

Roots and Routes

Factors Influencing Return Migration Intentions Among Surinamese
and Antillean Students in the Netherlands

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Abstract

The motives that impact the intention to remigrate have been researched frequently. More specifically, research on return intentions of international students between countries that share a colonial past has been limited. This study aims to research the factors that influence return intentions of Surinamese and Antillean students living in the Netherlands. By conducting five semi-structured interviews, a deeper understanding of the students' considerations about the decision to engage in return migration and the relationship between the origin country and the Netherlands is achieved. Results showed that the decision to return is based on a trade-off between the origin country and the host country. Job opportunities, higher wages, a more open society and personal development act as determinants for staying in the host country. On the other hand, homesickness, cultural differences, language proficiency and the urge to contribute in their origin country act as drivers for returns. Besides, the feeling of in-betweenness is widely felt among the interviewees, which shows the complicated relationship the interviewees experience between their origin country and the Netherlands. The interviewees feel a sense of helplessness about the economic and political situation in their origin country, making them dissociate themselves from the news. To conclude, the trade-off of factors that impact the intention to engage in return migration for these Surinamese and Antillean students is a very personal decision, based on many different factors. Implications, practically and for further research, are made to continue the narrative about this topic.

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1. Introduction

Return migration amongst international students has been researched frequently over the years (Alberts & Hazen, 2005), but a literature gap appears to exist concerning the return intentions of international students in the Netherlands, specifically, students coming from (former) colonial territories. This study examines the factors that might influence the intentions for return migration between the Netherlands and Suriname, Curaçao and Aruba. These former Dutch colonial areas remain closely connected to the Netherlands due to the spoken language, family ties between the countries, and tourism purposes. As mentioned in Vezzoli's (2014) paper about Suriname, post-colonial ties have been nurtured since Suriname's independence, with great dependence on e.g. Dutch aid. On the other hand, there is also a feeling of discontent, with the website Caribisch Netwerk (van Dam, 2023) stating that 45% of Curaçao's population feels that the Dutch government interferes too much with life on the island.

The high number of inhabitants from these former colonies who decided to study in the Netherlands contributes to the significance of this paper. It aims to understand the factors that impact the decision-making process of intending to move back to one's origin country after finishing one's studies. Multiple aspects play a role in this, which are discussed in depth in the theoretical framework. To understand what considerations about a potential return are made by students, the motives for return migration are investigated in this research paper. These motives reflect the perception of the students on both the host and the origin country and the considerations in choosing between them. Besides, the students' perception of the involvement of the Netherlands might shed light on the potential feeling of neocolonialism.

The target group of this study is students who live in the Netherlands but were born and raised in Suriname, Curaçao and Aruba. These students often navigate between two cultures, possibly causing a feeling of 'in-betweenness' (Ali & Holden, 2006). While these students come from outside the Dutch borders, their starting point in the Netherlands could be considered unique compared to other international students. Due to the colonial past, the education system in the researched countries has similarities with the Dutch system. For example, students from Curaçao and Aruba, referred to as Antilleans in this paper, take the same final exams as students in the Netherlands. Therefore, it is interesting to see how they have experienced living in the Netherlands, as well as what their considerations of wanting to return might be. While other areas with colonial ties (e.g. the United Kingdom and Barbados) have been the subject of research (Reynolds, 2015), little has been written about the Netherlands, and the role of students in particular. Therefore, this study can fill a knowledge gap.

For these reasons, the following question deserves to be asked: 'What factors influence the intentions of Surinamese and Antillean citizens studying in the Netherlands to engage in return migration?'

To answer the research question, several sub-questions are used:

- What are the motives for individuals, and specifically students, to engage in return migration or not?
- What influence does the colonial relationship have on intentions to engage in return migration?
- How do Surinamese and Antillean students experience living in the Netherlands?

1.1 Structure of thesis

This thesis consists of 6 chapters. Chapter two elaborates on the various motives Surinamese and Antillean students might have to engage in return migration, and what the influence of the colonial past might be. The motives for individuals, and students specifically, to engage in return migration are explored through existing literature. Based on Alberts & Hazen (2005) and Purdue (2023), supported by other literature, a classification of types of return migration for students can be made. Besides, the literature investigates the influence of colonial legacy on return migration. The feeling of in-betweenness and 'transnational identities' as described by Ali & Holden (2006) and Reynolds (2015), help in understanding the decision-making process of the students. Chapter three explains the data and methodology, including methods and ethics. Chapter four discusses the results found in the thesis. Chapter five discusses their relationship to the literature. In-depth interviews with Surinamese and Antillean students have tested multiple aspects. The students were asked to discuss their experiences of living in the Netherlands and were questioned on their return intentions. Besides, they were asked in what way they had experienced the institutional relationship between the Netherlands and their origin countries. Chapter six answers the research questions and poses ideas for future research.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Return migration of students

Regarding factors influencing students' return intentions, the literature outlines four categories with associated subfactors. These categories are professional, societal, personal (Alberts and Hazen, 2005), and structural factors (Purdue, 2023). A visible dimension in all these factors is the weigh-off between host and origin country. Thus, intentions of returning should be seen as an interplay between the situation in one's origin and host country (de Jong and Fonseca, 2020; Dustmann, 1996). Bijwaard & Wang (2016) explain this interplay in the following way:

“Completion of education in the host country enhances the migrant’s host country-specific human capital, thereby facilitating the participation in the host country’s labour market. This may lead to less return. Working after graduation in the host will also improve human capital, which enhances the opportunities in the home country and leading to faster return.” (p.34)

2.1.1 Professional factors

It is visible that professional factors were mentioned most frequently and amongst a wide range of research participants (Alberts and Hazen, 2005; Arthur and Flynn, 2011; de Jong and Fonseca, 2020). Job opportunities were noted as the biggest factor impacting their return intention. The participants indicated that having an educational background in the host country could make it more complex to find a job in their origin country. Especially in the social sciences field, it is argued that it is more challenging to apply the acquired knowledge due to the different social and cultural contexts (Alberts and Hazen, 2005). Other factors mentioned, especially by students from low-wage nations, are the higher wages and the standard of living students can receive in the host country. However, if this higher economic status can be acquired in the origin country rather than the host country, this can be a determining factor for returning (Gmelch, 1980; Reynolds, 2015). Besides, international students from more high-wage countries were notably more interested in factors such as culture, climate and language, also known as societal factors (de Jong and Fonseca, 2020). Lastly, international students appear to struggle to develop a professional network in the host country (Arthur and Flynn, 2011). It is evident that most international students who try to gain professional experience, for example by doing an internship, experience difficulties integrating into the company. Arthur & Flynn (2011) further argue that international students generally experience cultural barriers and face discrimination, as well as struggle with the networking and application process.

