White inside: a critical examination of how structural whiteness in the Dutch climate movement obstructs climate justice

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Abstract

Despite attention for lack of racial diversity in climate movements in the Global North, there is little examination of other manifestations of whiteness. This thesis examines how structural whiteness – as a norm and as a power structure – shapes the Dutch climate movement's relation to climate justice and how these impacts can be countered. Understanding racial justice as central to climate justice, I apply the lens of Critical Whiteness Studies to the Dutch climate movement. I combine expert interviews with activists engaged in intersectional climate justice activism and focus groups with white climate activists in XRNL and an NGO. The results show that whiteness significantly shapes the mainstream climate movement in the Netherlands in a way that obstructs climate justice. It leads to reductive uses of climate justice, narrow narratives on the causes, consequences, and solutions to climate change, and silencing or tokenising of BIPOC. Solidarity is an important way to enact climate justice and dismantle white supremacy but can still be inhibited by whiteness. Tackling whiteness requires genuine solidarity activism, following BIPOC leadership, and education on colonialism and white supremacy. It is important that white people take responsibility for their education and countering whiteness. Moreover, self-examination is needed on how they personally reinforce white supremacy to counter white exceptionalism and performative activism.

Keywords: *whiteness, climate justice, climate movement, solidarity, the Netherlands*

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1. Introduction

'This crisis has racist roots and consequences, which we need to address to achieve true climate justice.' (Ramanujam and Asri 2021, 6)

1.1 Climate justice = racial justice

As the climate crisis keeps getting worse, it is important to not merely stop climate change but fight for climate *justice*. Broadly I understand this to mean that climate action must address the social injustices inherent to both the causes and consequences of climate change, which are rooted in capitalism and colonialism (Gonzalez 2021). Racism – or rather, white[1] supremacy – is central to both of these (Ibid.). Climate justice thus necessarily requires racial justice, highlighting the need for intersectionality: a concept emerging from Black feminist critique which allows 'to visualize co-constituting identities, structures of power and oppression as well as intersecting and overlapping political issues' (Dupuis et al. 2022, 8). As all social movements are 'shaped by multiple intersecting inequalities and power dynamics', an intersectional perspective also highlights 'unmarked and privileged categories' (Roth 2021, 2). This is especially relevant for analysing climate movements which do not focus on a particular social category, unlike women's or workers' movements for example (Ibid.). Whiteness is such an unmarked category, representing 'normality, dominance, and control' (Garner 2007, 9) and 'hegemonic racial power that privileges white groups while subordinating racialized "others"' (Brooks-Immel and Murray 2017, 316).

Coined by activists from the Global South, climate justice has been increasingly taken up by climate movements in the Global North, including in the Netherlands. However, these emerge from an environmental movement whose roots were explicitly connected to European colonial projects, situated 'within racialized colonial logics that use environmental discourses as a ruse for the expansion of capital, the dispossession of Indigenous peoples, and the exploitation of slaves and workers' (Curnow and Helferty 2018, 147). These logics are most explicit in conservation efforts, which continue to dispossess people (Ibid., 148). Meanwhile, how these logics shape contemporary climate movements in the Global North remains underexamined. The main way that whiteness has received attention is through the lens of racial diversity, as these movements' demographic make-up is widely criticised for being white and middle class. This has led to a focus on increasing racial diversity without challenging structures of whiteness that also shape what movements stand for and how they operate

[1] I decided not to capitalise white or whiteness because of its white supremacist connotations (Laws 2020). However, I recognise the arguments for capitalisation to acknowledge white is a racial identity like Black and challenge the normalisation of whiteness (Bell and Bevan 2021, 1209).

(Bell and Bevan 2021). It is this *structural* whiteness that I seek to examine, precisely because it is largely ignored. My hypothesis is that it significantly shapes the movement in a way that obstructs climate justice.

1.2 Study aims and research questions

This thesis aims to uncover how structural whiteness shapes the Dutch climate movement's relation to climate justice and how these effects could be countered. Because whiteness is socially constructed and fluid, it is important to study it in a specific context. I focus on the Netherlands because I am most familiar with this context, and it is where I personally feel the most responsibility to contribute to as a white Dutch citizen. My broader aim is to contribute to building a decolonial, anti-racist and intersectional movement for climate justice. I thus consider this a form of scholar-activism, as I believe research should not be purely for the sake of research but rather contribute to fighting social injustice (Piven 2010). For this reason, I am committed to practically implementing my thesis, for example through presenting my results and facilitating workshops. Regarding the audience of this thesis, I am aware that it might not provide as many new insights to Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC)[2] who are directly confronted with the climate movement's whiteness as to white people for whom whiteness 'is rendered invisible under the weight of accumulated privileges' (Garner 2007, 35).

The academic aim of this thesis is to fill a gap in the literature as there is little scholarship on whiteness in climate movements, despite increasing attention for this in activist circles. This is perhaps not so surprising in the Netherlands, as whiteness in general is barely examined in contrast to the US where critical race theory emerged (Wekker 2016). However, even in the US there is a surprising 'lack of literature that acknowledges the whiteness of the mainstream environmental movement head on, since this is a widely understood critique in the movement' (Curnow and Helferty 2018, 147).

My research questions are:

1. How does structural whiteness shape the Dutch climate movement's relation to climate justice?
2. How can the harmful impacts of structural whiteness in the Dutch climate movement be countered?

[2] I generally use BIPOC rather than 'racialised' or 'non-white', as the latter re-centers whiteness while the former wrongly suggests that whiteness is not a racial identity. Nonetheless, I recognise there are also objections to the term BIPOC, which (especially in abbreviated form) still lumps together a large and diverse group of people.

I recognise these are big questions, and that the Dutch climate movement is broad and heterogenous. Rather than pretending to be comprehensive, I hope my thesis will provide a starting point by uncovering some if not all manifestations of whiteness in the Dutch climate movement and preliminary suggestions how to counter these. Human Ecology is a relevant lens to approach these questions as it allows an interdisciplinary examination of how human phenomena such as white supremacy are deeply intertwined with other-than-human nature. Combining Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) and climate justice theories is important because studying climate change requires 'insights from various strands of theorising on relations among humans and human relations to nature' (Kaijser and Kronsell 2014, 426).

1.3 Structure of the thesis

I end this introduction chapter with a background on the topic including a brief description of the Dutch climate movement. Next, I present my theoretical framework, first introducing CWS and key concepts related to whiteness and then discussing various conceptualisations of climate justice and its connection to white supremacy. Chapter 3 describes my methodological choices, ethical considerations, how I collected and analysed the data, and some limitations of my study. The results chapter presents the most important themes I identified in the data, supported with secondary data and academic literature. In the discussion, I relate my findings back to my theoretical framework and draw out some overarching points. I conclude with a summary answering my research questions and suggesting avenues for further research.

1.4 The Dutch climate movement

The climate movement is currently one of the biggest movements in the Netherlands, with 40,000 people joining the 2021 climate march in Amsterdam. BIPOC activists have been doing crucial work in climate activism, but the mainstream climate movement remains predominantly white in constitution and in how it operates (cf. Cheuk 2019, Meelker 2019). BIPOC activists have also been raising the issue of whiteness and racism in the Dutch climate movement and I am much indebted to them for their work and inspiration. In recent years the issue has started to receive more attention in media, for example an article in a main newspaper about 'The white face of the green movement'[3] (Derbali 2019). Chihiro Geuzebroek, one of the most vocal and prominent of these activists, speaks widely on what she terms 'climate racism', criticising for example the framing of climate change as a future problem, which disregards that many communities of colour are already affected by climate change (Meelker 2019). Geuzebroek also notes that whenever someone mentions colonialism, they face backlash and

[3] My translation

are told that climate racism is 'irrelevant' (Ibid.). In recent years Aralez, a 'pan-decolonial network & grassroots organisation' (Aralez n.d.), has become an important organisation addressing racism and colonialism in the Dutch climate movement. This thesis concentrates on some of the most prominent groups and organisations in the mainstream climate movement: the institutionalised environmental NGOs Milieudefensie and Greenpeace, and the grassroots groups Extinction Rebellion Netherlands (XRNL) and (to a lesser extent) Code Rood. Below is a brief description of each.

Milieudefensie was founded in 1972 as the Dutch branch of Friends of the Earth. Through large public campaigns and lobbying politicians, they aim to hold large polluting companies accountable. It has a hierarchical structure (if relatively flat compared to other NGOs) with an office of around 120 paid employees, 35 local branches, and over 100,000 members (Milieudefensie n.d.).

The Dutch office of Greenpeace was established in 1979. Their mission is to 'expose major environmental problems and promote sustainable solutions through scientific research, lobbying, demonstrations and peaceful and inventive confrontations'[4] (Greenpeace Nederland 2022, 11). Greenpeace NL employs around 100 people and has around 330,000 donating members (Ibid., 9).

XRNL started in 2019 modelled on XRUK, using 'non-violent direct action and civil disobedience to persuade governments to act justly on the Climate and Ecological Emergency' (Extinction Rebellion Global n.d.). Due to XR's autonomous and non-centralised character XRNL has developed as a distinct group, with a decentralised structure including over 30 local groups (Extinction Rebellion Netherlands n.d.). As of August 2022, it has over 18,000 followers on Facebook and over 20,000 on Instagram.

Code Rood is a collective of activists founded in 2016, organising civil disobedience actions against the fossil fuel industry. From the beginning it had a more intersectional approach than most existing groups in the Dutch climate movement, stating 'solidarity with other movements against the fossil fuel industry and climate change and other forms of injustice, extortion, repression and discrimination' (Code Rood n.d.). As of August 2022, it has over 7,000 followers on Facebook and around 2,000 on Instagram.

[4] My translation

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Whiteness

2.1.1 Critical Whiteness Studies

This thesis draws on Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS), which aims to problematise whiteness based on the understanding that 'whiteness lies at the center of the problem of racism' (Applebaum 2016, 1). It counters the traditional focus on studying those racialised and seen as 'Other', showing that whiteness is 'a racialised identity like any other' but at the same time '*unlike any other*, because it is the dominant, normalised location' (Garner 2007, 5-6, emphasis in original). Making whiteness 'visible' is important because of the paradox that while whiteness shapes all aspects of society, this often goes unnoticed precisely because it is everywhere. However, unmarked is a better term since 'whiteness is only invisible for those who inhabit it' (Ahmed 2004). Making it visible only makes sense from a white-centred perspective and should only be done 'insofar as that visibility is seen as contesting the forms of white privilege, which rests on the unmarked and the unremarkable "fact" of being white' (Ibid.).

An important danger of CWS (especially for white scholars) is that it risks re-centring or reifying whiteness. Examining whiteness is not automatically anti-racist: '[t]he "critical" in "critical whiteness studies" cannot guarantee that it will have effects that are critical, in the sense of challenging relations of power that remain concealed as institutional norms or givens' (Ibid.). This does not mean that the study of whiteness should be abandoned, rather that it should be done carefully, critically, and self-reflectively, and always with the aim of working towards anti-racism and social justice. Rather than studying whiteness on its own, which risks recentring it, the focus should be on how it relates to racism (Garner 2007, 10). Moreover, it is important to acknowledge that whiteness studies build on Black critique (Ahmed 2004). Leonardo (2004, 142) goes further, arguing that many 'white attacks on whiteness appeal mainly to a liberal white audience, the content of which has been previously articulated by scholars and activists of color.' I further reflect on the risks of whiteness studies in my methodology.

Whiteness has been conceptualised in many different ways, which I do not consider necessarily contradictory but rather highlighting different effects. This thesis focuses on whiteness as a norm and power structure. To elaborate on this, I next discuss some key concepts.

