to the Dutch identity are linked to ancestral roots, customs, values and beliefs, and more formal matters like having a passport and speaking the language. When asked if the Netherlands is a white country, the general understanding is that the Netherlands is considered *blank*¹², but that big cities specifically are also greatly populated by people of colour, with the admission that indeed, in bigger cities there are also non-white

¹¹ The holiday of Sinterklaas is often regarded as a Dutch Santa Clause. In the following chapter, Sinterklaas will be further explained and discussed within the context of this research.

¹² Historically, *blank* has been used more often in the Dutch language to describe a white skin-colour. However, in recent years, the use of *blank* has become more controversial as the colonial connotations and the racial hierarchy it reinforces are being increasingly recognized by Dutch people. Here *blank* is used because all participants preferred the use of *blank* over *white*. When I asked questions related to a light skin-colour, I always used the word *wit* as I am personally critical of the use *blank*. It is important to note, however, that while the term *wit* was used in my questions, most participants used the word *blank* in their answers. As my personal beliefs are that the use of *blank* reinforces racial hierarchies, the rest of the thesis will follow the use of *wit* when discussing lighter skin tones.

populations. A participant named Daniel links this view of Dutch people being white to his understanding of the history of the Dutch nation having originally white inhabitants. He explains this in the following way:

[The Netherlands is] Traditionally *blank*, but there is not really any more to speak of it now. This heritage can still be seen in the provinces. Within a white rural area. Basically, what the Netherlands looked like before. But in cities, you can see the ethnic transition there. So, it is not really a white country. I would say a multicultural multi-racial society.

With this quote, we can link Daniel's understanding of the Dutch national identity to the *container model of society* by Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2002, 309-310). As Daniel perceives the Dutch identity as traditionally white but involved in a so called 'ethnic transition,' his naturalized understanding of the Dutch Self is challenged through the immersion of ethnic minorities. Moreover, these results also confirm Wekker's findings in which she states that through the concepts of "autochtonen" and "allochtonen", Dutch citizens reinforce the division between "us" and "them", meaning there are citizens who do not really belong to the Dutch identity. In addition, here we can recognize the racialized understanding of this process of othering in which their understanding of the Dutch identity is considerably white (2016, 15). However, when focusing on this belonging to the national identity, the perceptions of the participants do differ. When asked if someone could become Dutch through assimilation and integration several participants state that being Dutch is supposedly about feeling Dutch and acting accordingly, no matter someone's race or what their ancestral roots might be. About this, another participant, Luuk says the following:

Someone who is tinted can sometimes be more Dutch than some of the white people I know. Doesn't matter at all. My bosses at work, they are Armenian, but I think they are much more Dutch than some of my classmates.

With this quote we can see how Luuk's perception of the national identity is first and foremost linked to the level of belonging to the Dutch identity a person experiences themselves. As the interview proceeds, Luuk describes how his classmates identify more with

a European identity than with a Dutch one. Within his critique of their lack of national pride, Luuk describes that even though his bosses - who he still calls Armenian - have different ancestral roots, he believes them to be more Dutch as they do display a certain Dutch proudness. In contrast to this view, another participant, Nigel, voices a different view on belonging to the Dutch identity. He argues that the possibility to claim belonging to the national identity can be reduced to kinship namely having Dutch ancestry.

When does someone belong to that Dutch identity? I think that will take a long time. And that is, well, that's the case for every country. I mean, if I went to live in Australia and I had kids there, my kid wouldn't be Australian. They would simply be Dutch by origin. And maybe her great-great granddaughter, she might well feel connected to Australian culture.

Again, Nigel's understanding of national identity can be recognized within Wimmer and Glick Schillers *container model of society*. He describes Dutchness as having cultural purity through which migrants should completely adapt to the fixed understanding of the specific national identity. In this view, maintaining the undeniable oneness of Dutch culture or Australian Dutch is what guarantees one's belonging. Moreover, the argument of loyalty in relation to this national belonging is also evident in the quote above as he questions the loyalty towards the national state through a presumed ongoing devotion to the former nation-state and its identity, which apparently cannot co-exist (2002, 309-310).

Thus, as described above, the participants perceive Dutchness as a fixed national identity to which access can only be fully acknowledge if complete assimilation has taken place. Moreover, while not all participants specifically state that this Dutch identity relates to whiteness, most of them do imply that, with exceptions aside, white Dutch identities often correspond more with their perception of Dutchness. The following paragraph will focus on the participant's perception of race and the understanding of the issue of racism in the Netherlands.

Individualized racism versus institutional racism

The issue of the definition of racism is an important part of the findings of this research. Before elaborating more in-depth on the participants' critiques of the understanding and use of this concept, it is important to understand their own perceptions of racism as a concept. To start, all participants describe that the concept of racism is the distinction of people based on their race, joined with feelings of superiority or hate. Almost all participants' immediate response after being asked if they were racist themselves was a definite 'no'. After their first response, the following reactions differed between the participants. Some just repeated their answer to make sure I really understood they were not racist at all. Other participants reflected on possible unconscious forms of racist thought they might have had. About this Nigel explained:

I do have certain prejudices, of course. And I try to be very aware of that. Let's just say I don't go through with it. So, I wouldn't exactly call myself a racist. For example, I don't think that every coloured person here in the Netherlands should take the boat back home.

