

To live in a world with(out) racism

How older Dutch White people produce reflexivity vis á vis racism in the
context of the anti 'Zwarte Piet' debate

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Master's Thesis

June 2022

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this thesis is reflexivity vis á vis racism in the context of a long-lasting public debate. Specifically, this thesis aims to uncover individual reflexivity processes vis á vis racism by older White Dutch people amid a public debate around a Dutch tradition involving blackface: 'Zwarte Piet'. The production of reflexivity refers to engaging in a conscious effort to become aware of and address one's unconscious biases vis á vis 'race' and 'racism'. However, these processes are not linear, nor are they undergone easily, especially not in the context of hegemonic discourses that have long been (and still are) present in the Netherlands. Hence, this thesis aims to uncover how this debate and a long unquestioned hegemonic status in society impact individual meaning-making processes by focusing on two related research questions. Firstly: How is reflexivity vis á vis racism produced by older Dutch White citizens in the context of the ZP campaign? Secondly: What role did media play in their meaning-making processes? As this research is rooted in a constructivist paradigm and aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of individual meaning-making processes, it takes on a qualitative approach. Hence, fifteen semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with older Dutch White individuals between the ages of 65 and 94. These interviews were analysed through a combination of Thematic and Critical Discourse Analysis. The analysis uncovered three scopes through which these individuals produced reflexivity vis á vis racism amid the 'Zwarte Piet' debate: (1) an ever-changing society, (2) others, and (3) the 'Self'. The first two scopes outline how reflexivity processes were enhanced and limited by external factors: hegemonic status and discourses in media and society at large and efforts by activism and media actors to fight those. The last scope addresses how individuals can put in the work to not only become aware of those influences but also how these were internalised and, consequently, how one can combat them. The implications of this research are that these influences and processes are made explicit and that it uncovers how these play out amid a decade-long public debate. Moreover, this thesis addresses how media can both challenge and enhance these processes, not only through discourse, but also by adding directly and indirectly to the personal experiences of Dutch White individuals.

KEYWORDS: *Hegemonic discourses, Reflexivity, Racism, Whiteness, Media*

Word count: 19.985

Table of contents

Abstract and keywords

List of Abbreviations	1
1. Introduction	2
2. Theoretical Framework	6
2.1 Contextualising the ‘Zwarte Piet’ Controversies.....	6
2.2 Reflexivity	8
2.3 Reflexivity and Whiteness.....	10
2.4 Reflexivity and Media	12
2.5 Reflexivity and Activism.....	15
3. Research Design and Methods	18
3.1 Explanation and Justification of the Case	18
3.2 Discription of Procedure	18
3.3 Data Analysis	21
3.3.1 <i>Critical Discourse Analysis</i>	21
3.3.1 <i>Thematic analysis</i>	23
3.4 Researcher Reflexivity and Ethical Aspects.....	24
4. Results	27
4.1 Reflexivity and Society	27
4.1.1 <i>Generational (Dis)connectedness</i>	28
4.1.2 <i>Public Discourses</i>	32
4.1.3 <i>The Relativity of Time</i>	36
4.2 Reflexivity and Others.....	37
4.2.1 <i>Media Narratives</i>	37
4.2.2 <i>Personal Experiences</i>	39
4.3 Reflexivity and the ‘Self’	40
5. Conclusion.....	42
5.1 Limitations.....	44
5.2 Future Research.....	45
References	46
Appendix A: Topic list	53
Appendix B: Recruitment Message.....	57
Appendix C: Coding Tree	58
Appendix D: Form for Informed Consent.....	62

List of Abbreviations

BLM	Black Lives Matter
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
NL	The Netherlands
NWB	The foundation 'Nederland Wordt Beter', which means 'The Netherlands gets better'
RQ	Research Question
TA	Thematic Analysis
ZP	'Zwarte Piet', which means 'black Pete'

1. Introduction

‘Zwarte Piet’ (ZP) is the black helper of Sinterklaas, who gives children in the Netherlands (NL) presents every year on December 5th. Like many other people in NL, I grew up with this tradition. For me, a White Dutch person, the Sinterklaas period (from the moment Sinterklaas and ZP arrive in NL in November until they leave again on December 6th) consisted of eating sweets, placing my shoe at night with a carrot for Sinterklaas’ horse, receiving presents on December 5th, and making a personalised gift for my classmates. In other words, the Sinterklaas period was a magical time for me, with ‘Zwarte Piet’ (or black Pete) being Sinterklaas’ silly but loving sidekick.

However, this experience was (and still is) not so magical for everyone. ZP’s appearance (until recently consisting of black make-up, curly black hair, golden earrings, red lips and a colourful outfit) has become a point of contention: what for some is an expression of Dutch tradition and identity, for others, is a symbol of systemic racism that contributes to the ‘Othering’ of Black¹ people (Euwijk & Rensen, 2017; Hall, 2013; Hilhorst & Hermes, 2016; Krumer-Nevo & Benjamin, 2010; Rodenberg & Wagenaar, 2016). Systemic racism refers to “an overarching system that perpetuates inequitable outcomes, treatment and experiences” based on race (McCluney et al., 2021, p. 50). With the tradition being strongly linked to the Dutch history of slavery, which has long been silenced within Dutch public narratives, it is part and parcel of this system (Balkenhol, 2016; Euwijk & Rensen, 2017).

Although ZP has long been a source of controversy in NL, it was not until 2011, when an organisation – now known as the foundation ‘Nederland wordt beter’ (NWB, NL gets better) – organised a protest, that there was a real turning-point (Euwijk & Rensen, 2017). Since then, NWB has been engaged in an ongoing struggle to highlight ZP’s racist and stereotypical attributes, such as blackface (Euwijk & Rensen, 2017; Hall, 2013; Koning, 2018; Reyes, 2019). However, the anti-ZP movement seeks not just to stop the blackface practice but also to educate about colonialist history, slavery, and racism (Nederland wordt beter, n.d.). Hence, it is part of a larger “ideological struggle” against systemic racism (Hall, 1990, p. 31).

It may seem somewhat unbelievable to anyone who did not grow up with this tradition, but these controversies surprised me as I had never seen anything ‘bad’ in the tradition. Having always considered myself a relatively progressive person, I initially thought: sure, if people have a problem with ZP, why not change it? It was not until I discussed the topic with others and saw a documentary by Sunny Bergman, which came out in 2014, called ‘Zwart als Roet’ (Our Colonial Hangover in English), that I realised that it was not as simple as that. First, as I discussed the issue with people

¹ In this thesis, ‘Black’ is capitalised when it refers to a socially constructed racial category. As such, ‘Black’ refers to a person’s racial experiences, while ‘black’ refers to a colour (Appiah, 2020). Thus, by capitalising Black in this thesis when referring to Black people, I aim to highlight the differences in racial experiences between people who identify and/or are perceived as Black and White.

around me (who were primarily White²), I realised that many did not want to give up on this tradition as easily as I did. Later, after seeing the documentary by Bergman (2014), I also realised that it was not that simple from the opposing perspective either.

The documentary, the activism, and the overarching debate triggered me to dig deeper and ask questions like: What does the tradition of ZP entail? Where does it come from? What does it mean for *me* that I grew up with such stereotypical portrayals of Black people? Do I have biases? Why have I never seen or heard any issues with the tradition before? After some time and many more questions, I realised that most of my network consisted of White people. I realised that I, myself, am a White person and that this means something for how I view the world, how I view and treat other people, and how others view and treat me. After these realisations, I started to become more and more interested in the topics like ‘race’ and ‘racism’. I was not the only person who went through these stages. Over the years, more and more people went from loving ZP to thinking it was time for the tradition to change (I&O Research, 2020).

Thus, the case of ZP – and the public debate it unfolded across media – illustrates contemporary challenges of modernity that spur reflexivity on local traditions, culture, and traditional forms of identity (e.g. national or racial) (Giddens, 1991; Hilhorst & Hermes, 2016; Rodenberg & Wagenaar, 2016). This paper aims to uncover how these challenges are taken up and made sense of by members of said culture. Specifically, members who had likely lived most of their lives without thinking about their race and questioning how their racial identity may have influenced their experiences: White people.

Hence, this thesis is guided by a Critical Race Theory framework, specifically, a Critical Whiteness Studies framework, aimed at uncovering (and tearing down) structural inequalities between White people and those often viewed as the ‘Other’ in Western societies (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; 2018; DiAngelo, 2018; Lewis, 2004; van den Broek, 2020; Wekker, 2016). Consequently, this analysis is socially relevant as it not only highlights how “White racial identities, as the dominant actors in society, serve as key mechanisms in the reproduction of a racially stratified and segregated society” but also how reflexivity on “White racial identity formation” may be produced amid a public debate (Golash-Boza, 2016; Hughey, 2022, p. 6). Ergo, the thesis’ societal relevance stems from the learnings on “transformative learning” and reflexivity concerning a public debate around (systemic) racism and criticising aspects of Dutch culture (Mezirow, 2000, p. 8).

² Much like ‘Black’, ‘White’ is also capitalised in this thesis to emphasise that it does not refer to a person’s skin colour, but “to call attention to White as a race as a way to understand and give voice to how Whiteness functions in our social and political institution and communities” (Appiah, 2020; Nguyễn & Pendleton, 2020). In this thesis, ‘White people’ therefore refers to people who identify as White, rather than people with a light skin-colour. Thus, by capitalising ‘White’ in this thesis, I aim to emphasise the privileged role of White people in history and society, and “to highlight the artificiality of race” (Haslanger, as cited by Appiah, 2020; Appiah, 2020).

This project is scientifically relevant as it adds a new angle and includes a not-yet-researched population concerning ZP. Existing literature on the ZP-debate focuses on how it has taken place, the controversies, and the way forward (de Beukelaer, 2019; Euwijk & Rensen, 2017; Lemmens, 2017; Muysken, 2016; Rodenberg & Wagenaar, 2016; Vliet, 2019). Another aspect of ZP literature focuses on the tradition itself (Koning, 2018; Reyes, 2019). In turn, this project focuses on the anti-ZP movement's impact on individual meaning-making processes, and how this impact relates to hegemonic influences in society.

Additionally, as most research around reflexivity focuses on researcher reflexivity, there have been calls for a stronger focus on participant reflexivity and consideration for interviews as an active reflexive act (Perera, 2020; Riach, 2009). As such, this thesis does precisely that. Another way in which this project is unique is that it – in contrast to Perera's (2020) and Riach's (2009) projects – is aimed at uncovering how reflexivity is produced, not only real-time during the interview but also how reflexivity may have been produced throughout a decade-long period of public debate and coinciding social change.

The impact of such a long-lasting struggle is difficult to measure, as many factors contribute to social change (Buechler, 2013; Owens et al., 2010). Therefore, this paper seeks to understand how it impacts individual meaning-making processes by focusing on two related research questions (RQs). Firstly: How is reflexivity vis á vis racism produced by older Dutch White citizens in the context of the ZP campaign? Secondly: What role did media play in their meaning-making processes?

Here, 'older' refers to 65+-year-olds who have longest experienced the ZP controversies (and a time without those controversies) (CBS, n.d.-b). Moreover, older Dutch citizens have shown the most significant recent shift in attitude towards ZP, offering a unique opportunity to understand their meaning-making and transformative learning processes and capture moments of reflexivity (I&O Research, 2020; Kluttz et al., 2020; Mezirow, 2000; Perera, 2020; Riach, 2009).

As this research is rooted in a constructivist paradigm and aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of individual meaning-making processes, it takes on a qualitative approach (Brennen, 2017). Fifteen semi-structured in-depth interviews with older White Dutch people were collected with the aim of not just uncovering how these individuals engage in reflexivity processes but also of understanding how the question of power and unquestioned hegemonic status in society were negotiated in everyday life. As such, the interviews were analysed using Thematic and Critical Discourse Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Machin & Mayr, 2012).

This thesis starts with an outline of the theoretical framework, which was put together by drawing from several relevant works of literature: the ZP controversies and the Dutch post-colonial discourses; and reflexivity concerning 'race', media, and activism. The thesis outlines the research design, with explicit attention to accountability for the choice of this specific case, researcher reflexivity, and ethical aspects. The findings are organised around three main themes outlining how reflexivity vis á vis racism is produced: through the scope of (1) the ever-changing society, (2) others,

and (3) the 'Self'. The conclusion provides an answer to the RQs, outlines the limitations of the research, and offers some recommendations for future research.

2. Theoretical Framework

To investigate meaning-making processes around the ZP-debate and racism among older White Dutch people and the media's role in them, this thesis will first outline the history of the debate. These meaning-making processes are part and parcel of becoming aware of and critically assessing taken-for-granted assumptions concerning this tradition, the debate, and systemic racism (Mezirow, 2000). To better understand this process, this thesis employs the analytical lens of reflexivity, outlining its transformative learning aspects as well as its challenges. Special attention is devoted to how reflexivity relates to the (socially constructed) concepts of race and Whiteness, particularly in the context of Dutch culture. The (potential) role of media and anti-racism activism in spurring reflexivity is further discussed, with an eye to how media regimes and activism engage power structures.

2.1 Contextualising the 'Zwarte Piet' Controversies

NL has a long colonialist history and was one of the last countries to abolish slavery on July 1, 1863 (Nationaal Archief, n.d.). Even after the abolishment, the narratives of former enslaved incapable of handling freedom and a policy focused on the loss of income for slave-keepers remained in place. Therefore, the enslaved were obligated to sign a contract to keep working for their former slave-keeper for ten more years, while the slave-keepers received financial compensation from the Dutch government (Nationaal Archief, n.d.). Although this narrative evolved over the years, the topic of slavery remained unacknowledged for many years to come (Balkenhol, 2016). When the history of slavery was formally acknowledged around 2002, Dutch collective memory still left little room for the experiences of Black people – the latter were generally pitied, which allowed the Dutch to claim the compassionate upper ground (Balkenhol, 2016). Such hegemonic discourses of victimisation may make people visible but continue to take away their voice and thus deny them agency (Balkenhol, 2016; Georgiou, 2018). This way, Black identities remain 'othered', and the hierarchical difference between the perceived 'us' and 'them' is re-legitimised (Balkenhol, 2016; Hall, 2013; Krumer-Nevo & Benjamin, 2010).

This history of othering infuses the tradition of ZP, in which blackface – the process of painting the face of a White person black to impersonate a Black person – is a recognisable visual marker of 'race' in an otherwise seemingly non-racialised tradition (Koning, 2018). Indeed, the use of blackface to (re)produce the contrast between 'us' and 'them' has been present in NL since the 19th century, being intimately linked to the history of Dutch colonialism (Balkenhol, 2016; Koning, 2018). Anti-ZP activism has therefore highlighted the link between ZP's stereotypical image of Black identities and Dutch colonialism, calling for recognition of how stereotypical images continue to reproduce an image of the 'Other' as inferior and how this underlies contemporary forms of racism (Hall, 2013; Krumer-Nevo & Benjamin, 2010).

Controversies around the othering that ZP (re)produced in Dutch society were present as early as 1927, when a Black defendant had hit a dock worker for scolding and calling him ZP (Euwijk & Rensen, 2017). Criticism also came from the media: in 1930, *De Groene Amsterdammer* drew attention to the Western media depictions of Black people, referencing ZP in this context. Similarly, Dutch-Indonesian (a former Dutch colony) publications argued that the influence of such a holiday in which “people of colour were [shown as] beneath compared to White people [translated quote]” were poisonous for Indonesian children (Euwijk & Rensen, 2017, p. 71). Another former Dutch colony (which is still part of the Dutch Kingdom today), Curaçao, experienced yearly protests against ZP, starting from around the mid-1960s. These protests eventually led to adaptations of the appearances of Sinterklaas and Pete on Curaçao (Euwijk & Rensen, 2017). In NL, efforts to eliminate ZP also started around the mid-1960s, with national Dutch newspapers starting to cover anti-ZP protests (Euwijk & Rensen, 2017).