2.1.2 Supremacy, privilege, normativity

Whiteness upholds white supremacy, which is a more useful term than racism, particularly in relation to the 'liberal movement away from the perpetuation of overtly racist discrimination, exploitation,

and oppression of black people which often masks how all-pervasive white supremacy is in this society, both as ideology and as behavior' (hooks 1989, 112–13). Charles Mills explains that white supremacy refers to 'a system that not only privileges whites but is run by whites for white benefit' (Mills 2004, 31 in Garner 2007, 23). It encapsulates the *structures* that systematically benefit white people while marginalising people of colour, which exist regardless of individual white people's intentions: '[a]ll whites are *beneficiaries* of the [Racial] Contract, though some whites are not *signatories* to it' (Mills 1997, 11, emphasis in original). White supremacy thus moves the focus away from individual racist practices to the need to actively dismantle white supremacist structures.

White privilege refers to 'the unearned benefits and advantages' white people get simply by being white in a white supremacist society, even if other parts of their identity will influence what this privilege looks like (Applebaum 2016, 6). This privilege is not just something that white people have but it is relational and active, inherently connected to and dependent upon the marginalisation of people of colour. Besides 'positive white privilege' granting unearned benefits, *negative* white privilege gives white people 'permission to be ignorant, oblivious, arrogant, and destructive' (Ibid., 11). White ignorance describes this privilege to not know, as there is a 'vested interest in not knowing', influencing which questions and problems are considered important (Ibid.).

Finally, white normativity can be understood as 'the cultural norms and practices that make whiteness appear natural, normal, and right' (Ward 2008, 564). White viewpoints are assumed to be universally valid as the ubiquity of white norms has made them 'appear to be common and value-neutral to the social groups that benefit from them' (Applebaum 2016, 2). This is closely related to white-centring and explains why white people often do not consider themselves racialised but 'just' people, while non-white people are racialised as people of colour (Radd and Grosland 2019, 667). Whiteness thus also refers to 'ways of thinking, knowing, and doing that naturalize whiteness and become embedded in social and institutional life' (Ward 2008, 564). Because of this, white normativity can persist even in environments that are racially diverse, shaping the culture, communications, behaviour, and organisational style (Ibid.). White normativity is thus central to my aim of moving beyond the common focus on the climate movement's white demographic composition, towards an analysis of its structural whiteness. An intersectional approach requires 'not only to look for the adverse impacts of climate change on "vulnerable" groups, but also to shed light on and problematise norms and underlying assumptions that are naturalised and regarded as common sense' (Kaijser and Kronsell 2014, 428).

2.1.3 Whiteness in the Netherlands: ignorance and innocence

As a socially constructed category, whiteness is not fixed but 'subject to continuous reproduction and alteration' and should be understood in its historical and geographical context (Ibid., 422). It is

therefore necessary to discuss some aspects characterising whiteness in the Netherlands. To begin, whiteness remains far less studied in the Netherlands than in the US for example, where critical race theory and whiteness studies emerged. It is largely absent in academia as well as society more broadly, since 'whiteness is not acknowledged as a racialized/ethnicized positioning at all' but 'generally seen as so ordinary, so lacking in characteristics, so normal, so devoid of meaning' (Wekker 2016, 2). This is exemplified by the Dutch word 'blank', a colonial term for white people still commonly used, reinforcing the notion that they are unmarked. A study in a Dutch university found that European white students were much less familiar with whiteness than their American classmates (Essed and Trienekens 2008, 64). Reluctant to acknowledge whiteness as an important identity marker, they emphasised nationality and culture instead, expressing discomfort over questions of white privilege. This highlights whiteness's unmarked and normative position. Overall, Essed and Hoving (2014, 10) identify ignorance and denial as key characteristics of Dutch racism. Because whiteness is considered so normal, studying it is seen as irrelevant, ridiculous, or even 'emptiness incarnate' (Wekker 2016, 3). This explains why it is understudied while underlining the importance of doing so, since this is itself a manifestation of whiteness.

The dismissal of whiteness and race in the Netherlands is a recent phenomenon as race used to be a common category, named explicitly in colonial laws for example. The reluctance 'to acknowledge "race" or even "ethnicity" as a formal category (…) makes the question of Dutch "whiteness" as identity complex and convoluted' (Essed and Trienekens 2008, 55). Although it does exist as a legal category, 'references to race are more implicit and often intertwined with notions of culture and ethnicity' (Ibid.). In fact, registering race is 'considered morally wrong' (Ibid., 52). At the same time, racialisation plays a clear role in the othering of people considered 'not quite Dutch' and consequently treated as second-class citizens (Ibid, 57-8). The racialisation of Muslims highlights the fluidity of racialisation processes, as 'it is an increasingly complex constellation of markers that constitute the "Other" in contemporary Netherlands' (Ibid., 62-3). This thesis refers to race due to the focus on whiteness, yet it is important to keep in mind that racial identity is closely tied up with ethnicity and religion.

One central examination of whiteness in the Netherlands is Gloria Wekker's (2016) *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race.* Wekker presents an 'ethnography of dominant white Dutch self-representation' and summarises the Dutch self-image as one of 'white innocence' based on the belief that the Netherlands is a morally good country where racism does not exist (Ibid., 1-2). Common reactions to conversations about race are claiming colour blindness and portraying racism as a problem of the past or elsewhere, such as the US and South Africa (Ibid., 72). This stands in contrast with clear evidence of racism existing in the Netherlands, from the blackface tradition of Zwarte Piet

to ethnic (or rather: racial) profiling by the police and the tax authorities. Innocence is also reflected in the emphasis on the Netherlands being a small and insignificant country, in contrast to its economic and political power and extensive colonial legacy (Wekker 2016). The claim of being small is also used to justify limited climate action, ignoring the Netherlands' large role in the fossil economy and agro-industry (Milieudefensie 2021). Innocence is maintained through ignorance, with colonialism being painfully absent in education as well as public spaces (Wekker 2016, 13). Glossing over the Netherlands' role as an imperial aggressor, far more attention goes to the second world war where the Dutch are portrayed as innocent victims (Ibid., 12). Ignorance is far from innocent however, as the claim to innocence 'contains not-knowing, but also not *wanting* to know' (Ibid., 17, emphasis added). Meanwhile, 'the production of whiteness as innocence reifies its position of superiority' (McLean 2013, 359). The strong tradition of dismissing race, rejecting whiteness and claiming innocence, all highlight the relevance of examining whiteness in the Netherlands, even more so in a movement where people are inclined to consider themselves progressive, and thus innocent.

2.2 Climate justice

> 'Climate change may be the most far-reaching manifestation of white privilege and class privilege to face humankind.' (Moe-Lobeda 2016, 27)

2.2.1 The multiple injustices of climate change

Climate justice can be conceptualised in many ways, but generally refers to climate change being fundamentally connected to social justice issues of inequality and exploitation, and exacerbating existing inequalities (Gonzalez 2021). The concept of climate justice falls under the broader theory of environmental justice, within which multiple forms of justice are identified. This includes for example 'burden-sharing justice': the ones to carry the burden of addressing climate change should be those who caused it, those who benefited from the activities that caused it, and those with the capacity to address it (Caney 2014, 125–26). Similarly, distributive justice highlights the Global North's responsibility for greenhouse gas emissions from which it has also gained economic benefits, while those harmed by climate change have generally contributed least to it and benefited least from it (Gonzalez 2021, 113). Meanwhile, corrective justice highlights that those most affected by climate change (but not responsible) are not compensated for this while procedural injustice points to the North's dominance in decision-making processes and ignoring of views from the Global South (Ibid.).

Finally, a less acknowledged but increasingly relevant aspect of climate injustice, is that BIPOC communities in the Global South are also carrying the burden of mitigation measures, being displaced for example by wind parks or carbon offset schemes (Ibid., 117-9). This is an increasingly relevant and

dangerous form of climate injustice as climate action becomes more mainstream and green growth narratives advocate an energy transition without energy reduction. This promotes 'green extractivism', a new wave of extractivism causing social and ecological harm 'whereby intensive resource exploitation is framed not only as compatible with climate change, but indeed as *necessary* to its mitigation' (Voskoboynik and Andreucci 2022, 803, emphasis in original). Many actors concerned about climate change and even proclaiming climate justice risk exacerbating this form of climate *in*justice. Race cannot be ignored in an examination of who inhabits 'the sacrifice zones of both the fossil fuel economy and the emerging green energy economy,' for the very designation of areas as sacrifice zones is based on their occupants being classified as 'sub-human and disposable' (Gonzalez 2021, 117). In the context of white supremacy, these are people racialised as non-white, whose lives are deemed less valuable. This comes through in all forms of injustice described here, as those who suffer most are consistently BIPOC communities: from the pollution and violence associated with extractive industries to the death and damage caused by climate change-induced impacts to supposed solutions to climate change (Ibid.). The centrality of racial justice to climate justice highlights the need for climate movements to be anti-racist.

2.2.2 Climate change as debt, colonialism, and structural violence

Central to climate justice is the acknowledgement of the historical socio-economic roots of climate change: colonialism and capitalism (Gonzalez 2021, 117). This is highlighted by terms such as climate debt, climate racism and carbon colonialism, which challenge neutral framings of climate change. The term climate debt also originated in the Global South and 'describe[s] the imbalance between nations and communities likely to suffer the earliest and worst from climate change and those contributing most to it' (Moe-Lobeda 2016, 29). It thus emphasises distributional and burden-sharing justice. Meanwhile, Indigenous scholars understand climate change as 'an intensification of environmental change imposed on Indigenous peoples by colonialism' (Whyte 2017, 153). The Wretched of the Earth, 'a grassroots collective for Indigenous, black, brown and diaspora groups and individuals demanding climate justice,' describes it as follows:

> The impacts of climate change are continuous with, and a consequence of, colonial and imperial violence that sees these lands and lives as expendable. (…) the history of conquest, genocide, and slavery is the foundation of our modern economic system – the very system responsible for the global disaster that is climate change. (Wretched of the Earth 2015)

White supremacy is inherent to both colonialism and capitalism, two historical dynamics linking 'climate change to white privilege, class privilege, and Global North privilege' (Moe-Lobeda 2016, 35). Moe-Lobeda argues that climate change should be recognised as a form of structural violence, defined

as ‘the physical, psychological, and spiritual harm that certain groups of people experience as a result of unequal distribution of power, privilege, and access to the necessities for life or for its flourishing’ (Ibid., 33). Overconsumption by privileged groups constitutes structural violence because it causes climate change which disproportionately harms racially and otherwise marginalised groups (Ibid.). Generally, the power of structural violence lies in remaining ‘invisible or ignored by those who perpetuate it or benefit from it,’ in part because it is not criminalised, not an individual act alone and a longer-term process rather than an event (Ibid.). Meanwhile, it is maintained and legitimised by ‘cultural violence’, the cultural norms that make structural violence seem normal and not wrong (Ibid.). Identifying the cultural norms that justify the lifestyles based on the exploitation of people and ecosystems are thus needed to dismantle the structural violence caused by this and raises important questions:

> How does the cultural narrative of whiteness help to normalize ways of life that generate climate debt? In what sense does white supremacy undergird climate entitlement and denial? Understanding climate change as structural violence and cultural violence may help to expose climate debt, its links to whiteness and white racism, and the moral and policy implications. (Ibid., 34)

There is a clear parallel between Moe-Lobeda’s discussion of structural violence and white supremacy, and between cultural violence and whiteness, in particular white normativity. White supremacy then does not merely function as cultural violence undergirding the structural violence of climate change, but rather is itself a form of structural violence, maintained by the cultural violence of white normativity. Since white supremacy is also central to the root causes of climate change, it becomes clear that climate change cannot be separated from white supremacy. Another parallel between these two forms of structural violence is the privilege to be ignorant, as this also allows denial of the true nature of climate change: ‘[i]gnoring the mounting ecological debt and its lethal consequences is also ignoring the racial lines of that debt and the white privilege inherent in it’ (Ibid.). Connecting whiteness to climate injustice can thus reveal interesting parallels in failing to take responsibility for climate change as well as white supremacy. In the Netherlands, white innocence allows to ignore its colonial and racist history, as well as its responsibility for climate injustices, or its climate debt. It is then relevant to examine to what extent the climate movement challenges or perpetuates this.