Through this, we see that having prejudices and being racist are not regarded as one coherent mechanism. This separation of thought and action is something that all participants have stated when talking about their definition of racism. They argue that unconscious racist thoughts are not inherently the same as being racist. When talking to Luuk about prejudices, he states that he does believe that our own identity can influence how we perceive people who are different from us. However, he states that this is a natural given that we cannot really change. Moreover, Luuk separates biases based on differences from biases based on skin-colour with the following statement:

Luuk: I also think it is logical ... that you often choose for someone like yourself when you are in a managing function. You often choose something you trust. Then you roughly know what their good and bad qualities could be. But you don't choose someone because they have that skin colour, it's just all unconscious, mainly.

Interviewer: It happens unconsciously. And would you also say that racism sometimes happens unconsciously?

Luuk: Not no, yes, not in the way that it really is purely about skin colour. Not really, but I'm sure it happens sometimes, at certain aspects, with certain people.

While the quote above is not a complete rejection of the notion of unconscious racism, as it might happen sometimes with certain specific individuals, he does emphasize that unconscious biases are only occasionally based on skin colour. Therefore, unconscious racism is not fully recognized. Moreover, he states that it only happens with certain people through which he argues that the issue of racism in Netherlands should be considered as an individual's issue instead of the issue of a country. Like Luuk, all the participants of this research stated that racism should not be regarded as a national issue but as something that hardly happens in the country. For example, after being asked if every Dutch person might be a little racist, Stijn said the following:

I consciously believe that most of the Netherlands is not racist at all. But some people just don't get that things they say can be racist... Sure, there is definitely a racist group in this country and, well, I don't want to pay attention to that. But no, I do believe that most of the Netherlands is not genuinely racist.

In this quote, Stijn not only states that the issue of racism should be regarded as an individual's mistake, but he also states that we should not give too much attention towards these individuals. Through the quotes above we can recognize Essed's understanding of the issue of racism in the Netherlands. As previously explained, Essed states the Netherlands is a country in which institutional racism does take place, as the racist belief system is - due to our history with slavery - inherently part of the institutional acts of the country (Essed 2002). However, she describes, as these racist institutional acts of the country are often not recognized, and people solely perceive extreme forms of racism as actual racism, the issue of racism is often not regarded as an institutional issue, but merely as an individual's mistake. In accordance, the differentiation of conscious and unconscious forms racism is likewise a

reasoning through which unconscious racism is not acknowledged as part of the country's racist institutional acts.

As a result of the Black Lives Matter movement, we have seen an upsurge of the recognition of racism as an institutional issue in the Netherlands (Ghorashi 2020). Ghorashi describes that an increasing number of white Dutch citizens are starting to acknowledge unconscious and institutional forms of racism as a national issue. However, as described above, the participants still have a different understanding of the issue. Therefore, this difference between conscious and unconscious racism is also greatly intertwined with the participants' critique on the contemporary, often perceived as faded, definition of racism. About this Nigel says the following:

Yes, I have often been called a racist, but I find that a bit... it is without a good argument, but then again, when is something racist? Well, that's an easy example: someone is, uh yes. Well, that's actually quite difficult. I think that line has kind of faded these days.

As seen in the quote above, Nigel explains that he thinks the requirements of being racist are not clear anymore. All participants state that this definition has been blurred by left-wing people because of the increasing debate on the issue. Moreover, the participants explain that nowadays many things are regarded as racist, even when it is about religion, about jokes or about unconscious biases. Similarly, all participants also describe that nowadays, things and/or people are too quickly and too often called racist. About this, Rutger says:

But I actually find that very insulting to people who are dealing with the serious side of racism. And I also notice nowadays, it is used so often that it is worth nothing. It used to be like 'oh that's a racist person, we're going to avoid them. We will stay away from him, or we deal with him a little differently.' These days the first thing I think, and a lot of people think along with me, if someone says someone else is racist: 'Oh is that really true, or did he happen to throw an unpopular opinion about something and didn't phrase it well?'

As quoted above, the blurred definition of racism is decreasing the sensitivity which was experienced in relation to the concept. Rutger describes how calling someone a racist has

lost the heaviness of its statement since the changing definition of the term is not recognized by the participants. As Rutger explains, the participants feel like racism now also includes unpopular opinions or the unfortunate phrasing of someone's thoughts. However, these things do not correspond with their understanding of conscious and individual racism. In the following paragraph this blurred definition of racism will be linked to Dutch governmental actions that are taking place to address the issue of institutional racism.

