Underdogs Tilting the Scale in Dutch White Spaces:

Experiences and Strategies of Academically Educated Black Dutchmen in the Construction and Negotiation of Their Identity in the Netherlands

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Abstract

The Netherlands is internationally recognized as a liberal and progressive country. However, ethnic and racial minorities that live in the Netherlands experience living in the Netherlands differently than those of Dutch descent. It has been widely discussed that while the Netherlands and Europe may dismiss the existence of race and racism, the effects of these social phenomena are observable. Even as the Netherlands is a multicultural society, its population consists predominantly of white Dutch of European descent. In predominantly white societies, there is also an underlying ideology, whiteness, that affects the culture and people that it reaches. As such, the experiences of black people as minorities in spaces that consist of mostly white people become relevant. The present study highlights the experiences of *academically educated black Dutchmen from former Dutch colonies*, a particularly relevant group of individuals living in the Netherlands. The study aimed to explore and understand how black Dutchmen from former Dutch colonies create and negotiate their identity in Dutch white spaces. For this, an intersectional qualitative study was conducted. The data set consisted of 11 interviews that were thematically analyzed. The main themes addressed the notions of being black and Dutch, living in the Netherlands, Dutch white spaces, and how the participants negotiated their identity in these spaces. The results show that while black and Dutch are factual labels, being Dutch does not hold much significance for the black Dutchmen that were interviewed. All the participants were subjected to a form of (verbal) marginalization while living in the Netherlands, and there were several, vivid examples, of how the existence of the participants has been racialized in the Netherlands. The results furthermore show that even though the Dutch language, clothing, networking, and education were the most used tools to venture into white spaces among the participants, personal and cultural factors are also important.

<u>KEYWORDS:</u> *race, racism, the Netherlands, whiteness, white spaces, black Dutch*

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It is through the effort to recapture the self and to scrutinize the self,
it is through the lasting tension of their freedom that men will be able to create
the ideal conditions of existence for a human world.
- Frantz Fanon

1. Introduction

The first country in the world to legalize same-sex marriage, its progressive views on prostitution and euthanasia and an attractor to tourists for its grey area when it comes to laws regarding recreational marihuana (Ross, 2014), the Netherlands is often thought of as a tolerant, liberal, and progressive country (Meinhardt, 2014; Zonneveld et al., 2017). With only over 17 million inhabitants, the Netherlands is among the 20 wealthiest countries in the world (Silver, 2020), is ranked among the best countries to pursue higher education in the world (Educations.com, 2021), and is considered to be one of the best countries in the world to conduct international business (Forbes, 2020). Indeed, the Netherlands is positioned as a lucrative, prosperous, internationally oriented, commercial, multicultural, and seemingly progressive country internationally.

Similar to many other prosperous countries in and outside of Europe such as the United Kingdom and the United States, however, those that live in the Netherlands may have different experiences than what is portrayed to the world. The Netherlands is currently dealing with a colonial past affecting a portion of its citizens, though unrecognized (Goldberg, 2006), the systemic presence of a rather complex form of racism (Essed & Hoving, 2014), and the rise of xenophobia – particularly against Muslims over the past few decades (Oostindie, 2010). These social issues serve to exemplify that there is a different side to the Netherlands than most people know of. Scholars have noted how the Dutch have "refused to collect systematic data on discrimination" (Goldberg, 2014, p.409), which, in turn, affects those who are the victim of a subtle and well-hidden system of marginalization. These people are often unnoticed, and their experiences are undocumented. Similar to other European countries, the Netherlands is reluctant to refer to humans in racial terms (Goldberg, 2006; 2014). This reluctance systemically limits the possibilities to fundamentally and structurally make efforts to change the conditions and experiences of those who are deemed as and treated as inferior in Dutch society.

To assist in the change about this structural denial and refusal (Goldberg, 2014), the current thesis aims to elucidate the experiences and perceptions of *black Dutchmen from former Dutch colonies that are currently living in the Netherlands*. This thesis is mainly concerned with how these citizens create and negotiate their identity in Dutch white spaces. As such, it intends to explore the different social elements that may be of influence in this process of identity construction.

Societal relevance

While black people in the Netherlands vary in ethnicity, and they are all part of a minority group, *black Dutchmen from former Dutch colonies* is a particular group of people of African descent that is both socially and scientifically relevant to study in relation to wider white Dutch society. The products and reminders of a brutal colonial past, these Dutch citizens have legal access and equal opportunities by the law. Despite their same official nationality, however, this group of Dutch citizens is perceived and dealt with differently than the European/Western Dutch citizen. The historical ties, as well as the racial, ethnic, and cultural differences these citizens have with the Netherlands, make their experiences worth noting for several reasons.

Firstly, their Dutch nationality may give the impression that they are the same as everyone that is also Dutch while this is not the case. Secondly, the historical ties these citizens share with the Netherlands affect their identity on several levels, including the extent to which they feel as Dutch and how they perceive the Dutch culture. This is relevant because the perceptions of these Dutchmen also reflect and give accounts of Dutch society from a different perspective. While these people may be Dutch, some of them may be even born in the Netherlands, and have a life in the Netherlands, their experiences are different than those of Dutch citizens of Western/European descent. This is because there are several variables that affect their experiences and how they perceive living in the Netherlands and Dutch society. Third, the ethnic and cultural references these citizens have are also relevant studying, as these help shape their social understanding of reality and Dutch society.

Moreover, there is a gender gap in higher education in the Netherlands with men being the least educated compared to women (Matthews, 2017). Even as this assessment did not take ethnic and racial variables into consideration to measure the proportionality of this disparity, considering the position of blacks and ethnic minorities in the Netherlands (e.g., Vasta, 2007, Wiener, 2014), experiences of *academically educated black Dutchmen* are relevant. This study is socially relevant not only for the ones living in the Netherlands who are from a former Dutch colony but also those who are black and living in the Netherlands. They too explore these spaces and could benefit from the shared experiences of others. Conducting such a study on members of the Dutch population who are not the majority is also important for policy makers and employers because these experiences and perceptions provide insightful information about a significant yet often overlooked group of the Dutch population or organization. With a new understanding might come a new approach.

Scientific relevance

Even though there are enough reasons to inquire on the perceptions and experiences of *black Dutchmen from former Dutch colonies*, black people have been limitedly studied and discussed in relation to Dutch culture. Even as there are accounts on Dutch racism and its everyday manifestations (e.g., Essed, 1991; Vasta, 2007; Essed & Hoving, 2014; Weiner, 2014), little attention has been given to black men and their experiences in the Netherlands (Hondius, 2014). There has only been one study conducted on the experiences and identity of black people in the Netherlands (Zonneveld et al., 2017). This was a small study and "participants provided very brief (or no) answers that were often not contextualized" (Zonneveld et al., 2017, p. 148). Indeed, as blackness and whiteness are unmentioned in the Netherlands, the (scientific) representation of black people living in the Netherlands "remains institutionally invisible and inarticulate" (Hondius, 2014, p. 274).

This thesis not only aims to explore how black Dutchmen from former colonies create and negotiate their identity, but it also aims to explore this phenomenon *in-depth* and *in relation to Dutch white spaces*. While the Netherlands is by default a white society, its whiteness has been mostly studied conceptually (e.g., Essed & Trienekens, 2008; Sijpenhof, 2020), and never before discussed through the experiences of its black citizens. While there have been extensive studies on ethnic minorities in the Netherlands (Essed & Nimako, 2006), more often than not, these were not accounts of the experiences of the minorities themselves. Less so in relation to Dutch whiteness. The concepts of whiteness and white spaces are often studied in the U.S (Alexander, 2004; Anderson, 2015). Using these concepts from the U.S., this thesis aims to explore whether the understanding of white spaces and whiteness at large holds relevance in the Netherlands or not - and how. Besides the abovementioned, this study will also add to the body of knowledge in notions of identity construction, the influence of space in mediating identity, Dutch racism, and the experiences of black people in Western Europe.

Research questions and thesis overview

The research question guiding this study asks: *How do academically educated black Dutchmen from former Dutch colonies living in the Netherlands create and negotiate their identity in Dutch white spaces?* To unpack this question, this thesis will also explore the following sub-questions:

- How do academically educated black Dutchmen living in the Netherlands relate to Dutch society?
- What are the perceptions of black Dutchmen from former colonies living in the Netherlands of Dutch culture?

- What are the perceptions of black Dutchmen from former colonies living in the Netherlands of white spaces?
- Which tools do academically educated black Dutchmen from former colonies living in the Netherlands use to negotiate Dutch white spaces?

This study was designed to answer the questions from a critical and analytical point of reference. Therefore, the following chapter starts by discussing the necessary literature to comprehend the reasoning behind this research. The Theoretical Framework chapter serves as the base for this thesis, as it discusses its relevancy more in-depth. Thereafter, the Methodology chapter will address the methodological guidelines used in the collection- and analysis of the data that was gathered. These systemic guidelines ensure an analytical lens to conduct (replicable) research. Then, the analysis itself will be discussed in relation to the theory, so as to connect lived experiences with literature. Finally, the last chapter will answer the research questions, discuss societal and scientific implications, and provide suggestions for future research.

2. Theoretical Framework

The presented framework is created to serve as the premises on which this thesis is built; it intends to expound some of the many different elements that are relevant when studying and discussing how black Dutchmen from former Dutch colonies create and negotiate their identity in Dutch white spaces. The identity of *black Dutchmen from former colonies* needs to be situated in the context of Dutch colonial history in order to comprehend some of its complexities. This is because the origins of *the black Dutch [people]* are rooted in the colonial history of the Netherlands. After this historical and foundational explanation, identity is conceptualized, and relevant parts to the identity of *the black Dutch* are addressed. Moreover, race and racism, both in European as well as Dutch contexts, are discussed. They are instrumental to understand some of the complexities that this thesis deals with and intends to capture. Notions of whiteness and white spaces are also discussed and expanded on, so to provide a solid theoretical foundation for this thesis. While all these concepts and topics will elucidate the major elements that are relevant to unpack and understand the complexities of this research, they cannot be fully understood when analyzed individually. Therefore, intersectionality as a theoretical concept will help to connect these topics and concepts.

2.1 Colonial past reshaping present Dutch society

2.1.1 A critical and succinct Dutch colonial story

The Netherlands became an important influencer of Western civilization and an important player in world trade between the 16th and the 17th century (Prak, 2014). This period known as the *Dutch Golden Age* was a period of massive success, wealth accumulation, power, and dominance for the Netherlands. The Dutch guilder was a strong currency back then (similar to the US dollar nowadays), the Dutch army and navy were respected and feared, and Dutch scientists were contributors to the Scientific Revolution (Prak, 2014). During this period, the Dutch traded internationally and founded the first large-scale joint-stock company in the world in 1602: the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and her sister company, the Dutch West India Company (WIC) (Prak, 2014).

In this period of prosperity, entrepreneurship, and massive power, the Dutch colonized countries in Africa, Asia, the Americas, and the Caribbean (Oostindie, 2010; 2014). People were abducted from their natural environment and their native lands and were traded overseas in the Caribbean and the Americas for profit (Nimako et al., 2014). While this shameful side of the Dutch history is often reduced and distorted in Dutch textbook and school curriculums (Weiner, 2014), trading people by kidnapping and selling them as slaves was part of the Dutch

business for more than 200 years (Raboteau, 2014), and the Netherlands continued to exploit its colonies until the 20th century (Slijpenhof, 2020). Eventually, the Dutch empire lost some of its colonies. The Netherlands became a modest yet significant player in the world and the world's politics and continued to be among the wealthiest countries with some colonial power, such as the Indonesian archipelago colony and the colonies in Suriname and the formerly Netherlands Antilles: Curaçao, Bonaire, Aruba, Saba, Sint Maarten, and Sint Eustatius. (Oostindie, 2010).

According to Dutch historian Gert Oostindie (2014), there were slave trades in both the Dutch East- and West Indies, but the impact and legacy of human trafficking in the Caribbean colonies are considered more eventful and important than that of the VOC. Even though the colonial expansion in the Dutch East Indies was considered as the most important expansion for the Dutch (because of the several economic and political benefits for the Netherlands), the less important trans-Atlantic trade had left a "deep impact on the former colonies" in this area (p. 133). Contrasted with the Dutch East Indies, where the Dutch occupation was short-lived and the space Europeans took was minuscule in comparison to the total population, native populations in the Dutch Caribbean (the islands under Dutch control) were completely wiped out and replaced by slaves from the African continent. By the time slavery was abolished in 1863, over 90 percent of the Dutch Caribbean population were originally from Africa (Oostindie, 2014).

Oostindie (2014) accounts that Indonesia ceased to be occupied by the Dutch in 1942 when the Japanese invaded the back-then Dutch colony during the war. After the Japanese had surrendered in August 1945, Indonesia's first president declared independence but it took years of fighting, negotiation, and international pressure on the Netherlands before the Dutch transferred sovereignty to Indonesia in 1949. Some years later, in 1945, the islands in the Dutch Caribbean were offered a certain degree of autonomy within the Dutch Kingdom with the proclamation of the Charter of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. It was during this period that the Netherlands Antilles came to exist. However, as keeping these Caribbean colonies tied to the Netherlands was more of a financial burden than an advantage for the Netherlands, the Dutch government started to urge its remaining colonies in the Caribbean to accept their independence. In 1975, Suriname accepted its independence. In 1986 Aruba attained an autonomous status within the Dutch Kingdom and the Netherlands Antilles moved from consisting of six islands to five islands. The remainder of the Netherlands Antilles got dismantled in 2010. The people in all of the islands voted how each island would like to posit itself in relation to the Netherlands. This changed the Kingdom dynamics once again. Since 2010, Curaçao, Aruba, and Sint Maarten are currently constituent countries of the Kingdom, and Bonaire, Saba,

and Sint Eustatius have become Dutch municipalities. The *Black Dutchmen* this thesis refers to are mostly men who come from one of these former colonies and who identify as black as well.

2.1.2 Post-colonial mass migration

Since the so-called Golden Age, the Netherlands has been reputed to be a tolerant country, open to different religions, and an interesting destination for immigrants (Oostindie, 2010; Prak, 2014). While the first migrants to come to the Netherlands were white, the population in the Netherlands became more diverse in terms of race and ethnicity in light of globalization and post-colonialism. The Netherlands has moved from consisting of an almost entirely white population in 1945 to over three million migrants from the global South in 2010 (Oostindie, 2010). Generally, the global South refers to regions outside of Europe and North America. Often contrasted with the global North, the global South implies low-income countries and civilizations deemed to be marginalized, either politically or culturally (Dados & Connell, 2012).

