Radicalization in the Climate Movement: How do relational dynamics explain Extinction Rebellion Netherlands' radicalization between 2018 and 2021?

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Introduction

Social movement radicalization has long been the subject of government concern and academic interest. Understanding how and when social movement escalation occurs is vital for national security (Wilner & Dubouloz, 2010). It is equally of interest for activist groups aiming to remain non-violent and can help to address radicalizing elements within their ranks.

With the attempt to take no normative stance on radicalization or the social movement in question, this paper examines how relational dynamics explain Extinction Rebellion NL's radicalization between 2018 and 2021. The research outlines different relational dynamics and which of them affect Extinction Rebellion's radicalization.

Literature Review

Understanding escalation in violence and radicalization has been the topic of a vast amount of research in varying fields including social psychology, terrorism studies, conflict studies and social movement studies. The literature aimed at understanding the roots of terrorism and the escalation of violence have looked at radicalization as an organized phenomenon (Crenshaw, 2001), an individual phenomenon (Stern, 2003), or as part of a network (Sageman, 2004). Research on the topic often involves an analysis of disadvantageous conditions causing an individual to radicalize, or an ideological grounding as an explanation for radicalization.

Social movement theorists have often criticized the study of radicalization in the field of terrorism studies, arguing that many scholars in the field are directly or indirectly involved in counterterrorism, leading to a narrowed vision on radicalization. Practical policy concerns have driven subjective research on radicalization, while the standards of empirical research are considered low (della Porta, Haupt, 2012, p.311). As a response, attention to radicalization from social movement theorists has increased. Unlike in terrorism studies, social movement theorists have been effective in 'de-exceptionalizing violence and locating it in broader contexts and more complex processes' (della Porta, Haupt, 2012, p.313).

Research on radicalization within social movement studies has been diverse. Tarrow (1997) examined political violence through the concept of cycles of contention. He argues that periods of intensified conflict in a political system, with a rapid diffusion of collective action between actors, and increased innovation in tactics alternate with periods of lower levels of contention in continuous cycles. Cycles of contention develop through several

stages: expansion, institutionalization/radicalization, exhaustion, and re-stabilization (Tarrow 1997, p.199). Within these cycles of contention, social movements scholars have tried to explain the radicalization stage in greater detail.

Recent social movement research has examined radicalization through the so-called relational approach, which argues that radicalization is an effect of interplay between actors (Alimi, 2011, della Porta, 2018.). The relational approach looks at the interaction between actors within and outside social movements and how this affects collective contention. This approach makes exchanges between actors a central focus of analysis. The interplay between actors involves a degree of creativity and negotiation that lead to changes in movement tactics and repertoires. (Tilly, 2003). The relational approach contrasts with the ideational approach (that focuses on ideology, beliefs, and values) and behavioural approach (that focuses on personal motives, and opportunities) (Alimi, 2011). The relational approach has the advantage of identifying different arenas of interaction, comparing them to one another and measuring their different effects on social movement radicalization.

When analysing radicalization, the relational approach focuses on the complex interactions between a range of relevant factors that may or may not lead to the appearance or increase of political violence in a social movement repertoire of contention. Radicalization is a gradual process whereby actions and reactions between actors in a reciprocal relationship lead to incremental change in repertoires of contention (Taylor & Horgan, 2012). Especially interactions between social movements and state authorities have been researched (Alimi, 2011; della Porta, 2014). Research by McAdam (1983) outlines how repertoires of contention can evolve over time. With a lack of institutionalized power, opposition movements must devise unconventional techniques of enacting change: a process McAdam refers to as 'tactical innovation'. In order to address and counter such tactics, authorities must adapt. The continuous process of tactical innovation and adaptation between the challenger and authorities lead to the evolution of repertoires of contention. In some cases, continuous clashes with law enforcement can lead to increased radicalism as '[violence] develops relationally from interpersonal processes. Violent forms of contention usually belong to a wider repertoire, and social movements often shift between violent and nonviolent forms of action or use them simultaneously' (della Porta, 2018).

Theoretical Framework

Alimi (2011) outlines 3 so called 'arenas' wherein relational mechanisms operate that could lead to radicalization. Dynamics of contention are categorized in these 3 conceptual spaces where a pair of actors interact. How these pairs of actors interact with each other in the separate arenas can help determine the process of radicalization. The first one is *competition for power between movement actors*. Opposition movements usually consist of a range of actors whose interests align or contrast in varying degrees. Different groups may complement each other's strategies or undermine them. Competition can emerge between groups over dominant strategies, agenda-setting ability and resources.

The second arena of relational mechanisms that Alimi (2011) outlines is the *unfavourable opportunity/threat ratio* between a movement and the political system. This mechanism looks at shifts in opportunities or threats in the political environment that a movement operates in, which can be at the regional, national, or international level. Changes in public opinion, political alliances, or social cleavages, to name a few, will lead to a shift in political leverage that a movement holds. For example, if there is an increased perception that political elites are unwilling to act on an issue, or are actively blocking action, a social movement actor may feel a need to escalate tactics of contention. In other words, if there is a decrease in the political leverage of a movement actor vis-à-vis the political system, one can speak of an *unfavourable opportunity/threat ratio*.

The final mechanism is *Action-counteraction escalation* which occurs between a social movement actor and authorities. Building on McAdam (1983), Alimi (2011) recognizes the possibility of escalation in the interplay between opposition movements and authorities. Each side incrementally escalates its contention/repression in response to the other, creating an upward cycle of action and counteraction. Escalation occurs when transgressive means of contention feature. While contained means of contention occur between established actors, and through legitimate means of contention (from the perspective of authorities), transgressive means of contention are a result of new challenging actors upsetting the established norms, or one of the parties develops new modes of contention (challenger) or repression (authorities).

The relational approach is useful in establishing arenas that can be studied separately and can help isolate sources of radicalization. Identifying sources of radicalization within social movements can help academics further understand reasons for escalation.

While these processes have been described in other contexts, little is known about how they apply to climate movements. This is especially important as climate action groups are becoming increasingly visible as a force that can determine the political agenda-setting of climate policies. In this thesis, I address this gap in knowledge by examining Extinction Rebellion (hereafter: XR) as a case of a radicalizing social movement actor. I look into these issues by using the following research question: How do relational dynamics explain XR's radicalization between 2018 and 2021?

Methodology

Case Selection

Using Alimi's (2011) approach to analysing radicalization, this research will look at what caused XR to radicalize, and which relational dynamics played a role in the escalatory trajectory. An interview[1] that I conducted in early 2021 showed that XR has shifted to more confrontational and disruptive tactics since 2018. Official sources have also kept a close eye on XR: the Dutch counter terrorism authority (NCTV) has listed them as a new potential threat. According to a 2019 report by the NCTV, XR is non-violent as of yet, but with a potential to escalate and radicalize (NOS, 2019). The NCTV report does not mention on what basis these conclusions were drawn. Considering these developments, the relational mechanisms that contributed to the escalation of tactics and radicalization of XR will be examined.

The term radicalization is widely used in popular media as well as in a wide range of academic literature. The concept is ever changing and differs between academic fields. Opposition movements are easily called radical in popular media, and conceptual stretching has led to the loss of some analytic value. In social movement studies, radicalization has generally been defined as a development from non-violent, to gradually more disruptive and violent repertoires of contention over time. In line with Tilly's (1978, p. 176) view on political violence: violent repertoires of contention are those where people are harmed or property is either seized or damaged, despite resistance from authorities. For the purposes of this research, I will take a narrower definition of radicalization as I am tracing radicalization over a relatively short period of time (end of 2018-2021). Additionally, the shifts in tactical

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[1] Interview with Carla, 2021. (Hereafter: Interview with Carla) (Full interview in Appendix E)

change in XR in this timeframe is relatively small. To accommodate to this context, and to measure escalation more accurately, I will define radicalization as a gradual increase in disruptive repertoires of contention over time, provoking more police action and/or a gradual increase in tactics to evade or resist police efforts of repression.

In this research I will exclusively focus on the Dutch branch of XR. Due to XR's decentralized nature each national branch acts relatively independently, often developing their own set of tactics and political alliances depending on national context. While XR also operates in a decentralised fashion in The Netherlands, there is enough coherence at a national level to analyse it as a unit.

Using the relational approach outlined in the previous section, this research will examine the interaction XR's relations on three different levels: between XR and other groups in the climate movement, XR and the wider political environment and XR and law enforcement. I will briefly outline each of these 3 arenas of interaction in the context of XR before outlining the data collection method.

The first arena, *competition for power between movement actors,* will look at the relationship between XR and other environmental activist movements in the Netherlands. Relevant actors within the Dutch environmental social movement include Greenpeace, Fridays for Future, Code Rood and Milieudefensie. While there are many more social movements, these 4 are the most prominent actors on climate change in the Netherlands and will therefore be examined for level of competition vis-à-vis XR. Urgenda, while being an important actor on climate issues, was not included as they deal exclusively in legal procedures. The research will examine interactions and evaluate to what extent competition exists between XR and other groups, and how it could lead to escalation and radicalization of XR.

In the second arena, *unfavourable threat/opportunity ratio,* I will examine how the Dutch political environment has shifted in favour of or against XR. XR has been active in the Netherlands since 2018 (Extinctionrebellion.nl, 2021). While this is a short period of time, shifts are occurring fast in public opinion (Corner et al., 2020; Shwom et al., 2015) and in climate policy (Lestestuiver, 2017). With this in mind, the ratio of political environmental threats and opportunities will be examined to see what role they have played on XR's radicalization since it started operations in The Netherlands.

In the third arena, *action-counteraction escalation,* I will analyse the interplay between XR actions and Dutch law enforcement repression. While the UK branch of XR has recently employed more violent tactics, such as destruction of property at Barclays Bank headquarters (Extinctionrebellion.uk, 2021), XR Netherlands has limited its tactics to legal demonstrations or non-violent direct action (NVDA) as modes of disruptive protest. Large bi-yearly blockades of important infrastructure are the main instances of contention and attract the most media and police attention. In addition to that, smaller blockades, legal protests, lobbying and 'die-ins' occur throughout the year. Dutch law enforcement is always present in large numbers at the disruptive bi-yearly XR protests, and often conducts numerous arrests (NOS, 2021). This leads to a high number of interactions between XR and law enforcement. This research will examine whether there is an escalatory cycle of tactical innovation by XR and adaptation by authorities that could help explain radicalization.

Each of these 3 relational mechanisms has a unique effect on escalation and radicalization of a social movement actor. Analysing the interplay within and between these pairs will provide an indication as to which relational dynamics contributed to radicalization, and in what way.

Data Collection

In order to accurately trace the factors that contributed to the radicalization of XR, I will collect data concerning the 3 arenas where relational mechanisms operate. For each of the arenas a different, suitable data collection method will be used.

For *Competition of power between movement actors,* I will use a range of primary sources to structurally examine the degree to which a competition of power exists between XR and other actors in the climate movement. As there is no conclusive academic literature on the topic yet, I will examine press releases, blog posts, annual reports and articles originating directly from the official platforms of actors in the Dutch climate movement. I will look at sources that date from the establishment of XR in the Netherlands in 2018 up until the present.

In order to draw a conclusion from the body of sources, I will set up a coding framework to categorize units of data[2]. Each press release, blog post, and article will be considered a unit of data. For the annual reports, each subsection will be treated as a unit.

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[2] Coding Scheme in Appendix A

Each unit will be categorized in one of 3 sections in the coding frame. The first category is *collaborative*: when other actors are either praised for their role in the movement, referenced in a positive way or mentioned as part of a collaborative effort. The second is *neutral*, when other actors are mentioned without a value judgement and outside of a direct collaborative effort. The last category is *competitive,* when other actors are referenced in a critical or negative way or taking part in an action that the author of the source distances itself from. In addition, the sources will be organized by year, to determine competitive or collaborative patterns between 2018 and 2021. Conclusions on competitiveness will be drawn based on emergent patterns and the salience of one category over the others.