2.1.2 Personal factors

While it seems that professional factors have an impact on a student's motivation to stay, personal and societal factors operate oppositely by being of influence in drawing students back to their origin country. A broad topic that is part of these personal factors is family. Alberts and Hazen (2005) found that irrespective of how close the participants were to their families, they all mentioned that they were concerned about not being present for important family events. The students feel a deep sense of connection with the origin country due to family ties and it being the place of childhood memories (Thomas-Hope, 2002). Gmelch (1980) and King et al. (2000) mention that holiday trips home could be seen as 'social investments' creating an emotional connection and loyalty to the origin country that plays into the considerations of returning. Besides, the support students receive from their family about the decision to move abroad is important. This support could act as a drawback to their origin country, or a reason to stay if students feel supported in their decision (Moores & Popadiuk, 2011).

The integration of students in the host country is relevant in the weigh-off between returning or not. It is visible that students who form relationships, and thus feel more connected, are more likely to stay in the host country. These vitally important relationships can be of any kind and either with other international students or host nationals (Arthur & Flynn, 2013; Arthur & Popadiuk, 2013; Moores & Popadiuk, 2011). The time of stay and ability to adjust are connected to the formation of these relationships. The longer students reside in the host country, the more social and professional relationships they have formed. These connections can cause students to look for jobs in the host country rather than elsewhere. Alternatively, if their stay has been brief, fewer connections are made, allowing students more flexibility to leave. As mentioned by Mosneaga & Winther (2013),

“Yet, in the long term, the ability to overcome language barriers and to integrate into the society becomes the crucial parameter shaping international students' perspectives about continuing their careers in the host country.” (p.189)

2.1.3 Societal factors

The societal factors that impact the intention of international students to return are often intertwined with professional and personal factors. For example, the quality of life that the students can have in the host country is linked to the job opportunities they may get.

Wu & Wilkes (2017) note that many international students experience a culture shock when starting their studies abroad. The difference in culture compared to the origin country can be experienced positively or negatively. On the one hand, students may experience homesickness

and move back. On the other hand, if students identify more with the cultural norms and values in the host country, they are more likely to stay (Dentakos et al., 2017; Wu & Wilkes, 2017). From all cultural factors, participants in the research of Dentakos et al. (2017) mention factors about the norms and customs of the host country most often. It is further argued that high multiculturalism makes students feel more comfortable in the host country, positively impacting their quality of life.

The societal factor 'language', appears to be an important determinant of the ability to integrate in the host country. In many papers that use qualitative methods, it is evident that international students have to deal with discrimination in the job market due to their, generally lower, language skills (Alberts & Hazen, 2005; Alho, 2020; Scott et al. 2015). Interaction with local people enhances international students' language skills and fosters social interactions, which can lead to the formation of relationships. Moreover, this interaction may also decrease the prejudice and discrimination against these international students (Scott et al., 2015). It appears that the self-doubt international students feel about communicating in a non-native language has more effect than the actual skills they have in speaking the host country's language (Moores & Popadiuk, 2011).

2.1.4 Structural factors

A category that is disregarded in most literature, but that is interesting for the researched countries, are the structural factors that affect intentions of migrating (Purdue, 2023). Due to the (former) colonial bonds between the Netherlands and Suriname, Curaçao, and Aruba, there are various special regulations for students from these countries wanting to study in the Netherlands. For Antillean students, it is often financially more interesting to come to the Netherlands instead of countries more proximate such as the United States. Their Dutch passports make them eligible for student loans (DUO) and other financial assistance (RvIG, n.d.). Also, the students do not need to request a visa but simply enrol in the municipality they are moving to in the Netherlands. For the Surinamese students, who do not have Dutch passports, various exceptions such as lowering the tuition fees from around 20.000 euros to 2500 euros have been made (Universiteit Leiden, n.d.). These students have to request a visa from the Dutch government, which can be a time-consuming process (Surinamese Student Society, n.d.). Additionally, Surinamese students are not eligible for Dutch student loans, but can get a loan in Suriname for their studies (Nationale Ontwikkelingsbank van Suriname, 2024).

2.2 Present-day colonial influence of the Dutch

Diving into the present colonial influence of the Dutch, one should look back at what had happened before this time. After a brief British rule, Suriname became a Dutch colony in 1667 and remained so until their highly contested independence on the 25th of November 1975 (Oostindie, 2008). Suriname was mainly used by the Dutch as a plantation economy, initially for the production of sugar cane, and much later in the gold and bauxite industry (MacDonald, 2020a). The Antillean Islands of Aruba and Curaçao were Spanish, British, and Dutch colonies. From 1816 onwards, they remained in Dutch hands and became part of the Dutch Antilles, formally formed in 1954 (*Aruba | History, Map, flag, population, climate, & Facts.*, 2024). Aruba and Curaçao were used as transportation hubs for the African slaves used on the plantations, for example in Suriname (MacDonald, 2020b). Aruba gained a 'status aparte' in 1986, and Curaçao did in 2010, even though the island had informally already considered this way. The term 'status aparte' was officially abolished in 2010 as it became the norm for countries within the Dutch Kingdom. It means that even though the islands are still part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, they function autonomously (Canon van Nederland, n.d.). The streams of migration from Curaçao, Aruba and Suriname were massive during the 1970s and 1980s. For comparison, in 2011, around 350,000 Surinamese people were living in the Netherlands (Oudhof et al., 2011), compared to 620,000 in Suriname (World Bank Open Data, n.d.). In 2008, a combined 125,000 Antilleans were living in the Netherlands, compared to around 280,000 inhabitants left on the islands (Oostindie, 2008).

In his paper, Oostindie (2008) goes into depth about the influence on the societies in Suriname and the Netherlands Antillean islands. As the majority of non-European inhabitants were brought to these places by the Dutch, their entire culture is shaped by the Dutch colonial rule. Therefore, while colonial rule is in the past, the colonial heritage is all-encompassing, for example considering that Dutch is still the (one of the) official language(s) in all three countries. Next to this intangible cultural heritage, there is also an economic dependence on the Netherlands by all three countries. This dependence, instead of a structural adjustment, can partly be explained by the continuous financial aid that the Dutch governments have given, also after Suriname's independence (Buddingh, 2001). The unemployment rates went up, as did the government's foreign debt.

On the other hand, the situation on Curaçao and Aruba is quite different. These islands are still not fully independent, meaning they can fall back on the Dutch government when necessary. As described by Van Amersfoort and Van Niekerk (2006), this could be seen during times of political unrest in Curaçao at the end of the 1960s. Back then, the local authorities had to ask for assistance from the Dutch military to maintain safety and peace. Interestingly, this raised the

discussion in the Netherlands about the consideration of the Antilles becoming fully independent, which resulted in the 'status aparte'. Besides, it is argued that this ongoing connection with the Netherlands results in a higher standard of living compared to Suriname. Therefore, it is concluded that the Antilleans have no intention of becoming fully independent (Van Amersfoort & Van Niekerk, 2006).