It is in this context that the effects of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and colonial legacy in the previous Dutch Caribbean colonies become relevant: With the independence of Suriname in 1975, over a third of the Surinamese population migrated to the Netherlands, and there has been a large-scale migration from the former Antilles to the Netherlands since the 1980s (Oostindie, 2010; Weiner, 2014). Most of the latter group of migrants were born in Curaçao; in 2014, half of the Curaçaoan population lived in the Netherlands (Oostindie, 2014). There was also a wave of immigrants in the 1940s, after the war, from Indonesia. However, this wave of migrants was the smallest in terms of population dynamic compared to the other two, and most of these migrants were Eurasians and Dutch colonials that were residing in the East Indies (Oostindie, 2010; 2014). While the migration waves from Indonesia and Suriname were both shortly after the independence of these former colonies – as with independence there is also the implication of the borders of the Netherlands being closed for future migrants – this is not the case for those from the former Antilles. In choosing to stay within the Kingdom of the Netherlands in 2010, people from the Dutch Caribbean islands have maintained their Dutch nationality. They are granted Dutch citizenship in the Netherlands uninhibitedly as they hold a Dutch passport (Oostindie, 2010). Different than the other former Dutch colonies, people from the islands that were part of the former Antilles are still constantly migrating to the Netherlands as they are granted Dutch citizenship in the Netherlands uninhibitedly (Oostindie, 2014).

There are reasons for motivations for mass migration since the 1980s from the Caribbean colonies that cannot be explained without addressing the involvement of the Netherlands in slavery. Most of the ancestors of those who are widely considered as “Antilleans” (Oostindie, 2014, 140), were kidnapped from Africa, sold, used and abused, and then left to re-

create themselves after slavery was abolished. They were left to do this on small islands without (m)any natural resources. Moreover, this identity re-creation happened within structures of the Dutch state, for, even after the Caribbean islands were freed from enslavement, the reins of power on these islands were held by Dutch people and those of European descent until the 20th century (Oostindie, 2010). This control by the Dutch left no chances for self-realization for the locals because, despite slavery being abolished, the social, political, cultural, and economic process of emancipation (Nimako et al., 2014) never fully occurred in the Dutch Caribbean.

With the "postcolonial bonus" of Dutch citizenship (Oostindie, 2010, p. 50), most of those who moved to the Netherlands from the Dutch Caribbean, did so because they were made aware, from a very young age, that the former metropole is where the opportunities reside. They were made to believe from their education and political system, which were built on the Dutch education and political system, all the way to the official language, which is also Dutch (Oostindie, 2014), that the Netherlands and the Dutch culture in its totality, is superior and better. This dynamic can be further observed by the celebration of the racist festivities of Sinterklaas and its helper known as Zwarte Piet (Black Peter) (Raboteau, 2014). This controversial, racist tradition was also adopted by the Caribbean colonies and celebrated over the years without much critical thought. According to anthropologist Keisha Wiel, the reason why the Dutch Caribbean islands (which consist of mostly black people) celebrate a racist tradition is that talking about racism and discrimination is still considered to be taboo in the Caribbean colonies compared to the Netherlands (Schenk, 2019). This is worth noting, as the Netherlands has dismissed to a great extent the importance and even existence of race and racism historically, and it has not been until the last couple of decades that people have been increasingly and more actively voicing their position in this regard (Essed & Nimako, 2006; Essed & Trienekens, 2008; Weiner, 2014).

As uncomfortable and confronting reminders of the colonial past (Mains et al., 2013), most of those that moved to the Netherlands from the Caribbean as well as Suriname are descendants of the slaves that were under Dutch control (Nimako et al., 2014). Some of these immigrants, especially from the Dutch Caribbean islands, are faced with much resistance in contemporary Dutch society and thought to be a problem of migration because of their apparent lack of proper integration (Oostindie, 2010). Indeed, they are different: from the color of their skin being several shades of brown to their shared history that is different than that of the European Dutch, to their norms, values, and customs which are also different, those that come from the former (Caribbean) colonies were exposed to different conditions that have affected how they view themselves and relate to the Netherlands. It is because of the brutal, cruel, and shameful history of the Netherlands discussed that today there is even the need to

understand how this group of Dutch people are different from the average Dutch. It is the combination of the dynamics discussed above (and more) that makes *the black Dutch* a complexity on its own.

2.2 Complexities of the black Dutch identity

2.2.1 Conceptualizing identity

Identity can be discussed from different angles and analyzed from several domains. From a Western perspective, for example, identity is considered to be more of an internal and individual process, because Western individuals are generally perceived to be more individualistic than non-Westerners (Phinney, 2000; Rodriguez et al., 2010; Schwartz et al., 2010, as cited in Adams, 2014). Zonneveld and colleagues (2017), for example, refer to identity as an "internal continuity that regulates behavior" (p. 141), emphasizing the role of the individual relating to its surroundings and less about the surrounding affecting the individual. From non-Western perspectives, conversely, collectivistic norms and values are of importance and influence a person's sense of identity (Adams, 2014). From this kind of perspective, social, situational, and cultural backgrounds and contexts are important when discussing and analyzing identity. These considerations are worth noting in light of this research, as there are historical, cultural, social, and structural differences that must be considered when discussing the identities of Dutch citizens from the former colonies.

Relevant for this research is the social constructivist notion of identity that positions the self as well as human behavior as phenomena that are constructed and determined in social contexts such as historical understandings, linguistic conventions, and culture (Yi & Shorter-Gooden, 1999). Within this framework, Adams (2014) conceptualizes identity as "the conscious and unconscious process of defining the self through intra-psychic, relation, social, and specific contextual domains" (p. 12). Identity can thus be understood as a socio-psychological process that distinguishes people from each other while simultaneously, creating similarities that connect people (Buckingham, 2008). Addressing identity from this approach, therefore, entails recognizing that identity is not something that comes to exist without external influences. Instead, the approach embraces the different factors that makeup – or construct – an identity.

Building on the constructivist notion of identity, a person's identity can be broadly divided into personal, relational, and social identity (Adams, 2014; Adams & Van de Vijver, 2015). *Personal identity* entails how someone defines themselves and attends with the intrapersonal parts of one's self such as values and beliefs, and includes the different meanings attributed to experiences (Zonneveld et al., 2017). As values and beliefs are not created in isolation, a person's social reality is important when creating their personal identity. Still, the

individual remains center; the construction of personal identity is a process in which the individual's internal guidance system is the least dependent on its social surroundings (Adams, 2014). *Social identity* is a psychological process that reflects one's knowledge of their group membership and the degrees of value and significance they attach to their group (Tanti et al., 2011). Several aspects, such as someone's gender, ethnicity, nationality, and religion can influence a person's social identity (Adams, 2014). Research has found that people tend to act in accordance with the shared norms and values of the groups they sense belonging to (Zonneveld et. al., 2017) or make decisions based on the social groups and larger societies that they are part of (Adams & Van de Vijver, 2015). Social identity can be furthermore negotiated "in the broader context of the value society has placed on one's group membership" (French et al., 2006 p. 1). Finally, *relational identity* is linked to the social roles people perform, such as their occupations and titles. Interpersonal relations are particularly influential in the creation of a relational identity (Adams & Van de Vijver, 2015). These dynamics of identity are relevant to note when discussing the identity *construction* and *negotiation* of *black Dutchmen from former Dutch colonies*. While the *personal* dimension of identity can be the closest to being an internally guided decision and the least affected by outside factors (Adams, 2014), the following parts of this chapter will discuss some of the most relevant variables that help construct the *social* and *relational* aspects of the identity of this group of Dutch citizens.

2.2.2 The "Other" in the Netherlands

For a very long time, the Dutch have created an imaginary border within society by making clear distinctions between those who are considered natives and those who are perceived as foreigners. There was a common understanding in the Netherlands that only those who are considered as *autochtoon* are thought to be genealogically Dutch, as opposed to the *allochtoon* - those who are foreign Dutch (Essed & Trienekens, 2008). The autochthonous Dutch is assumed to be white, as being native Dutch is often associated with being white (Weiner, 2014), and the allochthonous are those considered to come from "other soil" (Jordan, 2014, p. 205). While these specific terminologies are since 2016 not used anymore in official documents or CBS (Statistics Netherlands) reports (Ree, 2016), there are still divisions in Dutch society, and distinctions are still being made between Westerners and non-Westerners in official Dutch statistics. Now, instead of using allochthonous and autochthonous, Statistic Netherlands divides and categorizes the Dutch population as consisting of Netherlanders, first- and second-generation Westerners, and first and second-generation non-Westerners (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2021).

According to Statistic Netherlands (2018), those with a Dutch background, the Netherlanders, are those whose parents were both born in the Netherlands. Western migrants as those who were born (or whose parents were born) in a European country (that is not Turkey), North America, Oceania, Indonesia, or Japan. The latter two are categorized as having a Western migration background due to their socioeconomic and cultural position and constitute mainly of people born in the former Dutch East Indies and migrant workers from Japan. Non-Westerners, according to Statistics Netherlands (2018b), are people who come originally from a country in Africa, South America, Turkey, or Asia (excluding Indonesia and Japan). Essed and Trienekens wisely stated over a decade ago,

> it is an increasingly complex constellation of markers that constitute the "Other" in contemporary Netherlands and Europe in which nationality, ethnicity, race, corporeality, and religion at times converge and then again diverge on the basis of 'acquiredness' to distinguish one "Other" in the eyes of the beholder from yet a much more 'Other' one (2008, p. 63).

Indeed, the understanding of who is perceived as a Western immigrant and who is not, shows that the words by Essed and Trienekens (2008) are still relevant in the Netherlands. Statistic Netherlands has not explained nor conceptualized the determinants "socio-economic status" or "cultural position" for labeling a country as Western or non-Western. These vague, unexplained terms make the distinction between Westerners and non-Westerners confusing and in some cases even seemingly arbitrary. Using the model employed by Statistics Netherlands to categorize immigrants from Western descent would make, for example, Serbians and Russians Western immigrants. While some of these observations raise concerns as to the legitimacy of ethnic categorization in the Dutch system, those concerns are beyond the scope of this thesis. Relevant for the present study are the positions of the islands in the Dutch Caribbean within the division as presented by Statistics Netherlands.

The islands in the Dutch Caribbean do not fit any part of the geographic demarcations discussed, but those who move to the Netherlands from the Dutch Caribbean are categorized as non-Western immigrants in official statistics of the Netherlands. These people are born legally Dutch but are not Western. Even as they hold a Dutch passport, but are not socio-economically or culturally Western – whatever that is in this specific context. And so, even though these citizens are not called allochthonous anymore, they cannot call themselves completely Dutch either. They are clustered in a non-Western label despite not being factually geographically located in Africa, South America, Turkey, or Asia. While this distinction separates the Dutch that

comes from the former Caribbean colonies from the rest of the Dutch population, it also serves as an indication that these Dutch citizens are a different type of Dutch people.

2.2.3 Race, ethnicity and culture to define the "black Dutch"

When referring to people, the term "black" generally is intended to signal someone with "African ancestral origins", and it includes a wide range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds (Agyemang et al., 2005, p. 1016). "Black" also has cultural connotations, which are built on racist ideologies. As the "black" race has been historically associated with laziness and measured against the white race, which was thought to be innovative, since the 18th century (Loue, 2006). Being someone that is in any way associated with black in Western society, especially societies where most people are white, means to be subjected to systems of power in which one's sense of identity cannot be separated from one's racial identification (Alexander, 2004).

Even though science has progressed beyond the primitive understanding of race as proposed by taxonomist Linnaeus (Loue, 2006), associating physical, mental, or behavioral attributes and assumptions to races can be still widely noticed in different parts of the world. There are still intense connotations with the term "black", and "black" people are widely marginalized in Western societies, also in the Netherlands (Van den Broek, 2014). According to Agyemang and colleagues (2005), particularly in politics and when discussing power dynamics, "black" usually signifies "non-white" minority populations – implying that "white" is the dominant race when discussing power relations and politics. Considering the historic influence of race on modern, especially Western civilization, there is a consensus that has led to issues of race and the notion of *whiteness* (more on this later) being addressed in academia and other domains in the U.S. (Alexander, 2004; Essed & Trienekens, 2008).

Different than the U.S., however, many European countries including the Netherlands are reluctant to recognize race as a defining factor for success or failure in society, and would rather use ethnicity as an identification form (Essed & Nimako, 2006). Despite many European societies negating the saliency of race, research shows that race is an important and influential factor in contemporary Europe (Goldberg, 2006). Thus failing to address the importance of race also implies failing to recognize the realities of those that deal with racism (Weiner, 2014). Considering that most people that move to the Netherlands from the former colonies (especially the Caribbean) are black because their ancestors are of African descent, their race matters in the construction of their identity in the Netherlands, where 75% of the population does not have a migration background (meaning they are of white European descent) (Statistics Netherlands, 2021).

Ethnicity, as was previously touched upon, is part of one's social identity (Adams, 2014), and may refer to "membership in a tribe, region, race or nation" (Yinger, 1994, as cited in Loue, 2006, p. 37). Ethnic identity can be social-psychologically analyzed in terms of the value society has placed on one's group membership (French et al., 2006). French and colleagues (2006) note that individuals who are well-positioned in society and generally accepted do not adapt their identity to their surroundings. But when one's ethnic group is socially devalued, strategies are usually employed to cope with the societal perception of one's ethnic group.

Loue (2006) argues that ethnicity is multi-layered, and ethnic identities are linked to culture and may encompass several other forms of identities, including nationality-based identities. Agyemang and colleagues (2005) share a similar perspective, explaining that ethnicity consists of different layers, and comprises of, but is not limited to, cultures and traditions that are distinctive and a shared language. They further explain that the characteristics surrounding a person's ethnicity may be difficult to measure and use in research as they change over time (Agyemang et al., 2005). While difficult to measure, ethnicity is an elemental component to understand the identity of immigrants who were born in or whose parents were born in the former Dutch colonies. This is particularly relevant because, within the current scope of ethnic identity, culture becomes relevant.