From a blurred definition to a polarising anti-racism discourse

In this paragraph, I will give a description of the participants' views on the Dutch national understanding of the anti-racism discourse and on the governmental actions that are taken to address these issues. The Dutch anti-racism debate, as defined by Stijn, is the discussion of what is regarded as racist and what is needed to counter the issue. Some participants state that a Dutch debate on racism is needed, as it is relevant and important to act on real racism and dangerous prejudices. In contrast to this view, other participants explain that the issue is pretty much solved, and that the debate is not needed anymore. Though, all participants agree that the debate itself has increased a lot in the last decennia. About this, Stijn explains that the increase of the debate has made people more aware of racism and has made it easier to talk about the subject. However, Stijn, and all other participants, describe that the increase of the Dutch racism debate has also led to several more negatively perceived consequences which will be described in the next chapter. First, it is important to understand how the participants perceive the changes regarding the debate and how they view the Dutch governmental actions that addressing the issue.

To start, several participants feel like the anti-racism debate has become more mainstream through the impact of the racism debate in the United States, Dutch media institutions, and because of the increasing politicization of the issue. These mainstream Dutch media institutions are regarded as left-wing and are perceived as projecting a left-wing narrative of societal issues like racism. Here we can understand a left-wing perception on racism as the acknowledgement of institutional racism. As a result of the increase of the debate in media outlets, the participants explain that both right and left-wing political parties tend to use the issue within their own political agenda. When asked how political parties have influenced the racism debate Rutger said:

For example, *BII1*, because in my eyes they are just often pointing out things that have to do with the debate in an incorrect way and then people go by that information, which, in my opinion, is incorrect. After they get angry, there is a kind of struggle, a kind of friction. And Forum isn't thinking about anything remotely close to inclusion or about how they could keep their supporters in check. So, with them it was more just the absence and the fact that things suddenly came out internally because they indeed just made very strange insensitive comments.

In the quote above, Rutger explains how the understanding of racism as an institutional issue can be regarded as a way in which left-wing parties are making a bigger issue out of racism than it actually is. As a result, he states, left-wing citizens are now following this 'extreme' definition which is, subsequently, creating friction within the country. Following, he explains that on the right-side of the political spectrum, a party called Forum for Democracy is actually not strict enough about their definition of racism which, he describes, can lead to their followers making 'actual' racist statements. Here, Stijn wants to emphasize that both left, and right-winged parties are using the disconnect amongst citizens regarding the issue of racism in order to gain votes but are, subsequently increasing the level of polarization between Dutch citizens. Moreover, most participants argue that the anti-racism debate is predominantly left-wing in which the institutional understanding of racism is most frequently considered. Consequently, as the participants do not recognise this definition, they are often indifferent to this debate. This critique on the increasingly left-wing anti-racism debate in the Netherlands can be linked to the findings by Ghorashi, as she explains how the arrival of the Black Lives Matter movement in the Netherlands has created an increasingly '*broad solidarity between people from a variety of backgrounds, including White Dutch people, in collectively addressing racism*' (2020, 4).

Following this perception of the anti-racism discourse, the participants are also critiquing the way in which the Dutch government is increasingly more often acknowledging the existence of institutional racism. In addition, they also perceive an increase in governmental actions that would be addressing these issues. Moreover, following the participants' understanding of the issue of racism being a mere conscious and individual act, the participants state to support implementations taken against extreme forms of racism yet

they critique all actions that are taken against institutional racism. For example, after being asked if the Dutch government should interfere on the issue of racism, Luuk states the following answer:

Yes, if people have real racist ideas. Then that must obviously be fought. If it is expressed, racism in practice, so to speak. If a company really judges purely on skin colour. Then of course that needs to be addressed.

Corresponding to this point of view, several participants state that the Netherlands is doing very well with the regulations against actual forms of racism. Some participants even state that, compared to other countries, the Dutch government is a frontrunner at the political actions that address the issue. This “frontrunner” argument corresponds with Wekker’s description of the Dutch people’s own national identification as a tolerant and colour-blind (Wekker 2016, 20). Several of the participants state that they would expect positive outcomes if the governments’ actions to address racism would exist out of formal laws against serious cases of individual racism or if the government would offer education on the issue. However, all participants are critical of the increasing changes the country is making to fight institutional racism. Governmental interference like working with quotas, apologizing for the country’s history with slavery or the prohibition of the caricature of Black Pete are regarded as inadequate. Through these actions the participants state that the government is following left-wing ideals without considering the thoughts of other citizens. However, the participants state that it is important to consider the ideals and experiences of all citizens. About this subject Stijn states the following:

Sometimes progressive change is needed but you must include everyone in the population in those kinds of changes. And if the population says 'boys, up to here and no further' in a larger majority, then we must also be able to accept that.

Several participants, like Stijn, argue that the Dutch governmental actions to address racism are increasingly in contrast with the ideals of right-wing Dutch citizens who have a different understanding of the issue. Moreover, Stijn also links the need for progressive change to the norms and values we consider ‘normal’ at present. This perception can be linked

to the previously described concept of a *national ideal* about which Ahmed has linked the notion of *national shame* (Ahmed 2004). While Stijn states that the national ideal should be linked to a right-wing perception on the anti-racism discourse, we can also link the national ideal to the increasing acknowledgement of institutional racism. As explained by Ghorashi, *'the growing calls against institutional racism in the Netherlands mean unsettling the status quo'* (2020, 4). As a result of this increasing recognition of institutional racism in the country, a new national ideal has unsettled the old status quo in which racism was formerly understood as a mere unconscious and individual act. In addition, this new Dutch national ideal regarding institutional racism has created a feeling of national shame regarding the issue. Subsequently, the participants' definition of racism safeguards them from feeling guilty about the subject and thus can withhold them from participating in the national shame discourse. If racism is an individual action and there is no institutional racism, then there would be no national shame in relation to racism that the participants would have to feel guilty for.