3. Methodology

3.1 Feminist methodologies

Throughout this research process I have been inspired by feminist methodologies, which ‘contest dominant and normative notions of research as rational, disembodied and “objective”’ and

foreground 'the experiential and embodied nature of doing research' (Dupuis et al. 2022, 4). This resonated a lot with my own fieldwork experience and the impossibility of separating my role as researcher from my position as (fellow) activist as well as recognising the emotional impact of the research on me personally. Instead of professing a 'view from nowhere', I follow Haraway's (1988) emphasis on seeing knowledge as always situated, acknowledging that I inevitably started my research with certain assumptions, expectations and ways of seeing. A feminist approach helped me deal with the many tensions included in studying whiteness as a white woman, researching a movement as neither insider nor outsider, and balancing the line between activism and academia. It explicitly requires 'staying with the trouble' (Haraway 2016) and not hiding 'partialities, anxieties, discomforts and contradictions' (Flores Golfín, Rusansky, and Zantvoort 2022, 216). This allowed me to recognise and validate the time and energy I put in navigating ethical questions and continuously questioning whether my work was contributing something valuable and not doing harm. Moreover, feminist approaches fit with my anti-racist aims as their value lies in the 'critical interrogation of power relations and dedication to understanding and transforming intersecting systems of oppression' (Ibid., 214).

Practically, implementing a feminist approach centred around reflexivity, including 'reflection on self, process, and representation, and critically examining power relations and politics in the research process, and researcher accountability in data collection and interpretation' (Sultana 2007, 376). Moreover, feminist methodologies highlight the importance of ethics and the responsibility of the researcher (Dupuis et al. 2022, 4), which I elaborate on below. Unfortunately, I was not able to completely follow feminist methodologies in all aspects. This was in large part due to the restraints inherent in the requirements of a master's thesis, as 'feminist approaches take time, require flexibility, and demand that we put more of our whole selves into our work' (van den Berg et al. 2022, 295). Ideally, I would have been more continuously engaged in the movement and allowed for more participatory cocreation of knowledge rather than being the one to decide what the final product would look like. This was also difficult because I was living in Sweden for most of the time of writing.

3.2 Ethical considerations

All participants were informed beforehand about the nature and purpose of my thesis and how I would use their data, after which they gave their oral consent to participate. My choice for oral consent follows feminist methodologies' emphasis on 'non-hierarchical interactions, understanding, and mutual learning' (Sultana 2007, 375). Additionally, I found it more appropriate to my positioning as a scholar-activist who is part of the movement. Rather than obtaining a signature on a form suggesting

a fixed one-time agreement after which the researcher can do whatever they want, I wanted to establish relations of trust and reciprocity, in which participants could also change their minds.

3.2.1 Positionality

Reflecting on positionality is crucial as a white woman studying race, with additional privileges of class and education among other things. I personally only started to properly reflect on how I reinforce white supremacy after friends of colour confronted me with this in 2020, after which I started an 'unlearning group' with some friends based on Layla F Saad's (2020) *Me and White Supremacy: How to Recognize Your Privilege, Combat Racism, and Change the World*. Unlearning remains a life-long journey in which I will continue to make mistakes, yet I believe it is important to not let this hold white people back from doing the important work of confronting white supremacy head-on. I recognise that I have inevitable blind spots preventing me from always seeing whiteness and all its effects and could inadvertently recentre whiteness through my own ignorance. I hope I have succeeded in avoiding this by trying to be reflexive, humble, careful, and critical throughout this thesis, as well as discussing these dilemmas with others.

Regarding my position in relation to the Dutch climate movement, I consider myself a relative outsider as I have not been actively engaged in the movement for long because I was living abroad. In the four months before starting my thesis I did an internship at Milieudefensie and lived in Amsterdam, where I also met XRNL activists. This gave me some insight into the movement but only partially, causing some bias in how I approached this study. Being a relative outsider had benefits to my role as researcher in having more distance to my object of study. On the other hand, it is a disadvantage to not be fully embedded in the movement as this meant I had less background knowledge.

3.2.2 Extractive research versus centring whiteness

A main ethical concern for me was being extractive: taking information from participants for my own academic purposes without giving back (Flores Golfín, Rusansky, and Zantvoort 2022, 226). I was particularly cautious of asking time and energy from interviewees, most of whom had been asked for interviews before. A white person asking a person of colour questions about racism can be even more extractive as it perpetuates a pattern of white people relying on BIPOC to 'explain' racism to them. I therefore attempted to get BIPOC perspectives as much as possible from existing sources such as interviews, articles, or panel discussions. I also tried to minimize the extractive aspect of interviews by accommodating to the interviewee's preferences for the time and place and asking them how I could make it more reciprocal. The main response coincided with my own intention to follow up with presentations and workshops. It is thus important to recognise that research can also produce social

change by 'contribut[ing] to ongoing conversations of resistance and to the development of critiques that are used to empower and inform the movement' (Ibid., 228).

On the other hand, limiting the amount of BIPOC participants contradicts feminist methodologies' commitment to centre marginalised voices and risks recentring white voices. A study with only BIPOC participants would indeed provide many additional insights. However, I felt that as a white researcher I was not the best to conduct such a study. Moreover, I consider it important for white people to reflect on whiteness and that the white participants provided relevant perspectives to my research questions. My aim is to only give space to white people in this paper insofar as it functions to challenge the dominance of whiteness.

3.3 Research design

My research question and aims require qualitative methods, as I examine *how* whiteness shapes the Dutch climate movement rather than *to what extent*. To accommodate my broad research questions and study aim, I have chosen a mixed methods approach using two qualitative methods: semi-structured interviews with a variety of experts on the topic and focus groups with white climate activists, allowing to capture a range of perspectives. In my analysis I complement this primary data with secondary data and existing academic literature. While I started with the hypothesis that whiteness significantly shapes the Dutch climate movement in a way that obstructs climate justice, I otherwise followed a largely inductive approach in following what participants presented as most relevant in *how* whiteness shapes the movement. My sampling strategy was a mix of purposive and convenience sampling, as well as some snowball sampling (Bryman 2016, 408,415). Almost all participants were found through two personal contacts, without whom it would have been difficult to find enough participants. I did reach out to groups where I had no personal contacts, but unfortunately received no reply there.

3.3.1 Limitations

Overall, I consider the low number of participants and limited representation of my sample the main limitation of my study. The final sample was significantly shaped by whom I was able to contact, reducing its diversity as only a few groups were represented and most participants came from urban centres, particularly Amsterdam. This contrasts somewhat with the broad scope of my questions, which I chose because of the lack of existing literature, wanting to get a range of perspectives on the problem of whiteness in the Dutch climate movement in general. For this I believe my research sample allowed for relevant and valuable results, comprising people closely involved with some of the most important groups and organisations in the Dutch climate movement (Milieudefensie, Greenpeace,

XRNL, Code Rood) and affiliated with others. Moreover, most participants felt that the issues discussed were generally applicable to the movement. While far from representing all the diversity present in the Dutch climate movement, the broad range of participants still allowed to gain multiple perspectives on my research questions as participants differed amongst other things in race, gender, age, expertise, and relation to the movement. There were also some limitations in the execution of the methods, especially in the focus groups which were affected by external interruptions and participants arriving late, leaving early, or cancelling.

3.4 Interviews

Through interviews I aimed to learn how experts see whiteness manifested in the Dutch climate movement, with what effects and how it could be countered. I considered them experts based on having relevant experience and knowledge to reflect on this. There were broadly two types of interviewees: three BIPOC activists with knowledge and experience on the intersection between racism, colonialism, and climate justice, and three white climate activists working on solidarity, movement building, and intersectionality. They thus engaged with issues of whiteness in the climate movement from different perspectives, where the first group are also experts through their personal experience of racism, as someone's situatedness is 'crucial for how he or she perceives and understands power relations' (Kaijser and Kronsell 2014, 422–23).

Practically, four interviews were in-person and two online, all lasting between 60 and 90 minutes. They were semi-structured, using an interview guide (see Appendix B) which I revised based on a pilot interview. I sent all interviewees the questions beforehand and gave them the option to remain anonymous. I also allowed them to check the profile description and quotes used in the thesis, primarily from an ethical perspective and secondly as a form of ensuring data quality as a limited form of member checking (Creswell 2013, 252). Below I list the interviewees, with a slightly longer description in Appendix A.

<u>BIPOC interviewees</u>

- Raki Ap: leader of the Free West Papua campaign in the Netherlands, affiliated with the green political party GroenLinks.
- Lawrence Cheuk: previously chairperson of Milieudefensie's youth organisation, and actively engaged with other groups in the Dutch climate movement.
- Darko Lagunas: environmental sociologist and freelance researcher, recently focusing on green extractivism.

White interviewees (all active in the climate movement for around 10 years)

- Noor Blokhuis: diversity organizer at Milieudefensie.
- Philip Schols: cofounder Code Rood, closely engaged in anti-racist solidarity activism, community mobiliser at Greenpeace NL.
- Alex (not their real name): active in XRNL since 2019, recently focusing on climate justice, intersectionality and solidarity actions.

3.5 Focus groups

The decision to do focus groups was not merely for efficiency in interviewing multiple people simultaneously, but studying processes of collective meaning making in groups and analysing collective identities (Bryman 2016, 501). Focus groups with white people are relevant to observe how whiteness operates, especially since it is a collective identity. Whereas the interviews allowed for a more bird's eye view and in-depth reflections from people with particularly relevant knowledge and experience, through the focus groups I examined how white people in the Dutch climate movement reflect on whiteness and climate justice with each other, having varying levels of prior engagement with these topics.

Disadvantages of focus groups include discomfort reducing participation or leading to answers deemed socially acceptable (Ibid., 522). This can lead to unreliable or partial data if participants are not speaking honestly or openly. These are real risks in this study as white fragility increases discomfort (DiAngelo 2018) and white people in the Netherlands are not used to discussing whiteness (Wekker 2016). Moreover, their innocent self-perception can lead to socially acceptable answers or not speaking freely out of fear of being perceived as racist. The group setting can also lead participants to try to show off in front of each other, which was evident in the XR1 group. To make participants feel more comfortable to share openly, I made small groups, assured everyone's anonymity, and conducted the sessions in-person at a location familiar to participants. I also conducted a pilot focus group to practice facilitating such conversations and improve my interview guide (see Appendix C). Aiming for four or five participants per group, I tried to get six people for each group to mitigate the risk of no-shows (Bryman 2016, 506). Nonetheless, last-minute cancellations caused one group to have only two participants, unfortunately reducing the level of group interaction. Difficulty in finding participants also reduced my ability to further select participants to maximise diversity in representation.

I conducted three focus groups, all 'natural' in the sense that participants knew each other and were part of the same group or organisations so their conversation had a common basis to facilitate

conversation (Ibid., 509). Two groups consisted of XRNL activists and one of NGO employees, although participants had also engaged with other parts of the climate movement. Participation was purely voluntary and out of own interest, which caused some selection bias of people with an interest in the topic. Below I list the participants' pseudonyms with their gender because this is relevant from an intersectional perspective. I acknowledge there are many other relevant identity markers, however, disclosing these would compromise participants' anonymity. The majority had completed higher education and were from urban areas in the Netherlands while the age range spanned from twenties to sixties. XRNL participants were separated according to their level of prior engagement with the topic, based on my personal contact's assessment. It is notable that the group with less prior engagement, XR1, had both white and male privilege (those who cancelled were also men), while in the other groups men were underrepresented.