A complex concept with a multitude of meanings, culture should be defined before continuing. Drawing on Hall's (1997) anthropological and sociological definition, culture refers to that which is different about a group of people. Its nuances and variations are found in people finding shared meaning and common understanding about practices. In this regard, culture is a process that is primarily concerned with meaning-making and exchange between members of a society or group (Hall, 1997). This interpretation of culture makes it something that is constructed, done and performed, as opposed to the essentialist understanding that posits culture as something people inherently have or they belong to (Piller, 2017). With origins and for some upbringings in different parts of the world, black Dutch citizens from former colonies are different in culture and customs than European Dutch citizens. One of the intentions of this thesis is also to elucidate how this group of Dutch citizens situate themselves in relation to what they understand as the Dutch culture.

2.2.4 Intersecting elements to make sense of the "black Dutch" identity

Intersectionality as an analytical framework is useful to connect the different elements discussed in this theoretical framework with each other as well as additional elements that are discussed in the next paragraphs. Intersectionality recognizes the complexities and interrelatedness of identity and power (Cho, 2013). Its usefulness is found in the consideration of several socially

constructed variables which are studied together but which are ultimately separate (Essed, 2020). This provides a more holistic account to understand identity and social dynamics (Essed, 2020). However, Essed (2020) warns that intersectionality also reduces experiences to a set of conditions. As such, the list of possible considerations when analyzing a topic through intersectional lenses can be extensive, but ultimately, will be reduced to a set of general variables that ultimately still provide a limited scope compared to the totality. With intersectionality, identity is acknowledged to be constructed and communicated intra-categorically with several other considerations, and never in isolation (Essed, 2020).

When the aforementioned identity factors of the *black Dutch* (*race*, *ethnicity*, and *culture*) intersect, they highlight the importance of each factor separately as well as together: While race covers a wide range of people, ethnicity clusters these people based on attributes that might be relevant and influential to their identity, and culture organizes these people in terms of their shared meanings and values. It is out of this intersection that the term *the black Dutch [person]* came to exist for this research. *Black Dutch* people deal with a colonial history that affects their identity. They inhabit a skin that can be classified as "black" and carry a legal status that acknowledges on paper their sameness with other Dutch citizens, while simultaneously, as discussed thus far, they are different from the Western Dutch – in history, culture, skin color, and ethnic background. This umbrella term includes Afro-Caribbean, Afro-Surinamese, Dutch-Caribbean, Afro-Dutch, and those who classify themselves as black while being Dutch citizens.

The black Dutch, as an intersectional concept, is meant to acknowledge the differences within the Dutch society by addressing those who can identify with both the black race as well the Dutch nationality, while also honoring their own ethnic (hi)stories and cultural backgrounds. As it stands, and as has been discussed thus far, *the black Dutch* is different from the perceived native Dutch, and this thesis addresses this group of people accordingly – piercing through the disguise of sameness that comes with the Dutch nationality. *[Black Dutch]* People from the former Caribbean Dutch colonies, together with other non-Western immigrants, are at the bottom of the social hierarchy in the Netherlands (Vasta, 2007) and deal with institutional racism as well as everyday racism (Essed & Hovings, 2014; Weiner, 2014).

While the intersectional framework is useful to help conceptualize *black Dutchmen from former Dutch colonies* based on *racial, ethnic,* and *cultural* components, only those components will not suffice to elucidate their experiences of these men in white Dutch spaces (a concept that will follow in the subsequent subchapters). To answer the research questions, *gender* and *education* will also be included in the analysis and the Discussion and Conclusion chapter. Being a black *male* from a former Dutch colony in the Netherlands brings different experiences

than those of black females of the same background. Likewise, the *education* component makes a difference; having attended a university plus being male, plus being from a former colony (and thus having a different background and customs), plus being black, creates and leads to different conditions than someone with the same background but without access to university and the places a university degree can assist and lead to. *Gender* and *education* are therefore important components so to understand how this group of Dutch citizens create and negotiate their identity in – among others – these spaces.

2.3 Racism and the Netherlands

Scholars have noted that even though race is often unnamed in the Netherlands, its effects are visible daily (Essed, 1991; Essed & Hoving, 2014; Vasta, 2007; Weiner, 2014). One of the ways that racism in the Netherlands manifests itself is in the sense of superiority that can be found in Dutch society; from the implicit understanding of belonging that is found in connotations of national identity and citizenship, to ideologies linked to Western superiority and civilization (Essed & Trienekens, 2008). Building on these notions, and to cast light on the systemic and everyday functioning of racism in the Netherlands, this thesis will use Philomena Essed's (2020) definition of racism:

> Racism is about the creation of hierarchies of worthiness attached to groups of people identified as different in terms of (attributed) racial, or cultural (ethnic) factors. It is a historically anchored ideology, structure and process, where one racial or ethnic group privileges its members on the basis of attributed preferred values and characteristics, in order to legitimize the disadvantaging of other groups. These values and characteristics are used to assess the worthiness of human beings and ways of being in terms of related degree of entitlement to 'be', to be validated and to develop (p. 477-478).

Racism, in this sense, is not necessarily concerned with primarily or explicitly skin color, though it does not exclude it. But more than that, this understanding of racism deals more broadly with ideologies surrounding worthiness and people's sense of validation and belonging in a space (Essed & Trienekens, 2008; Essed, 2020). Many Dutch do not recognize racism as an issue in the Netherlands, and they are reluctant to even acknowledge its existence (Sijpenhof, 2020; Vasta, 2007; Weiner, 2014). Even race as a category has been widely ignored in the Netherlands since the Second World War (Essed & Trienekens, 2008). Some argue that ignoring the issue of race has been a national strategy to deal with it (Hondius, 2014).

It has been argued that racism is more difficult to accept because the (Western/European) Dutch were never confronted with it to begin with (Weiner, 2014). The

terrors of the Dutch empire were done overseas, never in the Netherlands (Raboteau, 2014), which in turn fuels the fallacious belief that suggests that racism does not have a place in the Netherlands (Essed & Trienekens, 2008). Like many other European countries, the Netherlands have disassociated themselves from this part of their history to the point of almost forgetting their colonial histories and the atrocities that these brought with them (see: historical amnesia, Goldberg, 2006). However, despite race and racism not being generally acknowledged in the Netherlands and is often ignored and denied from public discourse, there is increasingly more evidence and understanding of racism in the Netherlands.

On an institutional level, immigrants are heavily marginalized in the Netherlands. For example, Ellie Vasta (2007) addressed how the Netherlands has moved from being considered as a “liberal” and “tolerant” society to being a country that demands “conformity, compulsion and seemingly undemocratic sanctions against immigrants” (p. 714). Using data from the late 1990s and early 2000s, Vasta (2007) discussed how levels of educational attainment among migrants differed substantially compared to those who are considered as native Dutch as a result of (among other factors) segregation in schools. She also noted how some children were refused entry to certain schools because of their ethnicity or religion, and that some were put on waiting lists based on where they came from (Schriemer, 2004, as cited in Vasta, 2007). Melissa Weiner (2014) shared similar findings, adding that minority students “lag behind their white Dutch peers in placement in higher secondary educational tracks, high school graduation, and college attendance”, and notes that “racially stratified educational outcomes” have deeply affected the social and economic opportunities of minorities (p. 735).

Vasta (2007) also accounts how “dramatic” the unemployment rate is for ethnic minorities, including “Surinamese and Antilleans”, compared to the native Dutch (p. 722). Moreover, according to the findings by Vasta (2007), native Dutch employees earned the most, Turks and Moroccans earned lesser and Ghanaians earned the least for doing the same work in a company. While this finding is not to be generalized, it does provide an indication of preferential treatment based on one’s race and ethnic background, and a glimpse into how discrimination affects those of different ethnicity and race than the white Dutch. Research has also found that minorities often experience racism where they study and where they work and frequently deal with discriminatory remarks in public places (Siebers, 2010).

A more recent study by Renée Zonneveld and colleagues (2017) on the experiences of black people in the Netherlands found that black people feel that the police are more suspicious of them than of their white Dutch counterparts. The same study also reported that because of negative stereotypes, some of the participants did not trust Dutch mainstream media – indicating that (racial and racist) stereotypes are still prevalent in contemporary Dutch media

(Zonneveld et al., 2017). In a different study, Maria Luce Sijpenhof (2020) interviewed teachers in the Netherlands and found that most of those teachers expected different performances based on the assumptions that black students and students of color came from low socioeconomic status and that these students lacked support systems. Through in-depth interviews with these history teachers, Sijpenhof (2020) found that most respondents "racialized people [of color]" and "lacked critical knowledge about racism" (p. 9). Even more problematic, findings by Sijpenhof (2020) revealed that some of the respondents "despise that Dutch people of color (who are frequently seen as 'newcomers' or 'immigrants', even though often they are not) claim their rights as Dutch citizens" (p.8). As the findings in these different studies show, racism in the Netherlands is institutional, systemic, and daily, as opposed to unfortunate occasional isolated events (Essed & Hoving, 2014). These examples provide evidence of an engrained ideology of superiority that manifests itself in the consequent misunderstanding, misjudgment, and mistreatment of those who are subjected to it.

2.4 Whiteness, white privilege, and white spaces

As meanings are socially constructed, discourses of race and racism are mediated in social settings and through space. Just as there is a generally shared belief that associates "black" with "needy, lazy, and belligerent" (Van den Broek, 2014, p. 260), there are connotations to the "white" race as well. These notions usually benefit "white" people who have a contrasting and opposing discourse; they are often thought of as "the helping peace-bringing or peace-keeping" heroes when discussed in relation to the third world (Van den Broek, 2014, p. 260). In the Netherlands, more specifically, there are normative associations with "white" (blank) being "clean, fair, colorless" (Stam, 2020, p. 198). This understanding of "white" moreover shares the "connotations of white supremacy from the colonial past" (Nzume, 2017, p. 17, as cited in Stam, 2020, p. 198). Mass media portrayals, everyday interaction, and dated attitudes still continue to contribute to the recreation and confirmation of these ridiculous and erroneous connections between race and self (Van den Broek, 2014). These connotations of what it means to be "black" and "white", and the way they are promoted in (especially) Western societies, can serve to show an underlying notion of power negotiation and maintenance that happens daily.

It should be first noted that *being* "white" is different than *performing* whiteness; while someone can be of "white" European descent and thus be defined by the "social interpretation of pigmentation or melanin", whiteness as *performance* is an *act of doing* (Alexander, 2004, p. 655). Whiteness, as a form of racialization, is "a constant process of doing race" (Berg, 2008, p. 214). This performance is based on the "social import that is placed on skin and how that

manifests into specified behavioral relations to others" - both within and without the racialized categories (Alexander, 2004, p. 655). Some scholars moreover argue that *whiteness* is focused on narratives and "discursive practices" (Shome, 1999, p. 108) that are co-created with other colors, usually "alongside blackness, in a symbiotic relation" (Fine, 1997, p. 58). Indeed, as Shome (1999) noted, whiteness as an object of study deals with "the interlocking axes of power, spatial location, and history" (p. 109), and as such, discourses of race and racism are (re)produced socially though space.

With the performance of whiteness being the cultural norm in places where the majority is white, comes also the privilege of performing whiteness: white privilege. White privilege posits that white people profit from "hidden institutional benefits that stem from their whiteness" (Morris, 2005, p. 100). Specifically in Dutch context, Weiner (2015) noted how despite ethnic and cultural diversity in classrooms, there was evidence of a Eurocentric discourse that positions Western ideologies and reflections of white cultural norms. Indeed, whiteness is "a symbolic form of capital" (Morris, 2005, p. 102) that benefits some more than others. While those who are white privilege off of the structures of whiteness, Alexander (2004) cautions not to presume this privilege to be absolute, for privilege is relative to that which is not privileged. People who are not white can also benefit from the privileges that come with spaces where whiteness is performed because power dynamics of the privileged and the unprivileged are co-constructed by factors such as class and income too - not only skin color (Alexander, 2004).

Most performing whiteness in these (white) spaces are culturally and physically "white", thus the habitual performance becomes second nature. However, some people have the cultural capital mentioned above but lack the racial component that creates and maintains institutionalized whiteness (Anderson, 2015). *Academically educated black Dutchmen from former Dutch colonies* are minorities within a minority because they are more educated than the average *black Dutchman* or Dutch person from a non-Western background (Van den Broek, 2014; Vasta; 2007; Weiner, 2014). This means that they transit places that are also different than most black men in the Netherlands. From the universities they attend to their workplaces, they are, unfortunately, a very small minority. Hondius (2014) notes that black people in Europe are "the only, the first, or one of the very few black colleagues, neighbors, classmates, family members, friends, or acquaintances" of their white counterparts (p. 273). Combining the minority status of black people in these spaces, together with established norms in most white societies that sustains the cultural practice of whiteness, black Europeans in general, and black Dutch more specifically, often have to find their way in white spaces (Anderson, 2015).

While "white spaces" as discussed by Anderson (2015) and Dutch white spaces may share the same characteristics and culture of *whiteness*, their histories are different. There was

the Civil Rights Movement in the United States – this was an explicit, well-known, addressed "racial incorporation process" (Anderson, 2015, p. 10), and as a result thereof, there is such thing as black spaces and white spaces. In the United States, black spaces are often linked to the ghetto, while white spaces are where the opportunities reside (Anderson, 2015). The Netherlands, on the other hand, has never had such an incorporation process, as the issue of race is barely even acknowledged in the Netherlands. Being mostly a white society, the Netherlands has never had these so-called black spaces that are contrasted with so-called white spaces. The Dutch had colonies that consist of mostly black people. These people were deemed and treated as inferior; they were sold and traded against their will in the most gruesome and inhumane ways (Nimako et al., 2014). This makes the concept of white spaces in the Netherlands worth addressing and discussing, but also exploring further, so as to either confirm or refute its existence in the Netherlands.