Conclusive summary

The findings described in this chapter shed light on right-wing perceptions on Dutch belonging, the definition of racism and the anti-racism discourse that follows the complexity of this definition. In terms of Dutch identity, participants highlighted factors such as being born in the Netherlands, language proficiency, and adherence to Dutch customs as determinants of belonging. Some participants emphasized assimilation and integration as pathways to becoming Dutch, while others emphasized Dutch ancestry as an important factor. Although not explicitly articulated by all participants, the prevailing notion suggests that Dutchness is often associated with whiteness, with the understanding that white Dutch identities more closely align with their conception of Dutchness, barring exceptional cases.

The participants made a clear distinction between unconscious biases and actual racist actions, emphasizing that unconscious racist thoughts do not necessarily equate to racism. In this individualized understanding of racism, it becomes evident that the participants dismiss the notion that racist ideologies, stemming from a legacy of slavery, are deeply embedded within the national belief system. Consequently, they reject the concept of institutional racism in its entirety. Moreover, they expressed concern that the definition of racism has become blurred in the contemporary discourse, often encompassing issues related to religion, jokes,

or unintentional biases. The participants displayed varying perspectives on the extent of racism in the Netherlands, with most considering the country as predominantly non-racist, except for occasional individuals in certain rural areas. In accordance with their perspectives on the definition of racism, they assert the presence of individualized racism in the Netherlands. Consequently, despite the increasing recognition of institutional racism within society, they dismiss the matter of institutional racism in the country.

When examining governmental interferences in combating racism, participants generally recognized the importance of addressing explicit acts of racism through regulations and interventions. However, corresponding with their rejection of institutional racism, the participants are critical of institutional measures, such as quotas, apologies for historical wrongdoings like slavery, or the prohibition of the Black Pete caricature. They emphasize the need to consider the ideals and experiences of all citizens and voiced concerns about the limits of progressive change. Moreover, the participants have found that because of the rejection of the concerns raised by right-wing citizens who criticize the government's efforts to address institutional racism, right-wing political parties are experiencing a rise in their membership. Here we can see the intertwinement of the national ideal in relation to the issue of racism. As the institutional understanding of racism is gradually more acknowledged, a national feeling of shame regarding the issue is increasingly more implied. However, as explained, the anxiety in relation to this shame, which is experienced by the participants, creates a need for the rejection of this national feeling of shame. To safeguard themselves from this shame, they reject the issue of institutional racism itself. The next section will further focus on the participants' emotional dispositions of this perceived *national ideal*.

Chapter four – Fear, hopelessness, anxiety, and the refusal of shame

This chapter will be focused on the participants' emotions elicited because of the previously described shift of the national understanding of racism going from white innocence to national shame. First, it focuses on fear as it takes the case of the increasing critique on Black Pete as an example in which their fixed understanding of Dutch identity is threatened by a growing acknowledgement of institutional racism. Secondly, it delves into the personal experiences of participants who identify as right-wing, and it will describe how hopelessness, anxiety and the refusal of shame are elicited because of the changing national ideal towards institutional racism.

The fear of change

As discussed in the previous chapter, several participants describe how they feel like the debate has a serious left-wing overtone. They state that the left-wing influences have created an increase of the national acknowledgement of racist thought, an increasing focus on inclusivity, and has created an increasing critique on white supremacy. In the following quote Daniel explains how he feels like the racism debate is very left-wing and critical of many aspects concerning the Dutch history and, therefore, identity.

It [progressive statements] is a bit an invalidation of my identity and of my people, as a Dutchman. I really have the feeling that apparently my people, who have built this country, who have won wars for this country. Apparently it is dismissed as 'ah that's all just racist, we don't want that anymore, that's not the future.'

In this quote we see how the increasing institutional perception of racism is regarded as a threat to the fixed understanding of Dutchness. Because the participants' understanding of Dutchness has been greatly linked with its history, the growing critique on the implications of racism throughout the country's past are regarded as a rejection of Dutchness itself.