For the second arena of relational dynamics, *unfavourable threat/opportunity ratio,* I will examine whether there is a loss of leverage for XR vis-à-vis the political environment. In other words, a political environment that is not receptive to XR's demands. For the purposes of this research the political environment around the topic of climate will be indicated by two different fields: public opinion and government. Shifting threat/opportunity ratios in each of these fields will be studied, and then aggregated in order to determine whether there is an overall unfavourable shift in the political environment. The threat/opportunity ratio will be considered unfavourable if political environment threats exceed opportunities.

Relevant data will be collected in each of the indicators of the Dutch political environment. First, shifts in public opinion will be studied through polls on attitude on climate change. An increase in awareness regarding climate, and a willingness to enact change in line with XR's demands will be considered an opportunity, while the opposite will be considered a threat. Secondly, to identify shifts in government policy on climate I will base myself on sources from reputable government and non-government institutions. These include reports by advisory bodies and independent institutions such as the Dutch Bureau of Economic Policy Analysis (CPB), the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency (PBL) and Council of State (Raad van State). I will draw conclusions regarding an unfavourable threat/opportunity ratio in government policy based on findings in their reports. The findings within the each of the indicators will be aggregated to determine whether there is a general unfavourable shift in the political environment.

Lastly, to assess *action-counteraction escalation* I will conduct semi-structured interviews with representative members of XR. The interviews will consist of a combination of structured questions, to obtain some information about experience, background, protest styles, and protest dates; as well as unstructured questions to allow the interviewee to expand

on XR's interaction with law enforcement and how this has evolved. These interviews will have the aim of examining XR's relationship with law enforcement, and whether escalatory cycles of contention are taking place. Questions will assess the tactics used by XR, and how they evolved over time. In addition, questions will consider how authorities have treated XR during protests, and whether repression has developed over time. Finally, the relationship between action and repression will be explored.

The criteria for the selected interviewees are firstly, membership of XR since its emergence in the Netherlands, and secondly, active participation in XR actions. This is to ensure interviewees have a wholistic overview of developments.

To systematically analyse the interviews, I will code the interviews into mutually exclusive categories and subcategories. I will record the units of data by themes: tactical evolution by XR and repressive adaptation by police. Within these categories I will determine whether the evolution of tactics/repression was escalatory, de-escalatory or no escalation. In the category of repressive adaptation by police I will categorize a unit as escalatory if a repressive tactic is more violent, and/or undertaken at a larger scale, or if it is more invasive of protester's privacy compared to previous police strategies. Units will be categorized as less escalatory if the opposite is the case. In the category of tactical innovation by XR, I will categorize a unit as escalatory if an action or strategy leads to more disruption to the public or private businesses, and/or is more evasive/ resistant towards the police, compared to previous actions. Within the subcategories a unit will be colour coded green if a change in tactics or repression is caused by a change in tactic or repression by the adversary. This will aid in determining causal links between tactical innovation and repressive adaptation.

Interviews were selected as the best data collection method as no comprehensive secondary sources of XR actions exist as of now. Moreover, news articles are vague about tactics and repression in their reporting, which prevents meaningfully tracing their evolution. Limitations of interviews as a data collection method will be examined in the discussion section of this paper.

Considering the findings of the 3 categories, XR's possible radicalization since its inception in the Netherlands will be analysed.

Analysis

The 3 arenas of interaction were studied separately and indicated varying influences on XR's radicalization. The next sub-section will give the necessary case study context before analysing each of the 3 arenas in depth.

Case Description and Context

XR is an environmental movement that operates in 72 countries worldwide (Extinction Rebellion NL, 2021). Through non-violent direct action and civil disobedience, they aim to pressure governments and private companies to move towards more sustainable operations to avoid tipping points in the climate system and large-scale loss of biodiversity (Extinction Rebellion, 2021). XR cites civil disobedient activist groups such as the Civil Rights movement and Occupy Wallstreet as sources of inspiration (Extinction Rebellion, 2021).

XR brings forward 3 main demands to governments around the world. (1) Governments must tell the truth about the climate crisis and acknowledge the threats of ecological system collapse. (2) Governments must act now to stop biodiversity loss and reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2025 and (3) Governments must establish citizens assemblies to take the lead in tackling the climate crisis worldwide (Extinction Rebellion NL, 2021).

XR was launched in the UK in May 2018, and immediately garnered media attention when they staged large scale blockades on bridges across London in November of that year (Taylor & Gayle, 2018). Over time protests in the UK have gotten increasingly disruptive and this culminated in protesters smashing windows at Barclays Bank headquarters, stating 'better broken windows than broken promises' (Roach, 2021). Consequently, XR has been deemed extremist by some institutions. A right-leaning UK based think tank published a report stating that, 'Extinction Rebellion seek a more subversive agenda, one that that is rooted in the political extremism of anarchism, eco-socialism, and radical anti-capitalist environmentalism' (Wilson & Walton, 2019, p.5). In addition, a British counter-terrorism unit listed XR as a radical threat, alongside Islamist and neo-Nazi terrorist groups (Dodd & Grierson, 2020).

XR started operations in the Netherlands in late 2018. Since then, they have staged a range of non-violent direct actions and protests. An interview[3] conducted in early 2021 showed that XR has moved to increasingly confrontational and disruptive tactics since their arrival in the Netherlands. Concurrently, the Dutch counter terrorism authority (NCTV) has listed XR as a new potential threat. According to a 2019 report by the NCTV, XR is currently non-violent as of yet, but with a potential to escalate and radicalize (NOS, 2019).

In the following sub-section, I will analyse how the 3 relational dynamics can help explain XR's radicalization between 2018 and 2021, defining radicalization as: a gradual increase in disruptive repertoires of contention over time, provoking more police action and/or a gradual increase in tactics to evade or resist police efforts of repression.

Competition for power between movement actors:

'Comrades,' is the word that climate movement actor Code Rood used describe XR members at a joint protest against Shell[4]. This is indicative for the relationship between XR and other climate social movement actors. The primary sources studied suggest a strong collaboration and solidarity within the movement. Out of the 27 source that were studied, all were considered to indicate collaboration: other actors in the climate movement are either praised for their role in the movement, referenced in a positive way or mentioned as part of a collaborative effort.' No sources were considered to indicate neutrality or competition[5].

There are several strong signs for collaboration. Firstly, there are a range of joint protests, often initiated by one actor, and participated in by others. A few notable joint actions include Protestival, a collaboration between XR and Greenpeace, Septemberrebellie, a collaboration between XR, Code Rood, Milieu Defensie and Greenpeace, and CAP (EU Common Agricultural Policy) Protest, a collaboration between XR and Fridays for Future[6].

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[3] Interview with Carla, 2021. (Hereafter: Interview with Carla) (Full interview in Appendix E)

[4] *Keep it in the ground!* (2019, May 18). CODE ROOD. https://code-rood.org/nl/2019/05/15/keep-it-in-the-ground/

[5] Full results in Appendix A

[6] Fridays For Future Nederland. (2020, October 24). *Vote this CAP down* [Press release]. https://fridaysforfuture.nl/nieuws/persbericht-votethiscapdown/

When the actors do not stage joint protests, they often still advertise each other's actions[7]. Secondly, there were various instances of joint statements or demands to government, emphasizing solidarity between XR and other movement actors[8].

The sources indicate that movement actors have also become more collaborative over time. While in 2018 there was only one collaborative source, this increased to four in 2019, 14 in 2020 and is currently already at eight in the first months of 2021. This change over time could be explained by the fact that XR emerged in The Netherlands in 2018 as a relatively small and unknown actor. XR can be argued to have made a name for itself in later years and starts to appear prominently in the media as an established actor climate movement. It must also be considered that Fridays for future only started operating in the Netherlands in 2019, which explains why there are no sources of collaboration, neutrality, or competition before then.

We see an increase in XR collaboration with other movements between 2018 and 2021. Collaboration between the different social movement actors culminated in the 'Climate Crisis Coalition' (Klimaatcrisis Coalitie) which was established in 2020. The coalition was referenced often in press releases and blog posts as a strong source of collaboration between XR and other climate movements[9].The coalition aims to influence elections, create support for the climate agenda, and encourage people to join the climate movement. To do this they mobilize around important political events, such as high-level meetings and elections. The creation of a coalition and the statement of joint goals can be considered the ultimate indicator of collaboration. Besides the social movement actors that were studied in this paper in relation to XR, DeGoedeZaak, Fossielvrij NL, Oxfam Novib, De Woonbond, FNV and Grootouders voor het Klimaat were all also part of the Climate Crisis Coalition. This broad-based coalition is a strong indicator of collaboration between XR and other movement actors.

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[7] *Next Steps for Code Rood, XR and Earthquake Emergency Exercise*. (2018, November 23). CODE ROOD.
      https://code-rood.org/nl/2018/11/23/next-steps-for-code-rood-extinction-rebellion-and-earthquake-
      emergency-exercise/

[8] *Een open brief aan de inlichtingendienst van de politie*. (2019, June 5). CODE ROOD. https://code-
      rood.org/nl/2019/06/05/een-open-brief-aan-de-inlichtingendienst-van-de-politie

[9] Greenpeace Nederland. (2021a, March 14). *35.000 mensen luiden het Klimaatalarm door heel Nederland*.
      https://www.greenpeace.org/nl/klimaatverandering/45486/35-000-mensen-luiden-het-klimaatalarm-
      door-heel-nederland/

While the results show an unambiguous solidarity within the Dutch climate movement this high level of collaboration between climate movement actors is not always self-evident. The Dutch branch of XR contrasts with UK branch, where relations between XR and other climate movements have been more competitive at times. XR wrote an open letter to Greenpeace, stating that Greenpeace's methods of tackling the climate crisis were insufficient, and that they did not use their platform efficiently[10].. In order to make this clear, XR UK occupied Greenpeace HeadQuarters and demanded that they make their goals more ambitious and advocate for a non-violent rebellion against institutions causing the climate crisis. This level of competition was not noticeable in the Dutch climate movement.

Evidence for competition between the social movements actors was not found, and therefore there is no empirical foundation to indicate any radicalization stemming from competition with other Dutch climate movement actors over dominant strategies, agenda setting ability or resources. Rather, findings suggest that the opposite is the case, social movement groups collaborated on protests, supported each other's actions, made joint demands to government institutions, and formed a shared climate crisis coalition.

Unfavourable threat/opportunity ratio:

Results from independent reports, opinion polls and government institutions show that the Dutch political environment has shifted slowly towards more climate consciousness between 2018 and 2021[11]. XR demands for climate justice are gradually becoming more accepted in public discourse and Dutch government has increased legislation on climate change and further changes are on the agenda. However, while XR and the climate movement as a whole seems to have more leverage vis-à-vis the government and public opinion, the political system is shifting too slowly to meet XR's demands: reducing emissions to net zero by 2025, acknowledging the climate crisis and establishing a citizens assembly[12].

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[10] XR. (2018, October 17). *Open statement to greenpeace* [Press release]. https://docs.google.com/document/d/1-XvDC3XjqeloPmqUIJwKWJ2_azrC_3XDZ8khATsl6ZY/edit?fbclid=IwAR2CXyOjv13oUwT4iTTp0RVOmF1BO6b_ZuqqabGeGlbdUpCsarNW5Y7zpVU

[11] Full list of sources in Appendix B

[12] XR NL. (2021, March 6). *About us*. XR Nederland. https://extinctionrebellion.nl/over-ons/

The following paragraphs will go into detail regarding the shifting political system, and how the ratio of opportunities and threats affected XR's radicalization between 2018 and 2021.