- XR1: Paul (man), Peter (man)
- XR2: Blake (non-binary), Bonny (woman), Brooke (woman)
- NGO: Maria (woman), Margaret (woman), Michael (man), Molly (woman)

3.6 Data analysis

I recorded and transcribed all interviews and focus group discussions. During the transcription I familiarized myself with the data and noted any potential codes I identified. I then did a more systematic round of coding in Nvivo, after which I drew out the most relevant themes. Most of the data I analysed thematically based on *what* participants said. However, in the focus groups I also analysed *how* things were said using a latent rather than semantic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006, 84), which was particularly relevant for the XR1 group. For this I drew not only from the transcript but also notes I took during and right after the session, as well as notes taken during the transcription. Rather than seeing a hierarchy in evidence and using different methods for triangulation, I combined interviews and focus groups to achieve data completeness since 'each method reveals different parts of the phenomenon of interest (…) and contributes to a more comprehensive understanding' (Lambert and Loiselle 2008, 230). However, I did consider the different types of expertise in my analysis, especially since BIPOC can see whiteness more clearly than white people. As all interviews and focus groups were conducted in Dutch, the quotes are my own translations, with minor edits for readability.

Unfortunately, this thesis is far too limited in scope to address all the manifestations and impacts of whiteness in the Dutch climate movement that were mentioned in the data. My decisions on what to include were based on the following criteria:

1. **Relevance**: what answers my research questions best and is the most important?

2. **Newness**: what has been least discussed so far and is most likely to contribute new knowledge?
3. **Generality**: what applies to the movement in general rather than a specific group?
4. **Frequency**: what comes up most often in the data?

4. Results

This section addresses my two research questions: how structural whiteness shapes the Dutch climate movement's relation to climate justice and how these impacts can be countered. Drawing primarily on my analysis of participant responses, I complement these with secondary data and existing literature providing theoretical explanations or comparisons with other studies. The main themes are: i) the term climate justice; ii) narratives framing climate change; iii) silencing BIPOC; iv) solidarity; v) whiteness in operation; and vi) tackling whiteness.

4.1 Co-opting climate justice

> '"What do we want? Climate Justice. When do we want it? Now." Everyone can say that one.'
> (Bonny)

The influence of whiteness starts with how climate justice is used and understood. I asked all participants for their definition of climate justice and while these broadly fit my own understanding, they all diverged, and many participants did not have an obvious answer ready. The majority problematised the lack of a clear common definition and found that in becoming mainstream it had become somewhat empty. Only Peter and Paul did not see this vagueness as a problem, although they struggled to define it. Peter wrote down 'unknown', stating that the term says it all already and there is nothing more to say, while Paul said: 'I have few associations with this because I have no idea what it looks like'. Their answers exemplify the problem mentioned by others that people talk about climate justice without understanding what it means. Although it is important that climate movements emphasise justice, the problem is that in mainstream movements 'this shift often remains largely semantic, with many of the policy solutions that are advocated for staying at the level of technocratic management of fossil fuel emissions' (Curnow and Helferty 2018, 148).

Not only is climate justice not understood, mainstream movements have also changed its meaning. Several participants referred to the term originating from the Global South while white mainstream movements in the Global North appropriate it, in the process emptying or altering its meaning:

> ‘[NGOs] highjack our story with that term (…) misuse the word climate justice to give the impression that they are doing everything they can, but actually the narrative is super misleading. (…) It’s trending, climate justice, but what is it really about?’ (Raki)

> ‘[A]nd if there is awareness [of what climate justice entails] then it is a very limited definition of climate justice.’ (Lawrence)

> ‘[A] determining white interpretation of justice, while white people haven’t exactly shaped the world in a just way.’ (Molly)

One way that whiteness shapes the interpretation of climate justice in the Dutch climate movement is by emphasising class inequality. Multiple interviewees criticised the tendency to focus on low-income households in the Netherlands while neglecting the intersection between class and race. Lawrence found that NGOs highlight class inequality but consistently fail to mention anti-racism as part of climate justice. Some focus group participants exhibited this focus on class, complementing or even diverging in their answers about whiteness and climate justice to talking about classism. This ignores that climate injustice is not simply rooted in capitalism, but in *racial* capitalism (Gonzalez 2021). Reframing climate justice as a class issue functions to undermine the salience of race and upholds white innocence, allowing white people to ignore the role of white supremacy in climate change and how they themselves perpetuate it.

I consider such white washing of the term climate justice at best a form of white ignorance and unconscious white centring, but at worst a way to pacify a challenge to the status quo by co-opting the term and emptying it of its radical potential. Alternatively, movements might take up climate justice with genuine intentions but without serious consideration of what this entails and requires from white movements.

> Although employing a global climate justice model is useful to national and powerful organizations with problematically low diversity and difficulty collaborating with marginalized communities, deploying this framework does not in itself unpack the problems of whiteness that have been institutionalized in these organizations. (Black, Milligan, and Heynen 2016, 289)

4.2 Narrow narratives

‘Whiteness of the climate movement is about many things I think, it’s about the stories we tell, the message, and who is central in that.’ (Philip)

One of the most frequently mentioned impacts of structural whiteness was the movement’s narratives on climate change, its causes, impacts, and possible solutions. Multiple participants referred to the

existing narratives (seen in campaigns, speeches, slogans, articles, etc.) as not being 'the honest story' (Raki) or 'the full story' (Darko). I analyse how these centre whiteness through emphasising CO_2 and the future, which risks promoting unjust solutions.

4.2.1 Only seeing CO_2

The main critique was that the dominant narrative focuses on CO_2 rather than the root causes of climate change, somewhat exemplified by one NGO participant: 'The most important is CO_2 reduction, and if that's possible by ignoring all people and closing all, I don't know, coal factories or something, then I am in favour' (Margaret). This contrasted with interviewees' comments:

> '[Focusing on CO_2] distracts from the real story: decolonisation, human rights, genocide, ecocide. // That human component needs to come forward more strongly because that is what climate justice is about: social rights of people, Indigenous peoples, people in the Global South.' (Raki)
>
> 'The fundamental decolonization narrative is missing in most of the movement, let's say 90% of the movement does not share that narrative.' (Darko)

This reductive framing is related to whiteness. Lohmann (2021, 225) argues that the biggest challenge of whiteness in the climate movement are concepts like climate and energy coming from white-dominated science. This leads to a focus on CO_2 molecules as the problem 'rather than historically rooted patterns of capital accumulation, white supremacy, unrelenting imperialism and ruthless patriarchy' (Ibid., 226). In their 2021 report *The Climate Crisis is a (Neo)Colonial Capitalist Crisis: Experiences, responses and steps towards decolonising climate action*, the European Network Against Racism notes that 'the mainstream climate movement [has] largely focused on symptom-treatment,' calling emissions reductions 'a band-aid on the bullet-wound that is at its base a colonial capitalist crisis' (Ramanujam and Asri 2021, 6). The technical focus also reinforces the separation of climate change from issues like racism and colonialism, dismissing social justice issues as mere 'identity politics' considered less important than climate change (Lohmann 2021, 226). Several participants noted this pattern of isolating climate change, which also causes lack of understanding for anti-racist solidarity actions:

> 'I think the difficult thing of the climate movement is that it's so specifically *climate* movement. So then a lot of people think: "okay, this is what we fight for, I'm here for the climate."' (Blake, emphasis in original)
>
> 'When you say something about anti-racism or something like that, they say "Huh? Aren't you a climate group?"' (Molly)

Some interviewees argued that whiteness allows for this compartmentalization of problems, pointing at the privilege to see problems separately and have a narrow focus on climate change:

> '[T]here are people who cannot afford to do that and therefore tell a broader and, in the end, more honest story. (…) There are so many people who fight against injustice in all shapes and for them it's inseparable.' (Noor)

Some scholars (cf. Dietz 2014) describe different framings of climate change quite neutrally as diverging opinions about how to best solve the climate crisis. Taking whiteness as an analytical lens shows that this is not the case, since neglecting colonialism and racial capitalism erases the history that created climate debt while maintaining white innocence. Far from neutral, it is important to examine how power and privilege shape views of and responses to climate change.

4.2.2 Future framing

Multiple participants related this narrow focus on CO_2 to the framing of climate change as primarily a problem in the future, seeing this as a manifestation of whiteness:

> 'A very well-known example is of course talking about the consequences in the future and the consequences for *our* children and in that no recognition of the consequences that many people experience already now, and already for a long time.' (Philip, emphasis in original)

> 'I think that part of making yourself the norm, which you also really see in the climate movement, so centring your own perspective and let's say European lives or Western lives in general. The narrative in the climate movement is still very strongly: because of CO_2 emissions there will be dangerous climate change endangering future generations (…) you can hear that it's from a white perspective.' (Noor)

As Noor suggests, white-centring feeds this emphasis on the future by ignoring how racialised communities have already been affected by climate change and its root causes. Particularly poignant is the lack of attention for communities harmed by Dutch colonialism: 'We barely pay any attention to Suriname, we barely pay any attention to Indonesia, we barely pay any attention to our Moluccan friends, for South Africa' (Lawrence). Lawrence emphasised that even parts of the Dutch Caribbean that are special municipalities of the Netherlands or part of the kingdom of the Netherlands are ignored by the climate movement. Another glaring example of the failure to connect climate change and colonialism while ignoring BIPOC lives is Raki's occupied homeland West Papua. Despite being closely tied to Dutch colonial history and having the world's second largest rainforest, Dutch NGOs had ignored West Papua until Raki started explicitly connecting climate justice to Indigenous rights for

West Papuans who have been facing a slow genocide. In particular, he criticised anti-deforestation campaigns centring Orangutans rather than people:

> '[W]hat about 500,000 murdered Papuans, one third of my people? An animal is apparently worth more than the life of a Black person. // My people are dying, the world is silent for 60 years already. (…) They don't care about our lives.'

The neglect of colonial history and its continuing impacts is also noted by the European Network Against Racism, which finds that '[m]ainstream climate movements in Europe are largely ignorant of (…) [t]heir own colonial history and how it ties into the climate crisis' (Ramanujam and Asri 2021, 53). Such disconnect of the past is central to what critical race theorist Cheryl Harris (1993) terms 'whiteness as property', while Wekker (2016) relates it to maintaining white innocence. For colonizing countries, '[t]he history of colonial violence must be silenced in order to maintain a national identity of innocence' (McLean 2013, 359). As this neglect of colonial history is standard in the Netherlands, it is not surprising (if still disappointing) to see this reflected in the climate movement. Such historical amnesia allows to avoid responsibility, 'wip[ing] the colonial past from our collective memories and start afresh, as if past patterns of exploitation have little bearing on current inequities' (Gonzalez 2013, 92). Erasing this history depends on the silencing of BIPOC and thus not only obstructs climate justice but exacerbates climate *in*justice.

4.2.3 False solutions

The main danger of white-centred narratives is that '[i]nadequate analysis leads to inadequate diagnosis and remedies' (Moe-Lobeda 2016, 30). Focusing on emissions leads to technical solutions which might mitigate the danger of climate change for the minority world without addressing 'the power imbalances that have created climate debt' (Ibid.). An example of this is groups such as 'Nuclear for Climate' promoting nuclear energy (Kern voor Klimaat n.d.). Raki and Darko emphasised 'false solutions' as dangerous consequences of whiteness in the climate movement, criticising the focus on green energy which perpetuates exploitation and injustice:

> 'And that's why I say [the climate movement] is its own worst enemy. Because in the end those [solutions], for example nuclear energy but also windmills and solar panels (…) those are actually all capitalizable solutions that fit within the capitalist logic of profit making but don't do anything against green extractivism and the overexploiting of people. And those are the fundamental problems we need to fight, not just that CO_2 story. // What is presented as a solution is another double downing on the Global South.' (Darko)

Lennon (2020) relates this risk of exacerbating injustice through promoting renewable energy to the notion in climate movements that addressing climate change and its racial injustice can be achieved simply through fighting the fossil fuel industry. In his study in the US, climate justice activists acknowledged that the contradiction between climate justice and the social and environmental costs of renewable energy technologies are often ignored: 'the movement consistently abstains from recognizing the limitations of these technologies, as it remains intent on offering a utopic alternative to the fossil fuel status quo' (Ibid., 948). In the same vein, James and Mack (2020) argue that XR should not only engage with a 'politics of demand' but also a 'politics of refusal'. If truly advocating for system change, this 'requires dismantling the capitalist-colonialist matrix of oppression', and therefore refusing mere improvements to the current system (Ibid., 52). Whiteness is likely to inhibit such a radical challenge to (and refusal of) the status quo in which it is invested, aiming to maintain its dominant position. According to Noor:

> '[B]ecause white people have privileges in many other aspects, they don't have anything to gain from truly toppling the whole system and arrive at a more just world, because, what you see is that what we are doing as a white climate movement is to reduce CO_2 emissions within the current system and also using the current system.'

