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Towards a Sense of Belonging: intersecting gender and social identities of Zimbabweans in the Netherlands

Master Thesis
Ioannis Papisilekas (S3159027)
papisilekasioannis@gmail.com

Supervisor: dr. Ajay Bailey

MSc Population Studies, 2017
Faculty of Spatial Sciences
University of Groningen
The Netherlands



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Abstract

One's *social identity* and *sense of belonging* are interconnected. The current thesis explores how gender and social identities shape the experiences of Zimbabwean migrants in the Dutch context and locates the personal strategies they employ to create a sense of belonging in the host country. The study adopts an exploratory qualitative approach; in-depth interviews were conducted with 19 Zimbabweans living in the Netherlands. Their lived experiences were examined through the lens of *Intersectionality*, a theoretical framework suggesting that multiple identities operate simultaneously to create a sense of privilege and/or disadvantage. Through the analysis of the participants' narratives it was concluded that, depending on the context or the situation, all of them experience both these aspects of social inequality in the Netherlands. In many occasions, their experiences are found to be too complex to be explained by only one aspect of their identities at a time, and hence, intersections of multiple identities such as gender, nationality, race, social class and status, were identified. An important finding is that, for Zimbabweans, language and culture are important elements of identification and differentiation in the Netherlands as a host country. Being quite sociable as a people, Zimbabweans find it important to feel accepted by the natives, which reportedly requires substantial effort from the migrants themselves; they either conform to the Dutch reality or regulate their identities to gain the acceptance of the Dutch. Overall, the level of attachment to the community within which they socialize varies among interviewees and their belongingness depends on the acceptance they receive from people within their social circles.

Keywords: Zimbabweans, the Netherlands, Migration, Sense of Belonging, Gender, Social Identities, Intersectionality, Privilege, Disadvantage

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1. Introduction

1.1 Gender, Social Identities, and Belongingness in Migration

On a global scale, emigration for education and employment purposes has been a constantly growing phenomenon. Multiple migration studies (e.g. Jolly, Reeves, & Piper, 2005; Nawyn, 2010; Oishi, 2002) have identified gender as the key determinant of who moves and where to but focusing on gender merely at aggregate levels is only partially describing the whole process of migration. Each person experiences the migration process differently and is challenged with the endeavour of adapting to the different sociocultural norms and values of the receiving society (Coll & Magnuson, 2014). Quantitative studies on migration fail to capture the ways in which the dominant gender ideologies in both the country of origin and residence position women and men differently (Al-Ali, 2007; Curran, Shafer, Donato, & Garip, 2006). The need to look at gender from a micro perspective has proven fundamental towards unravelling the reasons behind the move but also the migrant's integration experiences at destination and relations with the country of origin. It is important to note that the consideration of gender in conjunction with other aspects of a migrant's identity, e.g. race, ethnicity, nationality, age, religion, sexual preferences, and social class, has only recently been introduced in social research (Anthias, 2012; Bastia, 2014; Smith & King, 2012). Locating this intersection is proving to be instrumental in dynamically and contextually understanding the migrants' own expectations and experiences of the migration process (Anthias, 2012; La Barbera, 2014).

The growing trend of international migration results into the establishment of various ethnic minorities and contributes to the sociocultural diversity of immigrant-receiving countries in Europe (Koopmans, 2005). The migrants' cultural and ethnic identities' recognition and acceptance is central towards providing them with a sense of belonging within the receiving society (Baldassar & Baldock, 2000). Belonging is defined as the human need of being accepted as a member of a social group, be it family, friends, working environment, and is fundamental in shaping human relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Belongingness is grounded on the dynamic process of seeking and granting attention, the dimensions of which are often context- and situation-dependent (Skrbiš, Baldassar, & Poynting, 2007). Depending on the situation, individuals may evoke aspects of their identities variably to be able to negotiate their belonging (Voloder & Andits, 2015). Feeling socially connected drives an individual's motivations towards favourable outcomes (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Tyler & Blader, 2003, 2000). On the other hand, when the quality of social bonds is perceived as poor, members of minority groups may experience a sense of uncertainty and vulnerability within their own academic or professional networks (Walton & Cohen, 2007).

Probyn (1996) points out that the concept of belonging is comprised of two interrelated elements; the *being*, which refers to the present state of classification, and the *longing*, the individual's own desired positions and ideals. Recent literature on belonging emphasises on the double dimension of social inclusion; the subjective, which refers to the level of satisfaction, and the objective or socially-defined, e.g. the number of friendships one possesses (Anthias, 2008; Grünenberg, 2005; Simplican, Leader, Kosciulek, & Leahy, 2015). Nonetheless, an individual's sense of belonging does not entirely depend on their own feelings and choices, but it is intertwined with the way other members of the community value these (Voloder & Andits, 2015).

1.2 Research Focus: Zimbabweans in the Netherlands

The present study focuses on experiences of Zimbabwean migrants in the Netherlands. Currently, residents of African origin in the Netherlands account for 3.8% of the total population, of which number, Zimbabweans constitute only a small yet not insubstantial fraction of almost 2000 people comprised of an equal number of males and females (CBS Statistics Netherlands, 2017).

Zimbabwe is a country of both ethnic diversity and unique emigration interest. Tevera and Zinyama (2002) identified two historical patterns of international migration from Zimbabwe; that of white Zimbabweans soon after the country's independence due to the change in the political rule and that of skilled professionals in the following decades (Crush & Tevera, 2010). The country's recent political instability and economic decline marked a third period of mass outmigration for both male and female, skilled and unskilled, and black and white Zimbabweans (Chetsanga & Muchenje, 2003; Crush & Tevera, 2010). Estimations show that almost one third of the country's population has migrated either voluntarily or involuntarily to the neighbouring countries, but also to Europe, North America, and Oceania (Pasura, 2008).

Due to the extensive levels of outmigration, most contemporary literature on Zimbabwean migration (Chikanda, 2005; Manik, 2012; Tevera & Crush, 2003) emphasises on the motives behind the moves and choices of particular destinations, but not on what happens after the migrants are settled in the host country. Nevertheless, both elements of belonging mentioned in the introduction – one's own feelings and the perceptions of their surroundings – along with the way individuals seek to create and negotiate their sense of belonging among these elements, are very important aspects in contemporary social research on migrants' identities.

Given that literature on Zimbabwean migrants' lived realities in the host countries has been relatively scarce and that, in the context of the Netherlands, migration research has almost entirely focused on other migrant groups, the current study aims on providing an original insight on the contextual challenges which Zimbabwean migrants face in their everyday lives in the Netherlands. According to Pasura (2008, p. 17), "the Zimbabwean diaspora is not a monolithic community, but divided by race, place, ethnicity, gender, politics, and immigration status". Therefore, the exploration of how disadvantage and privilege are diversely manifested through their own narratives constitutes a very tempting research objective.

The present thesis goes along with the *social constructionist paradigm*, based on which everyday social interactions shape the meanings individuals give to their reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). According to this approach, identities are socially formulated. Gender is conceptualized as a process, where gender identities and relations are fluid and not fixed concepts (Aavik, 2015; Mahler & Pessar, 2006).

1.3 Research Objectives and Questions

This research addresses two objectives. Its primary aim is to explore how gender and social identities (e.g. ethnicity, race, religion, age, sexuality, social stratification) form the experiences of Zimbabwean migrants in the Netherlands. To get a holistic picture, both elements of self- and social identification, as well as how they think others within their social networks perceive them are explored. Respectively, the following research question was formulated to address the first objective:

- How do gender and social identities (e.g. ethnicity, race, religion, age, sexual preferences, and social stratification) shape the Zimbabwean migrants' experiences in the Netherlands?

Secondly, the way Zimbabwean migrants mobilize their gender and their social identities to create a sense of belonging in the host society, the Netherlands, is examined. The corresponding research question was formulated to address the second objective:

- How do Zimbabwean migrants navigate their gender and social identities (e.g. ethnicity, race, religion, age, sexual preferences, and social stratification) to create a sense of belonging in the Netherlands?

Particular attention is given to how certain aspects of one's social identities interact in different circumstances and depending on the individual and the context.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Intersectionality

The theoretical framework by which the current study is guided is the *Theory of Intersectionality* and its recent adaptations among broader contexts.

2.1.1 The Roots

The concept *intersectionality* was introduced by professor of Law, Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989, 1991), in her attempt to criticise the existent unilateral antidiscrimination framework under which the multidimensionality of black women's experiences of subordination in the USA is underexplored. Intersectionality is rooted in the "problematic consequence of the tendency to treat race and gender as mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis" as these experiences "actually represent only a subset of a much more complex phenomenon" (Crenshaw, 1989, pp. 139-140).

The theory criticizes the deductive way in which the dominant perception that discrimination treats all members of a group of a specific class or category similarly operates. Black women, contrary to white women or black men, might experience double-discrimination when both race and sex operate as a whole to their disadvantage. Therefore, Crenshaw (1989) suggested that this interlinkage between race and gender be taken into account when referring to the discrimination against black women, as neither sexism or racism considered solely nor their summation are variables sufficient enough to explain and address the form of oppression black women face. Moreover, the theory stretches the importance of considering the combination of more than two aspects of one's identity, such as race, gender, sex, class, sexual preference, age, and physical ability, towards understanding how hierarchies in society are formed.

2.1.2 The Broader Framework

Some years after Crenshaw's notion, Collins (2002) thought the use of intersectionality as a means towards social change, through expanding its focus from only black women in the US to all women. Intersectionality's complex dimensions have been discussed by McCall (2005), who suggested that scientific research on human interactions and behaviour should consider the overlap of different elements that constitute one's identity, e.g. gender, race, and class. McCall (2005) pointed out the need for an interdisciplinary approach to study intersectionality as inequality is apparent in different forms in contemporary social reality.

Nash (2008) re-thought intersectionality as a broader framework. She criticized the previous sole focus on black feminism and, by incorporating class, nationality, language, ethnicity, and sexuality, discusses whether intersectionality could represent a generalized theory of identity and not merely a "theory of marginalized subjectivity" (Nash, 2008, p. 89). Kwan (1996, p. 1275) explained how "straight white maleness is a multiple identity" as well, providing straight white males with multiple privilege. Matsuda (1993) emphasized that a holistic picture of one's identity and experiences should be grounded on how oppression and privilege intersect. Both disadvantage and privilege can derive from different intersections of one's identities (Shields, 2008). According to Bowleg (2008) individuals can be members of dominant and inferior social groups at the same time. Treating all black women as wholly marginalized does not capture individuals' "experiences that afford some black women greater privilege, autonomy and freedom" (Nash, 2008, p. 89). Hence, lived experiences of an individual in

particular circumstances are strongly bound to how their multiple identities operate in intersections rather than how each component considered separately would. Most studies develop a unitary approach, taking either gender or ethnicity as their major analytical perspective through which to describe experienced disparities. Such approaches do not capture the experiences lived at the intersection of both elements (Aavik, 2015; Hancock, 2007).

Nash (2008, p. 89) argues that “intersectionality has yet to contend with whether its theory explains or describes the processes and mechanisms by which subjects mobilize (or choose not to mobilize) particular aspects of their identities in particular circumstances”. The current research drew its interest from the previously quoted argument and seeks to simultaneously explore how Zimbabwean migrants in the Netherlands identify themselves socially and how they make use of this identification to negotiate their belongingness.

2.1.3 Migration Studies; Context-Dependency of Intersectional Identities

Currently, the focus on intersectionality is expanding from feminism studies to gender studies and from oppression to diversity, incorporating multi-layered social relations and roles (Bürkner, 2011; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Bürkner (2011) stretches the importance of incorporating the concept of intersectionality within migration research. According to Winker and Degele (2011), the main categories responsible for the formation of intersectional identities are derived from social norms; class on the basis of social decent and education level, gender on the basis of heterosexuality, race on the basis of symbolic classifications of human groups, and body on the basis of age, ability and attractiveness. Therefore, as social norms differ among places and people, it comes as no surprise that these four categories are context-dependent, and that even body and age are components of one’s identity playing a critical role on how they are perceived by their surroundings.

Apart from the *context-dependency* aspect, Bürkner (2011), and Winker and Degele (2011) also refer to the *situational discrimination* aspect of the individual experiences of intersectionality. They claim that the same person when exposed to different everyday settings (e.g. at home, at work, with friends), might experience different sets of intersectionality; on the one hand, the individual might experience inequalities to the point of intolerability, while on the other hand, they might experience some intersections as positively compensating (Bürkner, 2011; Winker & Degele, 2011). Thus, Bürkner (2011, p. 187) suggests that, through an intersectional perspective, “an unbiased apprehension of the normality of the migrant experience” will be achieved, as studies on migrants will shed light on the complex origins of social inclusion or exclusion of men and women in a dynamic way.

The embracement and/or the disownment of different identities depending on the different situations and contexts is a parallel aspect to the complex process of seeking belongingness (Voloder & Andits, 2015). Even though overlays of categories, variables, and interpretations might have structural roots for an individual, the fact that everyday life is very much restricted to social networks, these aspects are also shaped by everyday social interactions (Bürkner, 2011).

2.2 Literature review

The current thesis has built its foundations on previous research which is summarized below. The reviewed literature revolves around three main categories of interest: the dimensionality and mobilization of international migrants’ identities, the background context of Zimbabwe, and experiences of the Zimbabwean diaspora.

2.2.1 International migration, dimensionality and mobilization of identities towards belongingness

Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, and Vedder (2001) stress that the ethnic and national identities of immigrants interrelate and interact with the perceived levels of acceptance within the host society. Ethnic identity is a dynamic and individually variable construct, according to Marcia (1993). Identifying with the host society is a more complex task (Phinney et al., 2001). Amit and Bar-Lev (2014) note that *identity* and *sense of belonging* are interconnected concepts and that in order to understand a migrant's belongingness, the ways social and self-identification are released in the host country must be examined. Zontini (2015) on her study on settled old Italian migrants in the UK, concludes that their sense of class, ethnic, and transnational identity plays a role in the formation of social networks and their social life but at the same time their lived experiences largely affect their sense of identity, as well. Thus, their feelings of belonging are not constant but change over the life course (Zontini, 2015). The connection of the migrant with the country of origin in the form of individual identity is maintained throughout the migration process, often used as an interpretive tool, contributing also to their own reality in the host society (Amit & Bar-Lev, 2015; Lerner, Rapoport, & Lomsky-Feder, 2007).

While some immigrants may emphasize on their individual and cultural characteristics towards feeling accepted, others may downplay their own ethnic identity to deal with negative attitudes towards them (Phinney et al., 2001). On immigration in the Netherlands compared to three other countries, Phinney et al. (2001) found that immigrants demonstrated the lowest levels of national (Dutch) identity, while scoring significantly high in ethnic identity levels. In the same study, immigrants in Finland are found to have largely marginalized identities, deriving from the fact that in Finland they *should act like Finns*, whereas in the Netherlands immigrants are encouraged to maintain their own ethnic characteristics (Rath, Groenendijk, & Penninx, 1991).

