Holding up the Mirror
Anti-Racism Narratives Resisting Dutch Tales of Tolerance

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List of Acronyms

CRT	Critical Race Theory
HIA	Humanity in Action
KoZP	Kick out Zwarte Piet
BLM	Black Lives Matter

Abstract

With the rise of global movements like Black Lives Matter, and Dutch-based activist groups such as *Kick out Zwarte Piet,* a new space has been created to address issues of racism and discrimination in the Netherlands (Ghorashi 2020). This research focuses on the resistance of dominant Dutch self-representations with regards to race and ethnicity and what this can tell us about the of what it means to belong in Dutch society. This qualitative study analyses open-ended interviews through the conceptualisation on politics of belonging (Yuval-Davis 2004; 2010; 2011) and place-belonging (Antonsich 2010), to map a picture on who belongs and on which conditions, while at the same time focussing on how these structures are resisted. This research is inquired by Critical Race Theory (CRT) as well as a Decolonial approach and is concerned with addressing how the naturalised hegemonic self-image of the Dutch is based on Whiteness and White Innocence, following Wekker (2016) and how this is harmful in upholding 'everyday racisms' (Essed 1984; 1991). I argue that by excluding certain histories and epistemologies while exerting specific narratives on 'us' and 'the Other', people of colour in the Netherlands do not *really* belong, even though they enjoy Dutch citizenship. As a result, I have identified three different counternarratives, being: I). 'Clever' use of Diversity and Inclusion; II). Decolonisation, and III). Holding space. This paper argues how these counternarratives are essentially concerned with renegotiating what it means to belong in the Netherlands.

Relevance to Development Studies

Within Development Studies, The Netherlands as 'developed' country should not be exempt from critique in relation to development and needs to be open to opportunities to learn from other, non-Western, countries and experts. In 2019, the Netherlands was criticised internationally by the UN for its lack of intervention against racism and discrimination (OHCHR 2015; 2019). After her visit, UN expert on racism and human rights, E. Tendayi Achiume, called out the Dutch paradox that its insistence on equality and tolerance already existing in the Netherlands is the very thing that creates a barrier to achieving equality and tolerance (OHCHR 2019), reciprocating the message previously voiced by numerous Dutch scholars (see for example: Essed 1991; Essed & Hoving 2014; Wekker 2016). This demonstrates the need for the ongoing attention to undo racist structures in the Netherlands. Moreover, another added value of this research is also the translation of the current debate on racism from Dutch into English, thereby adding to the relatively slim body of work on this topic. The main contribution of this research is thus, particularly for an international audience, by giving new insights into the workings of narratives on racial discrimination and resistance in relation to belonging within the "geo-cultural confines of the Netherlands" (Dikmans: 2020: 50).

Keywords

Everyday Racism, Tolerance, Whiteness, White Innocence, Resistance, Politics of Belonging, Place-Belonging, Decolonisation, Diversity, Inclusion, Self-Image, the Netherlands

Chapter 1 - Holding Up the Mirror

"We are fully dependent on each other for the possibility of being understood and without this understanding we are int intelligible, we do not make sense, we are not solid, visible, integrated; we are lacking"

(Lugones 1987: 8)

1.1 What is this Research About?[1]

As in many other Western countries, racism is a persisting problem in the Netherlands, yet repeatedly denied. Public and political recognition of the problem is still very limited, although more so, in the wake of "continuing anti-racist struggles there is a growing awareness of blind spots and structural bias" (Aouragh 2019). The agenda-setting of anti-racism issues can be attributed to the rise of Black Lives Matter (BLM) globally and within the Dutch context activist-organisations such as Kick Out Zwarte Piet (KOZP), as well as other growing resistance against institutional racism, a momentum was created to "embrace a transformation of its 'innocence' into critical self-reflection" (Ghorashi 2020: 4). This 'innocence' Ghorashi (2020) speaks about, has been a dominant self-representation in the Netherlands for many years together with notions such as non-racialism and tolerance (Weiner 2014; Wekker 2016).

Nevertheless, in recent years, many people have been demanding more attention to a different, less innocent origin story of the Netherlands: one that includes social injustices, imperialism, exclusion, racism, and discrimination. The narratives exerted by movements such as BLM and KOZP highlight the darker side of hegemonic Dutch narratives and focus on topics of dehumanisations, Dutch colonial and slavery-history as well as current lived experiences of the black, refugee and migrant other in the Netherlands (Wekker 2016). These narratives push back against white Dutch story of who 'we' are, which persistently overrules alternative narratives that allow the humanness of the 'other' and in turn underpins racisms on all levels of society. As a result of this resistance, the issue gained growing attention in the public and political agenda as a social justice matter over the past years.

In academia, many researchers have written on the specific attitude of Dutch society towards race (Essed 1991; Essed & Hoving 2014; Weiner 2014; Wekker 2016; Weiner and Báez 2018). These authors concur that there is a very particular type of racism that is unique to

[1] This chapter is largely inspired by essays I wrote for two courses I took during this MA, being ISS-4217 Conflict Analysis, and ISS-4354 Transitions for Social Justice Lab.

the Netherlands, shaped by its specific historical, cultural, and political developments and societal structures. Moreover, although the issue has been popularised, many (white) people keep denying that racial discrimination is still occurring today. Through the institutionalisation of the Dutch self-representation on all levels of society, depicting of the Netherlands as a small, ethical, and tolerant country, the narrative conveys tolerance, non-racism and even colour-blindness in relation race, ethnicity and the Other. In fact, according to the Dutch, except for a few minor incidents, racism does not exist in the Netherlands (Weiner 2014; Wekker 2016; Çankaya & Mepschen 2019; Ghorashi 2020).

However, although much research has got into the tracing of specific narratives and systems that uphold racial discrimination, not as much research has been done in the ways in which racism and discrimination are being resisted through the construction of other narratives. Building from previous academic work, in this research paper, explores in which ways anti-racism narratives in the Netherlands resist the hegemonic social and political discourses that convey Dutch tolerance, non-racism and colour-blindness. Additionally, this research focusses on how through these contestations, the boundaries of what it means to belong are renegotiated by Dutch people of colour. Following Yuval-Davis (2004; 2010; 2011), this research paper aims to understand the narratives and counter-narratives on Dutch self-representations can be viewed as projects of belonging through the lens of politics of belonging.

Research Objectives and Questions

As briefly mentioned above, the main aim is to discern and dissect (counter-)narratives on Dutch self-representations, and subsequently how these can be seen as projects of belonging – working congruently on the boundaries of belonging in the Netherlands. Furthermore, the second aim of this research paper is to critically look at white Dutch self-representations. In this way, this research paper seeks to add to a growing, but still slim, body on literature within the topic of Dutch self-representations with regards to (anti-)racism through Critical Race Studies, Decolonisation and Politics of Belonging. As will be illuminated upon below, the Dutch, white, dominant way(s) of being and relating to the Other often goes unnoticed and unchallenged, because it is naturalised and made part of everyday practices. As such, this research aims to question these narratives, and highlight Other possible ways of belonging in the Netherlands. As such, this paper is focused on the main question:

How do anti-racism narratives respond to and resist the dominant Dutch self-representation and subsequently renegotiate what it means to belong in the Netherlands?

The following sub-questions complement the main question:

1. What is the difference between 'us' and the 'Other' in the Netherlands? How are the demarcations of who belongs maintained?
2. How can (anti-)racism be defined in the Dutch context?
3. What are main dominant Dutch self-representations and who do they represent specifically? How do they relate to projects of belonging?
4. What are main anti-racism narratives and how do they relate to projects of belonging?

1.2 Situating the Research: Why does this Research Matter?

The social implications of institutional racism and its resistance are significant. Although many (white) people are quick to argue that in comparison to the United States for example racial discrimination is less violent and therefore less impactful in the Netherlands, yet they forget to take into account that the implications of discrimination are still very real[2]. Therefore, the issue needs ongoing attention to sequentially dismantle the systems of oppression that are sustained by specific narratives being which are being asserted. Moreover, as mentioned in the previous section, politically and socially, (anti-)racism is a very current and ever-evolving topic. The conversation on racial discrimination is shifting and gaining more ground in the public sphere and making waves in the political domain too. At the same time, the extreme right-wing is also gaining more traction, illustrated by the latest elections of March 2021 in which more than ever both extreme-right politicians *and* politicians of colour have been elected (Hoorntje 2021; Wiegman 2021). The growing success of right-wing parties in Europe, including the Netherlands, has been attributed to populism, xenophobia, Islamophobia, racism, and nativism (Kešić & Duyvendak 2019). This political polarisation raises the stakes on this issue, due to for example possible policy outcomes, making narratives as a tool of symbolic power all the more important.

At the same time, approaching this issue from an international development perspective gives importance to this research as praxis, too. Firstly, it is my contention that The Netherlands as 'developed' country, should not be exempt from critique in relation to development and needs to be open to opportunities to learn from other, non-Western, countries and experts. In 2019, the Netherlands was criticised internationally by the UN for its lack of intervention against racism and discrimination (OHCHR 2015; 2019). After her visit, UN expert

[2] Research shows that non-white people have lesser opportunities in school (see: Bovens *et al.* 2014; Van den Broek *et al.* 2018), face discrimination in the job market (see: Thijssen *et al.* 2019) and are discriminated against when buying a house (see: Andriessen & Wittebrood 2021).

on racism and human rights, E. Tendayi Achiume, called out the Dutch paradox that its insistence on equality and tolerance already existing in the Netherlands is the very thing that creates a barrier to achieving equality and tolerance (OHCHR 2019), reciprocating the message previously voiced by numerous Dutch scholars (see for example: Essed 1991; Essed & Hoving 2014; Wekker 2014). Another added value of this research is also the translation of the current debate on (anti-)racism from Dutch into English. As a Native Dutch-speaking person, I will be able to do my research in Dutch while writing it in English, thereby adding to the relatively slim body of work on this topic. The main contribution of this research thus is, particularly for an international audience, giving new insights into the workings of narratives on racial discrimination and resistance in relation to projects of belonging within the "geo-cultural confines of the Netherlands" (Dikmans: 2020: 50).

More specifically within the boundaries of Development Studies, the topic also fits within the specialisation Conflict and Peace Studies. Literature shows that sustained and/or systematic racism result in exclusion, violence, humiliations, marginalisation, isolation, and limited citizenship, among other things (Essed *et al.* 2019). Moreover, through the cultivation of specific culture that embodies both racism and the denial of it, people of colour are positioned as second-class citizens (Ghorashi 2020). These can be classified as cultural and structural violence (Galtung 1969; 1990), which privileges specific classes, ethnicities, and genders over others, and "institutionalises unequal opportunities for education, resources and respect" (Herbert, 2017: 5). In other words, systemic racism alongside the explicit denial of it happening in the Netherlands can be considered a conflict in the ways it creates injustices, unequal power relations and social tensions. Within peace and conflict studies, this could be considered as an intergroup latent conflict, or unstable peace (Brahm 2003), meaning that there is a conflict below the surface with the potential to emerge (Fischer *et al.* 2000; Brahm 2003). Nonetheless, (social) conflict is also necessary for the construction of "shared realities" (Vallacher *et al.* 2013) and provides a site for social progress and development.