3. Methodology

Conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews was the best approach for data gathering and analysis so to answer the research questions. The semi-structured nature of the interviews, different than unstructured or completely structured, gives researchers flexibility with their questions, enabling researchers to ask follow-up questions in specific areas of their interest (Young et al., 2018). Answers by the interviewee should shape further questions (Babbie, 2017), and semi-structured interviews provide the sort of flexibility that can facilitate more depth to the conversations. In-depth interviews allow a broader and deeper understanding of a phenomenon (Johnson, 2011). This is particularly relevant for the current research because the way a person performs their identity and the degree to which they relate to their environment is a multilayered phenomenon. Moreover, in-depth interviews are a useful tool to understand decision-making processes as well as values (Young et al., 2018). This aspect of in-depth interviews is also useful for the current study, as the value systems of people from former Dutch colonies might be different from those who were born in the Netherlands, which could, in turn, affect their (social) identity (Adams, 2014). Semi-structured in-depth interviews were therefore useful for this research to gain insights into, among other things, some of the processes behind the creation and performance of identity of academically educated black Dutchmen living in the Netherlands.

3.1 Methodological approach: constructionist thematic analysis

The qualitative, experience- and perception-focused nature of the current research called for a thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is useful to help identify, analyze and report patterns in the data and can be used to examine the perspectives of the research participants and note their similarities, differences, and new insight (Braun & Clark, 2006). The method is also useful for summarizing large data sets because of its structured approach (Nowell et al., 2017). Braun and Clark (2006) explain that different variations of thematic analysis can be made, depending on the specific interests of the researcher. This research is based on a social constructivist framework that assumes reality and culture to be socially constructed (Yi & Shorter-Gooden, 1999). Thematic analyses using this constructivist framework aim "to theorize the sociocultural context and structural conditions, that enable the individual accounts that are provided" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.85). Because of its constructivist nature, the thematic analysis conducted for this research was produced on a latent level. That is, the main focus of the analysis was to examine the underlying notions, beliefs, assumptions, and ideologies that shape the accounts provided by the interviewees Braune and Clarke, 2006).

Several topics were expected to be addressed in the interviews, leading to potentially several themes that may relate to the overarching topics. As this study aims to make connections between the experiences of black Dutchmen who are descendant of former colonies living in the Netherlands and Dutch socio-cultural structures, the interviews addressed notions of- and the experiences of the interviewees with issues of acceptance, education, work, racism, language, city, clothing, culture, performative self, and power. More of the interviews and the interview questions in the subsequent subchapters.

3.2 Selection criteria

For this research, individuals who fit the criteria of *academically educated black Dutchman from former Dutch colonies that live in the Netherlands* were interviewed. The criteria used to recruit these units of analysis were *education, race, gender, nationality, ethnicity,* and *age*. Academically educated Dutchmen can be translated into male Dutch citizens who have attended a university of applied sciences or a research university in the Netherlands. To avoid any ambiguity, *black Dutchmen* in this research refer to men who identify as black, have Dutch nationality, and have roots in former Dutch colonies. "Roots" in this context refers to lineage: family relations of the participants must be able to be traced back to a former Dutch colony. The individuals interviewed had to be at least 24 years, as most students in the Netherlands complete their undergraduate studies between ages 20 and 26 (RSM.nl, 2019).

Age 24 as a criterion considers the years to complete a degree but also leaves room for those who are not yet finished with their education. It could be that people around this age, though certainly older people, may be experienced working in the Netherlands. The criterion for 24 years as a minimum also considers the life experiences and maturity that come with adulting. Moreover, age 24 as a minimum criterion considers the possibility of a professional career that may require a minimum entry requirement such as a Bachelor's or Master's degree, or some university experience. In these spaces, people might conduce themselves differently than while being students.

As academically educated blacks only make up a small percentage of the black population in the Netherlands (Weiner, 2014), the experiences of this specific group with tertiary education are relevant for this research. Furthermore, the intersection of some of the elements that help shape the participants' identity (that is, education, gender, race, nationality, ethnicity, and age) provides rich information about this group of Dutch people, and how they create and negotiate their identity in the Netherlands and Dutch white spaces. Because the identities of the participants consist of so many layers, their unique position also provides insightful accounts on how they experience- and relate to Dutch culture and society at large. The distinct components

that help construct the target group's identity also serve to understand the underlying social dynamics that create the conditions in which there is the desire or perhaps even need to discuss tools that are useful in constructing one's identity as a black Dutchman from a former Dutch colony.

3.3 Sampling method and sample

Participants for this research were recruited mostly online, via the social media platform Instagram. Coming from Curaçao myself, most of the participants I reached out to personally or via Instagram were people I knew that come from Curaçao as well. I also contacted some people whom I did not know, but I thought could fit the criteria. I recruited two participants this way. In my direct personal network, four people fit the criteria and all of them were willing to have an interview. Babbie (2017) notes that in instances where recruitment is difficult due to the specificity of the population, the snowball sampling technique is useful. Indeed, most of the other participants were asked via friends or acquaintances that I had hoped could have connections and references that would fit the criteria. It should be noted, though, that most of the people these people knew also come from Curaçao or Suriname.

Ultimately, 11 participants were interviewed. These in-depth interviews lasted between 1 hour and 1 hour and 52 minutes. These conversations were profoundly insightful and they also served to show that a multifaceted topic such as *the identity creation and negotiation of academically educated black Dutchmen from former colonies* is difficult to unpack in less than one hour. Whenever possible and comfortable for the participant, we would have the interviews face-to-face. However, the Covid-19 pandemic affected the research process. Due to the pandemic, most participants chose to meet online. Finally, three interviews were held in person, and eight were held online, via Zoom.

Three of the 11 participants have two Master's degrees, one had a Master's degree, one is finishing his Master's, and four participants received a Bachelor's degree from a university of applied sciences. One of the participants did not finish his degree in Civil Engineering at a research university, and one did not finish his Bachelor's in Physics. The participants live in different parts of the Netherlands, but all share living in Randstad (one of the 5 biggest cities in the Netherlands). A listed summary of the interviews with information about each participant can be found in Appendix A. The list consists of the length of each interview, as well as information about the education, birthplace, and roots of the participants. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the participants.

3.4 Operationalization

3.4.1 Interview guide

Braun and Clarke (2006) explain that questions are an important component of qualitative research and that the relationship between different questions must be clear. As such, the research questions as well as a set of questions specifically to get accounts to answer the research questions were considered in the process of operationalization. The main research question asks how academically educated black Dutchmen from former Dutch colonies create and negotiate their identity in Dutch white spaces. To answer this, several aspects of the question had to be addressed in the interviews. An interview guide was designed to cover different angles of interest to get accounts about the ways the participants create and negotiate their identity in Dutch white spaces. There were several themes addressed in the interviews, and each theme had some questions. Some themes had more questions, as they were more central to the main research question. The guiding themes for the guiding questions for the interviews were: *Identity (& identity in Dutch context)*, *Living in the Netherlands*, *Dutch white spaces*, and *Tools of negotiation.*

The "Identity" theme was designed with questions to get acquainted with the several levels of the participants' identities as discussed by Adams (2014). Questions in this theme were concerned with the participants' racial, ethnic and cultural associations and perceptions. This was meant to get a sense of how the participants personally perceive themselves, their social reality, and their Dutch nationality, as ethnic and racial affiliations are important for identity social construction (Adams, 2014; Adams & Van de Vijver, 2015). Questions concerning the degree of association with the concept of *black Dutchman* were also asked, so as to understand how the participants view themselves in relation to being black and being Dutch. This is relevant considering the historical ties that black people have with Dutch people (Oostindie, 2010; 2014; Nimako et al., 2014). Questions that were part of the "Living in the Netherlands" theme were concerned mostly with the experiences of the participants while living in the Netherlands. These sets of questions were meant to provide insight into issues such as perception of the Dutch culture and the Netherlands as a whole. More sensitive topics, such as perceptions on race and racism in the Netherlands were also addressed, to start familiarizing the interviewees with the core of the interview and get an insight into their racialized experiences in the Netherlands. These accounts are relevant for further discussion and exploration of cases and instances of Dutch racism (Essed & Hoving, 2014). The theme "Dutch white spaces" had questions relating specifically to the participant's understanding of white spaces to connect responses to what Anderson (2015) discusses as white spaces. Tales of

experiences at university and/or work environment were encouraged, so to start getting a sense of the social dynamics the participants deal with daily. These dynamics are relevant to discuss both the concept of (Dutch) white spaces in relation to the participants' lived experiences. The focus of the questions guiding the final theme, "Tools of Negotiation", was to go back to the interviewees' personal experiences with larger Dutch society, and more specifically, what was discussed during the interviews as white spaces. Anderson (2015) notes that the method employed to get a "pass" in white spaces can range extensively (p.13), and can include various elements such as speech, vocabulary, and clothing. As such, questions specifically about clothing and language were asked. The interview guide used can be found in Appendix B.

3.4.2 The phases of thematic analysis

After the interviews were conducted, they were analyzed following the 6 phases of thematic analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke (2006). The first phase was to get familiar with the dataset. This was done several times by transcribing all the interviews, then going through them one by one and highlighting potentially relevant parts. It has been previously discussed that indeed, transcribing is an important part of getting acquainted with the data. Transcribing, in a way, can be understood as an interpretative process where meanings are created (Lapadat & Lindsey, 1999, as cited in Braune and Clarke, 2006). Following the first phase of familiarizing myself with the data, I generated the initial codes. These codes are segments of the data that were considered particularly interesting to understand and give an account of how academically educated black Dutchmen create and negotiate their identity in Dutch white spaces. In total, 23 codes were created that served as a basis for the analysis. An overview of these codes can be found in Appendix C.

After the initial codes were made (phase 2), I observed patterns within the codes across the data set. These codes and their patterns were sorted into potential themes. I extracted 6 themes out of this process: *Dutchness, the Black Dutch identity, White Spaces, Race and Racism in the Netherlands, Negotiating Worth,* and *Living in the Netherlands*. After these themes were created (phase 3), they were reviewed and refined (phase 4). This process entailed ensuring that the data within the themes complement each other internally while also ensuring that there are clear differences between the different themes (Braune and Clarke, 2006). This was done by going through all the extracts that were codes for each of the themes and observing whether there were patterns in the dataset. After this refinement process, a developed thematic map was made and different codes were assigned to each theme (see Appendix D). This thematic map was further refined by clustering parts that could go well together but that could be separately identified within the theme. A summary of the final

thematic map as used in this thesis, with its respective codes, can be found in Appendix E. In the end, four main themes were made. They were each named and defined, and then analyzed (phases 5 and 6). This analysis is the Results chapter of this thesis.

3.5 Positionality and ethics

Being an insider – considering that I too am an academically educated black Dutchman descendant from a former Dutch colony – facilitated some access to those who could participate in the research. My social (media) network exists of people of similar background and I expected their network to be able to be of assistance in reaching more people relevant for this research. While this group of people shares some commonalities, I am also aware that there are (sub)cultural differences and several other personal variables such as sexual orientation, attitudes, and beliefs that affect my position with the group I was interested in studying (Merriam et al., 2001). However, I recognize that my position in Dutch society and the similarities such as skin color, ethnicity, culture, hair texture, and education level have facilitated access to and rapport with the participants.

Aware that meanings were being produced and co-created in the interviews, I did my best to affect them the least possible with my personal experience and subjectivity. Admittedly, in some moments, I could not hide my agreeability or emotion on some of the comments interviewees would make. In such instances, I would nod and/or smile while trying to remain in my position of researcher. Even though reacting is natural – as my lived experiences do shape and are relevant in the way I construct my identity towards and interact with the world and those that look like me as well as those that do not look like me – I had to ensure that there was a basis for me to ask questions. For that reason, I created the interview guide before I started conducting the interviews. I shared the guide with Dr. Mélodine Sommier, my thesis supervisor, who helped me further refine it with her remarks. Because of its proximity to the theory, the interview guide was used as the reference point for the questions asked in the interviews. Sometimes, I did deviate from the interview guide to ask follow-up questions for the sake of depth and clarity. Depending on the interviewee, I would select how to start and which part of the guide to bring forth or move to the background for a later moment.

I was reminded of the complexity, depth, and responsibility that came with this research when one of the early participants told me that people trust me with their opinions and those opinions could be harmful to them if they were openly shared. He reminded me that some people might tell me things that they wouldn’t say outside of the safe space I promised them. To protect the participants’ identities, pseudonyms were created. Their names have also been removed from the transcript and the transcripts were numbered from Interview #1 to Interview

#11. Moreover, the specifics of the jobs of the participants were removed, and jobs were categorized in sectors as opposed to specific functions. The city where the participants live is not noted in this document, but instead, they all fall under Randstad. Furthermore, some specific organizations and some names were removed entirely from the transcripts to protect the participant's identity and privacy (in case of data leak), and instead, were named in alphabetical order (organization A, organization B, etc.). Some of these organizations were particularly relevant for the analysis, such as university names. These were not removed from the transcripts.

4. Results

The interviews were analyzed using a constructivist framework and following the steps of thematic analysis provided by Braun & Clark (2006). As mentioned in the Methodology chapter, four main themes were extracted out of the data, namely *Black and Dutch*, *Living in the Netherlands*, *Dutch white spaces,* and *Negotiating space in Dutch white spaces*. These themes reflected both the aims of this thesis as well as the different discussion points in the interviews. In this section, each theme is discussed.

4.1 Black and Dutch

The label *black Dutchman* is a factual categorization that considers race, nationality, and gender. While it is a factual description of (a part of) the identities of the participants, the overall symbolic value assigned to the title *black Dutchman* will provide a richer understanding of its connotations among the target group. This theme mainly addresses the degrees to which the participants relate with the label *black Dutchmen*. It considers relevant variables surrounding the understanding of being black and Dutch as discussed in the interviews such as ethnicity and culture next to race and nationality in the analysis. This, so to understand what helps construe the identity of the participants from a multidimensional perspective, as discussed in the Theoretical Framework chapter. Moreover, perceptions on the Netherlands and the Dutch culture as a subtheme are discussed to understand some of the cognitive processes that hold belief systems and associations relating to being black and being Dutch.