The most frequent described example of a way in which the increasing acknowledgement of institutional racism is regarded as a threat to Dutchness is through the earlier mentioned Dutch celebration of *Sinterklaas* and, more specifically, the figure which is linked with this tradition: *Zwarte Piet* (Black Pete). *Sinterklaas* is a Spanish bishop-like

character who, according to the tradition, yearly travels from Spain to the Netherlands with his helpers, known as Black Petes or Petes. On the national holiday, the Petes support Sinterklaas with delivering presents and candy to Dutch children on *Sinterklaasavond*, December 5th. The celebration is part of the Dutch cultural archive on which the participants' perception of Dutch identity is built upon. Thus, it is not that the Dutch identity can be found in the celebration, but rather that this celebration contributes to the shaping of the idea of Dutchness. Yet, in accordance with the increasing acknowledgement of institutional racism, there has been much controversy regarding the use of Black Petes, for which dressing up entails white people doing blackface. A research by I&O Research (2020) shows the increase of the Dutch critique on the black faced figure. The research states that in 2016, 65 percent of the Dutch citizens was in favour of keeping Pete as a black faced caricature whereas in 2020 this percentage has decreased to 39. The value that the participants link to this caricature varies between not important at all and highly significant. Whatever their personal relation to the caricature, all participants state that the national consensus of Black Pete being racist has changed over the last couple of years. In the following quote Luuk explains how he feels about the changes regarding the consensus on Black Pete.

Ten years ago, it was still a minority that was against Black Pete. But now you see that almost all municipalities have banned Black Pete. And if you, as a municipality, still dare to take Black Pete out of the closet and show it anyway... Then you will be immediately attacked or something.

These changes regarding the public consensus on Black Pete, which often come up within the debates on inclusivity, are perceived by most participants as a change of a traditional national holiday. As this tradition is regarded as an important part of the Dutch identity, most participants state that the alterations on the Pete character could lead to an increase of other changes regarding Dutch traditions. Moreover, several participants perceive this increase of changes as an attack on the national identity itself. More specifically, all participants state that they perceive the downfall of Black Pete as an example of the way in which the racism debate can influence Dutch traditions, and therefore the Dutch identity. Daniel explained this sentiment in the following quote:

I think Black Pete is very important, I think it is vital and we must hold on to it frantically. I think it is important to hold on to it because it is a symbol of the loss of local and national culture.

The arguments above display a fear of change of the Dutch identity which corresponds with the argument in the book *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger* by Appadurai (2006). As discussed in the previous chapter, Appadurai states that because of the conflict between globalization and a longing for local identity, exclusionary practices and even nationalist thought can arise. The debate on Black Pete can be seen as an example of this conflict as it shows how the desire of maintaining national traditions is linked to a fear of change, which is influenced by demographic changes. These demographic changes manifest in the participants' fixed perception of Dutchness as a white identity and the threat they experience because of the increase of a multicultural Dutch society. Furthermore, according to the participants, assimilation would entail embracing Dutch traditions such as Black Pete. The participants' fear can be linked to their belief that individuals with a migration background have played a significant role in promoting awareness of the intertwining of institutional racist ideologies with the depiction of the Black-faced character.

All the participants agreed that the possible national prohibition of the caricature would be bad, or even dangerous, as this change could lead to different changes in relation to the Dutch identity. About this Eva added:

I don't think that it [Black Pete] stands alone. I think more and more other things are being added. For example, that there is a plea for days off during the *Eid*, and things like that. I think it's all piling up, and more and more things are being added to that.

Fear of change can also be recognized in the quote above as Eva perceives changes, like the change of Black Pete, as a way by which proposals for more changes that could challenge the homogeneity of Dutch culture, could increase. She, for example, describes how, after the changes of the celebration of Sinterklaas, she noticed an increase in national calls for days off during Eid, which she does not consider to be part of the Dutch culture. Therefore, her experience of increasing changes that challenge her understanding of a fixed Dutch culture creates strong feelings of fear of losing this homogeneous understanding of Dutchness. This

fear is often associated with anxiety about minority groups within the society, demographic changes, and the increased number of immigrants. Fear is an important emotion that is elicited as a response to the growing recognition of institutional racism, however it is not the only emotion that can be found. In the next paragraph I will further describe how hopelessness, anxiety and a refusal of shame are likewise elicited because of the changing anti-racism discourse.

Feeling hopeless outside the national ideal

As previously explained, the participants feel like the racism debate has taken on a left-wing idea which has led to progressive changes in the culture and society. As described in the previous paragraph, this progressive change can lead a feeling of fear for changes within national traditions. Furthermore, because of the changes other emotions can also be elicited. More specifically, a feeling of hopelessness regarding the changing national ideal self is found within the answers of several participants. Hopelessness because they do not feel like they can really do anything about the increasingly progressive changes they have perceived in the Dutch society. Both Nigel and Stijn describe that they feel powerless and frustrated in relation to these changes. Additionally, both participants explain that within the context of what they perceive as a predominantly left-wing approach to racism in the Netherlands, they have taken a more distanced approach rather than actively engaging in left-wing politics. They state that their previous active involvement in societal issues made them feel hopeless and, as a result, quite unhappy. Nigel describes this process of taking more distance in the following way:

I try not to focus on it [left-wing politics] too much. I just enjoy living my own life. Because I can look around me all day long, and I did that a few years ago. At that time, I was very fanatically involved in the political debate in the Netherlands and in the world. But that won't make you happy either.