1.3 Methodology, Ethical Considerations, Methods

Methodology

In this research, I inform my inquiry by a decolonial, critical race theory (CRT) approach. I borrow from these traditions since The Netherlands knows an expansive history of colonial

exploitation, being a former colonial and imperial power[3]. Even today, the Netherlands includes the Caribbean Netherlands[4]. One of the demands of anti-racism movements in the Netherlands includes an institutional acknowledgement of the Dutch slavery history in for example, educational curricula, politics, and national remembrance days such as *Keti Koti*[5]. For this research particularly, it is crucial to not fall into (neo-)colonial structures still present to this day, including academia, as Tuck and Yang (2018: 225) posit; "knowledge of self/Others became the philosophical justification for the acquisition of bodies and territories, and rule over them. Thus, the right to conquer is intimately connected to the right to know". Put simply, my undertaking as a white woman to extract knowledge from people of colour, without reciprocation, could fall into reproducing neo-colonial structures. Therefore, investigating and unpacking my whiteness has been made an active part of this research. In this way, I aim to disintegrate the divides of hegemon-subaltern, coloniser-colonised, and in research, subject-object (Casa-Cortés et al. 2008; Tuck and Yang 2018)[6].

In extension, I follow Gloria Wekker (2016) in part, by utilising what was described by Halberstam (1998: 13) as a scavenger methodology, which originates from gender and sexuality studies to "collect and produce information on subjects who have been deliberately or accidentally excluded from traditional studies". Even more so, a scavenger methodology "refuses the academic compulsion toward disciplinary coherence" (*idem.*). In other words, next to, academic works from different (social) fields and interviews, I have drawn from my own observations, news articles, books, documentaries and more to sketch a picture of the discussion at hand. In both these methodologies, my positionality is an integral part, which will be discussed in the next section.

Ethical Considerations, Positionality, Reflexivity

Within the social sciences, it is important to reflect on one's positionality and subsequent reflexivity, one's past experiences and how they shape one's interpretation as a researcher (Creswell & Creswell 2018: 258). More specifically, researching racial discrimination in an ethical manner requires careful consideration with regards to positionality and

[3] During the 19th and 20th Century, the Netherlands had colonial settlements in countries such as (modern-day) Indonesia, Suriname, and the Antilles and actively partook in slavery practices. The image of the Golden Age, where the Netherlands was a world power and gained immense wealth due to their colonial and imperial endeavors (Oostindie 2010).

[4] i.e., the islands of Aruba, Curaçao, and Sint Maarten, as well as the municipalities Bonaire, Sint Eustatius, and Saba.

[5] *Keti Koti*, meaning 'Breaking of the Chains', is festival and commemoration on July 1 that commemorates and celebrates the abolition of slavery in the former Dutch colony of Suriname and the Dutch Antilles in 1863. Yet many enslaved people were not free until 1873 (Cain 2016).

[6] See also Zantvoort (2019) as another Research Paper example.

methodological approach, i.e., a CRT and decolonial approach. As such, I am a white, Dutch woman, born into in a middle-class household. Precisely of these categories I enjoy certain privileges in both the Netherlands and other parts of the world. From a (de-)colonial perspective, I am positioned at the coloniser's side in the colonial divide and because of that I cannot recall a time where I was discriminated against because of my skin colour, (perceived) ethnicity, or religion. As such, my whiteness is a significant aspect of my positionality in this research.

In extension, as a white person, talking to people of colour about their experiences with racial discrimination can follow patterns of coloniality and reproduce unequal power relations (Tuck and Yang 2018). In other to counter this, I have held a few conceptual tools and practices in mind throughout designing and conducting this research. First and foremost, my starting point for this investigation is Escobar's (2015) 'radical questioning, which leads to questions like 'why is this story being told over another?', 'why are we so set on these beliefs?', and 'who is 'we', and why?'. Put differently, my focus is on the mapping of resisting narratives that question hegemonic, naturalised, taken-for-granted Dutch self-representations.

Secondly, I also follow Sara Motta in decolonising the politics of knowledge through "the figure of the storyteller from the epistemological margins" (2016: 34). Instead of focussing on knowledges rooted in Eurocentrism and a Western epistemology, I will expand my view to a space in which "multiple knowledges, multiple subjects of knowing and multiple practises of creating knowledge" (Motta 2016: 45) exist together. This means that I focus on creating knowledge with the research participants without necessarily focussing on Western epistemology, but rather looking at decoloniality for example.

The third practice I apply in my research is inspired by Lugones' "world-traveling" (1987: 18). Because I am telling the story of resistance to racism and discrimination in the Netherlands from the perspective of someone that has not experienced racism herself and thus has a different lived experience, I engage with my research participants' stories though "world"-traveling and loving perception to cross the bridge. With this, Lugones' posits that through "world"-traveling, we can discover and understand that people have individual sets of lived experiences and identities that shape them. Moreover, as opposed to arrogant perception, "world"-traveling and loving perception are an act of acknowledgement which gives space to people who normally are victim to arrogant perception and reaffirm that they are "subjects, lively beings, resistors, constructors of visions" (1987: 18). Likewise, the research participants in my research are not research objects, but living, loving, curious, wise human beings, whose stories I had the privilege to interact with.

Lastly, in my conversations with the research participants, I have consistently addressed and been open about my positionality and open to criticism, reflections and tried to co-create the research with them. This way, this research paper is an attempt in active allyship as well as a learning experience in undoing my own whiteness.

Methods and Accounting for Limitations

To answer my research question, I investigated important and interesting anti-racism narratives in the Netherlands through semi-structured responsive interviews (Rubin & Rubin 2005; O'Leary 2017). With regards to the sampling, a combination of snowball sampling, moving through informal networks by means of referral, and targeted sampling (*Hennink et al.* 2020) was utilised. The advantage of this sampling method is that otherwise potential hard-to-reach participants suddenly become accessible through networking (O'Leary 2017; Hennink *et al.* 2020: 104). Additionally, semi-structured, responsive interviews also leave room for unexpected and interesting data that may emerge (O'Leary 2017; Hennink *et al.* 2020). Nonetheless, the downside of snowball-sampling is the potential lack diversity in the sample, which can be accounted for through careful consideration of the seed-participants (Hennink *et al.* 2020: 98). Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, most of the interviews were held online over Zoom. Of the interviews that were held in-person, one took place in a café and another in someone's kitchen while cooking. See Annex I for a participant overview.

Due to the limited scope of this research paper, I will pertain my search to some geographical boundaries and subsequent pool of interview participants. Importantly, the ideal target group for data collection is intersectional while all participants have an active role in the creation of anti-racism narratives, whether formal or informal, such as their work, studies, activism, or personal life. At the same time, this research focusses on the urban landscape[7], as opposed to rural or suburban areas, due to their more diverse nature in relation to ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds (Hoekstra *et al.* 2017; CBS 2021). In other words, I am working from the assumption that (counter-)narratives in the urban setting in relation to the narrative of the Netherlands as a tolerant, diverse country, are more nuanced than in rural settings where there is significantly less ethnic and cultural diversity (CBS 2021) and

[7] The urban landscape in the Netherlands is commonly referred to as *de Randstad* including big cities such as The Hague, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and Utrecht.

encounters are different. Moreover, being based in Utrecht myself, it is also more practical to focus on this area, being able to travel through the area easily to meet participants.

All the while, still some limitations exist: even though this research is meaningful, it way encapsulates only a small pool of stories that are part of a very large and diverse movement. With this I mean to say that, although worthwhile, this research is in no way complete, and ends where other interesting stories begin. At the same time, it would take years and many interviews to map out a general trend within the counter narratives and how they interact with the hegemonic Dutch self-image. It is therefore my suggestion to leave this to be researched in the future.

In extension, on a rather practical note, like most research, there was a limitation of time and resources. Another practical limitation was that, in the wake of the global COVID-19 pandemic, some interviews were held online over zoom while others were held in person. Especially sensitive and nuanced topics such as this research, are sometimes more difficult to discuss online, rather than in person. However, even though this remains a limitation, I am very grateful for the online interview participants especially, to have opened to me about their experiences, thoughts, and viewpoints on such an important topic, while never having met me in real life.

1.4 Chapter Outline

In this chapter, I have set out the research problem, questions, relevance, methods and limitations. In turn, Chapter 2 concerns the conceptual and theoretical framework for this research. I focus on views on the 'Other', the constructions of the White Dutch self-image, and propose theories of belonging as a lens through which I look at the research question. In Chapter 3, I set out important findings with regards to hegemonic Dutch self-representations, through the combination of a reflective section with my own experience having grown up here, and the views of interview participants. Following, Chapter 4 deals with the rest of the interview findings and deals with resisting narratives. In Chapter 5, these findings are analysed through the lens of the politics of belonging. I argue that the narratives on anti-racism which counter the hegemonic Dutch self-representations, essentially are about renegotiating who belongs to the Dutch community, through the operationalisation of diversity, inclusion, decoloniality and holding space. Lastly, in Chapter 6, I discuss some final reflections, thoughts, conclusions, and openings to which this research has led.

Chapter 2 – Conceptual Framework

"Forgetting, glossing over, supposed color blindness, an inherent and natural superiority vis-à-vis people of color, assimilating; these are, broadly speaking, the main Dutch models that are in operation where interaction with racialised/ethnicized others is concerned"

(Wekker 2016: 15)

In this chapter, I outline the conceptual framework that will serve as the theoretical underpinning of this research. The first part describes ways in which 'the Other' has been defined in the Dutch context, through its conceptions of race, ethnicity, and racism. The second part departs from Gloria Wekker's seminal work *White Innocence* (2016) and theorises 'whiteness', 'white innocence' and the Dutch cultural archive. Lastly, the third section conceptualises (repressive) tolerance in the Dutch context and proposes Theories of Belonging (Yuval-Davis 2006; 2010; 2011) as a framework.

2.1 No Race Here: the 'Other', Ethnicity and Racism(s) in the Netherlands

In pursuit of understanding the narratives of resistance, it is imperative to understand who and what is resisted. This section focuses on how the 'other' has been defined in the Dutch context and who 'the other' exactly is in the Netherlands. The concept of 'race' is a contested term in the Netherlands, illustrated by the utilisation of ethnic over racial categories (Essed & Trienekens 2008; Weiner 2014; Wekker 2016; Ghorashi 2020). Importantly, the meaning of 'race' and its surrounding discourse is fundamentally different from the meanings and discourses in the United States: the race demarcations are less intense in the Netherlands as opposed to the US where African-American and White American are seen as different 'races' (Essed & Trienekens 2008). In Europe, after the Second World War and during the decolonisation period, the term race disappeared from the "discursive scene" (Essed & Trienekens 2008: 55) in Europe, as a "wishful evaporation", in the wake of the devastating consequences of the racializing processes underpinned by anti-Semitism and followed by the Holocaust (Goldberg 2009: 152; Hondius 2014). The response to these happenings was to deny 'race' completely, and so "for Europeans generally, then, race is not, or really is no longer" (Goldberg 2009: 152). Yet at the same time, post-war migration to the Netherlands brought new

skin colours, religions, and cultures to the Netherlands. Post-war migration included three major groups: postcolonial migrants, labour migrants form the Mediterranean area and, more recently, Eastern Europe, and refugees from many different countries including Asia, Africa, and the Middle East[8] (Wekker 2016; Çankaya & Mepschen 2020). What happened here then, is quite paradoxical: while Europe did not speak of race any longer, at the same time it became more diverse than ever.

In relation to these migration groups then, the general discourse focusses on cultural differences (i.e., (post)modern versus 'traditional' cultures and religious differences) and national identity, emphasised by the usage of ethnic categories over racial distinctions (Essed & Trienekens 2008; Weiner 2014). The use of this discourse marks the 'important' differences in systems of oppression that are about divergences from the norm, in this case, the white Christian European Dutch norm. The Netherlands embodies a strong example of these discourses as a tool of differentiation in both formal and informal settings.