Still, the question remains about the perception of the involvement of the Dutch in these countries. This topic has not been researched often, and seems to involve people's perception, rather than hard evidence. Therefore, this is investigated in the interviews.

2.3 Colonial influence on return migration

The sense of identity is essential when considering the return migrants' relationship with their host and origin country, especially when there is a shared colonial history. While some may feel more connected to one society, others can also feel connected to multiple societies (Plaza, 2008). Ali & Holden (2006) argue that the migrants' identities are never complete but are flexible and in constant processes of 'negotiation, re-negotiation and de-negotiation' (p.218). Closely connected to these identities is the notion of in-betweenness, neither belonging to one country nor to another. This in-betweenness, or 'transnational identity', causes friction both in the host and the origin country. The returnees feel attached to both their origin and host country, and are known to maintain various networks: socially, economically and politically (Al-Ali & Koser, 2002; Cassarino 2004). Described by Reynolds (2015) in her paper about second-generation Caribbean return migrants, is that while they may feel connected to their origin country, they grew up in a different environment with different family relationships. Issues such as an accent or the different role a woman takes on in a family may be reasons why the return migrants feel homesick or left out. In that case, these return migrants depend heavily on the family who remained in the origin country as they can help them re-integrate into society. Thomas-Hope (2002) mentions various aspects that define the integration of migrants (both in the origin and host country), including educational level, position in the labour market, racial and linguistic characteristics and position in the housing market. She even talks about a transnational household that develops. This transnational household creates a livelihood that involves

“Working in one place and context, maintaining their families in another, socializing, investing, making purchases of goods and services, engaging in leisure pursuits, each at different points in the network and within the context of different accepted behaviours.”
(p.189)

Thus, one may see this as a more positive side of in-betweenness. Multiple authors (Reynolds, 2015; Thomas-Hope, 1999; Wang, 2016) mention that this cycle of return migration is no longer seen as unidirectional and permanent, but more circular and spontaneous. This also means that while the returnees may move back to their origin country, they keep their options open to expand their global context elsewhere.

2.4 Conceptual model

In the conceptual model below, one can see how the various factors described above impact the potential return to students’ origin countries, as was discussed in section 2.1. It is clear from the conceptual model that a combination of various factors impacts the decision to engage in return migration or not, rather than specific factors. The four factors are often intertwined and not mutually exclusive. The mediating influence that the perceived colonial relationship might have on students’ return intentions is described in sections 2.2 and 2.3, and was to be researched in the interviews in more detail.

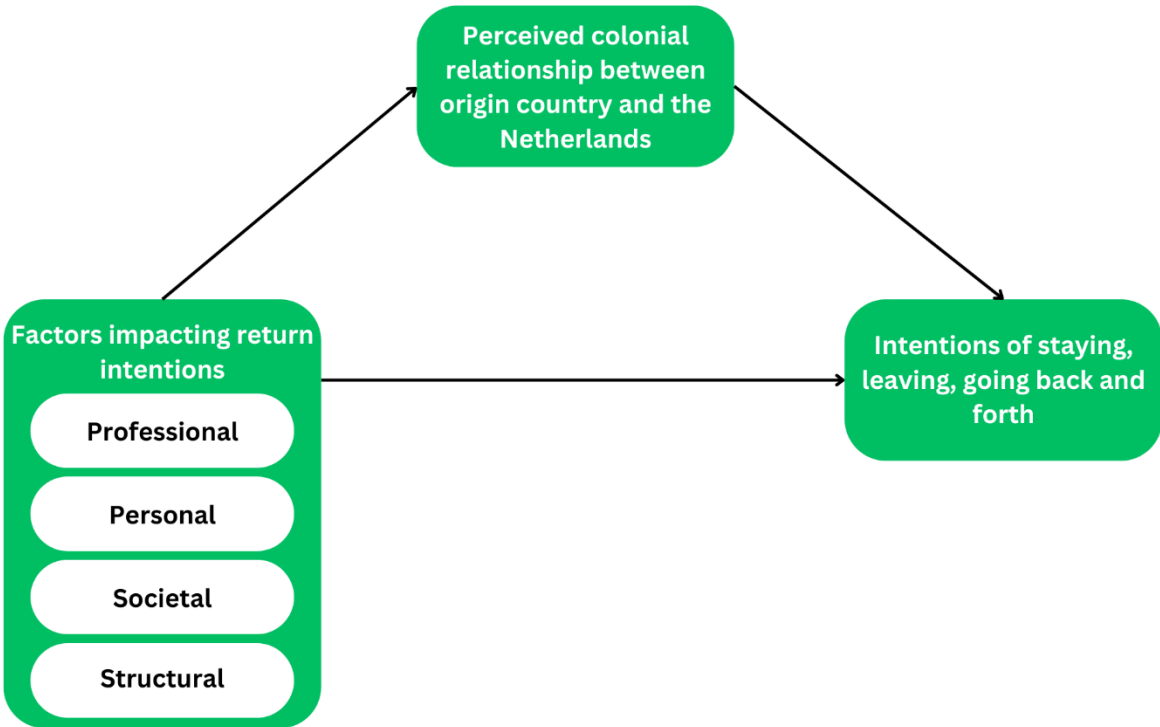


Figure 1: conceptual model, made by author (2024)

3. Data and Methodology

3.1 Operationalization

For this research, the researcher conducted interviews with five people who live in the Netherlands and who were born in Suriname, Curaçao or Aruba. The choice for first-generation migrants was made as interviewing second-generation migrants would have been ethically challenging. The questions asked during the interview (Appendix 1), especially regarding motives for returning could have been considered discriminatory as these persons were born in the Netherlands. Interviews were used as they have given depth to the research that surveys or other quantitative data could not have provided. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner, as this was considered the most appropriate method. Semi-structured interviews allow the interviews to unfold informally and conversationally (Clifford, 2016). This way, the researcher could guide the interview while giving the interviewee enough freedom with their answers. The interviews lasted between 20 and 35 minutes and were all conducted online. The interview was divided into four parts: an introductory part, a part about experiencing living in the Netherlands, a part about moving intentions and a last part about the institutional relationship between the Netherlands and their origin country. The interviews were led using an interview guide (Appendix 1).

3.2 Sampling strategy

To select the interviewees, purposeful sampling was used. In this type of sampling, the researcher uses personal judgment to decide which individuals of the population are included in the sample. Purposeful sampling was used as it allowed the researcher to use the limited interviews as efficiently as possible by selecting information-rich individuals (Palinkas et al., 2015). The participants had to adhere to the following criteria: (1) they were born in Suriname, Curaçao or Aruba, (2) they lived in these countries for the majority of their life, (3) they currently study in the Netherlands at a university or university of applied sciences. The sampling strategy worked out as expected. One of the participants was born in the Netherlands, but lived in Aruba between the ages of 3 and 18. After consultation with the thesis supervisor, this person was still deemed relevant for the research and thus included. For this paper, students of different genders, ages and academic tracks (university or university of applied sciences) were interviewed.