Here we see that being actively involved within increasingly left-wing political debates can be experienced as ineffective which can elicit feelings of hopelessness. This perception of the increasingly left-wing national ideal self can also be related to the experience of shame by right-wing voters. To start, however, it is important to note that all participants state that most

people who do not have a right-wing point of view are very accepting towards the participants' right-wing opinions. The informants explain that people often respect their right-wing opinions and that they rarely experience negative responses towards their right-wing views. About this Daniel explains the following:

Everyone on social media is very loud and direct. And then I sometimes hang out with someone who is a bit more left-wing, and I actually like them very much. Because then it feels as if they were to say 'you can think like that, that's fine too. I don't think the same way, I see it differently, but that's fine.' I have generally had positive experiences with it.

Through this quote we find that the participants mostly experience tolerance regarding the political views. However, it also shows that they do find polarising points of view are often heavily critiqued through social media. Moreover, even though generally the participants do not feel judged based on their political preference, all participants do have some experiences with judgement regarding their political view and opinions. In many cases this critique comes in the form of a judgemental response to a right-wing argument, or it is solely based upon the fact that they vote right-wing, as this would mean that they were not progressive enough. About this Eva shares:

It's kind of like the idea that if you don't necessarily support it [progressive thought]. And if you don't follow it enough, that you are bad or wrong. That you will be put away as bad. Like you must participate, and you are not allowed to criticize it.

In this context, it becomes apparent that the participants perceive criticism of right-wing ideologies as a harsh condemnation, resulting in individuals being categorically labelled as "bad." This observation sheds light on the significance of hopelessness and shame in the discourse surrounding anti-racism. With the rise of a prevailing left-wing perspective, which is associated with a collective sense of national shame, the participants describe the judgment from left-leaning individuals as a form of belittlement toward their right-wing beliefs.

Moreover, these perceptions of political judgement are often linked to a form of increasing (political) polarization. Rutger, Nigel, and Daniel all seem to connect polarization

with the judgement they experience towards their political views. Nigel furthermore talks about an echo chamber in which people are often only surrounded by people who carry out the same opinion as theirs. Consequently, he explains, people's understanding of political ideas that differ from their own decreases. As a result, in his experience, both left and right-wing people are increasingly feeling more judgement towards political opinions that differ from their own. Moreover, these three participants also state that this political judgement is not solely placed upon right-wing voters but can also be experienced by left-wing citizens. As Rutger explains in the following excerpt of an interview, he does perceive this judgement to be more significant towards right-wing people.

I think it might be a bit more [judgemental] on the left. I do have the feeling that when you say you support Party for the Animals, most people think: 'you're a linky winky but come and have a beer with us'. Then they are a bit more open, and with left-wing people there is often a bit more distance.

In this context, it is evident that the participants recognize a growth in polarization, amplifying the critical attitudes towards individuals with divergent political perspectives. However, this judgment appears to be more pronounced when directed towards right-wing citizens. Additionally, the intensified perception of criticism from individuals leaning towards the right further strengthens the belief that the feeling of national shame stems from the institutional acceptance of anti-racist ideologies. Although the participants may experience a sense of hopelessness due to the shifts in the national ideal, the research findings also indicate their refusal to embrace the feeling of shame that they associate with these transformations. This refusal to embrace the national shame will be further discussed in the next paragraph.

Anxiety and the refusal of shame

Another important way in which the participants perceive the imposed feeling of national shame regarding the anti-racism discourse is through the critique of the use of insensitive and discriminating words. All participants explain that having a political

conversation on more “sensitive”¹³ topics are sometimes experienced as “tricky.” Focusing on the formulation of one’s opinion, all participants explain that they feel like they cannot say things as they are thinking them, but that they have to pay more attention to how they phrase and express their opinions. While some participants already pay attention to what to say, others like Nigel experience more difficulty with this. Still, the issue of sensitivity concerning political issues is recognized by all participants. Taking a broader national perspective, most participants emphasize the existence of certain comments that are deemed excessively discriminatory and should be prohibited. This observation demonstrates their recognition of explicit and individual forms of racism. However, all participants also contend that in the contemporary anti-racism discourse, there is a growing trend of labelling what they perceive as ordinary comments as subject to criticism. Their critique of institutional racism is further evident in this shared experience of an upsurge in the censure of right-wing statements. Stijn explains his opinion with the following quote:

Legally, you could say almost anything you like. But people are paying so much attention to what you say. And if you do make a somewhat controversial statement even once, the whole of the Netherlands will be on top of it at the same time. The media is on top of it. Angry people are on top of it.

As described above, Stijn feels like the critique on controversial thought is sometimes too extreme. Like Stijn states in the quote above, several other participants also describe that this critique on right-wing ideas is widespread through the country and that social media greatly maintains this criticism. Furthermore, multiple participants elaborate on the escalating level of critique accompanied by specific repercussions, which they attribute to the phenomenon commonly referred to as “cancel culture.” Additionally, all participants express their concerns regarding the presence of “cancel culture” in the Netherlands, citing various instances where Dutch individuals or organizations faced severe criticism, loss of funding, and, in some cases, even job termination. The participants’ critical portrayal of “cancel culture” evokes feelings of anxiety and fear, as they recognize the potential for profound personal repercussions. They explain that this notion of “cancel culture” renders them reluctant to

¹³ In this context, sensitive topics are regarded by the participants as topics that triggered conversations about political correctness.

freely express their opinions, creating a sense that their views have no place in the discourse. Moreover, several participants recount their own encounters with the impact of "cancel culture." For instance, Rutger shared his experience of being fired from his internship after posting a tweet that did not align entirely with the company's ideals. In the tweet, he expressed indifference towards National Coming Out Day, despite being bisexual himself. Subsequently, his employer cited his comment as a reason to terminate his internship, leading to his dismissal.