Public discourse on climate issues has seen a noticeable shift since 2018. Reports on public opinion regarding climate and environment indicate that the Dutch population increasingly considers climate change a problem. However, the global COVID-19 health crisis that emerged in early 2020 has lowered the public perception of urgency on the issue. A public opinion report published in February 2019[13] indicates that many Dutch people are worried about climate change, and its effects on the Netherlands. This report states that 60% of people are worried about the effects of climate change on the planet as a whole. Willingness to make changes to their own lives, however, is relatively low, 80% of people feels like they personally do enough to counter climate change and 48% of people do not plan on changing their diet. Shifts in public opinion are already noticeable in October 2019. A public opinion survey[14] reports that the portion of people that are worried about the effects of climate change has increased to 70%, and 7% of people think that irreparable damage has been done to the environment. People's willingness to make a change in their own lives has also increased, 75% percent of people feel like they already 'do enough' for the climate, a 5% decrease from February 2019. Over just 7 months changes in public opinion are noticeable.

A report published in June 2020[15] shows that climate issues are deemed far less important in public consciousness than a year earlier. While 18% of the Dutch population considered climate change to be the biggest national issue in the last quarter of 2019, this dropped to just 7% in April 2020. This drastic shift can be explained by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The portion of people that considered public health the biggest national issue increased from 10% in the last quarter of 2019 to 30% in June 2020.

Public opinion shifted fast in favour of XR's demands on climate and environment issues between 2018 and 2020. This can indicate that the political environment was shifting and more receptive to XR's message. However, the COVID-19 Crisis that emerged in 2020

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[13] IPSOS. (2019, February). *Rapport klimaatbeleid voor Telegraaf.*
    https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/2019-03/rapport_ipsos_detelegraaf_klimaatbeleid_1.pdf

[14] I&O Research. (2019, October). *Hoe denkt de Nederlander nu over het klimaat?*
    https://www.ioresearch.nl/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/BMILHUM_klimaat_def.pdf

[15] Social Cultureel Planbureau. (2020, July). *Burgerperspectieven 2020–2.* SCP.
    https://www.scp.nl/publicaties/monitors/2020/06/29/burgerperspectieven-2020---2

pushed the problem to the back of Dutch public consciousness in favour of public health. The political environment shifted from increasingly favourable for XR between 2018 and 2020 to unfavourable in June 2020. This created a political environment where XR's leverage vis-à-vis the public was reduced and may help explain escalation in tactics.

The Dutch government's role in the political environment has followed a similar path to increasing consciousness about climate issues as public opinion between 2018 and 2021. However, reports show that the COVID-19 crisis did not have a strong impact on the prevalence of environmental issues in government legislation and agenda setting, as opposed to public opinion.

Since the Netherlands signed the climate accords in Paris (effective since 2016), questions about setting national climate targets, and embedding them in legislation, have arisen. A 2018 report (Raad van State) examines the state of climate policy and legislation and concludes that since the Paris climate accords, the Dutch government has increased efforts to codify climate goals in national legislation. In 2019, the Dutch government passed its first climate law in history, outlining that a 49% reduction in CO_2 output compared to 1990 must be attained by 2030[16], far below XR's demand of net zero CO_2 emission by 2025. Although this ambitious new climate law was passed, in September 2019, the Council of State reported that the Dutch climate policy was not sufficient to reach its targets. In addition, in July 2020 the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency reported that the pace of reduction of greenhouse gasses must be doubled to reach the 2030 climate law targets, while renewable sources of energy are not replacing fossil fuels at an acceptable pace[17]. While legislation has become increasingly ambitious since 2018, government policy is not reflecting the urgency of addressing climate issues. The government is slowly helping to shift the political environment in favour of climate issues and XR demands.

Although there is an increasing receptiveness to climate issues in the Dutch political environment, the shift in public discourse and government institutions is not enough to meet XR's demands such as reducing CO_2 emissions to net zero by 2025. While some progress on climate issues in public discourse and government institutions has been made, the slow

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[16] Rijksoverheid Nederland. (2020, January 1). *Regeling Klimaatwet*. Overheid.nl.
    https://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0042394/2020-01-01

[17] Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau. (2020, July). *Burgerperspectieven 2020–2*. SCP.
    https://www.scp.nl/publicaties/monitors/2020/06/29/burgerperspectieven-2020---2

progress and the setback of the COVID-19 crisis on public opinion on climate change can help explain XR's need for escalation and radicalization due to the *unfavourable opportunity/threat ratio* in the Dutch political environment.

Action-counteraction escalation:

The interviews show that XR has adapted their tactics in several ways. While not every tactical innovation is escalatory or a response to police repression, the interviews show a general pattern of escalation in both XR tactics and police repression. XR has changed tactics and strategies in several ways. XR has moved away from mass demonstrations to more targeted actions, actions have gotten smaller and more decentralized, during their actions they have generally gotten more disruptive and XR has gotten more secretive about their planned actions. In addition, the interviews show that while police have repressed protests more heavy-handedly, XR has not had a clear and unified response to this as of yet. In the following paragraphs I will examine each of these changes of strategy in depth and assess whether escalations were a result of interplay between XR actions and police repression.

Firstly, a main shift in XR tactics that emerged throughout the interviews is the shift from mass demonstrations to more targeted actions. Over time, XR has started to target actors that cause or enable climate injustice more directly. While initially protests were broad, and often aimed at the government or public in general, XR has shifted strategies to direct action towards actors like Shell, Vattenfall and the Ministry of Economic affairs and climate. An interviewee explains that they 'started actually targeting these organizations [that] are responsible for [climate injustice]. So indeed, like Shell or Vattenfall. In the beginning, there was a principle of no blaming and shaming.'[18] This shift in tactic coincided with the realization that disrupting the public was not making the direct impact on their perceived actors of climate injustice, 'we need to disrupt the people that are responsible for causing the problem. We've already seen in the UK the action at the London Tube where working class people were obstructed from getting to their jobs on which they're financially dependent, (…) we want to negatively impact the companies that are responsible for [climate injustice].'[19] This shift in tactic was a result of XR reflection on the effectiveness of their actions and was not clearly linked to police repression. In addition, this shift in tactic cannot be considered an

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[18] Interview with Mohammed, 2021. (Full interview in Appendix) (Hereafter: Interview with Mohammed)
[19] Interview with Sara, 2021. (Full interview in Appendix) (Hereafter: Interview with Mohammed)

escalation as the levels of disruption are not increased and they are not necessarily more evasive or resistant to police.

Secondly, XR actions have gotten smaller, secretive, and more decentralized. An interviewee described XR's more recent tactics as 'more decentralized (…), to stay a step ahead of the police, a type of guerrilla swarming, if you will.'[20] XR had, and still has to some extent, employed large blockades as a main tactic to draw attention to their cause. Protestors would link arms or glue themselves to streets to block essential infrastructure. These protests were often widely announced, easy to anticipate for police and short lived, as one interviewee explains, '[The police] were already prepared for our tactics. And I've seen the same tactic deployed over and over again. So whenever we do a big blockade, the first thing they do is close the perimeter with agents until buses arrive, and then they stack them next to each other so no one can even see to the inside, and then quickly arrest everybody.'[21] To address this, XR has shifted to smaller and more decentralized actions, 'We were able to block streets with very few people. The police has a lot harder time to arrest people if they are spread out in small protests of one.'[22] Interviewees indicate that this tactical innovation was a direct result of police repressive adaptation. Police were easily able to handle and arrest concentrated protests, causing XR to shift to more decentralized 'guerrilla swarming' as a way to complicate police repression and to increase disruption. This shift in tactic can be considered escalatory as police is actively being evaded, and levels of disruption are increased.

Police have adapted to this more secretive planning of actions by infiltrating group chats and tapping phones. 'We're pretty sure that a bunch of phones got tapped during the October Rebellion, to keep track of our swarming.'[23] Interviewees state that police seems to be one step ahead at protests, and is aware of things that are not publicly known, 'I've also had police show up to my family's house unannounced and just knock on the door, (…) somehow they knew that I was there.'[24] This form of repressive adaptation by the police led to ever more secretive communication among XR, '[We] assume that there's always police infiltration on whatever we do. We have become even more secretive about stuff, sometimes only discussing in person and planning in small groups and being careful with group chats.'[25]

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[20] Interview with Sara
[21] Interview with Sara
[22] Interview with Sara
[23] Interview with Carla
[24] Interview with Carla
[25] Interview with Mohammed

Finally, the interviews show that police have repressed protests more heavy-handedly, while XR has not clearly responded to this shift. The number of people arrested has increased. While in early XR protests only people that were blocking infrastructure were arrested, recently there have been more violent, widespread and preventative arrests. 'They have gotten more violent over time, in Utrecht (…) they arrested over 100 rebels. And the arrests were a lot rougher than before.'[26] One interviewee noticed a change in police repression, and arrest methods: 'something changed either in the municipality or I'm not sure, but they did start being more violent or just less compromising or not even respecting their own rules (…) they changed the way they approach us.'[27] In addition, XR protesters are increasingly preventatively being turned away from protests, '[We are] stopped on the street going to an action because you are wearing something with XR on it and they just are like, "Oh, no. You can't go."'[28] The interviews show that XR is uncertain in how to respond to increased police repression, 'Some people want to increase protests, and stand up to the police, while other have a preference to move back to legal protests.'[29] XR is at a point where it is faced with the choice of further escalation or a shift to more legal methods of contention.

XR has adapted their tactics in multiple ways. While not every tactical innovation is escalatory or a response to police repression, the interviews show that there is a noticeable pattern of escalation in XR's tactics. Evidence shows that protests have become more targeted, actions have gotten smaller and more disruptive, and XR has become more evasive and resistant towards police through increasing secrecy and guerrilla protest tactics. Police have also increased their repression through more violent arrests, preventative arrests and phone tapping. XR has not yet responded to this proactively, whether this will cause an additional escalation in XR tactics remains to be seen. All together the evidence suggests that *action-reaction escalation* between XR and law enforcement played a role in XR's radicalization between 2018 and 2021.

Conclusion

This paper aimed to explain social movement radicalizing by answering the following research question: How do relational dynamics explain Extinction Rebellion NL's radicalization between 2018 and 2021? Factors contributing to radicalization were analysed

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[26] Interview with Carla
[27] Interview with Mohammed
[28] Interview with Carla
[29] Interview with Mohammed

using the relational approach examining 3 separate arenas of relational dynamics. Research done by Alimi (2011) suggests that *competition for power between movement actors, unfavourable threat/opportunity ration* and *action -counteraction escalation* are all possible sources for social movement radicalization. Analysing each of these can help identify sources of radicalization.

In the case of XR, this research found significant evidence that *action-counteraction escalation* influenced radicalization. However, there was less evidence for *unfavourable threat/opportunity ratio* playing a role in radicalization and there was no evidence for *competition between movement actors* having an effect on XR radicalization between 2018 and 2021.

The analysis of primary sources originating from climate movements in the Netherlands shows that there is no indication of *competition for power between movement actors* over resources, agenda setting capabilities or dominant tactics of contention. In fact, the evidence suggests the opposite, that there is strong collaboration between climate groups and competition for power therefore does not contribute to an explanation for radicalization.

Reports on public opinion and government policy and legislation show that there is an increasing receptiveness to climate issues in the Dutch political environment. However, the shift in public discourse and government institutions is not nearly enough to meet XR's demands. Slow progress and the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on public opinion on climate change can help explain XR's escalation and radicalization due to the *unfavourable opportunity/threat ratio* in the Dutch political environment.

In addition, interactions between XR and Dutch law enforcement show a noticeable pattern of *action-counteraction escalation* in XR's tactics. In response to police repression, protests have become more targeted, actions have gotten smaller and more disruptive, and XR has become more evasive and resistant towards police through increased secrecy and guerrilla protest tactics.

Considering the 3 arenas of interaction, there is most evidence for *action-counteraction escalation* being a contributor to XR's escalation of tactics and radicalization. Meanwhile, the *unfavourable opportunity/threat ratio* in the Dutch political environment can also help explain XR escalation and radicalization, however due to some favourable changes such as the new climate law, and increasing public willingness to tackle climate issues, there is less evidence for XR's radicalization than for *action-counteraction escalation*. Finally, no

evidence was found that suggests *competition for power between movement actors,* this arena therefore has no contribution to XR's radicalization.