3.3 Data analysis scheme

For the analysis of the interviews, the researcher opted for a thematic analysis. The choice for this type of analysis was made as it allowed for relatively simple linking between qualitative data and theoretical framework (Braun & Clarke, 2012). In this research, a mostly deductive coding method was used, meaning that the researcher based the coding scheme on the literature that

was studied for this research. However, as is often the case, there is a combination with inductive coding as the interviews brought on interesting themes that were not discussed in the literature beforehand or with as much dominance. Braun and Clarke (2012) described a six-phase approach to thematic analysis that was used in this research. The steps taken were: familiarizing oneself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing potential themes, defining and naming themes and, lastly, producing the report. As described by Braun and Clarke, the researcher created a code tree that can be seen in Figure 2, after which ATLAS.ti was used for the actual coding.

3.4 Research ethics

To have a reliable project, one needs to adhere to ethical rules. Besides adhering to the university's scientific research rules, the researcher adhered to the Dutch Code of Conduct for Research Integrity. This Code of Conduct consists of five aspects that need to be adhered to by a researcher: honesty, scrupulousness, transparency, independence and responsibility (VSNU, 2018).

The topics discussed in this research such as return migration and colonial history can be sensitive topics for the interviewees as they are linked to personal experiences and considerations. Therefore, while the structure of semi-structured interviews allowed for an open conversation, the researcher needed to carefully consider the asked questions. It was decided not to ask any specific questions about the colonial relationship between the Netherlands and the students' origin countries, but rather focus on the current situation. Questions were asked about the institutional relationship, and follow-up questions were asked if interviewees started about the colonial past themselves. By focusing on this personal experience and giving freedom in answering, the interviewees were not put in a vulnerable position.

To protect the confidentiality of the interviewees, a data management plan was made (Appendix 3). As a part of this, data minimization was executed, meaning only the relevant personal information was used. In this research, only gender, age and place of birth were deemed relevant (GDPR, 2021). Interviewees were asked to sign an informed consent form (Appendix 2), which included information about the research and indicated that their participation was voluntary. By signing the informed consent form, the interviewee allowed the researcher to record the interviews and use the data for this research. These recordings were deleted after they were transcribed. The interviewees were made aware that they had, and still have, the right to withdraw from the research.

3.5 Data reflection

3.5.1 Reliability

The choice for conducting five interviews was based on Francis et al. (2010). They outlined the difficulty of deciding on an ideal number of interviews, thus an initial number of interviews was determined with the thesis supervisor, also known as the initial analysis sample. After conducting five interviews, the stopping criterium was reached. This means that no new themes were emerging from the interviews. Ideally, this would be the case for three consecutive interviews, but this was not feasible for this research. It is difficult to come up with an appropriate number of interviews beforehand as it is unclear when the data saturation will be reached (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Qualitative research aims to have participants who provide in-depth, rich information (Hennink et al., 2019). A downside of using purposeful sampling is that it may be difficult to find information-rich participants (Gill, 2020), which was also experienced in this research. Ideally, the researcher would have liked to have another participant from Suriname, but this person was not found, even after extensive recruitment.

3.5.2 Validity & trustworthiness of the collected data

The collected data in the interviews was gathered about the experiences of Surinamese and Antillean students in the Netherlands. Due to the relaxed nature of the interviews, not all of the questions written in the interview guide (Appendix 1) were asked. This was the case if the researcher felt that they had already been answered or were irrelevant. For example, in one interview, the interviewee indicated immediately with the question 'have you given some thought about where you would rather live?' that they would not want to move back. Therefore, the question 'how likely are you to realize your return', was not relevant and thus was not asked. Besides, it may have been the case that interviewees were unintentionally pushed to a certain answer: 'I: Yes, no, I can imagine that. So for you, the options you have are actually more important to you than, for example, where your family lives?'. This is an example of where the author, based on something the participant said beforehand, took an assumption and used it to ask a more specific question.

Lastly, since some interviewees were more comfortable speaking Dutch, some of the interviews were conducted in Dutch instead of English. Therefore, these interviews were translated and thoroughly checked to avoid any translation errors.

4. Results

4.1 Participant Characteristics

For this research, five students, aged between 21 and 25 were interviewed. The interviewees have all lived in the Netherlands for a period ranging from one to four years. The participants had different places of birth, which are visible in Table 1. All participants have moved to the Netherlands to study at either a university or a university of applied sciences.

Interviewee	Gender	Place of birth
Interviewee 1	Female	Suriname
Interviewee 2	Female	Curaçao
Interviewee 3	Female	Curaçao
Interviewee 4	Male	Aruba
Interviewee 5	Male	the Netherlands (but grew up in Aruba from the age of 3 until 18)

Table 1: interviewees and their gender and place of birth, made by author (2024)

4.2 Themes

A thematic analysis was conducted along the steps of Braun & Clarke (2012). As is visible in Figure 2, four main themes could be distilled from the available literature. These themes - personal, professional, societal, and structural - all impacted intentions of return migration. These themes had various subcategories evident in the literature, so-called deductive codes. On the other hand, when coding the interviews, various other codes came up for personal and societal factors, which can be seen in blue. These inductive codes were therefore added. The results are structured along the various parts of the interview: experiences of living in the Netherlands, return intentions, and institutional relationship between origin country and the Netherlands.