That hurts. ... That you are actually put away in that way purely and simply because you are too different. That was painful. And I know a lot of people like me who have had similar experiences with other companies. So, there is definitely a cancel culture, it has always been there by the way. It just evolved in a different kind of way.

In this quote we see how the participant expresses emotional pain and frustration at being ostracized due to their differences, highlighting the hurtful nature of cancel culture. He notes that many others have shared similar experiences with different companies, indicating the prevalence of cancel culture. Moreover, Rutger acknowledges that cancel culture has always existed but has undergone a transformative evolution in which the shame is now placed upon the right-wing view. Moreover, the norm of what one can or cannot say is perceived, once again, to be based on a specific social norm. About this social norm Stijn said:

There is a lot of moral fuss about it. There will be no general ban because that does not suit the Netherlands. But morally speaking we can say the boundaries are getting less and less far. I see a danger in it. ... Because if you keep making that line shorter, so to speak. Then it feels like people will become afraid to say things they want to say.

Most participants acknowledge the perceived "danger" associated with cancel culture. While this danger is often attributed to the restriction of freedom of speech, it is also seen as potentially contributing to the rise of more extreme right-wing ideologies. The rejection of national shame can generate anxiety and a desire for the validation through a new national ideal. Subsequently, the participants observe a growing critique of the imposed sense of shame, which has led to an increased interest in joining political parties that endorse these

ideas. Furthermore, Rutger observes that in recent years, the circumstances surrounding cancel culture have been better than anticipated, as a stronger countermovement has emerged. He notes that individuals who have experienced being cancelled are now more vocal about their experiences, including Rutger himself. This increased expression of dissent helps to restore a sense of balance in the discourse surrounding cancel culture. Finally, the participants also suggest that forcefully confronting someone with accusations of racism without engaging in dialogue is counterproductive. They argue that such an approach can reinforce and radicalize the person's racist beliefs, as they find validation among like-minded individuals. This, in turn, exacerbates the problem rather than resolving it.

Conclusive summary

This chapter explores the emotions experienced by participants in response to the changing national understanding of racism, particularly the shift from white innocence to national shame. It has shown how fear can be a response to the growing acknowledgment of institutional racism. The participants' fixed understanding of Dutch identity is threatened by the increasing awareness of racism and critique of white supremacy. The controversy surrounding Black Pete, a character associated with the Dutch celebration of Sinterklaas, exemplifies this threat to Dutchness. The participants perceive the changing consensus on Black Pete as a rejection of Dutch traditions and an attack on the national identity itself. They fear that this change will lead to further alterations in Dutch culture and traditions. This fear of change in Dutch identity aligns with Appadurai's argument in "Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger" (2006) that globalization and a longing for local identity can result in exclusionary practices and nationalist ideologies.

Alongside fear, the participants also experience feelings of hopelessness, anxiety, and a refusal of shame in response to the changing anti-racism discourse. They feel powerless to effects of change and perceive the prevailing left-wing perspective as a threat to their ideals. They believe that criticism of right-wing ideologies is often met with harsh condemnation, labelling them as "bad" or "wrong." This judgment contributes to their sense of hopelessness and leads to a refusal to embrace the feeling of shame associated with the changing national ideal. While they generally encounter tolerance for their right-wing opinions, they find that polarisation is resulting in more criticism, particularly directed at right-wing individuals.

Furthermore, the participants express anxiety to freely express their opinions due to the sensitivity surrounding political discussions. They feel the need to carefully phrase their views to avoid controversy and judgment. While they acknowledge the existence of explicit forms of racism, they also believe that ordinary comments are increasingly subjected to criticism in the contemporary anti-racism discourse. They criticize what they perceive as excessive sensitivity and the trend of labelling right-wing statements as discriminatory. The participants also highlight the impact of "cancel culture," citing instances in which individuals or organizations faced severe criticism, loss of funding, or job termination for expressing controversial views. The fear of being "cancelled" could lead to self-censorship and a sense that their opinions are unwelcome in the discourse.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis explored how white Dutch citizens perceive the recent political discursive shift on institutional racism and examined the emotions evoked by these changes. To start, the findings highlighted the participants display a strong resistance to accepting the existence of institutional racism and dismiss the notion that racist ideologies are deeply embedded within the national belief system. They tend to individualize racism, emphasizing the distinction between unconscious biases and actual racist actions. This individualized understanding leads them to reject the concept of institutional racism. They perceive racism as predominantly non-existent in the Netherlands, except for occasional individuals in certain rural areas. In terms of Dutch identity, the participants often associate Dutchness with whiteness, indicating that white Dutch identities more closely align with their conception of Dutchness.