However, it was not until 2011 that such initiatives spurred a nationwide public debate on ZP’s racist implications (Euwijk & Rensen, 2017; *Nederland wordt beter*, n.d.). This was prompted by a viral video of an anti-ZP activist getting arrested at the national Sinterklaas parade in Dordrecht, triggering news media coverage and a public debate (e.g. Dumpert, 2011; NOS Nieuws, 2011; Tjon A Meeuw, 2011; Zuidervaart, 2011).

Since then, this debate has continued on both traditional and social media, involving the United Nations, politicians, private persons, celebrities, activists, newspapers, and television broadcasters and programs on both sides (*Nederland wordt beter*, n.d.). For instance, in 2014, a Facebook page was created to propose a ‘make-over’ for ZP, supported by several Dutch celebrities (*Nederland wordt beter*, n.d.). Alternatives such as ‘multi-coloured Pete’, ‘rainbow Pete’, and ‘soot wipe Pete’ were proposed. Gradually, the idea that ZP no longer belonged in the festivities of Sinterklaas in NL was firmly put on the public agenda.

While such initiatives and the ensuing debates suggest increasing reflexivity on Dutch culture and identity within the dominant group, counter-initiatives to preserve ZP and to decry the alleged loss of culture caused by the ‘Other’ show such reflexivity remains contested (Giddens, 1991; Hilhorst & Hermes, 2016; Owens et al., 2010). Counter-initiatives, such as the Facebook page ‘Pietitie’ (Petition) calling for Pete to remain black, downplay the importance of ZP and seek to change the focus of the debate by bringing up ‘real’ (unrelated) issues, such as the deteriorating living conditions for older Dutch people (Hilhorst & Hermes, 2016; Krumer-Nevo & Benjamin, 2010; van Amstel, 2013). Reflexivity, then, needs to be understood as a site of ideological struggle where opposing agendas rhetorically pull and push public opinion in different directions on the question of ‘race’ (Giddens, 1991; Kluttz et al., 2020; Mezirow, 2000).

2.2 Reflexivity

Reflexivity, the focus of this thesis, refers specifically to these struggles and the coinciding process of becoming critically aware of taken-for-granted ideas, preferences, and behaviours (Giddens, 1991; 1993; Mezirow, 2000). For Giddens (1991), reflexivity has become a central feature of modernity as new evidence is continuously presented. Thus, reflexivity is driven by and drives social change, a process referred to as “transformative learning” (Giddens, 1991; Kluttz et al., 2020; Mezirow, 2000, p. 8). Transformative learning entails the adaptation of behaviour or actions as a result of reflecting critically on one’s own “frame of reference [which consists of] a habit of mind and resulting points of view” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 17). In that sense, reflexivity can be understood as “the struggle to become aware of and combat the social forces which alienate and dehumanise” (Holland, 1999, p. 473; Kluttz et al., 2020).

However, that is not to say that reflexivity equals transformation, but rather that the critical assessment of one’s assumptions is experienced differently by different people. Hence, the beforementioned struggle, per Holland’s (1999) definition, is experienced subjectively and what one person concludes to be problematic may not be viewed as such by the next person. When tradition no longer has unquestioned normative authority, feelings of uncertainty arise, requiring individuals to reassess their assumptions through what they know: their personal experiences (Giddens, 1991). These feelings of uncertainty become stronger with the increasing amount of possibilities being presented through modernity, leading to more individualised decision-making (Giddens, 1991).

Thus, the transformations that reflexivity may entail are complicated. Reflexivity is a process of working upon and challenging habitual forms of thinking, which often function as a ready-made filter to interpret a given experience (Mezirow, 2000). This filter can be based on collective taken-for-granted assumptions that merge the cultural stock with personal knowledge and experience (Mezirow, 2000). In other words, taken-for-granted ways of thinking are a part of the culture in which the individual is immersed; but they also inform the individual’s perspective of their own life. Taken-for-granted ways of thinking are notoriously difficult to challenge for two reasons: people are often unaware of them, and these ways of thinking are rooted in the “shared – but unproven and unprovable – framework of reality” that guides us through our day-to-day experiences (Giddens, 1991, p. 36; Kluttz et al., 2020; Mezirow, 2000). When they do change, this can be sudden – for instance, after a life-changing experience – or progressive, over longer periods of time when a “series of transformations in related points of view [...] culminate in a transformation” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 21). Importantly, such processes are neither linear nor are they undergone easily (Mezirow, 2000). This struggle of reflexivity is an ongoing process of consciously looking at and re-assessing one’s actions within an ever-changing world (Giddens, 1991; 1993). Indeed, reflexivity entails reflecting on past events, interrogating one’s “way of understanding [the] world”, and the ability to look at issues from multiple perspectives, which is helpful in transformative learning (Kluttz et al., 2020; Riach, 2009, p. 360).

Besides the unconscious dimension of these taken-for-granted ways of thinking, another difficulty stems from the fact that reflexivity – especially in the case of the ZP-debate – may entail a re-assessment of one’s identity (Buechler, 2013; Giddens, 1991; Hilhorst & Hermes, 2016; Kluttz et al., 2020; Mezirow, 2000; Rodenberg & Wagenaar, 2016). Such a re-assessment touches upon existential questions, which can lead to anxiety as it influences people’s understanding of what they do and why they do that (Giddens, 1991). In other words, reflexivity may influence how someone has filled their day-to-day life and their way of understanding this life, leading to uncertainties, which can cause anxiety (Giddens, 1991).

This is visible in (understandings of) the anti-ZP campaigns that challenge not just the use of blackface in representing Blackness but also the invisibility of colonialism and systemic racism within Dutch culture (as reflected in the celebrations around the Sinterklaas tradition) and subsequently Dutch-White identity (Euwijk & Rensen, 2017; Hilhorst & Hermes, 2016; Kluttz et al., 2020; Rodenberg & Wagenaar, 2016). Questioning tradition is intertwined with the questioning of identity:

As distinct from mere habit, tradition always has a ‘binding’, normative character. ‘Normative’ here in turn implies a moral component: in traditional practices, the bindingness of activities expresses precepts about how things should or should not be done. Traditions of behaviour have their own moral endowment, which specifically resists the technical power to introduce something new (Giddens, 1991, p. 145).

People find comfort in maintaining traditions: they help explain what is ‘right’ and what is ‘wrong’ and thus help individuals lead and morally justify their day-to-day lives, becoming a core aspect of identity. Importantly, traditions also promise to protect us from the uncertainties of change (Giddens, 1991). Hence, questioning tradition can lead to anxiety, as it requires questioning the very beliefs upon which identity is built (Giddens, 1991; Owens et al., 2010). Increasing unpredictability of modernity, traditions, or the habitual seem to offer security and minimise disruptive anxiety (Giddens, 1991; Rafieian & Davis, 2016; Riach, 2009). Reflexivity is thus interwoven with structural influences and human needs for security (Rafieian & Davis, 2016).

The ZP-debate prompts the self – particularly the White-Dutch self – to look at itself from an outside perspective, which is difficult for the reasons outlined above because it requires letting go of what was previously viewed as unquestionably ‘right’ (Giddens, 1991; Owens et al., 2010). This project starts from the premise that exposure to the anti-ZP campaign and the debate accompanying it prompts reflexivity processes around race and racism in NL. Significantly, recent prominent campaigns, such as the global Black Lives Matter-movement, intersect with the ZP-debates, bringing additional layers to the critical questioning of Dutch culture and identity, fostering a “dialectical interplay of the local and the global” and prompting the reconsideration of the ‘traditional’ (Giddens, 1991, p. 5).

Older generations are often seen as the link to and continuators of tradition (Giddens, 1991). However, the renewal of tradition from one generation to another is a reflexive act – as practices are renewed “only in so far as they are reflexively justifiable” (Giddens, 1991, p. 146). Reflexively justifiable refers to whether a tradition can still be justified in modern society and by its current actors (Giddens, 1991). While traditions may change or disappear throughout generations, this process is not easy, as customs, values, and behaviours are also still passed onto future generations – albeit to various extents and in different ways – and meaning-making processes also occur in varying levels of awareness and understanding in ways that can differ (Giddens, 1991; Mannheim, 1952). These different levels of understanding, as highlighted earlier, also depend on personal experiences (Mezirow, 2000).

Therefore, this project foregrounds the reflexivity processes around ZP among older generations, who have been argued to be less sensitive to current shifts in political values while more aware of and influenced by past events (Bartels & Jackman, 2014; Mannheim, 1952). That is not to say that they are less tuned to politics, but rather that their values may be less tuned to the fashions of the day than those of younger generations. This thesis seeks to uncover how the anti-ZP activists’ arguments resonate among older White Dutch and whether and how personal experiences and history become challenging in the process (Balkenhol, 2016; Giddens, 1991; Kluttz et al., 2020).

2.3 Reflexivity and Whiteness

In the context of the ZP-debate, reflexivity is interwoven with the question of race – and this often happens in the context of personal experiences, as individuals experience ZP as part of their family life. Nevertheless, understanding race and racism within the context of personal experiences is mediated by broader discourses on this topic (Emirbayer & Desmond, 2012; Fillieule, 2013; Fisher et al., 2020; Golash-Boza, 2016; McCluney et al., 2021; Smaje, 1997). White Dutch, for example, may have different levels of awareness and understanding around race and racism than Dutch people of colour (Mezirow, 2000). White identities – contrary to Black ones – were always included in recollections of history and traditions, and their hegemonic status gave little reason to question them (Balkenhol, 2016; Wekker, 2016).

Thus, race and racism are intertwined (Golash-Boza, 2016). Departing from Hall’s (2013) argument that nothing is in itself meaningful; instead, meaning is “constructed in and through language”, ‘race’ is viewed here as a socially constructed notion within a system of exclusion, built upon the idea that humanity can be classified into exclusive biological groups, based on personal traits such as skin-colour and culture (p. 1; Golash-Boza, 2016; Smaje, 1997; Sussman, 2014; van den Broek, 2020). In turn, racism refers to an ideology that seeks to define the idea of race as ‘biological’ and subsequently link it to “significant cultural and social differences and that these innate hierarchical differences can be measured and judged” (Golash-Boza, 2016, p. 9). Additionally, the notion of racism refers to both small- and large-scale principles that exemplify these hierarchical differences (Golash-

Boza, 2016). Throughout history, the notion of race has been used with the political purpose of ‘othering’ a particular group and emphasising hierarchical differences (Golash-Boza, 2016; Hall, 1991; 2013; Sussman, 2014; van den Broek, 2020). Biology was (mis)used to justify race, aiming to demonstrate that visible differences among people were proxies of differences in biology and levels of intelligence (Sussman, 2014). Such ideas constructed and legitimised a hierarchy of ‘races’ that served as a moral justification for Western-European colonial projects. Thus, Western Europeans could see themselves as inherently superior to ‘Others’ who looked differently and lived in different circumstances, becoming part of what in the previous section was termed the stock of ‘taken-for-granted’ collective knowledge (Sussman, 2014).

Such narratives are part and parcel of Dutch colonial narratives of which traces can still be found today (Balkenhol, 2016; Essed & Trienekens, 2008; van den Broek, 2020; van Sterkenburg et al., 2012; van Sterkenburg et al., 2021; Wekker, 2016). The harmful impact of ‘race’ and ‘racism’ within the exclusionary system can only be fought through political means, foregrounding how race is used to justify unequal and unjust social, political, and economic arrangements (Golash-Boza, 2016). This is rendered difficult by the benefits that the current exclusion system associates with Whiteness (DiAngelo, 2018; van den Broek, 2020; Wekker, 2016). Hence, questioning these structures of inequalities and systemic racism – and challenging White identities as inherently ‘good’ – can spark feelings of discomfort among White people, which DiAngelo (2018) coined as “[W]hite fragility” (p. 2). White fragility also becomes evident in the ZP-debate, which has been seen to trigger various defensive responses that are often rooted in feelings of “superiority and entitlement” (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 2; Euwijk & Rensen, 2017; Hilhorst & Hermes, 2016; Rodenberg & Wagenaar, 2016; Wekker, 2016).

Such feelings are also supported by related narratives, such as race-neutrality and colour-blindness (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; DiAngelo, 2018; Golash-Boza, 2016; van den Broek, 2020). These narratives argue that all people are treated equally, and that race is no longer an issue. Ahearn’s (2011) notion of “meta-agentive discourse” is also helpful here, as it helps uncover how narratives may attribute more or less agency to one’s own actions or those of others and how this agency is related to structural inequalities (p. 284). Hence, by claiming that racism is no longer present and that any inequalities people may experience are their own fault, these narratives neglect to consider the influences of inherently unequal and racially biased systems (Ahearn, 2011; Bonilla-Silva, 2018). Such narratives fail to acknowledge racial inequalities, amplifying and trivialising them instead (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Golash-Boza, 2016). In NL, “[r]eferences to race or race-like characteristics are shunned” while “[t]he dominant discourse on racial-ethnic groups is almost exclusively about ‘cultural’ problems” (Essed & Trienekens, 2008, p. 45).

Particularly in the context of former colonial powers, such narratives are accompanied by what Lewis (2004) describes as “hegemonic [W]hiteness” (p. 634). Hegemonic Whiteness refers to the idea that being White is the invisible status quo – being White is natural, and anything else is

‘different’ (Golash-Boza, 2016; Lewis, 2004). As Wekker (2016) explains, in NL, “Whiteness is generally seen as so ordinary, so lacking in characteristics, so normal, so devoid of meaning” that it is hardly ever really discussed within the public debate about ‘race’” (p. 2). This lack of discourse on what it means to be White makes reflexivity on the ‘self’ extra challenging for White people (Essed & Trienekens, 2008; DiAngelo, 2018; Giddens, 1991).

Additionally, years of racist imageries, texts, and stereotypical depictions and descriptions – of which ZP is an example – have been part and parcel of Dutch cultural traditions (van den Broek, 2020). Moreover, cultural traditions that may not have been associated with racism can further systemic racial inequalities. For example, while everything is equal by law in NL, in the context of pre-existing inequalities, equality further reproduces differences and marginalises groups with fewer opportunities (van den Broek, 2020). Thus, being treated the same is not the same as being treated equally. However, it is more difficult for White-Dutch people to notice the interplay between racism and equality in this case. A widespread belief among White Dutch that only blunt and intentional race-related statements are racist furthers this stance, as subtle modern-day racism remains unnoticed (van den Broek, 2020).

While these narratives are strongly intertwined with Dutch culture, this does not mean that reflexivity is not possible. Indeed, as explained earlier, people can consciously interrupt the automated processes and replace the stereotypical and racist assumptions with more accurate and truth-based information (Bargh, 1999, as cited by van den Broek, 2020; Mezirow, 2000). Nonetheless, the possibilities of challenging unconscious processes remain limited, and the process of becoming conscious is long and complex (Giddens, 1991). Importantly, the role of such narratives in making sense of everyday life can often lead to contradictions, as people, especially White people, may say different things about race in different contexts to defend and legitimate the White self, which in turn can seem hypocritical (Hughey, 2022). Such contradictory statements are related to reflexivity in that they show how individuals always perform a ‘Self’ in a given situation, depending on what the situation requires (Giddens, 1991; Owens et al., 2010). That is not to say that these performances are fake or that one individual has different versions of themselves, but rather that an individual assesses a situation and performs a ‘Self’ that seems suitable in a given situation. A possible theoretical approach here is to shift attention from whether an individual is racist or not to the discourses individuals use to explain themselves – and to question how such discourses further perpetuate inequalities (Hughey, 2022).

2.4 Reflexivity and Media

Crucial in this re-assessment amid the ZP-debate are the media. Representations of ‘race’ and racism can prompt audiences to reflect on their position vis-à-vis these concepts, spurring social change (Deuze, 2011; Giddens, 1991). In that sense, media can expose audiences to alternative views and create openings for critical reflexivity (Giddens, 1991). In that light, Deuze (2011) explains:

Life in today's liquid modern society is all about finding ways to deal with constant change, whether it is at home, at work or at play. Over the last few decades, these key areas of human existence have converged in and through our concurrent and continuous exposure to, use of and immersion in media, information and communication technologies (p. 137).