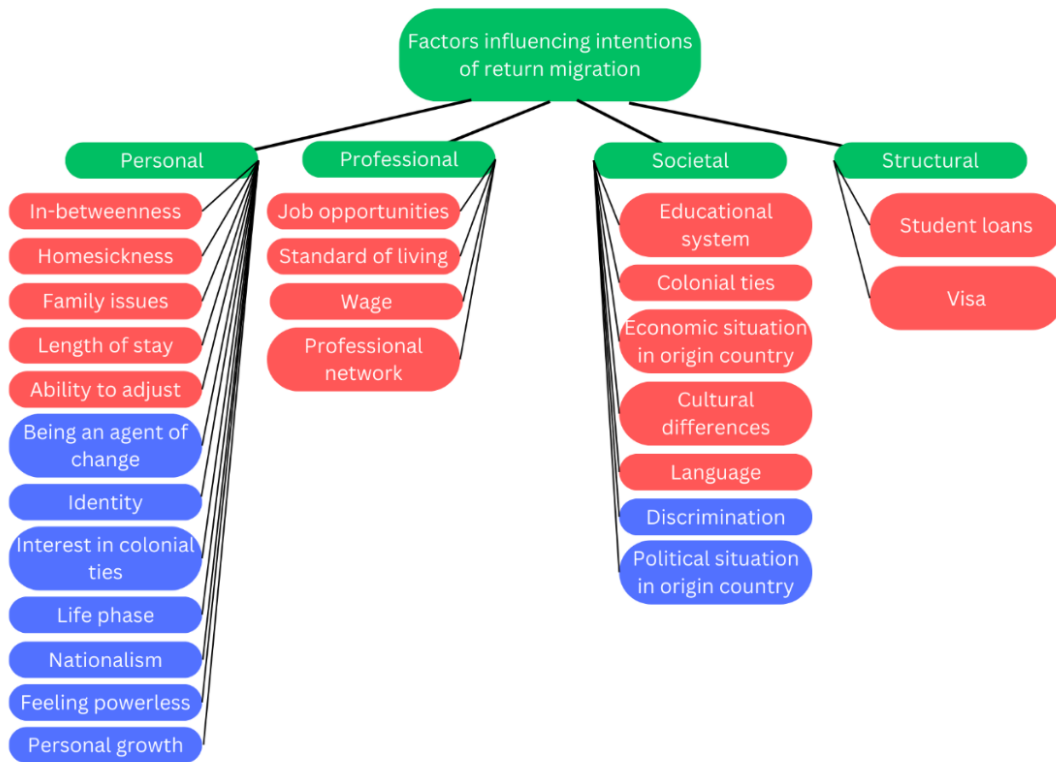


Figure 2: Code tree, made by author (2024)

4.3 Experiences of living in the Netherlands

In general, the interviewees had a positive feeling about living in the Netherlands. Some interviewees experienced it very positively, others indicated that they initially struggled to adjust and suffered homesickness. A factor that all interviewees mentioned impacted their ability to adjust was language. Even though all interviewees had a previous education in Dutch, especially the interviewees from Aruba and Curaçao indicated that their level of Dutch was not as high as they had expected.

“And then I realized, when I was in the student association, that I could hardly speak Dutch. Then I realized that... That was really strange, because you have... I thought, hey, VWO6, that's quite a high level of Dutch. And that's true, scientifically. But spoken language? No. I came here, someone said, yes, shall we go to the Appie? The what? Yes, I'll just send you a Tikkie. A what?” (Interviewee 4)

The interviewees realized that their ability to integrate and interact with Dutch people was highly dependent on their Dutch speaking skills. Interviewee 4 indicated that he was adamant about integrating in the Netherlands and thus joined a student association, as he saw many of his friends not manage to integrate and eventually return home without a degree.

The difference in culture, specifically in food, was mentioned frequently. Many of the interviewees indicated that they dislike the Dutch food and missed their local food. Additionally, some interviewees argued that they saw few cultural differences between their origin country and the Netherlands, due to for example similar national holidays. On the other hand, other interviewees had a different opinion about this culture, which they linked to nationality. This is discussed later.

“I mean, what is Dutch culture exactly? Because a lot of times in Curaçao we have a lot of, I don't know if I should say Dutch culture. But like, I see a lot of things here that we also have in Curaçao. Like, for example, the Koningsdag. We also celebrated there. Sinterklaas, they also celebrated there a lot of times. Like the food, like the frikandel or the kroket, they eat it a lot there too.” (Interviewee 3)

Mixed responses were given when discussing the possible discrimination the interviewees could have experienced. Interviewee 2 indicated that she experienced discrimination at her internship, which was not taken seriously. Interviewee 3 indicated that, while she did not have any bad experiences, she did come to the Netherlands in a high alert mode, after being warned by friends and family that she might experience discrimination. On the other hand, two interviewees indicated that they had not experienced any discrimination in the Netherlands, but had experienced discrimination in Aruba due to both of them being white.

“The funny thing is, I think, in Aruba I was the white Dutchman. And there's a word for it, 'Makamba', it's called. If you come from the Netherlands. So in Aruba I actually felt more Dutch, actually. And I was always told, well, that I shouldn't speak Dutch or something. But then again here in the Netherlands I felt much more Aruban, actually.” (Interviewee 5)

This links to the feeling of 'in-betweenness', that was widely resonated among all of the interviewees. Still, there were various points of view about this. Interviewees 4 and 5 do have the feeling of in-betweenness either in the Netherlands or in Aruba due to their skin colour. The other interviewees mentioned that they were more concerned about losing their identity.

“It's like a plant that grows in one place and if you pull it out and plant it again in another place, it won't grow that well anymore. It is growing, but perhaps a little imperfectly.” (Interviewee 1)

“How disconnected will I get from my country and how more similar will I become to the Netherlands, but also never be fully Dutch, because I don't have the Dutch experience here.” (Interviewee 2)

4.4 Return intentions

The interviewees gave a mixed response to the question of whether they would want to return. Some interviewees left their origin country with the idea never to return, while others knew they would want to return. All interviewees would be open to return but are unsure if they would go back. The main determining factors are professional and personal opportunities. It was clear that the life phase the interviewees are in, with many different options, influences the value they give to this personal development. For some interviewees, their decision to return or not was a purely rational decision. They did not mind either way and would simply want to follow whatever opportunities they might get, in the Netherlands, in their origin country or elsewhere.

“I do give priority to development and work experience. If there are opportunities where I can develop myself and enrich my knowledge, I think the Netherlands is very ideal for that, because you have a lot of access to information there compared to Suriname. That is something that is flawed here. And if there is an opportunity to develop myself further, then I would just stay. But if I don't find work that I like, I will simply come back to Suriname.” (Interviewee 1)

“And one of the main reasons is because I think for what I'm studying, there's more opportunities outside of Curaçao. And even so, I don't think I would go back because I think it's very limited to myself.” (Interviewee 3)

Other interviewees felt more emotional about this decision. Interviewee 2 was very clear about wanting to return. For her, the weigh-off between professional development and feeling at home was a struggle, as visible in the following quote.

“And I would really, really, really like to go back because also Curaçao, like the culture, everything feels more like home. But the financial situation is so bad that I don't think that I would be able to. So for now, I'm gonna have to stay and also gain more experience, more money.” (Interviewee 2)

Interviewees 4 and 5 indicated they would not want to return to Aruba. They mentioned various reasons, including a lack of job opportunities in their field of study, but also the political situation in their origin country.

“But then I really need to have a large base, because everything there is quite... small and it feels a bit like a kind of prison there in terms of possibilities and everything with the government is just very slow.” (Interviewee 4)

Next to the lack of professional and personal opportunities, multiple interviewees mentioned that Dutch society is more open-minded than in their origin country. Thus, they feel more freedom in expressing themselves, for example with their clothing or sexuality, and feel less judged.

“And even when I came here I felt more comfortable dressing in different ways, like how I actually like. Because in Curaçao a lot of times it can happen that people can look at you weird or like say something behind your back if you seem like, different than like the majority.” (Interviewee 3)

A shared feeling amongst the interviewees is that they miss the weather in their origin country, and that the Dutch weather makes them want to return, even if it is just for a holiday.