4.1.1 Black Dutch: race, nationality, ethnicity

While almost all of the participants factually identified with the *black Dutchman* title, most did not assign much value to the “Dutchman” part of the construct. For many of the participants, being Dutch is an “assigned identity”, a “technicality”, and a “formality” that they did not get to choose. Several of the participants acknowledge the history that has led to their Dutch nationality. And while being a Dutch national grants privileges, which the participants acknowledge, almost none of the participants feel Dutch. None of the participants that were born in Curaçao have expressed any sense of attachment towards the Netherlands. On the contrary, some of these interviewees were clear on their understanding that there is a distinction between themselves and those they consider to be Dutch. One participant expressed this sentiment by saying:

> We’re not Dutch, we’re just in the Kingdom. So by association, we’re Dutch. (…) Maybe it's a statement that we should have never had of calling people from the Kingdom

> Dutch. 'cause if that's the relation then fine, and everyone that's in the Kingdom should be Dutch, but I think from history we tend to call people from Holland Dutch. (Ray, 30)

As was previously discussed, there are indeed historical variables that affect the ascribed nationality of the *black Dutch*, particularly those that were born in one of the previous Dutch colonies. Some participants confirmed this further in the way they relate to their Dutch nationality. In those cases, participants showed an attachment to where they were born and less so what their passport nationality says. Some interviewees even noted explicit physical features as to how a stereotypical Dutch person looks, while others were more implicit in their recognition that they do not fit the Dutch look. For example, speaking about his Dutch identity, one participant stated:

> Actually, it doesn't mean much. I feel I do consider myself a Curaçaoan. The fact that I have a Dutch nationality is because we were colonized by the Netherlands, but being Dutchman itself, I do not just specifically see myself as a Dutchman, more as a Curaçaoan. And I feel that the advantages of having the Dutch uhm, nationality is great. So in that case, when it comes to having the Dutch passport, and when filling in forms when traveling (…), then it has to be Dutch. So in those cases I get confronted with the fact that I am Dutch on paper, but I feel that I'm Curaçaoan. (…) the Netherlands are predominantly white and it's a part of Europe where there is originally no black people. And the fact that… I don't know... Like, Afro-Americans, I can understand it. Maybe because it's far away and I'm not experiencing it myself. But Afro-Dutch? Or black Dutch? It doesn't match. (…) That idea of being black and Dutch is so not compatible. It doesn't match to me. (Jurgen, 27)

In bringing to light Curaçao's colonial past, his ethnic affiliations, nationality perceptions, and using racial comparisons to make his argument, Jurgen accentuated some of the complexities that he deals with when discussing his Dutch identity. Similar to Jurgen, several other participants also made the clear distinction between what Piller (2017) refers to as "passport identity" (p. 64) which in this case is Dutch, and their ethnicity, which oftentimes was linked to where they grew up. For most of the participants, this was in Curaçao. These participants call themselves Curaçaoans or Yu di Kòrsou (offspring/child of Curaçao) and say that they have Dutch nationality. Moreover, fusions between those that have a part of their identity tied to Africa (Afro) and another part of their identity linked to Europe (Dutch) are perceived as a contradiction in Jurgen's reflections. He was not the only one to admit the perceived dichotomy. Interestingly, a black Dutchman born and raised in the Netherlands and with roots in Suriname

noted that being black and Dutch are "polar opposites" for him. His rationale takes a notably critical stance of the Netherlands and what it means to be a Dutchman to him:

> I would say that Dutchmen is a colonial construct. I would say that like, if you if you look at how Dutchmen have been shaping this world for centuries and actually are still blocking doors and not giving room and energy and sometimes even lives to a lot of black people to begin with throughout history (…) I would never ever identify myself as a Dutchman because we will never uplift that narrative, and we shouldn't. We should be doing something else. We should define ourselves something else, I would say.
> (David, 35)

The abovementioned extracts show that while the *black Dutchman* is a factual label to use, the underlying value attached to these two words combined show a rather complex dynamic. For, even someone who is born with the Dutch nationality – in some of these cases even born in the Netherlands – can still refuse to associate with being Dutch. David identifies more with the city he was born in than with his Dutch nationality.

Some participants born in Curaçao thought the label *black Dutchman* to be a more fitting denomination for those born in the Netherlands, as opposed to people who are black and Dutch but born elsewhere. However, as the abovementioned extract shows, some men who are born in the Netherlands and who are black do not want to ascribe to the "Dutchman" label.

There was a group of interviewees that wanted to completely ascribe to neither their ethnicity nor their nationality. This group of interviewees opted to embrace more elements that could make up their identity. These people consciously or unconsciously chose to construct their identities in the manners that best fit how they relate with the world instead of taking an essentialist position of who they think they are based on their nationality or where they were born or only their black identity. For example, Alex (35) noted, "I am more comfortable saying that, OK, I'm a Yu di Kòrsou, but I'm also a Dutch. I'm a European but also Caribbean person." Indeed, there is an increased identification with hybridity, as discussed by Piller (2017) and confirmed in some of the interviews. However, the development of identity with ethnicity and nationality central is still prevalent. Piller (2017) noted that cultural fusions may challenge homogenous, nation-focused notions of culture, but she argues that these accounts still base their point of departure from ethnicity and nation. Indeed, most of the participants, including those who associate with several parts of different variables that can make up identity, are still strongly associated with their ethnic backgrounds. Charlie (31) noted, "I definitely have a hybrid identity, but I more strongly identify with the Surinamese aspect of my identity." He considers himself, like many others, to be a "Dutch passport holder" but he does not identify "culturally" as

Dutch. As will be discussed in the next subtheme, culture appeared to be an important variable affecting the ways and degrees that the participants relate to their Dutch nationality.

4.1.2 Dutch culture through the black Dutch's lens

As understandings of- and identification with certain cultures are highly subjectively construed processes (Mitchell, 1995), these accounts cannot be generalized. However, there was a common trend in the interviews surrounding the ethnic and cultural associations and understandings of the interviewees. Next to the racial, ethnic, and historical components mentioned above, how the participants express themselves about the Dutch culture could have links with the degree they associate with their perceived Dutch culture. There are seemingly big differences between the Dutch culture and the culture from Curaçao or Suriname. Contrasts were often made between the Dutch culture and the other two, with the Dutch culture often being referred to as "cold", "distant", "individualistic" and "direct."

Despite wanting to separate themselves and their culture from the Dutch, some participants were also appreciative of parts of the perceived Dutch culture they have acquired, such as the Dutch work ethic. Moreover, the "Dutch directness" is something that has helped participants shape the way they interact with others in Dutch society. However, many participants felt that (European/typical) Dutch people are impersonal and excessively structured. These were thought of as unlikeable, undesirable, and unrelatable traits. Having a structured life as (European/typical) Dutch people have was considered as restricting and inhibiting. Cultural differences were expressed in terms of customs, food and sense of humor, and communication style, and comparisons were made to illustrate differences (e.g., warm vs. cold; expressive vs. suppressive). The Dutch culture, as perceived by the interviewees, was also associated with specific actions, such as (day/beer) drinking just for the sake of getting drunk. However, some participants talked about these differences in more abstract terms. For example, Clive (36) thinks that "Dutch is a way of thinking and a way of being" but words fell short to fully explain what he means with that. Roger (32) had a similar perspective: "I don't really feel like a Dutch person. And that's because the way of thinking, the way of doing things (…)." The way of being, thinking, and doing that the participants mention indicate that indeed, culture is made up of several variables that are sometimes difficult to identify or name.

Even though the participants had specific associations with their *nationality*, *ethnicity,* and *race*, the perceptions they had of the Dutch *culture* disclosed several assumptions about the Netherlands among the participants, and what it means to be a Dutch person. While these assumptions may not be factually accurate, they were general among the participants and internally consistent during the conversations. They, therefore, provide general accounts of how

some *black Dutchmen from former Dutch colonies* perceive the Dutch culture. The cultural representations of the Dutch culture, as discussed by the participants, show the performative nature of culture when studied as a construct (Mitchell, 1995). Culture, in this sense, is mediated through a set of habits, acts, ideologies – a "way of thinking and a way of being", as Clive astutely said.

In their rhetoric, most participants used these cultural representations (habits, acts, ideologies) to illustrate and define an imagined Dutch culture that they did not feel they were part of or could relate to. In doing so, they presented *their* partial representation and limited perception of what it means to be Dutch. For, if the participants were Dutch of Western/European descent, the understandings of the Dutch culture would have probably been substantially different – perhaps even less negative. The differences highlighted by the participants were meant to differentiate the *black Dutch from a former Dutch colony* and Dutch people of Western/European descent. As such, these accounts provide striking examples of the effects of ethnicity, race, and culture when discussing the Netherlands and the Dutch way of doing and being.

4.2 Living in the Netherlands

Considering that all but two of the interviewees had (parts of) their upbringing in a different country than the Netherlands and settled in the Netherlands at a later stage in their life, this theme highlights some experiences living in the Netherlands as an immigrant that also happens to have Dutch nationality. As discussed, the lived experiences of a black Dutchman from a former colony are different from that of a Dutchman of European descent. This theme addresses the sense of being home and belonging, as well as the findings on the participants' thoughts on race and experiences with racism while living in the Netherlands.

4.2.1 Home and belonging

Less difficult than trying to point out which elements make the Dutch culture, participants had a vivid idea of what home means to them and why. Home, to most of the participants, is either a feeling or a place. Connections to feelings most often relate to where the participants grew up, whereas thoughts of the future are often linked to where the participants are now in their lives. For example, talking about his feeling of home, Roger (32) said, "it's not like I'm feeling Dutch, it's like I'm living here, I blend in, but I'm not feeling at home by the end of the day." The connections made to *feeling Dutch* and *feeling at home* illustrate how oftentimes these two overlap. There was also a group of participants who do feel at home in the Netherlands. Those would focus more on the present moment, how they perceive themselves, and how they relate

to their environment (as opposed to where they grew up and to what extent they identified with being Dutch and feeling at home in the Netherlands):

> I think I'm at home where I am. So I am at home here. But I'm also at home in Curaçao. So when I'm in Curaçao I am connected to Curaçao and when I'm here I'm also connected to Curaçao. But I'm also at home here. For me, wherever I choose to live I need to be able to at least partially identify with the population that lives here. Because if I don't, then I'm not at home. (Jeremy, 26)

While the feeling of being at home in the Netherlands may help with the feeling of belonging in the Netherlands, they are not mutually inclusive. Someone can feel like they belong in the Netherlands while still not feeling at home living in the Netherlands. As an example, Adam (25) currently feels at home in the Netherlands because his life is in the Netherlands. But he does not feel like he belongs in the Netherlands: "I don't think I belong here. I like it here and I'm living here. And you know, I'm working and stuff, and I like it here, but I don't think I belong here."

Even as generally, there seemed to be an understanding among the participants that feeling at home and belonging are personal and internal notions, experiences with one's surroundings also shape the way one engages with- and relates to feeling at home and feeling like one belongs. Charlie (31), for example, noted that his feeling of belonging does not stem from what society communicated to him:

> what society communicated to me, or what I interpreted is mostly, "you don't belong here." And when you kind of do have a place where you – where for me I had a place where I felt really at home – uhm, maybe those experience caused me to kind of identify, maybe even over identify, with the place that I do call home. (…) I do feel I generally belong because I surround myself with people that think I belong and that also that I think belong as well. But they are mostly people that society does not consider to belong.

How Charlie decoded what Dutch society communicated to him shows a deeper layer that affects how he engages with the Netherlands and to what extent he relates with his environment. While notions of home and belonging are internally regulated, external factors such as the ways someone views any given society that they are living in do affect how they navigate these societies and relate with them (Adams & Van de Vijver, 2015; French et al., 2006).

4.2.2 Accounts on Dutch racism

It was practically a given during the interviews that race is influential in the Netherlands. Jack (28), for example, observed that "race plays a factor, especially if you're black" and noted that "the opportunities are less." Some participants used statistical data to talk about social and racial inequalities, while others talked about the experiences of people they know to make a statement on race. Most participants, however, used their own experiences to show how much of a factor they perceived race to be in the Netherlands. These participants have either witnessed something they deemed as racist or experienced some situation in which their race became relevant one way or another.

One of the three participants who did not report having any incidents where him being black was a relevant factor said that he was probably "lucky" and "fortunate", providing evidence that while he did not have any conscious experiences where he perceived his race to be relevant, he is aware that his experiences are exceptional compared to the experiences of other black people in the Netherlands. This example shows that race is indeed relevant in people's experiences in the Netherlands.

Contemporary racism is more subtle and less expressive and explicit than it used to be (Anderson, 2015; Van den Broek, 2014). Many of the participants had several experiences of these subtle racialized experiences. In such instances, participants recalled incidents of racial profiling (as opposed to explicit or expressive perceived experiences of racism). There were several stories, sometimes multiple accounts of one person, on how the participants were followed in stores and/or supermarkets by security:

> I remember like a few months ago, (. …) I was just standing at the tram stop and then suddenly a police car appears and stops me. "Show us your hands", because like apparently there was someone a few moments ago who had stolen something from Albert Heijn [supermarket] or something, and they wanted me to show them my hands. (…) There were other people there, and I was waiting for the tram. (Jeremy, 26)

Jay (39) who like Jeremy was also born and raised in Curaçao noted, "The first time I wore a hoodie outside, police pulled me over." All three of the participants who grew up in the Netherlands admitted having grown up racially conscious, and all the other participants that moved to the Netherlands were very aware of how much of a racialized society the Netherlands is. Sometimes they were not aware of this until they were in situations in which their race became relevant:

> In every corner of this place there is the race talk. “Oh, he's from…”, or “*Waar kom je vandaan?* (where are you from?) *Wat is je afkomst?”* (what is your origin?) What is your descent? So everything has a race tied to it. I was like, why is this so important here? And that's where that realization came that the Netherlands is very racially driven when it comes to segregation. Segregation no, it's heavy. Separations. Or putting in boxes. (Jurgen, 27)

The experiences and observations shared by Jeremy and Jurgen show the covert forms that racism can take. Their implicit nature makes instances of racial profiling abstract and difficult to pinpoint; hidden behind security personnel taking precautions in supermarkets and stores are prejudices that lead to such measures and actions in the first place. Goldberg (2014) noted that “racism is within and un- or mis-recognized, covered over, held from views by others if not oneself by tolerance” in an ignorant society (p. 410). The accounts of the participants on how the Dutch make race relevant but in such inconceivable ways that it “rationalizes away the ignorance of local racist expression” (Goldberg, 2014, p. 409), making instances of racism often unnoticed, unmentioned, and uncontested.