In their study on Bosnian and Hungarian migrants in Australia, Voloder and Andits (2015) have found a strong desire among migrants to challenge stereotypes in the destination country. These stereotypes appear to hinder their level of belonging in the Australian context, as ethnic minorities are bound to show and defend their cultural characteristics and norms in order to feel part of the community (Voloder, 2011; Voloder & Andits, 2015). The researchers (2015) conclude that migrants often need to simultaneously identify and dis-identify themselves with certain notions of culture while negotiating a sense of belonging.

Visser, Bailey, and Meijering (2015), through examining the social wellbeing of Ghanaian migrants in the Netherlands, point out that the migrant's social network is central for cultivating their sense of identity and wellbeing. More importantly, the social ties with other migrants build trust and enhance their sense of being part of the community (Visser et al., 2015). In many cases, migrants might feel displaced within the host country, if they sense that the personalities of the host population differ significantly from theirs (Fulmer et al., 2010). Amit (2012) found that Western immigrants in Israel feel culturally superior compared to locals, while Ethiopian migrants' sense of inferiority in the same context derives from their thoughts of being perceived as a black minority. Visser et al. (2015) found that both male and female Ghanaian "migrants maintain social networks with other Africans to prove they still live up to their original values and habits" (p. 620). Their Netherlands-based social networks are found to contribute positively to their sense of belonging, as within them they are able to express their identity and common experiences (Visser et al., 2015).

Another factor contributing to the immigrants' identity and sense of belonging is their motives of migrating of both ideological and religious nature (Amit & Bar-Lev, 2015; Sabar, 2010). Especially for most African migrant groups which in general are quite religious, being able to go to church and keep

up with their religious practices in the host country is found to play an important role in their sense of belonging (Amit & Bar-Lev, 2015; Visser et al., 2015).

2.2.2 The Zimbabwean Context: Gender and Race disparities in the country of origin

In order to understand how Zimbabwean migrants identify themselves, a brief overview of how gender and race are treated within the home country Zimbabwe is considered necessary.

Since attaining its political independence in 1980 from Britain, Zimbabwe has been a country fighting for gender equality for three decades. Through the anti-discrimination *Labour Relations Act* of 1985, which supported that employers' choices should not be grounded on race, tribe, colour, or sex and through the establishment of various policies, the government sought to minimize gender disparities at all levels, by promoting equal opportunities in decision-making positions for both women and men. (Chabaya, Rembe, & Wadesango, 2009). Despite these efforts though, gender disparities in Zimbabwe are still persistent at multiple levels, and gender has emerged as the most powerful predictor of girls' future careers (Chabaya et al., 2009; Mutekwe & Modiba, 2013; Mutekwe, Modiba, & Maphosa, 2011). Chabaya et al. (2009) have investigated the negative influence of gender-role stereotypes on the women's confidence and perceptions towards pursuing a leadership career in Zimbabwe.

Multiple studies (Mpofu, Thomas & Chan, 2004; Mutekwe & Modiba, 2013; Mutekwe & Mutekwe, 2012) have concluded that education in Zimbabwe is gender insensitive, despite the fact that Zimbabwe has one of the highest literacy rates for both sexes in the whole of Sub-Saharan Africa (Nhundu, 2007). Mandaza (1986) observes that even in post-independence Zimbabwe, the schooling system retained the colonial class structure, dividing students into privileged and disadvantaged. Highly influenced by the colonial British system, the Zimbabwean education system encourages boys to become scientists, while girls are expected to be occupied with domestic or arts subjects (Gordon, 1997; Mutekwe & Modiba, 2013; Wolpe, 1987).

Furthermore, even though traditional African cultures tend to encourage black male children towards socializing more than their female counterparts, Reicher (2004) supports that with a change in the cultural setting, the same people may be perceived as loud and therefore feel socially disadvantaged. Moreover, within a multicultural context, white students' social status provides them with a perceived social advantage over their black peers (Cohen & Lotan, 1995). Mpofu et al. (2004), in a study conducted at multicultural Zimbabwean schools, have found white and female students to be significantly higher on social behaviour and social responsibility than their black and male classmates. They concluded that social competence in students is multifaceted and gendered.

2.2.3 The Zimbabwean Diaspora

Southern Africa

Literature supports that in the neighbouring Southern African countries, the existing xenophobia creates a sense of insecurity and unsettlement for Zimbabwean immigrants. More specifically, in a study concerning Zimbabwean farm-labourers in South Africa, Rutherford (2008) has found that their 'Zimbabwean-ness' creates a certain level of anxiousness which hinders the labourers' perceived level of security and belonging. Crush & Tawodzera (2014) have explored the experiences of children of Zimbabwean families in relation to accessing South African education. They have found that Zimbabwean families are pushed to avoid the unwelcoming public schools in order to educate their children as despite their legal status, they experience exclusion and discrimination.

In Botswana, Marr (2012) notes that Zimbabweans tend to have a strong sense of national identity, which is enhanced by their experiences of marginalization and discrimination in the neighbouring country. Interestingly, their high literacy levels and skills appear to have a reverse effect on the way they are treated by employers and officials. Many Zimbabwean immigrants report that they feel as they are being taken advantage of by the natives.

Oceania and North America

In Australia, Zimbabwean mothers experience multiple challenges when trying to raise their children in the unfamiliar environment. In many occasions, they feel discriminated against when interacting with the healthcare system of the host nation. They attribute their difficulties to the different cultural norms and expectations in Australia (Benza & Liamputtong, 2016).

Crush, Chikanda, & Maswikwa (2012) report that even though Zimbabwean migrants in Canada are highly educated, a large number have difficulties exercising their profession and finding a relevant job, as their certificates gained in Zimbabwe might not be fully accepted by the Canadian system. Similarly, in the US, Zimbabweans experience difficulties transferring their educational credentials (Chaumba, 2016). Additionally, their immigration status and internalized expectations appear to have a negative effect on accessing employment and highly-paid opportunities.

United Kingdom

This last part focuses on the lived experiences of Zimbabweans in the UK where contemporary literature on Zimbabweans' experiences mostly concentrates on, as a large portion of the Zimbabwean diaspora resides there.

Pasura (2008) explores the lived experiences of the contemporary Zimbabwean diaspora in the UK, emphasizing on how migrants negotiate and construct diasporic identities. In Zimbabwe, the existing unequal power relations of men and women are rooted in the dominant perceptions of patriarchal norms and structures (Made & Mpofu, 2005). In the British context however, Pasura (2008) points out that Zimbabwean migrants tend to construct new identities and rethink gender roles. Women do renegotiate their gendered identities; duties are shared between men and women as the latter are given more freedom towards making decisions.

Even though Zimbabweans are one of the most educated and highly skilled¹ African migrant groups, both their cultural and social capital are depreciated through migrating (Pasura, 2008). This is partly due to the fact that they tend to exercise low-status, irrelevant to their qualifications jobs in the host country. In another study, Madziva, McGrath, and Thondhlana (2016) examine the challenges which highly skilled Zimbabwean migrants in the UK face concerning their employability. They similarly find that despite the strong fluency in English and the high levels of literacy, their level of employability is hindered by the Zimbabwean cultural identity and the strongly embedded sociocultural norms (Madziva et al., 2016). This, in turn, also affects their sense of being part of the community.

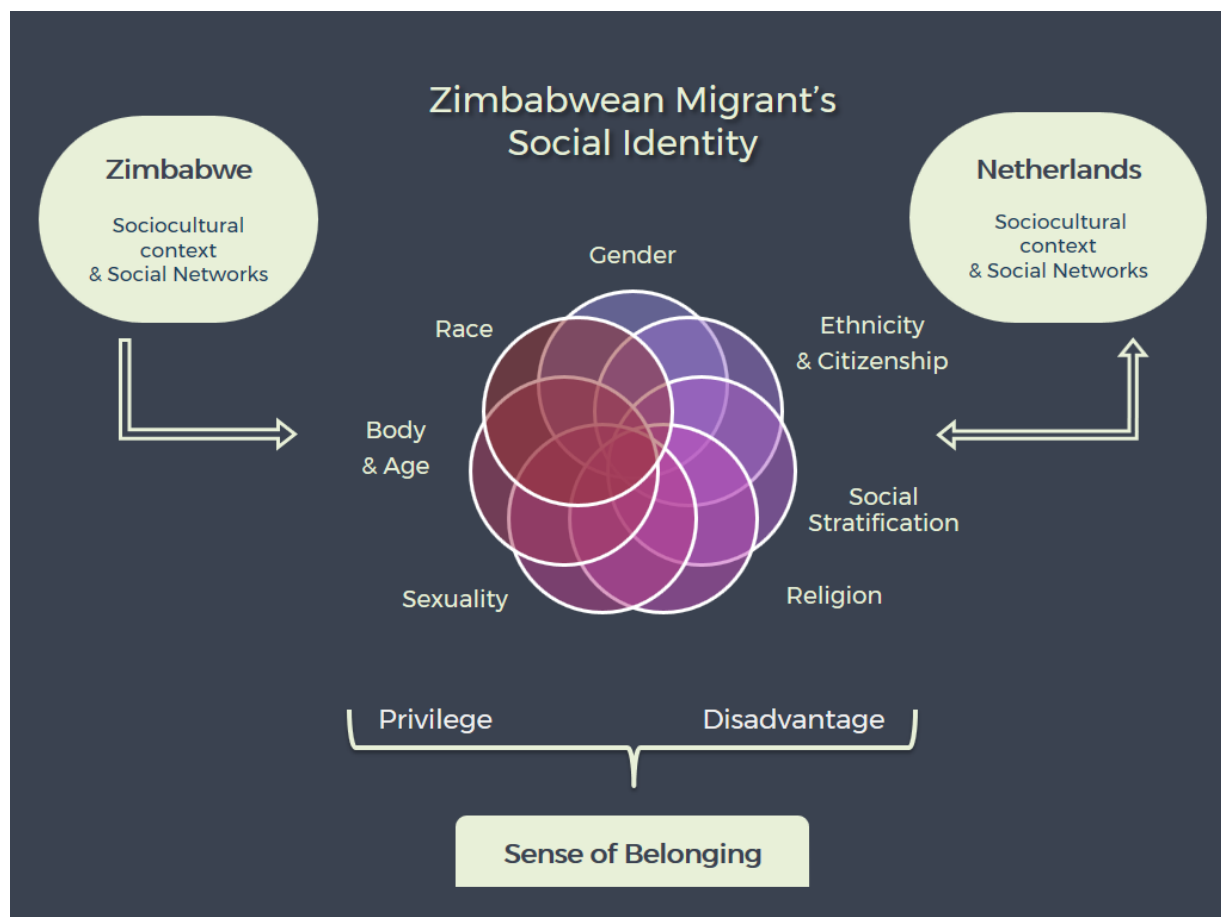
Overall, Pasura (2008) concludes that the majority of Zimbabweans abroad needs to adopt various strategies in order to participate in the labour market, due to the multiple forms of discrimination they face. Black participants in Pasura's study (2008) reflected on being harassed due to the colour of their skin combined with their nationality; being black and Zimbabwean implies less career

¹ Highly skilled migrants are defined as those who possess at least one university degree (Harvey, 2008).

prospects than being black and British. Moreover, they would suffer multiple marginalization grounded on their race, ethnic, gender, and tribal identities on a daily basis (Pasura, 2008). Although white Zimbabweans find it easier to integrate in host countries compared to their black counterparts, Pasura (2008) notes that they also do experience a form of multiple discrimination through the stereotypical assumption that they are altogether racists. Therefore, white Zimbabweans appear to mobilize certain aspects of their identity in order to defend their opinions, as well.

In conclusion, it is of great importance and relevance to the current study to realize the implication of the construct of intersectionality in the previous paragraph. One might suppose that the simplistic notion that skin colour considered solely explains the distinction between employment and unemployment, but as we see in Pasura’s study (2008), this assumption is highly biased. In both cases of black and white Zimbabweans, it appears at first as though their skin colour is the only determinant of the level of trust they receive. By a more thorough approach though, it is made obvious that once their nationality is exposed, not only people are seen differently, but this difference lies in the intersection of race and nationality.

2.3 Conceptual Model



Conceptual Model: Towards a sense of belonging; an intersectionality perspective

The conceptual model presented above is based on the theoretical framework of the study. Based on Intersectionality, an individual’s social identity is made up of various components, e.g. gender, ethnicity, race, etc. which are not mutually exclusive, but they interact through the formation of multiple intersections. An individual’s social identity is created and constantly influenced by the sociocultural

context they grow up and live in, as well as the social networks they create and maintain throughout their lives.

Once the individual migrates to another place with different social and cultural norms, beliefs, practices, infrastructure, and institutions, then the same person is also influenced by their new environment and creates new social networks. All these interactions with their new environment and the experiences they have, in conjunction with their primary beliefs and perceptions from their background, simultaneously shape the migrants' social identities.

The individuals give a certain meaning to the information they receive and form ideas and perceptions, which lead them to feeling advantaged or disadvantaged in particular circumstances. All these feelings deriving from their experiences contribute to the migrant's level of sense of belonging in the host society.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The present study adopted a cross-sectional and explorative qualitative approach. Specifically, the research employed individual in-depth interviews. According to Wengraf (2001), through an in-depth interview, a researcher is able to collect personal narratives and identify the subjectivity and the sociocultural context of the interviewee. As Lawler (2002, p. 243) points out, through narratives, “individuals and groups interpret the social world and their place within it” and construct their identities. As the research concepts here are based on *social constructionism*, we are interested in the subjective meanings people give to their stories to form their own personal views. The objectives of the study are addressed through the analysis of personal stories and narratives, reflecting on the emic perspectives of the participants. The interviews attempted to gain a deep understanding of the personal experiences of Zimbabweans in the host country, the Netherlands. Therefore, in-depth interviews were considered necessary for the purpose of this study. In total, 19 face-to-face interviews were conducted.