Autochtoon, Allochtoon – Insider, Outsider

In daily Dutch discourse, both formal and informal, the terms *autochtoon* (Dutch), and *allochtoon* (non-Dutch) are commonly used. In particular, *allochtoon* - defined by the Dutch government as "residents born elsewhere, as well as their children, even when born in the Netherlands and even when one parent was born in the Netherlands as well" - is a unique term in the Dutch language which has no English translation (Essed and Trienekens 2008: 57; Çankaya & Mepschen 2020). On the other side of the dichotomy exists *autochtoon* which includes the native, authentic, i.e., *White* Dutch citizens born in the Netherlands (Essed & Trienekens 2008; Weiner 2014; Wekker 2016). In other words, *autochtoon* is the insider, a member of the national community, perpetually part of the in-group, whereas the *allochtoon* is the "minority outsider" (Weiner 2014: 733). These concepts, together with notions such as "culture, ethnicity, migration, diverse, minority", are used instead of "race" in the Netherlands. Concurrently, these terms have "ruled important parts of Dutch political and academic discourse" (Hondius 2014: 275). Furthermore, formal distinctions are also made between western and non-western *allochtonen,* with western *allochtonen* representing likeness to western civilisation and the latter, non-western, being less integrated, and less 'modern' like western civilisation is (Essed & Trienekens 2008: 56). Non-Western immigrants include people from the Dutch Antilles, Surinamese, Turkish, and Moroccan people, as the four largest minority

[8] According to the Dutch bureau for statistics, i.e., CBS, in July 2021 24,8% of Dutch population had a 'migration background' (comprising of a first and second generation). Of this group, CBS distinguishes between two categories: 10,7% has a western background and 14,7% a non-Western background (CBS 2021).

groups currently in the Netherlands (Weiner 2014: 733; Wekker 2016; Çankaya & Mepschen 2020). Upon closer investigation of these terms then, the *autochtoon-allochtoon* dichotomy is the primary 'us' versus 'them' marker in the Netherlands (Hondius: 2014). The creation of boundaries through the usage of these terms also inhibits ethnicized groups to claim multiple identities (Essed & Trienekens 2008; Ghorashi 2009; Wekker 2016), such as 'Turkish-Dutch' or 'Surinamese-Dutch' (Weiner 2014: 733). Moreover, while ethnicized people are technically a migrant until at least the fourth generation (Essed & Trienekens 2008; Ghorashi 2006, 2009; Weiner 2014; Wekker 2016), they will forever remain *allochtoon* in the eyes of the *autochtoon*, because of their skin colour, (perceived) ethnicity or religion that does not fit into the white Christian Netherlands (Wekker 2016). In other words, this binary dictates who formally belongs and who does not; it sets the racializing process in motion (Goldberg 2009; Wekker 2016).

Different scholars have pointed out the ways in which the *allochtoon-autochtoon* discourse racializes groups of people, in particular people of colour, without actually having to use "distasteful racial terms" (Wekker and Lutz 2001; Hondius 2014; Wekker 2016: 15). As such, different scholars conceptualised the 'other' in different ways that ought to be less harmful and more to the point. Essed (1996), used the term 'racial-ethnic' to put words to the systems of racialization and ethnicization in relation to historic developments. Other scholars talk about people with a migration-background, or more to the point, black, brown people, or even "racialized" an "ethnicized" people or groups, to emphasise the process. (Goldberg 2009) On the other hand, Wekker (2016: 23) takes on 'race' as the "fundamental organising grammar in Dutch society" in relation to the black, refugee, and migrant other. She takes on Frankenberg's (1993: 11) notion of race as a socially constructed category as opposed an inherently meaningful one. What is more, "race refuses to remain silent because it isn't just a word. It is a set of conditions shifting over time. Never just one thing, it is a way (or really ways) of thinking, a way(s) of living, a disposition" (Goldberg 2009: 156). More specifically to the Dutch context, Çankaya and Mepschen also take race to be a constructed fiction yet argue that "it is as real as the door that keeps postcolonial migrants and their offspring from entering a night-club and as intrusive as being stopped and searched by a police officer" (2020: 628). In other words, although race and ethnicity are constructed, politically loaded categories, they underpin and set in motion actual daily racisms. One very recent example of this, is a Dutch court case in which the judge ruled that border checks at airports on the basis of ethnicity or (i.e., ethnic profiling) is not discriminatory (Çankaya 2021). This example showcases that although these race classifications are arbitrary, the

effects of skin difference is very real and politicised. At the same time, this case shows, as Çankaya puts poignantly, that "to be Dutch is to be White" (2020).

At the same time, Hondius (2014: 274) points out how the avoidance of "'race talk' may have good intentions: not giving an inch to "race" not allowing "race" any space in human interaction" yet, "this firm avoidance however, is a certain uneasiness in everyday interaction, especially in a society in which racial and ethnic segregation (…) have developed unmistakably". In this Research Paper, I will interchangeably use race, ethnicity, racialization, ethnicization, people of colour, and other terms instead of *allochtoon-autochtoon*. More importantly, I follow the scholars that argue for the constructed meaning of race, rather than a biological, inherently meaningful term. Even more so, I follow Hondius (2014: 276) in that although we (i.e., Dutch people in this context) think, or want to think that skin colour does not matter, it most certainly does.

Everyday Racism(s) and the Threat of Race

The demarcation dividing 'us' and 'them' in the Netherlands which focuses on perceived culture and religion and is linked to skin colour, lay the ground for 'everyday racism' (Essed 1984; 1991: 3). This conceptualisation links "ideological dimensions of racism with daily attitudes" and "connects structural forces of racism with routine situations in everyday life". The ideological dimension could be as specific as the view that Islam is inherently incompatible with a modern, liberal society such as the Netherlands (Essed & Trienekens 2008; Ghorashi 2003, 2006, 2020; Wekker 2016) or as broad as the assumption that whiteness and being white is better than being a person of colour, invoking notions of entitlement and superiority (Essed & Trienekens 2008; Wekker 2016). Importantly, the banishment of race from European discourse, brought along with it a shift from biological to cultural racism, in which Europe is more advanced, politically and economically, through work ethic as opposed to colonisation and exploitation (Winant 2001; Weiner 2014; Wekker 2016). In this way, the dominant (white) can blame the minority's cultural differences and lack of assimilation, for their socio-economic status, rather than the structures that keep these inequalities in place, and subsequently consigns minorities to "a perpetual outsider status" (Weiner 2014: 732).

Racism then, operates "in relation to and through other systems of exclusion, marginalization, abuse, and repression" (Essed & Goldberg: 2002: 3), whether it be overt or covert (Weiner 2014). In other words, the concept of 'everyday racism' distinguishes between interpersonal, or individual (micro-processes) and institutional (macro-processes) dimensions of racism (Essed 1984). Particularly, sites for institutional racism include concrete

organisations or institutional fields such as education, labour market, healthcare, and the police (Felten *et al.* 2021).

In his theorisation of racial neoliberalism, Goldberg (2009: 181) argues that through racial Europeanisation, Europe "resituates the classic mix of institutional and individual racisms, of racisms representative of the state and sewn into the fabric of civil society". In other words, the individual and the institutional are overlapping sites that constitute and reconfigure each other. Also not unimportant, Goldberg (2009) argues specifically that the framing of race as a 'threat' constitutes the contemporary significance of racial categorisations. Whereas in previous centuries, curiosity (differentiating from others by means of categories), and thereafter exploitability (i.e., slavery) were the main historical prompts for racial conception, now 'threat' constitutes the reason for racial significance (2009: 29). This is not to say that currently, curiosity and exploitability are not acting as prompts anymore inasmuch that 'threat' is now the foregrounding prompt, which is exemplified by the terms of Islamophobia and the policies against migration into Europe[9]. By framing the 'other' as threat, they should be kept at distance, whether physically, socially, emotionally, psychologically, or politically, from the European home of whiteness and Christianity (2009: 29).

Lastly, it is useful to define what I understand as anti-racism within this research. I understand anti-racism to be an approach "which acknowledges not only the pain of the past, but also seeks to unmask and engage racist, classist and patriarchal practices within systems" (Bowers Du Toit: 2019: 1). It is important to distinguish anti-racism from non-racialism, since non-racialism argues for a state in which one's race is irrelevant to "their social, psychological and material well-being - it is not necessarily a state in which races do not exist" (Msimang 2018: 49). In other words, non-racialism, or anti-racialism is against such racial categorisations altogether, and instead imagines a world in which race, essentially does not matter in the social structure (Goldberg 2009). Yet, as scholars have pointed out, non-racialism and its opposition against categorisations is not productive as it does not address underlying structures that are the result of visible difference, such as skin colour, as opposed to anti-racism (Hondius 2014; Goldberg 2009l; Msimang 2018; Bowers Du Toit 2019). Following from the previous section, it can be said that Dutch discourse and attitude towards race is following non-racialist attitudes, in pretending it does not exist. Therefore, in this research I use the term and ideology behind anti-racism, which actively takes a stance against an

[9] See for example, Chouliaraki & Stolic (2017) who set out five visual typologies of the refugee 'crisis' as seen in the media, which includes visibility as biological life, visibility as empathy, **visibility as threat**, visibility as hospitality and visibility as self-reflexivitiy.

imposed "set of conditions, an explicit refusal or a living of one's life in such a way one refuses the imposition, whether one is a member of the subjugated population or the subjugating one" (Goldberg 2009: 10).

2.2 Whiteness and Dealing with the 'Other'

A variety of scholars have attributed the Dutch discourse on race and ethnicity and everyday racism to a larger issue at hand. By shying away from discourse on race and racism and using cultural and ethnic differentiations, racism becomes rather nuanced and invisible. This conceptual loophole (Koekoek *et al.* 2017: 82), plays out both in the telling of Dutch (colonial) history[10] as well as the discourse on current everyday racism, and can be linked to Gloria Wekker's (2015; 2016) notion of white innocence, which will be explained in this section.

White Innocence and the Dutch Cultural Archive

If the 'them' is the *allochtoon*, the outsider: whom is the 'us'? When defining who the 'other' is, a definition of the Dutch insider should not be taken for granted. As mentioned in the previous section, the *autochtoon* is the Dutch, the insider, the native, authentic citizen. Normatively, being Dutch is being white. However, it is never pointed out, never actually defined: it is naturalised, taken for granted and never questioned (Wekker 2016). Whiteness then, can be defined firstly, as

> "… a location of structural advantage, of race privilege. Second, it is a "standpoint", a place from which white people look at ourselves, at others, and at society. Third, "whiteness" refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed" (Frankenberg 1993: 1).

One example with regards to the third point, is the celebration of Sinterklaas with the figure of *Zwarte Piet,* or 'Black Pete' of which the racial aspect went unmarked and unnamed until only relatively recently. In outlining the white Dutch sense of self, Wekker utilises and conceptualises white innocence and the Dutch cultural archive to anthropologize the White Dutch citizen. These concepts largely describe the (white) Dutch narrative of community and consequential self-image and therefore will be utilised in my analysis.

[10] For example, the term *politionele acties,* or 'police actions' which refers to the violent episodes of the Indonesian War of Independence and suggests that that it was about restoring civil order, as opposed to explaining it as imperial violence and wartime atrocities caused by the Dutch military (Wekker 2016; Koekoek *et al.* 2017).