Like Jurgen, several other participants are often faced with questions about where they come from. Even those born in the Netherlands feel as if they must explain their existence to the Western/European Dutch. Some participants, like Alex (35), experienced a “fair share” of “ignorant questions”, like one of his university lecturers asking him if Curaçao – a tropical island in the Caribbean – has winter. Adam (25) was once asked if the people in Curaçao lived in huts. He was also asked if his mother works in tourism. These examples show the “projection of Dutch arrogance regarding cultural others” (Goldberg, 2014, p. 411) in everyday discourse and unfounded cultural assumptions. Underlying these practices lies *everyday racism*: “the integration of racism into everyday situations through practices (cognitive and behavioral) that activate underlying power relations” (Essed, 1991, p. 50); power dynamics are constructed, maintained, and mediated with daily practices such as assumptions, generalizations, and seemingly ignorant questions. This form of racism has become so normalized and embedded in daily activities that, similar to other examples discussed in this theme, racism becomes difficult to grasp and point out (Goldberg, 2014).

Even though most experiences of racism among the participants were subtle and not easy to signal, some of the interviewees also had experiences with overt racist moments. Those instances are examples of what Essed calls *entitlement racism* (Essed & Muhr, 2018). The ones posing questions or giving remarks that are openly discriminatory and blatantly racist feel comfortable, at liberty, and entitled by the law to make (racial) assumptions and associations,

because they have a sense of superiority that makes them believe that they can get away inconsequentially with racist behavior (Essed & Muhr, 2018). Some participants discussed explicit experiences with entitlement racism, and others noted how these expressions would be made indirectly:

> I was dating a girl. A white girl. And she told me right away, “you can never come home with me.” Uhm, and I said it's OK. I accepted that and that's because, she straight up told me because I'm black. Maybe her father will accept me, below 70, but not the grandparents. And yeah, because they have a family business and he doesn’t want any people of color to come in the business. (Roger, 32)

These narratives give reason to believe that there are many factors of influence that affect how academically educated black Dutchmen from former Dutch colonies create and negotiate their identity as they show the relationship between ethnicity, race, and nationality, and how some benefit more than others systemically (Jones, 2014). The ease with which the participants talked about their racial experiences and the fact that some of them even went as far as to refer to the Netherlands as a country – thus systemically – as racist, show that race is indeed very relevant in the Netherlands, particularly among those who do not consider themselves fully or real Dutch. Consequently, how these people construct their identity in relation to their surroundings might also be affected by their racialized position in Dutch society (French et al., 2006; Zonneveld et al., 2017).

4.3 Dutch white spaces: perception and experiences

White spaces are perceptual and experiential places (Anderson, 2015). This theme provides the perceptual and experiential understanding of Dutch white spaces, as discussed by the participants in the interviews. The theme also addresses lived experiences in these symbolic places. The most general understanding of “white spaces” was: spaces where the overwhelming majority of people are white (and there is a lack of ethnic and racial diversity). Most participants reported having been or being (one of) the only black person(s) in their faculty, their study, or in their department at work. One of the participants reported being one of only four black people in a governmental building where over 400 people worked. The ratio of blacks in these spaces where most people are European/Western/white (Dutch) confirms the dynamics that can be found in white spaces, as discussed by Anderson (2015). When the participants were asked follow-up questions on their understanding, nuances were found in their responses. Based on the responses of the interviewees, the overarching *Dutch white spaces* concept could be subdivided into *physical* white spaces and *cultural* white spaces.

4.3.1 Physical white spaces

The physicality of physical white spaces was mostly noted in the people being predominantly white. As people make up spaces, these perceived white spaces were thought to be *consisting of* mostly white people. Perceptions of these spaces would differ from neighborhoods to student associations and other social situations and conditions where the participants thought themselves to be "the only black guy there", as Jay (39) said. Connections were also made to specific types of restaurants and cafes, particularly those where "there is that posh vibe" (Jurgen, 27). Despite the different understandings of white spaces, what remained constant through the perceptions of the interviewees is the majority-minority dynamic between whites and nonwhites. This was most notably exemplified in the working environments of the participants. Considering that almost 75% of the participants moved to the Netherlands from Curaçao after high school, these participants experienced *Dutch white spaces* for the first time during their higher education.

All of the participants who have attended research-oriented universities have experienced physical white spaces as described during their tertiary education. Research-oriented universities provide a different sort of education than higher vocational universities; higher vocational education is more practice- and profession-focused, while research universities focus more on theories and societal implications (Studiekeuze123, n.d.). These educational forms also differ in access and population, as the criteria to enter into research universities are more extensive than their practice-oriented counterparts. Thus, those who are often at the bottom of society get into these places with much more difficulty than those who are familiar with- and accustomed to these places. As the group of participants was diverse in this sense, these differences were observed between the participants. Talking about his experiences studying at a research university, one participant noted:

> As someone that works in a lot of political and policy-related things, I am often the only black person. So it's not even something that I have to say. It's very, very… It's always been visible in my career. (...) I'm the only black person working at a ministry in a specific area. The only black person working at a for a project in another specific area. When I enter into a board meeting or in a high level meeting with politicians, it's always, you know, I'm the black person and I'm the only Afro Caribbean person. So that plays a role. Uhm, so it's not something that I had to explicitly identify because I study Public Administration so it is very much really into policy. It's a very, very white study. Very European-focused. (Jeremy, 26)

When asked about what he means with "white", Jeremy went on, explaining that:

> most of the people that study there are, uh, they're from the Netherlands. (…) They have no other cultural background, or at least no other visible cultural background because we can't assume, but most of the people looked very similar. They did not look like me. And they come from a very privileged background because often Public Administration, I mean Leiden University is indeed one of the elite universities of the Netherlands. I mean, the king studied and a lot of the politicians that we have also studied at Leiden, and so it's very much the privilege is extremely visible within my study. So yes, fairly white, light skin.

What Jeremy discussed in the above extracts shows some of the layers of white spaces, and how oftentimes the physical manifestation is more often than not associated with a certain culture: the white culture. In Jeremy's account, "white" is parallel with "elite" and "privilege", confirming the limited access for those who do not have the (cultural) capital to be part of these spaces which for the white person is thought of as normal (Anderson, 2015).

There was also an understanding of a very specific type of white spaces – the type that "are white, are kept white, and remain white" (Clive, 36). Two participants who are familiar with the Netherlands and Dutch spaces used the neighborhood Duindorp in The Hague to make their case. Duindorp is a low-income, low-education, mostly white-populated zone in the Netherlands (Omroepwest, 2020). Despite their low socio-economic and educational position in society, inhabitants of Duindorp still carry the sentiment of a biologically superior race and "engage a performance of whiteness" (Alexander, 2004, p. 657); explicit racist behavior is considered normal in this neighborhood (Joop, 2014): one of the participants for this study noted that he was once cussed out at Duindorp because of the color of his skin.

While inhabitants in physical white spaces such as Duindorp think they are better than nonwhites, they are considered as *white trash* for white culture (Alexander, 2004). Newitz & Wray (1997) note that "white trash must be understood as both an external and an internal threat to whiteness" (p. 170-171, as cited in Alexander, 2004). This is because those who are thought of as part of this group of whites are not in a position to perform what whiteness usually represents. Here one can observe the conflation of race, culture, and social capital that make up white spaces. Indeed, even though inhabitants of Duindorp perform whiteness based on their race and their presumed privilege and superiority that comes with their race, they lack the culture that black people in white spaces are usually required to be part of (Anderson, 2015).

4.3.2 Cultural white spaces

Next to the physical associations that participants had with white spaces, they also thought of a certain culture pertaining to white spaces. Jay (39), for instance, noted, "I feel like they're… I

don't feel like they're only white in color, maybe I feel like they're white in culture." While Jay particularly linked this perceived culture to his idea of Dutch culture – as if these are two sides of the same coin – this so-called white culture is less tangible than physical bodies and their features. This makes the cultural side of white spaces difficult to name, though not difficult to identify:

> "[White space] is a space where it's practically 100% only white people. And quite possibly with a homogeneous way of thinking and viewing life. And if you would, and this is purely my thinking, if you would then start chatting with these persons, you would see that most of them have the same way of thinking. Same way of acting. Because one would add another person that's more or less the same to the group. So the group is the same and it keeps on growing. I tend to see that for example at work." (Alex, 35)

Alex's understanding of white spaces both confirms the notion of a homogenous group of people in terms of appearance, while also noting an underlying homogenous thought process and culture as a characteristic of white spaces (Anderson, 2015). Even though Alex did not explain exactly what that culture and mentality look like, Alex's understanding insinuates that there is such thing as white culture. Charlie (31) also addressed the notion of sameness that Alex thought to be foundational for white spaces, but was more specific in his understandings of this culture:

> "When I think white spaces, I think of spaces that perpetuate a specific type of violence that is rooted in white supremacy. (…) It does not have to be explicit. It's often very implicit. In the things that are very subtly communicated to people and letting them know this is who belongs here, this is what does not belong here, and I think most importantly, this is who's in control here. (. …) I think white spaces perpetuate institutional racism, and institutional racism leads to white spaces." (Charlie, 31)

Charlie talks of white spaces in connection to white supremacy – an ideology that is foundational to whiteness (Sue, 2006). At the core of Charlie's thoughts on white spaces and white supremacy lies the notion of power. As was discussed in the Theoretical Framework chapter, white spaces do indeed come from the notion of whiteness, which is rooted in white supremacy, which in turn is based on the ideology of a race that has more power and superiority over others (Alexander, 2004). Like Charlie, almost all the participants highlighted in one way or another how power dynamics are constructed and maintained in (white) spaces. For example, using the analogy of an organization, Clive (36) thinks on an operational level in the

Netherlands, employers do not care much about your ethnic background. However, as you climb the "social ladder of a company", as Clive puts it, "you'll end up in the Old Boys Network that consists of old white dudes." In other words, on a tactical and strategic level, organizations in white spaces become less diverse in terms of ethnicity as opposed to the operational level. And the reasoning for this is power. Talking about power dynamics and his experiences at his work, David (35) notes:

> Actually, those who are in control, those actually telling people they need to listen to them, (…) I would say 70% is white. And then you go to the managers, etcetera, and well, that's like eternal snowing. Like there's no diversity there. So in terms of ethnicity and race, yes, there's there is this diversity on streets when it comes to youth workers, I think that's a personal tactic of them just to put us in there because the streets are really non-Western, but if you look upwards more, it's more white and white.

While power can be traced to and measured in relation to positions within an organization, there are subtilities in how power is performed, negotiated, challenged, and sustained inter-personally. Adam (25), for example, noted:

> [Dutch/white] people tend to have these expectations of black people. They expect you to be in the lower position basically, to put it that way. They expect you to basically not be studying or not be at a university. They're surprised when you tell them, "Oh yeah, I've been teaching statistics at the university." They don't expect black people to be doing so well in my experience and especially working at a Big Four, you know, where you have a lot of these are white men that feel very like, "OK, I'm the best."

The fact that most participants not only recognize the particularities and characteristics of whiteness and white spaces, but are also able to define and describe them, shows how culturally aware the participants of this research are of the Netherlands, Dutch culture, white culture, and what they consider as white spaces in the Netherlands. The men interviewed for this study confirm that there is such phenomenon as *Dutch white spaces*, even as it is difficult to completely define and fully grasp.

The understandings of Dutch white spaces, as discussed until this point, focused on what these spaces are, and addressed some of the underlying characteristics and structures fueling them according to the participants. However, during the interviews, participants also shared how these places feel while venturing into them. Jay (39), for example, thinks that white spaces are spaces "where white people feel safe" and he wonders where that is not the case.

While Jay thinks white spaces are safe spaces for white people, David (35) thinks that these spaces are repressive for nonwhites:

> you're always fighting against some invisible walls or whatever in what kind of white space you're actually encountering or working or living. So, the reaction is, it's always like you always have the feeling you need to fucking explain yourself. (…) That feeling it's everywhere, it's very repressing and it's everywhere (. ...) it's more like a game. A game in which I try to find as quick as possible I find the right answers in explaining myself. Explaining myself and giving myself comfort to be there in that space, whatever that space is, so it's about explaining yourself as a black person. Actually, legitimizing your presence in that space continuously. That's what white spaces mean to me. Like, I know this is my working space, but I know something will happen. So you better already start giving yourself answers for the potential things, the potential problematic things, that actually can happen – will probably happen. (…) Even the black people calling or using those white frames and tactics, even them. So it's not about only white people, but it's the way – the white rhetoric they will use. (David, 35)

What David discusses here connects well with the descriptions of white spaces as discussed by Anderson (2015) as well: black people in white spaces have to constantly prove themselves or be reminded of their inferior position. David also talks about "white rhetoric" that conflates with the "discursive practices" that serve to maintain whiteness mentioned by Shome (1999, p. 108). Even though there were participants that highlighted one of the subcategories created for the theme *Dutch white spaces* more than the other, almost all of the interviewees discussed white spaces in such a way that addressed both their physical *and* cultural manifestations. Indeed, they were often noted as complementary to each other.

4.4 Negotiating space in Dutch white spaces

Navigating white spaces is considered normal for the black Dutchmen that were interviewed. Considering the demographics of the Netherlands, especially in Dutch white spaces as discussed above, it was practically a given among the participant that the Dutch society is white. The interviewees venture into white spaces all the time, and these white spaces differ from participant to participant with some being physical spaces, as discussed above, or cultural places. Because the experiences in white spaces – as well as the understandings of white spaces – varied from participant to participant, there was no one specific or a set of strategies the participants used while venturing into white spaces. Indeed, white spaces are perceptual and experiential (Anderson, 2015), and are therefore subjective to the person venturing them.

This theme addresses which tools are useful for *black Dutchmen from former Dutch colonies* while engaging in white spaces, and to what extent the participants feel comfortable taking space in the Netherlands.