3.2 Definition and Operationalization of Concepts

In this section, all concepts mentioned in the conceptual model of the study are explained in detail and operationalized to be measured during the study. Examples of questions from the interview guide (found in Appendix C) are provided in the table.

| Concept | Definition | Operationalization |
|---|---|--|
| <p>Sociocultural Context or Social Environment</p> | <p>is defined as the immediate social, cultural, and physical setting “within which certain groups of people function and interact” (Barnett & Casper, 2001, p. 465). The sociocultural context includes “built infrastructure; industrial and occupational structure; labor markets; social and economic processes; wealth; social, human, and health services; power relations; government; race relations; social inequality; cultural practices; the arts; religious institutions and practices; and beliefs about place and community” (Barnett & Casper, 2001, p. 465).</p> | <p>The present study focuses on the sociocultural context of the Netherlands as a place where the subjects live and to the context of Zimbabwe as the place where they have been born and grown up. The sociocultural context is the place where individuals from Zimbabwe experience their everyday lives, through the relationships they form with each of the context-composing variables, e.g. built infrastructure, beliefs about place and community, power and social relations, religious and arts institutions. (e.g. <i>How was it when you first arrived here? How did you feel?</i>)</p> |
| <p>Social Network</p> | <p>is a social structure consisting “of a finite set or sets of actors and the relation or relations defined on them” (Wasserman & Faust, 1994, p. 20). In this study, the focus lies mostly on the micro level of social networks: the social relationships which an individual forms.</p> | <p>refers specifically to all the people and institutions, Dutch or non-Dutch, with whom Zimbabweans in the Netherlands converse, communicate, and share their experiences. (e.g. <i>How would you describe your social life?</i>)</p> |

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| <p style="text-align: center;">Sense of Belonging or Belongingness</p> | <p>is the universal feeling of being accepted as a member of a social group (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Maslow (1954) identified belonging as the third basic human need in his hierarchy.</p> | <p>refers to the perceived level of being accepted as a member in the various social groups which Zimbabweans create and maintain in the Netherlands. It is measured by the number and the perceived quality of bonds which Zimbabweans form with each of their surroundings. They may rate their belonging as strong, poor, or somewhere in-between. (e.g. <i>To what extent do you feel that you are a part of the community you live in now?</i>)</p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Social Identity</p> | <p>According to Social Identity Theory (Turner & Oakes, 1986), social identity is defined as an individual's self-concept of themselves deriving from how they perceive their membership and status in a related social group. Tajfel (1974) stretches the significance of considering the emotions attached to this membership.</p> | <p>is measured as the way a Zimbabwean thinks about their former, current, and future self. It is comprised of various aspects, such as gender, sex, age, and ethnicity. Some of these aspects may form intersections and be considered inseparable from each other for an individual. (e.g. <i>How do you sense other people's impressions of you?</i>)</p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Gender Identity</p> | <p>"refers to an individual's sense of identity as masculine or feminine, or some combination thereof" (Morrow & Messinger, 2006, p. 8). Therefore, one's gender identity is an important aspect of their social identity and does not necessarily correlate with their biologically-given sex.</p> | <p>is how a person categorizes themselves in terms of masculinity and femininity. One might identify as male or female, but it could also be that they dis-identify from this binary distinction (e.g. transgender or queer). One's gender identity might differ across different contexts.</p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Ethnicity or Ethnic Group</p> | <p>"is a named social category of people based on perceptions of shared social experience or one's ancestors' experiences" (Peoples & Bailey, 2011, p. 389). Members of an ethnic group derive from all strata of a population and view themselves sharing culture and history similarities which distinguish them from other groups (Peoples & Bailey, 2011).</p> | <p>is the self-definition of coming from a particular background and place and having a common language, ancestral, national, and cultural experiences with a group. In this study, a person might identify with their country of birth Zimbabwe and/or with the tribe they descend from, e.g. the Shona or the Ndebele, or both their country and tribe origins. White participants might identify with their European ancestry as well.</p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Citizenship or National Identity</p> | <p>According to Miler (1995, p. 27), nationality is distinguished from other forms of personal identity by five elements: "a community (1) constituted by shared belief and mutual commitment, (2) extended in history, (3) active in character, (4) connected to a particular territory, and (5) marked off from other communities by its distinct public culture".</p> | <p>is determined by the passport an individual holds along with how they personally identify themselves with regards to national identity. One might acquire their citizenship by birth, by marriage, or by naturalization.</p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Religious Identity</p> | <p>refers to the sense of membership of an individual to a religion, often including religiosity and religiousness, but it does not necessarily refer to one's religious activity or participation to practices (Schmidt & Miles, 2017).</p> | <p>is measured by the kind of religion a Zimbabwean has decided to follow, e.g. Catholicism, the importance they give to their religious beliefs, e.g. highly religious or non-religious, and the personal meaning they give to religious practices, e.g. going to church.</p> |

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| Social Stratification (social class, social status, and party) | According to the three-component theory of stratification (Weber, 2009), social stratification is a multidimensional construct of three aspects of distribution of power within society: social class, social status, and party, which correspond to wealth, prestige, and power respectively. | is threefold. It is determined by social class: based on the economic power one has or is considered to have; social status: based on non-economic factors, such as prestige and honour and; party: referring to the political affiliations of an individual. |
| Body and Age | Body, apart from referring to the physiological structure and characteristics of a human being, also involves the individual's subjectivity in constructing their own meanings, as "the body-subject configures the physical body" (Radley, 1995, p. 5). Similarly, ageing refers to the process of physical, psychological, and social change which a human body is being subjected to over time (Moody, 2006). | is how a person interprets the physical form of their body and their age and how confident they feel about having these particular characteristics. The physical characteristics of an individual's body might have different importance for different people and might influence their sense of being accepted (both) positively and/or negatively depending on the sociocultural context. |
| Sexuality or Sexual Identity | is the way a person perceives themselves in terms of whom they are sexually and romantically attracted to (Reiter, 1989). It also includes the identification or dis-identification with a sexual orientation. | an individual might be sexually or romantically attracted to people of the same sex or gender, of the opposite sex or gender, of both sexes, of more than one genders or of no sex or gender. |
| Race | is the classification of humans based on their physical characteristics, ancestry, and genetics but its meaning has been varying over time referring to social conceptions, as well (Anemone, 2015). | an individual from Zimbabwe might categorize themselves as black, white, or mixed (coloured) based on the colour of their skin, but it could also happen that they do not consider race as an important part of their identity. |
| Intersectional Privilege | Aavik (2016, p. 39) defined as intersectional privilege "the opportunities and advantages that are systematically available to individuals or groups in particular social contexts and situations due to their privileged position on the axis of gender, age, ethnicity, race and other relevant social categories simultaneously". | When more than one aspects of one's identity operate simultaneously to their benefit, putting them in a favourable position of social inequality in comparison to other social groups. (e.g. <i>How differently do you feel that you are perceived here compared to Zimbabwe?</i>) |
| Intersectional Disadvantage | Relying on Aavik's (2016) definition of intersectional privilege, I correspondingly define as intersectional disadvantage the obstacles and hindrances that systematically individuals or groups experience in particular social contexts and situations due to their disadvantaged position on the axis of gender, age, ethnicity, race and other relevant social categories simultaneously. | When more than one aspects of one's identity operate simultaneously to their disadvantage, creating an unfavourable condition of social inequality in comparison to other social groups. (e.g. <i>Have you ever experienced any kind of discrimination?</i>) |

3.3 Research Instrument – Considering Intersectionality

As all of the participants are fluent in English, some of them having English as their mother tongue, all the in-depth interviews were conducted in English and carried out with the use of a semi-structured interview guide which was discussed with my supervisor prior to conducting any fieldwork. After the completion of the interview guide a pilot interview was arranged through which the relevance of the questions and their comprehensibility to the interviewee were assessed.

Subsequently, changes were made to address the objectives in a more concrete way and avoid the deconstruction of identities as much as possible, as suggested by multiple scholars (e.g. Aavik, 2015; Bowleg, 2008) who have had to deal with methodological challenges when applying an intersectionality framework in their studies. Bowleg (2008) supports that studies willing to conduct interviews under the scope of intersectionality should pay a lot of attention to the way the questions are formulated and posed. As one's identities are not mutually exclusive but interdependent, the content of the interview guide "should focus on meaningful constructs such as stress, prejudice, discrimination rather than relying on demographic questions alone" (Bowleg, 2008, p. 316). Deconstructing one's identity in an attempt to rank its components has the opposite of the desired outcome and therefore the questions should revolve around the participants' experiences and how they spontaneously invoke those (Aavik, 2015; Bowleg, 2008). Relying on these researchers' arguments, I have tried to construct an interview guide focusing mostly on perceptions and feelings, and tried to evoke reflections and reasons behind their experiences. Some participants described the questions of the interview as 'very general' and 'too broad', often requesting a reformulation of the question. Hence, the upkeep of the discussion and the data collection was dealt with the use of multiple probes.

The questions in the interview guide revolved around – but were not limited to – topics such as the participants' background and sociocultural context, social networks and the process of socialization, social and self-identification, contextual challenges and "unusual" experiences, sense of equality and discrimination, sense of belonging, and feelings towards Zimbabwe, and can be found in Appendix C.

3.4 Participant Recruitment

The research subjects in this study were purposively chosen under the primary conditions of originating from Zimbabwe and residing in the Netherlands for not less than one year. Based on Pasura's statement (2008, p. 17) that "the Zimbabwean diaspora is not a monolithic community", to capture a holistic view of the Zimbabwean migration experiences in the Netherlands, the study sought to include a diverse group of participants; both men and women, of black and white skin colour and within a range of ages and professions.

Due to the small number of Zimbabweans in the Netherlands, most of the participants were contacted and familiarized with the purpose of the study well before the initial conduct of the research, in order to be established whether the project is feasible or not. Most of the research subjects were identified through the means of social media, e.g. Facebook and Linked-In, as well as African-networking websites. Another participant-recruitment strategy employed was chain sampling (i.e. "snowball" sampling).

Overall, around 50 Zimbabweans were identified and contacted, more than half of whom replied on time. Of those, 19 were chosen to participate in the study. Every interviewed person has been positive towards the research and contributed significantly to the realization of the primary idea into a successful project.

3.5 Profile of Participants

For the purpose of the study, 19 people born in Zimbabwe and living in the Netherlands were interviewed. As previously mentioned, the study sought to include a diverse group of participants. Therefore, to ensure the diversity of backgrounds and identities, some main demographic characteristics of the participants were established even before the actual meeting took place. A

notable characteristic of my sample is that all of them have moved to the Netherlands as legal and/or highly skilled immigrants. Most characteristics presented below are intentionally not linked to the name of the participants to secure their anonymity.

Overall, 10 of the participants are women and 9 are men; 14 are black, 4 white, and one of mixed-race or 'coloured'. Their ages range from 19 to 50 years, covering all 5-year intervals in-between. Origin-wise, 9 participants were born in the capital Harare or some suburb, while the remaining 10 originate from almost all corners of Zimbabwe. Moreover, at least 5 different ethnicities are included, e.g. Shona, Ndebele, Nambya, and white of European ancestry. Linguistically, almost all of the participants speak at least 3 or 4 languages, e.g. Shona, English, Ndebele, Dutch, with the majority having Shona as their mother tongue. At the time of the interviews, the participants were residents of 7 different cities in the Netherlands with some of them working or studying in another city. Interestingly, 9 of them have lived in some other country or countries before moving to the Netherlands. Their time in the Netherlands ranges between 1 and 24 years, averaging 8 years. With regards to their occupation, 9 participants were either Bachelor or PHD students of various disciplines, 3 of whom were also exercising minor jobs. One participant was a recent graduate in search of a job. The remaining 9 participants are all employed, most of whom in high-level positions, e.g. manager, company owner. Regarding their marital status, at the time that the interviews took place, 7 were single, 3 were in a relationship with a Dutch person, 3 were married to a Dutch, 5 were married to a Zimbabwean, and one was married to a British.

Finally, it was also considered interesting to conduct separate interviews with a limited number of people who are related to each other; two of the participants are married to each other, and two have a parent-child relationship. Apart from some common experiences they have shared with me, it was interesting to discuss with both sides and see the differences in their points of view and also what is their role in each other's sense of belonging.

An analytical table of the participants is presented below. Pseudonyms were used to protect their identities but simultaneously reflect their gender and ethnicity. Their ages were loosely categorized in 10-year age groups: younger (19-30); 30-40; and older (40-50), with no participant belonging to more than one age group.

| Date of Interview | Pseudonym | Sex | Age Range | Race* | Main Reason to Move to NL** | Years in NL | Marital Status*** | Occupation in NL | Lived Abroad before NL |
|-------------------|-------------|-----|-----------|----------|-----------------------------|-------------|-------------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| 09-Apr | Panashe | F | 19-30 | Black | Study | <5 | Single | BA Student & Work | ✓ |
| 06-May | Trudy | F | 19-30 | White | Study | <5 | Single | BA Student | |
| 07-May | Kutenda | M | 19-30 | Black | Study | <5 | Single | BA Student | |
| 10-May | Rachel | F | 19-30 | White | Family | 5-10 | Relationship-D | Social Scientist | |
| 11-May | Tafadzwa | M | 40-50 | Black | Love | 10-15 | Married-D | Company Management | ✓ |
| 12-May | John | M | 19-30 | White | Study | 5-10 | Relationship-D | BA Student & Work | ✓ |
| 14-May | Anodiwa | F | 40-50 | Black | Love | >15 | Married-D | Company Management | |
| 14-May | Anenyasha | F | 19-30 | Black | Family | >15 | Single | BA Student & Work | |
| 19-May | Rutendo | F | 30-40 | Black | Love | 10-15 | Married-Z | Finance Officer | |
| 19-May | Tonderai | M | 30-40 | Black | Study | 10-15 | Married-Z | Manager | |
| 19-May | Danai | F | 19-30 | Black | Study | <5 | Relationship-D | Management Trainee | ✓ |
| 20-May | Vimbo | F | 19-30 | Black | Study | 5-10 | Single | BA Student | |
| 21-May | Anthony | M | 40-50 | White | Love | >15 | Married-D | Technician | ✓ |
| 21-May | Munesu | M | 30-40 | Black | Work | <5 | Married-Z | Ass. Professor | ✓ |
| 24-May | Kudzai | M | 19-30 | Black | Study | <5 | Single | PHD Student | |
| 29-May | Tanaka | F | 30-40 | Black | Family | 5-10 | Married-UK | Accountant | ✓ |
| 29-May | Simba | M | 19-30 | Coloured | Study | <5 | Single | BA Student | ✓ |
| 04-Jun | Ndabezinhle | M | 30-40 | Black | Love | <5 | Married-Z | Work | ✓ |
| 04-Jun | Xolisani | F | 30-40 | Black | Study | 5-10 | Married-Z | PHD Student | |

*Table of Participants: *I do not refer to my participants as “black”, “white”, or “coloured” as an outcome of racist classification, but as a product of the ways literature and participants during the interviews referred to Zimbabweans. **Study: Moved specifically to study, Family: Moved following their family’s decision, “Love”: Moved following their partner’s choice to live in the Netherlands. ***D: to/with a Dutch, Z: to a Zimbabwean, UK: to a British.*

3.6 Fieldwork, Data Collection, Quality, and Analysis

The fieldwork took place in 5 different cities of the Netherlands, during the course of one month; from the 6th of May until the 4th of June 2017. The pilot interview took place one month before the remaining 18 interviews to allow time for reassessing the interview guide and organizing meetings with the participants. It is worth mentioning that 3 of the participants came to Groningen from other cities to facilitate the process. 9 of the interviews were conducted in private spaces, such as the participant’s home or workplace, while the remaining 10 took place in public; cafeterias or bars. Most interviews lasted around one hour, but in an attempt to receive deep and meaningful information, the duration of the interviews was not fixed but ranged from 39 minutes to 2 hours and 16 minutes.

In general, no disruptions occurred during the data collection, apart from one interview where the recorder stopped and part of the interview was lost. To minimize the data loss, its transcription was done immediately after its conduct, relying mostly on memory and notes taken during the interview. Subsequently, the transcript was sent to the interviewee, who wholeheartedly took the time to check, correct, and add to the answers.

All the recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. Hence, the overall adequacy of the data received, as well as the smallest detail in the participants’ expressions and feelings, were maintained. Most importantly, as all interviewees are proficient in English, language did not undermine their answers.