In operationalising the concept of "cultural archive" borrowing from Edward Said (1993), she asserts that an "unacknowledged reservoir of knowledge and affects based on four hundred years of Dutch imperial rule plays a vital but unacknowledged part in dominant meaning-making processes, including the making of the self, taking place in Dutch society" (Wekker 2016: 2). The Dutch cultural archive is located "in the way we think, do things, look at the world […] most important, it is between our ears and in our hearts and souls" (2016: 19). In other words, the cultural archive is not an actual location, but an archive of collective memories and cemented in rules, policies, popular cultures and everyday common-sense knowledge (2016: 19). The Dutch cultural archive thus is the repository from which the Dutch self-image is imagined and created. Yet, this self-representation is a highly paradoxical one, we see ourselves as an ethical and gentle nation, and pride ourselves with the emancipation of women and LGBTQIA+ rights and tolerance (Wekker 2016: 5). Nevertheless, these self-representations are premised by the structural erasure and denial of racism and its violent colonial past (Wekker 2015; 2016; 2018). Wekker (2016) specifically sets out three paradoxes within the Dutch archive which point to white innocence: i). there is no identification with migrants; ii). the Dutch as innocent victim of German occupation; and iii). the Dutch imperial presence in the world. These paradoxes all assert the 'innocence' of the Dutch as a small, white, Christian country. Wekker argues that innocence is a strong feature of dominant Dutch culture and way of seeing in the world (2016: 17). Yet, the claim of innocence is "a double-edged sword: it contains not-knowing, but also not wanting to know" (2016: 17). Alternatively, Essed and Hoving (2014: 24) refer to this concept as smug ignorance, or "(aggressively) rejecting the possibility to know", self-imposing the Dutch innocence. Ultimately, the conservation of innocence means the continued preservation and cultivation of privilege, entitlement, (moral) superiority, and violence[11] (Essed and Hoving 2014; Wekker 2016).

(Repressive) Tolerance and Assimilation

The preservation of privilege and superiority through white innocence links to another practice which I would argue is very much part of the Dutch cultural archive: tolerance. Seen as a precondition for democracy, stemming from the era of *verzuiling*[12] (Ghorashi 2006),

[11] In the tradition of peace and conflict studies, in this context, I understand violence also as cultural violence following Galtung (1969; 1990), superseding the notion of violence as merely physical.
[12] short explanation *Verzuiling* or Pillarization, was the social system in which society was categorized roughly between 1880-1970. The four pillars (*zuilen*) were Catholics, orthodox-protestants, social-democrats, and liberals, which translated into a political decision making and a 'pacification-democracy' (Hoogenboom en Scholten 2008: 109).

tolerance has always been a characteristic the Dutch identify and pride themselves with, as the epitome of moral goodness (Çankaya and Mepschen 2019). Yet, although for the Dutch, 'tolerance' has a general positive connotation[13], different scholars have pointed out the entitlement and supposed superiority of the act. Goldberg contends that "tolerance is always expressed towards the tolerated […] from the tolerating agent's position of power" (2009: 157). In other words, tolerance is granted and therefore can be taken back at any moment by the tolerating agent, which is a possibility that looms over every interaction. Critical Race Theory "exposes how taken for granted claims of race neutrality, color blindness, and the discourse of tolerance, often hide from view the 'hidden, invisible, forms of racist expressions and well-established patterns of racist exclusion'" (Essed and Nimako 2006, in Wekker 2016: 51). Thus, tolerance is a tool for racist exclusion and exerting power. Dutch tolerance especially goes hand in hand with the notion of assimilation, which has been the main model of dealing with racial difference, next to segregation (Essed 1994). Put differently, tolerance always has a way of keeping an outsider the outsider, because the white Dutch insider whom the power to tolerate, also sets the standards for assimilation. The racial and ethnic other never *really* belongs, they are stuck on an invisible border which demarcates the white Dutch from the not-quite-Dutch, and so "longing is cut off from belonging, the former restricted to economic considerations in the case of the alien, drawing conceptual boundary cutting off the stranger from the inherent insider" (Goldberg 2009: 188).

Colonial Aphasia

However, there is also another view on the erasure of the Dutch colonial past, which according to Wekker is one side of the paradox of white innocence. The Dutch colonial past has gone unnoticed for many years and trying to insert the colonial memories "into the general memory often meets with hostility and rejection" (Wekker 2016:4). Within the national framework, we commemorate World War II, yet do not acknowledge the imposed violence in the former colonies (Bijl 2012; Wekker 2016), this is not only true for the Netherlands, but for other European countries as well (Goldberg 2009). Moreover, the memory of the Second World War and its trauma has largely defined what Europe sees as 'race' (Goldberg 2009). To contest these discourses in favour of a more realistic and inclusive history of the Netherlands has been met with strong resistance and denial. It is argued that there has been a collective amnesia of the Dutch colonial past, because of its loud silence in the collective

[13] Tolerance, or *tolerantie* also translates into *verdraagzaamheid*, invoking notions of something being 'bearable', close to 'forbearing' - which is perhaps a better translation for the connotation behind Dutch tolerance.

memory (Bijl 2012; Goldberg 2009). Yet, Dutch colonialism and violence "sometimes appear as forgotten in the Netherlands because the victims of colonialism are not memorable within a national context and there is no language available to discuss them as a part of Dutch history," as opposed to being made absent through conspiracies and cover-ups (Bijl 2012: 458). In other words, through the separate framings, the national and colonial histories are kept apart since the latter is framed as "outside national history and collective Dutch concerns" (Bijl 2012: 458). Even when the Dutch colonial past is talked about, the general idea exists that the Netherlands was relatively innocent, for example, during the Indonesian War for Independence from 1945-1949. Yet, it has been construed that the Dutch army, structurally used extreme violence during that war, as opposed the idea that extreme violence was an incidental excess at the most (Limpach 2016). This process is reminiscent of Stoler's (2011) colonial aphasia, as "a dismembering, a difficulty speaking, a difficulty generating a vocabulary that associates appropriate words and concepts with appropriate things" (2011: 125). Put differently, aphasia points to how silences are not always specifically about complete oblivion or purposeful forgetting, but to issues of lack of language and possibilities for its expression. This lack of language moreover, "inhibits the production of a memorable past" (Bijl 2012: 449).

While this may be true, at the same time this "inability to recognise historical wrongdoing of the colonial past impacts contemporary conceptions of national history, identity, and reconciliation of historic oppression with contemporary inequalities (Weiner 2014: 738). So, even though there is the argument of colonial aphasia, the question is, aphasia for whom? Certainly not for the people who face contemporary inequalities as a result of colonialism and whose identities are actively shaped through the colonial past. Yet, through Foucauldian power relations, dominant (white) narratives are naturalised and regarded as true at the expense of Other narratives.

2.3 The Politics of Belonging

Theorising Belonging

The complex idea of 'belonging' can be theorised in many ways and has been done so in a variety of different social disciplines (see: Halse 2018). Yet, the concept of 'belonging' however remains a rather vague term (Antonsich 2010; Halse 2018). Grammatically, "belonging can mean 'to belong '(v) or to possess or to own something; it can also mean 'belongingness ' (n), denoting that one belongs to and is a member of a particular social group, solidarity,

collectivity or organisation (Halse 2018: 3). However, what belonging specifically involves then, "is not straightforward in a world of increasing racial, religious, ethnic, cultural and language diversity" (Halse 2018: 3). As such, the concept of belonging operates on multiple scales, including the home, the nation-state, or global communities, and focusses on "one's attachment to particular social groups, social solidarities or social collectivities" (Halse 2018: 5). As one of the most influential scholars on belonging in relation to the nation state, political theorist Nira Yuval-Davis (2004: 215) has pointed out that belonging:

> "Is not just about membership, rights, and duties, but about the emotions that such membership evoke. Nor can belonging be reduced to identities and identifications, which are about individual and collective narratives of self and other, presentation and labeling, myths of origin and of destiny. Belonging is a deep emotional need of people"

In other words, concepts of 'citizenship' or 'identity' cannot encapsulate the notion of belonging at the level of the nation state - rather, belonging is a collusion of identification and participation (Yuval-Davis 2004: 216). More specifically, belonging should not be confused with the politics of belonging, which will be discussed in the next section. Belonging is about an emotional, ontological attachment of people, of "feeling at home" (Yuval-Davis 2011: 10). Furthermore, as with the hegemonic structures, belonging tends to be naturalised and part of everyday practices, until it is threatened in some way (Yuval-Davis 2004; 2011).

Yuval-Davis identified three facets in which belonging can be analysed (2006; 2011: 12). Firstly, belonging can pertain to social and economic locations; secondly, to people's identifications and emotional attachments; and thirdly, the ethical and political value systems that people relate to, and consequently judge others against (2011: 12). Relating to the first facet, people's gender, sex, race, class, profession, kinship and more, make up one's socials and economic location with which one relates with and is positioned on the grids of power relations in their society. These social and economic axes are socially constructed and can be compared to a basic interpretation of intersectionality (see for example Crenshaw 1989; 1991). Here, it is important to emphasise how within black feminist groups the notion of intersectionality was created (Yuval-Davis 2011), while the term as it is popularised, was introduced by Crenshaw (1989). I follow both Crenshaw (1989; 1991) and Yuval-Davis (2011) in my understanding of intersectionality, which focusses on how specifically the combination of race, class, and gender as axes of one's identity intersect with each other and can explain

one's lived reality through experiences as a result of the intersection of these identities. Although throughout the years the term 'intersectionality 'has been criticised, I follow Yuval-Davis in using the term as "it evokes an intuitive understanding of the subject matter discussed in spite of all the reservations" (2011: 6).

Particularly, the second facet is of specific interest for this thesis. Yuval-Davis understands identities as "narratives, stories people tell themselves and others about who they are" (2011: 14). Although not all of these stories engage with belonging explicitly, they often relate to one's perception of what a grouping or collectivity could entail (2011: 14). These identity narratives are ever evolving while simultaneously relating to the past, present, and future of a collectivity. Identity narratives can just exist verbally or constructed as a specific practice (2011: 14). Furthermore, identity narratives are constructed and reproduced through social and cultural spaces, repetitive practices, as well as individual and collective behaviour. In other words, identifications and attachments to social solidarities are performative. Identity is both "[…] reflective and constitutive. It is not individual or collective, but involves both in and in-between perpetual state of becoming" (Yuval-Davis 2010: 271). This relates to a dialogical approach[14] of the construction of identity, emphasising dialogue as the constitutive element. Importantly, it should be highlighted that "analysing the processes by which identity narratives are constructed in the communal context is vital in order to understand the ways intersectional power relations operate within the group" (Yuval-Davis 2011: 16). In other words, although the dialogical approach focusses on the reflective and constitutive properties of identity narrative construction, one should always be aware of the power relations and intersectional differences between the members of the group and how these affect the dialogical process. Additionally, identities are relational and therefore they relate to boundaries since these narratives are concerned with discerning the self and the non-self (Butler 1993; Yuval-Davis 2011). Lastly, identity narratives reflect both who individuals believe they are, as well as who they desire to be (Halse 2018). The third and last axis, on which belonging is constructed is ethical and political value systems, which focus on the ways in which both social locations and the construction of narratives are assessed by the self and the other (Yuval-Davis 2011). Put differently, the arena of political and ethical values shape and create the conditions and limits on how specific identities are articulated and explicit boundaries are drawn (Yuval-Davis 2011; Halse 2018).