4.4.1 Dutch language as a tool of negotiation

The most important tool for the participants was their ability to fluently communicate in Dutch, particularly what people in the Netherlands call *Algemeen Beschaafd Nederlands* (ABN), also known as civilized Dutch. There were several personal motives and perceived benefits for commanding the Dutch language. Alex (35), talking about his ability to fluently speak Dutch says: "I know enough, let's say expensive or difficult words, that I can throw out in certain situations to make a certain case and put the other people at a disadvantage." Like Alex, other participants also leverage their position in the Netherlands with the Dutch language. Some find benefit in speaking Dutch so they can let people know what they want. Others, like Alex, use language to defend themselves. A few of the participants do not use the Dutch language necessarily as a tool, but enjoy the benefit of being "easier understandable", thus "[European/Western Dutch people] understand you better and you're more passing" (Jurgen, 27). Conversely, the lack of language proficiency creates a gap between what is the norm and what someone (usually an "other") can level up to. Integration in Dutch society, especially access to Dutch white spaces, is perceived to become even more complicated in such instances:

> "I think that Dutch people in general are very like, if you cannot speak Dutch correctly, they will point it out. And they will make you feel less than. And they will think less of you. I think from what I experienced. So being able to speak Dutch really will help you to be perceived as someone, that is, you know, worthy of being somewhere." (Adam, 25)

Jack (28) shared similar feelings as Adam, explaining that language is a factor for being embraced or not. However, he also admitted the differential treatment between people who are "from the islands" and other immigrants. Similarly, Jeremy (26) observed, that as a Dutch black person from a former Dutch colony you are "expected to perform at the level of the Dutch" even as "you don't have the cultural reference of other Dutch people." This observation adds to the complicated dynamics *black Dutchmen from former Dutch colonies* deal with. That is, being Dutch legally, not identifying as Dutch culturally, navigating Dutch white spaces where they are expected to perform the same but at the same time are not expected to be in these places to

begin with. This makes living in the Netherlands ever so distinctive for this group of Dutch people that adapting to venture into these spaces is not uncommon among them.

The ones *performing* the civil Dutch language, even though they do not consider themselves as Dutch nor can they relate to the Dutch culture, are doing so to pass and possibly take space in Dutch society and Dutch white spaces. Indeed, civil Dutch language could be considered as a form of "articulatory whiteness", as discussed by McLaren (1999, p. 36, as cited in Alexander, 2004) because people engage and perform a particular performance of the Dutch language and in return get easier access to spaces that require such articulate performance compared to those who do not command this form of performance.

It should be noted that several of the participants who were born and raised in Curaçao remarked that while the Dutch language has helped them in white spaces, their biggest asset in these spaces when it came to language was the fact that they could speak multiple languages, including Dutch. This often makes an impression on others who often only speak one or two languages. Thus, while the Dutch language is used as leverage, it is often also used in combination with other languages to negotiate the position of the participants in a place or social dynamic.

4.4.2 Clothing as a tool of negotiation

Clothing, as discussed by Anderson (2015) was also a tool of negotiation for some of the participants, though less important than spoken or written language. The discourses on clothing varied. Some participants very consciously and strategically use clothes to their advantage, while others do not aim to make an impression with their clothing style. There are also accounts of those who used to care about their clothing to fit in, but who have changed their perspective on themselves and their clothing while living in the Netherlands. Most participants, whether they used clothing as a tactic to fit in or as a way to stand out, through their discourse, showed the symbolic value that clothing holds:

> "I didn't wear hoodies outside and stuff is because I didn't want to be profiled like *'that black person'* [emphasis], you know because that's bad. Do you understand how bad that is? (…) We grow up as black persons thinking, like, "I have to dress in certain ways because otherwise I will look like a criminal or something." (…) I would always, you know, dress nicely, even when going to the supermarket." (Jay, 39)

Through the discourse of Jay, one can notice how there used to be a mentality to fit in into white spaces by accommodating accordingly (Anderson, 2015). Apparently, the *hoodie* is a racialized piece of clothing packed with stereotypes and assumptions not only in the U.S. (Fung, 2012;

Nguyen, 2015) but also in the Netherlands. As noted earlier in this chapter, Jay got stopped by the police the first time he wore a hoodie outside. Jeremy was also wearing a hoodie when he was racially profiled at the tram stop by the police. Referring to his clothing style, Jurgen thought that if he “would be wearing something more extravagant it would ask for the wrong attention and maybe accentuate the things that they always used to prejudice.” The accounts and experiences discussed in this paragraph provide evidence of an unspoken yet agreed-upon ideology on the value and meaning of clothing, and what is acceptable or not.

While some are cautious to not draw negative attention to them, others are consciously using clothes to draw attention to them and negotiate their position. For example, Adam (25) noted that “being well-dressed” gives him “a boost”. However, what exactly entails “well-dressed” was associated with “having a blazer” and the subjective opinions of people who would say “oh that's a good-looking man” or “oh you are well dressed.” In his account, Adam showed cultural awareness of what is deemed as acceptable, respectable, and “well” but he did not have the words to explain. Similarly, Alex (35) noted that as a freelancer,

> “At a certain point, if you have to meet senior managers, and especially if there are more of them and it's your couple of first meetings and you haven't had a chance to show who you are and what you can deliver, I would then match their way of dressing. So it would be a fitted suit with a proper tie, and depending the case also a red tie on a blue suit and white shirt. (….) because that is a very powerful color palette. If you check American presidential debates, they always wear a blue suit, white shirt, and red tie. It means I am more powerful than you.” (Alex, 35)

Even though Alex matches the way of dressing that people have in some white spaces, he noted wanting to go “as simple as possible” in his clothing in his daily life, indicating the performative as well as the symbolic nature of clothing outside of his daily, casual life. Alex performs a role that tells others “I am more powerful than you” in specific instances where meanings are created, power is negotiated, and relationship dynamics get established. In such instances, Alex, like others, knows of the symbolic value of clothing in his performance, similar to other black men know how clothing can lead to acceptance (Gurung et al., 2021).

4.4.3 Other tools of negotiation

The participants provided an array of tools that they use to their benefit while navigating white spaces. While most of these were personal and individual attributes, some tools were mentioned by more than three participants, thus becoming a trend among the participants. Next to language and clothing, the education level of the participants was also widely considered to be

a tool. Almost all of the participants agreed that their education and their university degrees give them a foot in the door in getting jobs or projects. Even one of the two participants that did not have a degree mentioned having on his LinkedIn that he attended Delft University has helped him get access to certain places. This was expected, as education is a form of social capital (Helliwell & Putnam, 2007).

Besides the three main tools mentioned in the previous paragraph, networking also appeared to be an important tool employed by the participants. Anderson (2015) noted the importance of creating allies and making connections in white spaces, and the interviews confirmed that the participants understood the importance of allies, connections, and people who can vouch for them (Anderson, 2015). Several participants said that they are just being themselves. Therefore, in a way, personality is also one of the tools that participants use. However, as this study considers a postmodern position where identities are created and fluid as opposed to essential and static (Yi & Shorter-Gooden, 1999), it challenges this notion. This study proves that there are socio-cultural elements that affect the self and how the self relates to its social world. As such, people often act in a way that benefits them. The dynamic between navigating white spaces authentically (thus by being one's self), while simultaneously talking about power and the ways that this is negotiated seems contradicting. Spangler (2002) noted that "authenticity is obscured, fragmented, confused, and ultimately lost in a complex web of signification that promises the genuine article but is always unable to deliver" (p. 125). Indeed, the "self" that the participants referred to that they believe they are "just being" holds many complexities. While these might not be instantly recognized, they affect the self, its states of being, and the extent to which it feels uninhibited to be. Still, one's *personal identity* could be of influence to what extent they feel like they have to strategize in these spaces (Adams, 2014).

4.4.4 Taking- instead of negotiating space

Even though the interviews focused for the most part on the experiences and strategies of the target group in Dutch white spaces, the notion of "taking space" was also addressed. Different than *negotiating space*, which is a continuous process in which one's sense of belonging, dignity, and worthiness are systemically yet implicitly debated in relation to the established norm, *taking space* centers around more proactive stances and actions against the dominant "white culture". This can range from speaking out against microaggressions and instances of bigotry, which are fundamental to maintaining the status quo and hierarchical levels of belonging and worthiness, to feeling uninhibited to voice critical thoughts.

Perceptions on taking space were dual: those that felt that black people are taking more space in the Netherlands and those that felt that black people are not. Drawing on the current

political environment in the Netherlands – both local politics as well as activism – some participants felt that the Netherlands is becoming less homogenous in mentality. The Black Lives Matter movement was mentioned a few times by some participants; they used the movement as an example to demonstrate that people are becoming more vocal about social inequality and racism in the Netherlands. Some participants used political party BIJ1 and Sylvana Simons, the party leader *(a black Dutch woman from a former Dutch colony)*, to showcase how black people are in spaces that they have not been before and that people are less silent about racial issues and social inequalities against minorities in the Netherlands. However, some were ambivalent about black people taking space in the Netherlands. Some even used election outcomes to make a point that black people have been in Dutch parliament before and will be in the future, but fundamentally and structurally, nothing changes. (It should be noted that shortly before the interviews were conducted, the Netherlands had the Dutch general elections in March 2021, making local politics a point of reference.)

As for the participants themselves, most feel at liberty to take space as described above. The acquired "Dutch directness" that the participants mentioned serves them well for they are not shy to call people out on bigotry. Even more amazingly, some participants noted that calling bigotry out is not enough – one must also question it. Their rationale was: questioning one's thought process (and thus their intelligence) will lead to people thinking about what they do and say in the future. Others noted that while they have no issues calling people out, they are not going to do the work of educating (willfully) ignorant people on their ignorance. As white people are becoming more vocal in expressing their sense of superiority in moments of *entitlement racism* (Essed & Muhr, 2018), these results show that some people question the intended motive of such expressions, and in doing so, do not let these moments pass silently.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Main findings

The main aim of this thesis was to unpack *how academically educated black Dutchmen from former Dutch colonies create and negotiate their identity in Dutch white spaces*. The sub-questions guiding this research were interested in discovering how these black Dutchmen relate to Dutch society, the perceptions of these Dutchmen on Dutch culture and white spaces, and which tools these men use to negotiate their position in white Dutch spaces. To uncover as many aspects of this multilayered topic, the most relevant components were discussed independently, both theoretically as well as during the interviews, to understand which are the most relevant. Now, using an intersectional approach, this conclusion intends to tie all that was discussed together.

Perception of Dutch society and being black and Dutch. The participants that were part of this study did not relate to Dutch society because there are important and relevant components such as race, culture, history, and ethnicity that influence their perception and their experiences in the Netherlands. The results show that even the label *black Dutchmen* was mostly only factually accepted, but participants could not relate to the notion of being both black and Dutch. There were strong indications that the participants not only did not relate to being black and Dutch, but they also did not want to be identified as Dutch. The "postcolonial bonus" of Dutch citizenship (Oostindie, 2010, p. 50) was often thought of in practical terms such as a "passport identity" (Piller, 2017, p. 64) as opposed to attachment or a sense of belonging. Even though reasons varied for the strong disassociation with being Dutch, biological and cultural ideas of what makes someone Dutch were strong variables.

There were clear distinctions between how the participants perceive themselves and how they view the Dutch (culture). Dutch culture was often compared to the culture of where the participants were born. This resulted in stark contrasts made, and in every case, the Dutch culture was deemed as the least desirable in these contrasts. As discussed earlier, people who are a member of marginalized groups in society tend to cope with this in different ways (French et al., 2006). One of such ways is *social creativity* – a strategy in which these people reassess and reject the validity of the "standards by which their group is judged" (French et al., 2006, p. 9). This phenomenon is partially observed in this study as well; the participants take pride in their ethnic heritage while noting contrasting differences with their current reality. In doing so, they revalue their ethnic and cultural position in relation to larger Dutch society. Participants especially from Curaçao share a more "positive group-esteem" (French et al., 2006, p. 9) for their birth country than they do so of the Dutch culture.

Race, white spaces, and tools. Even though race often goes unmentioned in the Netherlands (Essed & Trienekens, 2008; Goldberg, 2014), the findings confirmed again that indeed, most instances of racism in the Netherlands are subtle, hidden in the everyday experiences (Essed, 1991; Van den Broek, 2014). Instances of everyday racism (Essed, 1991) were traced to, for example, belittling comments or questions that seem ignorant but that are meant to convey information about un- or subconscious beliefs that stem from notions of superiority. Questions and comments by (white) Dutch people about the origins of the participants are meant to highlight differences between the questioned and the questioner. The perceived cultural superiority of the Dutch is subliminally communicated in those situations; those questions or comments are, advertently or inadvertently, intended to make a distinction, *the other*, with *what is* (or *what should be*) (Goldberg, 2014). They confirm the "Dutch obsession with difference" that Essed and Hoving mention in *Dutch Racism* (2014, p. 23).

This study moreover confirms that white spaces, as discussed by Anderson (2015), are present in the Netherlands. Participants talked about the nuances that Anderson (2015) describes but in Dutch contexts, such as dressing properly, speaking civil Dutch, and networking with people that can vouch for them in these spaces. The participants also addressed power in relation to white spaces, and who has the most power in these spaces. This power was reflected in positions in the organizations that the participants frequent: usually, management positions and strategic roles are left to white people, and black people have lower positions. Power was moreover thought of as being subliminally communicated in a form that tells people covertly who is in control, as discussed in the previous paragraph. These findings also confirm the relevance of space, in constructing, maintaining, and negotiating power dynamics (Anderson, 2015).

White spaces evoked negative feelings for some participants, while others accepted it as being the norm in the Netherlands. Aware that these Dutch white spaces are spaces where meaning is created and negotiated, participants noted that speaking civil Dutch provides opportunities and a little bit more of a leveling field for them, confirming the acceptability that comes with speaking in an "educated way" in white spaces that Anderson talks about (2015, p. 13). For some, clothing was also an important physical symbol to negotiate their way in Dutch white spaces, as clothing conveys information and can be racialized through the assumptions that are attached to it (Feinberg et al., 1992; Nguyen, 2015; Gurung et al., 2021). Some participants also mentioned the importance of networking while venturing into these spaces. This is to say that these participants are indeed negotiating their identity in the Netherlands and particularly, in Dutch white spaces. Besides elucidating the experiences and of the participants, their accounts also confirmed the local, Dutch expression of white spaces. It more broadly also

confirms that, despite the wide reluctance to acknowledge race as a determining factor in the Netherlands, race represents ways of being, living, and making meaning in the world. Even as it is unseen, especially those who are subjected to it "still suffer the racist effects" (Goldberg, 2006, p.339) of having to, for example, negotiate their legitimacy and identity (Anderson, 2015).