The study has potential limitations in methodological approaches that could be addressed in possible follow up research.

XR has only been active in the Netherlands for under 4 years. While radicalization has been accurately traced over brief periods of time (Alimi, 2011; della Porta, 2018), this is a relatively short time to measure shift in political environment in the *unfavourable threat/opportunity ratio* arena of the relational approach. As XR's existence only spanned across a single government mandate, there was a possible limitation on the measurability of change over this period. However, shifts in policy and legislation have been accelerating over the past decade (Lestestuiver, 2017), and the results show that over the past four 4 years there has indeed been a measurable shift. The new climate law that was passed that in 2019, and its continuous scrutinization in parliament show that indeed shifts in political environment over four years are measurable.

For further research it may be useful to also investigate what effect the international political environment has on the *unfavourable threat/opportunity ration.* This study examined how Dutch government policy and public opinion posed threats or opportunities to XR. In order to provide a more wholistic overview of the *unfavourable threat/opportunity ratio,* follow-up studies could include the international political environment in the analysis.

Another possible limitation that should be discussed is the measurement strategy for *competition for power between movement actors*. I measured the degree of competition between climate groups by analysing online blog posts, articles, press releases and end of year reports that all originated directly from movement actors. Results showed no indication of competition. It must be considered that the primary sources may have a bias towards sharing positive messages. Social movements may be more inclined to show solidarity with one another publicly, even though competition may exist below the surface. Future research may supplement the analysis on *competition for power between movement actors* by also conducting interviews with group members from other organizations, to examine more implicit levels of competition that are not advertised to the public.

In conclusion, applying the relational approach of social movement radicalization has shown significant evidence that *action-counteraction escalation* can help explain XR radicalization, some evidence for *unfavourable threat/opportunity ration* and no evidence for

competition between movement actors playing a role in XR radicalization between 2018 and 2021. These findings are relevant for the public and policy-makers concerned with social movement radicalization, and can be an important first step into further research into the dynamics of escalation of climate movements worldwide.

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Appendices:

Appendix A: Coding scheme and results for: *Competition for power between movement actors*

Coding Scheme:

Social Movement Actor	Date	Collaborative (25) When other actors are either praised for their role in the movement, referenced in a positive way or mentioned as part of a collaborative effort.	Neutral (0) When other actors are mentioned without a value judgement and outside of a direct collaborative effort.	Competitive (0) When other actors are referenced in a critical or negative way or taking part in an action that the author of the source distances itself from.
Greenpeace	2018 (0)			
	2019 (1)			
	2020 (5)			
	2021 (3)			
Code Rood	2018 (1)			
	2019 (2)			
	2020 (4)			
	2021 (1)			
Fridays for Future	2018 (0)			
	2019 (0)			
	2020 (1)			
	2021 (1)			
Milieudefensie	2018 (0)			
	2019 (1)			
	2020 (4)			
	2021 (3)			

Results:

Social Movement Actor	Date	Collaborative (25)	Neutral (0)	Competitive (0)
Greenpeace	2018 (0)			

	2019 (1)	*XR NL sluit zich aan bij protestival*. (2019, December 14). XR Nederland. https://extinctionrebellion.nl/extinction-rebellion-nl-sluit-zich-aan-bij-protestival-debuut-nederlandse-red-rebels-slaan-alarm-met-een-optreden-tegen-de-oneindige-groei-van-schiphol/		
	2020 (5)	Greenpeace Nederland. (2020a, June 25). *Aankondiging: 'Maak van Klimaat de Rode Draad'*. https://www.greenpeace.org/nl/klimaatverandering/40947/oproep-aan-kabinet-maak-van-klimaat-de-rode-draad/ Schijndel, L. (2020a, September 23). *Bedankt!* XR Nederland. https://extinctionrebellion.nl/bedankt/ Karst, B. (2020, May 1). *"Alleen steun voor grote bedrijven op voorwaarde van klimaatbeleid."* Greenpeace Nederland. https://www.greenpeace.org/nl/klimaatverandering/32720/alleen-steun-voor-grote-bedrijven-op-voorwaarde-van-klimaatbeleid/ Greenpeace. (2020, December). *Jaarverslag 2020 Greenpeace Nederland*. https://www.greenpeace.org/static/planet4-netherlands-stateless/2021/04/3f81248d-greenpeace-jaarverslag-jaarrekening-2020.pdf		
	2021 (3)	XR NL. (2021, March 11). *Grote Klimaatalarm Mobilisatiecall*. XR Nederland. https://extinctionrebellion.nl/events/grote-klimaatalarm-mobilisatiecall-2/		

		Greenpeace Nederland. (2021a, March 14). *35.000 mensen luiden het Klimaatalarm door heel Nederland*. https://www.greenpeace.org/nl/klimaat verandering/45486/35-000-mensen-luiden-het-klimaatalarm-door-heel-nederland/		
Code Rood	2018 (1)	*Next Steps for Code Rood, XR and Earthquake Emergency Exercise*. (2018, November 23). CODE ROOD. https://code-rood.org/nl/2018/11/23/next-steps-for-code-rood-extinction-rebellion-and-earthquake-emergency-exercise/		
	2019 (2)	*Een open brief aan de inlichtingendienst van de politie*. (2019, June 5). CODE ROOD. https://code-rood.org/nl/2019/06/05/een-open-brief-aan-de-inlichtingendienst-van-de-politie/ *Keep it in the ground!* (2019, May 18). CODE ROOD. https://code-rood.org/nl/2019/05/15/keep-it-in-the-ground/		
	2020 (4)	Schijndel, L. (2020d, October 13). *Haal Shell van tafel. Lobby eruit, burgers erin!* XR Nederland. https://extinctionrebellion.nl/haal-shell-van-tafel-lobby-eruit-burgers-erin/ Schijndel, L. (2020a, September 23). *Bedankt!* XR Nederland. https://extinctionrebellion.nl/bedankt/ Schijndel, L. (2020c, October 12). *Actievoerders smeren 'olie' op ministerie van Economische Zaken tegen aanwezigheid Shell op klimaatdag*. XR Nederland. https://extinctionrebellion.nl/actievoerders-smeren-olie-op-ministerie-van-		

		economische-zaken-tegen-aanwezigheid-shell-op-klimaatdag/		
	2021 (1)	Greenpeace Nederland. (2021a, March 14). *35.000 mensen luiden het Klimaatalarm door heel Nederland*. https://www.greenpeace.org/nl/klimaatverandering/45486/35-000-mensen-luiden-het-klimaatalarm-door-heel-nederland/		
Fridays for Future	2018 (0)			
	2019 (0)			
	2020 (1)	Fridays For Future Nederland. (2020, October 24). *Vote this CAP down* [Press release]. https://fridaysforfuture.nl/nieuws/persbericht-votethiscapdown/		
	2021 (1)	XR NL. (2020, November 12). *XR NL Youth*. XR Netherlands. https://extinctionrebellion.nl/en/community/xr-nl-youth/		
Milieudefen-sie	2018 (0)			
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Appendix B: Source list: *Competition for power between movement actors*

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Appendix C: Source list for *unfavourable opportunity/threat ratio*

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Appendix D: Coding Scheme and Results: *Action-Counteraction escalation:*

Coding Scheme:

Category:	Sub category:	Explanation	
Police: Repressive adaptation			Excerpt from Interview (Colour coded green if the change in tactic has a clear causal link to the adversary):
	Less repressive	If a repressive tactic is less violent, and/or undertaken at a smaller scale, or if it is less invasive of protester's privacy compared to previous police strategies	
	No Change	If there is a change repression but it is not more or less violent, and/or is not undertaken at a larger scale or smaller scale. It is not more or less invasive of protester's privacy compared to previous police strategies	
	More repressive	If a repressive tactic is more violent, and/or undertaken at a larger scale, or if it is more invasive of protester's privacy compared to previous police strategies	
XR: Tactical Evolution			
	Less disruptive	If an action or strategy leads to less disruption to the public or private businesses, and/or is more collaborative towards the police compared to previous XR NL actions.	
	No change	If there is change in action or strategy but it is not more or less disruptive and is not more or less collaborative to police compared to previous XR NL actions.	
	More disrupive	If an action or strategy leads to more disruption to the public or private businesses, and/or is more evasive/ resistant towards the police, compared to previous XR NL actions	

Change in Police Tactics	Excerpt from interview
Less repressive	-
No Change	• So from already in the first action that we organized the first mass action, which was in October 2019, the police had their big riot events already at the location that we announced in the moment we occupied that location. They fenced off the surroundings, not allowing anyone to enter or exit so already before... It was not like the UK that they were unprepared and then they had to learn how to deal with these actions. Either were already prepared for our tactics. (S, p.1) • . And I've seen the same tactic deployed over and over again. So whenever we do a big... Big locate, the first thing they do is close the perimeter with agents until buses arrive, and then they stack them next to each other so no one can even see to the inside (S, p.2). • ... One change that I have noticed is that the breadth of the types of actions we do has increased, but towards the more, in a way that increases participation (S, p3) • .
More repressive	• That is a very different experience than dealing with uniformed police or dealing with the ME or the Marachausee. They have gotten more violent over time. As you mentioned, in Utrecht last week they arrested over 100 rebels. And the arrests were a lot rougher than before (C. p8) • I've also had police show up to my family's house unannounced and just knock on the door and be like, "Oh, we're here to talk to you about your involvement in XR." And I'm, "Okay. What do you need to know?" "Yeah, no, we just want to talk to you. We just want to figure it out. It's just protocol." "Okay. What do you need from me?" "Yeah, no, nothing really in particular." In the meantime, they're in my house. So somehow they knew that I was home (C.p8) • It's a fact that we're pretty sure that a bunch of phones got tapped during the October Rebellion, to keep track of our swarming. (C.p8) • being stopped on the street going to an action because you are wearing something with XR on it and they just are like, "Oh, no. You can't go." So it's things like this that I think are the most present with regards to police violence (C. p8) • I think, something changed either, in the municipality or I'm not sure, but they did start being, more violent or just less compromising or not even respecting their own rules of us, like allowing people to leave. So I saw that there was a shift in the relationship over the years now they know who we are and so they are ready, and before they were probably confused and as a consequence they changed the way they approach us (M, p.2). • We changed the way we see them. We see them indeed with more like an injustice kind of eyes, because many times they do things that they shouldn't be doing, like when they arrested all of us at the kickoff in Utrecht, even before anything happened, and that's just unlawful. This preventative arrest, you cannot do that.(M, p.2).

XR Change in Tactics	Excerpt from Interview
Less disruptive	•
No change	• Then in the end, the police encircles us. And I think if we keep on repeating that tactic over and over, we'll have the same effects (. p.5). • So I did notice that change a little bit to try to really like, make it more participative. To be more open to outsiders joining (M, p.4) • Like we started actually targeting this organization are a bit more responsible for it. So indeed like the Shell or button fall. In the beginning, that was a principle of no blaming and shaming (M. p.5)
More disruptive	• I said that I think that, yes, it's definitely shifted and it's shifted towards more localized action and more individual groups, like smaller groups doing more specific targeted actions (C.p6). • I think that within that shift to also more confrontational tactics (C.p7) • 'We have gotten more disruptive and started doing more things like gluing ourselves to the street, and disrupting traffic throughout cities. We definitely stay peaceful, as hard as that is for me, but our attitude towards them has also changed (C. p8).' • we resist arrest a lot harder (C, p.8) • In the September but in one year later we had a specific action targeted, third thing, the Zuidas and the companies that are located at the Zuidas in Amsterdam because of the big financial... Big financial influence, that the lobby asks on our government's policies. And then I'm also started seeing that is smaller actions. So for example, the, [inaudible 00:11:18] participated in was specifically targeted at the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climates. And the biomass action was also targeted at a specific company that was trying to build new infrastructure (S, p.4) • very big feedback that came up was that we could... We were able to block streets with very few people.. The police has a lot harder time to arrest people if they are spread out in small protests of one (S, p.5) • these were purposely kept within close communication groups. So we could do the action and not have the police stop us. So that's actually another shift that I'm seeing that within... Affinity groups are organizing. Not organizing [inaudible 00:17:59] each person invites some of the people that they trust and that way they keep it from reaching the police and that also prevents the police from being there beforehand and blocking us (S, p.5). • Yeah. More decentralized actions, but also more secret actions to stay a step ahead of the police, a type of guerrilla swarming, if you will. (S, p6). • assume that there's always police infiltration on whatever we do. We have become more secretive about stuff, sometimes only discussing and planning in small groups, and being very careful with group chats. (M, p.6)

Appendix E: Interviews: *Action-counteraction escalation*

Interview with Carla (Pseudonym)

Interviewer (Laurens):

This interview is conducted is for a university research, for the course social movements and political violence. You will remain anonymous. You may leave the interview whenever you want. You may refuse to answer any question. Can I record the interview?

Carla:

Yeah, all of that is fine.

Interviewer (Laurens):

I will transcribe it, and then delete it. Nobody but me will have access to the recording in the meantime.
Feel free to take some time to think before answering questions

Interviewer (Laurens):

I think it will be around 30 minutes to 45 minutes. Also, feel free to ask me questions about the questions or feel free to take time as well before you answer.

Carla

Yes that's ok

Interviewer (Laurens):

First, let me start off by asking you, how did you first get involved in the Climate Movement?

Carla:

I think that's kind of a hard question, actually, because I feel like I just tumbled into it because of one of my friends who took me to an XR thing. Before this, when I was at UCU (University College Utrecht), I was focused on social issues in general and social justice. So, because of this I became really interested in things like postcolonialism, decolonial theory, anti-racist theory, stuff like this. Also, gender theory, generally. All of the feminist kind of areas of school. And then I remember feeling quite a big gap between where I was and the group, or trying to actually doing action and really taking part actively in the debate in a social sphere. So then I went with one of my friends to one of the actions. It was such a small action. This was already two years ago.

Interviewer (Laurens):

That was about 2 years ago?

Carla:

Yeah, no, two years. So literally two years ago. And it was so small. It was really we were with 10 people or something.

Interviewer (Laurens):

This was also XR?

Carla:

This was XR, yeah. Kind of trying to bring this awareness. It was through that that I started talking with all these 10 people, obviously, having some of the conversation and where I started really thinking about the role of colonialism and all of this. You know about these things. I knew the theory and I knew kind of what the impact was of global inequality and how neocolonialism was affecting people and what impact this has in the climate. But I really wasn't hearing that in those conversations, so I was really like, "Oh, no. Oh no. We cannot just have this movement without these perspectives." So then that was when I was really like, "Okay, this is something. I'm 100% terrified of climate change, so I want to do something about it. This seems like a quite nice, easy way to get involved."

Carla:

Also, I see that there are perspectives missing here, which I, as a white person, may not be able to fully bring in, but I, as a white person with education and decolonial and post-school theory as well as critical development theory, can bring in some new questions and start to challenge kind of like, why are we all white? Why are we not talking about climate racism? Stuff like that. So that was really what got me involved. And then other than that, I think I already tend to be someone who, when I learn enough about a topic, that I will become quite an active person in it. So 100%, yeah. I joined XR and, of course, then you start to read more about the climate and read more about the human repercussions on the planet and everything. And so I was just getting more and more angry and then in the end, basically just really took off.

Interviewer (Laurens):

What is your role within XR? How do you see your own role in XR?

Carla:

Yeah, that's a really big question. I think it's also changed a lot over the years. Right now I'm not so much organizing anymore, because I had a burnout in March and I basically was just like, "All right. I need to stop organizing, at least with XR, for now." Now, I'm organizing more with Radicaal, which is the youth organization of Bij1, which ticks a little bit more of my boxes in terms of all of the shit that I think is important. So I definitely moved out of an organizing role. I think, literally, the first thing that I did when I joined XR was start organizing actions. And I was in UCU. There, you have a big arts community, so I was doing a lot of stuff, working on arts development and how can we make actions really quirky, beautiful and interesting and almost not comical but engaging in a way which is not all death, gloom, meteors hitting the earth, shit like this.

Carla:

So that was kind of the first thing that I did. And then we organized a climate march. I did that with a couple of people. So I was in that work group. Then I started giving heading-for-extinction talks, and I got involved in the fact that I didn't think the heading-for-extinction talk was intersectional. So then I started developing a new talk, which was focused on climate justice. From there, I don't know. I just kept doing stuff like this. I also got involved in the integration working circle, which was focused on how do we bring new people into action. I also helped doing a lot of really organizing level stuff, infrastructure level stuff as well. Then when I was doing my first Masters in Gender I did my internship for my master's degree with XR.

Carla:

I worked full time for XR for three months, and that was why I had a burnout. That was mostly focused on setting up the inclusion and power circle and, again, trying to challenge issues of power and the lack of intersectionality within the climate movement. That's kind of been my space of operation. I think the main theme has been just trying to bring intersectional analysis into the climate movement.

Carla:

Now, I'm basically a freelance activist. One of the AGs that we do a lot of stuff with, they basically will just let me know when they're doing an action and I join and my partner joins and some other people from our AG. So that's more kind of on a, "Oh, I'll join if I can fuck up the [foreign language 00:07:40]."

Interviewer (Laurens):

That's also a bit inherent to XR, right? That kind of freelance way or organization, as you call it? Or is that more of the way that you...

Carla:

I wouldn't say it's inherent to XR. I think this is a really big image issue, actually, that we've been dealing with for a really long time. This actually links really nicely into a little bit this politics and intersectionality and what that means within nonviolent direct action and civil disobedience. I'm lucky enough to have a Dutch passport and I'm white. Really, the only major systemic oppression that I experience is going into jail as a trans person and being misgendered and being deadnamed. I'm not experiencing the excessive police violence that black people or people of color experience. I think even the perception of my gender, as being perceived as a woman, even benefits me to a certain extent.

Carla:

But yeah, there's a lot of people who cannot participate in this way. If you are a migrant or if you're a refugee or if you're just someone... I have friends next door who are studying to be doctors. These are people who cannot come into contact with the police. There's an image issue here, and we've been working on it a little bit, but I still don't think it's going well, is that you have to be doing NVDA or civil disobedience to be a part of XR. This is not the case. XR

is really about this kind of prefigurative politics, demonstrating the systems that we want to see and the change that we want to see. That means that a lot of time and energy is also spent on organizing on community level activities, on things like flyering, on more legal demos, on putting together art stuff, on painting banners. These are all things that take forever and that also need to be done. So yeah, no, I would say that it's not an integral part of being in XR, but it is an integral part of doing NVDA and civil disobedience.

Interviewer (Laurens):

And then so onto NVDA. Is it an explicit tactic? Why does XR use NVDA? What is the reason for that? Why not more violent? Or why is it disruptive at all?

Carla:

This is an interesting conversation, yeah. NVDA is really like when you go and block something. We did last week, two weeks ago, a week and a half ago, we actually did block the biomass center outside of Amsterdam. We blocked it for the good part of the day. That's direct action, things like blocking, things like actually disrupting production.

Carla:

Arguably, some of the actions, like the blocking of the biomass centre in the September Rebellion, was closer to nonviolent direct action, because it restricted people who are also doing lobbying, engaging in lobbying and things like this, from getting to work. For me, still a gray area. It's not directly stopping any kind of climate destruction, basically. Whereas, occupying trees in which I hope doesn't happen but I also kind of do hope it happens because I really would like to occupy a tree, that would be direct action.

Interviewer (Laurens):

This distinction that you make, is this an XR distinction or this is how you justify it to yourself or how you explain it for yourself?

Carla:

This is actually a theory-based distinction. So I don't know how useful I am with a normal subject, considering that I am an academic and I do have, I think, a stronger theoretical basis in terms of social movement, in terms of prefigurative politics, in terms of alternative power structures, stuff like this, than kind of everyone who is in XR. So this is a theory. This is something that I based off of my understanding and my interpretation of theory of NVDA versus civil disobedience. In XR, I notice that they're usually used as if they're the same thing, and we're not really going to, but yeah.

Carla:

On to the violence question, I personally do not think that nonviolence is going to be the answer, but trying to figure out an alternative to nonviolent action versus violent action is very difficult. I think XR has chosen it because it is a very palatable way to protest. It is also a very low barrier, low threshold kind of level of becoming an activist. People are way more likely to come with you and sit in the street and do this significantly bland nonviolent action

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than they are to arm themselves and hunt Nazis, for example. That's, I think, the main reasoning behind structuring XR as nonviolent. It's also because it garners more public support because of the palatability of it. And then that way, the idea is that you would be able to create a mass movement, which is something that I think we're in dire need of. Whether I think nonviolence is going to always work is... I don't think it's always going to work. It's okay. You can just walk. I don't think it's-

Interviewer (Laurens):

So you're saying, XR, they're kind of balancing between what is most efficient, terms of, say, in hunting Nazis versus how much public support you get or versus how many participants you get?

Carla:

Yeah. And I have a lot of critique on the foundations of XR and on the assumptions that are made in a lot of the structuring of strategy. One of the big assumptions that we see being made is the idea that the state is inherently benevolent and will take care of us because of the climate crisis, like, "Oh, the social contract is broken and we can rebel." That's essentially what it says in the articles of rebellion. That's why we're doing it. I don't agree with that. I don't think that the state is inherently benevolent. I actually think, as an anarchist, many aspects of the state are really violent to a lot of people. Like in the Netherlands, we can literally look at something like the toeslagenaffaire and realize that the state is not there to protect people and the police are not there to protect people. I don't know if you saw that, but a year ago we had that whole fucking scandal. Not scandal. It was like a big, problematic thing with some people chanting, "Police, we love you."

Carla:

So that really shows if you chant something like this, that you believe that the state is going to treat you well, that you believe that the state is there to protect you, that you believe that if they would act on the climate crisis, then that would be enough. And then we return to business as usual. Do I think that that's the actual solution? I don't think so. I believe that we need deep, deep reform of pretty much every institution that we have. And I do not think that all of these institutions will want to be reformed. So sometimes violence is necessary to overthrow institutions that don't allow themselves to be reformed, if that makes sense. An example that's very frequently used as a nonviolent mass movement is the civil rights movement, which was backed by militias of black people, who armed in themselves to protect themselves against the state.

Carla:

This is what I mean. You can say and scream that, "Oh, it's such a great nonviolent movement. Oh, nonviolence is the answer." But if we look at most nonviolent, also the decolonial movement in India, do we really think that decolonial movement in India was only Gandhi and only nonviolent action? It was not. It wasn't.

Interviewer (Laurens):

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You're literally writing my paper for me right now, because this is exactly the topic. But yeah, no.

Carla:

I've thought about this a lot.

Interviewer (Laurens):

Yeah, I know. Clearly.

Carla:

There's a book called How Nonviolence Protects the State. There we go. I think I have a PDF of it somewhere. It's an anarchist book.

Interviewer (Laurens):

But do you think the XR tactics are donw out of pragmatism? Because I think there's plenty of people like you, or also in XR, who would like to think that more violent tactic would be the solution. But then pragmatically speaking, would that work, in terms of public support? What is your view on that? What in XR's view on that?

Carla:

Man, XR can't even fucking agree on who, whether we go to 'Kick Out Zwarte Piet' protest as XR or not. It is very difficult in an extremely decentralized organization with super niche kind of activists in different areas to talk about what XR does and doesn't believe. So I really can only speak for myself and the people that I've debated with and my own analysis of what I do and what the organization does. Do I think it's pragmatic? Yes. Do I think it's pragmatic because it appeals to privilege? Also.

Interviewer (Laurens):

But isn't that necessary?

Carla:

Yeah. I think that under the current system and with the current climate discourse, it works well. I think that if we are going to start really talking about the underlying mechanisms and the way that, for example, that climate change and capitalism are buddies hand-in-hand and that capitalism is inherently incompatible with any kind of economic or ecological sustainability, it's just not possible. If we start having these conversations, if we start having the conversations of why are we okay that hundreds of people are fucking dying in Global South countries, well, we're talking about climate change as if it will come at some point, "Oh, no. It's the future." Right?

Carla:

I think when we start addressing those issues, we're going to see that there's a lot more pushback and that there's a lot more necessity for violence. And I think that violence here

needs to be very loosely defined. It's not just offensive violence, it's also defensive violence, like the Black Panthers. That's defensive violence, but it is violence nonetheless. But I think, realistically, if we look at already what is happening now with activists on the left, who are being doxed, who are being threatened, especially people of color. It doesn't seem that far off that we're going to be fucking fighting people and actually having to arm ourselves, like in the US. I'm very much in favor of arming, for example, black trans people.

Interviewer (Laurens):

So looking back and looking forward, has XR changed their tactics over time? The movement isn't very old. You were saying it's two years or three years, more or less. Have the tactics changed? Have they become more violent or less violent?

Carla:

No worries. Okay. So basically, I said that I think that, yes, it's definitely shifted and it's shifted towards more localized action and more individual groups, like smaller groups doing more specific targeted actions. At the beginning, it was kind of also in terms of narrative. It's really big, broad, like, "Oh, the government needs to act" kind of thing, without having specific targets. Over the past few years, it's shifted from the government needs to act on the climate crisis to the government needs to, specifically honing in on one demand, institute a citizens' assembly for any decisions made on the climate, which is now in three or four party programs. Amazing. That's agenda setting.

Carla:

This is what we want to be doing and actually moving more towards nonviolent direct action, like the action that I did in Lenterebellie, where we blocked a power plant. Or going specifically to the Ministry of Economy and Climate and being like, "Hey, excuse me. It's been five years since you all signed the fucking Climate Agreement, the Paris Climate Agreement, and you're not doing enough, so we're going to spray paint the graph on your building." Kind of like these more specific and more targeted messages, which I didn't as much see at the beginning of the movement, where it was more broad, more just trying to raise awareness. Whereas, now it's a bit more focused and issue-oriented as well.

Interviewer (Laurens):

And why is that?

Carla:

I think it's because it works better. I think it's because the movement is maturing. The people who organize are maturing. XR mostly people who have no organizing experience. Very different from looking at, for example, the Kraak Beweging, where you have people who have been squatting buildings for 40 years who have been training. I lived with a person who was doing trainings. They were 30 years old and they were like, "Oh, yeah. I've been squatting for 10 years. I do training so that some people can learn how to squat building." Very different kind of level of organization and understanding than a bunch of 20-year-olds in a room together, like, "Hmm, what should we do now?" So as the organization matures, its strategies

also mature. I think that within that shift to also more confrontational tactics, maybe in 10 years we'll see little militia groups popping up, where they actually go and really fuck up and fuck with production capacity.

Interviewer (Laurens):

And is that kind of the general discourse in XR or around XR? Is that on the table or is that just your your hopes?

Carla:

No. I think a lot of people in XR are still... I'm definitely an extreme. I'm an abolitionist. Like prison, police, go away. We have a lot of people who still believe that the police is an inherent necessity to having a peaceful society. We have people who do not identify as anti-racist or anticapitalist. We still have people who are literally like, "I'm here for the nature." And I'm like, "What about the millions of fucking people that are being displaced and dying?" So there is a really big variety. I think a lot of them are not radical in the same way that I am. It is much more comfortable to be kind of thinking like, "Oh, if we are nonviolent, the state will listen to us and we will get to do what we need and then we'll get there." I also don't really have that much hope that we're actually going to solve anything. So then I think the more hopeless you become, the less fucks you start to give about whether or not what you do is legal.

Interviewer (Laurens):

In terms of repression or how you've been dealt with by the authorities, has that changed over time? Like in Utrecht I think two weeks back. Is that was a real escalation compared to what you're used to?

Carla:

Yeah. I wasn't there, but I had a couple of friends who were there. I mean, fuck, man. Cops fucking suck. They really fucking suck. Regardless of whether the individual cop is or is not a shitty toxic masculinity person, the institution of the police is basically to maintain the status quo. As we can very fucking clearly see, the status quo is not fair and it's not just and it's not working, and we're all going to fucking die. So by doing something that is illegal, by standing up directly to this institution, which is basically there to make sure that you don't do that, is that something that I think is kind of easy to forget? Like the cops, they seem quite nice. For example, cutting people out of lock ons or taking the glue off of super glue and stuff, they're usually pretty nice guys. They'll come. They'll have a little laugh with you.

Carla:

That is a very different experience than dealing with uniformed police or dealing with the ME or the Marachausee. They have gotten more violent over time. As you mentioned, in Utrecht last week they arrested over 100 rebels. And the arrests were a lot rougher than before. We have gotten more disruptive and started doing more things like gluing ourselves to the street, and disrupting traffic throughout cities. We definitely stay peaceful, as hard as that is for me, but our attitude towards them has also changed. As I said earlier, we don't sing "police we

love you" anymore, and we resist arrest a lot harder. Espeially the Amsterdam police I don't like at all. And there's one very specific holding cell, holding space in the Bijlmer in which the cops are fucking assholes, and that was the last place that I was held.

Interviewer (Laurens):

This is all in the context of XR?

Carla:

Yeah, this is all in the context of XR. And the way that the repression is different, it's differentiated. I've also had police show up to my family's house unannounced and just knock on the door and be like, "Oh, we're here to talk to you about your involvement in XR." And I'm, "Okay. What do you need to know?" "Yeah, no, we just want to talk to you. We just want to figure it out. It's just protocol." "Okay. What do you need from me?" "Yeah, no, nothing really in particular." In the meantime, they're in my house. So somehow they knew that I was... Also, this was the first time that I was home in three months, so it was kind of weird that they knew that I was there. But it's shit like this.

Carla:

It's a fact that we're pretty sure that a bunch of phones got tapped during the October Rebellion, and being stopped on the street going to an action because you are wearing something with XR on it and they just are like, "Oh, no. You can't go." So it's things like this that I think are the most present with regards to police violence. I've seen a disproportionate amount of police violence being taken out on my male friends, and especially my male friends of color. In that sense, that's when I really start to hate nonviolence, is because you're faced with basically a group of people who not only have a monopoly on the ability to use violence and the justification to use violence but also carry guns and carry batons, which they are allowed to use. And in those situations, watching, sitting nonviolently on the fucking ground while you see one of your friends in a choke hold is really a difficult thing to do, I think.

Interviewer (Laurens):

Yeah. Okay. This is a whole different thing now, but do you think XR has reached any of its goals or have they succeeded in any way?

Carla:

Yes, no, I think 100%. Like I said, the fact that burgerberaaden are now a thing that is actually being talked about and actually taken seriously is a big step forward, regardless of whether you're named in it or not. It is something that now, after a big set of protests, is being talked about in politics. That's pretty interesting. Also, I think, with regards to reaching the goal, it's going to be really hard to reach the goal.

Carla:

It's really the little things. Also, in Utrecht, I don't know if you remember this, but there was a huge, huge Shell banner in the middle of the city. And so we did a protest on this. We literally just went into City Hall and we fucking staged some oil death. And then it puts it on the

agenda. That's essentially what we want to do. It's like a de-normalization of business as usual. It's like, "Hmm. Is this actually how it should be going?" I think that's the goal of a lot of activism. So I would say that if that's the goal that you're referring to, then yes. If you're referring to whether or not the government is fucking telling the truth, definitely not. GroenLinks 2045. Are you fucking kidding me? Or actually actively letting citizens decide right now and doing what they need be doing, none of that is happening. But little baby steps.

Interviewer (Laurens):

Compared to other more mainstream climate activism, do you think XR is more effective? Considering the NVDA element.

Carla:

Yes. We've been doing petitions and marches and all of this shit since the 1980s. Indigenous people have been fighting for their rights way longer. The climate struggle is an indigenous struggle, and the indigenous peoples that have been colonized all over the globe has been struggling with this since colonization. So if we look at how we have been campaigning for the preservation of biodiversity and the preservation of our climate, it's almost impossible to say that those tactics have worked. They have not. Otherwise, we would not be where we're at, which is basically no carbon budget, one-and-a-half degrees of warming pretty much locked in, everyone's going to die. We're already having climate refugees. All this shit.

Interviewer (Laurens):

And that is because of civil disobedience and NVDA?

Carla:

I think that civil disobedience and NVDA, yes, had a big part of it.

Carla:

I think it's really the disruptive actions that get the attention of the media. What fucking media is going to report on, "Oh, another petition got 10,000 signatures." No one reports on that shit. So it's also about raising the awareness within everyone, because I think a lot of people are like, "Oh, that will come later," or like, "Oh, that doesn't bother me," or "I don't even believe in it." So just putting it on the agenda and having it being covered by media is already a really big step. Disruptive actions do this. Weird actions do this. My friend in the fucking storefront of H&M with their tits out does this. People are reading this and they're like, "Oh, shit. I didn't know what greenwashing was and now I do, because this person stood in this fucking window with their tits and covered in green paint." You can write an article and post it on the internet about greenwashing, but it doesn't do the same thing. It doesn't do the same thing.

Interviewer (Laurens):

So any attention is good attention?

Carla:

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Any attention is good… no I don't think so.

Interviewer (Laurens):

As in if the goal is for the newspapers to report on it, then you can do something crazy and violent and then it comes to the newspaper, so therefore it's good. Or is that not what you mean?

Carla:

That's another reason why I think that the nonviolence is a really big part of XR strategy is because it is covered in media and you do need public support. We saw after Protestival so much public outrage about the acting of the police, because they literally came in and they were beating the shit out of people. There were videos of this and there were videos of nonviolent protest and white protestors getting a baton on their chest, on their ribs, lying like this, being hit. If that's something that you can put out and you can say, "Look, this is what we're going through to put this in the agenda, and this is what's happening in order for us not to protest," It starts ringing alarm bells.

Carla:

I think that this is in human nature. This is also in the nature of the whole fucking system that we live in in terms of what it means to be "violent" and "nonviolent". Nonviolence will garner more overall public support. Violence is going to get you the anarchists and the communists and shit. But like, "Yeah, hey, we're already on your side, so it doesn't really make that much sense to ask us that." So I think that that definitely has something to do with the nonviolent aspect. And I think if something violent... I don't know if you remember, but there was a occupation of a factory farm in the Netherlands probably a year or two ago as well. This was not even that violent, but it was a more violent occupation of this farm. It got quite a lot of negative press. Animal rights might also be more of a contentious topic. But it was really not well received.

Carla:

I think in the end, that farm... Also from a communication perspective, that actually harms your goal. So I think where we're at right now, nonviolence is the best option. And with the tactic, with the strategies and with what XR wants to achieve, it's the best option. I don't know if it will endure being the best option in 10 years, if not a lot is changing, but we'll see when that time comes, I guess.

Interviewer (Laurens):

Yeah. Okay, cool. Interesting. I think for my official questions, that is it. It was very helpful to talk to you. I'll stop recording now, but I'll happily keep talking a bit.

Interview with Mohammed (Pseudonym):

Interviewer (Laurens):

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This interview is conducted is for a university research, for the course social movements and political violence. You will remain anonymous. You may leave the interview whenever you want. You may refuse to answer any question. Can I record the interview?

Mohammed:

Yeah that's ok

Interviewer (Laurens):

I will transcribe it, and then delete it. Nobody but me will have access to the recording in the meantime.
Feel free to take some time to think before answering questions

Interviewer (Laurens):

I think it will be around 30 minutes to 45 minutes. Also, feel free to ask me questions about the questions or feel free to take time as well before you answer.

Mohammed

No problem, that's fine

Interviewer (Laurens):

I'm going to move on real quick to the next part. In your view, what is XR's relationship with Dutch law enforcements? This is a very broad question, obviously, so just take your time and you can go into the detail if you want.

Mohammed:

Yeah. It's funny because I think things change, for example, I didn't get arrested before, like a couple of months ago. And when you do get arrested, when you do have a confrontation, then it changes the relationship with the police and law enforcement.

Interviewer (Laurens):

Do you force the relationship with them?

Mohammed:

Yeah. So indeed, to me, I don't see that there is like a collective way of receiving it. Like some people think that it's just part of the game, like it's just part of the system and we of course, are disrupting it then that's what happens. And other people that maybe have either suffered, personal things or have studied from a bit more of academic perspective, like the situation they start really seeing it as a tool for suppressing us and for oppressing us.

Mohammed:

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Yeah. But I think in one and a half year's ago that our legal team also was not really sure. And now it's getting better. So I think that the relationship is also changing out of knowledge, with what's happening. I think that indeed like a struggle speaking about XR in general. So, because I think that there is not such a thing as an XR relationship with Dutch law enforcement, because it also really changes, for example, like if you have knowledge on racism and oppression, like you will never actively know. Yeah. To me, for example, I usually still can connect to police people, but then I would be very aware of what I say, like publicly, for example, because I know that could marginalize certain people, and this is like also recent occuring more into this realization now that if you then start saying certain things or the law enforcement, then certain people are going to feel, people don't understand really what's going on.

Interviewer (Laurens):

Yeah, no, exactly. I remember personally from, I think at first people used to sing a lot "Police We love you, we do". And then at some point it got phased out cause know there was more of a knowledge that no, you know, that's not necessarily the case.

Mohammed:

Yeah. Yeah.

Interviewer (Laurens):

In terms of patterns, like in terms of general shifts, have you seen a general shift towards, it's really hard to just talk about that. You can talk more maybe in your personal, in your own circle. Have you noticed some sort of shift or not?

Mohammed:

Well, as I said, definitely, the 'love you' part has been dismissed. So now, if there is the people singing, it's like, it's not the 'love you' part. It's just, we do it for your children. And yeah. I think also like the shift is that police started taking us more... Before I think that they were not really sure who we were and what we were doing, because it was just so new. So remember we needed October rebellion. Like it was so chill because like, we really felt we could do whatever we wanted and we were not even get arrested.

Interviewer (Laurens):

You mean in the beginning?

Mohammed:

Yeah. You know, they would just like move us or when we did the swarming, they didn't even try to stop us. They came and then they saw, and then they left.

Interviewer (Laurens):

When was this?

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Mohammed:

This was October, 2019.

Mohammed:

And it was without borders. Like there, I remember that the police didn't really care actually, or maybe they thought it was just like something that just happened. And then you are away, and then the moment which they realize that we're here to stay, I think, something changed either, in the municipality or I'm not sure, but they did start being, more violent or just less compromising or not even respecting their own rules of us, like allowing people to leave. So I saw that there was a shift in the relationship over the years now they know who we are and so they are ready, and before they were probably confused and as a consequence they changed the way they approach us.

Mohammed:

And as a consequence, we changed the way we see them. We see them indeed with more like an injustice kind of eyes, because many times they do things that they shouldn't be doing, like when they arrested all of us at the kickoff in Utrecht, even before anything happened, and that's just unlawful. This preventative arrest, you cannot do that. And so like, it really changes, the way people look at it and they really start seeing it as something that is frowned upon. Just the law enforcement.

Mohammed:

The last thing that I can say about it is that, well, arrest is one of the main tactic of XR. And I heard it more before, like in the beginning when I joined that was it, we were just taking a theory of change without making it our own. And so it was like we always have to strive for that kind of thing. And that also changed then the eagerness of people to get arrested. Like there was this hype, I think that sometimes in a Superman complex of wanting to struggle with police and then going out, not on your feet, but I suppose as a Superman figure, and that also really changed.

Mohammed:

The hype and feeling that you should do it, that you should get arrested without even thinking about it or yeah. That you should [inaudible 00:06:55]

Interviewer (Laurens):

It has become less over time, that hype, or what do you mean?

Mohammed:

I saw that it's become less because we develop a different theory of change or we understood that arrests doesn't always make sense. It makes sense in certain occasions, but not out of principle. So this changed the kind of decision-making that are made prior to the action, but also during the action and also it changes the individual eagerness or feeling of pressure to do it or to not do it. It seems to me that it's a bit more chill not to do it now than it was before.

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Some people want to increase protests, and stand up to the police, while other have a preference to move back to legal protests.

Interviewer (Laurens):

And why is that? You're talking about a change theory or a different theory of change. What is that?

Mohammed:

I think that indeed, there is more people joined with an interest of on focusing, not on the action part, but on everything surrounding it. And so brought in new ideas, new discourses indeed on change or on the system or on what it means to be radical. And, well, for example, I could see that region was not really possible to bring, it was very hard to bring this ideas from a regen perspective, from the region circle. So I just started thinking how I could do it. And I started just putting myself into, the CC, the coordination circle.

Interviewer (Laurens):

Okay.

Mohammed:

I nominated myself for the coordination circle facilitator in Utrecht. And from there I could spread the regen values more because I had a place.

Mohammed:

And not that I would centralize the kind of topics around what I wanted, but definitely use the platform to bring these other, like for me, I'm also interested from a theoretical perspective also because I've been doing research on it. So indeed I was looking up different theories of change. And then I was, really just mentioning them, for example. And so people started thinking that we are here not only to create a destruction, but for example, to also create our own thing. That's also valuable that we are creating a bit of an alternative community that is trying to really do things differently and trying to build resilience 'in case'.It's always needed, but especially in case things start going South, that we have our community to really fall back to for example. So like this moraty of change of creating alternative systems, and slowly but surely stop engaging with the old system, but creating a bit of a new one, for example.

Interviewer (Laurens):

And what do you mean by going South, when things go South?

Mohammed:

For example, if the way the whole deep adaptation discourse, I am pretty sure you're probably aware of that. That for some it's already about starting to adapt to the changes instead of trying to prevent them. So still doing what you can to prevent what's preventable, but that the major things is not preventable. So there is this idea still going around, especially I would say among region people. That we have to be careful also, and we should start also thinking about

these things. So start taking that as a possible reality. And so building in this community resources and individual resources to still be able to continue doing what we're doing or this kind of stuff.

Interviewer (Laurens):

You've spoken kind of like at an abstract theoretical level a bit now. In terms of like concrete tactics XR has, have they shifted over time, maybe also in response to police or just in general, have you noticed a shift in tactics?

Mohammed:

Well, again, I think that one other tactic, so in terms of like, so the action part?

Interviewer (Laurens):

Yeah.

Mohammed:

Shifting tactics, I think concrete ways. Well, first of all, I do think that we are learning to better how to make decisions and actions. So I did notice that change a little bit to try to really like, make it more participative, to be more open to outsiders joining. That's one thing. Then I did notice that there is more eagerness to also do legal demonstration. And I think that's indeed stemming from the understanding of privileges, for example, that not everybody can engage in illegal demonstration and adding a legal component. Really make it more possible for people to join. And indeed you understand a bit better what's going on. So you can be a bit more inclusive towards the people that cannot join certain activities.

Mohammed:

Well, of course, because of COVID there has been a lot of online stuff. So either Twitter storms, but then I feel like that's less concerned with the police and more concerned with the COVID situation. And then again, one of the biggest tactic that I think that this legal part it's really central actually, because it stems from an understanding that it's not all about arrest and it's not all about disruption, but it's really about creating something new and that's like really present. We could see it, for example, in the last year legal camp in September in rebellion. Did you see that?

Interviewer (Laurens):

Yeah.

Mohammed:

And really like creating a platform for sharing skills and for sharing knowledge and to really think about systemic things and things such as injustices.

Mohammed:

So I really like to grow into that. So that I think is also like a tactic to manifest the kind of community that we want to see as well as the sharing of this knowledge base and experience base components to really grow more as an activist. To know better, like what's happening and ground our activities and our projects into a bit of an understanding of the system of dynamics of power and what not. And that we could see it again, for example, in the order kickoff, where like we did the legal component next to the legal one and that was also really nice and really appreciate it. We could see it again in Aldebaran were both the digital version. So even trying to be even more inclusive.

Mohammed:

So I see that as well as seeing a shift, like we started actually targeting this organization are a bit more responsible for it. So indeed like the Shell or button fall. In the beginning, that was a principle of no blaming and shaming. It was not really understood. And it was taken as we should never make names. For example, we should never do certain things. So then it grew to that it's fine to make names and it's fine to try to haul things, people and just organization in companies accountable. Without the ground in understanding that it's not, so not necessarily like in the whole community, but for me, it's fine to keep this accountable, but without thinking that it's part of a system.

Mohammed:

To me, it's really nobody's fault. It's just like things develop. And unfortunately we internalize certain cultural component and even the horrible things that Shell did in certain parts of Africa. Unfortunately because of the old cultural thing that was considered normal or that was considered to not be a big deal. So to me it's keeping this organization accountable, but still understanding that we're all part of this you know, and it's, nobody's fault to have certain ideas or to have done certain things, but it's then the responsibility to change it.

Mohammed:

So, but that happened more. So we started targeting more this, and I also saw that some people don't like it because then it's going beyond the government. And so you're targeting specific companies, for example.

Interviewer (Laurens):

Why don't they like that?

Mohammed:

Because indeed, then we have dissolved demands. They're very strict and they'd say, if you want to do this kind of stuff, then you should be doing so from another foster frying, for example, free. Yeah. That's really targeting more these companies and we are targeting that the government. So we engage in the direct of conversation with the government, not with the companies. So we want the government to engage with the companies at a demand level and more the fact that we are rebelling against the government, that was like, it all started then. So I heard certain people saying that they don't agree with certain ways in which this is developing.

Interviewer (Laurens):

Just to swing back to one of the earlier questions, what you said that, you've seen that law enforcement have gotten more kind of oppressive and violent since XR came to Holland. Has XR had a response to that? Have you noticed that response to that? Have things changed in XR because of that? Or have they adapted in a certain way to them?

Mohammed:

Yeah. Well, I know that there's been some conversations that I was not part of around police violence. There has been some conversations indeed. And then from the legal team, people start also having the support. Well, we are much more on top of our shenanigans to lawyers, for example. Well, it's still not great, but I feel like a bit more like we have some lawyers like around the Netherlands that are always supporting us. And so there has been like more, emphasis on this component, like on the legal aspect of things. So what really changes or what you can do, what you risk as well as trying to keep police accountable. So they support to file complaints, they support. People were even talking, I'm not sure the development of it, but for example, after the order kickoff, they were really talking of doing a collective suing thingy, I'm not sure the legal part, but there was this component.

Mohammed:

And then like I said, going two ways usually, either you have its care than, and then you're not so interested in joining because of fear for your personal safety or for your future, this kind of stuff or the other way, which is indeed getting more radical. And so I see this going both ways. And also with COVID that it started to understand what is for what, because we were growing so much, with thousands of people on museum, plane, and then that changed, COVID happened and so it's hard to say what are the reasons for some stuff to happen.

Mohammed:

I guarantee that it's interesting, that it's changed is that there was a period in which people were really concerned about infiltration and I heard it less, like still there is still secret actions. It is something though that comes and goes, like the openness that we want to. It's interesting actually, because I don't see like a pattern. I did see, for example, after the kickoff, like some people say saying, well we didn't tell really like what was going to happen to the police so they didn't know what to expect. So this was the reaction. And so yeah, some people are also with the idea that you should tell more, you should be more explicit so that they know what to expect then they don't have such a unnecessary reaction.

Mohammed:

So I heard that. I also heard peoples saying that we should completely be a hundred percent open and just assume that there's always police infiltration on whatever we do. We have become even more secretive about stuff, sometimes only discussing and planning in person small groups, and being very careful with group chats. Which there is also a problem because it's that embarrassed engagement and reproduces a sort of inner circle of people that they are not open for that. Like how do people come and start getting to know the other people. I also see the troubles with that.

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Mohammed:

What's interesting was what happened with the rebellion of one is that there was a discussion whether indeed we would say something to the police or not. So this is just being reported to me. I wasn't involved, but, after the decision making, they decided to actually apply for Kenneth Steven, the permit, like in the hundreds of application. So that then, so this is like kind of a tactic to say, 'Hey, something's happening'. So we are applying all over the place. So, we're telling you, but then you don't know where and how. So kind of trying to go around and be a bit more sly.

Interview with Sara (Psuedonym)

Interviewer (Laurens):

This interview is conducted is for a university research, for the course social movements and political violence. You will remain anonymous. You may leave the interview whenever you want. You may refuse to answer any question. Can I record the interview?

Sara:

Yes

Interviewer (Laurens):

I will transcribe it, and then delete it. Nobody but me will have access to the recording in the meantime.
Feel free to take some time to think before answering questions

Interviewer (Laurens):

I think it will be around 30 minutes to 45 minutes. Also, feel free to ask me questions about the questions or feel free to take time as well before you answer.

Sara:

Thanks, yes.

Interviewer (Laurens):

If my questions are too broad, just let me know. But...

Sara:

Go ahead...

Interviewer (Laurens):

Can you speak to XR's relationship with Dutch law enforcement? What is your experience been with that so far?

Sara:

Like I said, I'm just going to speak from my own experience. I probably... other people in XR experiences it differently.

Sara:

So our relationship to law enforcement, I see... I think law enforcement is a limitation on the actions that we can take to reach our objectives. So what this means is that we know that we want to get to... We have certain demands that we want to reach. And one of them is to stop the greenhouse gases and get them to zero by 2025. And we know which companies are causing... Mostly responsible for that. So if law enforcement wasn't there, we could take more direct action against those companies, shutting them down, their offices and their operations.

Sara:

But currently the law has a lot of protections against that. So we can't do it without facing big repercussions like big fines or even time in jail. So we are... So because of that, I see it as a limitation on our actions and actions that we do organize. This means that we do take part in... Up until now, I think all actions in the Netherlands have at most have a risk of a "C" offense, which means they can hold you for a maximum of six hours in prison and then afterwards you can't get... You can't get convicted and also you won't have to go to prison for a longer time.

Sara:

Let's see if there's anything else about the relationship. So that's the way I see it, because whenever there's an action, there's always the question of like, oh what are the repercussions for me as a person. And it's always trying to push the limit of what is the most we can do without really having to face bad personal consequences.

Interviewer (Laurens):

Have you seen a change in... Because now you're speaking kind of broad terms, but in... In the policing of XR actions, have you seen a change in that over time or the change of relationship between XR and the police or how you... How they handle XR actions? I mean, obviously you've... You've been part of it for two years or maybe have you seen... Have you seen a change in that time?

Sara:

Yeah. So in terms of the... How police handles XR actions on the ground, I've seen absolutely no change. So from already in the first action that we organized the first mass action, which was in October 2019, the police had their big riot events already at the location that we announced in the moment we occupied that location. They fenced off the surroundings, not allowing anyone to enter or exit so already before... It was not like the UK that they were unprepared and then they had to learn how to deal with these actions. Either were already prepared for our tactics. And I've seen the same tactic deployed over and over again. So

whenever we do a big... Big locate, the first thing they do is close the perimeter with agents until buses arrive, and then they stack them next to each other so no one can even see to the inside, and then quickly arrest everybody that was blocking they road.

Sara:

Would you like to also know more about the relationship if the relationship has changed outside of actions?

Interviewer (Laurens):

Well, what do you mean by outside of actions? In what sense?

Sara:

People's attitudes towards the police.

Interviewer (Laurens):

Absolutely. Absolutely.

Sara:

Let's see. From my personal experience, I think having had multiple encounters with the police at actions has developed more resentment towards the police and about the role that they play. And at least for myself, I didn't see that as much before I did participate in actions. But once you are trying to do something to affect a certain change, and you're multiple times over and over you have police block your message, block people from looking and then possibly removing you. At least to me that has developed more... More resentment towards the police, but also more clarity about what role they play in maintaining the status quo.

Interviewer (Laurens):

So you're just saying that your resentment increased, that's not a response to how police change tactics, it's just more exposure-

Sara:

No it's like... Yeah, more exposure.

Interviewer (Laurens):

Exactly. So just... So you're saying, the more time you spend with them... Or less you spend with them, I don't know. The more you're faced with police the more you... The more you stop understanding them.

Sara:

No, actually the opposite. So not that I stopped understanding them, I think I understand them better. But because of that... Because of that I develop these increased resentments. So before I had the idea of police... Police are here to protect us, therefore it's... Therefore it's okay.

They removed me from this action after multiple encounters, and then I understand better that... The police is there just to enforce... Enforce the current... Enforce the current status quo and then prevent our actions from... From happening.

Interviewer (Laurens):

And do you recognize it like a similar attitude, like in more places than XR with other people that you've encountered?

Sara:

Yeah. So I'm not active in many other activist groups outside of XR, especially in other groups that have had encounters with the police. What I noticed with people that do not have those encounters with the police, they do not participate in XR actions. I often see that they still have a very positive view of the police, and see the police as... As necessary.

Interviewer (Laurens):

No, I mean more within XR, as in people. Other people that are in these actions, do you see a similar pattern as you?

Sara:

Oh. I can't speak for everyone I'm doing actions with because I don't speak with anyone around about the police, but... But definitely with a few people I'm closest with, I've also noticed, not as the same, but when police... When suddenly we were on the street and we see police come by or we're [inaudible 00:08:00] by, and then there's a big police van driving through that we all get pissed.

Interviewer (Laurens):

So you were saying that... So in Holland you haven't seen much change in tactics. They seem to already be prepared for XR's tactics from the start?

Sara:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer (Laurens):

Have XR's tactics changed over time in Holland in the time that you've been here? Or have you noticed a change or have you noticed any change in approach... An approach to actions and protests?

Sara:

Yeah. So one... One change that I have noticed is that the breadth of the types of actions we do has increased, but towards the more, in a way that increases participation. So one big point of feedback that we built was that all people that wanting to get into XR, but that they didn't. They didn't think it was for them because they didn't want to get arrested. And therefore, many people that started off don't take these high risk roles and the people that sort of maybe

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participate... Maybe in a support role, or even in a... Actually with no risk of arrest and then the longer they are in the movement, the more... The higher risks they might take. So I see that there are more... The more low risk actions to promote. You have to promote more inclusion and giving more people the chance to participate in actions and in terms of high risk actions, I think there's... I started seeing a shift towards more... More targeted actions with more clearer targets of who we want to disrupt or who we want to block.

Sara:

So before the theory of change, that will... That came from the UK is what is going to disrupt transport. And that will affect... That will cause economic damages that will lead us to a position where we can push forward our demands. But we've learned that it's not smart to just block public... Like any random form of transport and that we need to target the people that are most responsible for causing this crisis. So before, for example, in September, 2019, we just blocked the road in front of the [inaudible 00:10:49]. I mean October 2019, but then in the September but in one year later we had a specific action targeted, third thing, the Zuidas and the companies that are located at the Zuidas in Amsterdam because of the big financial... Big financial influence, that the lobby asks on our government's policies. And then I'm also started seeing that is smaller actions. So for example, the, [inaudible 00:11:18] participated in was specifically targeted at the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climates. And the biomass action was also targeted at a specific company that was trying to build new infrastructure.

Interviewer (Laurens):

And why is this shift happening? You're saying?

Sara:

So I think, well I don't know it's happening for this reason, but the reason why I think it should be happening is because when we need to disrupt the people that are responsible for causing the problem. So we've already seen in the UK the action at the London Tube where working class people were obstructed from getting to their jobs on which they're financially dependent on. And meanwhile, the companies that are actually responsible for the problem didn't face such disruptions. So it's happening because we want to negatively impact the companies that are responsible for this or the other government ministries that are responsible for this, first of all, to draw attention to what they're doing. So for example, if we would do an action at the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate we would draw attention to their failing policy. Or we do an action at H&M, we draw attention to the unsustainability of fast fashion, so that's the first aspect of it. But the second aspect is because we stopped... We directly stopped the harm that we want to stop from happening.

Sara:

And this is where you see the distinction between civil disobedience and direct action. That civil disobedience is just about doing something that the law doesn't permit as a form of protest. And in direct action, you stop yourself what you wish that wasn't happening anymore. So for example... A good example is Ende Gelaende in Germany. These are protests against coal mines. So the way they stopped it is not by standing with a banner saying that it should

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stop or blocking their headquarters, but instead they go to the coal mines themselves and then with enough people, they stop the mining operation.

Interviewer (Laurens):

Interesting. Very interesting. And you're saying that no, absolutely. I've one more question about the relationship with law enforcement in Holland. So you're saying there's this standard thing that the police do at big actions, they surround you and then they close ranks so you can't even look back inside anymore and they slowly start transporting everyone out. Has XR found... Is XR trying to find a way around though, or trying to find a way to... Has it... What does XR's response to this observation that you're making? I don't know if this is an XR-wide observation or is this just that you've made some observations by yourself, but is this something that XR is aware of or responding to?

Sara:

Yeah, I think there's some response to it. So in a sense there isn't... So for example, if you look at the September Rebellie of 2020, we did again go with a lot of people to one place and the police encircled us. So in some way we're still... We're not responding enough, I think, to their tactics. But in another way, I think we are, for example, with the rebellion of one that recently happened. Part of the reason that rebellion... The rebellion almost adopted in the Netherlands was of course... Because it's an action that you can do in during a pandemic, but also because, and this is also something that we noticed during the action, that was a very big set of feedback, is that very big feedback that came up was that we could... We were able to block streets with very few people.. The police has a lot harder time to arrest people if they are spread out in small protests of one.

Sara:

And at the same time, a lot of onlookers stopping and looking and seeing what was happening and talking to us. And that was, I think for me, the first time that I really experienced that while we were doing an action, that we could talk to the people in the streets and that we weren't encircled by police. And also that they weren't able to... Because they couldn't clearly see which people were about to do an action or which people just standing or walking on the street. So in conclusion there is some shift happening, but I think not... Not enough of a shift.

Interviewer (Laurens):

Why do you say not enough of a shift?

Sara:

Well, I said from early because in masks... In most actions. So this is one big rebellion. We still in the going to with a lot of people to one specific location. And then in the end, the police encircles us. And I think if we keep on repeating that tactic over and over, we'll have the same effects.

Sara:

There's also some other changes in that respect. So for example, instead of announcing the exact location, they announce separate locations a bit further away. And then someone who knows the location walks with the action. So that's why I don't see enough of a shift in these big actions. However, with smaller actions, like the one at the Ministry of Economic Affairs or a waterfall with the biomass plants, these were not publicly announced. And these were purposely kept within close communication groups. So we could do the action and not have the police stop us. So that's actually another shift that I'm seeing that within... Affinity groups are organizing. Not organizing [inaudible 00:17:59] each person invites some of the people that they trust and that way they keep it from reaching the police and that also prevents the police from being there beforehand and blocking us.

Interviewer (Laurens):

So more decentralized actions. Is what you're saying to me, that affinity groups are taking things into their own hands.

Sara:

Yeah. More decentralized actions, but also more secret actions to stay a step ahead of the police, a type of guerilla swarming, if you will.

Interviewer (Laurens):

Yeah. Okay. Yeah. Interesting. Yeah.