When social issues such as racism are not experienced first-hand, media can “step in as the main source of information” and put them on the public agenda or highlight aspects as important (Croteau & Hoynes, 2019; Hansen, 2018, p. 159). As such, media expose us to ideas that spur reflexivity on identity, tradition, or morality (Deuze, 2011; Giddens, 1991). On the other hand, media reception is complicated, as messages are unpacked differently by different people (Hall, 1973). For instance, news representations of the civil rights movement resulted in some people supporting the movement and others supporting segregation, demonstrating how these processes are different for everyone (Croteau & Hoynes, 2019; Deuze, 2011; Giddens, 1991).

Furthermore, media representations have been (and continue to be) gendered, classed, and racialised, reproducing stereotypes and inequalities (Golash-Boza, 2016). Hall's (1990) argument that media often start from the vantage point of a “racist ‘common sense’ [...] without questioning it” still holds true today (p. 28; National Museum of African American History and Culture, n.d.). In turn, this also limits the reflexive questioning of the political categories of race (Golash-Boza, 2016, p. 21; Hall, 2013).

This is also true in the case of Dutch media, which both challenge and reproduce racially-biased notions (de Veen & Thomas, 2022; van Sterkenburg et al., 2012; van Sterkenburg et al., 2021; Wekker, 2016). For instance, van Sterkenburg et al. (2021) found that Dutch sports media professionals aspire and claim to be “unbiased, race-neutral professionals”, often by espousing colour-blind discourses while also reinforcing colonial narratives of ‘race’ by focusing on the physicality of Surinamese players rather than intellectuality (p. 40; Bonilla-Silva, 2015; van Sterkenburg et al., 2012). Notably, the Dutch have a long history of addressing the period of Dutch colonialism as ‘The Golden Age’, often downplaying NL's role in the slave trade and highlighting the Dutch's successes in this period, allowing for such colonial discourses to continue (van Sterkenburg et al., 2012; Vliet, 2020).

Today, such discourses around slavery and racism in Dutch news media are more often scrutinised and challenged:

Where the lingering effects of slavery had previously been left mostly off the page, even in articles about racism, a cause-and-effect narrative began to emerge. Stories of Black Pete protesters directly called on the reader to recall histories of slavery when they

encounter the blackface tradition. An influx of opinion commentary provided a compelling series of personal narratives, diving into not only the reflection of slavery on everyday Afro-Dutch life but into the desire for a personal history. (Vliet, 2020, p. 10)

In the case of ZP, media are increasingly bringing up the context of colonialism and slavery (from a Black-Dutch perspective) instead of emphasising the tradition's value for Dutch culture (from a White-Dutch perspective).

However, as argued above, this does not automatically entail that such media narratives are also accepted by their audiences. When one does not take part in the debate but only sees it on television, it could potentially spark “non-reflexive viewer consciousness”, meaning that viewers do not see themselves “as a participant in the construction of the social world; [but] as merely acted upon by the social world” (Dahlgren, 1981, p. 104). In other words, because people are not learning through their own experiences, reflexive learning processes may not be set in motion (Dahlgren, 1981; Mezirow, 2000).

Older Dutch people, in particular, grew up in a society where the media discourses around topics of racism and colonialism – if even discussed at all – were primarily told from a White-Dutch perspective (Balkenhol, 2016; Vliet, 2020). As highlighted earlier, this is especially crucial in processes of reflexivity for older individuals, as past political events have been found to affect people's critical awareness more strongly than current ones (Bartels & Jackman, 2014; Mannheim, 1952).

The media system is also complex and changes over time – which further complicates the potential ways in which they influence this process of reflexivity (Delli Carpini & Williams, 2020; O'Loughlin, 2020). Furthermore, the blurring of the distinction between news and entertainment and between journalists (who produce news) and citizens (who consume news) adds to this complexity (Delli Carpini & Williams, 2020; O'Loughlin, 2020). Additionally, media complexity in NL can be understood as consisting of formats (broadcasting/print/social media), scope (local/national/global), and ideological orientation (Pew Research Center, 2018; Puustinen et al., 2008).

Changes in the media ecosystem – which spill over into changes in audience consumption – are also pertinent to the relation between representation and reflexivity. Social media affect the media ecosystem, leading to increased public debate that takes place simultaneously through ‘old’ media (e.g. TV) and ‘new’ media (e.g. social media) (Delli Carpini & Williams, 2020; Chadwick, 2013). This increased public debate could lead to shared processes of reflexivity in which citizens determine, together with media and other public actors, what is still deemed acceptable or ‘correct’ and what is not (O'Loughlin, 2020). Here, the question remains how older generations' current reflexive processes are influenced by their media use.

Furthermore, social media also increased the production and circulation of representations of race and reflexivity on (systemic) racism. Debates on social media on ‘race’ and racism are prompted by individuals – whether from majority or minority groups – openly questioning shared traditions, cultures and behaviours among networks of friends and family (O’Loughlin, 2020). Such individual but somewhat public questioning (e.g. storytelling) could be even more potent in spurring (collective) reflexivity.

Although older individuals may use less social media than younger people, their day-to-day lives and reflexivity processes are still affected by it through the consumption and interpretation of other media (CBS, 2020; Chadwick, 2013). Especially if individuals do not directly experience social issues – as is the case for many White older individuals with racism – the media can put those issues on the public agenda (Croteau & Hoynes, 2019; Hansen, 2018). By presenting these issues and highlighting several aspects, media expose us to multiple ideas and create an opportunity for reflexivity on our own position regarding those ideas (Deuze, 2011; Giddens, 1991). At the same time, media may also mitigate such reflexive processes by leaving racist common-sense ideas unquestioned or even perpetuated (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; de Veen & Thomas, 2022; Golash-Boza, 2016; Hall, 1990; van Sterkenburg et al., 2012; van Sterkenburg et al., 2021). Nonetheless, media actors and discourses evolve, continuously presenting new and sometimes distracting ideas (de Veen & Thomas, 2022; Deuze, 2011; Vliet, 2020). In turn, the mechanisms through which media affect reflexivity are influenced by transformation within the media ecosystem (Chadwick, 2013; Delli Carpini & Williams, 2020; O’Loughlin, 2020). Important here is to consider all these complexities when thinking about the reflexivity processes of individuals throughout the ZP-debate.

2.5 Reflexivity and Activism

Another driver of the public debate on this topic is anti-racism activism. Media and activists have a co-dependent power relationship – albeit unequal, as activists are more dependent on the media than the other way around (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993). Two intertwined dimensions of activism are critical here: (1) the contribution that activism makes to public debate via its framing of race and racism, and (2) the amplification of this framing via news media coverage. In so doing, contemporary anti-racism activism openly puts the question of (systemic) racism on the public agenda and focuses its efforts on keeping the debate alive.

Contemporary anti-racism activism can be seen as a continuation of the antislavery movement – which started in Europe and then spread to the US mid-eighteenth century (King, 2013). A significant part of the eventual success of this movement can be related to the fact that they utilised influential platforms such as churches and various print media, which allowed them to spread their message globally (King, 2013). Furthermore, the antislavery movement was persistent, officially organised, bridged diverse geographies, and frequently focused its claims against the state (King,

2013). It blended dismantling the segregation system by influencing policy-making and creating awareness for civil rights, inspiring future movements (Andrews, 2013).

In the case of the ZP-debate, activism has been associated primarily with the NWB foundation and its awareness-raising ‘Zwarte Piet is Racism’ campaign – focusing on expanding knowledge of Dutch colonial history and its implications (Nederland wordt beter, n.d.). The grassroots (bottom-up) organisation – and therefore also the campaign itself – takes a non-White anti-racist frame by focusing its efforts on educating and creating awareness of race and racism in NL in White-dominated spaces (Georgiou, 2018; Kluttz et al., 2020; Mezirow, 2000; Seikkula, 2021).

As Gamson and Wolfsfeld (1993) explained: “A frame is a central organizing idea, suggesting what is at issue. It deals with the gestalt or pattern-organizing aspect of meaning” (p. 118). Within anti-racism activism, the way race and racism are framed remains crucial for several reasons. Firstly, the beforementioned co-dependent relationship between media and activism can be described as somewhat paradoxical as “[t]he media carry the cultural codes being challenged, maintaining and reproducing them. In this sense, they are a target as much as a medium of communication” for activist movements (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993, p. 119). Therefore, it is challenging for movements to get their intended message across, as it often fights the very conventions through which the media operate (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993). However, by offering new ideas and terms on ‘race’ and racism, news media may see newsworthiness in the activists’ efforts, expanding the public discussion (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993). The beforementioned developments in the media ecosystem could potentially increase the activists’ power, although this increased power remains limited by the structural issues of inequalities still present in this media system today (Freedman, 2015).

One framing strategy in anti-racism activism focuses on “recognition” (Seikkula, 2021, p. 16). This frame is particularly useful in understanding the efforts by NWB, as it “accounts for repetitive and mundane racism, against which anti-racism appears as a demand to demolish racist misrecognitions, racializing stereotypes, or the undermining of people of colour” (Essed, 1994, as cited by Seikkula, 2021, p. 11). Unlike the defence frame, where “racism is perceived as a threat from outside”, recognition framing of anti-racist efforts opts for change from within (Seikkula, 2021, p. 16). As such, the anti-ZP campaign can be seen as an “anti-racist struggle [which] explicates a critique against a space of [W]hite normativity – an outcome of colonial oppression – within different institutions, social settings, or in the space defined by the nation-state” (Hall, 1991; Seikkula, 2021, p. 17).

As already mentioned, anti-racism activism has always relied heavily on news media coverage for its amplification. For example, the civil rights movement utilised journalistic conventions to report on its endeavours – a tactic that seems to have paid out (Croteau & Hoynes, 2019). Through (mass) media, activists’ actions gain attention and are legitimised (Rohlinger & Vaccaro, 2013).

However, media coverage can swing in different ideological directions and support different viewpoints, which has also been found to be true in the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement (Banks,

2018; Ince et al., 2017). BLM sparked a global debate around racial inequality by building upon and extending “the framings developed by earlier movements” (Ince et al., 2017, p. 1817). The reporting on the BLM-movement also drew connotations to the civil rights movement (Banks, 2018). However, contrary to the civil rights movement, these connotations often portrayed the movement as violent (Banks, 2018). As such, the interpretations of the reporting on the BLM-movement – much like was the case with the reporting of the civil rights movement – varied greatly with people fostering behind and against the movement (Banks, 2018; Croteau & Hoynes, 2019).

As these examples show, activism can push for enhanced reflexivity on race and racism. Activist efforts can prompt citizens to question the democratic system, engage in or support forms of collective action, and become critical of hegemonic ideas (Bañales et al., 2021; Kluttz et al., 2020; Thompson & Thurston, 2018). However, this is not a given, as the ways in which people may interpret the activists’ actions and messages strongly depend on their personal experiences, cultural background, views, and other personal aspects such as “social age” (i.e. social experiences throughout their lifetime) (Croteau & Hoynes, 2019; Fillieule, 2013, p. 2; Hall, 1973).

Furthermore, the more open someone’s frame of reference is to influences from the outside, the more capable of change they are and the more likely they are to engage in transformative learning (Mezirow, 2000). In the case of the anti-ZP efforts, this means that, in addition to activists’ efforts, people’s general openness toward other points of view also matters (Kluttz et al., 2020; Mezirow, 2000). This suggests that, on an individual level, reflexivity toward race and racism is shaped by one’s experiences, personal and cultural background, and the exposure to and interpretation of activists’ messages, representations and actions.

Researchers have argued that “[i]ndividual’s transformative learning in social movements reflects at least some of Mezirow’s (2000) 10 stages of transformative learning, with a disorienting dilemma, feelings of shame, anger or guilt followed by introspection, leading to a questioning of assumptions through critical reflection and dialogue resulting in changed meaning perspectives” (Kluttz et al., 2020, p. 3). These stages are important in this project because such struggles may also be experienced by older White-Dutch citizens who are interpreting and trying to make sense of the efforts by the anti-ZP activists.

3. Research Design and Methods

This project focuses on individuals' meaning-making processes. As such, it takes a qualitative approach, rooted in a constructivist paradigm, that argues there is no single 'big truth' but several truths based on interpretations, recollections and reflections (Brennen, 2017). This paradigm informs my take on the RQs examined here, aiming to understand how reflexivity is entangled with the meaning-making processes around racism in NL amid an ongoing public debate and the media's role in these processes. Thus, to capture personal interpretations, recollections and reflections, the research design relies on semi-structured in-depth interviews that are analysed using Thematic Analysis (TA) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

3.1 Explanation and Justification of the Case

The ZP-debate revolves around the Dutch tradition of Sinterklaas. The controversies are directed at a specific aspect of the tradition: blackface (Koning, 2018). There are many factors at play here, such as the increasingly globalising world, a global public debate around racism and equality, developments within Dutch narratives which highlight increasingly diverse experiences, and the recent adjustments that have already been made to the tradition (Balkenhol, 2016; Essed & Trienekens, 2008; Euwijk & Rensen, 2017; Hilhorst & Hermes, 2016; Lemmens, 2017; Muysken, 2016; Reyes, 2019; Rodenberg & Wagenaar, 2016; Vliet, 2019; 2020; Wekker, 2016). Since blackfacing is considered highly controversial in many other countries, the Dutch debate around ZP makes for a fascinating case to analyse individual meaning-making processes amid social change.

Hence, as highlighted in the theoretical framework, the debate around ZP can be seen as an aspect of broader societal struggles against the invisibility of colonial history and Black experiences throughout Dutch history. Having resulted in a decade-long public debate that has been nearly impossible to miss, it is an interesting case to analyse in the context of reflexivity processes among older White Dutch. In line with earlier findings on generational differences in reflecting on social change, this group is of interest here as it grew up with the tradition when it was not yet publicly questioned and in a society that kept non-White experiences out of public discourses (Balkenhol, 2016; Bartels & Jackman, 2014; Mannheim, 1952; Vliet, 2020).

3.2 Description of Procedure

Fifteen semi-structured in-depth interviews (each lasting 35-90 minutes) were conducted, focusing on the interaction and information shared (Kvale, 2007). The interviews took a discursive approach, meaning that specific attention was paid to distinct aspects of the discourse during the interview, such as (in)consistency and allowing diversity in the conversation (Kvale, 2007). The interviews were more informal conversation-like exchanges with the interviewer as an active

conversation participant rather than an interaction more closely related to questionnaires (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, as cited by Kvale, 2007).

As the interviews were in person, the personal interaction allowed for an in-depth conversation about reflections on the issues presented (Kvale, 2007). The topic guide (Appendix A) helped guide the conversations. In line with methodological recommendations, I paid specific attention to establishing rapport at the start of each interview by asking the interviewees to introduce themselves, their (professional) lives, and their interests (Kvale, 2007). To trigger engagement with the topic, the interview proceeded with participants' recollections of celebrating Sinterklaas as a child and their (grand)children (if applicable).

The next topic engaged with representations of ZP in news and entertainment media that the interviewees may have experienced as memorable, with differences in media representations over time often coming up. The conversation moved on to the interviewees' accounts of the ZP-debate, often related to their media use, conversations with others, and how the interviewees experienced the debate. Next, the activism around ZP was discussed by asking whether participants had ever seen or participated in protests and how they viewed the efforts undertaken by the activists (of both sides of the debate). At the end of the interview, I asked each interviewee to share their thoughts on the statement initiated by the anti-ZP activists: 'Zwarte Piet is racism' (ZP is racism) and whether they had any final thoughts they wanted to share about the topic.