Intersecting. After having discussed important parts that make up the totality, it can now be stated that the participants create their identity in Dutch white spaces mainly with their ethnic origins as their reference point. As most of the participants cannot relate to what they perceive as Dutch culture, nor do they associate with their Dutch nationality, these men often distance themselves from white spaces when they do not need to be in them. Most hold on to their roots, and they repel white spaces and their associated culture. Nonetheless, all these men must navigate white spaces. Even though they would use language, clothing, networking, and their education (degree) to negotiate their position in Dutch white spaces, it appeared that their *self* is also an important tool to negotiate.

This self is multilayered and complex. It consists of several elements that become relevant if they were mentioned. One of these is for example the gender element. Even as it was not explicitly addressed in the analysis, the fact that these people identify as male is relevant. An intersectional notion, *gendered-racism* posits that "race is modified, co-constructed, or fused with gender, class and the other way" (Essed, 2020, p. 446). Black men have been historically marginalized differently than women (Taylor et al., 2019) and the racial stereotypes of hoodies are mainly often assigned to black *males* (Gurung et al., 2019). Despite the lack of academic evidence in the Netherlands, it can be presumed, based on overall whiteness and general accounts on Dutch racism (both extracted from this study as well as what has been discussed prior to it), that *gendered-racism* might present in the Netherlands as well. However, being male as opposed to female does come with benefits such as perhaps the thought to be more equipped to do a job based on gender (Marsh, 2011).

Some participants accredited their upbringings for how their self has been shaped and how that, in turn, is helping them in these spaces. Others appeared to think that the self is more essential, more authentic, and less constructed – even as they give accounts on how they construct the performative self in specific instances. In these dynamics, one can notice also how *personal* identity and *social* identity affect someone's overall sense of identity and how they engage with their environment (Adams, 2014; Adams & Van de Vijver, 2015; French et al., 2006). While performing in white spaces, the participants' *relational* identity takes the forefront and is legitimized with their position in an organization (Adams, 2014; Adams & Van de Vijver, 2015). Most participants also recognized their university degree(s) to be of influence in this

legitimization of their position in a company, showing also the symbolic and cultural value of education (Helliwell & Putnam, 2007).

Limitations

Next to my positionality discussed above (and the limited and subjective meaning-making process that can stem from my understanding and experiences), one of the limitations of this research was access to its target population. Eight of the 11 participants were born in Curaçao and moved to the Netherlands at a later stage in their life, and three of them were born in the Netherlands but have roots in Suriname. The fact that most of the participants come from Curaçao and the rest from Suriname did limit the scope of the study and created a limitation for the research. Notwithstanding this lack of diversity, the participants that were recruited were still relevant for this research for two reasons. Firstly, the participants interviewed were still representatives of the population of *black Dutchmen of former Dutch colonies*. According to Oostindie (2014), "Antillean migration is not representative by origins, as the overwhelming majority hails from Curaçao only" (p. 141). Secondly, despite the lack of ethnic diversity, participants interviewed are *black Dutchmen from former Dutch colonies* and therefore relevant. Considering the statistical data, regardless of their birthplace, black people are at the bottom in the social hierarchy together with other immigrants of color, and they experience institutional racism in the Netherlands (Vesta, 2007; Van den Broek, 2014; Weiner, 2014). Thus, while they may differ in their ethnicity, all the participants are victims of institutional marginalization. Though they share this problematic reality, they are also among a small minority that has attended university, which becomes a privilege considering their position in society.

Another limitation can be found in the items that were intersected. While intersectionality is multilayered, it is also reductionist (Essed, 2020). Thus, more elements may be relevant to unpack more of how black Dutchmen from former colonies construct and negotiate their identity in Dutch white spaces. While this study considered some important variables, some more subtilities and nuances may also be relevant, such as the "self" that the participants talked about that is thought of as independent and separate from the one strategizing in white spaces. Personal characteristics, such as perceived attractiveness, can influence someone's level of success (Udry et al., 1984).

Socio-theoretical implications

The fact that all the participants, consciously aware or not, were subjected to Dutch racism is disturbing but provides more evidence of the subtilities that can be found in Dutch society. This thesis unveiled some angles to understand why some *black Dutchmen from former colonies* might not want to be labeled as Dutch, or why they do not consider themselves to be Dutch.

Even as the label *Black Dutchman* is a factual one, its symbolic connotations are not deemed as desirable. This shows that there *is* a difference between how black people and white people experience living in the Netherlands. Moreover, this thesis shows that being "Dutch" is more complex than having Dutch nationality.

From its introduction to its conclusion, this thesis breaks down a heavy and dense topic into separate components, discusses and analyzes them, and then unites these components to make sense of the totality of these when put together. This is fascinating, particularly in the Netherlands, where notions of race, racism, blackness, whiteness, white privilege, colonial history are generally ignored. Indeed, the subtilities of Dutch whiteness and how it is perpetuated in daily life show that to unpack it, one has to consider several separate yet interrelated concepts. As such, this body of work is also an addition to studies on race and racism in Europe and the Netherlands – so to continue to elucidate both the systemic structures as the personal experiences of people living within such structures.

Employers and policymakers can make use of this work so to understand how whiteness is manifested, communicated, and maintained in (Dutch) spaces. Considering how deeply engrained Dutch whiteness and racism are in Dutch society yet simultaneously almost inconceivable and extremely nuanced, the topics in this study are also intended to make these issues more tangible and recognizable. Lastly, this study intended to provide academically educated black Dutchmen in Dutch white spaces (and the Netherlands) a reference point to remember that they are not alone.

Suggestions for future research

The main goal of this thesis was to explore and discuss the identity creation and negotiation of the target group in Dutch white spaces. This question dealt with several separate, yet interrelated concepts to comprehend the relevancy of the topic as well as the complexity that comes with studying and analyzing the Netherlands in relation to white spaces. Future research could benefit from the notions of *black Dutch [person]* and *Dutch white spaces* as discussed in this topic and expand more on them. This study suggests future research to quantitatively assess whether being *black* and *Dutch* are considered compatible – especially among people that are born in the Netherlands. This will provide insight on whether and how there is a stereotypical idea of what Dutch means. Moreover, the participants of this study were a highly privileged group of men. Lastly, it would be also interesting to study whether notions of whiteness and white culture apply in spaces that are more openly accessible and whether people who are not academically educated experience white spaces similar to what was discussed here.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Summary of Interviews

	Length	Pseudonym	Age	Highest Education	Occupation/Industry	Born in	Roots
1	1:01:20	Jurgen	27	Educational Science & Digital Media and Human Development Masters	ICT and Communication Advisor	Curaçao	Curaçao
2	1:51:30	Charlie	31	Civil Engineering Bachelor (no degree)	Artist, Teacher and Consultant	Netherlands	Suriname
3	1:43:17	Ray	30	International Business Bachelor	Finance	Curaçao	Curaçao and St. Maarten
4	1:20:08	Clive	36	Trade Management Bachelor	Ports Support	Netherlands	Suriname
5	1:38:47	Jay	39	Communication and Multimedia Design Bachelor	Business Analyst	Curaçao	Curaçao and Suriname
6	1:06:34	Alex	35	Physics Bachelor (no degree)	Data Management Consultant	Curaçao	Curaçao
7	1:47:08	Jeremy	26	(Finishing) Public Administration Master	Public Servant and Consultant	Curaçao	Curaçao
8	1:18:41	Adam	25	Communication Science & Business Administration Masters	Communication Officer	Curaçao	Curaçao
9	1:22:05	Jack	28	Econometrics & Quantitative Risk Management Masters	Fraud Analyst	Curaçao	Curaçao
10	1:12:50	Roger	32	Communication and Multimedia Design Bachelor	Developer	Curaçao	Curaçao
11	1:09:35	David	35	Media Studies Master	Social Worker	Netherlands	Suriname

Appendix B: Interview Guide

RESEARCH QUESTION: How do academically educated black Dutchmen from former Dutch colonies create and negotiate their identity in white Dutch spaces?

- How do academically educated black Dutchmen living in the Netherlands view themselves in relation to the larger Dutch society?
- What are the perceptions of black Dutchmen from former colonies on Dutch culture?
- What are the experiences and perceptions of academically educated black Dutchmen living in the Netherlands on race and racism?
- What tools do the participants use to negotiate their identity in white Dutch spaces?

OVERVIEW OF THE THEMES AND QUESTIONS GUIDING THE INTERVIEWS

Themes to guide the interviews:

- Identity
- Living in the Netherlands
- Dutch white spaces
- Tools of negotiation

IDENTITY (& IDENTITY IN DUTCH CONTEXT)

- How old are you and where were you born?
  (In case they moved to NL: When did you move to the Netherlands?)
- In which city are you currently residing?
- How would you describe / define yourself in terms of identity?
  (think: gender, sexual orientation, nationality, education)
- Even as you hold Dutch citizenship, how Dutch do you consider yourself to be?
- What does being Dutch means to you?
- Do you identify with the label “black Dutchman?”
  (If yes: what is the relevance of “black” here for you? Why the need to make that distinction? If no: why not?)
- How close do you feel to where you(r parents) were born?
- Would you call the Netherlands “home?”
- How do you balance staying true to your “roots” and living in a big city in the Netherlands?

University experiences:

- What did/do you study?
- Were/Are there other people that look(ed) like you in terms of skin color or ethnicity in your study? How many? How was this experience?
- In which language did you do your studies / are you studying? Why did you choose this language? How was this experience?
- Did you ever feel like have to prove yourself as someone knowledgeable, worthy of studying at the university you attend(ed) to, as a black man? Why is that?

Professional experiences:

- Are you working as a professional already?
  (If they work: What is your current job?)
- How diverse is your work space?
- How many colleagues do you have that look(ed) like you in terms of skin color or ethnicity in your field of work? How does this make you feel?
- Did/do you feel "out of place" at your job? Why (not)? (if yes: can you give me an example?)
- In the professional field, have you ever felt the need to prove people wrong about you? In which instances? Based on which assumptions do you think?

TOOLS OF NEGOTIATION

- How do you feel about taking space in the Netherlands?

With "taking space" I mean feel at liberty to say what you really want to say; call people out when they say or do something offensive; actively participate in conversations, either at work or university or outside of these places; feel free to voice critical thoughts.

- How do you "take space" and negotiate your position in the Dutch society as a black man?
- Do you feel like those that look like [us] are taking more space in places where [we] weren't before?
- What have you used to your advantage to "succeed" in the Netherlands?
- How well do you speak Dutch? How much of a useful tool is being able to speak Dutch fluently in negotiating your status or respectability in the Netherlands?
- How conscious are you of your clothes in relation to the places you visit? Have your clothes helped you in your "success" to the Netherlands?

LIVING IN THE NETHERLANDS

- How would you describe the Dutch culture? Do you consider yourself to be part of this culture? (If yes: how come?)
- Do you feel like you generally belong in the Netherlands? How come?
- Do you think that the color of your skin is relevant while discussing your life in the Netherlands? Why (not)?
- What are your thoughts on race and equality in the Netherlands?
- In your experience, how important of a factor is race in the Netherlands?
- Have you ever experienced prejudice or racism while living in the Netherlands - either during your studies, at work, or outside these spaces?
  (If yes: How do you react in such instances? What goes through your mind?)
- Have you ever given the impression that you are inferior while living in the Netherlands?
  (If yes: can you recall an example or some instances where this was the case?)

DUTCH WHITE SPACES:

- Which places do you usually visit? Before the pandemic, where did you usually frequent?
- What was the demographic of these places? How did you experience this?
- When you hear “white spaces,” what comes to mind? Why is that?
- How do you feel when you visit places that are infused with white people and in which you are the only one or one of the few ones that is black? Do you usually visit these places? Why (not)?
- Have you ever had instances where you felt like you had to adapt to fit in spaces – for example at work or elsewhere – where you are a minority? (If yes: in which spaces, and how do you adapt? Do have an example?)

Appendix C: Codes

CODE NR	CODES:
1	Identity perceptions: how do you perceive yourself in relation to your environment
2	Ethnic and racial associations: how you perceive your ethnicity, the Dutch ethnicity, and the associations you make with either
3	Personal cultural associations: how you perceive your personal culture - from family, to work, to school, to beyond.
4	Being Black + Dutchman: how you perceive specifically the dynamic of being black and being Dutch
5	Being (legally) Dutch and its meanings: How you perceive specifically your Dutch nationality
6	Perceptions of Dutch culture and being Dutch: how you perceive the Dutch culture and the Dutch people
7	White spaces, experiences, and their meanings
8	Perceptions of race and equality
9	Differential treatment
10	Experiences of racism
11	Dutch language and its importance
12	Belongingness in the Netherlands
13	Colonial history and identity
14	Feeling of "home"
15	The Dutch "Look"
16	Thoughts on taking space
17	Experiences with taking space
18	Appearance in the Netherlands - looks
19	Educational / University experience
20	Work Experiences
21	Clothing: experience and influence
22	Negotiating Worthiness: worthiness and tools that are used to negotiate status, position and worthiness in a space
23	Power

Appendix D: Developed Thematic Map

THEME NAME	CODE
Black and Dutch: relating to the identity of the participants based on their nationality, race, ethnicity and culture	**1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 13, 15**
The Dutch Nationality and Citizenship	
Perceptions of the Netherlands and Dutch culture	
Identification with the term "Black Dutchman"	
Ethnic and Cultural influence	
Living in the Netherlands as a black Dutchman from a former colony	**8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14**
Feeling home and sense of belonging in the Netherlands	
Accounts on race and equality	
Accounts of Dutch racism	
White Spaces: perception and experience	**7, 19, 20, 23**
Understanding of white spaces (physical white spaces, incl. work and uni)	
White supremacy	
Power	
Tools for Success	**11, 21, 22**
Influence of language in succeeding	
Influence of clothing	
Other influences	
Thoughts on Taking Space and Negotiating Worth	**16, 17**

Appendix E: Final Thematic Map

THEME NAME	CODE
Black and Dutch	**1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 13, 15**
Black Dutch: race, nationality, ethnicity	5, 13
Dutch culture through the black Dutch's lens	1, 6
Living in the Netherlands	**8, 9, 10, 12, 14**
Home and belonging	12,14
Accounts on Dutch racism	8, 9, 10
Dutch white spaces	**7, 19, 20, 23**
Physical white spaces	
Cultural white spaces	
Negotiating space in Dutch white spaces	**11, 16, 17, 21, 22**
Dutch language as a tool	11
Clothing as a tool	21
Other tools	22
Taking- instead of negotiating space	16, 17