[14] (see for example: Bakhtin 1985)

From Belonging to the Politics of Belonging

Following from this, the *politics of belonging* refers to the specific "political projects aimed at constructing belonging" in relation to a particular collectivity which is being constructed in "very specific ways and in very specific boundaries" (Yuval-Davis 2011: 10). Importantly, the politics of belonging not only involves the constructions of boundaries, but also the inclusion and exclusion of "particular people, social categories and groupings within these boundaries by those who have power to do this" (2011: 18). Politics both involves both actual and symbolic power, the latter being of crucial importance in relation to the politics of belonging. The boundaries with which the politics of belonging is concerned are therefore both physical and symbolic (Yuval-Davis 2011). Different hegemonic projects of belonging take place within the nation state, which shape membership, entitlements and status affect different groups, and in turn are the locations on which tensions, resistances, and contestations arise. More specifically, these tension scan arise along the different facets of belonging - social locations, identifications and attachments, and ethical and political values - in different projects of the politics of belonging (Yuval-Davis 2011: 21). In this way, "the politics of belonging are not merely about who belongs and who does not belong but about the discursive processes that make belonging possible and able to be performed and experienced" (Halse 2018: 10).

As such, the politics of belonging also include struggles around determining what exactly is involved in belonging and therefore it is dialogical (Yuval-Davis 2011: 20). In this way, the politics of belonging is not only about "the maintenance and reproduction of the boundaries of the community of belonging by the hegemonic political powers […], but also their contestation, challenge and persistence by other political agents" (2011: 20). Importantly, race is one way by which the boundaries can be constructed between those who can and those who cannot belong (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1993).

Emphasising Place-Belonging

Although I follow Yuval-Davis in her theorisation of the politics of belonging, I would like to highlight Antonsich's (2010) conception of 'place-belonging' as an added dimension to the understanding of the politics of belonging. Antonsich argues that Yuval-Davis (2006) overlooks the notion of place, "as if feelings, discourses, and practices of belonging exist in a geographical vacuum" (Antonsich 2010: 647). In response, the political and social geographer argues for place-belongingness as a personal, intimate feeling of being at home, being connected to a geographical place, next to belonging as a "discursive resource that constructs,

claims, justifies, or resists forms of socio-spatial inclusion/exclusion" (2010: 645). Specifically, place-belongingness entails one's individual attachment to a specific geographic place, symbolic space, or territory that gives them an attached and rooted feeling of being secure, comfortable and 'at home' (2010: 647). Place-belongingness can take place through five factors: auto-biographical, relational, cultural, economic, and legal.

Auto-biographical factors entail one's personal history that attach a particular person to a specific place, such as childhood memories, experiences, and emotions. In turn, relational factors relate to the personal and social ties in a given place, whether that be with strangers, friends, or family members. Cultural factors then, refer to language, cultural expressions and traditions as one of many examples. Economic factors zoom in one material conditions that create a safe and stable condition for the individual's life. Lastly, legal factors are essential in relation to security, which is also a vital dimension of belonging (Antonsich 2010: 647-648). These five factors can lead a person to "lead a life that is meaningful, a life worth living which […] is what to find a place where we belong is all about (2010: 649). The integral epistemological assumption of Antonsich is that contrary to other politics of belonging scholars[15], the absence of place-belongingness is a sense of loneliness, isolation, and non-belonging (Antonsich 2010: 649). In other words, the individual dimension of belonging, conceptualised as place-belongingness, is just as important as belonging on the social, collective, political scale. Yet, these two dimensions are not completely separate from each other. Indeed, Antonsich (2010) also argues that the other dimension, namely the social scale, is interwoven with place-belongingness. In his own words, "one's personal, intimate feeling of belonging to a place should always come to terms with discourses and practices of socio-spatial inclusion/exclusion at play in that very place and which inexorably conditions one's sense of place-belongingness" (2010: 649).

2.4 Recapitulation

To conclude, in this Chapter I set out three sections. The first and second section respectively help to understand the 'us' vs. 'the Other' dichotomy and its dynamics. These chapters work together in the sense that they set out different contexts and narratives in which it is showcased that there is a very clear hegemonic project of belonging in the Netherlands and which tools serve the maintenance of these boundaries. The third section has presented theories on the (politics of) belonging, in order to understand the ways in which narratives around the

[15] (See for example Trudeau 2006: 423)

Dutch self-representation are constructed and more importantly, contested and re-constructed.

Chapter 3 – Which Self-Representations? Depends on Who You Ask

In the previous chapter, I described the conceptual framework, and showed how hegemonic narratives dictating the 'essential' Dutch self-image is white dominated in the ways it upholds whiteness as the norm, substantiating institutionalised racism and discrimination in the process. In this chapter the interview findings will be set out. In conversations with interview participants, I investigated what, according to them, the Dutch self-image is and how this self-image(s) is, or should be, resisted. The interview fragments[16] are discussed in three themes, spread over two chapters: the Janus-face of Dutch self-representations, acknowledging the unacknowledged, and in the next chapter, identifying pathways forward

The first section in this chapter serves as a starting point and will briefly touch upon the starting points for my inquiry, as reflected by the Dutch cultural archive. The second section illuminates the selectivity of the White Dutch story according to the interviewees. Thirdly, the current situation and the lack of acknowledgement among white Dutch people that my interview participants experience will be described.

3.1 Starting Points for Inquiry

As established in the previous chapter, the Dutch self-representations and narratives are all constituted and reflected by the Dutch cultural archive (Wekker 2016). Therefore, in order to understand these self-representations, it is important to take a brief look at this archive.

To reiterate succinctly, the Dutch cultural archive is a metaphor for an" unacknowledged reservoir of knowledge and affects based on four hundred years of Dutch imperial rule plays a vital but unacknowledged part in dominant meaning-making processes, including the making of the self, taking place in Dutch society" (Wekker 2016: 2). In other words, the Dutch cultural archive dictates the Dutch self-image, cultural practices, and dominant narratives. Growing up as a white 'native' Dutch woman, the Dutch cultural archive has shaped my knowledge, (cultural) practices, thought patterns, and my sense of normality. It also shapes how I and all other Dutch people construct the 'Dutch' and 'the Other'. Scholars have pointed out how some Dutch dominant narratives are specifically intertwined with racisms and Othering the black, migrant and refugee other (Weiner 2014; Wekker 2016). These

[16] All interview fragments were translated from Dutch by the author and keywords have been italicised/boldened to emphasize the key theme of the citations.

stories are about Dutch tolerance and equality, protector of LGBTQIA+ rights, and the Netherlands as a victim of the second World War and even further back in time, the Golden Age as start of the Netherlands as it is now. These are the stories that Dutch people like to tell themselves and others, even more so these stories have institutionalised in museums, schools, and cultural practices. Personally, growing up in the Netherlands as a white woman, I have heard all these stories and as such I can confirm these dominant self-representations. Most other narratives, I have had to learn autodidactically, through literature, documentaries, other people and the internet, yet my knowledge is only so limited because of my positionality. This was my starting point for my conversations with the interview participants. When I asked them about what dominant Dutch narratives are, a lot was confirmed, yet they also painted another picture.

3.2 The Janus-Faced Dutch Self-Image

My starting point for the interview participants was asking them about their view on the Dutch dominant story: "what are Dutch dominant narratives/self-images when it comes to race and ethnicity?". This question provoked quite some different stories and emotions. Several participants described a frame in which the Dutch view themselves as a victim of the German occupation. A second theme that arose as a pattern is how participants denoted that our Dutch self-image mostly focused on freedom and justice.

> "… this I still find an interesting frame. That we're the victims of ***German occupation***. That still is a very dominant viewpoint… that ***we're an innocent country***, that we want the best for the rest of the world, that we're the country of human rights and freedom. I don't think that's entirely untrue, but ***I think it's only a part of the story*"** (LN, 9 September)

This dominant narrative can be explained as the still popular Dutch disposition that we were a victim of the Second World War, which vastly overlooks Dutch cooperation with the Germans and pre-existing anti-Semitism. Yet, in no other Western country, except Poland, were "as many Jews abducted and murdered in German concentration camps as from the Netherlands" (Wekker 2016: 12). Moreover, some of these interview participants spoke of the Second World War and its prominence in Dutch society while directly linking it to another part of Dutch history: our colonial past. Especially for participants with a direct, personal ties to the former colonies of the Netherlands - more specifically, Suriname, the Dutch

Antilles and current-day Indonesia - spoke of the war-frame in comparison to the past that according to them has been buried and emotionally, feels much further away.

> "That is of course the hypocritical part about it: emotionally, because there is so much attention given to ***World War II***, it feels closer. And, speaking for myself, colonialism feels much further in the past, even though it ended later of course, because ***Suriname for example only gained independence in 1975*** and Indonesia officially, acceding to the Dutch, in 1949"
>
> (LN, 9 September)

> "A lot of stuff happened here [in the U.S.], ***so you cannot deny*** that slavery happened. With the Netherlands, it's a lot of a ***'ver van je bed show'***[17]"
>
> (AC, 6 September)

Alongside the narrative of WWII, values such as 'gezelligheid', tolerance, and normalcy, were all described by interview participants as narratives that resonate with the Dutch - or we even pride ourselves with. All the while these values are highly selective in nature and defined by whiteness, which came to the forefront in several of our conversations.

> "***Gezelligheid***, which is typically Dutch, although you can also find it in other cultures: 'Yeah it has to stay 'gezellig", 'act normal then you're crazy enough"'
>
> (AC, 6 September)

> "I think if you ask the average Dutch person, then I think they'll find ***the Netherlands a really good country*** and, how do you say it, ***tolerant*** indeed. But that's of course the problem for years already, when you look at refugees and migrants, then it comes back to your face, 'this land is ***ours*** and, ***they*** have to stay away"'
>
> (LN, 9 September)

> "The dominant frame that Dutch people like to describe themselves as, and I count myself as a Dutch too, so: that ***we*** like to describe ourselves as, is that ***we're very tolerant.*** And that everything is allowed in the Netherlands. (…)

[17] *ver van je bed show,* or 'far from your bed show' refers to that, because something is not happening, or happened, in the Netherlands, it does not feel close enough to really care or be aware about.

> Because Holland is seen as tolerant because of the LGBT+ community that has always existed here and that we were the first country where you can marry regardless of your sex. But that does not mean that we're tolerant in all other aspects. Plus, tolerant is also different from acceptance. So, if I say to you ***'I tolerate you'***, that wouldn't be nice at all of me. But if I say, ***'I accept you as you are'***, then you have a different starting point as a society"
>
> (MT, 14 October)

As illustrated by the above citations, the participants not only explained what they saw as dominant narratives, but also were quite critical of it. For example, while confirming that tolerance is a popular self-image, MT also immediately points out the rather negative connotation the word holds for her. Participant LN denotes that Dutch tolerance has its limits: who deserves our tolerance? Moreover, participants described what the underlying implications of the unspoken limits of our tolerance are according to them, in relation to the Dutch and the 'Other'. Delving deeper into what this means, one participant reflected on how, next to claims of tolerance, there exists also a silent attitude surrounding race and ethnicity in the Netherlands. Another participant recounted how Dutch people silently frame this as: "***We*** are a Christian country, we are white we are very advanced and progressive, and '***they*** are not"'[18]. Albeit is mostly not expressed this directly, these are the underlying connotations and meanings concealed in different sayings.

From the conversations also follows that the distinction between 'us' and 'them' is a silent given: while 'we' do not like to talk about race and ethnicity in the Netherlands, because race does not exist here, we don't do race (Hondius 2014). On the one hand because we are 'gezellig' and tolerant, but on the other hand it also links back to the WWII narrative: "we don't want to talk about race or ethnicity, because we had the second world war and ***that*** was bad, but it does play a role … You hear that a lot, that really is a ***thing***"[19]. In this way, the horrors of the Holocaust are the touchstone against which all other things 'race' are gauged and directly become 'less important than'. The same participant linked this unwillingness to discuss race with the way the 'Other' is described in the Netherlands, the way in which ***allochtonen*** all belong to one category, de facto dehumanising them by neglecting their individual identities, even though people of colour in the Netherlands have a wealth of different backgrounds, identities, desires, dreams, and attitudes.