To avoid social desirability, I avoided sensitive and confrontational questions such as 'what do you think about race', opting instead for more neutral questions such as 'what do you think about how media covered the anti-ZP' and 'what do you think about the activist work to change ZP'. Moreover, I used participants' recollections of media events surrounding the anti-ZP activism and the overall debate to uncover how these may have influenced reflexivity processes in light of ZP. However, because moments of reflexivity can be difficult to identify, I sometimes brought up opposing arguments to trigger what Riach (2009) identified as "sticky moments" (i.e. uncomfortable moments) because they can help identify or even trigger reflexivity (p. 357; Kvale, 2007; Perera, 2020). Another way participants were encouraged to consciously reflect on what they said or were saying was by highlighting a previous point they made in light of new arguments they presented themselves. During the interviews, great emphasis was put on close listening and reacting accordingly to prevent "crossing discourses" between the interviewer and interviewee (Kvale, 2007, p. 84). Whenever possible and relevant, I took notes during the interview so that previous arguments could be remembered and to ensure close listening. However, notes were also added afterwards, as greater emphasis was placed on the conversation during interviews than on writing notes.

As the topic is complex, sampling was initially aimed at only White-Dutch people in Rotterdam. However, finding participants proved challenging, leading to an expansion to Amsterdam and places around those cities. Nonetheless, the participants all had similar experiences in the sense that (1) they lived in (or close to) a large multicultural Dutch city, (2) they grew up in a society in

which non-White experiences were nearly invisible in public discourses, and (3) they experienced a societal transformation of public discussions of race and racism in NL (Vliet, 2020).

The participants were found through a combination of hanging up notes, reaching out to a care facility in Amsterdam where a mental caretaker helped me by handing out my recruitment message (of which a translated version can be found in Appendix B), approaching older people supervising exams at EUR, approaching people on the streets in Rotterdam, and reaching out to my network (Flick, 2007). The youngest participant was 65, and the oldest was 94. In table 1, the interviews are listed in chronological order with demographic information about each participant. However, to ensure the anonymity of the participants, the names of the smaller cities have been replaced by ‘medium city in Randstad area’ (30.000-70.000 inhabitants) or suburb of Rotterdam (< 30.000 inhabitants) (CBS, n.d.-a).

Table 1

List of participants

Interview number	Pseudonym	Age, gender	Place of residence	Education level
1	Egbert	77, man	Amsterdam	MBO
2	Niels	65, man	Rotterdam	HBO
3	Leendert	66, man	Rotterdam	Undisclosed
4	Yvonne	94, woman	Rotterdam	MBO
5	Sonja	69, woman	Medium city in Randstad area	Undisclosed
6	Sebastiaan	73, man	Rotterdam	University
7	Olaf	92, man	Amsterdam	HBO
8	Edith	86, woman	Amsterdam	University
9	Sjaak	67, man	Medium city in Randstad area	MBO
10	Eduard	69, man	Medium city in Randstad area	University
11	Marco	74, man	Suburb of Rotterdam	Undisclosed
12	Elly	74, woman	Suburb of Rotterdam	HBO
13	Nico	66, man	Medium city in Randstad area	MBO
14	Agnes	70, woman	Rotterdam	HBO
15	Rob	66, man	Amsterdam	LTS

The interviews took place in locations per the participants' choice, ranging from their own home to a neighbourhood garden they volunteered at, the EUR campus, and a coffee place. They were voice-recorded and transcribed. Along with the interview notes, the transcripts formed the data for the analysis.

3.3 Data Analysis

To gain an in-depth understanding of how personal experiences relate to larger societal issues and developments, the interview transcripts were analysed by combining TA with CDA. Both methods provide tools that help perform the analysis in a structured manner while recovering slightly different aspects of the data (Augoustinos & Every, 2007; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Lawless & Chen, 2019; Machin & Mayr, 2012; van Dijk, 2008). Combining these two methods was primarily based on the argument that merely “articulating themes about phenomena that people similarly experience does not do enough to articulate how human discourse is linked to larger systems of power within a society” (Lawless & Chen, 2019; p. 98). Thus, where TA helped to uncover meaningful patterns in the data, encouraging findings to emerge from the data inductively and having existing theory guide the analysis deductively, CDA allowed me to pay specific attention to the articulation and use of discourses (such as how race and racism were spoken about or not; what individuals emphasised to identify how reflexivity is produced and in what ways existing narratives around race and racism may spark or limit these processes).

3.3.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

CDA functioned as a perspective throughout the phases of TA (discussed next), used to clarify latent meanings and power relations in the participants' discourses by providing a thorough, detailed and methodical description (Machin & Mayr, 2012; van Dijk, 2008). The constructivist premise that texts are “means of social construction” shaping while also being shaped by society forms the basis for this analysis method (Hall, 2013; Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 4). Here, it helps to understand the context in which meaning-making processes occur and denaturalise things people say (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Moreover, CDA allows uncovering reflexivity concerning the self and societal structures (Giddens, 1991; Warburton, 2016).

Reflexivity, as explained above, refers to the struggle and process of becoming critically aware of one's taken-for-granted assumptions and the ongoing process of consciously (re-)assessing one's views and actions (Giddens, 1991; 1993). To identify reflexivity in my analysis, I built on existing models of discourse analysis and considered how their tools could also help me uncover reflexivity in meaning-making.

Thus, I have first used Machin and Mayr's (2012) tools to help uncover covert “connections between language, power and ideology” (p. 5). Here, I focused on lexical choices such as using specific words and their synonyms (overlexicalisation) because discourse theory suggests these

elements point to ideological controversy and persuasion (Machin & Mayr, 2012). I also looked for absences (suppression) to highlight what may be silenced or taken for granted. Additionally, I looked at how my participants articulated “structural oppositions [of which often only one is] mentioned, which can imply differences from qualities of its opposites” (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 39). An example is that some participants, when explaining in their own words what the debate was about, only highlighted the arguments against ZP and not those supporting ZP. Lastly, I looked at the language used to add authority or credibility to what someone said (e.g. stating that their friends of colour also agreed that ZP should ‘just’ stay black) (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

To add further depth to my CDA, I also relied on Augoustinos and Every’s (2007) literature-based framework for approaching talk of prejudice and race in Western liberal societies. Here, I have tried to link this framework to reflexivity. The authors identify five tactics used by White people when talking about race: “(a) the denial of prejudice, (b) grounding one’s views as reflecting the external world rather than one’s psychology, (c) positive self and negative other presentation, (d) discursive deracialisation, and (e) the use of liberal arguments for ‘illiberal’ ends” (Augoustinos & Every, 2007, p. 125). These known tactics guided the analysis of these discursive interviews in five ways.

First, their presence in the interviews could point to common language practices used to justify and prevent being perceived as prejudiced (Augoustinos & Every, 2007). These tactics are particularly relevant for this project because the way participants use them is entangled with reflexivity. For instance, participants may reflectively problematize their own denials of prejudice or engage with Dutch colonial history and the link to slavery in formulating their positions.

Secondly, grounding one’s views as reflecting the external world rather than one’s psychology can point to internal dilemmas (Augoustinos & Every, 2007). Specifically, dilemmas between people’s “lived ideology” (in this case, dominant ideas about race in NL that are taken for granted by participants in their daily lives) and “intellectual ideology” (here, more abstract thinking about race in general) can point to processes of reflexivity (Billig, 1988, p. 28). Thus, reflexivity here consists of those moments when participants would stop and challenge themselves, be unsure or uncomfortable, hesitate and go back on what they have said.

Thirdly, in light of possible tactics of positive self and negative other presentation, I looked for ways in which participants addressed the dominant discourse in NL around White Dutch as being “tolerant, hospitable, and rational” while racial minorities are seen as ungrateful or deviant (Augoustinos & Every, 2007; Hilhorst & Hermes, 2016). Reflexivity, in this case, becomes visible in efforts to make explicit, challenge, or problematise in any way this dominant narrative.

Fourthly, a complete denial of different racialised experiences may point to tactics of discursive deracialisation (Augoustinos & Every, 2007). Looking out for such tactics helped uncover possible narratives of colour-blindness and depoliticising racial experiences in NL (Golash-Boza, 2016; van den Broek, 2020; Wekker, 2016). On the other hand, one may address differences in racial experiences and assess their own experiences, indicating reflexivity processes.

Lastly, Augoustinos and Every (2007) point to using liberal arguments for illiberal ends, which may be used to legitimise or hide discriminatory situations. People may emphasise liberal values such as equality and individualism to legitimise racism and deny inequalities (van den Broek, 2020). On the other hand, making these social inequalities explicit in making sense of the ZP-debate may indicate reflexivity processes.

Finally, in my analysis of reflexivity, I was also informed by Wetherell and Potter's (1992) argument that people's reasoning may not be clear-cut. It is nearly impossible to summarise people's views in one sentence because our reasoning can be messy, and our thoughts are not always clear to ourselves. Thus, someone may engage in discourses on the topic of ZP using several of the beforementioned tactics and show changes and counter-arguments in the process (Wetherell & Potter, 1992). Therefore, the unit of analysis is not the individual but rather the varying and complex discourses that these individuals produce in reflecting on the ZP-debate (Wetherell & Potter, 1992). It is at the level of these discourses where processes of reflexivity can be assessed as they show how ideological dilemmas are made sense of when discussing personal recollections of the ZP-debate and its various sides (Billig, 1988; Wetherell & Potter, 1992).

3.3.1 Thematic analysis

With these tools in mind, I engaged in a TA informed by Braun and Clarke's (2006) model. TA allows the discovery of meaningful patterns in the data while also being flexible: sensitising concepts derived from existing literature helped guide the overall process, but the method still allowed for findings to emerge from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Step one of Braun and Clarke's (2006) phases is to immerse oneself in the transcripts and take notes. This process started directly after the first interview, taking advantage of the method's iterative nature, allowing me to point out some things other participants mentioned (such as the generational differences some of the first participants experienced and the emergence of topics like Dutch slavery and colonialism in public discourses). Additionally, they showed me that it is sometimes good to leave longer silences to allow for some thought processes.

In the first stage of the analysis, the open coding stage, I worked inductively, coding the data by staying close to what was being said and deductively, informed by the sensitising concepts outlined in the theoretical framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These sensitizing concepts are: (1) struggles of reflexivity, (2) colour-blindness and race-neutrality, (3) White fragility, (4) colonial discourses, and (5) non-reflexive viewer consciousness. The next phase was axial coding, where I clustered the large number of codes emerging from the open coding stage into more significant (and a more manageable number of) categories by focusing on recurrent things and anything different or marginal (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this stage, I noticed the three main themes. Some initial categories are worth mentioning here; the shared history between generations, how societal discourses can limit processes of reflexivity (or how they function as a point of departure for reflexivity), and how the debate is

related to more significant societal developments amid a multitude of alternative perspectives. I improved and revisited these initial themes in the final phase by returning to the data once more (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Because the number of initial categories was still relatively large, I returned to them at a later stage and grouped them into more substantial categories, which became the sub-themes. The data analysis was conducted with the help of the software Atlas.ti, and the coding tree can be found in Appendix C.

3.4 Researcher Reflexivity and Ethical Aspects

The aim of qualitative research is to produce an authentic, ethical, and transparent research report (Brennen, 2017; Kvale, 2007). Therefore, this section makes research design decisions transparent, while an interview guide and coding tree are provided in the appendices so that readers are informed enough “to decide whether they would have done the same and arrived at the same conclusions” (Kvale, 2007, p. 66). The in-depth interviews enable authenticity in this project, as each interview is unique and brings up personal experiences. Moreover, the intense focus on establishing rapport and active listening enhanced this project's authenticity.

In any qualitative project dealing with a sensitive issue such as race, the researcher plays a prominent role in generating participant answers (Brennen, 2017). My questions and my position (in terms of ‘race’, cultural knowledge, age, and professional status) are inevitably implicated in how participants relate to and share their thoughts with me. Therefore, researcher reflexivity is vital in helping to understand how interpretations of the data have been influenced (Brennen, 2017).

Firstly, the interviewees and interviewer are White, making it essential to acknowledge and understand the privilege of being White (National Museum of African American History and Culture, n.d.). For instance, as a White-Dutch person, I too carry taken-for-granted assumptions about ‘race’ – these may be translated into how I introduce a topic for discussion or even in the elements of the issue I bring up. For instance, when one of the participants mentioned that no one in their surroundings had ever talked to her about ZP being racist, I asked her whether she had people of colour in her network. Perhaps it was based on my parents’ and grandparents’ network, but I must admit that I assumed their network would also consist of mainly White people. When the participant said she had people of colour in her network, I was slightly thrown off. Therefore, I missed an opportunity of asking more critical questions about this topic.

However, my racial privilege is probably most prominent because I was able to do this research and was generally able to establish rapport and successfully conduct the interviews. This aspect became evident when one of the participants pointed out that they found it easier to talk to me than if I had not been White or Dutch.

Through research, I, too, produce discourses consisting of both “explicit [and] implicit dimensions” (Alejandro, 2020, p. 152). For instance, one prudent decision has been focusing on White Dutch – a decision that can potentially silence the voice of racial minorities by not including them in

research. However, this decision was taken as I ultimately wanted to understand how reflexivity is produced around the topic of race, specifically by White people, amid a public debate related to race and challenging aspects of Dutch culture, given that thinking about race in such a manner involves processes of challenging taken-for-granted assumptions. That is not to say that these aspects of Dutch culture may not have influenced people who are not White, but rather that White people have perhaps rarely been challenged to think about such issues.

Hence, the decision to focus this thesis on White people's meaning-making practices stems from the presumption that White people look at racism through a ready-made lens of taken-for-granted (often racist) assumptions that may limit the willingness or ability to understand racism from another perspective than their own (Hughey, 2022, p. 3; van den Broek, 2020; Wekker, 2016). Hence, the goal is to understand better how unconscious racist discourses may limit critical engagement with racism and how these unconscious discourses can be disrupted through reflexivity (Giddens, 1991). Moreover, as reflexivity processes are already complex, opting for racial diversity would further complexify the analysis as experiences and meaning-making processes of people who do not identify as White are likely to differ significantly from those who identify as White.

However, one way it became evident that my Whiteness and Dutch origin led to some assumptions around the topic of race is that being White seemed relatively clear-cut to me. However, one of the participants pointed out that she was ambiguous about her Whiteness, stating that she sometimes feels White and sometimes does not. This specific participant was born in a then Dutch colony (Indonesia). At first, I was unsure whether her experiences would diverge too much from the other participants. Nonetheless, including her experiences helped me deepen my analysis.

Finally, my performance as a researcher seeking to establish rapport with my participants may also contribute to (re)producing dominant discourses of race in NL. There are small moments when, consciously or unconsciously, I have nodded or said 'yes' as if I agreed, whereas they were meant as moments of encouragement for the participants to keep talking. An example of this would be my lack of jumping in when one of the participants used an outdated word that is now unacceptable to address a Black person. However, this is also where the iterative nature of this research proved helpful, as while transcribing the first interviews, I noticed these moments and, at times, a lack of actively questioning or probing on specific issues, and focused more on this in future interviews.

In addition to the beforementioned aspects of researcher reflexivity, there were also ethical considerations regarding the participants. Respondents were asked to read and sign an informed consent form, of which a translated version can be found in Appendix D (Flick, 2007). This form was in Dutch and shared with the participants in advance via e-mail (if possible). Additionally, I brought a copy to each interview to let them read it uninterrupted. The informed consent form contained background information on the research, its purposes, the participants' role, and confidentiality of personal details. The transcripts are pseudonymised to protect the identity and privacy of the respondents. Moreover, because some participants also knew each other, I decided to leave out the

specific names of the smaller towns. All data has been stored on a secured cloud drive from OneDrive, through an account provided by EUR. Lastly, participants' freedom to withdraw from participation at any time was emphasised.