Michael expressed the fear that despite aiming for system changing, false solutions might be needed as a last resort:

> 'You just see that there's going to be a time when you can't avoid to then implement even some of those kinds of solutions for God's sake, because otherwise we simply won't make it, to at least slow it down. While you are striving for system change, you're stuck with the dilemma that you simply have almost no time.'

The point of urgency was mentioned by Noor and Alex as an obstacle to intersectional climate justice activism. Similarly, a study of XRNL notes that '[b]y adopting a language of emergency, XR risks obscuring the roots of climate change and ecological destruction in a long history of colonialism and extractivism' (Zantvoort 2019, 15).

4.2.4 Catering to white audiences

While some participants ascribed narrow framings to white normativity and white centring, others considered it a conscious strategic choice. For instance, Peter and Paul felt that XRNL activists opposing an anti-racist solidarity action did not deny the intersectionality of climate change and racism: 'in fact they understand it very well, they are smart people, they understand very well what

Demand Zero [for climate justice] entails and why [the action] fits with that. They just (…) for strategic reasons they want a narrower focus' (Paul).

One specific reason is appealing to a target audience, which is assumed to not be open to a broader narrative of climate justice which references capitalism, racism, or colonialism. Lawrence saw this as NGOs making a strategic choice for their own sake: 'no organisation wants to estrange their members or the people. (…) It's the fear that you lose members and therefore money and therefore capacity to fight for the good cause.' Urgency also plays a factor here, creating 'a tension between intersectional analyses of the climate and ecological crisis (…) and the need to urgently build a mass movement to address the crisis, which might be undermined by a message that is considered too "radical" or too "left-wing"' (Zantvoort 2019, 19). I identified three different arguments in the data why the broader narrative was inappropriate for the target audience, related to their ability to i) understand it; ii) cope with it emotionally; iii) empathise with BIPOC.

i) 'The whole intersectional thinking simply isn't developed yet to such an extent, as a sort of collective conscious. So then you can't, then you get the question of catering to your target audiences because your target audience doesn't want that, because they don't get it.' (Molly)

ii) 'Because well some suffering we just can't bear or people get paralysed and then they don't take action anymore and then it's not strategic to do it that way.' (Noor)

iii) 'Maybe white people are moved sooner by thinking about the consequences for their children than a person of colour who is already experiences consequences now, or say, the polar bears.' (Philip)

Some participants' responses suggested there was a certain neutrality in considering what is most effective for the movement's aims. However, taking whiteness as an analytical lens shows this is not the case. Strategically choosing to *not* tell a decolonial narrative and the stories of BIPOC silently legitimises the whiteness informing these choices which prioritise white comfort over climate justice.

First, the argument that people will not understand a broader climate justice narrative relates to the privilege of having not engaged with colonial history or (hi)stories of oppression before. Such permission to be ignorant is an example of white ignorance as negative white privilege. NGOs for example told Raki that a full climate justice narrative is too big, too hard to understand and too confronting:

> '[B]ecause [the NGOs] are scared that the people in the country, the *white* people in the country, won't understand this story – because that is the truth – they want a softening approach to climate change and then it's about reducing CO_2.' (Raki, emphasis in original)

The second point, coping emotionally, relates to the privilege of usually being able to avoid the painful realities of climate injustice. Hearing about the racist and colonial aspects of climate change can trigger what Robin DiAngelo terms 'white fragility', when white people lack 'racial stamina' and 'consider a challenge to [their] racial worldviews as a challenge to [their] identities as good, moral people' (DiAngelo 2018, 2). Some participants also mentioned this:

> 'They are geared towards what their audience can bear and there is that fragility. The white fragility of not daring to acknowledge that our lifestyle maintains colonial structures and essentially maintains the position of power of white people.' (Raki)

Finally, lack of empathy for BIPOC also relates to the privilege of not having experienced certain injustices, as well as white centring and valuing white lives above non-white lives, as expressed by some participants:

> 'What I think is fundamentally the reason for the lack of these topics in the more white climate movement, is that there, the pain in a sense, of knowing what exclusion is, and knowing what exploitation is and what that feels like, it's not there.' (Darko)

> '[T]he question of whether you take action or look away is related to how close you are to the problem which in turn has to do with privilege. // [W]e then maybe see some misery kind of as a lost cause, but also because it affects us less at the deepest level because we don't identify with those who are already dying now for example.' (Noor)

Zantvoort's study of XRNL notes that 'questions of how to appeal to "mainstream" Dutch citizens continued to surface' which were understood 'as normative: white, male, middle-class, and relatively conservative' (Zantvoort 2019, 19). An important question then is why the movement aims to cater to this audience, with multiple participants arguing that this was exclusionary towards others:

> 'Sometimes it's also seen as a strategic question that if we pay more attention to anti-racism etcetera then we lose certain people, maybe mostly white people who don't have any affinity with that. (…) But then there is less attention for the fact that if you don't do that you also already lost people.' (Philip)

> ‘Within XR the decision is very often “we want to keep this white 60-year-old man on board,” ignoring that that white 60-year-old man has certain unconscious behaviours and makes certain remarks that in fact exclude many other groups.’ (Alex)

Ultimately, most participants thought it was in fact *not* strategic to abstain from intersectional narratives in order to appeal to these target audiences. Lawrence argued that it prevents getting broader support which is necessary for change while Noor felt that a narrow focus leads to movements being played out against each other, inhibiting solidarity. In contrast, a ‘race-conscious decolonial narrative of climate justice (…) has the potential to unite diverse and powerful social movements’ (Gonzalez 2021, 129). Some argued that it could (and should) be a strategic choice to become a frontrunner amongst NGOs by truly embodying climate justice: ‘What I find so hard is that we think that the constituency and people who follow us will not understand that, while I think that it is precisely a task for us to tell those stories’ (Noor).

4.3 Silencing BIPOC

> ‘Our communities have been on fire for a long time and these flames are fanned by our exclusion and silencing.’ (Wretched of the Earth 2019)

White-centred narratives are actively maintained through silencing BIPOC, which is another recurring theme in how participants saw whiteness manifested in the climate movement: the lack of BIPOC stories, voices, and decision-making power. Alex for example reflected:

> ‘I actually think that it [whiteness] is *the* biggest problem of the climate movement, especially because it’s people of colour who actually lead the climate and ecology movement (...) and the fact that let’s say here in Europe and in the Netherlands the climate movement is so white, yeah I think it comes from colonial structures, from certain NGO structures, but in my opinion it doesn’t in any way do justice to what’s actually going on.’ (emphasis in original)

4.3.1 Space to speak

Multiple participants spoke about the need to centre and amplify BIPOC stories and experiences more, and, even better, provide platforms so they can speak for themselves, whether through an article, a podcast, or a podium at a protest.

> ‘Why don’t you make sure those people get the resources to talk for themselves? To give them the platform to amplify their voice?’ (Lawrence)

> 'I think the most important is to centre activists of colour in the things you do, things you organise, or visions, yeah just showing there is more than the European white colonial story that we grew up with.' (Alex)

However, many comments suggested that even when BIPOC are given a platform, the dominance of whiteness is still determining. For example, when BIPOC are invited by white groups or organisations, they are moulded into the existing, white frameworks. Brooke felt that people don't realise enough that making space 'means literal physical space and simply space in time,' and just saying: '"here you have a block of our attention and it's yours," without attaching lots of demands because it then fits in our program or something like that.' Meanwhile, Margaret was frustrated that NGOs often talk *about* people rather than *with* them or letting them speak for themselves: 'it's very much *about* those people and we have a *white* spokesperson and *white* communication' (emphasis in original). She reflected that when collaborating with BIPOC activists or organisations, the white NGO's dominant position allows them to still mould a story to white standards, dictating BIPOC how to tell their story so it's more effective: 'I then really feel that I am forcing my white way of communicating, my white ideas, my white solutions onto that person.'

Whiteness can also assert itself by devaluing platforms, illustrated by Darko and Lawrence's experiences of getting a platform to centre Indigenous perspectives where subsequently the validity was questioned. Darko wrote an article for Down to Earth[5] (DtE) criticizing sustainability as green capitalism based on his ethnographic research in Latin America with Indigenous groups. However, DtE only wanted to publish it as an op-ed rather than a normal article: 'very typical, because what doesn't fit in your reality, in your scientific normativity, you will sooner consider as opinion'. As for Lawrence, he interviewed three Indigenous climate activists who criticised NGOs like Greenpeace and Milieudefensie (Cheuk 2019). The NGOs initially reacted defensively to the article, saying they didn't recognise themselves in it, on which Lawrence reflected: 'you know I don't need protection, but those activists, their story is being discredited essentially.'

4.3.2 More than a platform: a seat at the table

Many participants mentioned that while BIPOC were getting more platforms, this had not yet evolved into actual influence:

> 'You're allowed to give input but you don't have any ownership.' (Noor)

[5] An independent magazine started on initiative of Milieudefensie but not necessarily representing the NGO's position.

> 'And still I have to bark from the sidelines – that's how serious it still is in reality, after five years of kicking against the door with Indigenous activists to get a seat at the table. // [B]ecause [white NGOs] are still in the dominant position in the green story which should be about Black lives and lives of people in the Global South. (…) Where are we at the table? That's still the critical question.' (Raki)

Some went beyond calling for a seat at the table, understood as having a say with limited decision-making power, questioning the power structures determining this: 'Who decides who is invited to the table? But before that actually there is the question: who decides where the table is, and why was Milieudefensie already the table?' (Noor). Similarly, Chihiro Geuzebroek argues that 'just joining the table is not enough, because the table is rigged', and that only offering some participation 'is saying you're offered some representation for assimilation' (Geuzebroek et al. 2021). Multiple participants called for collaboration beyond asking for input:

> 'Of course, it's one thing to say: "Do you want to think through my campaign with me?" It's a completely different thing to say: "You have that expertise, we have this expertise, shall we work together?"' (Noor)

> 'Maybe it's also less about inviting people and saying "we value your input" and rather say "we need each other, what can we do for you, for your mission, at this moment with the resources we have? Because we see that we have the same mission." // My favourite thought experiment is simply to not invite people to join us in talking about our strategy, but for example to just say our entire budget and resources are for your fight for a whole year.' (Molly)

These reflections suggest that platforms and limited input are not enough to challenge the dominant position of whiteness, pointing to the need for solidarity, which I turn to next.

4.4 Solidarity

> 'For me, solidarity is that as different groups or movements you support and reinforce one another. And the climate movement has quite a lot of resources and reach, and I think that it's very logical and good to use that because all those struggles are intertwined.' (Alex)

Solidarity was one of the most recurring themes, posited as central to both climate justice and countering white supremacy. In contrast to charity which does not aim to disrupt oppressive systems, solidarity strategies are based on shared political visions and 'explicitly attempt to use disparate access to power and privilege as part of their strategic interventions' (Curnow and Helferty 2018, 152). Here I look at how participants described solidarity and some ways that whiteness inhibits this.