[18] (LN, 9 September)
[19] (AC, 6 September)

> "It is very different if you have a Surinamese connection or a Turkish connection. It is a very different way, your relation to Holland, how you came here, but no ***'you are all allochtonen, you are all one pile'***"
>
> (AC, 6 September)

These *allochtonen* know a different lived reality from *autochtone* Dutch, and so the main Dutch self-image is only really reflecting one specific part of Dutch society - *white* Dutch society. Additionally, there exists a lot of inequality on the basis of skin colour in the Netherlands which…

> "…is not really ***black-and-white inequality***, but which is inequality in the practical sense because there *are* ***specific mechanisms in place*** which assure that some people are able to move through life with more ease than others. And if you look at article 1 [of the Dutch constitution] then new are all equal to the law and you are not allowed to discriminate based on religion, race, gender, but you see that that is ***not a reality***, when you look at discrimination on the basis of skin colour. Then it all comes back to, I think, ***white innocence and white privilege*****,** which plays a big role. Or religion, like Islam, or status, with regards to passport"
>
> (LN, 9 September)

What follows from this then, is a rather nuanced picture on the Dutch self-image. On the one hand, we see ourselves as tolerant and as a free, progressive country: everything is permitted. Although this is partly confirmed by participants, they also describe another interpretation of this self-image. There is a strong reluctance to talk about race and ethnicity for which the tolerant and progressive ideals serve as a diversion, a *dooddoener*[20], all the while, racism is a daily structural and institutional occurrence.

Moreover, research participants linked the story of the second World War immediately to what is not talked about enough according to them: the Dutch colonial history, or rather, the Netherlands being complicit in colonial and slavery undertakings. Especially in conversations with people that have (personal) ties to former Dutch colonies, the issue of our Dutch

[20] *Dooddoener* is Dutch for 'clincher', a buzzkill, something that puts an immediate stop to the discussion.

colonial history came up. More so than in conversations with people that do not have ties to former colonies.

Of course, they still have family and friends there, or they even lived in these countries themselves for a while. For these people then, the Dutch colonial history is not *history*. It lives on in their family, it is in their blood, and their experience of living in the Netherlands. Importantly, the same is true for white Dutch people, only this goes unacknowledged as it is naturalised and in that sense, benefitting them and their position in Dutch society. Yet, for people with different ties to the Netherlands, history remains history to a degree. This leads to another common theme in the interviews, the (lack of) acknowledgement in Dutch society, in institutions, such as education and politics and cultural practices, of race, ethnicity, racism and colonialism.

3.3 Acknowledging the Unacknowledged

One of the other topics that I was eager to learn about as the positioned 'insider', was the question: is the Netherlands changing in its attitude and self-image with regards to race and ethnicity? If so, what has changed and how? What has not changed? Since the surge of Black Lives Matter, the *Zwarte Pieten* discussion and more, I was wondering if this had an effect in the way the interview participants experienced white Dutch people when engaging with topics of race and ethnicity, both in their daily lives, as well as on a wider societal and institutional level. Two themes came up very strongly with most participants: yes, there has been some growing awareness, albeit there is still a lack of (institutional) acknowledgement. One participant recalled Black Lives Matter and its effect in the Netherlands:

> "It was in talk shows and on the news a lot at some point, and for a moment there was a lot of attention for it. I feel that that was a ***tipping point,*** that people in the Netherlands really investigated that more themselves. And with that I mean, people outside of HIA[21], but just ***'everyday' people*** that suddenly started thinking about it more and were confronted with it, like ***'oh shit'*** (…) Because of this, the words 'racism' or 'discrimination' have in any

[21] HIA is Humanity in Action, an organization that focusses on education about social justice issues and democracy in several countries, including the Netherlands, through which I got to know this research participant as we both are fellows.

> case become a little more accepted than before, but still, ***anyway, again, it's a starting point*****"**
>
> (LN, 9 September)

More participants felt like there was some shift with Black Lives Matter and in general, it has become more of a public topic. Yet at the same time, participants experienced that when they want to talk about race, ethnicity, and racism, it is still met with a lot or resistance and denial. One trend which emerged from the conversations is that it quickly becomes too much, too extreme for white Dutch people, whenever race and racism is brought up. There is a very limited space in which it is deemed okay to speak up about, address it or even be different. One participant working in the cultural sector from a decolonial framework says they see this a lot in their work.

> "So, there is a lot of ***denial,*** a lot of ***downplaying*** in reactions. And sometimes also just […] that someone approaches you with 'hey should you say that, is that not too much', or 'is that really neutral, we are a neutral podium', things like that. Or ***'we are neutral, we are objective'*** is also used occasionally as an argument. So those are also the type of reactions that you can receive."
>
> (MP, 21 September)

This was recognised as well by other participants, whether it be in their work and personal interactions when it comes to changing the structures which cultivate and predicate daily racisms. Issues of power and the question of 'who has a say' also came up in several conversations. Participants felt and experiences that overt or covert, trying to address specific structures, adding stories, 'adding colour', was met with resistance that eventually, is about power.

> "There are a lot of little things [that are changing], but it cannot be too much and the things already in place, you cannot touch. ***So, you can add a little colour, but what was there already, must stay.*** Because, if you really wanted to change things, these ***power-relations*** change as well and then it becomes a very different story. Because 'my story is the right story' and then the quality goes down. That sort of things you hear a lot; 'if we add this then the quality goes down' because your story is no longer the only story, your story becomes 'merely' one of the many stories and not *the* story. And that is ***difficult to accept.***"

(AC, 6 September)

> "And I realised: the *zwarte piet-discussie* is not about *Zwarte Piet* at all, it is about power. So, ***who has the power in the Netherlands to have an opinion*** of our society, our culture, our norms, our values, and our symbols ... a lot was about 'who do **you** think you are, as **a black woman**, that you have the power to say something of **my** culture, symbols, rituals'."
>
> (MT, 14 October)

When delving into how this came about, where this stems from, people referred to the existing narratives in Dutch culture and how these have created systems that have worked particularly well.

> "If you see these ***systems or structures,*** then it is not weird that a large part of the Dutch people has lived in a ***white bubble for a really long time,*** and that bubble is breaking little by little, which goes too fast for some people"
>
> (MT, 14 October)

> "Holland has its own history when it comes to that denial and where that is coming from. So that is something that you need to take into account. You cannot just say ***'those people are in denial'***. Yes, that is true, but why? And how deep is that?"
>
> (AC, 6 September)

Whereas for some participants it is very frustrating to have to work around this denial in their anti-racism work, for others it was also a very personal matter. Especially when this denial comes to the story of the former Dutch-Indies, now Indonesia, which is mostly overlooked in Dutch history and discourse according to participants. In turn, denial feels more personal, since for many people it is currently a lived experience. One participant told me about her grandparents who came to the Netherlands from Indonesia and how:

> "It just **hurts** when I think of what my grandfather had to endure, and that they still wanted to go back [to Indonesia] … the Dutch government ***never***

> ***officially apologised for that***[22], and now it is getting ***swept under the carpet*** again"
>
> (LN, 9 September)

In another conversation, a participant recalled how they were a part of demonstrations against the University of Amsterdam (UvA) in 2015, to demand more room for student involvement in the institutional decision making. Within this demonstration, a subgroup of students organised themselves, under the name University of Colour, that focused specifically on the decolonisation of the university, of which this research participant was a vocal part. In conversations with the university, they experienced that:

> "At the ***institutional level there is just no acknowledgement***. […] Because it is just difficult to acknowledge, that you acknowledge your historical role, then apologise for that and then possibly have to remediate that or [to pay for] reparations"
>
> (MP 21 September)

This lack of acknowledgement on racism, race and ethnicity, the downplaying of its importance, its historical roots, and the lack of (white) initiative to dismantle systems that keep this in place, is one of the biggest challenges, and sore points for interview participants. The vast majority of participants explicitly stated that they would like to see this change. Yet from this point on, goals, visions, and pathways for look quite different for each participant, as outlined in the next chapter.

[22] 'That' being the practice of colonialism in Indonesia as well as the Dutch structural violence that was used in the Indonesian War of Independence against the Dutch oppressor.

Chapter 4 - Identifying Pathways Forward

From sketching the current situation (set out in the previous chapter), most of the conversations led to the question: which narratives would you like to see more? If you could change one aspect, what would it be? What would the ideal Dutch society look like when it comes to interacting with race and ethnicity? How would we achieve this? Most participants answered that they would like to see a Netherlands where there is more acknowledgement and where whiteness is no longer the norm. In the words of one participant: "I hope that in all those power structures we have in this society, […] there will be a ***serious, normalised,*** and ***depoliticised*** place for people of colour"[23] The desire for a serious space in the Netherlands for people of colour was expressed by other participants as well, albeit in different ways. One iteration of this is the wish for more space for different stories: "that there is space to tell your story - and then I mean really ***your complete story***, completely open and honest"[24]. Another interview participant, with whom our conversation was mostly about diversity, inclusion, and decolonisation, said:

> "Actually, ***diversity is a white word***. They speak of a norm that makes the rest 'diverse', but diversity is a fact, a reality. And really, the norm is part of asking the 'Other' to act according to the norm. And I think that for me, that is what inclusion and decolonisation is about. ***That norm, there should be no more norm***, there should be multiple tables instead of one table with one style where the other, possibly maybe can join when they act nicely and is tolerated enough"
>
> (MP, 21 September)

Even more so, another participant recalled her experience of finding how there is very little room for change; "that was my experience too, 'we love having you and we want you to lead us, but ***ai, that is a little bit [too much]***"[25]. Nevertheless, the question about how we can move forward towards this place, was mostly different for each participant. Following from this, a few approaches can be discerned from the conversations: decolonisation, 'clever' use of diversity and inclusion, and holding space. In this chapter, I will set out each in turn.

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[23] (MT, 14 October)
[24] (LN, 9 September)
[25] (AC, 6 September)

4.1 Diversity and Inclusion as Resistance

My inquiry for different pathways started with the buzzwords 'diversity' and 'inclusion'. The conversations landed mostly on the question whether these terms were productive (enough) and if so, how they should or could be operationalised. Interestingly, as also demonstrated in the previous quote, most participants experienced the terms as rather unproductive.

> "What I find strange in the first place, is that we talk about diversity and inclusion in the same sentence, because diversity is irrelevant, I think, what you want is inclusion. Because like you said earlier, is entirely true: you and me with the two of us are already diverse, apart from the fact that I am black, and you are white. ***Diversity is not the goal, inclusion is the goal***. So, what it really is about is that our structures, our institutions, are set up as such that you have a ***valid place*** irrelevant of your colour, social-economic status, sexuality, handicap, etcetera. That is what is needed"
>
> (MT, 14 October)

So, although these words are popular right now, most interview participants concur that especially the word 'diversity' misrepresents the situation: there is already diversity, it is a fact, what is needed is true and total inclusion of everyone. Although most people critiqued the buzzwords in that sense, there was one participant, AN that works a lot with the framework of deep diversity and deep democracy. He focuses on diversity and inclusion in his work by giving workshops on the topic, amongst other things. Speaking of the framework, AN explained that deep diversity, termed by Shakil Chouldry (2015), aims to overcome the 'us' vs. 'them' dichotomy through the analysis of the unconscious, below-the-radar group and individual dynamics. In practicing deep diversity, then, is to reach greater levels of fairness and inclusion in communities.