4. Results

Through the aforementioned combination of analysis methods, three main themes emerged: (1) 'reflexivity and society', (2) 'reflexivity and others', and (3) 'reflexivity and the 'Self'. Each theme represents a scope through which one assesses their behaviour and attitude towards race: an ever-changing society, a myriad of views and opinions, and through the 'self'. In other words, as the chapter progresses, the scope through which reflexivity is produced becomes smaller and more personal. The first two themes outline how one's surroundings influence personal meaning-making processes. The last theme outlines how reflexivity is produced by looking inward as to what these outside influences 'do' from the perspective of the 'Self'.

The first theme – reflexivity and society – consists of three sections. Each section outlines a way in which societal developments influenced individual reflexive meaning-making practices throughout these older White-Dutch individuals' lives: (a) generational (dis)connectedness, (b) public discourses, and (c) the relativity of time. The second theme - reflexivity and others – consists of two sections. Much like the first theme, each section outlines how others influenced these individuals' reflexive meaning-making practices: (a) media narratives and (b) personal experiences. The third and final theme – reflexivity and the 'Self' – outlines how, albeit marginally, individuals engaged in critical reflexivity not only on how these outside influences conditioned racial biases but also how they have internalised these racial biases and what these racial biases meant in light of their day-to-day lives and their own identity.

The sample consisted of fifteen older Dutch White citizens, the youngest being 65 and the oldest 94. Although everyone celebrated Sinterklaas when they were younger, some did not celebrate it anymore (for differing reasons). All participants were engaged with the topic of ZP to more or lesser extents. Only one of the interviewees (Rob) had participated in activism around the ZP-debate: he participated in an alternative Sinterklaas parade in Amsterdam, with a Black Sinterklaas and no ZP.

4.1 Reflexivity and Society

For many participants, the ZP-debate was part of the many societal developments that have taken place since they were young. Inevitably, this is interwoven with an assessment of how society changed from the past until now and how this has influenced one's own place, attitude and behaviour within and towards these changes and this society.

Hence, reflexivity is produced through the scope of this ever-changing society by continuously re-assessing what societal change means for the individual. This production of reflexivity does not occur in the same way for everyone, nor does it lead to the same outcome: where some saw this change as an improvement, some were longing for times they knew, while others simply described change as an inevitable part of life. In the latter case, changes may still be normatively assessed, but it

also leads to resignation as the individual does not feel like they are part of this change but rather a powerless spectator (Dahlgren, 1981; Giddens, 1991).

This (re-)assessment of society can seem contradictory, as it is a struggle to continuously assess a situation that feels different from what you have always known (Giddens, 1991; Holland, 1999). It requires the individual to look back at their past actions and re-assess them through a new lens, which can feel like what you did before was ‘wrong’. Specifically, in the case of re-assessing the tradition of Sinterklaas, such questioning can destabilise how one lives their life as it has always been unquestionably ‘right’ (Giddens, 1991). The following sections outline how individuals assessed the ZP-debate in relation to societal developments and how their reflexive meaning-making practices were influenced by and related to (1) generational (dis)connectedness, (2) public discourses, and (3) the relativity of time. Each theme highlights how Whiteness, media and activism come into play with these meaning-making practices.

4.1.1 Generational (Dis)connectedness

Each interview started with the participants’ memories of Sinterklaas celebrations. One shared experience across the sample was that these celebrations were always a happy memory for them as a child:

Well, that's always a party, of course, with small presents. Of course, we weren't that rich in the early years, so that wasn't extravagant, but it was just the anticipation of the Sinterklaas period. [...] It was just fun, always... and now and then, a ‘Zwarte Piet’ and Sinterklaas also came over, of course. (Egbert, 77)

Much like other participants, Egbert highlights his positive experiences while emphasising that his family did not have much money. Hence, in a way, Sinterklaas celebrations were a bit of light in darker times, offering comfort and security. This is further emphasised through the extensive use of the phrase ‘of course’, highlighting how ‘normal’ and ‘natural’ these celebrations were back then. Thus, with the tradition being such an inherently positive and natural thing back then, it functioned as a benchmark used to assess day-to-day experiences and future changes (Giddens, 1991).

The media furthered this moral endowment of the tradition through continuously positive representations of Sinterklaas and ZP. Edith highlighted that although she grew up in the Dutch-Indies, “of course, the newspapers always said that Sinterklaas had arrived [...] with the boat and the gray horse and the Zwarte Piet. And beforehand that Zwarte Piet [...] came to listen to what you wanted”. These influences remain apparent to this day, as the ‘Sinterklaasjournaal’ – a popular children’s fictional TV programme from the public broadcaster NTR, which shows the challenges and adventures Sinterklaas and ‘his Petes’ face on their way from Spain to NL through the format of a news broadcast

– still plays a vital role in the representations of the tradition (including its recent adaptations). For instance, Sonja watched it with her brother’s children “because they, of course, watch that”.

Moreover, through its use of blackfacing, the tradition was part and parcel of hegemonic discourses through which Black people were continuously ‘othered’ (Balkenhol, 2016; Hall, 2013; Krumer-Nevo & Benjamin, 2010). However, for many White-Dutch people, this shared tradition had always been so inherently ‘good’: it was simply an “innocent children’s celebration” (Marco) that was part of something they shared with other members of their culture; a shared structure of reality that was never proven nor provable, as its righteousness had always been implied and guided individuals through their day-to-day experiences (Giddens, 1991; Kluttz et al., 2020; Mezirow, 2000).

Because the tradition has long resisted the gradual societal changes, it offered protection against the uncertainties of these changes and helped minimise disruptions to individuals’ day-to-day lives and moral beliefs (Giddens, 1991; Rafieian & Davis, 2016; Riach, 2009). This is also why, when a tradition like that comes under scrutiny amid this already changed (and continuously changing) society, it requires a re-assessment of one’s day-to-day behaviour and, consequently, one’s identity (Giddens, 1991; Owens et al., 2010).

Therefore, participants would often highlight the innocence of the tradition to emphasise the loss they were experiencing and to hold on to the sense of security the tradition once offered them:

Why should it be changed like this all of a sudden? Why? What have those people done wrong? What did Zwarte Piet do wrong? Nothing! He just wants to be friendly to the children. And then he is being forced to lea... gone! Not allowed anymore. Because he looks black. (Olaf, 92)

This feeling of loss and discomfort Olaf expresses shows how ‘White fragility’ emerges when hegemonic discourses of White customs and ideas being unquestionably ‘good’ are challenged (DiAngelo, 2018).

The innocence of the Sinterklaas celebrations was not only used to protect the tradition but also to disentangle racism from blackfacing and ignore the effects such stereotypical images have on children. For instance, two participants mentioned that their child had called a Black person ZP. However, although they both explained to their child that this was a Black person and not ZP, they did not relate this to racism. Instead, this comparison was “very normal” for these individuals, and they “paid little attention to it” (Yvonne). When I asked her whether she thought this comparison could have been a bad experience for the Black person in question, Yvonne said, “No, quit it! [...] Then we should experience everything as harmful”. In justifying her child comparing a Black person with ZP, Elly said it was not the black colour that resulted in the comparison, but merely the “fat lips”. Hence, the perceived innocence of the tradition of ZP was used to depoliticise racism (Wekker, 2016). Moreover, the lack of linking this comparison – and the tradition of blackfacing overall – to racism

shows how White-Dutch people often think of racism only in the blunt sense of the word, while modern racism works in more subtle ways (van den Broek, 2020).

Therefore, when the anti-ZP activists criticised the tradition, they were perceived as “radical” because “they disrupt the Sinterklaas celebrations” (Niels) (Hilhorst & Hermes, 2016). This idea of disruption touches upon a loss of connection between generations: where the older generations still “all learned the same children’s songs” (Edith), the adjustments to the tradition felt like a “break with your past”. The tradition had always connected individuals who were part of the same culture, as they shared customs, songs, and experiences. This connection offered comfort, making it difficult to accept “strange influences [coming] in” because “then that unity is broken” (Niels).

In light of the importance of shared history for a sense of connection, Yvonne emphasised the importance of shared experiences for her engagement with others:

I think like those conversations we’re having right now... I’m a chatterbox too... and... it’s different... it’s more satisfying, uh, what they [White-Dutch nurses] went through with their parents and... [...] But this is *my* experience, that I say like... I can talk to you more easily than if a dark-skinned girl were sitting here. (Yvonne, 94)

Thus, Yvonne reflexively expresses that she finds it easier to talk to a White-Dutch person as she feels they have familiar experiences. However, she does not express any transformation she has gone or should go through, nor does she indicate that her preference is problematic. By relating racial-ethnic issues only to cultural problems, a White individual can stay clear of feeling like they are ‘racist’, as racial-ethnic preferences are related only to cultural problems (Essed & Trienekens, 2008; van den Broek, 2020; Wekker, 2016). In doing so, racial-ethnic inequalities are trivialised and amplified (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Golash-Boza, 2016).

In contrast, Egbert – when talking about his worries that Moroccan-Dutch youth on the street will “take [his] wallet”, feels that these biases are “of course, not acceptable at all”. When delving deeper into these biases, Egbert compares his attitude towards the ‘Other’ to that of his stepson: “But [he] doesn’t have that [distance], because he grew up with those boys. [...] We... I’ve never been integrated into it either”.

Hence, processes of reflexivity are interwoven with personal experiences, which are mediated by broader discourses and developments on race and racism (Emirbayer & Desmond, 2012; Fillieule, 2013; Fisher et al., 2020; Golash-Boza, 2016; McCluney et al., 2021; Smaje, 1997). Specifically, earlier experiences (i.e. growing up in a predominantly White environment, with persistent narratives emphasising a hierarchical distance between the dominant ‘Us’ and the ‘Other’) still inform the lens through which Egbert and Yvonne view the world (Balkenhol, 2016; Bartels & Jackman, 2014; Mannheim, 1952; Vliet, 2020). Both individuals noticed a difference in how they deal with the ‘Other’ compared to younger generations. However, where Yvonne relates her biases to the idea that the

'Others' are simply different, Egbert makes a reflexive, normative judgement of this lens being 'bad'. Thus, the extent to which an older individual not only understands but is also influenced by the politics of the day depends on how critical they are of their own biases.

Similarly, Nico related the fact that Dutch society had become a lot more diverse to why younger generations may have fewer difficulties with adjusting ZP:

For example, our generation and my father and mother's [...] had nothing to do with [the ZP controversies]. And with a multicultural society, that all came later. And that's getting worse with all those, uh, immigrants coming in. They all need a place. Uh, and of course, we have already lost parts of the Netherlands in that regard... Well, not lost. But... it has become multicultural, especially in the big cities. I go to Rotterdam a lot. And now, you hardly see anything else there. Then the White people are probably disadvantaged in terms of proportions, so to speak. So I think today's youth would more likely think: OK, we live in a multicultural society. There has been discrimination in the past. We don't know the details, but uh, ah well, just get rid of it and just do 'Soot Wipe Piet'. (Nico, 66)

In contrasting to what he believes younger generations may feel, Nico's own words emphasise 'threat' and 'loss'. These feelings seem to stem from the changes he has seen as a spectator of the social world. Hence, where Nico was once an active participant in 'his' world, he is a mere spectator of today's world in which outside threats have led to a loss of "parts of the Netherlands". This distance is further emphasised through a structural opposition of 'we' (White-Dutch people) and 'them' (immigrants) without explaining why these two groups are so different (Golash-Boza, 2016; Krumer-Nevo & Benjamin, 2010; Machin & Mayr, 2012).

However, he adjusts his wording from 'lost' to saying 'it has become multicultural'. Such change of wording can indicate that he did not want to seem biased and therefore tried to make his argument more nuanced as he would otherwise be performing a 'Self' that did not seem adequate in this social situation (Giddens, 1991). Similarly, he indicates that White people are 'disadvantaged' in Rotterdam. Again, by adding 'so to speak' to his argument, he tries to nuance his own words. Adding such nuances to one's statements illustrates a dilemma between their lived ideology that views the 'Other' as a threat and the intellectual ideology, leading to more abstract and nuanced thoughts concerning 'race' and racism (Billig, 1988).

Additionally, Nico suggests that younger people are more willing to give up on the tradition of ZP because they grew up in a multicultural society. In contrast, older generations find this more difficult because of their life experience. Hence, in a way, although Nico actively produces reflexivity by critically assessing his attitude and difficulties in dealing with the 'Other', he also feels he is no

longer an active participant in the social world and therefore does not need to actively engage in transformative learning because it is no longer ‘his world’ (Dahlgren, 1981; Mezirow, 2000).

4.1.2 Public Discourses

This resignation can also be explained as a feeling of powerlessness, especially when changes do not make sense in light of an assumed reality. For Niels, this meant that “then you see the generational difference, [...] everything is put in a different light these days. And all customs [...] are critically assessed [...] wokeness”.

This critical review of the Sinterklaas traditions did not resonate with some participants, who grew up in a world in which ZP was never really questioned. Elly mentioned she “never heard anyone complain that [...] black was misused, the word ‘black’”. For her, the anti-ZP arguments seemed to come out of nowhere. In this instance, we can see the hegemonic, White-Dutch collective memory at play in individual meaning-making processes as these controversies had long existed prior to the current debate – albeit less prominent (Balkenhol, 2016; Euwijk & Rensen, 2017).

However, throughout time and social change, this collective memory increasingly allows room for Black experiences:

Phew yeah, uh definitely that dark-skinned people more... uh, dare to express themselves. That’s important too. And that we now also uh... uh, dark-skinned people have been able to get higher positions in society. And they were more comfortable with... daring to express uh... about the past. [...]. So maybe they have a deep-rooted problem, of which other people ranked lower in society didn’t dare to speak about, or who don’t talk about it at all because they are afraid of it or something. So in the multicultural society all people, of all skin colours, also White and Black, engage in discussions more easily, because you have to deal with each other. And then such discussions are more likely to come up than with the older generation. (Nico, 66)

Thus, for Nico, the lack of discourse around ZP was related to the fact that Black people were in disadvantaged positions back then and did not “dare to speak up”. In saying this, Nico does not speak about how Dutch society did not allow for this space, attributing much agency to Black people (Ahearn, 2011). In doing so, although he mentions that it is good that this has improved, Nico re-legitimises the lack of Black experiences within Dutch collective memory. Through his choice of words, he victimises Black people back then (without saying what they were victims of; without highlighting exclusionary systems perpetuating these inequalities) and implies that whatever issues there were before are gone now and that all that remains is a “deep-rooted problem” within Black people. The lack of talk on the role of hegemonic influences and the responsibility of White people in addressing these issues shows how hegemonic Whiteness makes it difficult for White people to

address the role of Whiteness in racial issues, as this role was never really discussed (Essed & Trienekens, 2008; DiAngelo, 2018; Giddens, 1991; Golash-Boza, 2016; Lewis, 2004). As a result, racial discussions are always focused on those disadvantaged by this system and rarely on what caused these disadvantages. Hence, instead of rejecting racism, such tactics justify the privileged position of White people in modern society (Hughey, 2022). As such, the production of reflexivity is limited, because White-Dutch individuals do not look inward but only focus on the ‘Other’ in forming the problem and the solution.

Because ZP was never so publicly criticised when these individuals were younger, it was difficult for them to accept that ZP may not be inherently ‘good’. Hence, even though the public discourses around ZP have evolved, how one takes up and makes sense of the anti-ZP efforts still greatly depends on personal experiences (Hall, 1973; Vliet, 2020). Consequently, if an individual mainly assesses the activists’ message through this lens of hegemonic Whiteness, processing and accepting the non-White anti-racist frame through which the activists aim to educate and create awareness of race and racism in NL is challenging (Kluttz et al., 2020; Lewis, 2004; Seikkula, 2021; Wekker, 2016).