The transcripts were anonymized and uploaded into the Atlas.ti software for qualitative data analysis. All 19 interviews were coded both deductively and inductively. Deductive codes were developed based on the concepts included in the conceptual model and patterns were identified resulting into inductive codes, as well. During the preparation of the data, transparency was ensured with detailed descriptions of most codes, and the code development reached a saturation point. Overall, 85 codes were developed which were then categorized into 6 code families to reflect the main objectives of the study. An analytical table of the Code Families can be found in Appendix D.

From there, the analysis of the results was done, often going back and forth to cover all data received and simultaneously taking into account the different intersections of identities observed.

3.7 Ethical considerations

Each participant was informed through an invitation letter about the content and the goals of the study, its voluntary nature, as well as the option to withdraw from the interview at any time prior to conducting any fieldwork. The exact same invitation letter together with an informed consent form were reviewed and signed by each participant at our initial contact right before each interview took place. All participants were adults by the time of the study, and therefore, all consented in taking part on their own. Overall, all interviews were completed without disruptions and none of the participants left the study prematurely. The Invitation Letter and the Informed Consent can be found in Appendices A and B, respectively.

During the data preparation process, all names of persons involved were replaced with appropriate pseudonyms to retain the participants' anonymity. Confidentiality was ensured by securely keeping the original recordings inaccessible from any third party, whereas the transcripts were only accessed by my supervisor. Despite the fact that only a few participants exclusively asked certain identifiable stories to remain confidential, it was considered necessary to keep locations, names, very sensitive information, and all identifiable stories unrevealed, as the security of the participants' identities is of utmost importance.

To conclude with, all participants will electronically receive a copy of the present thesis as most of them requested so during our meeting. In addition, one participant will receive the completed transcript of their own interview, as requested.

3.8 Reflection and Positionality

As my research deals with identity, I felt it is necessary to reflect on my own positionality. The following paragraphs reflect on how my own identity as a young white male student, from a country other than the Netherlands and with a mother tongue other than Dutch or English, could have been perceived by the participants and possibly influence their answers during the interviews.

The fact that I am not Dutch has proven to play a positive role throughout the conduct of the fieldwork. On the one hand, I personally have been able to take a neutral stance when it came to the participants' views and feelings towards the Netherlands, the Dutch people, and language. Simultaneously, I received a level of trust from most participants as a 'fellow outsider', who also comes from a 'passionate' culture and who also does not speak his native language in the Netherlands. Moreover, some of them had been to Greece, shared their experiences with me, and even compared Greece to Zimbabwe and the Netherlands for me to get a better understanding of their experiences in the latter.

My gender identity in conjunction with my skin colour might have had both a positive and a negative effect. Most female participants felt the need to further explain the challenges they go through as women, but also as black women. On the other hand, some black male participants reflected on my gender as a common-ground factor through which I should be able to understand them. My outward appearance might have resulted in some loss of information, as some participants felt uncomfortable answering the question concerning their feelings towards their external characteristics.

Older participants have approached me as their son, often explaining stories in detail and helping me understand their background, whereas participants around my age have seen me as a 'fellow student', and could relate on the 'study pressure' students in the Netherlands experience.

To conclude with, most participants reflected on how my interest on the African continent and the fact that I have been to Sub-Saharan Africa twice made them feel at ease to express themselves. Some were interested in learning more about my experiences and ideas after the conduct of the initial interviews. With regards to how they found the interview, most participants mentioned that they found interesting the fact that I am interested in Zimbabwe, a couple talked about 'being taken down the memory lane', re-thinking about their identity, and feeling emotional, while a couple said that they were used to talking about Zimbabwe. After the completion of the interviews, some of the participants discussed personal experiences from Zimbabwe concerning the political and economic situation, showed me photos of Zimbabwe, and one participant even offered me a small Zimbabwean flag as a souvenir.

4. Findings

In this chapter, the main findings are presented, led by case studies (C.S.). Each C.S. provides a typical example introducing the following subsection and illustrating its content. The chapter is divided into two sections.

The first section aims to provide an understanding of how social identities shape the Zimbabweans' experiences in the Netherlands. The analysis was done under the scope of intersectionality in an attempt to display the complex dimensions of the participants' experiences. The findings are displayed according to how disadvantage and privilege – as well as their interplay – are manifested in the host country, and framed within the main inductively-derived contexts, i.e. social life and everyday interactions, and employment and occupation. Subsequently, the focus lies on individual experiences of discrimination in the host country.

The second section deals with the interviewees' belongingness. It begins with an analysis of the participants' social connectedness and the social bonds they form in the host country. Then, the coping strategies employed by Zimbabweans to negotiate their sense of belonging in the Netherlands are discussed. Last, an overall account of the participants' sense of attachment to their place of residence is given.

4.1 Disadvantage & Privilege

Zimbabweans, just like other migrants, arrive in the Netherlands with a certain set of values and expectations deriving from the sociocultural norms they have been brought up with. Hence, as sociocultural norms are place-specific, it is reasonable for them to come across several challenges in a country where language and culture differ from their own. Some challenges are minor and easily handled, such as dealing with the 'food culture' or 'biking'. However, participants are also confronted with stereotypes, are denied access to institutions, feel socially marginalized, and even face discrimination, mainly due to race, ethnicity, and gender. These unfavourable situations hinder the immigrants' everyday lives and affect their sense of belonging.

However, not all immigrants feel disadvantaged in the host society; even more so, the same person could feel privileged in several contexts. A sense of privilege for an individual stems from advantages and opportunities systematically available to them and is sometimes built on the intersection of more than one aspects of their identity, such as social class, race, nationality, access to higher education, professional and migrant statuses.

From within their own social circles to their everyday interactions with others and from accessing an institution or a job to maintaining their position, participants have disclosed a variety of situations where their life in the Netherlands was either hindered or boosted because of one or multiple aspects of their identity. All information below is based on the participants' experiences².

² I would like to make it exclusive that I do not refer to my participants as "black", "white", or "coloured" as an outcome of racist classification, but as a product of both the ways literature and participants during the interviews referred to Zimbabweans.

4.1.1 Social Life and Everyday Interactions

Case Study 1 – “Not the easiest people...”

Danai is a young black woman who moved to the Netherlands together with her Dutch boyfriend. During her first days in the new environment, socialization was facilitated by meeting her boyfriend’s friends and family. Being a quite sociable individual, she also emphasized on her personality as an asset. However, she gradually realized that maintaining relationships with the locals was not an easy task as her African identity played a negative role in the way she experienced social life:

To be honest, Dutch people are not the easiest people to understand. [...] Normally you come to the conclusion that they don't like you. You start thinking so many things...”Ah...is it because I'm not Dutch? Or because I'm black?” [...] In Africa, you always have family and friends; you barely have a private life. And then I come here, and there's so much space around you. People just...leave you. They don't even want to be seen every day!

Moreover, not knowing the language proved an obstacle towards creating relationships with the locals, so learning Dutch felt like a privilege.

They speak English when you first meet them. But after a while, they get tired. They just speak Dutch. That's it! And for you to actually be part of that, you need to also learn. And that, I notice, improved my relationships with people; you develop a relationship more than someone who doesn't speak Dutch.

At her workplace, Danai feels more advantaged than her European male counterparts when it comes to socializing owing to the intersection of her gender and ethnic identities.

I think sometimes because you're a woman and also because I am different it's easier for people to talk to me than with the guy who sits next to me. I talk to so many people.

However, she noted that she feels being perceived ‘in a better way’ in Zimbabwe than in the Netherlands; in the former, her qualifications and profession stand out, whereas in the Netherlands, people view her as ‘just another black African person’, making her outward appearance a determining factor of social identification. Moreover, she often comes across stereotypes:

A lot of people just know Africa is that “country” where “people are starving” and everyone is “so poor” and we live in these huts...

Perceived Barriers and Privileges

The majority of the interviewees disclosed that in the Netherlands they first felt quite insecure due to their skin colour, ethnicity, and migration status (C.S.1). They classified themselves as ‘obvious foreigners’ or a ‘clear minority’ striving to fit into the host society. The fact that they come across fewer Africans and black people than in Zimbabwe combined with their struggle to build and maintain meaningful relationships with the natives reinforces their self-doubting feeling. Accordingly, it is natural for them to be insecure on the Dutch ground. On the other hand, some participants’ multicultural upbringing, schooling background, and/or transnational experiences have reportedly provided them with advantages; some of them had already experienced being part of a minority during their time at school or while living in multiple countries. Thus, those experiences have equipped them with the ability to mingle well with people of other nationalities, ethnicities, and races.

With regards to language, even though English is not the mother tongue of the majority of the participants, they recognize their proficiency in English as an asset in almost every context. However, everyone supported that in order to build relationships with the Dutch people speaking in English with them is not enough (C.S.1). In Ndabezinhle's narrative below, it can be observed that race in conjunction with the inability to speak Dutch does create a higher level of insecurity than the former would if it were to be considered solely.

My confidence might be challenged sometimes...Especially if you're the only black person in a group! If I'm going to be listening to a presentation, it's not much of a problem. But if you're going to be engaging in a conversation, that's when there's a problem...Because they make you tell them: "Oh, I'm sorry...I cannot speak Dutch." Obviously, your mind will run all over the place and ask yourself what do these people think about me.

Nevertheless, for those participants who do speak Dutch, knowing the language provides them with an advantage (C.S.1). For example, Rutendo observes that even though her command of Dutch is not so good, just the fact that she speaks a little has considerably helped socially.

Furthermore, a few participants presented interesting cases of intersectional privileges. Being a white blonde woman, Trudy finds her outward appearance in conjunction with her field of study and her ability to speak perfect English a beneficial combination when building relationships with her peers. As she explained, sometimes she lets people think she comes from a European country because she feels that they are only interested in learning about her country of origin instead of really wanting to get to know her on a personal level. Hence, we could argue that for Trudy, race, appearance, language, and professional identity intersect to her advantage towards achieving the preferred level of acceptance. Another interesting example is Tanaka's case whose husband is British; she explained how the intersection of her marital and migrant statuses provides her with certain advantages:

Because of the whole EU, and my husband coming here with the work, we were treated better than other people. But we came in under the "expat banner". If I had come here without my husband, I'm an immigrant. If I came as an immigrant I'd be standing in queues and discriminated against.

Intersections of Gender

To obtain an understanding of their gender identity, I asked participants to imagine how their lives would have evolved if they were women instead of men and vice versa. Worth noting, in order to imagine their hypothetical selves the majority had to simultaneously consider other aspects of their identity, e.g. appearance, race, nationality and the sociocultural context. The main theme that emerged from the interviews with men was that, in the Netherlands, none of them finds being male particularly advantageous in any setting. One participant (John) even identified the intersection of his gender and white Zimbabwean upbringing as an obstacle in achieving the relationships he wants as he finds himself thinking in gender-stereotypical models. As norms around socializing differ between Zimbabwe and the Netherlands, some participants find being a woman beneficial in social settings. For example, Tanaka talked about 'getting a free drink'. She elucidated that accepting a drink from someone in Zimbabwe does not have connotations. In Europe, however, it is not considered appropriate for married women. Hence, being a married woman with a Zimbabwean background, she feels privileged when it comes to explaining to her British husband why she accepted a drink from a stranger at a bar. However, contrary to Danai's experience (C.S.1), a few women experience intersections of gender as obstacles in social settings. As Trudy explained, she always gets ignored during discussions with men because of being a woman and having a lighter tone of voice than them. Another participant noted:

The fact that I'm a woman, black, African, Zimbabwean...I feel that all this puts me in a disadvantaged position. I see that in my everyday life; even in the smallest thing. For example, [in] a conversation, I always feel that I have to work extra hard to prove my point and be heard by the others. – Vimbo

A notable difference between the two accounts is that Vimbo did not simply emphasize on her gender and body structure like Trudy. Her sense of disadvantage is created at the intersection of gender, race, and her Zimbabwean and African identities.

Challenged by Stereotypes

Most participants disclosed being often confronted with stereotypes, like Danai (C.S.1). The intersection of African identity with external appearance often results into presuppositions and labelling by the locals which in turn hinder the participants' professional identity, social status, and class. They have the feeling that their educational level is assumed poorer than it is and that they supposedly were forced to leave their home country instead of making an informed decision to move to the Netherlands. As a result, some participants feel being 'put into the same box' with refugees, or other black or African people. The following quotes illustrate such stereotypes: 'What's it like to wear clothes now?', 'Were you born white or did you turn white when you got here?', 'Do you have brick houses in Africa?', 'How come you know English if you're from Africa?' (Kudzai, Rachel, Trudy, Xolisani). For one participant, the 'less focus' on religion in the Netherlands proved to be the biggest obstacle; used to socializing within a Christian community, Simba never had people challenge his religion before, yet in the Netherlands, he is often coerced to defend his beliefs.

For white Zimbabweans who do not speak Dutch, it is mainly their skin colour that overshadows their African identity, while for those who do, their Dutch language skills in combination with race complicate their situation and make their peers doubt their African identity even more. For Rachel and Trudy, being around other Zimbabweans provokes intimidation, embarrassment, and worry of having others associate them with racism and homophobia.

I don't want to be white when I'm with the Zimbabweans. You're worried that they might perceive you as white and all the stereotypes that go with it... – Rachel

I like the separation I have with my Zimbabwean identity and my European identity. Because I see that the values and the outlook clash so much. When my dad was here, and sometimes with my brother I feel trapped. – Trudy

In the first account, race directly affects Rachel's perceived level of acceptance by the Zimbabwean community, while for Trudy it is the intersection of gender and ethnicity – and possibly age – which puts her in a disadvantaged position; being a young woman from a culture where women are considered inferior to men.

Literature corroborates that the same individual can experience different sets of intersectionality depending on the context or the situation. These experiences make them mostly feel either disadvantaged or privileged (C.S.1). However, the analysis of some narratives has shown that not all experiences are either black or white, as different intersections of aspects of one's identity might operate differently. The following excerpt illustrates the variety of emotions that derive from intersections of Anenyasha's identities; race, ethnicity, and language.

Dutch people don't learn to use their emotions very easily...readily. So, I like to stir that up a bit. I will speak English. The Dutchies that tend to have a problem with me living in their country tell me to learn their language. And then I'll switch to Dutch and speak the equivalent of the Queen's English; the "Queen's Dutch" basically. Without an accent, as well.

I sound exactly like I was born and raised in this country. And their jaws drop! So...they know that you're black and that's the-. Not that you're black. Actually, it's worse! It's that you're African...black African is the right term! And you can see it written on their face but they don't dare to actually word it that way. Obviously because it's f***** ridiculous to say something like that to someone! They'll be like: "Oh! But your Dutch is so good...and your English is also so good! How long have you been living in the country?", "Wow! But you don't have an accent at all! That's quite amazing that you're not a native Dutch speaker and you speak Dutch as well as you do. Because there's a lot of foreigners in Holland that still have an accent and still..." And I know that the only reason is: if my skin was not black and if I didn't come from Africa, your amazement wouldn't be as huge. And I can't tell them that directly cause you're not giving me that directly! But the undertone is...that's what it is. And I'm proud of the fact that I shock them, but at the same time it is hurtful that the continent of a country that I come from, still considered in the Western world as being backward and being...black and African still considered as being a savage, basically! That mind-state has not changed. They still consider themselves more evolved, or more civilized than certain cultures in the world, which is sad!