Following, the changing national understanding of racism, particularly the shift from white innocence to national shame, elicits strong emotions among these white Dutch citizens. Fear is a prominent emotion, which arises from the growing acknowledgment of institutional racism and critique of white supremacy. The participants perceive this shift as a threat to their fixed understanding of Dutch identity, fearing that it will lead to further alterations in Dutch culture and traditions. This fear of change aligns with Appadurai's (2006) argument on globalization and the longing for local identity resulting in exclusionary practices and nationalist ideologies. In addition to fear, the participants experience feelings of hopelessness, anxiety, and a refusal to accept national shame in response to the changing anti-racism discourse. They feel powerless in the face of these changes and perceive the prevailing left-wing perspective as a threat to their own ideals. They encounter criticism and judgment, which contributes to their sense of hopelessness and a refusal to accept the feeling of shame associated with the changing national ideal. Anxiety arises from the sensitivity surrounding political discussions, leading to self-censorship and a perception that their opinions are unwelcome in the discourse. The participants also criticize what they perceive as excessive sensitivity and the trend of labelling right-wing statements as discriminatory. They highlight the impact of "cancel culture" and fear being "cancelled" themselves, which could further contribute to self-censorship.

The findings of this thesis are based on an in-depth theoretical framework which discusses theory on identity formation, national belonging and the relation between emotion, race, and nation-making in a Dutch context. National identity politics and emotions of shame, fear, and the feeling of innocence have been brought together to better understand the emotions that have risen because of Dutch public discussion on institutional racism which is challenging the notion of national belonging. Next, to answer the research question above, I have conducted six semi-structured interviews in which I have explored the participants' ideals, perceptions, and values. The data was analysed through coding and categorization using NVIVO software. Ethical considerations were considered, including informed consent, confidentiality, and participant withdrawal rights. The research population consisted of politically engaged white young adults with right-wing affiliations. Reflexivity was an integral part of the research process, acknowledging my subjectivity and positionality, particularly as a gender studies student with left-wing political views.

Finally, the research presented in this thesis makes valuable contributions to academic debates surrounding the perception of institutional racism among white Dutch citizens and the emotions elicited by the recent political discursive shift. By exploring the participants' resistance to accepting the existence of institutional racism and their tendency to individualize racism, the study contributes to discussions on racial attitudes and ideologies within the Dutch context. The association of Dutchness with whiteness and the emphasis on factors such as birth in the Netherlands, language proficiency, and adherence to Dutch customs adds to the understanding of how Dutch identity is constructed and perceived. Furthermore, the examination of emotions such as fear, hopelessness, anxiety, and the refusal to accept national shame provides insights into the emotional responses triggered by the changing anti-racism discourse. The study aligns with existing scholarship on the relationship between emotions, race, and national identity, particularly in the context of globalization and local identity politics. The incorporation of Appadurai's argument on exclusionary practices and nationalist ideologies further enriches the discussion on the dynamics of fear and identity in response to societal shifts. Furthermore, it adds to the academic findings of Essed (2002), Wekker (2016) and Ghorashi (2020) on the Dutch understanding of institutional racism. Finally, it likewise further enriches the academic debates by Ahmed (2004) and Wekker (2016)

on the relation between emotions of fear, innocence and shame resulting from the acknowledgement of institutional racism.

However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the research. Firstly, the study focuses solely on white right-wing Dutch citizens between the ages of 18 and 25, limiting the generalizability of the findings to other segments of the population. The exclusion of diverse perspectives may restrict the understanding of how different groups perceive and respond to the political discursive shift. Future research should aim to include a broader range of participants, including individuals from diverse racial, ethnic, and political backgrounds, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the issue. Moreover, the research focusses solely on the racialized “other”, whereas the Dutch islamic other, as discussed by Wekker (2016), is not mentioned through the findings. Therefore, further research on the religious “other” in relation to national belonging should be conducted. Additionally, the use of semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method may introduce certain biases. Participants may tailor their responses to conform to societal expectations or express opinions that align with their perceived political affiliations. The researcher's subjectivity and positionality as a gender studies student with left-wing political views could also influence the data collection and analysis process. It is crucial to acknowledge these biases and ensure transparency in the research process.

To further enhance the understanding of white Dutch citizens' perceptions and emotions regarding institutional racism, future research could employ mixed-method approaches. Combining qualitative interviews with quantitative surveys or more experimental research designs which would allow for a more nuanced examination of the emotions and their underlying causes. Additionally, continuing studies over a longer period of time could explore the temporal dynamics of these perceptions and emotions, capturing changes over time and identifying potential shifts in societal attitudes. Lastly, it would be beneficial to explore the role of media and politics in shaping these perceptions and emotions. Analysing the influence of media discourses, online platforms, and political campaigns on individuals' attitudes and emotional responses could provide a deeper understanding of the broader societal context in which these perceptions and emotions emerge.

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