On the other hand, the participants who essentially rejected the buzzwords, another question remains: what does this inclusion look like? How is it operationalised? For this question, the participant approaches split into two paths: decolonisation as resistance and holding space as resistance. I will set out these two paths in turn.

4.2 Decolonisation as Resistance

For two participants, decolonisation was a very outspoken ideology that they were committed to as a way of resistance and creating meaningful change. For the most part, they felt that

'diversity and inclusion' were too white-centred and unproductive, rather the framework of decolonisation was something that they felt personally connected to and used in their work as well.

> "Really, you include someone in an already existing system and with that you do not change the system, maybe another term that is useful is ***'cultural cloning'***, so you are allowed to participate, but only within certain limits, and so you become a copy of the other"
>
> (MP, 21 September)

> "People of colour do get 'accepted', but only if they fit within the ***dominant culture***, so you should not diverge from that too much. So, you *can* ***look different,*** but if you have vastly different visions or fundamentally different ideas, then suddenly it is different. So [tolerance, diversity, and inclusion] is ***not going far enough***"
>
> (LN, 9 September)

Likewise, another participant recalled that while people of colour are tolerated indeed, it mostly happens when they are just a little different, yet mostly fit within the dominant culture. For these interview participants, diversity and inclusion do not go far enough in that sense: they do not allow for total difference, there always must be some resemblance to the (white) norm.

> "Decolonisation goes much further than diversity [and inclusion]. You go much further and that causes ***unease***. If you talk about diversity and inclusion and such, that is something people can handle. But if you talk about the colonial aftermath, or 'white people', those types of words are much ***more uncomfortable*** and there you notice the ***discrepancy***" (LN, 9 September)

> For me, ***decolonisation is not a metaphor***, […] Inclusion for me is not the same as decolonisation, it is something fundamentally different. Because colonisation is very much about…: you arrive in an area and you make it yours, you put a system on 'the Other'. Then, within this system, you're going to say, 'yes but I also want a seat at the table, also a seat on the white men's table,' then you're ***not decolonising***, then you are integrating within the colonial

> system. So, there is a difference in approach. There has also been a lot of critique on: decolonizing is not a metaphor. It is not just about 'oh now we understand better where these micro aggressions come from, we understand where exclusion comes from,' ***no, it is also about the literal system of colonisation***"
>
> (MP, 21 September)

What follows from this then is that the participants feel that decolonisation is useful because the system and structure should be changed, whereas diversity and inclusion are about including people into the existing system, which is essentially white-dominated and white-focussed in its origin. In this way, people of colour will never stand on the same foot as white people in the Netherlands (and the rest of the world, since coloniality automatically pertains to the global), because people of colour will always be included 'by the grace of' the benevolent white Dutch.

Yet, practically, as mentioned before, the word 'decolonisation' is a scary term for white-dominated organisations, institutions, and the like. Therefore, one participant mentioned that

> "Sometimes I use ***'diversity' and 'inclusion' as cape***, it is an empty and non-descript term, but you can use it and within that space you create, because it is an acknowledged thing, and everyone suddenly has to do something with it. Within that space you can do different things, or within that frame. So, you can play with that, and it is also a ***form of resistance***" (MP, 21 September)

Drawn from this experience then, there is also a practical element to resistance. Although the interview participant does not necessarily agree with 'diversity and inclusion' as terms, because it works for white people, these terms are the Trojan horse in which a more radical framework is utilised within the space that is created.

4.3 Holding Space as Resistance

The last path of resistance that became visible in the conversations with interview participants is 'holding space as resistance'. I distinguish this approach from the decolonial approach because of the different focus, notwithstanding that these approaches can, and do, overlap. With holding space as resistance, I refer to how interview participants describe how taking space in a white-dominated society is resistance to them: "it is not just about telling

stories, but also **about creating space**, taking space and changing things. ***The ruling norm is so narrow***"[26]. For one participant specifically, holding space, is an act of personal resistance as well as healing. Since she grew up in a white town as a girl from Indonesian descent, "I didn't want to know anything about my Indonesian roots, it is also a type of s**urvival mechanism**, because you don't want to stick out, you just want to be accepted like everyone else"[27].

One participant, AC, explains that within the practice of holding space, making space for, and telling stories is a considerable part because it is exactly those stories that highlight a different history, way of being, and interpretation of living in a society that is important, especially in relation to Dutch history and narrative. One participant would want:

> "…a ***story about vulnerability***, more openness, and if you look at historical stories, family history, that those are important. In my case, the Moluccan-Javanese story, and I think that there should be ***more acknowledgement*** for that. And I am not alone in that, so I look up people to share that with."
>
> (LN, 9 September)

Within the creation of space, for example by stories, a common thread is that this creation of space does not necessarily have to be in a white-dominated space. For research participants it is enough to find like-minded people, that possibly share the same background. One example of this is, the Decolonisation Network for the Former Dutch-Indies, mentioned by research participant LN. Because of its specific history, the sharing of stories and finding out about your own identity and background is an act of resistance and healing within the network, because of the system of colorise in place in the former Dutch-Indies.

> "Put bluntly: it was better to ***repudiate your own heritage***, so you did not want to know about and be associated with your Indonesian heritage, which is still reproduced in our generations and community […] ***The coming together is already a form of healing***, to explicitly give attention to your ***cultural heritage***, to focus on your ***personal*** and ***family history***"
>
> (LN, 9 September)

[26] (LN, 9 September)
[27] (LN, 9 September)

Alongside highlighting stories of the past, there was also focus put on the question of 'what stories do we want to create?' Where do we want to go from this point in time? One participant expressed that holding space also means that there is space for mistakes, holding space for yourself in a situation that cannot be changed immediately. Withal, holding space as resistance can also take more 'practical' approaches, the fact that people of colour just have to occupy more space in the public sphere. In this case, holding space is related to operationalising inclusiveness.

> "I think that the last thing is thus that we don't work with ***tolerance***, but towards acceptation and that a ***serious place in the public space, media, politics, science, culture,*** is a part of that. So that we go from 'oh there can, should be a person of colour here too', to 'it is logical that there is a person of colour here', because, yeah, that is what it's supposed to be like."
>
> (MT, 14 October)

In this way, holding space in the public sphere is about changing the public frame becomes more inclusive through an equal representation of the diverse society as it by de facto. By showing a diverse Netherlands in the public sphere, it enters the collective memory and in this way people from different migration backgrounds become more naturalised and depoliticised.

4.4 Some Final Notes on the Process

Lastly, I would like to highlight out some process notes. The participants were very eager to talk about their stories and viewpoints. Some participants had made it part of their job, for others it was a part of their personal life that they wanted to tell me about. Especially the first question on the Dutch self-image seemed a good starting point to get people talking about what they think and feel, a chance to speak their mind. As shown above, some questions became very personal, people were rather emotional, while I also received the remark 'this is not the first conversation I have had about this', denoting that they have been through the motions before, posing a certain detachment to the topics or their opinion, as if it were routine. What will stay with me particularly, is that, when I asked one participant what she would do differently if she were to be president of the Netherlands, she remarked: "I'll say

something 'funny', I don't think that I'll live to see the Netherlands having a black woman as president."[28]

[28] (MT, 14 October)

Chapter 5 – The Renegotiation of Belonging

In the previous chapter, I have set out the various outcomes of the conversations I had with the interview participants on their views of the (white) Dutch self-representation and resistance. In this chapter, the aim is to analyse what these findings could mean through the conceptual and theoretical lenses set out in the second chapter. As such, I will analyse the findings through the concepts described in the conceptual and theoretical framework and answer the central research question. To recapitulate, the main question is, *'how do anti-racism narratives respond to and resist the dominant Dutch self-representation and subsequently renegotiate what it means to belong in the Netherlands?'* The aim of this research is thus to understand how non-white Dutch people understand the dominant Dutch self-representation, what exactly they resist and how they resist this through the telling of their own narratives. Ultimately, this chapter is concerned with how these narratives are essentially, about renegotiating belonging.

5.1 The Keys to the Archive

Essentially, in conversations with research participants, a dominant self-representation is sketched with which the participants do not (really) resonate. At most, they argue that the dominant Dutch self-image is only a part of the story, incomplete, they feel something is lacking. They paint a picture in which they do not find themselves completely represented. This becomes interesting through Yuval-Davis' (2011) second facet of belonging – i.e., people's identifications and emotional attachments, which can be described as narratives that people tell themselves, and in turn say something about what a specific collectivity could entail. In this light it can be said that yes, the Netherlands is 'gezellig' and 'tolerant', but the other side of the coin is that this narrative is only true for *some* Dutch people - white Dutch people. For the refugee, migrant and racialised Other, this narrative does not ring so true, as they experience many intolerances and strict limits on their way of being in the Netherlands. Because the dominant self-image is not the narrative of people of colour, they do not really identify with that story and because of that: they do not really *belong* to that narrative. In other words, these findings echo Wekker (2016) through the ways in which the Dutch cultural

archive is selective by only acknowledging the White Dutch story as an ethical nation, while at the same time structurally erasing and denying racism and colonial pasts[29] (2016; 2018).

Indeed, through the eyes of the research participants, the Dutch colonial past and subsequently its effects on the position of the racialised Other in the Netherlands, is severely underrepresented. Then, to criticise this archive and dust off the old files that are buried, but still alive in the experiences of people of colour in the Netherlands, is essentially about belonging. This belonging is two-fold: firstly, Dutch people of colour feel that they are a part of the Netherlands, they are at home here, grew up here, so they belong to this socio-geographic landscape, which makes them belong to Dutch society in a very practical, everyday-way, entailing specific rights and duties as well – reminiscent of Antonsich's place-belonging (2010). Secondly, while this may be true, the dominant narratives and self-representations are not about people of colour, making them Dutch citizens that continuously walk the border of belonging and non-belonging (Yuval-Davis 2004; 2010; 2011). From this position, people of colour try to solve the tension of not-quite-belonging by renegotiating what it means to belong, through the resistance of Dutch dominant self-representations, substantiated by the fact of place-belonging: this is also *my* country. This is different from, for example, first-generation migrants for whom the claim of place-belonging is not as strong as for second- and third- generation Dutch-born citizens. Moreover, the way they experience the Netherlands, the 'good' and the 'bad', is very much so embedded in their multiple identities as a *dubbelbloed*[30]*,* or double-blood.

The ways in which this resistance happens, can follow the ways which I have set out in the previous chapter, being: 'clever' use of Diversity and Inclusion as resistance, Decolonisation as resistance, and Holding Space as resistance. In this way, the resistances can be understood as a political project that aims to reconstruct belonging, with racialised Dutch citizens both having and not having the power to do this. In other words, Dutch people of colour are asking, demanding, the keys to the archive. Yet, there are multiple systems in play that keep the keys in the clutched hands of the White Dutch and maintain it this way – as illustrated by the interviews. These are roughly: the autochtoon-allochtoon dichotomy; the

[29] I use 'past' in the plural, as the histories of the Western and Eastern Colonies are quite different and reproduce differently into power structures and inequalities to this day. In acknowledging this past, it should also be priority to conflate the complexity of these histories as well by putting them in one pile.

[30] *Dubbelbloed,* was mentioned by research participant EV (20 September), concurrently also the name of her book. The word, opposite of half-blood, reflects on the way she is both Dutch and Surinamese and how she experiences that.

framing of race as threat and everyday racism(s); white innocence and smug ignorance; and (repressive) tolerance. I will discuss each in turn.