“But when I came here to the Netherlands, it was cold and really not pleasant. And at times like that you will miss Aruba. It's actually a nice life there. And then you look back and say, oh did I enjoy Aruba enough?” (Interviewee 5)

4.5 Institutional relationship between the Netherlands and origin countries

A two-sided feeling emerged when discussing the institutional relationship between the Netherlands and the interviewees' origin countries. On the one hand, all interviewees indicated that they were happy with the collaboration between the Netherlands and their origin country. Interviewee 1 did not have a strong opinion about the institutional relationship between the Netherlands and Suriname.

“I think we benefit a lot from the educational system. Also, we have the Dutch passport. That means when we come to the Netherlands, we are treated as, like a Dutch citizen, like we both have the same benefits, like DUO or when we are trying to look for housing. And also it's a really good passport, I think.” (Interviewee 3)

On the other hand, some interviewees from Aruba and Curaçao indicated that they felt that a dependent relationship remains between the Netherlands and their origin country that seems difficult to get out of. For the interviewees, this gives a feeling of frustration and powerlessness about the political and economic situation in their origin country.

“Honestly, at this point, I feel like no matter how hard Curaçao tries, we will need a miracle to be able to sustain ourselves, not because we can't, but because we believe that we can't. And also our politicians don't really work towards that in the sense that they keep stealing from the land, which makes it really hard for Curaçao to, like, sustain itself and not depend on the Dutch. It's very conflicting. It's very conflicting. Because part of me really wants us to be independent because I know we can do it and I know we can do great things. Right. Another part of me also knows that being, like, in relations to the Dutch brings a lot of benefit. Like the Dutch passport, huge benefit.” (Interviewee 2)

Next to this frustration, Interviewees 2 and 5 indicated that they feel that they need to give something back to their origin country, or be a so-called 'agent of change'. Still, they are quite unsure about how they can implement a change, and how this might be received.

“And besides, look, what I have often thought about myself is that I really want to go back. And I really want to help. But I'm also white and have blonde hair. So then they simply won't listen to me that quickly, but I think there really needs to be a change. But that is, yes, what I also said, that has become very deep.” (Interviewee 5)

Lastly, the topic of nationality was brought up. While the students from Aruba and Curaçao have a Dutch nationality, almost all interviewees indicated that they do not feel very connected to the Dutch nationality and culture. Interviewee 5 went as far as mentioning that there is a deeply rooted dislike of the Dutch, even though the Antilles are still financially dependent on the Dutch, for example through tourism.

“Anthem of the King of Nassau, blah blah blah. That's not my anthem, because that is my attitude. My national anthem, it is from Aruba, it is in Papiamentu, I know it from my heart.” (Interviewee 4)

4.6 Discussion

This research explored what considerations Surinamese and Antillean students in the Netherlands make, concerning their potential return to their origin country. The main research question was *'What factors influence the intentions of Surinamese and Antillean citizens studying in the Netherlands to engage in return migration?'*. Based on the literature and the interviews, several themes that influence intentions of return migration could be deduced: personal, professional, societal and structural (Alberts & Hazen, 2005; Purdue, 2023). The findings from this research indicate that, following the literature, professional factors are significant determinants in the decision to stay or return. Besides, the feeling of in-betweenness (Ali &

Holden, 2006) is strongly felt by all of the interviewees. Alongside this, linking to Reynolds (2015), Thomas-Hope (1999), and Wang (2016), the interviewees agreed that return migration is not necessarily unidirectional but rather spontaneous. Most of them saw themselves moving to places where there are opportunities, which could also be in a different country than the host or origin. Linking to the ability to adjust and integrate into society, language is paramount. All participants noted that having a high or low command of the Dutch language has an impact on how they function in the Netherlands, which links back to research of Scott et al. (2015). Some interviewees mentioned that, in agreement with Dentakos et al. (2017), they prefer the norms and values in the Netherlands, and feel that the society is more open-minded than in their origin country. As confirmed by Arthur & Flynn (2011), discrimination was mostly experienced in a professional setting.

Some interesting outcomes were not, or not extensively, discussed in the literature. Firstly, while conducting the thematic analysis, it became evident that personal growth was very important to all of the interviewees. Many interviewees found this personal development equally as important as their professional development and often saw it as two sides of the same coin. This could be due to the life phase that the participants are in. With all of the interviewees still being students, they are busy thinking about their future endeavours and how to develop themselves further.

Next, the outcomes of the questions about the institutional relationship between the Netherlands and Suriname, Aruba, and Curaçao were interesting in different ways. In general, the interviewees felt positive about their origin countries in terms of weather, food and parts of the culture. But, they were less positive about the political and economic situation, which left them feeling frustrated and powerless. Contrastingly, they were very positive about the possibilities they have got in the Netherlands in terms of education and potential jobs. Therefore, they mostly emphasized the positive outcomes of the colonial ties with the Netherlands: student loans, DUO, and a good educational system.

When specifically asked about whether the students follow the news about the institutional relationship, all of the interviewees indicated that they did not. The main reason for this was a feeling of frustration and that things may never change. This frustration, which could be mistaken for indifference, could be due to these students being more removed from the colonial past than their ancestors. This is an interesting outcome of the research since the influence of the colonial past on the futures of these Surinamese and Antillean students has not been researched widely, and specifically what effect this has on the daily lives of these students.

Following Van Amersfoort & Van Niekerk (2006), some interviewees indicated that they thought that it would be better for their origin country to become independent, but that they were not sure how and if this was ever going to happen, since they did see how dependent they still are on the Netherlands. Contrary to what Oostindie (2008) said, about the Antillean and Surinamese cultures being fully shaped by the Dutch, many of the interviewees indicated that they are very proud of their own nationality and culture, making them feel disconnected from the Dutch.

5. Conclusion

This study provides a deeper understanding of the factors that influence the intentions of Surinamese and Antillean students in the Netherlands to engage in return migration by addressing the question: *'What factors influence the intentions of Surinamese and Antillean citizens studying in the Netherlands to engage in return migration?'*. It can be concluded that there are various factors at play in this decision-making process. The factors found in the literature – professional, personal, societal and structural – all were mentioned by the interviewees. The significance of this research was proven during the thematic analysis, where it became evident that emotions and experiences are paramount in the decision to return or not, which was not as prominent in the literature. The decision to return to one's origin country is a very personal one, and all of the interviewees had a different, but equally complicated thought process.

The students from the researched countries are in a different position than other international students in terms of their previous educational system, relatively affordable education, and ability to speak Dutch. On the other hand, they indicate that they struggle to integrate and that their use of the Dutch language is often not as good as they had thought. The differences in culture, homesickness and the wish to contribute to the development of their origin country act as drivers to return. Professional opportunities, including higher wages and a better standard of living, and personal opportunities act as forces to let students stay in the Netherlands.

The unique historical relationships that Suriname, Curaçao, and Aruba have with the Netherlands have caused feelings of in-betweenness for the students. They are unsure how to navigate between complex histories and ambitious futures, leaving them feeling frustrated and distanced from the news and politics in their origin countries.

Practically, the backlog that the Antillean students indicate to have when starting their education in the Netherlands should be discussed. While the students have to take the same final exams as students in the Netherlands, they indicate that their use of the Dutch language is poorer than expected, which might affect their results both in the Netherlands and the Antilles. Practically, this might be fixed by offering additional Dutch courses aimed at understanding more day-to-day Dutch, rather than the more formal Dutch they may get taught in high school. This would, in accordance with the literature, allow for better integration into society and possible workplaces. Besides, the inductive codes found in this research mainly aimed at emotions or experiences.

Moreover, more up-to-date research about the residential paths of these Antillean and Surinamese students after their studies would be interesting. Since most interviewees indicated

that they have not decided yet whether they would want to return due to the limited possibilities, it would be interesting to see where they move to. Looking from the perspective of the origin countries, it would be interesting to see if these highly skilled individuals return or not, and what these countries can do to attract these students. Lastly, similar research about the opinion about the relationship between the Netherlands and Suriname and the Antilles would be interesting to conduct with an older target group, as they might have a very different view on this topic.

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Appendix 1: Interview Guide

Hello, my name is Rosa ter Haar and I am a Human Geography and Planning student at the University of Groningen. For my Bachelor Thesis, I am writing a research paper about the factors that influence stay and return intentions from people who came to the Netherlands from Suriname, Curaçao and Aruba. For my Bachelor's thesis, I am conducting interviews with people who were born in Suriname, Curaçao or Aruba and who are currently living in the Netherlands. Before starting the interview, I would like to ask for your consent to record this interview and use your answers for my Bachelor's thesis. Please be aware that you can withdraw from the interview at any time.

- Opening questions
 - Could you please tell something about yourself: including age, place of birth, nationality, where you live and how long you have lived here?
 - Why did you decide to come and study in the Netherlands?
 - Could you explain to me whether you needed to apply for a visum? Are you eligible for all student loans etc. as all of the Dutch students?
- How has your experience of living in the Netherlands been?
 - How welcome do you feel in the Netherlands? How is your interaction with Dutch people?
 - Do you feel Dutch? What part of the Dutch culture do you embrace? Does this affect your consideration of wanting/or not wanting to return?
 - In literature comparing people living in the UK who were born in Barbados the notion of 'inbetweenness' is mentioned. This notion means that people feel as if they belong to neither of the two countries as they lived in both. Would you say you resonate with that experience or not?
- Have you given some thought about where you would rather live?
 - If yes, why would you want to move back?
 - Could you name a motive for wanting to return?
 - If not, why would you not want to move back?
 - Could you name a motive for not wanting to return?
 - How likely are you to realize your return?
 - Was it your initial idea to return immediately after studying or not? Has your idea about this changed?
 - Do you have any regrets about going to study in the Netherlands?
- How do you feel about the institutional relationship between the Netherlands and Suriname/Aruba/Curaçao (pick interviewees home country)?

- How do you feel about the aid that the Netherlands gives to Suriname/Aruba/Curaçao?
 - Do you follow what the Dutch government/king says about Suriname/Aruba/Curaçao?
 - Do you follow the news about official visits, aid, and institutional collaborations? Are you indifferent to this type of news? If not, what does this discussion evoke to you more personally? How does this affect what we've just discussed?
- Do you have anything that you want to add or say?

Appendix 2: Informed Consent Form

INFORMATION SHEET

Factors influencing stay and return intentions for Surinamese and Antillean students in the Netherlands

Dear Participant

Thank you for your interest in participating in this research. This letter explains what the research entails and how the research will be conducted. Please take time to read the following information carefully. If any information is not clear kindly ask questions using the contact details of the researchers provided at the end of this letter.

WHAT THIS STUDY IS ABOUT?

This study is done as the Bachelor's Project which finalizes the researcher's Bachelor Human Geography and Planning. The research study includes various parts, including a literature review which covers the following topics: motives for return migration, present-day colonial influence of the Dutch and colonial influence on return migration. These topics are extensively discussed, and the interviews are aimed at providing additional information on these questions and answering the research question: 'What factors influence the intentions of Surinamese and Antillean citizens studying in the Netherlands to engage in return migration?'

You were asked to participate in this study since you were born in either Suriname, Curaçao or Aruba and are now living in the Netherlands.

WHAT DOES PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?

You are asked to answer several questions in a semi-structured interview, which will be recorded. The interview is set to take around 30 minutes. Semi-structured interviews are used as this allows for an informal and conversational interview in which the participant has freedom in what to answer.

DO YOU HAVE TO PARTICIPATE?

Participating in this research is completely voluntary. This means that you can choose to withdraw from the study at any moment and choose not to answer questions without consequences or providing reasons.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS IN PARTICIPATING?

Some questions in the interview could make participants feel uncomfortable, as they discuss sensitive topics such as colonial histories. Therefore, if you want to stop or take a break during the interview, you can say so at any time. Besides, you can request to take someone with you during the interview.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS IN PARTICIPATING?

For you, there are no direct benefits in participating, but for the researcher, your participation may contribute to further knowledge on this research topic.

You can request the final thesis at the contact person.

HOW WILL INFORMATION YOU PROVIDE BE RECORDED, STORED AND PROTECTED?

For this research, the researcher will not use any names, addresses or other personal information. Instead, you will be referred to as either Interviewee 1, Interviewee 6, etc. The individual information will not be disclosed to anyone outside of the study team. The information provided will only be used for this research and publications directly related to this research project.

The data (consent forms, recordings, interview transcripts) will be retained on the Y-drive of the University of Groningen server for 5 years, in correspondence with the university GDPR legislation.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY?

The results of the study will be used in this Bachelor's project.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

This research study followed the procedure for theses, which involves a reflection on ethics in research based on the standards of the ethics board of the Faculty of Spatial Sciences. The researcher will uphold herself to relevant ethical standards.

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I would like to ask you to sign the Informed consent form below. This means that you intend to participate in this research, but also means you are allowed to withdraw at any time.

WHO SHOULD YOU CONTACT FOR FURTHER INFORMATION?

Rosa ter Haar (r.m.m.ter.haar@student.rug.nl) - Researcher
Adrien Remund (a.p.p.remund@rug.nl) - Thesis supervisor

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title study: Factors influencing stay and return intentions for Surinamese and Antillean students in the Netherlands

Name participant:

Assessment

- I have read the information sheet and was able to ask any additional question to the researcher.
- I understand I may ask questions about the study at any time.
- I understand I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.
- I understand that at any time I can refuse to answer any question without any consequences.
- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.

Confidentiality and Data Use

- I understand that none of my individual information will be disclosed to anyone outside the study team and my name will not be published.
- I understand that the information provided will be used only for this research and publications directly related to this research project.
- I understand that data (consent forms, recordings, interview transcripts) will be retained on the Y-drive of the University of Groningen server for 5 years, in correspondence with the university GDPR legislation.

Future involvement

- I wish to receive a copy of the scientific output of the project.
- I consent to be re-contacted for participating in future studies.

Having read and understood all the above, I agree to participate in the research study: yes / no

Date

Signature

To be filled in by the researcher

- I declare that I have thoroughly informed the research participant about the research study and answered any remaining questions to the best of my knowledge.
- I agree that this person participates in the research study.

Date

Signature

Appendix 3: Data Management Plan

Instructions: this is the template for a data management plan. Please fill this in and discuss it with your supervisor during the design phase of the thesis. If your thesis is nearly complete, please add this as an appendix to the thesis. The purpose of making a dmp to think ahead. How will you manage the data gathered for your project? It is not about providing the 'right' answers, but making your research transparent. Some items just require ticking, some require further explanation.

1. General	
1.1 Name & title of thesis	Rosa ter Haar: Factors influencing intentions of Surinamese and Antillean students in the Netherlands to engage in return migration
1.2 (if applicable) Organisation. Provide details on the organisation where the research takes place if this applies (in case of an internship).	x

2 Data collection – the creation of data	
2.1. Which data formats or which sources are used in the project? For example: - theoretical research, using literature and publicly available resources - Survey Data - Field Data - Interviews	I am going to use theoretical research using literature and publicly available resources and interviews.
2.2 Methods of data collection What method(s) do you use for the collection of data. (Tick all boxes that apply)	<input type="checkbox"/> Structured individual interviews <input type="checkbox"/> Semi-structured individual interviews <input type="checkbox"/> Structured group interviews <input type="checkbox"/> Semi-structured group interviews <input type="checkbox"/> observations <input type="checkbox"/> Survey(s) <input type="checkbox"/> Experiment(s) in real life (interventions) <input type="checkbox"/> Secondary analyses on existing data sets (if so: please also fill in 2.3) <input type="checkbox"/> Public sources (e.g. University Library) <input type="checkbox"/>

	Other (explain):
2.3. (If applicable): if you have selected 'Secondary analyses on existing datasets': who provides the data set?	<input type="checkbox"/> Data is supplied by the University of Groningen. <input type="checkbox"/> Data have been supplied by an external party. (Please mention the party here).

3 Storage, Sharing and Archiving	
<p>3.1 Where will the (raw) data be stored <i>during</i> research?</p> <p>If you want to store research data, it is good practice to ask yourself some questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How big is my dataset at the end of my research? 	<input type="checkbox"/> X-drive of UG network <input type="checkbox"/> Y-drive of UG network <input type="checkbox"/> (Shared) UG Google Drive <input type="checkbox"/> Unishare <input type="checkbox"/> Personal laptop or computer <input type="checkbox"/> External devices (USB, harddisk, NAS)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do I want to collaborate on the data? • How confidential is my data? • How do I make sure I do not lose my data? <p>Need more information? Take a look at the site of the Digital Competence Centre (DCC)</p> <p>Feel free to contact the DCC for questions: dcc@rug.nl</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (explain):
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<p>3.2 Where are you planning to store / archive the data after you have finished your research? Please explain where and for how long. Also explain who has access to these data</p> <p>NB do not use a personal UG network or google drive for archiving data!</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> X-drive of UG network</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Y-drive of UG network</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> (Shared) UG Google Drive</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Unishare</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> In a repository (i.e. DataverseNL)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other (explain):</p> <p>The retention period will be 5 years.</p>
<p>3.3 Sharing of data</p> <p>With whom will you be sharing data during your research?</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> University of Groningen</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Universities or other parties in Europe</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Universities or other parties outside Europe</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I will not be sharing data</p>

<p>4. Personal data</p>	
<p>4.1 Collecting personal data</p> <p>Will you be collecting personal data?</p> <p>If you are conducting research with personal data you have to comply to the General Data Privacy Regulation (GDPR). Please fill in the questions found in the appendix 3 on personal data.</p>	<p>Yes.</p>
<p>If the answer to 4.1 is 'no', please skip the section below and proceed to section 5</p>	
<p>4.2 What kinds of categories of people are involved?</p> <p>Have you determined whether these people are vulnerable in any way (see FAQ)?</p> <p>If so, your supervisor will need to agree.</p>	<p>My research project involves:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Adults (not vulnerable) ≥ 18 years</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Minors < 16 years</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Minors < 18 years</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Patients</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> (other) vulnerable persons, namely (please provide an explanation what makes these persons vulnerable)</p>

	<p>I am going to conduct interviews with Surinamese and Antillean students in the Netherlands. They are all adults.</p>
<p>4.3 Will participants be enlisted in the project without their knowledge and/or consent? (E.g., via covert observation of people in public)</p>	<p>No</p>

<p>places, or by using social media data.)</p>	
<p>4.4 Categories of personal data that are processed.</p> <p>Mention all types of data that you systematically collect and store. If you use particular kinds of software, then check what the software is doing as well.</p> <p>Of course, always ask yourself if you need all categories of data for your project.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Name and address details <input type="checkbox"/> Telephone number <input type="checkbox"/> Email address <input type="checkbox"/> Nationality <input type="checkbox"/> IP-addresses and/or device type <input type="checkbox"/> Job information <input type="checkbox"/> Location data <input type="checkbox"/> Race or ethnicity <input type="checkbox"/> Political opinions <input type="checkbox"/> Physical or mental health <input type="checkbox"/> Information about a person's sex life or sexual orientation <input type="checkbox"/> Religious or philosophical beliefs <input type="checkbox"/> Membership of a trade union <input type="checkbox"/> Biometric information <input type="checkbox"/> Genetic information <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please explain below):
<p>4.5 Technical/organisational measures</p> <p>Select which of the following security measures are used to protect personal data.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Pseudonymisation <input type="checkbox"/> Anonymisation (only their age, nationality and gender will be used) <input type="checkbox"/> File encryption <input type="checkbox"/> Encryption of storage <input type="checkbox"/> Encryption of transport device <input type="checkbox"/> Restricted access rights <input type="checkbox"/> VPN <input type="checkbox"/> Regularly scheduled backups <input type="checkbox"/> Physical locks (rooms, drawers/file cabinets) <input type="checkbox"/> None of the above <input type="checkbox"/> Other (describe below):

<p>4.6 Will any personal data be transferred to organisations within countries outside the European Economic Area (EU, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein)?</p> <p>If the research takes places in a country outside the EU/EEA, then please also indicate this.</p>	No
5 – Final comments	
<p>Do you have any other information about the research data that was not addressed in this template that you think is useful to mention?</p>	x