The effect of such hegemonic discourses on individual meaning-making vis á vis racism can also be found in narratives of colour-blindness and race-neutrality. For instance, when I asked Olaf whether he felt that we – as White people – could judge whether something is discriminating, he said:

You can just appreciate them. That you say: well, he has a different colour. I just say: hey, they’ve been in the sun more than me. [...] Those are ordinary people. And I have always treated them and always will treat them as if they were ordinary people. (Olaf, 92)

Given that such colour-blind narratives have always been dominant in Dutch public discourses, they feed into the ideas contributing to a ready-made filter through which not only the actions of others but, in this case, also one’s own actions are assessed (Balkenhol, 2016; Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Giddens, 1991; Golash-Boza, 2016; van den Broek, 2020; Wekker, 2016). This way, individuals can dismiss racism as something outside of them – something they never do because they do not see colour, supporting their own feelings of superiority (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; DiAngelo, 2018; Golash-Boza, 2016; van den Broek, 2020). These narratives enable Olaf to say a racist thing like “they’ve just been in the sun more”, while still deflecting blame.

Through such narratives, individuals justify racial biases by explaining where these biases come from (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; DiAngelo, 2018; Golash-Boza, 2016; van den Broek, 2020). In doing so, White people may often say contradictory things about ‘race’ and racism because these topics require them to perform a ‘Self’ that is accepted in a given situation (Giddens, 1991; Hughey, 2022; Owens et al., 2010).

For instance, while explaining his frustrations with the ZP-debate (and other recent controversies around Dutch colonial history), Sjaak began his argument by saying that he is, “of course, entirely against discrimination on any grounds”. Then, to add some credibility to the statement he was building up, Sjaak justified his own experiences of ageism. Finally, he reflected on issues in his former neighbourhood Crooswijk (in Rotterdam) to an influx of Turkish people moving into Crooswijk.

To add more credibility to his argument, he said that his father was very welcoming at first. However, as the Turkish community grew and kept asking for more help, the “native” Crooswijkers started to get annoyed – indicating a positive self and negative other presentation (Augoustinos & Every, 2007). In light of this story, Sjaak said:

...and that has nothing to do with being from Turkey, eating different food, or following another religion. But I think it just has to do with culture. And uh, if you put a lot of different cultures somewhere in a native neighbourhood... yeah, that will clash at some point. (Sjaak, 67)

Interestingly, there are several contradictions in Sjaak’s story: (1) he starts by saying he is against any form of discrimination but then legitimises it and (2) he uses a structural opposition between ‘culture’ and aspects of culture (country of origin, food, and religion). Saying contradictory things and highlighting ‘culture’ as the problem allow Sjaak to critique the ‘Other’ without feeling ‘racist’ and defend and legitimise his own privileged position (Essed & Trienekens, 2008; Hughey, 2022; Machin & Mayr, 2012). Lastly, Sjaak never mentions ‘discrimination’ when talking about how the Turkish people were treated in Crooswijk, pointing toward this word being silenced.

However, even though individuals may have internalised such colour-blind and race-neutral discourses, additions to personal experiences – such as reading an article about how people with a migration background are disadvantaged while “Dutch [...] are preferred” (Yvonne) or through conversations with others – triggered individuals to engage in some processes of reflexivity. For instance, after I specifically mentioned discrimination, Sjaak emphasised that, through his hobby (basketball), he had gained many “friends with different nationalities” and that, in his experience, Black basketball players were merely praised for their abilities and talents. Thanks to this, Sjaak had “never experienced any discrimination. Not consciously”. It may be small, but by adding the words ‘not consciously’, Sjaak shows some real-time reflexivity as he adds nuance to his own words and admits that discrimination may still exist even if he does not see or experience it himself (Billig, 1988).

Nonetheless, these processes of reflexivity remain limited as they are often immediately followed by a justification for this discrimination; through a narrative of a bad experience with “a large Black man” (Yvonne) in the supermarket or by emphasising how the ZP-debate “polarises” and

causes “discrimination to flourish” (Sjaak). Hence, even when discrimination is being addressed, the ensuing inequalities remain unaddressed. By focusing on the ‘Other’ in what causes discrimination, White-Dutch identities remain the invisible status quo (Golash-Boza, 2016; Lewis, 2004; Wekker, 2016). Hence, instead of fighting discrimination, such narratives work to justify and amplify existing inequalities (Bonilla-Silva, 2018).

As discussed earlier, discussions of colonial history, slavery and discrimination have also long been prone to tactics of silencing within Dutch public discourses (Balkenhol, 2016). Journalism is essential here:

When journalism gets involved, when people start publishing about it, something like this starts to simmer. [...] Uhm, because a newscast is intrusive and many people watch the news. [...] So then, you get confronted with it. If you also read about it in the newspapers. Then yes, you get an idea about that. But it wasn’t discussed back then. (Eduard, 69)

Thus, after years of doing the opposite, the media have helped draw attention to these issues (Hansen, 2018; Vliet, 2020). Niels highlighted the persistence with which media do this: “Well, it seems... there’s a lot of talk about it in the media, a lot of articles about it and its history... and uh... It seems like it’s some kind of uh collective inherited guilt that still lives”. Although Niels first rejected this “inheritance debt”, he later said that:

Maybe it’s a good thing because that’s never really been discussed. It had, uh, as it were, disappeared into history. At one point, slavery was abolished, and there’s never really been a collective processing... it seems. So I guess that’s why it’s all resurfacing now. (Niels, 65)

Niels’ pivot shows how media representations can support discussions and vice versa, and how interviews can prompt reflexivity processes (Giddens, 1991; Riach, 2009). Hence, media can expose audiences to alternative views and create openings for critical reflexivity, but this critical reflexivity is neither a given nor a linear process (Deuze, 2011; Giddens, 1991; Hall, 1973).

Although these older White-Dutch individuals avoided using social media because they felt social media lacked nuance and were a place where people just “swear at each other” (Egbert), their meaning-making processes were still influenced by the ever-evolving media landscape (Delli Carpini & Williams, 2020; O’Loughlin, 2020). For instance, issues such as colonialism and slavery were described by participants as part of a “media hype” (Sjaak). Although these individuals mainly read about these topics in newspapers or saw them on TV, they are part of the anti-racist framing of activists who strongly depended on social media to get their initial message across (Chadwick, 2013;

Nederland wordt beter, n.d.). However, because these individuals only learned about these arguments via traditional media, their meaning-making processes were often limited to mere spectatorship – resulting in resignation – instead of active constructors of the social world (Dahlgren, 1981).

4.1.3 The Relativity of Time

Therefore, looking back and re-assessing the Dutch history of colonialism and slavery seemed unnecessary for some individuals, as “we didn’t do that” (Yvonne). Hence, because colonialism and slavery are in the past, some individuals deemed it unnecessary to keep addressing them. Instead, they should be viewed in light of their own time, when these things were still socially accepted. Thus, although individuals highlighted the importance of “learning from the mistakes you’ve made in the past”, by saying that highlighting this past in light of the tradition of ZP “is a waste of time” (Sjaak) they neglect to reflect critically on the harmful effect these aspects of history still have today: in the form of colonial and other hegemonic discourses (Balkenhol, 2016; Essed & Trienekens, 2008; van den Broek, 2020; van Sterkenburg et al., 2012; van Sterkenburg et al., 2021; Wekker, 2016). This way, these individuals avoid (re-)assessing current systems of exclusion, allowing themselves to remain in a position of privilege (DiAngelo, 2018).

However, viewing things in light of their own time also meant for some people that things that were once acceptable and innocent were no more in light of modernity. For some, this was about the social norm; for instance that the Sinterklaas songs “shouldn’t be sung anymore” (Elly). For others, this was more an intrinsic feeling that “it is indeed the way in which Zwarte Piet is portrayed. Like stupid” (Agnes). Agnes described how she now feels uncomfortable when someone still dresses up as ZP, as “it does say something about someone’s view”. Hence, the meaning of tradition changes, making them no longer reflexively justifiable (Giddens, 1991; Hall, 2013). These considerations are highly subjective: where some feel they can no longer sing the songs from their youth, others “just keep singing” (Yvonne) (Giddens, 1991; Mannheim, 1952; Mezirow, 2000). Nonetheless, realising that something is no longer innocent is painful and confronting because as old habits become scrutinised in modern society, “it’s almost like you’ve done something wrong yourself” (Rob). It requires the individual to become aware of tacit assumptions which have influenced many of their past attitudes and actions (Riach, 2009; Kluttz et al., 2020; Mezirow, 2000).

Hence, these reflexivity and transformative learning processes were driven by social change as public discourses evolve and times change (Giddens, 1991; Kluttz et al., 2020). However, engaging in these processes remains something one has to actively ‘do’, otherwise the social change will just pass them by, leading to individuals feeling unhappy about these changes. Nonetheless, once individuals were able to get passed these uncomfortable feelings and accept that the “symbolism [of their youth] no longer applies” (Eduard), they experienced personal growth and a “wider view [...] on society” (Agnes).

4.2 Reflexivity and Others

Simultaneously, individual transformative learning processes also contribute to social change, as they are necessary for an open discussion (Giddens, 1991; Kluttz et al., 2020). Such a discussion – in which White individuals are open to listening to the activists’ arguments that foreground how race and racism are used to justify social inequalities – is an essential political means to fight existing inequalities within the current exclusionary system (Golash-Boza, 2016).

However, being open to alternative perspectives is not a given, especially not when such perspectives were long being kept out of public discourses. Even with these alternative perspectives appearing in Dutch media nowadays, media reception remains a complicated and subjective process (Hall, 1973; Vliet, 2020). Therefore, besides the necessity of public discourses offering multiple perspectives on issues, individuals must actively engage in meaning-making processes and accept these perspectives as valid (Mezirow, 2000).

Thus, reflexivity is produced through the scope of these various perspectives by becoming aware of them, accepting them as ‘valid’, and assessing them. The following sections outline how individuals engaged with the ZP-debate concerning the perspectives of others and how their reflexive meaning-making practices were influenced by (1) media narratives and (2) personal experiences.

4.2.1 Media Narratives

As already highlighted, Dutch public discourses had long left little space for Black experiences, but instead pitied Black identities and, in so doing, reinforced hierarchical differences between the dominant White ‘Us’ and the inferior Black ‘Them’ (Balkenhol, 2016; Euijck & Rensen, 2017; Georgiou, 2018; Hall, 2013; Krumer-Nevo & Benjamin, 2010; Vliet, 2020). These hierarchical differences were further enhanced through colonial discourses which described the period of Dutch colonialism as ‘The Golden Age’ and through which NL’s role in slave trade was downplayed (van Sterkenburg et al., 2012; Vliet, 2020). With the anti-ZP activists linking ZP to Dutch colonialism and slavery, they make these discourses explicit. In other words, through the activists’ efforts and the media attention they have received in the past years, the issues were put on the public agenda, forcing Dutch-White individuals to engage with the activists’ arguments.

However, this individual assessment remains influenced by the aforementioned hegemonic discourses because they have fed into a ready-made filter through which Dutch-White individuals view the perspectives of others (Balkenhol, 2016; Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Giddens, 1991; Golash-Boza, 2016; van den Broek, 2020; Wekker, 2016). For some individuals, this ready-made filter limits the conscious engagement in accepting the perspectives of Black people as valid. Individuals may adopt these discourses in everyday life when talking about race:

Maybe they [...] use less brain capacity after all. That they think like that? [...] And the ideas of people who may have that [...]. [T]hat they get... like: we are discriminated

against, for we have been slaves. That they allow themselves to be influenced by that.
(Olaf, 92)

There are several ways in which Olaf's adaptation of hegemonic discourses contributes to his lack of openness to non-White perspectives. Firstly, he indicates that people who criticise ZP use "less brain capacity" and that the idea of being discriminated against is implemented into people's brains. In saying this, he implies that people who advocate against ZP are not intelligent enough to think for themselves and to judge whether or not ZP is racist; a narrative also prominent in Dutch colonial discourses (Balkenhol, 2016; van Sterkenburg et al., 2012). Moreover, by saying that people "allow themselves to be influenced," he implies that they have a choice in the matter; that someone can actively choose to feel discriminated against. In doing so, structural racial inequalities in Dutch society are ignored, and the privileged position of White people remains justified (Ahearn, 2011; Bonilla-Silva, 2018; DiAngelo, 2018; Golash-Boza, 2016; van den Broek, 2020; Wekker, 2016).

Olaf was not the only participant to adapt hegemonic discourses while assessing the anti-ZP activists' messages. Several others, albeit more subtle, engaged in similar tactics by highlighting the activists' efforts as aggressive, emotional or irrational. Such tactics show the difficulties for movements to get their message across, as they limit people's openness to the activists' arguments. Hence, the recognition of mundane racism remains limited, despite the activists' attempts to draw attention to it (Seikkula, 2021). In other words, effects of the anti-racist struggle of criticising the White normativity within the tradition of ZP are limited due to the very structures and conventions the activists are aiming to challenge (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993; Hall, 1991; Seikkula, 2021).

However, the activists' efforts are legitimised through media attention, which may contribute to individual openness to these perspectives (Rohlinger & Vaccaro, 2013). Notwithstanding, media attention does not equal openness; levels of openness to an outsider's perspective are subjective (Giddens, 1991; Hall, 1973; Owens et al., 2010). For instance, where the criticism of the United Nations prompted some individuals to look at ZP from an outsider's perspective "because you never saw it that way" (Eduard), others said that when such organisations get involved, "it's a long way off" (Marco) and that they should mind their own business.

The framing of these perspectives remains important for individual meaning-making practices (Banks, 2018; Croteau Hoynes, 2019; Ince et al., 201). For instance, a news item in which Ghanese-Dutch anti-ZP activist Akwasi stated that he would kick the next ZP he saw in the face led to a rejection of the activist's efforts as he was deemed "not being open to nuance" (Sebastian). On the other hand, an item in the satirical TV programme 'Zondag met Lubach' where the White-Dutch tv-host, Arjen Lubach, performed a rap together with the Curaçao-Dutch rapper Fresku in which they criticised Dutch colonialism and colonial discourses was described as "an excellent way to make it clear" (Sebastian).

Besides Sebastiaan, several others also described the efforts by Black activists as problematic while highlighting the efforts of White media actors as “a right way” (Elly) to address the issues of ZP. Hence, it may not merely require media attention to validate the anti-ZP activists’ efforts in a way that older White-Dutch individuals perceive them as valid; for some, it requires White-Dutch (media) actors to advocate for it.

However, that is not to say that a Black person’s arguments cannot be perceived as valid on their own merits. Rather, it matters whether and from which perspective these arguments are contextualised and portrayed. For instance, Egbert explained how reading about Black experiences changed his mind: “I did read interviews of people who were also Black, and were small children during the Sinterklaas period and that those children did not feel comfortable at all. They were made out for Piet, those children”. Hence, when media offer space for Black experiences to be highlighted from a Black perspective (rather than merely giving attention to activist efforts without contextualising them), there is more room for individuals to interpret and accept these experiences as valid (Vliet, 2020).

Nonetheless, it still requires individuals to decode such media narratives, which remains a subjective process (Hall, 1973). In doing so, merely understanding that several viewpoints may be correct does not automatically enable an individual to view the argument from another perspective as valid, especially not if one does not perceive oneself as an active participant in this construction of the social world (Dahlgren, 1981). This perhaps explains why Elly emphasised that ZP was “abolished [...] to be able to meet the wishes of those people”. Such non-reflexive viewer consciousness likely limits the possibility of engaging in transformative learning processes (Dahlgren, 1981; Mezirow, 2000).

4.2.2 Personal Experiences

Non-reflexive processes were also expressed as a fatigue of the debate causing participants to shut themselves off from it. This fatigue is related to White fragility and hegemonic Whiteness, as White people have become so used to being uncriticised that this ongoing critique feels like a lot and can be tiring (DiAngelo, 2018; Giddens, 1991; Vliet, 2020). These feelings come from a place of privilege, in which Whiteness has been the invisible status quo and challenging those hegemonic discourses can be difficult to resonate with for older White-Dutch people (Bañales et al., 2021; Fillieule, 2013; Golash-Boza, 2016; Hall, 1973; Kluttz et al., 2020; Lewis, 2004; Wekker, 2016).