In conclusion, in this subsection we have seen that gender, race, appearance, nationality, and ethnicity – separately or in intersections – play an important role in the way participants identify themselves among their surroundings in the Netherlands. In most cases, the ability or the inability of speaking the Dutch language – either on its own or through its intersections with other aspects of identification – improves or undermines respectively the participants' everyday social lives.

4.1.2 Employment and Occupation

Case Study 2 – *"You have to prove yourself!"*

Ndabezinhle is a black man in his early 30s. He finished his Bachelor in Zimbabwe where he got a permanent job. He soon moved to the Netherlands to be with his wife who had already been in the country for some years. The major obstacle he faced was finding a job related to his profession which requires good command of the language. Staying at home without an income for nine months was 'hard for someone who's used to working' but despite his desire and efforts, Ndabezinhle has not been able to go past basic knowledge of Dutch. He applied for various positions but eventually had to exercise a job requiring no certification and socially considered as done by women. Nevertheless, he experienced difficulties being accepted even for this job despite being over-qualified for it. He explained that his skin colour along with his gender deterred his employers from trusting him. In his own words:

I think it's because I'm black. That is the first thing that came to mind. And maybe also because of the gender. Maybe they think [that] men cannot be doing this job! So, it's a question of...whether it's racism, or it's a gender thing...

Furthermore, his social status also changed when the context changed. In Zimbabwe, he was a well-known and respected 'celebrity'. Moving to the Netherlands, his social status is hindered by the intersection of ethnicity, race, and gender.

With my few experiences, I think people are cautious because of where you're coming from, or skin colour, or gender! If, for example, a Dutch person...girl...was to go for the same job, they wouldn't have all those questions.

It is therefore clear that, as a black African man, he finds himself in a disadvantaged position in comparison to a Dutch woman.

You're always challenged to prove yourself. I think I do more than what other people would. Cause I would be having that I will be judged...at the back of my mind. It has to come out above average, whatever it is that I do for me to gain that respect. But in time they trust you...I think they're now confident about what I can do despite where I'm coming from and my skin colour! [...] I've managed to be at a place where they're now used to me and see me as a normal...human being.

Employment

Participants who immediately started searching for a job relying on their Zimbabwean qualifications encountered several obstacles. Like Ndabezinhle (C.S.2), Tafadzwa also could not find a job related to his profession; the consultation he received by a state employee made him feel he was not treated as a man of his age and that his work experience from Zimbabwe was disregarded. Anodiwa had to push her English qualifications as she was not even allowed to work from the beginning; the Dutch system would not recognize her 'Third World country's' certificates. But even those graduating with a European or Dutch degree expressed discouragement concerning their employability in the Netherlands and shared fears of how it might be hindered due to several aspects, such as race, ethnicity, and gender (Kutenda, Munesu). None of the women though believe their gender is a hindrance; they focused on other aspects, such as race, body, language, and ethnicity. For example, Panashe explained how language and even her 'African name' can prove disadvantageous towards her being considered for a job:

If you were a Dutch person, you own a Dutch company and you have an application; one person is called Sanne, but the other person is called Panashe, you're like: "Who's Panashe? I'd rather have Sanne". So, they'll look at my very African name and then whatever they have in their head of what Africa is they'll associate with me.

As previously mentioned, all participants were born and brought up in Zimbabwe. However, many have either Dutch or British citizenships, gained either by marriage or naturalization or because some parent or grandparent originated from these countries. Interestingly, participants who have a passport other than Zimbabwean consider this fact as advantageous in the Netherlands. For example, having a British passport was inconvenient for Simba in Zimbabwe and even in the UK – in conjunction with his 'Zimbabwean-kind-of-income' – but proved to be an asset in the Netherlands:

I wanted to study in the UK, but cause I hadn't lived there for long enough, they wouldn't consider me as...proper English citizen. So, I would have to pay international fees. When I applied in [the Netherlands], I could get the EU fees which are much lower. So, money-wise, that was the decision...

John explained that having a 'different document' than the average Zimbabwean made him gradually realize the additional advantages in the Netherlands.

European companies don't recognize the qualification of somebody coming out of Zimbabwe. [...] I have a Dutch passport while most Zimbabweans have a Zimbabwean

passport. I think that's discrimination because just somebody had the wrong document, so to say...I can come over here, I gain an education and become successful. The same person could be working twice as hard as I did and still lines up at square one!

On the other hand, many participants find that being an ethnic minority provides them with certain advantages regarding their employability in the Netherlands. For some, 'being of colour' affords them more employment opportunities compared to the average white person. Others went a step further, recognizing that privilege derives from intersections of aspects. Some explained that specifically a Zimbabwean – compared to other African nationalities – has more chances of being considered for a job owing to their professional and migration statuses. The intersection of being an African, black, and highly-qualified woman puts Xolisani in the most advantageous position compared to all other social groups:

From where I sit, I'm trying to say this without coming out as arrogant...But it's an observation that I do make. So, because I'm a minority...I'm a black African, I'm female, and I've been able to excel in several aspects, I've become the poster child for success!

Nevertheless, she represents those interviewees who do not necessarily feel comfortable with the discriminatory recruitment practices; she feels that being an ethnic minority overshadows her qualifications in the eyes of employers.

They can claim that I'm here because they had these policies and they put it in their mind to find people like me...That's not how it should be! So, "diversity"...(sighs)...I'm not here because people did me favours! I'm here because I fought to get here! [...] I always had to be...exceptionally better to be given a chance into the next step; I had to get 8, 9, or 10 to progress. I don't think I would have gotten scholarships and a good job if I graduated with the same grades that a Dutch student would. – Xolisani

On the other hand, a few participants experienced positively the employment process in the Netherlands. Tanaka is one of them:

Once, I went for an interview. I felt they treated me really fairly. They needed somebody to speak Dutch but they don't judge you on that. They looked at you as a rounded person...It would never happen in the UK! You always had to work harder; not just as a woman, but then as an African. And in Zimbabwe, it would depend on who I know: "Who's your uncle? Who's your dad?"

At Work

At the workplace, a number of participants feel disadvantaged because of who they are. All black participants – especially men – emphasized on the key role their outward appearance plays on how they are viewed depending on the context and other people's consciousness. Especially those working in high-level positions (Munesu, Tonderai) disclosed being 'given the feeling of not being the person' others expect to see. Some feel being 'extra-tested' and therefore need to be proving they are capable of doing their job in order to gain their employers' trust and establish themselves (C.S.2). As Tafadzwa put it, some people see skin colour and cultural differences as barriers, making the intersection of race and ethnicity operating at his expense within his working environment. Hence, he feels he has less privilege than his colleagues. In her narrative, Danai makes it explicit that we need to consider the intersection of her gender, race, and ethnic identity in order to understand her situation.

Me being a woman, I feel like there's need to work extra hard for things. And actually, me being female and African, I have to work even extra hard than the average woman. I'm the

[only] “actual” [African] black person at work. So, I have more to prove than...for example, a Dutch woman. There hasn't been...many of me. They don't know how much I'm capable of...

However, the majority emphasized on the key role their personality and attitude play in both being able to gain other people's trust and being in control within their work environment. Proactivity and confidence were identified as the main characteristics an individual should possess to avoid mistreatments and succeed in the Netherlands. Tonderai explained how taking good care of his appearance plays an important role in building up his confidence:

I'm comfortable in my skin and I dress myself good enough just because I am happy with who I am. If I would've to compare myself to my Dutch colleagues, I'm probably less colourful in my dressing...more elegant. So, outwardly, I am not bothered by my height or my weight; I take a lot of pride in the fact that I can eat all of the cakes they bring to the office without gaining weight!

Overall, the common challenges in their native country, e.g. political instability, racial divide, economic problems, seem to have provided Zimbabweans with a strong ability to adapt to different environments and stubbornness to achieve their goals. Many participants (Kutenda, Panashe, Anodiwa, Tanaka) referred to their upbringing as 'fortunate' and relate their current confidence and ambitiousness to their schooling background.

I grew up in an environment of rich people, but my family itself was not rich. My parents thought education is what you need to get out. So, they actually invested a lot of money in taking us to private schools. By being in that environment, I just became ambitious. That's how I ended up here, doing my [studies], and getting this job! – Danai

4.1.3 Everyday Experiences of Discrimination

The analysis showed that the concept *discrimination* is very subjective and depends on the context. Some participants demonstrated it by comparing the way they think they are treated in Zimbabwe and the Netherlands. For instance, Ndabezinhle has been mistreated as a minority in both countries; in Zimbabwe simply as a Ndebele (tribalism), whereas in the Netherlands as a black African man. For others, negative experiences elsewhere overshadow their sense of predicament in the Netherlands. For example, Tanaka has been harassed in both Zimbabwe – due to the way she dresses and her social class – and the UK – due to her race. As a result, she finds the Dutch less biased towards Zimbabweans than the British. Others (Tafadzwa, Rutendo) supported being 'quite confident in their skin' and not letting individual denigrating behaviour harm their feelings in that respect. However, most interviewees, and especially those who have been living in the country for long, recalled a range of incidents where they felt discriminated against; from being denied entry into a club, verbally attacked, and racially profiled in stores, to even being wrongfully accused, taken into custody and spending one night in prison. Most interviewees translated these incidents as acts of either racism or sexism but the analysis has shown that some events at their expense happened at the intersection of several identities.

Case Study 3 – “Socially Punished”

Rachel is a white woman born in Zimbabwe. As a girl brought up in a conservative family environment where gender-role stereotypes were prominent, she was physically punished by her father and always made feel inferior to boys. As she explained, being a young girl meant both that she did not have the body strength needed to defend herself physically, but also that she would ‘never be taken seriously’ for anything she would say. Moving to the Netherlands did not prevent her from being a victim of discrimination. Even worse, alongside her gender and body structure, and notwithstanding her white skin, speaking English in public with her friends resulted into her being harassed multiple times. When asked whether she has ever had any negative experience in the Netherlands, Rachel’s reply was:

I can tell you so many. Not that I remember them all...but...On so many occasions, people have...swearing at me, spat at me, told me to go back to my own country!

While still in a Dutch high school, Rachel explained why she was socially punished by her classmates:

I absolutely hated high school here! There was so much bullying and all that. I was the odd one out! Because I'm the one that nobody knew...I'm the one who came from a different culture...I was different from everybody...and I didn't fit in the box!

She attributed this mistreatment to being different regarding her ethnic identity and migration status. However, she elucidated that not being able to speak Dutch as well as her peers only made matters worse and contributed to her marginalization.

Several participants recounted racism incidents in the Netherlands, in some of which race intersected with language or gender to their disadvantage. Just like Rachel (C.S.3), Anenyasha had a difficult transition into the Dutch society. She mentioned being harassed for talking in English to her non-Dutch friends, racially judged by teachers at school, and recalled being thrown into ‘dirty murky waters’ by one of her female peers interpreting it as an act of racism. Some black women (Anodiwa, Anenyasha, Xolisani) disclosed being watched and followed by security people due to their skin colour and even having been racially profiled in stores but in none of the presented cases were the suspected participants rightfully accused. Men have also gotten into prejudicial situations due to their skin colour. For example, Tafadzwa has been verbally attacked and called names multiple times in various contexts:

There was an older woman who cycled past my house all the time. And I was playing with my daughters outside. And she started shouting: “All the black people! The blacks...Send them back to where they come from!” You can argue with this person or you can choose to turn your kids away. [...] Some people are direct! They don't even know me! You're in the pub and just come from the toilet...and they ask you: “Did you wash your hands?” And you look at them: “Yes, I have washed my hands.” And they say: “Yeah? You don't need to cause they're dirty anyway!”

White interviewees are criticized and sometimes even harassed for being foreigners and not knowing the language (C.S.3), often getting remarks such as: ‘Ah...What do you know? You're a foreigner!’ and ‘Learn to speak the language properly!’ (Anthony). When asked what the most challenging thing she experienced is, Trudy’s reply was definite:

Being Dutch but not really being Dutch; I have a Dutch passport and my skin is white, I look Dutch and...my father's side of family is Dutch. On paper, everything’s fine. But as soon as I talk to someone, they look at me like I'm an imposter, taking advantage of the system! I feel

I'm not really wanted here as a Dutch person. Maybe as a Zimbabwean I am, but...it's this kind of feeling of not really belonging anywhere, because I'm not welcomed in Zimbabwe either because I'm white.

In some occasions, participants highlighted more than one aspect of their identities to have simultaneously resulted into their negative experiences. Vimbo provided an interesting example of discrimination on the basis of gender and ethnicity – and possibly race.

There was this Dutch guy and he was telling me about how he used to invite people to his home and host them and how frustrated this made him and that he needed his personal space...And I thought: "This is the norm in Zimbabwe; we always host people, we eat together and stuff". So, I was trying to get to know his story, but he interrupted me all the time and he seemed really angry and was attacking me, saying that I do not understand because I am a woman and I come from a different culture and stuff...I felt discriminated.

Some young black participants admitted being denied access to clubs in the Netherlands. In the beginning, they loosely translated these incidents as acts of racism. However, the analysis of their narratives showed that more than one aspect operate simultaneously against their favour. Kutenda recalled his most recent experience of being denied entry into a bar along with a Middle-Eastern friend of his. When asked to identify the reason why he was not let in, he started disentangling his own identity; the common denominator was that he is a dark-skinned man from a minority group. Two other participants, Kudzai, a black man, and Vimbo, a black woman, separately narrated the exact same experience; being denied entry into a club. They were in a group of 'only black Africans': all men were in front of the women. What adds value to these particular narratives is the different explanations the two participants gave. Although they both agreed it should have been a racism incident, Kudzai did not limit his answer; he emphasized on the fact that the boys were standing in front. When asked why he thinks he had this experience, Kudzai replied:

Maybe based on racial profiling! I think this was the major thing. [But] certainly that says something about being a male. Like: "Ok, this is a group of black guys. Maybe they're there for some havoc or something". If it was a group of all females he was gonna let them in!

As it can be observed, Kudzai added gender as a factor to Vimbo's translation of the experience, interpreting this incident as being profiled as a black man, stressing the stereotypical consequences it might have in the 'bouncer's' eyes.

In some of the narratives, gender, race, or their intersection resulted into the participant being discriminated against but once their social class, status, and/or professional identity were exposed the experience changed to their benefit. Anodiwa's and Tonderai's stories are typical examples: Anodiwa disclosed being harassed many times as a black woman by white men while walking on the street, while Tonderai narrated an incident where he accidentally became subject of harassment. Nevertheless, the others' attitudes seem to change when they realize the participants' high socioeconomic status.

I would get a lot of hoots from old men in cars, thinking that this black woman wants to be with a white man, so she's easy. But when they see me close up they think: "Oh, no, this one's educated. We can't treat this the same." They back off right away. – Anodiwa

I opened the door from my car and it apparently hit the car of the person that was parked next to me. She got out and freaked out, said a lot of terrible things! And I was quiet. So, I said: "Let's call the police because you don't seem to want to hear my story." And her mother comes and says: "Ah, you people are asylum seekers, just living on our taxes, bla bla bla!". And I am just quiet. So, the police come and I tell them I am Dr Tonderai and I am working for the University, I am a researcher...Suddenly, the woman was just quiet. That next day

she came to pick the paper she needed from my house. I let her in the house, we gave her a cup of coffee. She's sitting inside and she realizes we are much better off than she is...and I pay enough taxes to look after her...as a student! And the whole dynamic changes! She was so sorry for how and what she has been saying the other day... – Tonderai

4.2 Belongingness

4.2.1 Social Connectedness

As human interactions are central for Zimbabweans as a people, the majority of the participants seek to form and maintain new relationships in the Netherlands. From their family environment to their neighbourhood, and from school to their workplace, all interviewees give importance to the quality of their social connections.