5.2 The Clutched Hand Holding the Keys

Firstly, the allochtoon-autochtoon dichotomy came up in several conversations. Not only is this dichotomy the marker between 'us' and 'them' in the Netherlands, but it also puts people with a migration background all in "one pile", as mentioned by one participant[31], demarcating the white Dutch and the racialised, dehumanised[32] 'Other'. This disregard for the possibility of different connections, histories, and individuals is something that stings for people of colour. Moreover, even though the term allochtoon is used to avoid the use "distasteful racial terms" (Wekker 2016: 15), the result and connotation is very clear to the interview participants. When there is no way in which ethnicized groups can claim multiple identities (Essed & Trienekens 2008; Ghorashi 2009; Wekker 2016), they can also never be 'Dutch' - even if it is only partly, such as 'Surinamese-Dutch'. Therefore, there is no need to have a self-representation that includes stories of the 'Other'. This also can be tied back to the reluctance to talk about race, race does not concern 'us', so we do not need to discuss it, because 'we' are *gezellig* and a tolerant, innocent country (Hondius 2014).

Yet, as one participant remarked in our conversation, these values fade away quickly in the light of the (possible) influx of refugees and migrants. Then, the demarcation between 'us' and 'them' reappears strongly, invoking notions of race as threat (Goldberg 2009: 29). The threat of race paints the migrant and refugee Other as something to fear and therefore should be kept at distance whether psychically, socially, emotionally, psychologically, or politically. With the *allochtoon* being all the same then, all *allochtonen* could, or should, be kept at distance from changing the current structures. This is illustrated by how research participants noted how they experienced that when they tried to challenge these structures, they faced backlash along the lines of: 'this is going too far' or 'who do you think you are to change our system', aptly demonstrating who really belongs and therefore has the power to say something about the current way of things.

[31] See: Chapter 3, (AC, 6 September)

[32] See: Chouliaraki and Stolic (2017) for an example on how this plays out in the case of media and the refugee 'crisis'. My argument here echoes theirs in the sense of framing migrants as a threat, addressing them by one term and keeping them at distance, that only describes them as biological life at most, excluding the possibility of individuality and claims for other identities

Thirdly, whenever racialised and ethnicized Dutch people address the dominant self-representation(s) and try to insert other narratives such as the colonial history, they are met with white innocence (Wekker 2016) and smug ignorance (Essed and Hoving 2014: 24) through the denial and downplaying of those Other narratives, as illustrated by interview participants. The denial and self-imposing of innocence means that there is a preservation and cultivation of white privilege, entitlement, and (moral) superiority. In extension to this, when the ethnicized Other tries to resist this, it gets to hear either or both of two things: things have to *stay* 'gezellig' because that is who 'we' are, and 'we are a tolerant country, so what is the fuss about'. It positions the non-white (Dutch) as aggressive and over-demanding as there is, according to the white-Dutch, no justice to be had, as there is no case. Fourthly, specifically with regards to the last remark, tolerance is another tool to remind the Other of the power relations at play, for tolerance is always expressed to the tolerated and can be turned around too (Goldberg 2009). This claim of tolerance as clincher to claims of racism also has a way of keeping the outsider the outsider, since the white Dutch insider who has the power to tolerate, also sets the terms of belonging.

In turn, the hegemonic way of belonging in the Netherlands enforced by these tools are also the locations through which tensions, resistances and contestations arise.

5.3 Renegotiating Belonging Through Three Resistances

As mentioned in the conceptual framework, "the politics of belonging are not merely about who belongs and who does not belong, but about the discursive processes that make belonging possible and able to be performed and experienced" (Halse 2018: 10). As such, the three forms of resistance, being: 'clever' use of Diversity and Inclusion, Decolonisation, and Holding Space, could be characterised as a discursive processes and tools to renegotiate belonging and (try to) make it possible to be performed and experienced by the racialised Dutch in particular. I will illuminate upon each in turn.

Firstly, Diversity and Inclusion, although receiving mixed reactions of research participants, can be understood as a resistance, following from the findings. Particularly, 'diversity' as a term needs to go for most participants, since diversity exists de facto. When the focus is put on inclusion, there is one integral change made to the Dutch self-identification: that there is a valid place for people of colour within Dutch society, through inclusion and representation of people of colour in the media, politics, cultural practices, and other arenas. One example of this might be the inclusion of *Keti Koti* as a national holiday, adding it to the cultural framework of the Netherlands through the practice of remembrance. This inclusion also has

a strong link with the need for (institutional) acknowledgement by Dutch white society. Yet, this demand is something that cannot solely be negotiated through resisting dominant self-representations and therefore is a striking example of why people of colour do not quite belong. In the words of one research participant, "there is a powerplay here, as in, **one party** has to explain and prove everything"[33]

Secondly, from the findings, participants that view decolonisation as resistance, agree that diversity and inclusion are not going far enough. To continue the analogy, according to these participants, diversity and inclusion are about asking/demanding the spare set of keys – about wanting to be included. Decolonisation is about reorganising the whole archive *and* removing the locks. Thusly, this would create a very different narrative of what Dutch self-representation should look like and who has the power to renegotiate it - it is fundamentally changing the entire premise of the narrative and refocus on the belonging.

Thirdly, Holding Space is maybe the most holistic approach of the three in the sense that it is very adaptable in its operationalisation. Holding Space focusses on the telling of Other narratives within the space that is created, alongside the stories that are already there. It differs from Diversity and Inclusion as it is not about being included in something per se, in fact, the focus is very much about existing on one's own terms. Nor is it the same as decolonisation, because of the fundamental difference in the aim of these approaches. Holding Space is fundamentally about existing and telling stories, *without* seeking reassurance or actively resisting the dominant Dutch narrative. It is more nuanced in that sense, for it does not de facto exclude all the dominant self-representations that are already in the Netherlands, and with which a lot of people identify.

5.4 Shifting Boundaries?

Having identified three strategies to renegotiate belonging, the question remains – can this renegotiation be considered successful, i.e., are boundaries shifting? Suggested by the findings, there seem to be some shifts taking place in the Netherlands with regards to its self-representation on race and ethnicity. New openings have been, and are being, created and boundaries are becoming more fluid. In the tradition of Yuval-Davis' notion of belonging (2011), identity is both reflective and constitutive, and these are both changing in light of the critical reflection on the current system and constitution of new narratives, ideologies, and

[33] (MP, 21 September)

solidarities. The "white bubble"[34] Dutch people have been living in is slowly breaking open through the constitution of new identity narratives and the claim to be taken seriously as Dutch citizens, rooted in place-belonging (Antonsich 2011).

Even more so, it seems that within the shifting boundaries of belonging and changing narratives another grouping is emerging: a growing group of (white) Dutch people that (finally) has a growing awareness of blind spots and structural bias. I would argue that this grouping could be characterised through the notion of colonial aphasia, in the discrepancy that is between not knowing through lived experience, or education, yet wanting to help, but being inhibited through the lack of language and possibilities for its expression. In extension, I would include myself into this grouping. As such, a lot of learning still has to be done autodidactically, which, in a way, also is about renegotiating, constituting, and reflecting new narratives that make up the self-representations of the Netherlands. Specifically in relation to this paper, I consider this research as an exercise in learning autodidactically and reflecting on the boundaries that are in place.

In conclusion, the boundaries in with regards to race and ethnicity and belonging have proven to be malleable and moreover are being renegotiated - whether it be through clever use of diversity and inclusion, decolonisation or holding space. Tools such as the allochtoon-autochtoon dichotomy, tolerance and white innocence are all being resisted by different actors from different backgrounds, on all levels of society. Even more so, this contestation is not going unnoticed and is causing, sometimes heavy, backlash, constituting some conflict. However, projects of belonging are about conflicts, since it concerns the "maintenance and reproduction of boundaries of the community of belonging by the hegemonic social powers […], but also their contestation, challenge, and persistence by other political agents" (Yuval-Davis 2011: 20), showing that narratives on racism and anti-racism in the Netherlands, are ultimately, about the negotiation of belonging.

[34] (MT, 14 October)

Chapter 6 - Conclusion and Closing Reflections

In this Research Paper I have attempted to dissect and understand anti-racism narratives in the face of dominant Dutch self-representations on tolerance and (white) innocence through the lens of theories of belonging. After describing the conceptual framework focussed on understanding the insider-outsider dynamics in the Netherlands, which are inevitably concerned with race in ethnicity, I set out to answer two questions through: I). What are the dominant Dutch self-representations, and who do they represent specifically? How do they relate to projects of belonging? and II). What are main anti-racism narratives and how do they relate to projects of belonging? I have answered these questions by collecting data via through qualitative, open-ended interviews.

The findings were analysed by using the framework of theories of belonging and showcasing how dominant self-representations can be understood as the hegemonic project of belonging. The boundaries ae maintained between the people that belong (white Dutch, *autochtoon* citizens) and who do not, or not quite belong (the racialised, ethnicized Other) due to different mechanisms such as the autochtoon-allochtoon dichotomy; the framing of race as threat and everyday racism(s); white innocence and smug ignorance; and (repressive) tolerance. In response, anti-racism narratives can be viewed as a contestation and renegotiation of these boundaries of belonging, by trying to insert new self-images (by means of decolonisation), or by adding nuance to existing narratives (by means of 'clever' use of diversity and inclusion). The third identified path of resistance is harder to pin down, floating between resistance and not bothering to actively resist, but just Holding Space with dignity, and the power of Other stories, reminiscent of the phrase 'my existence is my resistance'. In sum, one can conclude that, the hegemonic boundaries are changing, albeit slowly, proving their malleability, making it 'merely' a project of belonging instead of the naturalised, definite way of being. This finding may bring hope for the future, in which there is a serious, depoliticised space for Dutch people of colour, and the refugee migrant Others seeking a new home to experience place-belonging.

This paper began with a quote by philosopher María Lugones; "we are fully dependent on each other for the possibility of being understood and without this understanding we are intelligible, we do not make sense, we are not solid, visible, integrated; we are lacking" (1978: 8). To me, this is what belonging to a community is about: trying to understand each other, listening with an open heart, "world"-travelling, reciprocating, and making place so that others can hold space. My hope is that this research can contribute to a better understanding of

processes of belonging in the Netherlands, concerning the racialised, ethnicized Other, and by understanding, also learning from the current. Rather than seeing this Research Paper as an end, a definitive answer, I see this project as the start of other projects that, through radical questioning and "world"-traveling can work towards better understanding other lived experiences, attitudes, ways of being and world-views, for without the possibility of being understood, we are lacking indeed.

Appendices

Appendix I. Participant Profiles and Interview Log Table

Participant + Code[1]	Gender	Background (self-described)	Expertise	Interview date + Medium	Recorded Interview length
1. (AC)	F	Surinamese-Dutch and American citizen	Author, consultant, educator	06/09/2021 Zoom	53 minutes
2. (LN)	F	Moluccan-Javanese-Dutch	Recently graduated MA student on Decolonization history of the VU	09/09/2021 Zoom	66 minutes
3. (AN)*	M	Iranian-Dutch	Consultant, moderator, trainer on deep democracy, deep diversity	17/09/2021 In-Person	111 minutes
4. (EV)*	F	Surinamese-Dutch	Writer, columnist, talent-coach, educator	20/09/2021 In-Person	70 minutes
5. (MP)*	M	Half-Armenian, Quarter Dutch, Quarter Portuguese-Jewish	Cultural sector, organizer, activist	21/09/2021 Zoom	45 minutes
6. (MT)	F	Eritrean-Dutch	Student, politician in municipality The Hague	14/10/2021 Zoom	54 minutes
7. (DH)*	F	White Dutch	Researcher, university teacher, author on oral history, anti-semitism, racism in NL	14/10/2021 Zoom	55 minutes
					Total: 454 minutes (7,5 hours)

[1] Participants with an * behind their name were included through referral

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