4.4.1 Words, money, and actions

Public statements of solidarity were mentioned as one form of solidarity, with examples of Code Rood and XRNL expressing solidarity with Kick Out Zwarte Piet[6] (KOZP). Raki and Lawrence emphasised that big established NGOs could have a big impact by communicating explicitly and consistently about anti-racism. Raki mentioned that XRNL's solidarity with the Free West Papua campaign (FWP) and communications on climate justice already made a difference despite their limited capacity, stating that 'the big environmentalist clubs should do this, then we're making real progress. But it's not yet happening, or not enough.' Lawrence commented that Milieudefensie's participation in anti-racist demonstrations was an important first step, 'but so far I haven't seen an op-ed of [the director] who publicly takes a stance on anti-racism.'

Financial support was mentioned as an important form of practical solidarity because of the unequal distribution of resources. Philip for example noted that 'you see how many resources go to the climate and environment, and how relatively few resources go to for example anti-racism.' Raki had found that four of the biggest environmental NGOs (Greenpeace NL, Milieudefensie, WWF, Oxfam Novib) combined have a budget of 300 million euros and almost 1000 employees. He contrasted this with FWP's budget of zero and him having to do his activism next to a regular fulltime job, reflecting how much his organisation could do with just one million euros: 'then we'll make a revolution tomorrow.' Unequal distribution of resources is tied to unequal distribution of power. Noor for example mentioned that within the international Friends of the Earth network 'you still often see that the North pays, so the North decides. So there the internal power relations are just a bit skewed because we have more resources here.' Moreover, she observed that financial support can also be problematic: 'sometimes it's still a neoliberal way of we have some money here for you, or like a very measurable, demarcated piece, instead of truly, yeah relationship and equal collaboration.' In the same vein, Lawrence argued that 'if you do the one thing – so supporting grassroots organisations – but don't incorporate it in your own political campaign then you lack credibility'. But the other way round 'then it seems as if you are taking their ideas and trying to get more money and volunteers through that. So it just has to be both.'

Most participants saw solidarity as being about actions: 'not just talking and thinking about it but also putting it into practice' (Philip). Blake described it simply as looking at what you have and what you're good at and offering this in support of another. According to Raki, if you're serious about climate

[6] Kick Out Zwarte Piet is the main campaign fighting against the racist blackface tradition of Zwarte Piet, which has become the focal point of the fight against and conversation about racism in the Netherlands. While public opinion is shifting rapidly in recent years thanks to anti-Zwarte Piet activism, the tradition still has widespread support and anti-Zwarte Piet activists continue to face violent backlash (VICE Redactie 2020).

justice, 'then you should facilitate us, then you should make your space available, in your budget, in your facilities, in your narratives, in your communication.' Several participants emphasised the importance of centring the movement or group that you are in solidarity with, which in anti-racist solidarity actions implies decentring whiteness:

> '[R]eally letting the other say what is needed and follow. And also just listening instead of deciding what would be a good move. // A certain humility and starting to listen better and yeah just making space are important parts of being in solidarity.' (Noor)

A frequently mentioned example was XRNL's action in solidarity with KOZP where activists dropped a large banner from an old ship belonging to the Dutch East India Company that read: 'Black Pete is racism. Break with colonialism.' Alex described how it came about as a response to KOZP's open call with 50 ways to support them; they thought about what XRNL activists are good at, what skills and resources they have, came up with an idea for a civil disobedience action and asked KOZP what they thought about it. XRNL did the work, but KOZP had the decision-making power, also for example in reviewing the press release for the action. KOZP wanted this action to be explicitly from XRNL, showing publicly what XRNL stands for. Similarly, solidarity statements are relatively meaningless if they are anonymous. However, some comments reflected that at other times advertising one's solidarity is a form of centring yourself:

> 'Just go to other movements and say "hey, use us. What do you need?" And then not going with XR flags because that's not what you are there for.' (Blake)

> 'Solidarity means that you are prepared to use what you've got to achieve the goal of someone else, without immediately [tying] your own campaign targets or strategy [to that].' (Noor)

4.4.2 Tokenism and saviourism

While the previous examples show how solidarity can be a way to 'enact the principles of climate justice', there is not enough critical reflection in the climate movement on how solidarity activism can also reproduce 'processes of racialization, colonialism, and whiteness' (Curnow and Helferty 2018, 146,150). Noor's comments about financial support exemplify this, showing the difficulty of navigating power differences in solidarity work, as the latter does not automatically challenge the former. Others pointed out that solidarity statements can sometimes be a form of performative activism:

> 'It's a nice sauce, it's like greenwashing but then diversity washing or something like that.' (Bonny)

> 'The fact that you mention KOZP doesn't mean that it's suddenly inclusive.' (Brooke)

This type of performativity can lead to white saviourism and tokenism rather than genuine solidarity. Lawrence mentioned how the climate movement is keen to include 'friendly' BIPOC in order to show diversity, as long as they are not too confronting. Indeed, Chihiro Geuzebroek (2019) stated that she 'can only be present as a silent token to say something "diverse" now and then.' Multiple participants raised the problem of white saviourism in solidarity attempts, for example representing BIPOC only as victims or doing solidarity actions without checking what is needed. It was often contrasted with 'gelijkwaardigheid': usually translated as equivalence or equality but literally meaning with equal worth or dignity. To maintain the word's full meaning I have kept it in Dutch.

> 'It has everything to do with gelijkwaardigheid, so (…) whether you really see the other as a gelijkwaardige comrade in the struggle. (…) not "I'm going to help you," but "we have a problem together". That's really a big difference. I think that we as a white climate movement are still very much in the "I'm going to help you" narrative.' (Noor)

Some participants connected white saviourism to ignorance about colonialism and a narrow view of climate justice:

> 'It [climate justice] doesn't come up. But when it does come up it's very much like "they are really sad victims and we have to help them." And not, "we caused this, so we need to stop this."' (Lawrence)

> '[Y]ou often see white saviourism, this white concept that "we will solve it, we're going to deploy money, resources, innovation, court cases to reverse this injustice." And then put yourself forward as a saviour when you're actually part of the problem. I think that's a very white characteristic of the climate movement, at least how we know it in the Netherlands.' (Noor)

The climate movement thus perpetuates the white saviourism of governments: '[i]nstead of acknowledging responsibility for past wrongs, the global North ascribes its differential commitments under the climate regime and other environmental treaties to *noblesse oblige* — benevolence, morality, and good will' (Gonzalez 2012, 92, emphasis in original). Looking at the US, Curnow and Helferty (2018, 150) note that 'even in the context of coalition efforts, environmental organizations may take up colonial or paternalistic behaviors.' White saviourism is related to ignoring history, as both help maintain a moral self-image and allow to avoid responsibility. White innocence thus also manifests in solidarity work, when 'white people seek to avoid implication or complicity in racial hierarchies through strategies which will earn absolution' (Ibid., 154).

White saviourism is fostered by seeing allyship as a static identity instead of 'allyship-as-action' or a long-term ongoing process (James and Mack 2020, 40). The latter requires an 'ethics of care', which entails 'taking the time to build lasting, meaningful, and reciprocal relationships' (Ibid., 47). Many participants emphasised the importance of building relationships, giving different examples of whiteness preventing this. Some pointed at white normativity making it difficult to collaborate with communities or groups who work differently, while others highlighted neoliberal values of efficiency inhibiting genuine solidarity:

> 'It remains to be seen whether you honour your relations with your partners in this way, both partners in the South and groups from social movements in the Netherlands that you engage. And whether that strategy of short-term campaigns with short preparation time and then a peak and then moving on again, yes, if it's not also somewhat an awkward saving attempt without genuine relationship and reciprocity. (…) In this pressure cooker, in that process, partners can sometimes feel quite uncomfortable and think why does it have to go so fast and why don't we take the next five years to work on this goal with lots of care for the process and each other? And I think it's quite a white thing to then say, "No we want to achieve certain results within a year and afterwards we have something else to do."' (Noor)

4.5 Whiteness in operation

Whereas the previous sections drew mostly from participants' reflections on how whiteness shapes the climate movement, I now examine how whiteness manifested during the XR1 focus group session. I analyse how Peter and Paul exhibited white ignorance, colour blindness, and other behaviours upholding whiteness.

4.5.1 Denying racism

To begin, Peter diverged from all other participants in his definition of whiteness. While the majority associated whiteness with power, privilege, superiority and normativity, Peter answered 'milk, bland, chocolate.' He thus did not distinguish white as a colour and whiteness as a social construct, although my invitation explained my focus on structural whiteness. However, the explanation he gave afterwards indicated that he was not unaware of race as a construct – the more passive ignorance of not knowing – but rather that he did not consider it relevant or important: the more active ignorance of not *wanting* to know which promotes white innocence (Applebaum 2016, 13). The following quote further illustrates his claim to colour blindness, which functions to 'ignore the norm of whiteness and make it difficult to acknowledge institutional racism and one's part in it' (Ibid., 4).

> ‘I concern myself very little with those kinds of categorisations like whiteness and blackness (…) I don’t think about colonialism or things like that. (…) In my world – I know it still exists, I know that there are many people who have a lot of issues with it – but those are not the associations that I still have with it. // I also don’t see the difference between me and a pig for example.’ (Peter)

He exhibited a lack of understanding what white supremacy entails, referring to employers now giving preference to women of colour: ‘then I think well, so then you’re no longer privileged, then you notice a bit that those privileges did play a role once.’ The latter implies a denial that he still has privileges from being a white man, even though at another point he did acknowledge these privileges. Additionally, Peter spoke about BIPOC’s experiences of racism in a sceptical way:

> ‘[S]omeone of colour was really playing the role of “you are all racists.” // He really put himself in the corner of being discriminated against because, well in the way it seemed, he didn’t get what he wanted.’

Colour blindness and describing affirmative action as reverse discrimination are distancing strategies to present oneself as a ‘good’, i.e. not racist, white person (Case and Hemmings 2005). Both Peter and Paul also employed more subtle distancing strategies, which I analyse next.

4.5.2 Avoidance, performativity, and contradictions

Being silent or evading questions is another way for white people to ‘create a safe, personal distance between themselves and the socially volatile issue of racism’ (Case and Hemmings 2005, 608). This was reflected in Peter and Paul’s avoidance of questions, comments showing lack of interest and not taking my questions or research seriously. From the beginning their attitude was somewhat condescending, belittling questions as ridiculously obvious and uninteresting: ‘that question is pretty easy to answer I think, it’s not going well with the climate, is it?’ (Peter). They regularly answered in abstract or vague terms or went off on long tangents about theology and philosophy. This provides an interesting contrast with the NGO group discussing abstract language as a manifestation of whiteness.

Once I did get direct answers, these showed a surprising awareness about climate injustices and the relevance of racism. However, this often appeared disingenuous and performative since these responses were not spontaneous and because of Peter and Paul’s general disinterested attitude. It seemed like they had learned about climate justice, racism and colonialism in a workshop and were aware that intersectionality had become important for XRNL and the more socially acceptable or more progressive position to hold, thus knowing what they *should* say without necessarily fully understanding it. For instance, Paul stated in a matter-of-fact way that he found the new demand for

climate justice very important. When I prompted him to elaborate, he merely replied that climate justice summarised it for him and that he simply didn't agree with the way the world works. Additionally, jokes or irrelevant tangents following the answers minimised their significance.

Contradictions in their answers also point towards performativity. For example, after first dismissing the relevance of race, Peter later said: 'there is very clearly a connection between whiteness and the situation we are in now.' Additionally, both expressed support for the KOZP solidarity action as if this was obvious, when I knew that Peter at the time had disagreed. Peter spoke about *others* not understanding the action and how it fit with XR, excluding himself from this. Meanwhile, Paul mentioned the importance of continuously examining racism in yourself, only to later joke about the blackface tradition of Zwarte Piet: 'well you can counter whiteness with face painting but that's no longer allowed.' In general, despite mentioning the importance of introspection, their own answers did not reflect this. They mostly located the problem of whiteness in the climate movement outside of themselves, another distancing strategy to evade responsibility (Case and Hemmings 2005).

Overall, Peter and Paul did not take my questions as an opportunity to reflect on a complex and relatively underexamined topic. They seemed somewhat bored, expressed no interest in reading my thesis and said they had not learned anything new. Their attitude contrasted strongly with the other participants, who showed appreciation for the question as relevant, good, difficult and interesting to reflect on. Even the interviewees, whom I worried might get bored because of their familiarity with the topic, showed interest which Peter and Paul did not, despite seeming to have the most to learn still. Their arrogant and condescending attitude, lack of self-reflection as well as *willingness* to reflect, contrasts with the humility of other participants who expressed difficulty at answering some questions as well as doubts and uncertainty in relation to their own positionality. Peter and Paul did mention their privileges but with little further reflection on the implications, thus seeming more like a 'confession' which 'releases the bearer of white privilege from the responsibility of action' (Levine-Rasky 2000, 276). Ahmed (2004) critiques such 'politics of declaration', where simply admitting a bad practice is considered a good practice, arguing that 'declaring one's whiteness, even as part of a project of social critique, can reproduce white privilege.'

On a personal note, while all interviews and focus groups were inspiring and pleasant, this one was unpleasant – if still motivating by highlighting the problem of unexamined whiteness. Not only did the participants embody whiteness, but also patriarchy. As a white woman I felt the latter much more strongly at a personal level, for example in their condescending and patronising way of speaking, not taking my work seriously, and being 'mansplained'. It thus also highlights the importance of intersectionality in relation to overlapping privilege-identities.

4.6 Tackling whiteness

'Whiteness in the climate movement is a violent force that needs to be tackled.' (Darko)

Having analysed various ways that structural whiteness in the Dutch climate movement obstructs climate justice and even inhibits solidarity activism meant to address this, I now turn to how these impacts can be countered. In this final section, I analyse participants' reflections on this, highlighting education and white people taking responsibility.

4.6.1 Moving beyond diversity

Despite explaining my emphasis on structural whiteness, many participants reverted to talking about demography both in relation to how whiteness shapes the climate movement and how this could be countered. Thinking of whiteness as a norm and power structure determining more than who participates tended to happen only after I asked it more explicitly. Michael described how he mostly notices the movement's whiteness when he is surrounded by white people at a climate march, commenting: 'I mean what you describe [structural whiteness] is much more important, but those are the things that you experience more.' Others confirmed the focus on diversity:

> 'I think people are increasingly aware that we're quite white with each other, but I think that then often the aim is for diversity (…) in the sense of "we want those people to be able to participate as well, but we don't necessarily want to change ourselves."' (Noor)

> 'I think it's a very big problem and that [whiteness] gets very little attention and so it gets stuck a bit on how can we involve "other" groups.' (Alex)

For Lawrence, inclusion was a central aspect of climate justice: 'looking for something that all people can be a part of that climate movement and be a part of the solution.' He considered it necessary to engage the masses which in turn is needed to fight climate change, emphasising intersectionality:

> 'I feel that environmental organisations are only in that transition now, from first diversity and now slowly they are talking more about intersectionality and inclusivity. (…) Diversity in my opinion is simply checking the boxes, (…) while intersectionality is really looking at the issue from all angles.'

While the focus on diversity could be explained by it being the most visible manifestation of whiteness, more important is that it threatens whiteness the least. Where diversity is something positive, equality and justice evoke more challenging notions (Ahmed 2006, 122). It risks framing the problem of racial injustice simply as a matter of needing to include more BIPOC rather than tackling the structures that exclude them in the first place (Labonte 2004). Not surprisingly, common institutional approaches to

diversity 'emphasize cultural differences while failing to produce systems of white accountability or new structural outcomes' (Ward 2008, 566). Counting the amount of BIPOC is a superficial and white approach to diversity, failing to examine 'the broader forces of white normativity' (Ibid., 583). Not only in NGOs, but also in grassroots groups 'acts of "outreach" and fostering "inclusion" are not enough to dismantle histories and institutionalizations of white privilege' (Black, Milligan, and Heynen 2016, 288). In their study of how XRUK excludes marginalised communities, Bell and Bevan (2021) note an 'add BIPOC and stir' strategy which avoids internal change and does not consider whether 'others' even want to be included. This shows how focusing on diversity risks promoting tokenism. They conclude that 'XR needs to genuinely transform itself, including its priorities, if it wants to be a more diverse movement,' and in the meantime 'build solidaristic alliances' with marginalised communities rather than try to get them to join (Ibid., 1217). XRNL's recent work on climate justice and solidarity actions can be seen as steps towards this.

4.6.2 Education

All participants emphasised education as central to countering whiteness, both internally and externally, cultivating awareness amongst the wider membership and public.

> 'I believe in education and training, and yes that really needs to be part of movement building.' (Noor)
>
> 'That critical reflection is not at all part of the history, of the culture of the environmental movement and of the climate movement (…) so we are really starting from quite a low level of awareness.' (Philip)
>
> 'You need to then have that in your whole organisation, so like awareness of your history, of your terminology, of your way of working.' (Lawrence)
>
> '[T]hen you need to take responsibility as a movement and actively make structural changes (…) so you also educate people in that. // Normally it's you have the welcoming talk and then you do the NVDA[7] training and then you're ready for the action, but with that there should also be what is solidarity.' (Blake)

Some participants emphasised that education is needed throughout the entire movement. It's not enough for NGOs to become more intersectional if their membership does not follow this development. Similarly, while climate justice and intersectionality have become more important in XRNL, this is not yet embodied by all members. Consequently, while the national coordinating circle

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was in support of the KOZP solidarity action, the finance circle initially refused to pay for the banner because they did not see how it fit with XR. According to Alex, this 'shows how in the standard template of climate activism whiteness is still the norm, and if you digress from that, you need to explain that.'

4.6.3 Learning from BIPOC

Many participants referred to the need to learn from BIPOC in order to tackle whiteness, explaining its importance for climate justice:

> 'It's quite narcissistic to then think that you will also come up with the solution.' (Darko)
>
> 'Something we're not so good at is listening well and following, for example the anti-racism movement or Indigenous rights movement. But I do believe that's where it starts, the solution.' (Noor)

However, participants did not always distinguish between learning from BIPOC through existing work or asking them personally, where the latter requires extra effort. Some mentioned the need to learn from BIPOC in order to counter their own, white-centred thoughts and behaviour.

> 'I need people around me with whom I can check (…) because I myself am white and so can't do that part.' (Noor)
>
> 'I try to do something about it [thinking and working in a white way] by [involving] people of colour or of a different background or something like that and it's super frustrating, because we don't have those people.' (Margaret)

I asked Margaret if there were ways for white people to tackle whiteness that didn't require people of colour:

> Margaret: 'What a good question, I think that that is damn hard. (…) it's really difficult to not think white, even if you're willing.'
> Maria: 'You're still white after all.'
> Margaret: 'Yes exactly. And so I think that you need help from other cultures who just give their own input in that.'

Learning by asking BIPOC entails taking their time and energy, the dilemma I also faced in deciding to interview BIPOC. A study on burnout among racial justice activists of colour in the US found that an important cause was having to explain racism to supposed allies (Gorski and Erakat 2019, 794). According to Chihiro Geuzebroek, many people of colour in the 'whitestream' climate movement in

the Netherlands are indeed getting burned out (Geuzebroek et al. 2021). Raki recounted the effort of explaining colonialism and racism repeatedly to white people:

> 'Because all institutions failed basically, it takes a lot of energy and time from me and other activists or people of colour to make it understandable. // That is the privilege of white people, to not talk about it. And that's why today in 2022 it takes me so much time to [explain] something that should be our shared history.'

White people's reactions often exacerbate this labour when they respond defensively or emotionally. Many participants referred to white people's discomfort in conversations about racism as a barrier:

> 'They are extremely fragile; they get emotional and yes I have to deal with it. // It's a lot of sacrifice, it's taking a lot of pain.' (Raki)

Defensive reactions include denial, seen for example in Greenpeace and Milieudefensie's responses to the 2019 article mentioned in section 4.3.1. While later they did want to learn from it, 'that's always the second reaction, never the first' (Lawrence). Raki reflected:

> 'And there you in fact already saw the defensive position of the white person in the position of power. (…) you saw the fragility of these institutions, that they couldn't deal with the criticism (…) when they actually should be listening, what we're talking about, instead of criticising [us].'

Recognising the labour BIPOC activists put into educating a white movement, many participants emphasised that they should be paid for this. Alex observed that despite paying for external trainings 'there are people of colour who are part of the movement and (…) still have to do part of that emotional labour in order to be part of a climate movement where whiteness is still pretty central.'

4.6.4 White people taking responsibility

Reflecting on this paradox of learning from BIPOC without demanding their labour, some interviewees emphasised the need for white people to educate themselves:

> 'There are many activists of colour of whom I understand [that they say] "Yes but that's not *my* problem, it's *your* homework. You need to understand how racist your attitude actually is, how racist your silence is, how privileged your position is." // I hope of course that they [white people] take that moral responsibility themselves and do that reflection.' (Raki, emphasis in original)

> 'The question of how do we solve the problem of whiteness, in the end it's not really up to me to answer that question I think. But I do see it as a task for myself and all white people to be aware of whiteness. // Sometimes it's also on white people to fight the problem of racism extra hard, but yes it's also a bit contradictory because for that you also again need knowledge and expertise from people of colour.' (Noor)

bell hooks underlines the importance of self-education: '[f]or each of us, it is work to educate ourselves to understand the nature of white supremacy with a critical consciousness' (hooks 1989, 118). However, the XR1 focus group shows that people might learn about colonialism and racism as external manifestations of white supremacy without reflecting on how it manifests internally within themselves. I recounted my observation of performativity in the XR1 focus group to some interviewees and the XR2 group, who confirmed this could be a problem:

> 'The danger is indeed that you school your movement in climate justice while you don't, people [don't] have the inner awareness.' // 'Whiteness centres very quickly around itself so to speak, so it is indeed very possible that white climate activists sort of become performative (…) about climate justice or about anti-racism.' (Alex)

> 'I think in the first place that white Dutch people have a faulty self-image about tolerance and about open-mindedness, and even more so within the climate movement people see themselves as progressive and "I don't have anything more to learn in this."' (Noor)

White exceptionalism captures this attitude of white people who think they are 'exempt from the effects, benefits, and conditioning of white supremacy' and don't need to do antiracism work because they are 'one of the good ones' (Saad 2020, 67–68). The study on burnout in racial justice movements also noted this, where white allies harbouring racist views 'often perceived themselves as more racially conscious than they actually were' (Gorski and Erakat 2019, 794). Those with 'well-cultivated racial justice vocabulary and theoretical knowledge' could in practice be the most racist (Ibid., 795). On top of experiencing racism from fellow activists and having to educate them, activists of colour also faced 'pushback from white activists *who refused to scrutinize themselves*, hastening their burnout' (Ibid., 794, emphasis added). This again highlights the importance of white people taking responsibility, also to examine their own whiteness. Similarly, a study on allyship in XR-Vancouver calls for an 'ethics of relational accountability', which requires privileged people to 'actively do the uncomfortable work of learning about and discussing privilege, oppression, and (de)colonization' (James and Mack 2020, 44).

Self-examination does not necessarily mean individually though. From my personal experience of being in an 'unlearning white supremacy' group and facilitating the XR2 and NGO focus groups, I found that conversations about whiteness between white people can be valuable. However, this requires a genuine commitment to sit with the discomfort that comes from this and be accountable. The XR1 group demonstrates that otherwise such conversations risk reinforcing white exceptionalism and white innocence. The NGO group agreed that examining whiteness should be one of the first steps in tackling it, and that it was strange that this is overlooked.

> '[A] conversation about whiteness in the whole organization would really help, because in all the diversity and inclusion goals, this conversation is not included. When self-examination is needed to look at what can be changed.' (Molly)

Michael added that this conversation is not only needed internally with employees but also with the much larger member base of NGOs. Philip argued that reflecting on whiteness happens less because it's easier to get people to join in practical actions of solidarity:

> '(…) because it's quite straightforward and not necessarily very confronting at a personal level. So it's easier than the introspection of how does whiteness come up in our, in my behaviour, in our group, in how we organise ourselves, or how, how we are also part of reproducing that exclusion and inequality. And that, in my experience there is also less attention and time and energy directed towards that.'

On the other hand, Alex noted that there are many academic people in the climate movement who do read a lot about anti-racism but that this theoretical knowledge needs to be translated into action, otherwise 'it stays too much of a reading group.' Similarly, Philip reflected:

> 'Yes I think there needs to be a balance. Because, well, only being introspective but not doing anything with it in the outside world, that also has its limits. But the other way round as well.'

Indeed, another cause for burnout amongst activists of colour was white people's unwillingness to 'step up' and 'take a risk to achieve that change' (Gorski and Erakat 2019, 797). Anti-racism must be both inwards and outwards, since '[w]hile it is important that individuals work to transform their consciousness, (…) the struggle to end white supremacy is a struggle to change a system' (hooks 1989, 119).

5. Discussion

My findings show many different instances of structural whiteness shaping the Dutch climate movement and some ways to address this. I will now try to tie the various themes together, relating them to the theoretical discussions of whiteness and climate justice.

This thesis has only examined a few aspects of whiteness: most notably white normativity, white-centring, white innocence, and whiteness as a power structure. These repeatedly shape how things are understood, said, and done in the Dutch climate movement. The unmarkedness of whiteness comes up throughout the findings, where despite its profound impact and strong presence this is not recognised as such. White centring might not be explicit in how the movement uses climate justice or presents the causes, consequences, and solutions to climate change, yet once you take whiteness as an analytical lens it seems blatantly obvious. Centring white people's lives, experiences and perspectives is so standard that it goes unnoticed for white people. Combined with the dominant position granted whiteness, these perspectives then also gain legitimacy. Even in solidarity work, which is premised on acknowledging power differences (Curnow and Helferty 2018), whiteness can remain unmarked or only partially recognised. Similarly, in attempts to become more intersectional the neglect of whiteness is notable. Emphasising diversity or colonialism and racism at a high level allows to avoid examining structural whiteness within the climate movement and at an intrapersonal level. This unmarkedness helps maintain the power of whiteness, underlining that critical whiteness studies have an important role in exposing how whiteness shapes the movement, so that its effects can be more effectively countered.

The findings also repeatedly reflect the white innocence that Wekker (2016) considers characteristic of Dutch whiteness. A white climate movement can avoid confronting its own whiteness by focusing on capitalism instead of racism, scientific instead of historical causes of climate change, and technical solutions instead of system change. The historical amnesia and ignorance of colonialism common in the Netherlands is equally present in the climate movement. This obstructs climate justice, which requires engaging with history, for example to address climate debt (Moe-Lobeda 2016). Even after acknowledging racism in climate change and lack of racial diversity in the movement, white innocence can be maintained. Giving BIPOC a platform or some input can be a form of white saviourism supporting a moral self-image without significantly changing power imbalances. The same can be true for solidarity work. However, such actions could arguably still have positive impacts by contributing to intersectional activism, even if they also feed white innocence and white exceptionalism. While this might be true, such a pragmatic approach ignores that genuinely intersectional activism must also

address internal manifestations of white supremacy. White innocence and exceptionalism prevent this by making it hard to confront white people or hold them accountable.

Recalling how white supremacy is a form of structural violence underpinning the structural violence of climate change (Moe-Lobeda 2016), it is imperative for the climate movement to be actively anti-racist. The findings consistently show whiteness contradicting the principles of climate justice. Meanwhile, the groups examined in this thesis are arguably already much further than other groups in the Dutch climate movement which do not even centre justice. Nonetheless, many participants also reflected on improvements over the past years. Examples include climate justice workshops in XRNL as well as in Milieudefensie (both collaborating with the decolonial network Aralez) and Greenpeace NL recently launching a campaign focused on the Dutch Caribbean. Most notably, for the first time the national climate march on June 19th 2022 was led by the decolonial antiracist bloc, organised by Aralez, Free West Papua NL, ASEED and Code Rood. A blogpost explaining this decision by the *Klimaatcrisis Coalitie*, the relatively mainstream organizing committee of the march, explicitly connects white supremacy to climate change (Doorgeest and van Oeffelt 2022).

6. Conclusion

I started this research with a broad question and rather ambitious aims, to uncover how structural whiteness shapes the Dutch climate movement, with the hypothesis that it obstructs climate justice. Without having the pretence to cover all relevant aspects, this study shows that whiteness indeed significantly shapes the mainstream climate movement in the Netherlands, far beyond a lack of racial diversity in who participates. Structural whiteness leads to narrow narratives on the causes, consequences, and solutions to climate change, which centre white lives and protect white comfort. Ultimately, these fail to challenge the status quo as climate justice requires. The white narratives are perpetuated by silencing BIPOC voices, experiences, and histories, or moulding these to white norms. Structural whiteness can also inhibit solidarity activism, for example leading to white saviourism. Nonetheless, genuine solidarity remains crucial both to climate justice and to tackling white supremacy. However, this practical enactment of climate justice needs to go hand in hand with education on colonialism and white supremacy, as well as how this manifests at the personal and intrapersonal level. Without the latter there is a risk of white activists being performative about climate justice without examining their own whiteness. In short, the climate movement must fight white supremacy both externally and internally.

This thesis contributes to filling the gap in academic literature on whiteness in climate movements, opening up many potential avenues for further research. Future studies could include a wider range

of groups and organisations within the Dutch climate movement, as well as more participants from each. Having more BIPOC participants would be particularly valuable, as well as people experiencing different intersecting forms of oppression. This would allow to analyse whiteness in relation to other power structures and inequalities. Further research could also undertake vertical studies within groups or organisations, allowing for more focused analysis and customised suggestions on how to counter the impacts of whiteness based on their specific history, strategy, and organisational culture. Most of all, I hope this thesis provides a useful starting point for people, groups, and organisations within the climate movement to reflect on the impact of structural whiteness and how to counter this.

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Appendix A: Interviewee descriptions

BIPOC interviewees

Raki Ap is an Indigenous West Papuan and leader of the Free West Papua campaign in the Netherlands. Since 2017 he has been actively connecting the struggle of his people to climate change, trying to get solidarity from the climate movement by emphasising the root causes of climate change and the importance of Indigenous perspectives. He is affiliated with the green political party GroenLinks ('GreenLeft').

Lawrence Cheuk has been actively involved in the climate movement for almost 10 years, amongst other things as chairperson of Milieudefensie's youth organisation and founder of Jonge Klimaatbeweging (young climate movement). He cofounded the Climate Liberation Bloc which gives trainings on climate justice and intersectionality. At the moment he is also a member of Oxfam Novib's board of supervisors.

Darko Lagunas is a Dutch-Chilean environmental sociologist. He has done research on Indigenous perspectives on sustainable development in Latin America, sustainable behaviour of Dutch people with migration backgrounds and without, and most recently on the supply chains of raw materials needed for renewable energy technologies.

White interviewees

Noor Blokhuis has been involved in the climate movement since 2014, but always driven from a human rights' perspective. She now works at Milieudefensie as diversity organizer, focusing on intersectionality, movement building and solidarity.

Philip Schols has been involved in the climate movement since 2012 in grassroots activist groups including GroenFront and Code Rood, organising actions and working on building an intersectional climate movement. Since 2014 he has been actively involved in solidarity work with Kick Out Zwarte Piet. He now works at Greenpeace NL as community mobiliser.

Alex (not their real name) has been involved in the climate movement since 2013 approximately, already starting from a more international perspective and in the past two years focusing more on anti-racism. They have been active in XRNL since 2019 in various ways, more recently focusing on climate justice, intersectionality and solidarity actions.

Appendix B: Interview guide for individual interviews

As the interviews were in Dutch, this is the translation of my interview guide.

Definitions

1. What three words do you associate with climate justice? How would you define climate justice?
2. What three words do you associate with whiteness? How would you define whiteness?

Consequences of whiteness

3. Do you see (structural) whiteness manifested in the Dutch climate movement? If so, in what ways and with what consequences? Can you give specific examples of where whiteness is most apparent?
4. How do you think whiteness shapes the Dutch climate movement in the following aspects:
    a) Standpoints (e.g. goal, causes and consequences of climate change, solutions)
    b) Communications (e.g. words, images, communication channels)
    c) Strategies (e.g. types of actions and overall strategy)
5. What impact do you think whiteness has on the goal of climate justice?

Countering whiteness

6. To what extent do you think there is awareness in the Netherlands about the impact of whiteness on the climate movement?
7. What is your experience in how white people in the Dutch climate movement reflect on whiteness? Can you give specific examples of this?
8. Do you consider it necessary to counter whiteness and its impact on the Dutch climate movement? If so, how do you think that could be done?
9. Do you see a connection between decentring or dismantling whiteness and decolonising the climate movement? If so, what kind of connection?
10. What role do you think solidarity plays in decentring or dismantling whiteness?

Appendix C: Interview guide for focus groups

As the focus groups were in Dutch, this is the translation of my interview guide. I improved it after the first focus group, so this is the updated guide used in the other two groups. Due to participants arriving late or leaving early and lack of time I never followed the guide completely: sometimes I skipped questions or changed the order.

Introduction (10 min)

- Introduce myself, the study, and what the session will look like. Ask for consent to record and repeat ethics agreements (anonymisation, storage of recording, etc.).
- Participants: name and pronouns if they want to share, and what they are focused on right now in their climate activism.

Climate activism (15 min)

1. What role does climate activism play in your lives? Please give a short outline of your involvement in the climate movement: how long and whether there are specific actions, campaigns, or problems you are engaged with.
2. a. What do you see as the goal of the climate movement?
   b. What do you see as the main causes of climate change?
   c. What do you see as the main consequences of climate change?
   d. What do you see as the main solutions?

Exercise A: Write down three words/phrases that you associate with climate justice.

3. a. How would you define climate justice?
   b. Do you see this as an important part of the climate movement? Why?

Give my definition of climate justice.

Whiteness (20 min)

Exercise B. Write down three words/phrases that you associate with whiteness.

4. a. What does whiteness mean to you?
   b. How do you experience whiteness? To what extent do you see whiteness as part of your identity? What impact does whiteness have on your life?
5. How do you experience whiteness in relation to your own activism? Do you think whiteness shapes your engagement in the climate movement?

Give my definition of whiteness, clarify structural whiteness.

Break (10 min)

<u>Whiteness in the climate movement (30 min)</u>

6. Do you see (structural) whiteness manifested in your group / organisation and in the Dutch climate movement in general? If so, in what ways and with what consequences? Can you give specific examples of where whiteness is most apparent?
7. How do you think whiteness shapes the Dutch climate movement in the following aspects:
    a. Views (e.g., goal, causes and consequences of climate change, solutions)
    b. Communication (e.g., words, images, communication channels)
    c. Strategies (e.g., types of actions and overall strategy)
8. What impact do you think whiteness has on the goal of climate justice?

<u>Countering whiteness (20 min)</u>

9. Do you consider it necessary to counter whiteness and its impact on the Dutch climate movement? If so, how do you think that could be done?
10. What is your experience in how white people in the Dutch climate movement and your group / organisation specifically reflect on whiteness and/or racism? To what extent does this happen and in what way? Can you give specific examples of this?
11. What role do you think solidarity plays in decentring or dismantling whiteness? Can you give specific examples of this?

<u>Conclusion (5 min)</u>

12. What was it like for you to have this conversation? What feelings came up?