Even when individuals actively engage with the anti-ZP arguments, personal experiences may still make it hard for individuals to truly accept the anti-ZP arguments and their proposed adaptations to the tradition because someone remains “that father who also played Zwarte Piet” (Leendert). Hence, transformative learning processes not only require an individual to view an issue from multiple perspectives but also to accept that your image of what is ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ may need to be adjusted

accordingly; even if that means that your past actions may now be deemed as ‘wrong’, however painful that may be (Giddens, 1991; Kluttz et al., 2020; Mezirow, 2000; Perera, 2020; Riach, 2009).

In contrast, Edith placed herself amid the debate as she described her struggles on the subject: “Yeah, if you think about it, you don’t really know what context you’re in. In some contexts, I’m White and in others... in this kind of discussion I don’t know”. Her background made Edith more “alerted to discrimination” than other White people. Hence, racial experiences matter as they make you more or less aware of and alert to them (Golash-Boza, 2016). Therefore, becoming aware of racism requires more active reflexive processes from White-Dutch people, who have the privilege to otherwise live “in a world without discrimination” (Edith).

One way in which individuals could actively engage in such processes and add to their personal experiences was through conversations with people/persons of colour close to them, making it “easier to sympathise with those arguments” (Rob). Hence, conversations with people with different racial experiences than your own contribute to transformative learning processes, as they can help you become aware of your taken-for-granted assumptions (Giddens, 1991; Mezirow, 2000). However, these conversations were also prompted between White-Dutch people: as media representations of the debate made it “a topic of conversation at a birthday party” (Rob). Hence, media prompted White-Dutch individuals to engage with the topic and discuss it with others, spurring reflexivity processes (Deuze, 2011).

The interviews were also an example of this, as I had never likely picked this research topic without those media representations. Hence, the conversations between the participants and myself contributed to individual reflexivity processes. Such reflexivity became evident when participants would add nuance to their own words, contradict earlier statements, pause and go back (their or my) earlier statements, or send a follow-up email on a later day to propose “a nice suggestion [to which] no one can take offence” (Niels) or to let me know that that “there are indeed not that many songs with Zwarte Piet” anymore (Elly).

4.3 Reflexivity and the ‘Self’

Finally, reflexivity was produced through the scope of the ‘self’. Producing reflexivity by actively questioning the ‘Self’ proved the most challenging. It requires the individual to assess oneself critically and become aware of one’s own racial biases. This process of reflexivity not only requires one to become aware of social forces which alienate and dehumanise, but also how these social forces have influenced oneself to alienate and dehumanise others (Holland, 1999).

In other words, it requires individuals to not only question where their own racial biases come from but also what these racial biases mean for their actions and attitudes concerning race and racism (Giddens, 1991; Kluttz et al., 2020). Thus, reflexivity through this scope does not entail looking at the ‘Self’ from an outside perspective, but it means assessing the ‘Self’ from the ‘Self’ (Giddens, 1991; Owens et al., 2010). In the context of the ZP-debate, this entailed addressing one’s racial biases to re-

construct the 'Self'. That is not to say that this re-construction is not influenced by the ever-changing society and perspectives of others. Rather, it is to say that, after realising how Whiteness, media, and activism come to play in individual reflexivity processes through the scope of an ever-changing society and of perspectives of others, an individual may take up and make sense of these outside influences and see how they have influenced the 'Self' and what these influences mean for one's identity construction.

Addressing these racial biases requires individuals to be open and understand where the anti-ZP arguments are coming from and to examine what accepting these arguments means for themselves. It requires asking oneself: how did these stereotypical images "influence me subconsciously?" (Agnes) and question whether "that's not how I look at those people, right?" (Rob).

Asking yourself such questions can lead to uncertainties about the beliefs upon which identity is built (Giddens, 1991; Owens et al., 2010). For instance, Rob described how discrimination had "always been an important point" for him and how he had actively fought against it through protests and within the trade union of which he was a prominent member. However, when others explained the effects of stereotypical images, he started questioning his own racial biases:

Yes, that shocked me. Then I had to try to switch a button for myself, and I did. But [...] first I had to be aware of it, before I could accept that I too had to deal with that, with the institutional racism that is part of your upbringing. (Rob, 66)

Through this scope, the scope of the 'Self' White-Dutch individuals can truly be reflexive about their *own* biases and address them. One can move beyond learning about existing inequalities and actively fight them here.

5. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to uncover individual reflexivity processes that older White-Dutch produce vis á vis racism, while also understanding how hegemonic power structures affect these individual meaning-making process. In this thesis, I have outlined three scopes through which older White-Dutch individuals produce reflexivity vis á vis racism amid the ZP-debate: (1) an ever-changing society, (2) others, and (3) the 'Self'. Production of reflexivity entails reflecting critically on oneself, and actively engaging with these reflections, to unravel structural inequalities and how these influence personal biases. Hence, it entails a struggle to become aware of one's tacit assumptions, taken-for-granted knowledge, and the "social forces" that feed into them (Giddens, 1991; Holland, 1999, p. 473). This process is complex and highly subjective, relying strongly on personal experiences.

Firstly, reflexivity was produced through the scope of an ever-changing society, meaning that individuals take up and make sense of past societal developments that have led to today's society. Processes of reflexivity differ from one person to the next, and assessing the 'Self' through the scope of society was made sense of by highlighting the influences of and on generational (dis)connectedness, public discourses, and the relativity of time. The Sinterklaas celebrations were part of a shared history that had long been passed on through generations. Realising that this tradition was no longer considered reflexively justifiable is painful for older Dutch White people. This pain is related to losing connection and a shared history with younger generations. It also comes with a realisation that the world one grew up in no longer exists and that older White-Dutch people have to adjust to these changes to stay connected and participate in society. Media influence the reflexivity processes on two levels: (1) individuals have adapted dominant hegemonic discourses around race and racism that were long (and to some extent still are) part of Dutch media narratives, and (2) they brought the anti-ZP arguments (which fight the very discourses media are responsible for) into the homes of these individuals. However, not all individuals are willing or able to put in the work to engage with these newly presented ideas, as they no longer feel like they are active participants or constructors of the current world, limiting the media influences to the first level.

These findings are in line with the literature, which emphasises that reflexivity has become a central feature of modernity as new evidence is continuously presented, and that individual reflexivity is driven by social change, with activism being important a driver for social change (Giddens, 1991; Kluttz et al., 2020; Mezirow, 2000). However, as modernity does not only continuously present new evidence but also evolves as a whole, it is crucial for older Dutch White people's reflexivity processes to feel like they remain active participants and constructors of this world (Dahlgren, 1981). If one does not, this may lead to resignation, meaning that individuals just take up the new evidence but feel like this evidence is presented in a world that is not their own anymore on which they do not have influence, leading to feelings of powerlessness and even irritation with social change. Hegemonic Whiteness is part and parcel of this resignation and irritation, as hegemonic discourses (through media and tradition) have fed into older White-Dutch individuals' ready-made filter throughout their lifetime,

resulting in an assumed earned privileged and inherent ‘goodness’ of White identities. Media play a vital role in this non-reflexive viewer consciousness, as they present the new evidence in a way that does not always add to individuals’ personal experiences (Dahlgren, 1981; Mezirow, 2000). However, at the same time, media can add to these personal experiences more indirectly by prompting conversations between individuals. Moreover, through the proper contextualisation of the evidence, media can also add in a more direct way to personal experiences, as long as individuals are willing to part with (parts of) their assumed reality.

Secondly, reflexivity vis á vis racism was produced through the scope of various perspectives which are brought up and influenced individual reflexive meaning-making practices through media narratives and personal experiences. Staying connected to this ever-changing and diversifying society is difficult for people who grew up in a predominantly White society with little space for alternative views. Hence, before they can assess non-White perspectives, older White-Dutch individuals have to engage actively and consciously in becoming aware of and accepting these perspectives as ‘valid’. For these older Dutch White people, media played a crucial part in this, as they offered alternative perspectives, highlighted and legitimised the efforts by anti-ZP activists, and contextualised the debate. However, without putting in the work to be open to these perspectives, reflexive processes through the scope of perspectives of others remained limited. Nonetheless, by enriching one’s personal experiences through conversations and placing oneself amid these perspectives, individuals produced reflexivity vis á vis racism. Nonetheless, this reflexivity is not produced without struggle, as accepting alternative perspectives as true may require the individual to re-construct the ‘Self’.

These findings add nuance to the existing literature – which emphasises the importance of one’s ability to look at an issue from multiple perspectives – by highlighting the vitalness, for older White people in particular, of not only *looking* but also accepting multiple perspectives as ‘valid’ (Riach, 2009, p. 360; Kluttz et al., 2020; Mezirow, 2000). That is not to say that all perspectives need to resonate with an individual, but rather that an individual needs to accept that there is not one big truth but several smaller truths, which are all an equal part of the social world (Hall, 2013). This accepting of alternative perspectives as ‘valid’ is not a given for older Dutch White people, whose meaning-making processes remain influenced by years of colonial discourses through which non-White identities and their ideas were invalidated (Balkenhol, 2016).

Thirdly, reflexivity was produced through the scope of the ‘Self’. This scope proved the most challenging, as it required individuals not only to become aware of external influences which enhance social inequalities but also how these have influenced oneself to (re)produce narratives, biases and behaviours which contribute to social inequalities and how one can actively address and combat this. Reflexivity through the scope of the ‘Self’ was produced by questioning how hegemonic discourses – of which stereotypical images such as ZP were part and parcel – had influenced one’s unconscious biases and treatment of people/persons of colour. Through this scope, one can go beyond knowing about inequities towards actively combating them.

These findings align with the literature, which highlights the struggles of reflexivity on an individual level and the importance of individual reflexivity for social change (Giddens, 1991; Kluttz et al., 2020; Mezirow, 2000). They add to this literature as they show how exactly this reflexivity is produced by older White-Dutch individuals who have engaged in these processes on their own merits – who have added to their personal experiences, remained an active constructor of the social world, taken up and made sense of social changes, and processed all of those external influences within themselves.

Thus, to answer the RQs, reflexivity vis á vis racism is produced by older Dutch White citizens in the context of the ZP-campaign by taking up and making sense of the social changes and perspectives of others and how these external influences relate to one's place in society and attitude towards others. Moreover, reflexivity is produced by looking at these influences through the scope of the 'Self' and assessing what these external factors 'do' for personal unconscious racial biases. The media played a role in both limiting and enhancing these meaning-making practices: through years of hegemonic discourses, stereotypical representations of Black identities and uncritical representations of White identities, they have fed into the taken-for-granted knowledge that informs how older Dutch White individuals view the world of today. Moreover, media representations of new perspectives do not always add to people's personal experiences, as they are, in the case of the anti-ZP debate, often told from a White perspective that is viewing the efforts by Black activists, resulting in resignation rather than transformative learning. However, these representations may indirectly add to personal experiences by sparking conversations with others. Moreover, when Black ideas are told from a Black perspective or otherwise contextualised in a way that resonates with individuals, they do have the power to spark transformative learning processes.

5.1 Limitations

Like any other research project, this project also has some limitations. Firstly, this particular project did not allow for a second coder. As such, my personal background of being a White-Dutch 27-year-old woman from a city in the south of NL and my attitude towards ZP played an essential role in the findings. Hence, there is a substantial chance that another person would arrive at a different conclusion. However, I have reduced this limitation through transparency and extensive researcher reflexivity. Moreover, as this research is grounded in a constructivist paradigm, it also embraces the idea that this conclusion is not the only truth but one truth amongst many others.

Secondly, the interviewer-interviewee age gap may have limited the interviewee's trust in me, as they felt they could perhaps not identify with me as they would with someone older. Similarly, I believe that the age gap made me behave more politely at times, which may have sometimes limited my critical questioning. Moreover, it may have led participants to be less upfront about their views, as I perhaps represented the changing society that some found difficult to accept. However, at the same time, this age gap may have also allowed for an extensive analysis of the differences between the

society they grew up in, I grew up in, and the one we live in today. In that sense, I believe that it can be seen as a positive thing for this research that I, too, celebrated Sinterklaas without the current public controversies around ZP, as this enabled me to relate to the participants in their struggles of reflexivity.

Thirdly, the difficulties in finding participants forced me to adjust some requirements along the way. However, broadening the group of participants also offered some unexpected opportunities to enhance and deepen my final analysis.

The last limitation is related to limited time and resources: I believe that the research could benefit from more time and perhaps more resources. However, given that this was always meant to be a short-term project, I believe that the solid theoretical grounding and the number of interviews allowed for well-rounded research.

5.2 Future Research

In light of the last limitation, there is also an opportunity for future research. Given that reflexivity is an ongoing process influenced by personal experiences, it would be relevant to expand this research into a long-term project in which the findings are discussed with and perhaps among participants. This way, the research further adds to personal experiences, potentially sparking more, and perhaps deeper, reflexivity processes that can further enhance the research on the topic. Moreover, things someone said in a previous interview may enhance a discussion that could lead to more sticky moments, allowing the capture of more real-time reflexivity (Riach, 2009).

Another recommendation for future research is to focus on older non-White-Dutch people in light of the ZP-debate. Specifically, it would be relevant to learn from their personal experiences of growing up in a world that did not offer space for Black experiences in public discourses. Did they also experience it in that manner? Moreover, how do non-White people look at the current debate around race and racism?

Lastly, in light of learning from personal experiences in colonialism, it would be fascinating to delve deeper into the identity formation of people who grew up in colonies and moved to the coloniser's country (e.g. Dutch-Indonesian older individuals).

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Appendix A: Topic list

This topic list was translated from Dutch to English.

Starting questions

1. Informed consent, followed by oral agreement (recorded) and a quick gathering of demographic information:
 - a. Could you perhaps introduce yourself?
 - b. How old are you?
 - c. Current and previous professional status
 - d. Education level
 - e. Place of residence (past/current)
2. Generally useful questions (whenever applicable):
 - a. Do you think this is typical for Dutch culture?
 - b. How do you look at this now? Is this different from before?

Topic 1: History of Sinterklaas – from youth memories to family traditions (e.g. celebrating it with children and grandchildren)

- To start of this interview, I was hoping you could tell me something about the way in which you celebrated Sinterklaas as a child.
 - Possible follow-up questions: was this controversial in any way back then? Do you remember whether there was any talk about ‘Zwarte Piet’ and perhaps the controversies in the media back then?
- And could we perhaps make a bridge to the way in which you celebrated Sinterklaas in a later period of your life? Perhaps with your children? Or even your grandchildren?
 - What were some of the traditions and customs in your family?
 - Possible follow-up question: do you think these things would be considered controversial nowadays?

- Do you still celebrate Sinterklaas? If so, in what way?

Topic 2: News/entertainment media that left a mark on the participant in relation to Zwarte Piet.

- We have talked about your memories of Sinterklaas celebrations, and now I would like to move on to talking about Zwarte Piet in the media.
- Could you explain in your own words how you remember that Zwarte Piet has been in the media?
 - How was this back then, and how is that nowadays?
- What newspaper do you read? (How) do you remember their reporting on Zwarte Piet throughout the years?
- Do you think that this is different than for instance [insert a newspaper that differs on an ideological level]?
- Do you remember any memorable tv-moments revolving around ZP?
- Have you ever seen a debate about the topic on social media? Or perhaps participated in it or heard about it?

- From Zwarte Piet in the media, tot he debate that is still being held today surrounding Zwarte Piet. May I ask you to tell me in your own words what the debates are about according to you?

- Follow-ups to connect the debate to their own media consumption, but also to conversations with family and friends.
- What do you think of the debate? How did you experience it?
- I'm curious to see whether you feel that your viewpoints are also represented in the media.
- Could you think of a newspaper article or tv programme that talked about these debates and made an impression on you?