Family

Given the centrality of family in Zimbabwe, coping within the new environment proved easier for participants who had a family member with them, with a few supporting that in case they were alone they would have found it quite difficult to adapt (Rutendo). Apart from providing participants with a sense of trust and acceptance, family simultaneously provides incentives for creating new social circles in the Netherlands. For Tafadzwa and Anthony, socializing is facilitated by meeting their wives' friends and families. Moreover, for those with children, meeting the parents of their children's friends helps create a social network. For instance, Tanaka explained how her children 'opened her boundaries', helped her 'come out of her comfort zone', and start building relationships:

I'm not looking for anything...My son is! He's creating his own networks. And to facilitate that you have to become friends with their parents. I was challenged! I've got to know people in a way that I wouldn't have done. Also with our neighbours, because we share the same challenges; raising children.

Dutch and International Networks

The migrants' sense of belonging in the host society depends on the level of acceptance they receive from the natives. From making a simple transaction in the super market to conversing with neighbours and colleagues, interaction with the Dutch is inevitable. And the participants' impressions of Dutch people seem to play an important role on the bonds they eventually build with them. Older participants (Anthony, Tanaka, Anodiwa, Tafadzwa) appear to have better-established relationships while most young participants disclosed not having personally connected on a deep level with the natives, providing various explanations, e.g. 'the Dutch already have networks established', 'they go back to their hometowns', 'Dutch culture is closed'. Xolisani illustrated:

We have a departmental outing. At the end of the day, you'll probably going to interact meaningfully with four, five people...You'll think that, after that moment, these people you spent 5 hours of the day with, getting to know them better, next time you run into them at the corridor you have a different conversation. But that's not how it happens! So, I ran into the same person I spent 5 hours with yesterday, at the coffee machine today. It's like starting all over again. Very dry conversation! Never goes beyond the regular: "Hi, how are you?"

As the Netherlands attracts a lot of internationals, Zimbabweans inarguably come in contact with people of other nationalities depending on the social setting. Those who often go to church (Rutendo, Tonderai, Simba), referred to this as an activity which ‘keeps them going socially’. The majority of students described their social life as international. Being surrounded mostly by non-Dutch students tightens their social circles. Moreover, not being exposed to the Dutch culture enough prevents them from assimilating and integrating in the Dutch society.

Because I was in an international setting, most of my friends are internationals... I did notice [that Dutch] people want to express themselves in their own language. If you find yourself in that group, then probably you take yourself out, because you cannot really understand the language. – Kudzai

I feel Dutch people might like to stick to themselves. Maybe they’re just not comfortable with internationals. I don't come across a lot of Dutch people that are willing to be like “Oh, cool! You're international, let's get to know you better!” – Kutenda

Zimbabwean and African Networks

Living in a country where the sociocultural context differs from their own, Zimbabwean migrants strive to find the acceptance they need. Hence, it is natural for them to seek for a certain level of familiarity to overcome the uncertainty they feel in the new environment. Most participants find it in interactions with fellow Zimbabweans or other Africans. They like socializing with people who can understand them and with whom they feel a natural sense of closeness. A few (Ndabezinhle, John, Kutenda) agreed that Zimbabweans can relate with each other owing to the same oppression they have gone through. Moreover, fulfilling the need of ‘cracking a joke’ with other Zimbabweans is an important aspect for the majority’s wellbeing as they find Dutch humour ‘totally’ differs from theirs (Tafadzwa, Danai, Kudzai). Tonderai expanded on the importance of having Zimbabwean friends in the host country:

I can just connect to them without having to think: “Is it the right time? Do I need to make an appointment?” We stay at their house until late and they’re not bothered. It also allows us to share responsibilities with the kids. It takes out the safeguards that I have with my Dutch or European friends, where you have to say things properly and be aware that at some point you need to go home, because you can't stay for more than an hour, or you can't keep taking the cookies! If they give you a pot of cookies, you pick one, not five! (laughs)

However, given the small number of Zimbabweans in the Netherlands, it had not always been easy for those living longer in the country to find their compatriots. The creation of the Southern African Community significantly facilitated the process of meeting other Zimbabweans. Members of the community organize get-togethers and braais, i.e. Southern African barbecues.

The fact that Dutch culture differs considerably from their own also urges participants to socialize with other Africans. Despite Africa being a very large and diverse continent, a notable number of participants supported that there are many commonalities among Africans in general, referring to these as ‘African culture’:

The other day, I went out with my friends, all over we were just African people. For a while, I forgot I was in the Netherlands! Cause we were being typical African, telling jokes...talking about our culture. – Panashe

A few women (Anodiwa, Rachel, Panashe) supported that Dutch children are raised with different values and hence, their African friends can understand them better than their Dutch friends for cultural reasons. Anenyasha agreed:

It's easier dealing with my African friends. They understand a lot more of my upbringing, certain morals, and the way we are with elders...They give completely different advice than someone that doesn't understand the world you're coming from. We also relate because of how Dutch culture is "not there"...and different...and boring. [It] has its benefits obviously, but there's a lot of weird and negative things you would never suspect from such a "liberal", so-called, country.

On the other hand, a few participants (Munesu, Tanaka, Simba) disclosed not having such a strong connection with other Zimbabweans or Africans in the Netherlands. They supported that their friendships cannot simply be based on nationality or ethnicity, attributing it to the differences in social class, interests, or educational level. Anodiwa explained:

Just because you come from the same country, it doesn't mean that you'll get on. [...] And Africans here I find so subservient and "grateful to be here", that they become in their skin...And that drives me crazy!

4.2.2 Coping Strategies

In this section, the various personal strategies employed by participants to both adapt to the different environment and improve their life in the Netherlands are analysed. There were identified two main ways of creating a sense of belonging; either participants change themselves to adapt and match the sociocultural norms of the Netherlands, or they regulate their behaviour 'forcing' others to accept them for who they are.

Conformity

Case Study 4 – *"When in Rome, be like the Romans"*

Tonderai and Rutendo are a married couple of black Zimbabweans in their late 30s. They both supported that life was not always easy for them in the Netherlands and that 'rather than pushing others to accept them, they needed to find a way to adapt, but still be themselves'. Choosing to compromise with their identities helped them connect socially relatively easier than most participants. As Tonderai explained, sending their children to a Dutch school was one of their first steps towards building relationships with the natives.

I think once you put them in an international school you never get to integrate. But them being in a typical Dutch school, we have been following all the typical Dutch festivals and cultures and the like. They are playing at their friends' places, their friends also come to play here, we become friends with the parents...That means that you have to interact at that level, as well. Some of the parents don't speak good English so we have to speak in Dutch and that has helped us to speak.

An indication of their adaptation is the adoption of several sociocultural norms into their own way of life both in and out of their home. Rutendo explained that they both have come to rethink gender roles and share house responsibilities:

The way you are brought up shapes the way you feel of things, your responsibilities. I feel that who is the mother, the woman, it's your responsibility to make sure that the house is...in order! Though, of course, the way now me and my husband do things is a lot different from a couple in Zimbabwe. And we learned those things here. It no longer counts: 'It should be only you who cooks'. We just help each other in the house.

At work, Tonderai supported that he normally behaves 'very Dutch' and does things in a 'very professional way'. He explained that in order to feel part of the host society he has had to negotiate with his Zimbabwean identity:

For a long time, I tried to push my Zimbabwean-ness here but that had a lot of disadvantages to the things I wanted to achieve. And so...looking back in hindsight on how much effort and energy it took to try to get that Zimbabwean-ness through...I then got to a point where I gave up my Zimbabwean passport for a Dutch passport. It was a realization to say: "I'm stressing myself in trying to be Zimbabwean where it's not benefiting me". So, when in Rome, be like the Romans but remember you're not Roman! That's how I identify myself...

The couple maintains good relationships with their Dutch neighbours. Rutendo discussed her feelings towards sustaining a community:

I feel very much part of the community! I think it's not nice to separate yourself. It's good to interact more. So, we try with our neighbourhood things and our children get involved also. I want to take my responsibility; I always volunteer if I have time. I'm suggestive to show that I am part of the community!

Overall, they have found a balance in maintaining strong feelings towards Zimbabwe and embracing their Dutch identity. Tonderai explained how the choice of settling down and buying a house contributed to making the Netherlands feel as their 'second home'.

Home is Zimbabwe. However, I am here now and I must make the most of it and be comfortable here. On the Dutch days, I put up a Dutch flag with the orange flag next to it, and if on an ordinary day you ask me: "Who are you?", I will happily show you my Dutch passport without flicking and being worried! [...] Zimbabwe is home, but we are here now! And we must live life here now.

Sometimes migrants need to match the norms of the locals in order to adapt. Some interviewees disclosed they changed some of their perceptions and attitudes and conformed to the Dutch lifestyle and culture. Two participants apart from Rutendo (C.S.4) also mentioned voluntarily helping the community by making use of their personal skills. The majority recognize that taking the initiative to learn the language is the first step in receiving acceptance in the Netherlands (C.S.4). Anthony described himself as a 'chameleon' referring to his flexibility to acclimatize while respecting the host country's sociocultural norms:

You must not be too...stuck on your own identity. [...] The only way you're going to adapt: find work and speak the language. I've seen myself like a guest of this country. And I must abide by the rules, I must speak the language, and respect the traditions. It's having a bit of respect for the people that allow you to live in their country!

Tanaka added:

I'm very chatty, so I would love to learn the language. It just makes me feel more a sense of belonging. And I like to hear the joke! The Dutch joke a lot and I miss it. Jokes don't translate well....

An interesting finding is that within the Dutch context, most participants – regardless of gender, age, and race – have come to re-evaluate the gender-stereotypical models and redefine gender roles (C.S.6). During these negotiations, participants choose which elements of their culture to keep embracing and which to substitute. Tanaka agreed with Rutendo (C.S.4) in maintaining certain notions from Zimbabwe:

In my married life, I see it as my duty to make sure my husband's happy, my kids are happy. Here, I find that women can be very dominant! I don't come from that background...I can iron your shirt and still be a feminist!

Nevertheless, the balance of power has been shifting, with men accepting that their wives can also be breadwinners, decision-makers, and provide for their family. Tafadzwa explained that he has come to compromise a lot with the intersection of his African self and gender.

It comes from being an African guy. I can tolerate much better...now I'm here. Cause I've got married to a Dutch woman. And she says: "I'm gonna drink a beer at Karl!" And I'm thinking: in an African culture, tell me you wanna drink a beer at Joseph, you're ["dead"]. Women cannot do that! (laughs) And now you're telling me you're leaving me behind to go and drink a beer with Karl. "Who the f*** is Karl anyway?", "Ah...Karl's my gay friend.", "I don't give a s***! Karl is a man! You're a woman! You're my wife!" And here you realize: "Ok, you know what? As a newcomer, this is one of the things I might not like. Let her go." Now I can swallow that. Now I say: "Be my guest..."

Another notable example is the participants' views on homosexuality. Most men – irrespective of age and race – emphasized on the significance exposure has on their views. Owing to migration, they have come to rethink and confront their own culture or religious beliefs which forbid homosexuality by law in Zimbabwe. Coming across or even working with people of a different sexual orientation made the interviewees change their values.

I'm in a place where I can have a conversation with them, interact without challenging who they are. We have these preconceived ideas about people and their choices until we come across [them]. – Ndabezinhle

However, most participants mentioned that their community-based cultural background made it difficult for them to accept the 'individualistic' lifestyle of the Dutch. Therefore, on a social level, they have to negotiate with their expectations when trying to build relationships with the locals. Some supported trying to 'be like the Dutch'; they choose to walk past others without saying 'hi', or live their lives without pondering what others might think of them. Furthermore, a few have decided to 'stop trying' to induce the Dutch people's interest in them to gain mutual affection, as this had the opposite outcome in their past relationships. Rachel elucidated:

I was aware: "Don't say too much too soon"...For us [Zimbabweans] it's just exchanging stories about our lives. But in the Dutch culture it's perceived as: "you're giving me your problems..."

Self-regulation

However, 'abiding by the rules' is not always possible. When their belongingness needs are not met, participants emphasize on their own Zimbabwean, African, and gender identities to manage short-term desires. In many occasions, they regulate their behaviour to gain the trust of people and improve their social and everyday lives in the host country.

Case Study 5 – “I force people to like me!”

Anodiwa is a black woman in her mid-40s. Despite her high social class and status, she has had many negative – and even traumatic – experiences in the host country which appear to have played a negative role on her belongingness. Being a ‘social bee’ but unable to engage straight away with people due to language and culture differences, Anodiwa felt like an ‘individual in the shadows’.

That was my rude awakening here: feeling raped of who I am! The Dutch have an expression: “Just be normal. Don't try and be extra because you're already crazy being normal.” So, I felt like I couldn't be myself when I moved here. But I'm not a person that...accepts that! So, I push out and make them talk to me. Whereas back home, you're just accepted for who you are.

Therefore, she explained she ‘had to use extra energy to get their acceptance’. One of her strategies in approaching others is sitting in her lounge and ‘studying them’ first, trying to find something that they might have in common and ‘start from there’. She added that she ‘makes herself’ part of the community:

I have to always say something. That's what I taught my daughter as well: “Always speak! Don't keep it in. Show them that you're different and you want to engage!” [...] I need to create a lovely network for our son, for us. If I'm gonna live in a country that I hate living in, I'm gonna try and make it as workable as I can. And this is the only way I can do it. And so, I have more friends in Holland than [my husband] does. And he's lived here all his life!

Her stories acquire a lot of interest as examples of how an individual mobilizes certain aspects of their identity to avoid being confronted with stereotypes. She finds it important to always mention she is Zimbabwean and ask people if they know where Zimbabwe is. She makes sure she dresses a certain way in certain places because ‘it changes people’s opinions’ of her straight away:

I'll actually say to [my husband]: “We have to dress very well for this appointment because I don't want us to be the classic situation of...a white guy getting this black chick, just because she's black. They need to see that we are from class!” And promise you, it makes all the difference! I've done this experiment so many times! [...] There's been times where I've actually driven somewhere...just to make a point! I park my Mercedes in front and...completely different treatment! All over the world, your appearance and the size of your pockets opens doors for you. But especially, I have to use that in this country! I have to show I'm different than I'm from there...because by speaking to me they cannot tell that I'm an educated woman that's not here to beg from them...That's how ignorant they are in this country! They just assume: “You're black. You're a refugee. You need our help and you're taking our jobs!” It's really, really sad! There's so much...darkness in my heart from this country. I've had to grow an extra skin!

Even though she speaks Dutch perfectly, whenever Anodiwa engages in an argument she deliberately starts speaking in English to ‘confuse’ people because she ‘knows they can't answer quickly’. She gave an example of how she regulates her gender and race to build up her confidence and referred to her background in Zimbabwe to explain why she needs to always be proactive in her relationships:

The fact that I can walk into [my son's] football club being the only black mother in the whole crew of all these men and they all listen to me...my confidence is gonna happen anywhere! The first time I walked up to the chairman of the football club everybody was very scared of him. And now...he comes to me: “Hello, beauty”. So, I'm as confident here as I'm in Zimbabwe. Because we've had so many obstacles; the race back home and because my father was [rich]: white people hated that...So, we always had to prove why we're better.

Even from the way interviewees introduce themselves it can be observed that they decide to mobilize certain identities to gain people's acceptance. The majority of the participants find it important to make their professional identity or qualifications known to others so as to raise their social status. Parents (Rutendo, Tanaka) highlight the fact that they have children. Many participants find it important to make known to others they are Zimbabweans, like Anodiwa (C.S.5); black participants feel the need to distinguish themselves from other blacks or Africans, while whites and coloureds to induce other people's interest in them.

Many participants supported that because people are not exposed to that many Africans, the media play directly a negative role on how Zimbabweans are perceived in the Netherlands. At first, they were 'offended' but eventually realized they need to challenge these stereotypes (C.S.5). Being the only coloured Zimbabwean interviewed, and holding a British passport, Simba's skin colour, ethnic, and national identities give him the opportunity to be 'his own person' whenever he is confronted with stereotypes; depending on the situation, he mobilizes particular aspects of his identity to his own benefit claiming to be a black Zimbabwean, a white Zimbabwean, a black British, or a white British. Some feel the need to have a conversation with others, 'correct', and 'educate them' in order to gain their trust but also 'put Africa in a better light' (Kutenda, Ndabezinhle).

I have been to a lot of presentations where it's obvious that these people are used to speaking to a Western audience and come in with a pre-prepared speech and they are going to be very "open" and "honest" about how "horrible" Africa is! Then they notice in the corner there's actually a black African. So, naturally, I ask follow-up questions and I tend to be on the confrontational side...and that does have an impact! – Xolisani

A few participants mentioned observing the neighbours to understand their culture and then adjust their behaviour accordingly. Just like Anodiwa (C.S.5), Tafadzwa emphasized on his Zimbabwean identity to 'change the situation around instead of letting the situation change him':

Social life is just other than Zimbabwe; people live next to each other and they don't even have a conversation sometimes! When I moved here, my wife didn't know who her neighbour was. That's not doable! I'm gonna ask him his name! Every morning, say hello to the neighbours. [...] Once they get to know who you are and what you're capable of...they can trust you.

4.2.3 Sense of Home

Case Study 6 – *"The Netherlands has been good to us."*

Tanaka is a black woman in her late 30s. Prior to moving to the Netherlands she lived in the UK with her British husband. Soon after moving she started feeling like a foreigner 'for the first time' in her life as she was used to a different pace of life:

We were raised...more English than African which is very difficult cause you don't know where you fit in! I think I've started questioning that a lot more when I came here...[...] When I lived in the UK, every time I said "I can't wait to go home" it meant Zimbabwe. When I came here, sometimes I think of the UK as home cause a big part of my adult life happened there.

However, she supported that her belonging was always questioned in both countries.

In the UK, they always made you feel like an immigrant. [In Zimbabwe,] even I've still got a Zimbabwean passport, they don't consider me Zimbabwean! You get harassed at the airport. Why do I have to get a visa for my own country?! That doesn't feel like you're home. But here, with the Dutch, I think if you do things the right way they treat you very...fairly!

Hence, despite living in the Netherlands for a short time, Tanaka's level of belonging is growing owing to feeling equal in the host country. She also stressed the importance of family and summarized her social connectedness in the Netherlands:

I think it's a better pace of life with children here. There's a strong focus on families [which] has been a big part of making me feel at home. [...] I do feel more there's a community here. People mean it. And it's nice. I feel more connected to the people here than I did to the people in the UK.

In conclusion, Tanaka has developed a strong attachment to the Netherlands.

We're going for citizenship; we want to become Dutch and I'm excited! Cause they welcomed me. They made it feel like home for me...And I'll be proud to say I'm also Dutch. So, I guess I'm lucky to have three homes. In the whole culture now, where everybody's shutting their doors, I've been lucky enough to have been born in one country but call two other countries my homes. I think it's a blessing!

Feeling a sense of home is an important outcome of belonging. When asked where their home is, most participants referred to a geographical place, considering either Zimbabwe or the Netherlands, or both. Most try to make the Netherlands feel like home alongside their attachment to Zimbabwe. Just like Tanaka (C.S.6), Simba criticized the social life of the British and paralleled the Dutch social vibe with the Zimbabwean one to elucidate that he feels more at home in the Netherlands than in the UK. For a few participants, time spent in the Netherlands is important. For instance, Anthony has come to identify as a Dutch citizen:

Zimbabwe is a closed book for me! [...] I've been here half of my life and I really feel affinity to this country. I've settled down. My kids have been born here, I've bought a house, I've got a brilliant job. That's my home!

However, there was no clear pattern recognized as to whether age or time spent in the Netherlands play a role on their level of belonging. As a counterexample, Anodiwa and Anenyasha testified they still have not developed any attachment to the Netherlands and do not consider it home despite living in Holland for almost two decades. Others (Kutenda, Tafadzwa, Panashe) stressed missing the confidence they have in Zimbabwe which in the Netherlands is hindered by their migration status, according to which they need to always follow certain rules and procedures. However, the analysis of the interviews showed that an important factor contributing to the individual's sense of belonging is whether they have an ultimate intention to stay. In this case, participants are found to be more open towards adjustments and find ways to associate with the community easily. Most students do not develop such a strong attachment:

My home is in Zimbabwe because I know that I'm only here for a certain period and everything is dependent on my work. On the day my contract terminates, I'm supposed to go back. Of course, now I'm trying to make this feel like home...but I know that eventually I will have to leave at some point. – Kudzai

Even though the majority referred to a physical place in response to the question 'Where is your home?', there were a few participants who emphasized that being with their loved ones is essential to feel at home; 'Home is where the heart is', they said. They referred to the strong connection they share with their family as a substitute of any need to belong elsewhere. For some participants (Rutendo, Anthony, Tonderai), like Tanaka (C.S.6), being a parent plays a direct role on how they perceive the word home; they develop a stronger attachment to the Netherlands with which their children identify more. Tafadzwa, however, has mixed feelings:

My knowledge of what to do with my kids is limited, cause I didn't grow up here. I don't know exactly all the outings. I'm not that well-established. So, that actually limits your ability to feel at home! But when I'm in Zimbabwe, I'm in control of the whole situation. I know the place by heart.

Most white participants have a strong internal connection to Zimbabwe and would ideally return but referred to this idea as 'not possible' due to the current political situation against white Zimbabweans. Trudy felt quite emotional at the end of the interview:

I live here, and I call this room my home, but...to be honest, when I feel homesick, I really long for the African sunshine, the space, and the sky that just seems so much bigger! When I'm in the bush, I feel...at peace. That's my home!

5. Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Answering the Research Questions

Overall, the aim of this thesis was to explore how disadvantage and privilege are discursively produced in the narratives of Zimbabweans in the Netherlands, and provide an insight on how the latter negotiate their belongingness in the host country. In this chapter, I answer the research questions of the study by discussing the previously presented findings and linking them with the existing literature.

- *How do gender and social identities (e.g. ethnicity, race, religion, age, sexual preferences, social stratification) shape the Zimbabwean migrants' experiences in the Netherlands?*

The analysis revealed that the participants' individual ethnic identities and experiences in the home country Zimbabwe are often used as a means of interpretation of their realities in the Netherlands; this notion is in line with the Amit and Bar-Lev's findings (2015) regarding other migrant groups. Almost all participants agreed that socializing with the natives is a major obstacle as they feel the Dutch culture differs significantly from their own. Fulmer et al. (2010) supported that in this case a migrant might feel socially excluded, which is also supported in the present study. Many referred to experiencing a "culture shock" coming to the Netherlands, with some participants even recognizing these cultural differences as the main factor behind traumatic experiences they had with institutions in the host country, i.e. hospital, police. Similar traumatic experiences were also described in Benza and Liamputtong's (2016) research on Zimbabweans in Australia.

In most situations, while attempting to translate their experiences participants chose to give prominence to one aspect of their social identities at a time, e.g. ethnicity, race, or gender, possibly to induce more interest or because they do not feel some experiences are complex enough, an explanation given also by Aavik (2015) in her own study. However, it was interestingly observed that in some occasions, participants state explicitly that they see their experiences of social inequality being shaped by intersections of social categories. Moreover, the context-dependency notion of intersectionality was confirmed during the interviews and feeling privileged and disadvantaged was always found to be relational and subjected to the situation (Bürkner, 2011; Winker & Degele, 2011); it was notably observed that asking participants to simply identify themselves out of context led them to focus on their personality or rank their social identities instead. Once they contextualized their experiences, participants focused more on aspects of their social identities, e.g. gender, ethnicity, and nationality, as well as intersections of those, and provided examples of where they felt advantaged or disadvantaged in comparison to other social groups.

Separating their gender from other aspects of their social identity, such as their race, or their African, and Zimbabwean identities, proved to be a difficult task for the interviewees. Ethnicity and race constitute the two most prominent categories articulated; some black participants' sense of insecurity in public places is created at the intersection of race and ethnicity – and often the inability to speak Dutch. On the other hand, the same intersection provides white Zimbabweans with confidence among other internationals but not necessarily among other Zimbabweans with whom they feel disadvantaged and fear being associated with racism and homophobia, also supported by Pasura (2008) about white Zimbabweans in the UK. Age was articulated mostly implicitly as a means of interpretation of experiences of social inequality by younger participants and found in parents' discourse regarding decisions on their children's upbringing. One participant even explained her sense of national pride as an outcome of ageing. The least mentioned aspects were religious identity and sexuality.

In literature, Voloder and Andits (2015) talked about migrants being often confronted with stereotypes in the host country. Here, Zimbabwean migrants are also recipients of negative attitudes;

intersections of their external appearance, race, and ethnicity, generate prejudices in other people's minds which in turn hinder their social status and class. In some cases, stereotyping even results into discrimination. The multiple harassment due to ethnicity and race which Zimbabweans in the UK face as described by Pasura (2008), has been also confirmed in this study, although not its continuous character; the majority had instances of discrimination to narrate, but the fact that most of them had to think for a few seconds to recall them implies that it does not occur on a regular basis in the Netherlands. Those who had lived in Europe before – and especially in the UK – used their experiences abroad as an additional interpretative tool; they feel that Dutch people – compared to British or other Europeans – pay more attention to their individual personalities than on categories of difference, e.g. race or nationality.

Racism came up as the most prominent form of discrimination, but some experiences could not be merely attributed to race as the only hindering aspect. In many occasions, other aspects of participants' identities, such as gender and ethnicity, operated simultaneously to their disadvantage. Contrary to one's expectations, white participants' skin colour and appearance do not prevent them from becoming victims of harassment, as other aspects such as language, nationality, or gender come into play. However, it was observed that once another aspect of a participant's identity is exposed, such as their high social class, education level, or professional identity, the newly-formed intersection either mediates the negative feelings or even puts the participant in an advantageous position over others, a finding in line with Shields (2008).

Within the sphere of employability, participants recognize that belonging to minority groups lying at intersections of race, ethnicity, social status, and gender, is a privilege; they justified that as an outcome of the contemporary tendency of employers to show they embrace diversity. Furthermore, their qualifications, professional and legal migration statuses provide Zimbabweans in the Netherlands with a sense of superiority over other migrant groups and operate to their benefit; contrary to Pasura's findings (2008), interviewees believe that being a black Zimbabwean implies more career opportunities than being black African of any other nationality. However, a sense of disadvantage of various dimensions is also articulated within the context of employment; in line with Madziva et al. (2016), participants' strong English language skills and literacy are depreciated due to race, nationality, and cultural differences. Moreover, participants with Zimbabwean qualifications are unable to transfer their educational credentials and work experience, like in the US and Canada (Chaumba, 2016; Crush et al., 2012). Men emphasized on gender - often in conjunction with ethnicity and race – as a hindrance to their employability; the trend of employing more women makes them feel that the struggle for gender equality works against their favour in the Netherlands.

Regarding their occupation, participants tend to consider themselves as individuals, often referring to their individual characters and accomplishments to interpret their work-related realities; just like in Aavik's study (2015), the majority justified overcoming obstacles and achieving at work as outcomes of individual effort and their ambitious nature. When it comes to discussing prejudiced treatment however, they always attribute this sense of inequality to categories of difference, mostly race, ethnicity, and nationality. Both black men and women recognized their skin colour in conjunction with their gender and African identity as an intersection operating negatively to the way others perceive them at work; they often feel they have less privileges than their counterparts and are forced to prove their capabilities.

An important contribution of this thesis revolves around the concept of language competence. As previous research on Zimbabwean migrants (Benza & Liamputtong, 2016; Chaumba, 2016; Marr, 2012; Pasura, 2008; Rutherford, 2008) has been conducted only in English-speaking countries, language had not previously appeared as an important element of identification, perceived barrier, or privilege. In the present thesis, language is an indispensable aspect of each individual's identity, playing an imperative role in the Netherlands; the inability to speak Dutch is by itself a disadvantage, whereas the ability to speak Dutch is by itself a privilege. However, it is important to note that language was also

found to be a part of intersections, appearing often in conjunction with other aspects in interpretations of experiences; typically, participants feel more advantaged than other social groups, as the ability to speak Dutch in conjunction with belonging to an ethnic minority opens more doors for them both socially and occupation-wise.

- *How do Zimbabwean migrants navigate their gender and social identities (e.g. ethnicity, race, religion, age, sexual preferences, social stratification) to create a sense of belonging in the Netherlands?*

To understand the participants' level of belongingness, importance was given to both dimensions of social inclusion provided by Anthias (2008), Grünenberg (2005), and Simplican et al. (2015): the number of social bonds and the level of satisfaction stemming from them. In general, at the time the interviews took place, all participants mentioned feeling quite comfortable in the host country and emotionally fulfilled by the number and quality of social connections they possess in the Netherlands.

The findings of this study reveal that an important way for Zimbabweans in the Netherlands to feel belongingness is surrounding themselves with people with whom they share a natural, linguistic, and cultural connection. Family is the primary source of social interactions and, as noted by the participants, it also contributes to the creation of new social networks. Visser et al. (2015) found that Ghanaian migrants in the Netherlands need to socialize with other Africans. Similarly here, friendships with other Zimbabweans and Southern Africans are of great importance for the majority of the participants; they help them recreate a sense of home and improve their wellbeing in the host country. For the few religious participants, church is important in expanding their social circles and reinforcing their sense of acceptance, something also observed in other studies (Amit & Bar-Lev, 2015; Visser et al., 2015).

In line with Baldassar and Badlock (2000), in order to acknowledge their belongingness in the host society, Zimbabweans need to feel their identities are recognized and accepted by the natives. However, many participants testified struggling to develop deep connections with the Dutch. Hence, they feel a sense of uncertainty and incompatibility with them on a social level, which goes in line with Walton and Cohen (2007). As a result, they have had to adopt several strategies to gain the natives' acceptance. The main coping strategies as identified in this study fall under two main categories already discussed in literature; conformity and self-regulation. Phinney et al. (2001) have found that, in order to create a sense of belonging, immigrants need to either adopt several attitudes and adjust to the sociocultural norms of the receiving country or emphasize on their individual and ethnic characteristics to deal with the negativity against them.

In line with Fulmer et al. (2010), Zimbabweans feel in many cases socially excluded as they believe their culture and personal values differ from the Dutch one; despite Rath et al.'s (1991) allegations that immigrants are encouraged to maintain their own cultures in the Netherlands, most participants in this study emphasized on the importance of conforming to the Dutch culture and learning the Dutch language in order to become accepted by the natives. The findings show that many participants negotiate with their social identities; they downplay their gender identity and ethnicity to match the Dutch norms. They find that moderating their "Zimbabwean-ness" and adjusting to the Dutch lifestyle provides them with advantages in creating bonds with the locals. Many participants dis-identify with certain gender-stereotypical notions and ideas and rethink gender relations and roles in the host country, just like participants in Pasura's study (2008). They also form new identities, including developing a transnational identity, changing their migration status by obtaining Dutch passports, getting married to other nationals, and/or creating families.

On the other hand, when they believe their belongingness is questioned, participants choose to mobilize their sociability and emphasize on their individual identities and background experiences. The stereotypes they come across in the host country appear to play a negative role on their perceived

level of acceptance and belonging. Voloder and Andits (2015) talked about some migrants' need to challenge stereotypes and change other people's negative views of them. Similarly, in this study, participants feel a strong need to discuss with others and raise their own social status by emphasizing on positive aspects of their identities – mostly their high social class, level of education, and professional identities. Many black participants find that presenting themselves as Zimbabwean nationals partly improves other people's opinions on them – distinguishing them from other African nationalities with “worse” reputations. Moreover, it induces others' interest to share their own knowledge and learn about the economic and political situation of Zimbabwe. Especially whites with Dutch passports emphasize on their Zimbabwean identity, to minimize the negative effect the inability to speak Dutch has on the way they are perceived.

Overall, the interviewees – with a few exceptions – mostly have positive experiences, have built satisfactory relationships with their surroundings, and have managed to develop an attachment to their country of residence. Especially those who maintain a stable job and have families, have eventually come to consider the Netherlands as their new home. On the contrary, students socialize mostly with internationals and the bonds they create with their Dutch counterparts are perceived as poor, resulting into them finding it difficult to integrate and develop a strong attachment to the host country.

When asked whether they feel part of the community they live in, participants either hesitated admitting they do, restricted their answers to their occupation-based networks, or explained thoroughly their chronic struggle to develop this feeling. Despite realizing the cultural differences and the fact that as migrants they are the ones who need to adapt, Zimbabweans feel that they need to put an unjustifiably big effort to receive the appropriate attention and acceptance from the natives which possibly constitutes the most important contribution of the present thesis.

5.2 Limitations and Recommendations

Despite aiming to capture a holistic picture of the Zimbabwean experience in the Netherlands, there were several limitations in the present research regarding the sample or the data received. The majority of the interviewees were students as they were more easily contacted than other age groups (e.g. over 50). Furthermore, no undocumented or non-cisgender (e.g. homosexual) Zimbabweans were located. The relationships between some participants are possibly limiting factors as well; as Zimbabweans constitute a small migrant group in the Netherlands, it was expected that some of them might know each other from common African or Southern African communities. Common social networks might result into similar or even the same experiences lived by more than one participant and therefore, I took this fact into consideration during the analysis process. Another important aspect which might be considered as a limitation is my own race, age, national, gender, and ethnic identities. Information hypothetically withheld from me could have been disclosed to a black African female researcher for instance. A difficulty experienced during the data collection was always keeping the notion of intersectionality in mind and asking questions without explicitly stating categories of difference to receive meaningful information and find out whether they intersect in the interviewee's mind.

My experience with qualitative research in the field of migration could not have been more enlightening. I would like to encourage researchers to conduct qualitative research, as understanding the migrants' experiences is an imperative means for generating future policies and recommendations. Further research could focus on other migrant groups or a specific context at a time – e.g. experiences only in the sphere of employment – as the latter can provide more depth on a specific topic. Focus-group discussions with families could provide a better understanding on a migrant-group level, which I also find very interesting. Most importantly, I would like to suggest using *intersectionality* both as a

theoretical and as an analytical framework as it provides a holistic idea and approaches the complexity of individual experiences from an angle which is particularly useful in social research.

5.3 Conclusion

In this thesis, the narratives of Zimbabweans in the Netherlands were analysed through the intersectionality lens. The participants – Zimbabwean migrants of various occupations and backgrounds – are located at the intersection of multiple social categories which were found to shape their experiences. Hence, had their narratives not been studied using the intersectional approach, many of their experiences would have been simplified; for instance, in many cases, the narrator could not have been anyone else but a heterosexual, married to a Dutch woman, black man from Zimbabwe, or a young, white, blonde, Zimbabwean woman of Dutch ancestry but with no Dutch language skills, making the intersectional framework an indispensable tool for analysis in this thesis.

It can be concluded that the participants' upbringing, schooling background, transnational experiences, reasons to move to the Netherlands, in conjunction with various aspects of their social identities such as gender, race, and socioeconomic status, played an important role on both the experiences they have had and the way they interpreted them but also on the level of belonging they feel in the host country, the Netherlands.

I would like to conclude my thesis with an excerpt from an interview:

I live in a world where [skin] colour is very much an issue and still very much the way we identify ourselves *unfortunately*. As much as I am proud to be black, the reason I'm proud to be black is because it's considered...not negative, but mostly like "Oh, you go through hardship if you're a black person". But to me...I see the strength of my people through that; we still hear and reason. I can still communicate with...a Caucasian man without feeling hatred towards you because of whatever oppression my people have gone through. I think that shows the beauty of *especially Africans*. [We] have that even more, cause Americans tend to be a bit...stronger in their hatred towards white people. But I feel that that forgiveness was and still is very much part of the African society, *especially Zimbabwean* society! Forgiveness and letting go of whatever past injustices were done to you or to your loved ones and not judging those following because of it. That's made me proud of that heritage! And I wanna carry it and scream it out on the rooftops because it's being oppressed so much. *But* I also want to live in a country in a world where I don't have to do that! It's not about...the colour of my skin or the colour of your skin, or the fact that you have white privilege and I don't, or whatever bulls*** that's all going on. **Just wanna come to a time where I won't have to identify myself as a *black woman* anymore...**

– Anenyasha

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Appendix A – Invitation Letter



Information sheet

This paper contains all the relevant information regarding my Master Thesis titled “*Towards a sense of belonging; Gender and social identities of Zimbabwean migrants in the Netherlands*”.

The present research is being carried out between May and June 2017, under the supervision of Dr Ajay Bailey. Its general goals, as well as your role as a participant are explained below. If there is something unclear or you have any questions or concerns after reading this sheet, please do not hesitate to ask me, or send an e-mail to my supervisor Dr Ajay Bailey: a.bailey@rug.nl.

Objective

The goal of this study is to understand how *gender* and *social identities of Zimbabwean migrants* shape their *experiences* in the Netherlands. Attention is given to the different strategies the migrants employ to create their *sense of belonging*.

Your role as a participant!

The study consists of an interview that should last approximately 45- 60 minutes, depending on how detailed your answers are. The topics discussed during the interview are related to your social identity, lived experiences, social network, and sense of belonging. It is important to note that participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You can end the interview at any point in time without further justifications.

How will the interview be used?

With your permission, the interview will be recorded by an audio recorder. The purpose of recording our conversation is so that I can engage fully to our talk and make sure that no important information is left out or forgotten after the successful completion of the interview. I assure you that all provided information will be made anonymous. The interview will be written down and your name will be replaced with a pseudonym so that no sensitive information be traced back to you.

Thank you for considering my invitation!

Ioannis Papisilekas, i.papasilekas@student.rug.nl

MSc Population Studies, University of Groningen, the Netherlands

Appendix B – Informed Consent

Informed Consent

I,, hereby consent that I have read and understood the information sheet regarding my participation to the research *“Towards a sense of belonging; Gender and social identities of Zimbabwean migrants in the Netherlands”*.

My responses will be kept anonymous and therefore, I agree with the interview being recorded.

I also understand that my participation is entirely voluntary and that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty.

Signature of participant:

Signature of researcher:

Place:, the Netherlands

Date: / /

Appendix C – Interview Guide

In-Depth Interview Guide

[Zimbabwean Migrants in the Netherlands]

06.05.2017

Participant information

Name:

Sex:

Age:

Marital status:

Current Occupation/Specialization:

Current City of Residence:

Years in the Netherlands:

Previous Residences:

City of Origin:

Introductory Questions – Sociocultural Context

[First, I would like to go back in time when you decided to come to the Netherlands and then we will talk a little bit about your experiences, your social environment and how you cope with your life here in general.]

1. Could you tell me something about your life before moving to the Netherlands? Where did you live? How was it?
(experiences/family/friends/occupation)
2. What made you decide to come to the Netherlands?
(previous knowledge of NL/scholarship/opportunities/economic privileges)
3. How was it when you first arrived here? How did you feel?
(differences/ "culture shock"/architecture/infrastructure/institutions/people/difficulties)

4. Since then, how has your life in the Netherlands changed? How do you cope?
(family/activities/work/social relations)

Social Networks

[Let's focus on the people you know, your social networks.]

5. How would you describe your social life?
(process of making friends/relationships/Dutch, International, African/neighbours/group associations/church)
6. How do you feel about having Zimbabwean or African friends here? Why is that?
(body language/expressions/understanding/beliefs/communication)

Social and Self-Identification

[Now, I would like to focus a bit more on you and the importance you give to certain aspects of your own identity, as well as how others see you. Let me start with a very general question.]

7. How do you identify yourself? Who are you?
(with regards to nationality/religion/social status/class/ethnicity)
 - Are there certain aspects of your identity that you are most proud of? (to check if they rate their identities)
8. What image do you have of your appearance?
(body/external characteristics/feelings/confidence/embrace/pride/insecurity)
9. How do you introduce yourself, in a few words, to someone you meet for the first time?
(it depends/where/who)
10. How do you sense other people's impressions of you? Before they really get to know you?

- Do you have any recent experiences you would like to share?
(emphasis/strength/vulnerability/Africa/stereotypes)

11. What are the reactions of people to your ethnic or national identity?
(Zimbabwe, Africa/interested/keep their distance/discriminate/change attitude)

12. How does gender influence your everyday life?

(others' perceptions/roles/the way you see the world)

- Now imagine that you are hypothetically a (wo)man. What would change to the way you see the world and to the way you are perceived and approached? How different do you think your lived experiences would be?

13. How differently do you feel that you are perceived here compared to Zimbabwe?
(migration status/education/skills/income)

Experiences – Strategies

[I would like to emphasize a bit more on the difficulties you might have experienced in the Netherlands, as a person with a different cultural background, as a migrant from Africa.]

14. What are the main challenges you have faced in the Netherlands? Could you share some experiences?

(institutions/economic/language barriers/biking)

15. How do you overcome these experiences? Do you have any personal strategies that help you adjust?

(activities/motivation/emphasis on character)

16. What is discrimination to you? Have you ever experienced any kind of discrimination?

17. What is, according to you, equality and where do you feel equal?
(context/location/gender/race/religion/opportunities/respect)

Belongingness

18. Do you feel that by living in the Dutch society, your own way of thinking has changed, and in what way?

(equality/tolerance towards homosexuality/religious and political freedom/what if you go back)

19. When you compare being here with being in Zimbabwe, where do you feel more confident and comfortable? Why is that?
(independency/communication/culture)

20. To what extent do you feel that you are a part of the community you live in now?
(communication/activities/beliefs/religion)

21. To sum up, and reflecting on your self-identity and sense of attachment to (both) Zimbabwe and the Netherlands (and elsewhere), where is your home?

Concluding Questions – Participant's thoughts

[As we are approaching the end of the interview, I would like to ask you some questions on your general thoughts.]

22. Have you missed Zimbabwe? What are your plans for the future? Are you planning to go back?

23. Do you think that we have left something important uncovered? Any other interesting experiences you would like to share? A conclusion to make?

24. (How did you feel about talking about this topic?)

Phrases to maintain the conversation and clarify statements throughout the interview

- *Could you give me an example?*
- *What do you mean by that?*
- *Could you tell me more about that?*
- *Could you tell me why?*
- *Could you explain further?*
- *Would you like to add something?*

Appendix D – Code Families

| Code Family | Codes | |
|--|--|---|
| Background of Participant | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Culture Shock Difficult Experiences in Zim Family Elsewhere Family in Zim First Impressions of NL Life before NL Motives behind the move to NL Occupation Elsewhere | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Occupation in Zim Personality - Personal Values Previous Knowledge of NL School in Zim Social Expectations - Norms in Zim Tribalism Upbringing |
| Self-Image; Social and Self-Identification & Gender Identity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> African Identity Age Appearance - Body - Looks Dutch Identity Dutch Language English Language - Accent Ethnic Identity Feminism Future Aspirations Gender Gender-Role Perceptions Identifying with Family Marital Status Migration Status "Mugabe" | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Name Nationality - Citizenship - Passport Occupation in NL Others' Views of/Attitudes towards Participant Personality - Personal Values Political Affiliations - Party Professional Identity-Qualifications Race-Skin Colour Religious Identity Social Class - Status Social Expectations - Norms in Zim Transnational Identity Views of Homosexuality Zimbabwean Identity |
| Social Connectedness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> African Networks Children Church Community Engagement Current Friends Elsewhere Dutch - International Social Networks in NL Family Elsewhere Family in NL | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family in Zim Neighbours - Proximate Networks Others' Views of/Attitudes towards Participant Participant's Perceptions of Dutch People Socializing Through Children Struggling with People Trust Zimbabwean Networks |
| Challenging Experiences in NL | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bullying Climate - Weather Coming Across Stereotypes Culture Shock Definition of Discrimination Definition of Equality Discriminated Against Harassment Identity Challenged Institutions - Immigration NL Language as Obstacle | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Medical Services NL Minor Challenges "Mugabe" Occupation in NL Personal Fears Racial Profiling Sense of Equality - Inequality Social Exclusion Struggling with People Unusual Experiences "Zwarte Piet" |

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| Coping Strategies; Conformity & Self-Regulation | Changes in Attitudes - Perceptions Dis-identification - Differentiation Dutch Language Gender-Role Perceptions Identity Mobilization - Immobilization Keep Hopes Down - Stop Trying Need to Challenge Stereotypes | Need to Prove Oneself Others' Views of/Attitudes towards Participant Participant's Perceptions of Dutch People Personality - Personal Values Socializing Through Children Strategy |
| Belongingness in the Dutch Context | Community Engagement Confidence - Comfort Definition of Equality Return to Zim Sense of Belonging | Sense of Equality - Inequality Sense of Privilege Social Exclusion Trust |
| none | Feelings about taking part in the research | |