Topic 4: Knowledge of and viewpoint on the activism around 'Zwarte Piet'

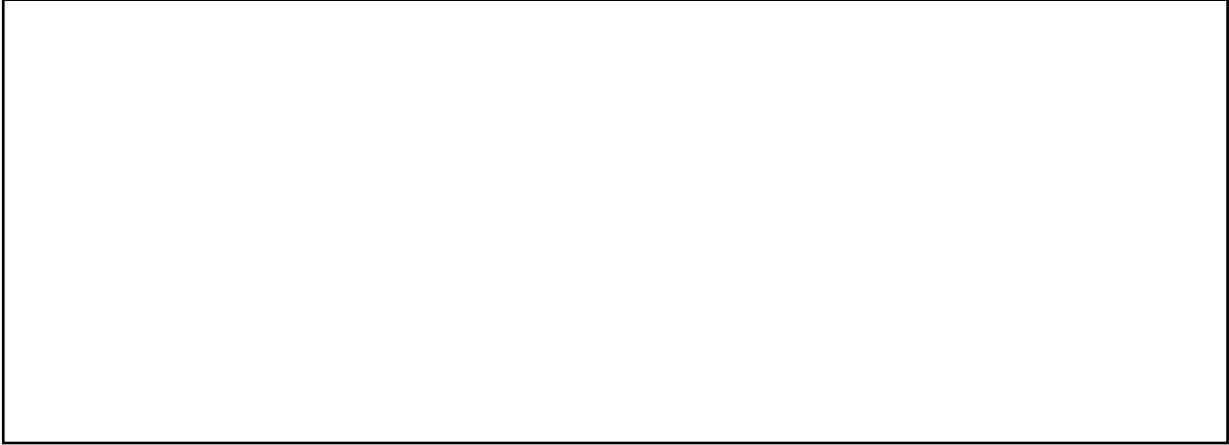
We just spoke about the debate around Zwarte Piet, but I was also wondering what you think about the role of anti-ZP activism which we have seen over the last years in the Netherlands.

- Have you ever seen any protests?
- Have you ever participated in any protests?
- Have you heard about contra-activism, such as people who protest against the anti-ZP protests?
 - What do you think of them?

Closing questions:

- To end each interview, I ask every participant what their thoughts are on the statement: "Zwarte Piet is racism".

- Thank you very much for sharing all these experiences and thoughts with me. I'm almost done, but I was just wondering whether there is anything about the subject that you would like to add to our conversation, or whether there is still a question that you feel could be interesting and/or relevant in light of this topic?



Appendix B: Recruitment Message

This recruitment message was translated from Dutch to English.

Dear Sir / Madam,

My name is Maud van Roessel and I am currently working on my graduation research for the master Media, Culture & Society at the Erasmus University in Rotterdam. This research aims to investigate the stories and experiences of White Dutch people aged 65 and older with regard to (the debate surrounding and the changes to) Zwarte Piet. To investigate this, I would like to interview people aged 65 and older who live in the Randstad.

Do you recognise yourself in this and are you open to an interview? Then I would like to ask you to contact me via the contact details below. I would like to emphasize that there are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers. Please feel free to answer in any way you see fit and appropriate. Of course, you don't have to answer questions that you don't want to answer either. In addition, any participation is voluntary and you can cancel your participation at any time. All participants in this survey will be kept anonymous and personal details will not be included in the final report. Furthermore, the interview answers are only used for this specific study.

So, have you followed the debate around Zwarte Piet and/or do you find it an interesting topic? Do you generally like to follow the news and/or other media? And do you have the time and interest to talk to me about this during an interview (of ± 45-60 minutes)? Then I would greatly appreciate it if you could contact me so that we can make an appointment for the interview.

My email address is: 583675mr@student.eur.nl

My phone number is: 06-40796183

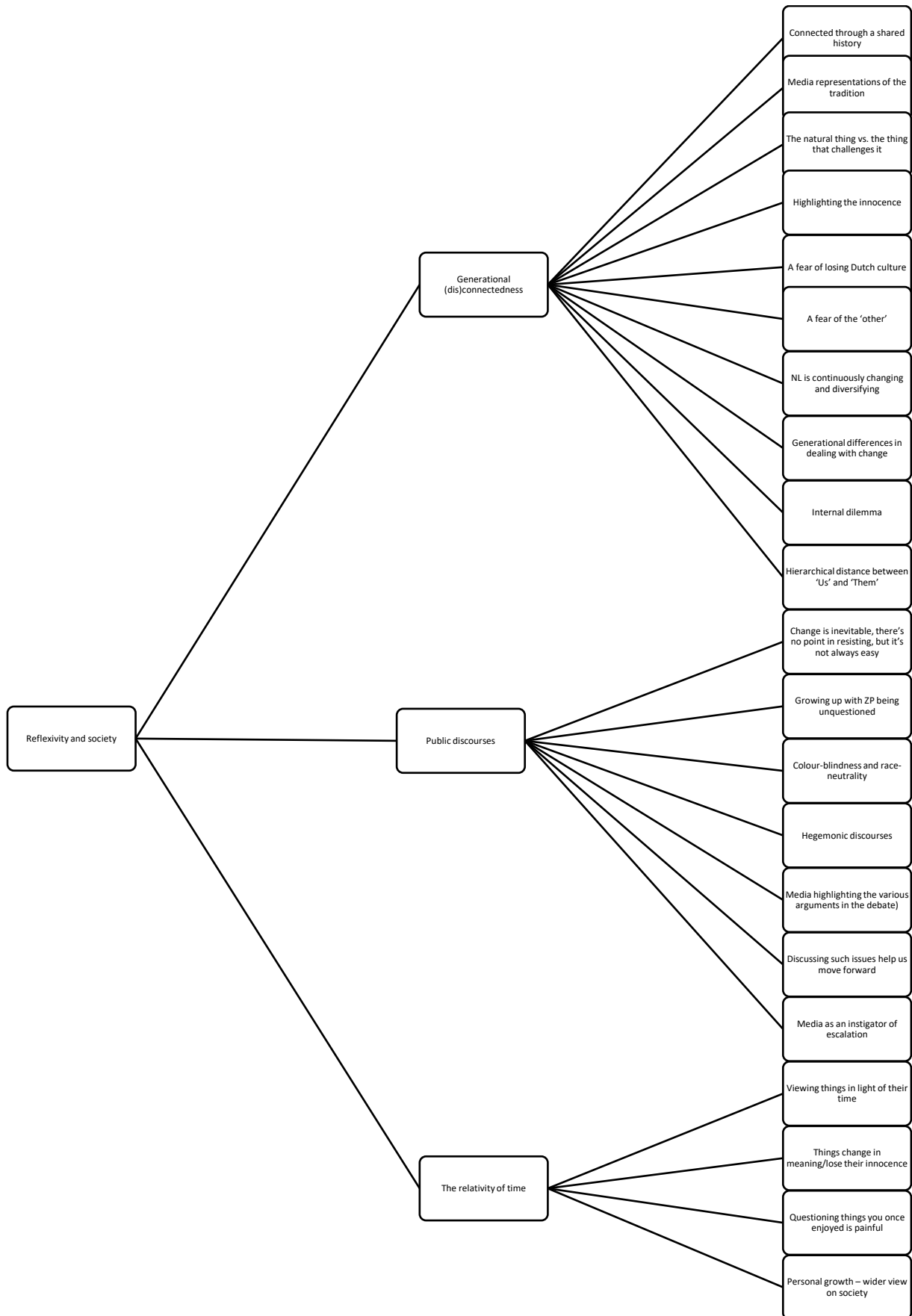
Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further questions. I look forward to your response and would really appreciate it if you would help me graduate!

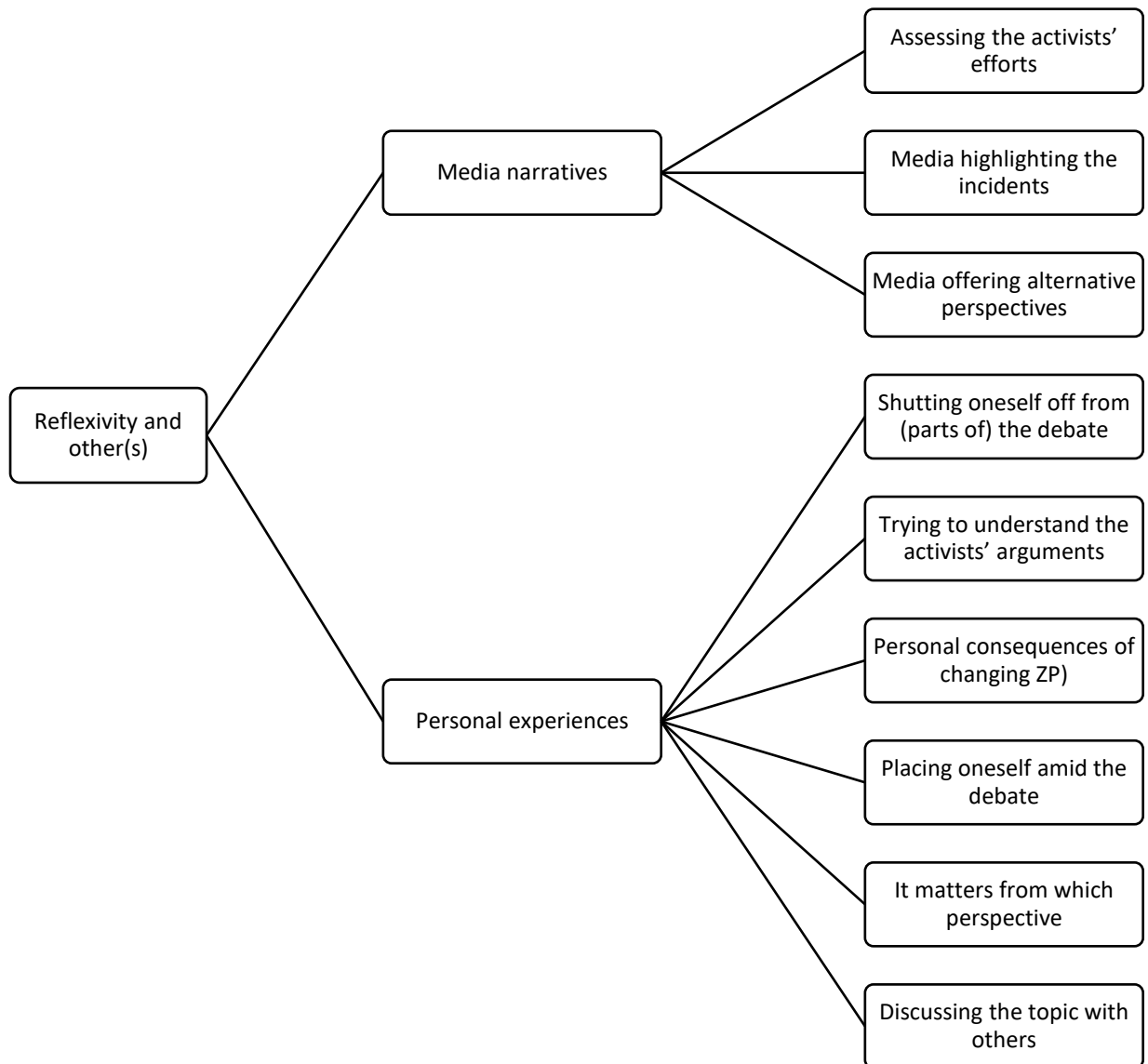
With Kind Regards,
Maud van Roessel

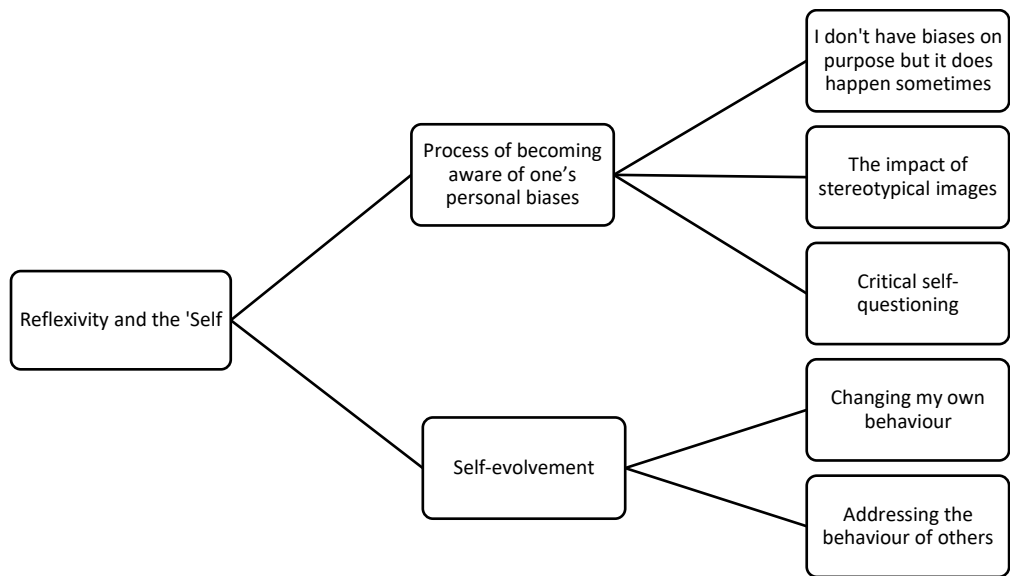


Appendix C: Coding Tree

As explained in section 3.3.1, there were three steps of the analysis. The first step consisted of an open coding, through which I generated a total of 963 codes. As such a large number of codes is not manageable, the second phase was focused on transferring these codes into a more manageable number of categories, which were then used to go back to the text to be improved. Lastly, the final categories were grouped into three overarching themes. Although these three themes already emerged through these initial categories, the initial categories were still too substantial. Therefore, I later added an extra layer to help organise these initial categories. To illustrate the coding process, Figure 1 outlines the coding tree, departing from the overarching themes. Secondly, the coding tree outlines the extra layer of categories. The third layer of the coding tree illustrates the initial categories.







Appendix D: Form for Informed Consent

This form was translated from Dutch to English.

Form for informed consent

Dear participant,

First of all, thank you for participating in this survey! In this informed consent form you can read all relevant information about the goals of the study and the possible consequences of participating in this study. The research is being conducted by Maud van Roessel, who is conducting this research as part of the master's degree Media, Culture & Society at Erasmus University Rotterdam.

This research aims to investigate the stories and experiences of white Dutch people aged 65 and older with regard to (the debate surrounding and the changes to) Zwarte Piet. I want to emphasize that there are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers. Please feel free to answer in any way you see fit and appropriate.

There are no apparent physical, legal or economic risks associated with participating in this study. You don't have to answer questions you don't want to answer. Your participation is voluntary and you can cancel your participation at any time. Participation in this study will not directly benefit you personally, nor will you receive any financial compensation for your participation. However, with your participation you can contribute to increasing our understanding of the effects of public debates surrounding racism on people aged 65 and over in the Netherlands.

By agreeing to participate in this research, you agree that the audio of the conversation will be recorded. However, these recordings are not shared with anyone and stored securely. Only citations from the transcripts will be included in the final report and the transcripts will be made available to the teachers. The recordings and transcripts are only used for this research and have no other purposes.

All participants in this research are kept anonymous. Anonymity in this case means that, although the researcher knows who these participants are, no personal data that could reveal someone's identity will be included in the final report. The form at hand will also not be included in the final report or shared with third parties. Only the following personal data are included in the final report: age, gender, place of residence, and any (past) work and/or education level (if applicable).

If you have any questions, or if you later decide to end your participation in this study, please feel free to contact me at:

- Name: Maud van Roessel

- Phone number: 06-40796183
- Email address: 583675mr@student.eur.nl

Please sign on the next page to consent to participate in this study.

With Kind Regards,
Maud van Roessel

I hereby declare that I fully understand the objectives of the study. I am aware that the conversation will be recorded and I give permission for this. I am also aware that I can withdraw from participating in this study at any time if I wish to do so.

Date:

Name of the participant:

Signature participant:

I, Maud van Roessel, hereby declare that I adhere to the above agreements and that the data processing is done in a confidential manner.

Date:

Name of the principal investigator:

Signature principle investigator: