



Between (in)visibilities: Experiences of race and migration among Brazilians in the Netherlands

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Home University: University of York – Centre for Women’s Studies

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2020



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Signature



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Abstract

This research investigates how Brazilians experience race in the Netherlands. Race is socially constructed and historically and contextually dependent, so this thesis looks at the ways in which race is lived by Brazilians in a new social and racial context. The study focuses on how this type of postcolonial migration (re)produces and (re)constructs racial meanings and identities, and how various axes of difference intersect in this process. Drawing upon 24 semi-structured interviews, the empirical analysis is divided into two parts. *Visa Matters* shows how race is invisible as a term, but present as a structuring notion, in immigration policies. Brazilian women moving to the country in a transnational relationship are subjected to strict and exclusionary controlling practices, which redefine the privilege and mobility they enjoyed in Brazil. At the same time, the different visa regimes re-inscribe and reinforce systems of privilege and inequality, not only among those applying for a ‘partner visa’, but especially among those migrating as highly skilled migrants or those holding dual citizenship, one of which is European. *Visibility Matters* presents how race is currently used in the Netherlands as a way to define and categorise people, despite the general denial of its existence in contemporary relations. A dichotomous colonial classification and a colonial relation of power still persists, where white representations of Dutchness/Europeanness are reinforced in the bodies of Brazilians carrying the visible marks of whiteness, while black/brown Brazilians are taken to represent foreignness. In this exchange, Brazilians who are identified as white enjoy the privileges of whiteness even if they are migrants, while Brazilians identified as black/brown must face the consequences of racism in their everyday lives.

Key words: Brazilian migration, Brazilian migrants, migration, immigration policies, race, racism, whiteness, white privilege, Brazil, the Netherlands

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At last, the end.

The completion of this thesis was marked by many symbolic events. I finalised its main version and entered its last phase on the last day of another cycle: on the eve of my birthday. Also, I am going to submit it exactly nine months after the meeting with my supervisor, when I first presented my research ideas and interests. This thesis was, so to say, a long pregnancy and labour process. Its completion is, indeed, the end of a cycle.

I faced not only the regular hardships intrinsic to this process, but also a pandemic. Hence, this process was marked by stress, despair, insecurity, anxiety, loneliness, fear, and anger. I dealt with delays, physical pain, and frustration. At many moments, I doubted myself and thought I would not be able to continue. However, I carried on and, because of that, I would first like to acknowledge myself. Only I know how hard it was, but I did it. *Vim, vi e venci!*

I would not have been able to make it, though, without the support and help of many special people.

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Let a new cycle begin!

Parece que não vês que as palavras são rótulos que se pegam às cousas, não são as cousas, nunca saberás como são as cousas, nem sequer que nomes são na realidade os seus, porque os nomes que lhes deste não são mais do que isso, os nomes que lhes deste.

José Saramago, *As Intermittências da Morte*

It seems you don't understand that words are the labels we stick on things, not the things themselves, you'll never know what the things are really like, nor even what their real names are, because the names you gave them are just that, the names you gave them.

José Saramago, *Death with Interruptions*

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1. Rationale and research questions

This thesis emerged from my astonishment at perceiving the proximities and points of divergence between the Brazilian and Dutch contexts in relation to race, and thus from my interest in understanding how race is lived and experienced in a context of transnational migration.

I made my first observation regarding this issue even before arriving in the Netherlands. As a student at the University of York, I was offered a two-week intensive Dutch course before my placement in the Netherlands. During classes, the teacher also covered cultural aspects of Dutch society and one of these topics was, of course, the *Zwarte Piet* (Black Pete), the (black-faced) servant/helper/slave of *Sinterklaas*. I was taken aback by the continued existence of such a racist character in a so-called ‘developed’ country. The teacher, a young Dutch woman, in the face of my dismay, argued that *Sinterklaas* was a children’s celebration and that children did not attach any racist meanings to the character. I would learn later that this is one of several ‘excuses’ used in the Netherlands to defend this ‘tradition’, but the evasion of racism felt extremely familiar from discourses in Brazil regarding similar racist situations.

My second experience with a familiar sense of the naturalisation of structural racism came with the well-known difficult housing situation in the Netherlands. After joining several Facebook groups to find a place to live, I started noticing the recurrence of a certain message before the announcement of a vacant room: “Dutch only/ Sorry, no internationals”. I was struck by the innocent claim of the message (Essed & Hoving, 2014; Wekker, 2016), by the routinisation and naturalisation of an everyday practice. “No harm here”, the message appeared to say, “we just want to be with *our own kind*, there is nothing wrong with that”.

I also saw a post asking for more information about the neighbourhood where my future house was situated. The question was about the safety of the area because the person posting had heard comments saying it was dangerous. The replies mainly read: ‘I’ve never had a problem there; they say it’s dangerous only because it’s a neighbourhood with a lot of Moroccans and Turks’. As I read the comments, I immediately thought about Brazil and the unproblematised and racist associations made between black people and criminality. In Brazil, as in the Netherlands, these discourses are usually backed up by statistics of criminality, with

no further problematisation of why those groups represent the majority in such statistics (Ghorashi, 2014; Hayes et al., 2018; van Dijk, 2000).

Later, I even learned of the existence of an '*allochtonen* meter', a website where you can see how many *allochtonen* live in a certain postcode.¹ In Chapter 3, I will elaborate upon this important term in the 'Dutch lexicon', but *allochtoon* means someone 'who came from elsewhere', in contrast to *autochtoon*, someone 'who is from here', which works as a proxy for white people (Wekker, 2016). The main point is that the existence of a website where people can consult how Dutch (white) a certain neighbourhood is (or is not) showed me that spatial segregation along racial lines was also something normalised by the two contexts.

These experiences, among others, made me wonder about the ways in which race is experienced by Brazilians in the Netherlands. In this sense, my aim with this research is to understand how race is manifested and lived in this new social and racial context, especially considering that Brazilians do not represent the racialised Others in contemporary Europe ('the Muslims' and 'the refugees'), but are also defined as coming from a non-Western, underdeveloped country. What are the consequences produced by the racial ambiguity of coming from a former colonised country that went through a process of epistemicide, the murder of knowledge (B. de S. Santos, 2014), and was thus forced to share the same sets of values as Europeans, but is still not considered to be on equal terms with Europe? How does this kind of postcolonial migration (re)construct and (re)produce racial meanings and identities? How do different axes of difference, such as gender, class, or reasons for migration intersect with race and shape the experiences of Brazilians?

These questions are of particular interest because, in Brazil, depending on the tone of a person's skin colour, visible or not-so-visible 'black' features, and the presence of other characteristics such as wealth, education, and social status, a person can move between racialised categories, and can be 'reclassified' as white (Munanga, 1999). However, in the different racial and cultural Dutch context, and considering the postcolonial movement of people from a former colony to a former colonial power, how would this shifting character of whiteness be read in the Netherlands? Would the racial privilege conferred by a person's perceived whiteness in Brazil be transferred to the Dutch context? In this sense, such an analysis would not only help in understanding the daily experiences of Brazilians in the Netherlands, but also racial meanings in the Dutch context, adding to discussions about the

¹ See <http://www.allochtonenmeter.nl/>. For an analysis of the ways in which this application performs and produces racial identities in the Dutch context see van Schie et al. (2020).

applicability of the concept of whiteness to the Netherlands specifically, where a strong emphasis on cultural factors is present, ‘hiding’ race (and especially whiteness) from view (Essed & Trienekens, 2008).

Another motivation for addressing this topic is the scarcity of research about Brazilian migrants in the Netherlands (e.g., Miranda, 2009; Oosterbaan, 2010; Roggeveen & van Meeteren, 2013; van Meeteren et al., 2013; van Meeteren & Pereira, 2013, 2018), although they represent the largest Latin American group (excluding Suriname) in the country. While they still constitute a small group compared to other migrant populations, their presence has steadily and continuously risen over the years. According to Statistics Netherlands (*Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek* – CBS, 2019), the population of Brazilians living in the country (both first and second generation) grew from 6,589 in 1996 to 30,104 in 2019. This population had always been predominantly female, and in 2019 women represented around 59% of the total number of Brazilians in the Netherlands. When considering only first-generation Brazilians, this number rises to 64%, which is probably related to the number of marriages between Brazilian women and Dutch men (van Meeteren et al., 2013).

These figures, however, do not include Brazilians who hold dual citizenship or those who do not have a residence permit to live in the Netherlands. While the first group is missed by statistical monitoring because, by entering the country using their second European citizenship, they are counted together with other European nationals, the second group is naturally not controlled and it is difficult to estimate how big it is. According to van Meeteren et al. (2013), at the time of their research, key informants estimated that around 3,000 to 20,000 Brazilians were living in the Netherlands without a residence permit. Considering the rising trend of ‘legal’ migration (CBS, 2019), these estimates could also be adjusted upwards.

Finally, this research might also contribute to the field of migration studies in its engagement with critical race studies. As scholars Philomena Essed and Kwame Nimako (2006) have shown, critical race research is mostly absent from mainstream migration research in the Netherlands. In their analysis of research, institutions, and policies, they noticed not only a denial of racism but also a delegitimization of research about racism. Although their study was conducted in 2006, their conclusion is still relevant today, as observed by Willem Schinkel (2017, p. 115) when analysing a paper from 2015 by two Dutch scholars denying the notion of racism in the Netherlands, and as I will discuss further in Chapter 3. In this sense, this project will provide an analysis of the phenomenon of migration contextualised within the history of European colonialism and the invention of race and Othering practices.

1.2. On (in)visibilities

In this project, I look at the dialectical practices of visibility and invisibility and how they are co-constituted and coexistent. “Visibility is a complex system of permission and prohibition, of presence and absence, punctuated alternately by apparitions and hysterical blindness” (Kipnis, 1988, p. 158, as cited in Gordon, 2008, p. 15), and in this research it refers to the multiple ways in which race appears/disappears, is present/absent, seen/in the shadows.

Considering that race was developed and exported by Europe, but is largely denied and ignored in the region (El-Tayeb, 2011), I take inspiration from Avery Gordon (2008) to argue that race acts as a seething presence, as a ghost haunting society and reminding us in the present/by its presence, about the acts of the past. In this sense, this thesis intends to make what is ‘invisible’ in Europe, visible.

At the same time, only that which is visible and seen “can generally achieve the status of accepted truth” (Alcoff, 2006, p. 6). Race, despite acting as a ghost in Europe, and thus being disavowed, also works through the realms of what is visible. It is through the visible marks on the body that the identity of a person is defined, and certain meanings and interpretations are attached (Alcoff, 2006). This means that what is visible is taken to represent the truth about a person’s identity, and the practices of what is constructed as visible, and the signification of these signs, are left aside. In this regard, this thesis also aims to question practices around the visibility of race, showing its constructiveness and enquiring into its truths.

1.3. Thesis outline

This thesis is divided into six chapters. In this first chapter, I have introduced the aim and questions guiding this research. I presented my personal and academic reasons for pursuing such a project, and my understanding of (in)visibilities as a conceptual framework to approach race.

In Chapter 2, I describe and reflect upon how I investigate these issues. Starting from the assumption that social research is messy and complicated, I describe the path I took to develop this research, situating myself as a feminist researcher: that is, someone who questions relations of power within research and problematises traditional accounts of impartiality, neutrality, and objectivity. I give an account of my method – semi-structured interviews with 24 Brazilians living in the Netherlands – and the steps taken, from recruitment of participants to analysing the interviews.

In Chapter 3, I give a theoretical and contextual account of how race is understood as a category of analysis in both the Brazilian and Dutch contexts. I argue for the importance of retaining race as an object of inquiry for its workings and impact on everyday life, despite its consensual discrediting as a ‘scientific’ reality. I connect its development with the history of European expansion and colonialism and show how it informs contemporary immigration policies in the Netherlands.

In Chapters 4 and 5, I analyse the data collected through my fieldwork. Chapter 4 discusses the invisible visibility of race in the governmental practices of border control. I show how participants are differently racialised through visa regimes, producing “a new form of transnational racism” (Castles, 2007, p. 360), and how different axes of power interact in this process. In Chapter 5, I approach race through the visibility of the body, and how Brazilians are differently read by the Dutch in their interactions. Thus, I make visible how Dutch people do see the visible manifestations of race, despite general claims stating the opposite, and how this impacts differently upon the lives of Brazilians visibly conforming to white norms, or visibly standing out in their physical racial difference.

Finally, in Chapter 6, I conclude my findings, briefly summarising my analysis and reflecting on my approach. I further reflect on the practices of (in)visibilities, broadening the meanings according to what was first invisible to me when I started this project and later became visible.

Chapter 2 – Organising the ‘Mess’: My Methodological Path

2.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I outline the methodological path that I have taken in this research. My starting point is that social reality is messy and marked by a constant negotiation of meanings between different individuals, discourses, and groups, and thus so is the process of knowledge production (Lykke, 2010). In this sense, although the final product of any research (the writing part) is usually presented in an organised, linear, and straightforward manner, the whole research project involves dealing with the chaotic and messy reality of defining one’s research questions, theoretical approaches, and methods, making sense of the multiple pieces of information gathered, and finally writing it all in an organised and structured way.

I start by calling attention to this point because, although the following sections of this chapter (and the forthcoming chapters) may appear to present this project as a “transparent report about the world studied” (Richardson, 2000, p. 923), in reality it involves writing as a way of ‘wording the world’:

And then we “reword” the world, erase the computer screen, check the thesaurus, move a paragraph, again and again. This “worded world” never accurately, precisely, completely captures the studied world, yet we persist trying. (Richardson, 2000, p. 923)

With that in mind, in this chapter, I will first outline the feminist epistemological assumptions that have informed this research and describe the concept of intersectionality as an important framework guiding my analysis. Then, I will present the methods applied to collect and analyse my empirical data. Given that my research interest involves the experiences of Brazilians in the Netherlands, I used semi-structured qualitative interviews as my primary research method. I will describe the processes involved in this method and present a brief characterisation of the participants. Throughout each of these moments, I will critically reflect upon the choices I made, the issues I encountered, and my ethical commitment and positioning as a researcher, feminist, and woman. This means that I do not reserve a separate section to address reflexivity and ethical considerations, rather they will be considered throughout the chapter, as in my understanding they are interwoven with the whole process.

2.2. Feminist researching

To affirm that a research project is a messy and chaotic endeavour contradicts any notion that knowledge is available ‘out there’, ready to be fully accessed and generalised if the scientist follows the rules of objectivity and neutrality (Hesse-Biber, 2012). On the contrary, I approach my research from a feminist framework, one that questions these traditional scientific assumptions and engages in a critical, relational, located, partial, and political way of producing knowledge.

Questioning traditional norms of objectivity and neutrality does not mean a complete relativization of knowledge. Particularly important is the foundational concept of ‘situated knowledges’ developed by Donna Haraway (1988). To this scholar, feminist objectivity means “limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object” (p. 583). To consider that knowledge is partial, embodied, and located, and thus that it does not merely entail describing from above what one sees (what Haraway calls the ‘god trick’), means to be truly and fully accountable for one’s own claims and knowledge production. As pointed out by Lykke (2010), the researcher “must justify why some – partial – articulations of reality . . . are better than others, and she or he must take moral responsibility for her or his partial position seriously” (p. 135).

Viewed in this way, feminist research is about producing knowledge that is accountable for its own partiality – both because the knowing self is also partial and in permanent construction (Haraway, 1988), and because feminist knowledge-making is political and committed to recognising “issues of power, authority, ethics, and reflexivity into the practice of social research” (Hesse-Biber, 2008, p. 338). Since denying biases, one’s own values brought to the research, and politics is unrealistic and undesirable (Hesse-Biber, 2008), objectivity in this sense means to be partial and not (impossibly) impartial.

In this regard, critical to this research is my assumption that issues of gender, race, colonialism, and nationalism influence and inform (in a relational and co-constitutive manner) our individual histories, our ways of being in the world and relating to each other, and our imaginaries and representations of the world. In this sense, Critical Race Theory, Black Feminism, and Postcolonial Theory are particularly important in this research. Specifically, this project is informed by my ethical and political commitment to taking an anti-racist position and producing knowledge that is critical to understanding unequal relations of power and subjugation, and to the essentialisation and dichotomisation of identities. In this sense, I take the view of filmmaker and feminist Trinh Minh-ha (1987) as an Inappropriate/d Other, one

“who moves about with always at least two/four gestures: that of affirming ‘I am like you’ while pointing insistently to the difference; and that of reminding ‘I am different’ while unsettling every definition of otherness arrived at” (p. 9).

This position is in line with an intersectional framework relating to a “diversity of different kinds of social and cultural in/exclusion, domination/subordination, majoritizing/minoritizing” (Lykke, 2010, p. 135). Intersectionality is a key black feminist concept that was first coined by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1989), although it ‘existed’ as a politics before (e.g., The Combahee River Collective (1977/2017), Gonzalez (1984)). It refers to the “complex, irreducible, varied, and variables effects which ensue when multiple axis of differentiation – economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective and experiential – intersect in historically specific contexts” (Brah & Phoenix, 2004, p. 76). This concept emphasises the fact that these dimensions cannot be separated, which does not mean the mere addition of categories of location of a certain person.

In this sense, I could cite the many locations from which I ‘arrive’ at this research – cis-woman, Brazilian, white, middle-class, educated, able-bodied, psychologist, heterosexual; but they do not cover the multiplicity of my subjectivity, nor do they appear with the same force in all moments, nor are they fixed or mean the same in all contexts. Thus, just like social reality and the research practice, intersectionality is messy and embodied (Ahmed, 2017, p. 119) because, as an Inappropriate/d Other, “location is unstable” (p. 119). Many of these locations can just ‘lag behind’ and appear only in the relation to another body, or they can intentionally be brought to the front of consciousness. For instance, Sara Ahmed (2007) argues that white bodies ‘lag behind’ because their whiteness is not ‘stressed’ in the encounters with others, and thus goes unnoticed. In this sense, I try to make whiteness visible and bring it to the ‘front’ during the interviews, and when I look into participants’ experiences and how my own whiteness reflects on my analysis and my way of looking at the data.

I combine intersectionality and situated knowledge as a way to design my interview guide and to approach the data produced by the interviews, paying specific attention to the locations that ‘lag behind’, taken for granted in their naturalisation. This practice involves the effort of keeping an eye on my own locations lagging behind and on my own assumptions in order not to impose or to ‘miss’ meanings in the relational exchange between me and the participants, and between me and the material gathered in the interviews.

2.3. Doing fieldwork (during a pandemic)

2.3.1. Recruitment

As mentioned above, I decided to conduct semi-structured interviews. With one exception, all participants were recruited through Facebook pages of Brazilians in the Netherlands. These pages are a space where Brazilians help each other, ask for recommendations and advice, and provide and exchange information, usually connected with moving to and living in the Netherlands. As a member of these groups myself, I realised that it would be an effective space to recruit participants for my research. In this sense, the sample is restricted to Brazilians who are users of Facebook and interact with such pages (in such a way that the Facebook algorithm would make my post appear on their timeline).

Recruitment started in early April 2020 and was conducted in two parts, with a space of two weeks between the two recruitment posts. My first post, in which I explained that I was a master's student enrolled at Utrecht University and interested in learning about the experiences of Brazilians who had moved to the country, received 33 replies from people expressing interest in taking part in the research, and the second one received nine replies. They were posted in two distinct groups of comparable size: the first one had around 17,000 members by that time and the second around 14,000. After this first interaction, I sent out private messages further explaining the project and asking for their email contact in order to send information about the research and the declaration of consent. These documents were first produced in English and then translated by me into Portuguese.

While the first call was open to any Brazilian living in the Netherlands, the second was restricted to those Brazilians living in the Netherlands who racially identified themselves as either 'black'/*preta*, 'brown'/*parda*, 'yellow'/*amarela*, or indigenous/*indígena*. Together with 'white'/*branca*, these are the official racial census categories used in Brazil, defined by a pattern of colour classification that goes back to the first Brazilian census in 1872. With the exception of 'yellow', first included in 1940 to designate those of Asian origin or ancestry resulting from Japanese immigration between 1908 and 1929, and 'indigenous', included in 1991 to designate indigenous people, all the categories were already present in the first census (Petruccelli, 2013; Silva & Paixão, 2014).

Finally, an interesting note about the answers to my post: of all the people who first contacted me, only four were men. Of those, only one ended up participating in the research. This can be interpreted in many ways; perhaps it was because I am a woman and thus other women were more responsive to my post, or because the profile of Brazilian migrants is mostly female. But also, what participants shared during the interviews points to a gendered politics of solidarity. My research involved more than filling out forms, for instance, so anyone willing to participate knew they would be sharing their stories and experiences, which requires the dedication not only of time, but also of oneself. Many women stated that they had agreed to participate because they wanted to help me complete my studies or because they knew, from their own experience, how hard it is to do research and find participants. On the other hand, the only male participant, who came from an IT context, said that he had a lot of interest and curiosity about the humanities field, and that was why he wanted to participate. I am not implying that he was not also helping me, but it was really interesting to notice the pattern of justification among women and the different one he provided, especially because these were spontaneous remarks, and not something that I directly asked about.

2.3.2. *Interviewing*

Interviewing as a method has long been used to make people's experiences hearable (DeVault & Gross, 2012). From my own background in psychology, I understand the dynamic of listening and speaking as a powerful way to construct and produce knowledge and meanings. In this sense, considering that my research focuses on investigating the experiences of Brazilians with race and migration, interviewing emerged as the most suitable method to achieve my research aims.

All the interviews were conducted in Portuguese, they took place throughout April and, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, had to be done virtually. This change involved ethical and security protection considerations, especially in choosing which platform to use and negotiating the documentation of consent from participants (DeVault & Gross, 2012). For instance, during this period, Zoom became widely popular; however, several privacy and security issues were reported (O'Flaherty, 2020). Eventually, I conducted most of the interviews using Microsoft Teams, after some adaptation during the first few interviews and recommendation by the Research Data Management Support at the University. Considering

the isolation measures in force at that moment, I gave participants the option to either print the consent form themselves and sign it, or, if they did not have access to a printer, to video-record their consent separately from the interview.

Throughout the fieldwork, various technical issues occurred, such as participants having trouble ‘accessing’ the interview, unreliable connections, and poor audio or video quality, which eventually influenced the dynamic of the interview. The interviews in which I did not encounter any technological issues were all video-recorded with the consent of the participants, while others were only audio-recorded using the recorder on my computer.

This does not mean that the change was a complete disadvantage. While face-to-face interviews involve choosing the interview location, scheduling a mutually convenient time, and considering the time invested in travelling, online interviews were much easier to manage. In this sense, they were practical since participants could choose the best time of day when they were available to talk, even if it was late in the evening, and offered a sense of security and comfort since participants would be in their own homes. Because of that, I was able to schedule many interviews in the first week and the number of appointments that I had to reschedule throughout the fieldwork period was minimal compared to what can happen with in-person interviews.

The characteristics of this method also proved to be a challenge, however, which I realised only later. After the first few interviews, I noticed that most women defined themselves as white. Considering my interest in understanding how race and migration intersect in the experience of Brazilians, and that until that moment I had had two interviews with women who identify as brown, which provided different insights into their experiences, I decided to make a second recruitment call to locate more participants who would identify as either ‘black’, ‘brown’, ‘yellow’, or ‘indigenous’. This meant that, although I had originally planned to conduct 15 interviews, I ended up interviewing 24 participants in order to achieve a balance between participants who identify as white and those who identify as any of the other racial categories.² In this sense, considering the changing nature of the present moment in the face of this pandemic and the potentially increasing use of online interviews as a method, researchers must bear in mind these specificities when planning their research.

The interviews were semi-structured and lasted between 40 minutes and two and a quarter hours, with an average length of 1 hour and 42 minutes. Following the understanding

² Although it was not my intention to dichotomise into two categories (whites and non-whites), I had to consider the limitations of time and scope of a master’s project.

that race is a way of being in the world and making sense of it (Omi & Winant, 2015), I developed my interview guide with questions intended to tackle the experiences of participants in several domains of their lives. Hence, they mostly concerned questions not directly related to race, although those were also present. It must be said that this guide worked to situate myself regarding my topic, but I did not strictly follow all the questions. In fact, the guide was also adapted to the dialogical exchange in the moment of the interview, so some questions were ‘abandoned’ because they proved not to elicit much content, while others were included in view of the persistent recurrence of certain themes. For instance, my first contact with Black Pete made me think about *nega maluca* (crazy nigga), a racist and misogynistic Brazilian carnival costume, so I decided to ask participants about their views on that, but I realised that many people did not know this carnival costume. On the other hand, while I planned to ask about participants’ experiences with stereotypes of Brazilians in the Netherlands, I later added a question specifically addressing physical stereotypes because many women would refer to this.

The question about participants’ racial identification was asked in an open way (i.e. ‘how do you identify in terms of race or colour?’), instead of framing them within the Brazilian census categories, although the second call for recruitment was already framed by a specific racial identification. To facilitate analysis, I matched their answers to the specific census categories, although the reader must bear in mind that they do not refer to fixed identities.

During the first interviews, which were conducted with women who also identify as white, I noticed a certain discomfort on my part when addressing questions about race. Reflecting on this feeling, I identified it as coming from breaking what Brazilian psychologist and black activist Cida Bento (2002) calls the ‘narcissistic pact’. This narcissistic pact, kept by white people, implies the avoidance of racial issues in order to preserve racial privileges. Bento argues that invisibility and silence are the conditions *sine qua non* for the maintenance of this pact, which I was breaking when voicing these questions with ‘my equals’. Having identified my implication in this narcissistic pact, I approached the next interviews (and the process of analysing the data and writing about it) as a ‘world’-traveller (Lugones, 2003), agitating my ethical feminist commitment to an anti-racist politics, and my training as a psychologist to sustain and deal with my own contradictory feelings and take them into consideration during the research process.

Finally, one of the aspects of feminist interview practices is to reflect about issues of power in the research and the strategic disclosure of personal information by the interviewer (DeVault & Gross, 2012). Firstly, the facts that I was an ‘insider’ as a Brazilian and a migrant

myself and most of the women were well-educated and around the same age as me contributed to establishing a more equal relation during the interviews. Although I still held much of the power as the researcher, I approached this process while acknowledging the participants' autonomy and agency: I would start the interviews by explaining that they could refrain from answering any question or ask to stop being recorded, and gave them the space to ask any question themselves. In fact, at the end of the interview, participants would ask about my research interest and my studies, and some about my position on some other matter. I understand such questions as a way for participants to restore some of the power imbalance established in the process of sharing, but also as a sign that a level of rapport had been successfully established and that they felt comfortable in posing questions themselves.

Despite this movement by the participants, I also acknowledge my ethical responsibility in utilising what they shared. Besides taking care of practical ethical and security issues, such as storage of the interview recordings, personal information, and transcripts, I assumed a respectful and caring position when listening to participants' stories. The length of the interviews highlights this exchange, because I wanted to honour the fact that they had agreed to share their stories with me by engaging with them through active, empathic, and careful listening (DeVault & Gross, 2012). I was particularly mindful of this when talking to those participants who identify as brown or black, due to my awareness of the dynamic performed by white people in refusing to listen to black/brown people's experiences (hooks, 1981).

2.3.3. *Data analysis*

The interviews generated a significant amount of information. Firstly, I transcribed the recordings and pseudonymised the participants, erasing any information that could identify them. I then imported the transcripts into NVivo software, which allowed me to gain an overview of all the interviews and to organise the material in a single place. I relied on grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) to approach my data and to start making meaning out of the information I had available. I open-coded all the interviews irrespective of my research questions and then, I brought the themes that emerged into conversation to see how they connected with each other and with my own research interests.

Through this process of transcribing, continuous coding, and close reading of the interviews, I developed an 'intimacy' with the texts, which produced useful notes and

observations about patterns, contradictions, insights, and reflections connected to the research questions and to my own process of interviewing. For instance, a pattern of answers to a specific question about comparative perceptions of race in Brazil and the Netherlands made me realise that participants were understanding the question differently than I had intended, which I only noticed when I was analysing the interviews.

Having established this kind of intimate relation with the interviews, I finally moved on to critically analyse and interpret the content of the identified themes, guided by the intersectional lens defined beforehand and by a critical, historical, and contextual understanding of experience, one that takes experience as “already an interpretation *and* something that needs to be interpreted” (Scott, 1991, p. 797). I took inspiration from a Foucauldian-influenced discourse analysis model in order to “challenge ways of thinking about aspects of reality that have come to be viewed as being natural or normal and therefore tend to be taken for granted” (Cheek, 2008, p. 356). Thus, I could pay attention to the ways in which participants were influenced by and actively constructed discourses about race and migration.

All the transcripts were analysed in Portuguese and only the direct quotations included in this thesis were translated by me. While interpretation is already imbued with power, translation “is always interpretive, critical, and partial” (Haraway, 1988, p. 589). I italicised the quotes to distinguish the participants’ voices from my own (Leurs, 2015), although in my own act of translating them, I was also re-narrating them and thus inscribing my own voice. Drawing from Gloria Anzaldúa’s (1987) reflections about her experience as a Chicana, this act of translation involved a practice of adapting the participants’ narratives for the English speaker, rather than requiring the reader to accommodate the participants. That is, I had to adapt expressions and ways of speaking to an understandable English structure, and in this process, translate my participants’ own subjectivities, since, as Anzaldúa says, “I am my language” (p. 59). This felt extremely uncomfortable and it was one of the most challenging aspects of writing up this project, especially considering that this kind of accommodation is also symbolically inserted into a colonial relation of power, whereby the colonised is obliged to reach for and (literally) speak the language of the coloniser.

Finally, the act of engaging so deeply with the experiences of others around issues of race and migration meant having to deal with my own related experiences. For instance, analysing and writing Chapter 4 proved to be particularly sensitive and acted as a trigger to feelings of anxiety, frustration, and anger in my own dealings with issues of border and movement control as a migrant in Europe. In this sense, it involved rewording my world and the on-going process of writing, stopping, reflecting, creating distance from it, moving on to

write another chapter, and returning to it. Moreover, in this rewording process, these experiences also came into conversation with the analysis of the material and were reflected in my writing. This made me more aware of how immigration policies are easily naturalised and taken for granted when one is not subjected to their disciplinary and controlling practices, and how privileges carried along during the process of migration are important in ‘counteracting’ or minimising the effects of these governmental racialisations.

2.4. Participants

In the previous sections, I have described and reflected upon the assumptions and framework that guided this research and the methods I employed to develop this project. In the final part of this chapter, I will descriptively present the 24 participants.

The limitations of the sampling method shaped a certain homogeneity in the characteristics of the group, although at the same time it allowed a variety of experiences in other respects. For instance, if I had conducted face-to-face interviews, I would have probably only interviewed people around the region of Utrecht (where I lived). However, since the interviews were online, I could talk with participants from different regions across the Netherlands, as can be seen in Figure 1.



Figure 1 - Province of Residency (coloured, count, %)

As mentioned previously, all but one of the participants were female. The group consisted of well-educated participants who were in their mid-30s. They had been living in the Netherlands for an average of two years and five months, but their time in the country varied from one month up to around 12 years.

The main reason for coming to the Netherlands was a relationship with a Dutch person, following the trend described in the last chapter. Related to that, more than half of the interviewees (66.7%) are either married or in a partnered relationship. Of those, eight are

married to a Dutch citizen, six to another Brazilian, and two to another EU citizen. Finally, regarding the racial composition of the group, 12 participants identify as white, three as black, six as brown, and three as yellow.

Information about participants	Frequency
Gender (count)	
Female	23
Male	1
Age (mean, range)	36 (24-56)
Time living in the Netherlands (in months/mean, range)	29 (1-149)
Reasons for immigrating (count, %)	
Family formation	7 (29.2%)
Work	5 (20.8%)
Family reunification (work)	5 (20.8%)
Study	4 (16.7%)
Other	3 (12.5%)
Migration status (count, %)	
With residence permit	21 (87.5%)
Without residence permit	3 (12.5%)
Educational level (count, %)	
Postgraduate	7 (29.2%)
Postgraduate (currently studying)	3 (12.5%)
Undergraduate	12 (50%)
Vocational studies	2 (8.3%)
Marital Status (count, %)	
Married/partnered	16 (66.6%)
Single	4 (16.7%)
Divorced	4 (16.7%)
Racial Self-identification (count, %)	
Black/ <i>preta</i>	3 (12.5%)
Brown/ <i>parda</i>	6 (25%)
White/ <i>branca</i>	12 (50%)
Yellow/ <i>amarela</i>	3 (12.5%)

Table 1 - Descriptive analysis

Chapter 3 – Race Here and There

3.1. Introduction

Having presented my research questions in Chapter 1 and how I approached them methodologically in Chapter 2, I now turn to the theoretical contextualisation of my object of study before presenting the analysis of my results. My interest is focused on the experiences with race of Brazilians in the Netherlands and how they make sense of those experiences in their daily lives. Knowing that “immigrants’ notions of race are often shaped in reference to, and in dialogue with, concepts of race in both their countries of origin and settlement” (Omi & Winant, 2015, p. 126), it is important to understand not only what I mean by race when analysing the participants’ experiences, but also how this concept is signified, both in Brazil and in the Netherlands. What are the racial understandings into which Brazilians were socialised and which they ‘bring’ with them to this new reality? What is the social and racial context into which they arrive and to which they must adapt? This chapter will thus cover my theoretical approaches to race and contextualise its meanings and practices in each of the countries.

The chapter is structured in three parts: I first present the historical colonial development of the concept of race and discuss its differentiation/proximity to the concept of ethnicity. Then I elaborate on how race is seen and understood in Brazil, briefly presenting the historical development of this concept in Brazil’s history. Finally, I move on to present how race is denied and disavowed, in the Dutch context specifically, and in mainland Europe in general. I show that, despite this denial, race is still ‘alive’ in the country as a fundamental means of ordering and categorising, specifically discussing its relation to Dutch immigration policies.

3.2. A brief history of race

To talk about race is to enter a field of dispute and controversy over the origins of the term, definitions of the concept, and, nowadays, its utility and applicability. The notion of

‘race’³ as a ‘scientific’ category of human distinction based on perceived differences can be traced back to the European Enlightenment and the development of science. During this period, producing knowledge meant creating order and classifying reality on the basis of essential differences (Alcoff, 2006; Bhatt, 2010). Nigerian philosopher Emmanuel Eze (1997), who provides a reading of ‘race’ theories from philosophers such as Hume, Kant, and Hegel, shows that, although religion was superseded by reason during the Enlightenment, nature was still understood as a hierarchical system, where all beings were seen to occupy specific positions within a natural order. In this sense, human beings were also categorised into different ‘races’, and scientific knowledge sought to determine the number of ‘races’, the characteristics of each ‘race’, and the hierarchy between them (Miles & Brown, 2003). Physical characteristics, as the most visible markers of difference, were used as criteria for the classification of each ‘race’, which was understood to determine psychological, intellectual, moral, and social abilities, and, consequently, cultural and economic development (or underdevelopment, always compared to the European standard).

At the top of the chain there was the (white male) European (with further different hierarchies within this group; see, for instance, Miles and Brown (2003, pp. 42-43)), while the (black, red, yellow) non-European rest was positioned in the lower ranks of racial evolution (Bethencourt, 2013; Eze, 1997). In this regard, although ‘race’ as a ‘scientific’ category only took form during the eighteenth century, its ideas were informed and influenced by the rationale produced during the two centuries prior to this period, driven by the European expansion, exploration, and colonisation of other lands and populations (Grosfoguel, 2004; Hall, 2017; Omi & Winant, 2015). Portuguese historian Francisco Bethencourt (2013) shows that travel writings, paintings, and other art productions not only contributed to the construction of Europe as white, civilised, and superior, and the rest as non-white, savage, and inferior, but also already deployed a language of classification in terms of physical appearance and cultural elements. For instance, in 1570, Abraham Ortelius published the first printed atlas of the world, with an illustration of the four continents personified by four allegorical figures. This illustration, using physical and cultural markers, already highlighted the idea of the superiority of Europe, represented as sitting at the top, above all the others.⁴ In fact, according to Bethencourt (2013),

³ Whenever I refer to ‘race’ as a biological category, as it will be conceptualised in this historical context, I will use quotation marks to differentiate it from the understanding of race as a social construction with which I am working in this research.

⁴ For a full description and reproduction of the image, see Bethencourt (2013, pp. 107–110).

“it was the synthetic vision of Ortelius’s typology that proved most successful and finally was inscribed into the new classification of nature created by Linnaeus⁵ in the eighteenth century” (p. 496). In this sense, what was officially defined as ‘race’ within scientific discourse from the eighteenth century onward is only part of the European colonialist and imperialist history of white-supremacist race-making.

The discrediting of the scientific validity of the concept of ‘race’ and the end of what is now named ‘scientific racism’ is generally attributed to the experiences of WWII and the use of ‘race’ theories by the Nazis to implement the Holocaust. Although Miles and Brown (2003) argue that the credibility of ‘race’ was already in decline in scientific circles before 1933, it is telling that an arbitrary idea of the superiority/inferiority of certain groups according to equally arbitrary characteristics was rejected only when it promoted violence, exploitation, and death *within* Europe (Bhambra, 2009; Césaire, 1950/2000), after having been systematically used to justify the slavery and oppression of non-Europeans at the height of scientific racism (Feagin & O’Brien, 2010). In any case, ever since the end of WWII, it has usually been accepted that ‘race’ as a biological category has no scientific value and that there are no innate characteristics in humans that determine their psychological and social abilities, much less ‘cultural development’.

3.3. Race and ethnicity in contemporary scholarship

The decline of scientific racism led to a debate about the utility of continuing to use ‘race’ as an analytical concept (Bhatt, 2010; Miles & Brown, 2003). Among those who follow a nominalist or eliminatist approach, the understanding is that, since ‘race’ has no biological meaning, it should be avoided. It is also argued that the continued use of a concept that has no biological validity only reifies its existence and contributes to racism (Alcoff, 2006). This position is particularly present in mainland Europe, where scholars, politicians, and public discourses tend to avoid any mention of race.

⁵ Linnaeus (1707–78) in his *Systema Naturæ* (1735) classified man into four groups: European (white), American (red), Asiatic (dark), and African (black). He later developed this classification, moving from a hierarchy based on skin colour to one that also included psychological and political differences. For instance, Europeans were “fair, sanguine, and brawny, with flowing yellow hair, and blue eyes”, “acute, and inventive”, and “regulated by custom and law” (Bethencourt, 2013, p. 348), while Africans were “black, phlegmatic, and relaxed”, “had frizzy black hair”, were “indolent, negligent, and crafty”, and “were governed by caprice” (pp. 348-349).

However, Panamanian-*United Statesian*⁶ critical race scholar Linda Alcoff (2006) argues that a nominalist approach fails to understand the multiple meanings that race can assume by limiting its definition only to biology (which then makes race non-existent). In what she calls contextualism, race is considered to be socially constructed, historically dependent, and culturally contextual. Race is 'real' insofar as it has an impact on people's lives, but its meanings are relational and variable in time and space. In the same way, South African critical race scholar David Theo Goldberg (2006) understands race as "a way (or set of ways) of being in the world, of living, of meaning-making" (p. 334). In this sense, it is more than a false scientific claim about biology, but a complex relation "of culture tied to colour, of being to body, of 'blood' to behaviour" (p. 349).

Accordingly, *United Statesian* critical race theorists Michael Omi and Howard Winant (2015) are also critical of considering race as an essence rooted in nature, something fixed, objective, and concrete, but also of considering it purely as an illusion, as though it had no social consequences in life. To these authors, "race is a concept, a representation or signification of identity that refers to different types of human bodies, to the perceived corporeal and phenotypic markers of difference and the meanings and social practices that are ascribed to these differences" (p. 111). Within the history of race-making, certain physical markers, such as skin colour, hair texture, or shape of the nose, are selected and given meanings that justify or reinforce social differences, in a process called racialisation. Thus, racialisation implies the process of ascribing racial meanings to groups or individuals who were previously unclassified, which is a useful critical concept to employ in the cultural constructiveness of race discussed here.

It must be said that, among those scholars who understand race as an illusion (Omi & Winant, 2015), ethnicity is usually taken to be a better option to address differences between social groups (Miles & Brown, 2003; Miles & Small, 1999; Sollors, 2002). In this sense, ethnicity is usually grounded in culture and understood as a voluntary (rather than imposed) association with a certain group based on shared language, customs, traditions, and beliefs of a shared origin (Hall, 2017; Miles & Small, 1999). However, to confine race to the realms of biology and ethnicity to the realms of culture is to engage in a double process of rigidity and essentialisation, as though there were a clear division between culture and nature (Sollors,

⁶ Trying to not re-inscribe the neo-imperial matrix of power present between the United States of America (USA) and Latin America, I use this term to refer to US citizens, since 'American' refers to anyone who comes from America. For instance, in Portuguese, we have the word *estadounidense*. For more about this discussion, see L. C. V. Santos (2006).

2002), and as though ethnicity-making never used physical markers to define belonging (or exclusion), and race-making has not been conducted with reference to cultural differences ever since the beginnings of Spanish and Portuguese colonisation. In this regard, Jamaican British cultural theorist Stuart Hall (2017) argues that:

Whereas race is grounded in the biological and slides toward the cultural, *ethnos* or ethnicity . . . appears to be grounded exclusively in the cultural, in the realm of shared languages, specific customs, traditions, and beliefs, *yet it constantly slides*—especially through commonsense conceptions of kinship—toward a transcultural and even transcendental fix in common blood, inheritance, and ancestry, all of which gives ethnicity an originary foundation in nature that puts it beyond the reach of history. (pp. 108-109)

Bearing this in mind, talking about ethnic groups does not guarantee that identities will not be essentialised or constructed in a hierarchised way, or diminish the consequences of racialisation, oppression, and dehumanisation (El-Tayeb, 2011; Weiner, 2012). Moreover, since ethnicity implies a choice of belonging to a certain group, merely substituting ethnicity for race loses sight of power differences and thus disavows the specific experiences of racialised ethnic groups or members (Grosfoguel, 2004; Omi & Winant, 2015; Weiner, 2012).

Considering the importance of taking into account the historical continuities of exploitation and domination between Europeans and non-Europeans, inaugurated with colonialism, Puerto Rican decolonial sociologist Ramón Grosfoguel (2004) argues that racial and ethnic identities cannot be considered separately, but that identities “operate as both ‘racialized ethnicities’ and ‘ethnicized races’” (p. 332), which is the position assumed here. Grosfoguel develops his arguments from the concept of the colonality of power advanced by Peruvian decolonial and critical theorist Aníbal Quijano (2007), which posits that the power structure that produced the social discrimination and domination of what was later to be named ‘racial’ or ‘ethnic’ is still the framework within which social relations operate. In this sense, the colonality of power historicises and actualises the colonial hierarchical system that follows race or ethnicity, and shows that the avoidance of one term in favour of the other does not erase this structure of power.

Finally, as argued by critical race scholar Alana Lentin (2016), rather than staying in a circular debate about whether race is a biological or cultural phenomenon, it is important to understand what race does, rather than what is taken to be. In this sense, “our focus should be on the function performed by the idea of race and how it continues to underpin institutions,

laws, policies, and consequent attitudes. Race is inherently bound to reproduction, and is thus produced, naturalized and essentialized.” (Lentin, 2016, p. 44)

Having clarified that race is a category created during European colonialism and that it still structures and informs our ways of seeing the world, being in the world, and making sense of reality, I now move on to discuss how this concept is conceptualised, first in Brazil and then in the Netherlands.

3.4. Race in Brazil

“The language of these heathens all along the coast is one: it lacks three letters – there is no *F*, *L*, or *R*, a thing worthy of astonishment, because in this way there is no Faith (*Fé*), Law (*Lei*), or King (*Rei*), and in this way they live without justice and disorderly”. There you have the “natives of the land”, characterised by the notion of “lack”. (Schwarcz & Starling, 2015, pp. 64–65, *my translation*)

In an extensive biography of Brazil, Brazilian historians Lilia Schwarcz and Heloisa Starling reproduce the words of Pero Magalhães Gândavo who, in 1570, wrote about the people of the ‘new’, ‘discovered’ land. Lacking all the key attributes of any civilised society, according to the Portuguese understanding at that moment, the indigenous people needed to be subjugated to a colonial ‘civilising mission’: they would be converted to Christianity (after it was determined that they were, in fact, members of the same species as Europeans), taught, and saved from their savagery and backwardness (or, if they resisted, killed). This subjugation by the European shaped the formation of Brazilian society and continues to be manifested in contemporary relations between the Dutch and Brazilians, as will become clear in the following chapters.

Pero Vaz de Caminha described the native people as *pardos*⁷ in 1500 in the first written register of official Brazilian history (Biblioteca Nacional, 2015), and it is telling that this is the term that still figures today as one of the official racial census categories of Brazil. This proves, as previously discussed, that discourses of race cannot be understood separately from the history of European expansion and colonialism, and that the meanings of physical appearance

⁷ This refers to a brownish or greyish colour. The word can be found from the fourteenth century onwards and was widely used in everyday life (Bethencourt, 2013). In Caminha’s letter, he uses the term four times, twice to characterise the indigenous people and twice to characterise parrots. In contemporary Brazil, however, it is no longer used as a colour in the current language, unless implicitly in the name of a kind of paper: *papel pardo*.

and culture have been co-constituted ever since this period. Also, together with the role of the transatlantic slave trade, it shows that, as a society that came into being through subjection and constant essentialisation and reification of its peoples as an 'Other', Brazil is deeply marked by racial thinking and racial making.

The region now named Brazil was invaded and occupied by the Portuguese in 1500, and as early as 1549 the first enslaved Africans were brought to the country (Moura, 1992; Schwarcz, 2003). From this period until the abolition of slavery in 1888 (66 years after gaining independence from Portugal and one of the last countries to do so), Brazil was the country that received the highest number of enslaved Africans. Brazilian sociologist Clóvis Moura (1992) estimates that at least 40% of all enslaved Africans were brought to Brazil. Schwarcz and Starling (2015) estimate that 8 to 11 million Africans in total were enslaved and, of those, 4.9 million went to Brazil. Brazilian sociologist Sales Augusto dos Santos (2002) estimates this figure as 3.5 to 3.6 million. Despite the lack of agreement between scholars about the overall numbers, the major presence of African people in Brazil's history and the impact of this history on Brazilian society is unquestionable.

Many scholars have demonstrated the disproportionate numbers of men and women during the colonial period (Nascimento, 2016; Schwarcz, 2003; Schwarcz & Starling, 2015). In contrast to colonization in the USA, where whole families would migrate to the 'new land', in Brazil it was mostly unaccompanied men who arrived in great numbers (Schwarcz, 2003). Also, men represented 65% of the Africans brought as slaves to Brazil, due not only to a specific preference for a male workforce, but also as a characteristic of the matrilineal African societies (Schwarcz & Starling, 2015). According to Brazilian activist and politician Abdias Nascimento (2016), the gender imbalance in colonial Brazil was close to one woman to five men and practices of sexual violence by the Portuguese, especially against enslaved women, was widespread.

These numbers are relevant when we address the high prevalence of 'miscegenation' in Brazil and for understanding the complexity of racial formation in the country. Opposing the idea that this proves a less racist attitude by the Portuguese due to the sexual interactions, this 'miscegenation' represents a triple oppression: colonial, sexual, and racial. This historical evidence has had many consequences until contemporary times, considering that the body of the Brazilian woman, especially of the '*mulata*', is still sexualised and objectified by the male gaze.

'*Mulato*', the designation for a descendent of a white and a black person, stems from the word 'mule', the offspring of a horse and a donkey. When naming the results of

‘miscegenation’, animal metaphors were common (Bethencourt, 2013). This reveals the underlying idea of the degeneration of the ‘mixed race’, or *mestiço*, present in the European theorisation of ‘race’. The Brazilian elite, who consumed and imported such European ‘scientific knowledge’, could not deny the ‘miscegenation’ of the Brazilian population but, based on these racial theories, they developed their own understanding as they searched for a national identity after the abolition of slavery in 1888 (Munanga, 1999). The concern at that moment (or the ‘white fear’ as it was described by Brazilian historian Célia Marinho de Azevedo (1987)) was how to incorporate this new category of citizen, this ‘black wave’ (Azevedo, 1987) of former enslaved black people, who, until then, had been considered to be ‘moving’ property, just like pigs or horses (Schwarcz & Starling, 2015).

It is from this intellectual production and discussion at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century that the ideology of ‘*embranquecimento*’ (‘whitening’) of the population, and later of racial democracy, was developed. Discussing the ‘miscegenation’ in Brazil, Congolese-Brazilian anthropologist Kabengele Munanga (1999) shows that, despite the different elaborations, most of those intellectuals believed in the inferiority of the non-white ‘races’, especially the black race. However, since they could not deny the fact that the Brazilian population was already mixed, the ‘mulatto’ and other ‘*mestiços*’, especially those with ‘lighter’ complexions who ‘looked white’, emerged as a transitional category towards whiteness (Nascimento, 2016).

The idea, then, was to ‘whiten’ the population through the immigration of white Europeans, which would overcome the supposed inferiority brought by ‘black and indigenous blood’.⁸ In this context, ‘miscegenation’ (coupled with immigration policy) and cultural assimilation practices were considered the solution to this negatively evaluated Brazilian diversity, and racial meanings became unconditionally entangled with and defined by phenotypical appearance (especially skin colour, hair texture, and shape of the nose), which were associated with other socio-economic markers, such as education, social status, and wealth (Munanga, 1999).

⁸ The desired immigrant was the representative of the ‘white race’, usually defined as European: for instance, the government initially made entrance to Brazil free to any person, *except* those coming from Asia or Africa, and denied entrance to US citizens when it was verified that they were black. Also, amongst Europeans, the preference was for Nordics, Swiss, and Germans, while later accepting, “not without reluctance, Italians, Spaniards, less valued, but from the point of view from that time, ‘at least white’.” (Petruccelli, 2013, Histórico da classificação racial no Brasil section, para. 7, *my translation*) Between 1884 and 1913, roughly 2.7 million white Europeans immigrated to Brazil. Immigration policies included subsidised ship passages, a fixed stipend for settling, and land grants for those willing to immigrate to the country (Silva & Paixão, 2014).

It is with the work of Gilberto Freyre that the positive meaning of ‘miscegenation’ is consolidated, and the final boundaries of a Brazilian national identity are settled (Munanga, 1999). By shifting his focus from ‘race’ to culture, Freyre argues that Brazilian society was created by the positive cultural contribution of the three foundational ‘races’. In this sense, with his book published in 1933, *Casa Grande e Senzala* (The Masters and the Slaves), the idea of Brazil as a racial democracy was finally born, since this cultural and racial miscegenation was understood to have generated people who lived harmoniously and without prejudice (especially in comparison to the segregation in the USA). Moreover, since ‘miscegenation’ became a national brand, the ‘mulatto’ was erected as a national symbol of Brazilian ‘racial democracy’ and diversity was turned into unity (“we are all Brazilians”), thus hiding racial inequality and exclusion from view (Munanga, 1999). It became common-sense that any mention of someone’s race was rude and racist, and thus should be avoided. Since we were all Brazilians, colour did not matter and was not to be seen.

Brazilian society was formed, and is informed by, ideals of whiteness, white superiority and black inferiority, racial inequality and exclusion, and, at the same time, by the homogenisation of difference, racial and cultural mixture as national pride, racial disavowal, and ideals of racial tolerance, equality, and cordiality. Concisely, Brazilians live what Roth-Gordon (2017) calls a ‘comfortable racial contradiction’, the ability to handle all of these contradictions in everyday relations in a ‘comfortable’, common-sensical way. This way of dealing with race is present in how participants ‘arrive’ in the Netherlands and look to their own experiences and the experiences of others, in how they identify discriminatory situations, without necessarily naming them as racism, or see their own racial privilege as whites, without recognising their implication in racism and racial inequality.

3.5. (The absent presence of) Race in the Netherlands

As mentioned above, despite having been developed in Europe and ‘exported’ to the world, race is largely ignored on the European continent (El-Tayeb, 2011), including in the Netherlands. Talking about race in Europe invokes the experience of the Holocaust, which is understood to be the quintessential example of horror and violence (Foucault, 2003; Gilroy, 2005; Mbembe, 2003). However, the construction of the singularity of the Holocaust in collective memory has contributed to blocking the remembrance of the horrors and violence of Europe’s colonial past, disconnecting it both from what happened during WWII (Goldberg, 2006; Stratton, 2003) and from contemporary racialised enactments in Europe. In this sense,

because the experience of the genocide of European Jews is taken as the point of reference, race is rendered “unmentionable, unspeakable if not as reference to an anti-Semitism of the past that cannot presently be allowed to revive” (Goldberg, 2006, p. 339). And because this reference is symbolically represented by the mass killings in Auschwitz, racism also evaporates from view, because only blatant and highly visible acts of violence by neo-Nazi or right-wing extremists, who are clearly deploying biologised discourses of race, can have a chance of being recognised as racist, if at all.

In this sense, racism is usually recognised as non-existent in the Netherlands, found only elsewhere, such as in the USA. The country portrays a self-image of tolerance towards difference, which further reinforces the denial of racism and the implicit pact of not mentioning race or racism (Wekker, 2016). Hence, the development of Race Critical Theory in the country is restricted to a handful of names (see Essed and Nimako, 2006, p. 296), with recognised adverse consequences for those daring to confront the national identification with tolerance and to point out the structural racism underlying Dutch society. These consequences include rejection and ridicule (Hondius, 2014, p. 279), marginalisation (van Dijk, 2002), hate mail and lawsuit threats “for inciting racism against the Dutch” (Wekker, 2018, p. 137). Despite the growing number of people contesting such silencing and critically addressing such issues, discourses simply eschewing these critiques instead of critically engaging with them are still present.

For instance, in light of the killing of George Floyd by the police in the USA in May 2020, an article addressing students’ and professionals’ experiences with Dutch racism was published in the Digital University Journal (DUB) of Utrecht University (Klaasman, 2020). This article was answered by another one, five days later, by a white male⁹ Dutch student with the same “forcefulness, passion, and even aggression that race elicits in the Netherlands, while at the same time elusiveness, denial, and disavowal reign supreme”, as described by Wekker in 2016 (p. 30).

His article, “I won’t be told I’m racist” (van den Broek, 2020), exemplifies one of the findings of Surinamese-Dutch critical race theorist Philomena Essed (1991) in her research about everyday racism in the Netherlands, where to the white Dutch, “pointing out racism is seen as an accusation and, therefore, as an offense to the other party’s personality” (p. 274). So, instead of engaging with the problematic presented by the first article, this student

⁹ His own definition.

introduces his text with the typical disavowal of racism disguised as recognition, pointing out that “we do have a serious racism and discrimination problem” (para. 2) and then moving on, after the “but...”, to discredit evidence of racism, disregard people’s experiences, and even question professionals’ competence, using well-known colour-blind arguments, such as ‘reverse racism’ and ‘to see colour is to be racist’. As claimed by Surinamese Dutch critical race and gender studies scholar Gloria Wekker (2016), “denial and disavowal, the simultaneous affirmation and denial of a thought or desire, are important modes the majority white population uses to deal with race” (p. 30).

In this context, as in many other European countries, Dutch discourses make use of ethnic terminology in place of racial categories. Apart from the first article of the Dutch Constitution,¹⁰ the Personal Data Protection Act, and the Central Bureau of Statistics Act (Yanow et al., 2016), the term is mainly absent from political and public discourses, in what Dutch historian Dienke Hondius (2009) calls the anti-racist norm: “the norm that says that racial difference does not matter” (p. 41). However, this does not mean that social relations and practices are not informed by racial thinking and race-making, as I will demonstrate by analysing my data in the coming chapters. In fact, as demonstrated by Yanow et al. (2016), race clearly appears on medical registration forms or implicitly persists by using place of origin or birthplace as a proxy. Interestingly, as informed by Yanow et al. (2016) from Hooghiemstra (2007, p. 100), the Personal Data Protection Act determines that race “refers to any designation on the basis of ‘skin color, origin [*afkomst*], and national or ethnic ancestry [*afstamming*]” (p. 194), lumping together phenotypical features, place of origin, and ancestry, and making it clear that discourses about race can be evoked even when the term is absent.

3.6. Race and migration in the Netherlands

Contemporary readings of racial and ethnic relations in the Netherlands cannot be understood separately from the history of the Dutch colonial period, or from the history of migration policies in the country. As a European imperialist and colonial power, the Netherlands was also involved in developing a racial grammar of white Christian European superiority in order to promote enslavement, exploitation, and violence in its colonies. The colonial period is connected to the development of an ‘us and them’ mentality, different

¹⁰ “All persons in the Netherlands shall be treated equally in equal circumstances. Discrimination on the grounds of religion, belief, political opinion, race or sex or on any other grounds whatsoever shall not be permitted.” (Government of the Netherlands, 2012)

meanings to skin colour, different classes of citizenship, practices of movement control, the essentialisation of culture, and a politics of belonging to and exclusion from Dutchness that have informed and still inform current migration practices and discourses (Ghorashi, 2014; Jones, 2014). It is important to understand such connections to make sense of the data I will analyse in the following chapters.

Like Brazil, the Netherlands was one of the last countries to abolish slavery, in the Dutch East Indies in 1862 and in the West Indies in 1863 (Jones, 2016), although slavery was banned on Dutch soil (which does not mean that there were no enslaved black people in the Netherlands, as shown by Hondius (2011)). Also, as in Brazil, the abolition of slavery did not bring full citizenship to former enslaved people, nor did it mean the end of privilege and power for white male Europeans. For instance, in 1892, the Dutch government divided the population of the former ‘Dutch East Indies’ into two groups, the ‘native’ Dutch *subjects* and the ‘European’ Dutch *citizens*, with only citizens having the right to assume socioeconomic, military, and political positions in the colony. Although the legally recognised child of a male Dutch citizen and a female ‘native’ subject, known as an ‘Indo-European’, was considered a citizen, skin colour made a difference as to whether they would be fully socially accepted (Jones, 2016).¹¹

In the case of the ‘West Indies’, during the enslavement period, sexual violence by white men against black enslaved women also produced a group of ‘coloured’ people, who were free, but still considered inferior to the ‘pure’ whites (Allofs et al., 2008, p. 382). After abolition, assimilation policies were applied and everyone was granted full Dutch citizenship; however, the most powerful positions, as in the East, were primarily held by white male Europeans and fair-skinned Creoles¹² (Jones, 2016), creating a system of skin tone classification reminiscent of what still happens in Brazil today.

The independence of Indonesia in 1949 marks the beginning of a pattern of immigration that would reach the Netherlands. Starting with 1) the ‘repatriation’ of the white Dutch and the ‘Indo-European’ Dutch from Indonesia, the Netherlands received 2) labour migrants, especially from Morocco and Turkey, during the 1960s, 3) Surinamese during the period pre- and post- independence in 1975, 4) residents from the Dutch Antilles at the end of the 1980s, 5) asylum seekers and refugees, particularly from former Yugoslavia, during the 1990s, and 6)

¹¹ In reference to the interplay between gender and race, not only could a Dutch woman not grant citizen status to her offspring with a ‘native’ man, but she would also lose her own status and be turned into a ‘native’ subject (Jones, 2016).

¹² Surinamese of African and European heritage.

migrants from other Western and European countries, particularly increasing in the last few years due to the enlargement of the European Union. Despite this history of migration, the government only recognised the Netherlands as a country of immigration in 1998 (van Meeteren et al., 2013). Also, although contemporary migration in the Netherlands includes groups from different regions, who arrived during different periods, and came in for different reasons (including the growing number of highly skilled professionals), public discourse is still dominated by the groups from those earlier arrivals, especially the Turks, Moroccans, and Surinamese (Entzinger, 2014), which highlights a racialised ethnic focus underlying these discourses.

In the case of postcolonial migrants from Indonesia, although they are now represented as an example of integration, a racialised grammar was initially used in order to contain the immigration of these ‘Indo-European’ Dutch citizens. According to Jones (2016), they were first pressured to opt for Indonesian nationality, despite their Dutch identification, and then discouraged to move to the Netherlands. Constructed as ‘Eastern Oriented Dutch Citizens’ by the Dutch government, their requests for travel loans were initially rejected under the argument that they were “mentally, socially and physically maladapted to Dutch society” (p. 612), while ‘Western Oriented Dutch Citizens’ (white Dutch) were unconditionally granted travel loans.

In the early 1960s, a new trend of migration was established with the Dutch programmes of labour migration. These so-called ‘guest workers’ came initially from Spain, Italy, and Portugal, and later from Turkey and Morocco, until the oil crisis of 1973, when formal recruitment ended. As the term implies, these migrants were expected to return to their country of origin, but many stayed, particularly workers from Turkey and Morocco. Even after the end of recruitment, new migrants from those countries arrived through family reunification creating a large number of marriage migration (van Meeteren et al., 2013).

Finally, the process of decolonisation of Suriname was not only a nationalist movement, but also involved the Dutch desire to stop the significant migration from Suriname to the Netherlands (Allofs et al., 2008, p. 345). In their case, despite the assimilation policies of Dutch language and Dutch culture present in the colony, Dutch politicians argued that South America constituted “*the* proper socio-cultural habitat” for Surinamese to inhabit (Jones, 2016, p. 611), in a move that paralleled to the one applied to ‘Indo-Europeans’. In face of the Dutch government’s rejection of a referendum on independence for Suriname, one-third of the population – around 300,000 Surinamese – moved to the Netherlands before independence in 1975 (Jones, 2016), and more followed afterwards, under the five-year regulation of free migration (Allofs et al., 2008, p. 345).

These migration groups were met with different governmental policies, which were marked by a division between ‘them’ and ‘us’ and focused strongly on an essentialised idea of culture, embedded within a racialised process of othering. Until 1980, the assumption was that immigrants were only temporarily in the country and would return to their country of origin. The idea was to keep this migrant population separate from the ‘native’ population in order to guarantee that they would maintain their cultural identity (Entzinger, 2014). As sharply put by Dutch social theorist Willem Schinkel (2017), for the political left, this was thought to be a respectful attitude, while for the right it guaranteed that no cultural mixing would occur, since these groups were not considered part of Dutch society.

This exclusionary approach eventually led to discontent, especially among the emerging second generation of Moluccans.¹³ In face of violent conflicts with this group during the 1970s, the Dutch government became more aware of the shifting dynamics of immigration (Entzinger, 2014), and in 1983 approved a ‘Minority Policy’ that targeted Antilleans, Moroccans, Moluccans, Surinamese, Turks, and caravan dwellers. The understanding underlying this policy was that these so-called ‘ethnic minority groups’ would not return to their country of origin after all, and thus the government should develop ways to facilitate their emancipation (Essed & Nimako, 2006).

Although culturalist in regard to the cultural identity of these migrants, the focus was their economic vulnerability (Schinkel, 2017). The motto of these policies was ‘integration with preservation of identity’ and, according to Schinkel, this is one of the reasons why people would later speak of multiculturalism in the Netherlands. Schinkel argues, however, that this concept was not present in nor did it inspire Dutch policies. On the contrary, the policy already had an assimilationist orientation in the sense that “it assumed that the vantage point of one’s ‘own culture’ would offer a strong stepping stone toward assimilation, a process in which the stepping stone would be cast aside” (p. 122).

In 1989, the ‘Minority Policy’ was changed to the ‘Allochthonous Policy’ which questioned the focus on only those six groups and argued for the inclusion of all third-world migrants (Essed & Nimako, 2006). By this time, the terminology ‘ethnic minority group’ had been dropped and the term *allochtonen* to designate those ‘who are not from here’, in contrast

¹³ Moluccans represented another group of migrants from the aftermath of Indonesia’s independence. As ‘native’ subjects, they were given Indonesian nationality, but their loyalty to the Netherlands and their position as soldiers for the Dutch against Indonesian nationalists put them in a delicate position in the country. Hence, in 1951, in what was intended to be a temporary solution, the government brought around 12,500 Moluccans and their families to the Netherlands. They were housed in former military/Nazi camps while awaiting their promised independent nation supported by the Netherlands (Weiner, 2015).

to *autochthonen*, Dutch ‘natives’, was consolidated in public and policy discourse. However, the term had already been used in a 1971 report by Dutch sociologist Hilda Verwey-Jonker for the Dutch government. Van Schie (2018) lists the three criteria used by Verwey-Jonker in the report ‘*Allochtonen in Nederland*’ (Allochthonous in the Netherlands) for her choice of the groups. They:

- (1) have come to the Netherlands in large numbers and in a relatively short time, (2) have been subject to some form of government policy to facilitate their arrival in Dutch society, and (3) are clearly physically recognisable because of their skin colour and a language incomprehensible for Dutch people. (Van Schie, 2018, p. 78)

As can be seen, although intended as ‘neutral’ language to address difference, the first application of the term already used phenotypical markers to differentiate those who are not ‘from here’, thus referring to whiteness (without mentioning whiteness, as usually occurs) as one of the foundations of Dutch identity. In this sense, in practice, allochthonous means those who are not visibly white, while non-white Dutch are not considered autochthonous. Interestingly, Yanow and van der Haar (2013) show that the origin of the term already carries an essentialised and unchanging notion of identity. Used in geology to refer to rocks that were not originally formed in the region where they were found, allochthonous rocks would be recognised for specific characteristics from their context of formation and would always be recognised as being from somewhere else, regardless of the passage of time.

In 1998, a new policy was issued (‘Integration Policy’), which would no longer target groups but individual immigrants. The idea was that immigrants should *seize* the opportunities *offered* by Dutch society and that many of the disadvantages experienced by those individuals were due to their lack of knowledge of the Dutch language and society. Since 1998, then, it has been compulsory for newly arrived immigrants to attend language and civic integration (*inburgering*) courses (Prins & Saharso, 2008). With this policy, the cultural assimilative orientation that would mark the next phase is already visible; however, the measures were still focused on socioeconomic integration, “from which cultural integration was thought to follow” (Prins & Saharso, 2008, p. 370). Despite promising results, especially concerning the fall in unemployment rates, other indicators were still considered unsatisfactory, such as language proficiency, school and housing segregation, and delinquency rates (Entzinger, 2014).

In 2000, Dutch social democrat Paul Scheffer voiced the concern of many in his essay ‘*The Multicultural Tragedy*’: that multiculturalism has failed (although, as pointed out by Schinkel (2017), multiculturalism has never guided Dutch policies), that many immigrants did not and were not willing to integrate into Dutch society, and that democratic values were at

risk because of the growing Muslim population. In 2002, in the aftermath of the killing of Pim Fortuyn, the Dutch politician known for his aversion to Islam and critiques of toleration policies, integration policy changed to a clear assimilative focus. Migrants were expected to overcome the assumed backwardness of their own cultural background and were held responsible for their own integration (or failure to integrate) into society. Thus, they should invest in their own integration process, including paying for language and integration courses and exams. A stricter immigration policy was developed with tougher rules for asylum requests, the establishment of minimum age and income requirements for family reunification, mandatory pre-departure language and integration exams, as well as knowledge of Dutch history. In particular, they were expected to conform to Dutch culture and values, which became heavily based on discourses of gender and sexuality rights and equality, especially women's emancipation and same-sex marriage (Entzinger, 2014; Schinkel, 2017).

This turn put culture under the microscope, further essentialising and naturalising its meanings and consequences. In this sense, culture is deemed to be fixed and the cause of inequalities and economic differences; that is, it is turned into "a problem in its own right" (Prins & Saharso, 2008, p. 370). The focus on assimilation, in becoming 'like us', however, generates further difference by constantly reifying those who need to assimilate or integrate in comparison to those for whom integration is not an issue (Schinkel, 2017). In this regard, returning to the original meaning of *allochthonous*, it does not matter how long a person has been living in a society, or how well-integrated they are, if they carry the marks that show they are not 'from here' (e.g., non-whiteness or non-Christianity), they will always be controlled in terms of their level of integration, in what Schinkel calls 'moral monitoring'. This monitoring is exemplified by the categorisation of and research about the first, second, third, *nth* generations of migrants, whereby, from the second generation onwards, they can no longer be considered migrants.

During all these phases, although racial terminology is absent, racialisation is present. Firstly, ethnicity is ascribed by the government, instead of being a voluntary choice, and people are lodged in categories that are not only essentialised but also constructed with no reference to a shared language, history, culture, or origins. The standard is the (white) Dutch, against whom all others are defined (and lumped together) and compared. Among those who are not (white) Dutch, a second measure is established to distinguish Westerners, a definition which carries all the meanings of superiority and development created during the European expansion and colonisation, against the backward, underdeveloped, inferior non-Westerners.

In this sense, although the binary *allochthonous/autochthonous* has not been used by CBS (n.d.) since 2016, the definition has not changed. *Autochtoon* was then replaced by ‘person with a Dutch background’, that is, a person with both parents born in the Netherlands. *Allochtoon* was substituted by ‘person with a migration background’ (person with at least one parent who was born abroad), with the further distinction between Western and non-Western still in place. That is, the terminologies continue to be used as a proxy for racial differentiation. This is even more evident in the convoluted description of the distinct generations of migration background, which I deliberately chose not to make it easier to understand to convey how confusing this idea is and how it represents a racial project in practice, especially in the case of people who had never *migrated to* the Netherlands in the first place. So, all those who came from (first generation), or were born in the Netherlands but one of the parents are from (second generation), or were born in the Netherlands from both parents born in the Netherlands with at least one grandparent from (third generation) a country from Africa, Latin America, Asia (excluding Indonesia and Japan), or Turkey are defined as a person with a non-Western migration background (former non-Western *allochthonous*).

The contortions represented by these governmental definitions demonstrate a racial project in practice, highlighting how far the government is willing to go to make and maintain a distinction between the ‘native’ (white) Dutch and the *rest*, even if they are Dutch-born. In the case of the third generation, this intention is even clearer, because, although by definition they are considered to have a Dutch background, the government has started to monitor their characteristics (CBS, 2016), distinguishing them from the ‘real’ Dutch. Thus, again and again, a racialised grammar is used to produce difference and define hierarchies of superiority, with no direct mention of race whatsoever.

3.7. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have addressed the ways in which the European colonial project of othering has produced discourses and practices of race that still inform contemporary social relations, even when they are not mentioned as such. As a concept that involves more than just the strict sense of biology, race is connected to the co-constitution of meanings associated with culture and the realm of the visible, where this visible is socially, culturally, historically, and geographically constructed. In this sense, this thesis works with the notion that “one can hold without contradiction that racialized identities are produced, sustained, and sometimes transformed through social beliefs and practices and yet that race is real, as real as anything

else in lived experience, with operative effects in the social world” (Alcoff, 2006, p. 182). As such, it is a concept that we cannot yet do without and must take into consideration when analysing social realities.

This is especially true when looking at the phenomenon of migration. I have shown that, since European colonisation, race has been deeply connected with ‘migration’, both in the sense of the movement of Europeans to other countries through colonialism and of the forced diaspora of Africans and other groups in Europe. Interestingly, in both Brazil and the Netherlands, race is related to issues of contemporary migration through fear. The Brazilian elite’s white fear of the ‘black wave’ represented by the former enslaved people promoted the ideology of whitening through the incentive of white immigration and cultural assimilation to the dominant white group (Azevedo, 1987; Munanga, 1999). In Brazil’s case, then, immigration was presented as the racial solution to the Brazilian identity, which could not be thought of as ‘black’. In the case of the Netherlands, the white Dutch fear of the ‘black wave’ of migrants from former colonies and elsewhere threatening Dutch identity and the Dutch way of life (Entzinger, 2014) promoted more and more assimilative policies that actually produce yet more difference and othering.

Despite the effort to promote whitening and the search for modernisation and superiority, in the Netherlands, Brazilians are constructed as non-Western allochthonous, as a group that ‘threatens’ Dutch identity and must integrate into society. Thus, in the next chapter, I will discuss my participants’ experiences with this form of categorisation, looking at how and in which cases it is applied, and what consequences it provokes.

Chapter 4 – Visa Matters

4.1. Introduction

The idea I had about the Netherlands was perhaps a little wrong. I thought the Netherlands as a country more... somewhat flexible, somewhat tolerant, open, and since I moved here – I never suffered anything, I never faced prejudice – but I see from the governmental bureaucracies that are applied to me, that reality is quite different. They're not as tolerant, they're not that open, they're somewhat xenophobic, in a way, sometimes, towards some nationalities. I have no problem with the country, I just noticed that there's a little contrast between what I thought the country was and what it really is in practice.

(Rebeca)

In the last chapter, I showed that, in the eyes of the government of the Netherlands, Brazil is a non-Western country. However, since colonialism represented a systematic process of destruction of the knowledge produced by whole populations and the imposition of European perspectives and culture (Quijano, 2007; B. de S. Santos, 2014), Brazilians see themselves as sharing the same set of values, beliefs, and ideals as Europeans (the undisputed Westerners). Thus, they understand and define themselves as Westerners. If not a totally developed country as European countries are considered to be, they at least aspire to it, since, as argued by Quijano (2007, p. 170): “cultural Europeanisation was transformed into an aspiration” (p. 170).

Much as I had felt when confronted with this Dutch definition, many of the participants expressed surprise and curiosity about this categorisation. But being defined as non-Western goes beyond being a mere curious fact. As said by Rebeca, it has practical and material consequences, especially when it comes to migration.

In this sense, crossing borders involves more than simply occupying a new space or learning how to navigate the rules of a new territory; it also involves dealing with “governmental bureaucracies”, which define who has the right to cross borders in the first place. This process involves a confrontation between self-definitions and the different meanings ascribed to certain bodies, in which nationality, gender, race, socioeconomic background, and reasons for migration all intersect and produce the distinctions by which people are analysed.

While Rebeca's account implicitly points to this reproduction of a European colonisation of the imaginary, in which Europe is defined as the centre of development, modernity, and justice, and explicitly to the self-representation of the Netherlands as a tolerant nation (Wekker, 2016), she also introduces a sphere of racialised experience that participants encountered in the Netherlands. Such experiences do not necessarily or directly reference physical appearance or a biological understanding of 'race' (although it may do, as I will show in the next chapter), but they are still based on a colonial, racialised distinction between Europeans and non-Europeans.

Thus, in this chapter, I will analyse the experiences of participants during this process of crossing borders and arriving in the Netherlands, aiming to uncover the ways in which immigration policies not only work as state mechanisms of categorisation and control, but also reproduce a gendered, racial, and economic system of privilege and inequality. The chapter will be structured in three parts. I will first present the meanings associated with crossing borders as a non-Western *allochtoon* and the consequences associated with this governmental racialisation. Then I will illustrate the experiences of Brazilians who are able to escape this restrictive categorisation by fitting into different visa regimes: highly skilled professionals and Brazilians with dual citizenship. Through these experiences, I will show how these naturalised practices of differentiation further reinforce inequalities of power across axes of gender, race, class, and educational level.

4.2. Crossing borders with a non-Western label

A partner visa for Brazilians, for instance, and for other nationalities, not all, there are exceptions to the rule, we need to do a civic integration examination in Dutch at the consulate in São Paulo. Even before applying for the visa one needs to prove that one meets the requirements. Only that, this examination, many countries are exempted from doing it, so they apply this exam only to countries that they consider somewhat underdeveloped. If you're American, Canadian, Australian, Japanese, you don't need to do it, but if you're Brazilian, if you're African, then you need to. So, in my opinion this is a kind of prejudice.

(Rebeca)

Rebeca, who moved to the Netherlands in July 2019 and had occupied a privileged position in Brazil as a white middle-class woman, said that she felt discriminated against because, as a Brazilian, she was required to take the Basic Civic Integration Examination, while people from other nationalities are exempted from it. According to the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND, n.d.-a), the full list of exemptions includes nationals of EU/EEA countries, Australia, Canada, Japan, Monaco, New Zealand, South Korea, Switzerland, the USA, and Vatican City. This examination verifies knowledge of Dutch society and the Dutch language and is required for foreign partners or spouses who wish to move to the Netherlands. If the person is from any country not mentioned on the exemption list, they will need to take (and pass) this exam even before moving to the Netherlands.

Thus, Rebeca experienced being turned into a ‘sub-person’ by the Dutch government because of her origins and her intention to migrate. Defined as just another non-EU, non-Western national trying to cross borders into the ‘Western developed world’ by means of a relationship with a Dutch national, the mobility and privilege Rebeca had enjoyed within Brazil based on her social, economic, and racial characteristics were not transferred when she decided to immigrate to the Netherlands. Moreover, coming from an ‘underdeveloped country’, she was positioned as someone who is likely to be marrying for financial or material reasons (to acquire European citizenship, for instance), and therefore should be more strictly controlled.

As discussed in the last chapter, the Netherlands has become one of the strictest countries in terms of migration and is a model followed by other countries (de Leeuw & van Wichelen, 2014), especially in their regulation of integration, of which the Basic Civic Examination is one part. Despite the fact that immigration policies are a process of exclusion and segregation, such measures are usually socially naturalised and understood only as an expression of the sovereign right of every nation to define who can or cannot occupy the nation-state together with those – the national-natives – who have the right to self-determination over their territories (Sharma, 2020). In this “system of global apartheid” (p. 164), in which certain people are forbidden from moving or face more controls in transiting between and occupying spaces than others, the naturalisation of these practices renders their racist character invisible. In fact, the data I collected showed that most of the interviewees considered the Dutch policies to be important and agreed with them. That did not mean, however, a complete subjection to or acceptance of the measures to which they were subjected.

For instance, Beatriz, a 45-year-old woman who had been living without a residence permit in the Netherlands for more than nine years,¹⁴ said the following about her status:

I've heard many Dutch being against it: "Ah, what do you want to do here? You must stay in your country, you can't be illegal here, it's not fair, it's not right, you must stay in your own country", they're against it. But I have a defence, I rub it in, I say: "yeah, the only thing is that Brazil was colonised by Europeans, when you needed to escape from here both economically and because of the war, many people from Europe went to Brazil, immigrated to Brazil. I'm a descendant of the Polish because in the south there are Poles, Germans, there are Dutch in Brazil, there are Spaniards, there are Portuguese, so Brazil was colonized by Europeans, so when you needed it, you could go to Brazil. Now we need it, because we're going through a big economic crisis, lack of jobs, and here we see a better perspective, so we're also entitled to come over here."

Beatriz' quote shows the naturalisation of the sense of entitlement to one's own land because of one's own nationality, which then defines that those 'who are not from here' are not entitled to be in that specific land: "*you must stay in your own country*". Beatriz not only does not accept this exclusion put forward by the *autochtoon* Dutch on the grounds of an "inherent right to be in the territory of the nation-state" (Sharma, 2020, p. 235), but she also contests it by foregrounding the fore the European history of colonisation and immigration. In the same vein as the slogan 'we are here because you were there', alluding to the continuity between colonialism and immigration (Sivanandan, 2008) discussed in the last chapter, Beatriz challenges the fact that "*they want the country only for themselves*" when in fact 'they' have been in many other countries before.

It is revealing that, in her narrative, especially as a white woman descended from Europeans, she does not argue that Portuguese and Dutch people *exploited* Brazil, but that they went there out of necessity. She frames colonial history as a project of necessity for Europeans, not of violence by Europeans. Colonial legacies inform her views about citizenship and national borders, and because she understands that she also needs it, she argues that she is also entitled to live in the Netherlands, as Europeans believed they were entitled to occupy other lands during colonial expansion. Despite this rhetorical strategy of dealing with the everyday

¹⁴ She first came to the Netherlands in 2001 and stayed until 2008. Then she returned to Brazil, where she lived for 10 years, and has been back in the Netherlands since December 2018.

practices of social subjugation, she ultimately cannot escape the governmental control and could be deported if it is discovered that she did not comply with the regulations and does not have permission to live in the country.

Rebeca agrees with the need for integration measures, but argues that their real reason is to exclude and control people coming from certain countries:

I don't totally disagree, I don't disagree with [doing] the exam, that the exam should be done in a certain way, but the reason why it was created is already a little prejudiced, they say it's done to integrate the individual into society, [but] in my opinion this exam was created as a barrier measure. It's clear to me, it's done to wear people down because, many times, let's say you want to move to the Netherlands, you meet someone on one of those pathetic websites, you know, then you want to do something crazy, you two have never met before and you're going to move to the Netherlands. But then, you start to see everything that you need to do, you get tired, you don't go, or you don't have the money, there's a lot you have to do, so you get tired, right? It's not even created for people like me, it's created to wear people down.

As a lawyer, Rebeca had observed the discriminatory nature of this policy and how the discourse of 'integration' did not hold true because the need for preparation before moving to the Netherlands does not apply to everyone indiscriminately. In fact, at the time of the discussions on this theme, the Secretary of Justice justified the exemption list by pointing out that "the exemption would not lead to 'undesirable immigration' or 'fundamental problems with integration in Dutch society'" (Tweede Kamer, 2005, as cited in de Leeuw & van Wichelen, 2014, p. 345). But why would a person from the USA or Canada be more prepared for migrating to the Netherlands than a Brazilian? Why would they not need a basic knowledge of the language or of Dutch society? In defining those who are believed not to need to take the pre-departure exam, "the distinction is between those expected to have or to cause problems, ranging from poverty to crime, and those expected not to do so" (Schinkel, 2017, p. 151), but also in a racial grammar of global social hierarchisation, in what Castles (2007, p. 360) calls "transnational racism". Underlying this position is the colonial assumption of 'lack' (of Western values and culture, of civilisation, of modernity), the same 'lack' observed by the Portuguese in their first encounters with the indigenous people of Brazil, and that continues to be reproduced today. Characteristic of the most recent phase of immigration politics in the Netherlands, where there is a shift towards a clear essentialisation of culture, this 'lack' (always

defined by and in comparison to the Dutch norm) is understood to lead to fundamental problems with integration and thus must be contained.

Brazil, as a non-Western country, is positioned outside the privileges granted to other Western countries, and Brazilians are treated as any other ‘rest’ (Hall, 1992), in need of being controlled in their movements and to catch up with the ‘West’. Therefore, critical in Rebeca’s account is the idea of ‘barrier measures’; formal mechanisms that prevent certain people from crossing borders and keep them away from the country, specifically applied in the cases of marriage migration. Schinkel (2017) shows that tighter regulations as a means to ensure fewer marriage partners coming from abroad was clearly stated by former Minister Rita Verdonk, especially considering that ‘mixed marriages’ were taken to be a sign of integration. In this sense, complementing state control over the movement of people, there is state regulation over intimate lives in virtue of the relation between gender and nation (Schinkel, 2017).

In this case, the concern about fraudulent marriages, especially involving partners from non-Western countries, and a desire to maintain the unity of the national identity (Bonjour & de Hart, 2013) has led to stricter regulations, with the ultimate goal to “*wear people down*”, as phrased by Rebeca. Besides paying for and passing the exam, and providing other necessary documentation, this process of migration also involves income requirements that must be fulfilled. Schinkel (2017) argues that this requirement works as an importation tax levy upon transnational marriage, which ultimately represents an “economic test of love, for real love involves paying the price, no matter how high” (p. 179). In this sense, this measure not only controls the movement of people from non-Western countries, by trying to contain the prevalence of fraudulent marriages, but it also guarantees that the Dutch government does not make use of public funds to support non-Dutch citizens.¹⁵ In the end, it reinforces once again the dichotomous boundary between ‘us’ and ‘them’, establishing a hierarchy of value among people, and emphasising that the person who migrates has the responsibility for ‘integration’.

Besides this income requirement (which is ultimately the responsibility of the Dutch partner, being the reason why Schinkel argues that this also represents a test of loyalty to the nation for the Dutch person), all the participants who had applied for a ‘partner visa’ mentioned the high financial costs incurred in this process. All the exams (the Basic Civic Integration Exam, which must be passed prior to arrival, and the Civic Integration Exam, which must be

¹⁵ According to the IND (n.d.-c): “The Dutch government does not want to make use of public funds, such as social benefits to be able to live together with your partner in the Netherlands. Therefore, you must have sufficient independent, long-term means of support.”

taken after arrival in the Netherlands), the participation statement (a mandatory ‘workshop’ where newcomers receive an introduction to ‘Dutch core values’ and must sign their agreement to it), and courses (in preparation for the exams) are expected to be paid for by the applicant, as well as all the travel expenses incurred in this process (for instance, travelling to and from São Paulo, or in the case of Fernanda, who lived in Cologne, to Berlin, to take the pre-departure exam). Thus, this migration policy not only ascribes identities, but also reproduces unequal intersecting structures of class, gender, and race¹⁶ because either 1) the couple is unable to bear this financial burden and the border crossing does not happen, 2) the Brazilian partner has the financial means to do it (meaning that this person is probably from a middle-class background and white),¹⁷ or 3) the Dutch partner will need to pay for all of it, establishing a gendered imbalance of power in the relationship (which is reinforced by the fact that their partner will be a migrant), especially considering that such a transnational marriage usually refers to a Dutch man and a Brazilian woman (Roggeveen & van Meeteren, 2013; Sandoval, 2008).

In addition to the ‘economy of desire’ argued by Schinkel, Rebeca also highlights another dimension of this immigration policy, the ‘psychological’ toll one must pay in this process. Considering my own experience, I can relate to her account in being ‘worn down’ insofar as I was also subjected to migration policies, but as a student. I remember the fatigue, stress, and anxiety (besides the financial costs) involved in the visa process, even though in my case it was only about documents. In this context, dealing with this ‘governmental racialisation’ (Hesse, 2007) involves the tiresome proving that one does not represent the subjugated position of the ‘underdeveloped one’ constructed through those discourses (by proving the legitimacy of one’s claims, either as a real student, or as a ‘real’ couple, by proving possession of the required financial means and language level). Ultimately, this only reinforces the same subjugated position vis-à-vis Europe (by having to *prove* that one absolutely *deserves the permission* to cross borders). This colonial dynamic maintains and reproduces the racialised meanings attached to migrants since they have no option but to conform and accept the position

¹⁶ Educational level is also a factor in this process and, in the case of people coming from Brazil, it relates directly to race, because in 2018 the illiteracy rate among black and brown Brazilians over 15 years old was 9.1% compared to 3.9% among white Brazilians. Also, in 2018, the proportion of white young people aged 18 to 24 years old who were studying or had already completed an undergraduate degree (36.1%) was almost double that observed among black or brown people (18.3%) (IBGE, 2019).

¹⁷ In 2018, despite the brown and black population being the majority in Brazil (55.8%), only 27.7% of the population with the 10% highest income were black or brown, while they constituted 75.2% of the bottom 10% of incomes. In addition, the average monthly income of regularly employed people was R\$ 3282.00 (roughly € 480.00) among whites and R\$ 2082.00 (roughly € 305.00) among brown and black people (IBGE, 2019).

to which they are being ascribed, thus reinforcing a colonial racialised grammar of differentiation between ‘West’ and the ‘Rest’ (Hall, 1992).

The overall acceptance and naturalisation of these practices of governmentality by the participants can be understood within this matrix of colonial power between Europe and Brazil, where these practices of subjugation are continuations of colonial dominance. In this sense, at the same time as Rebeca recognises the pre-departure integration examination as a formal mechanism of exclusion, she aligns with this line of thought that some people should be kept out, that there is a unique, legitimate kind of marriage, a “‘proper’ marriage” (Bonjour & de Hart, 2013), and that those not complying with the requirements of legitimacy must be restricted. Thus, her sense of discrimination comes from being racialised into an inferior category, one that is looked upon with suspicion as trying to subvert the restrictions on movement by marrying a Dutch person. In fact, at the beginning of the interview, she made sure to inform me that she and her partner had met three years before and that “*it wasn’t a crazy romance where we met on the internet and I decided to move here without knowing anything*”. Hence, she claims that the exam is not intended for ‘people like her’, but she has ultimately been equated with ‘this kind of people’, which would not happen to a US citizen, for instance.

Showing how “the state does currently operate as a major producer of images of society” (Schinkel, 2017, p. 118), Gisele had experiences of hearing people commenting that she was “*using him [her French partner] to get a [European] passport*”. Thus, while Bonjour and de Hart (2013) reveal the gendered political discussion about transnational marriage in which migrant Moroccan or Turkish women are constructed as passive victims of forced and arranged marriages to Dutch-Moroccan or Dutch-Turkish men, apparently there is a different construction for Brazilian women, one which Rebeca tries to move away from when she argues that her relationship “*was not a crazy romance*”. In fact, Gisele, who came to the Netherlands to work as an au pair, said that many au pair agencies had stopped working with Brazilians because so many of them would stay in the Netherlands after starting a relationship in the country and the agencies were being questioned by the IND:

There was an agency that was against the IND, they [people from this agency] complained about this... this way of treating [the situation of] the partner visa, . . . I know that they [the IND] blame the agencies for not properly selecting the girls. They [the IND] said that if so many people are asking for the partner visa, it’s the agency’s fault, that they’re selecting girls who are coming here just to get married. So, there was an agency that was against this, “it’s not like that, love is something that you can’t

program, it happens, she's here, so obviously she will go out, maybe she will fall in love, it happens, it's normal." And they closed this agency. So, like, the IND can't say "we're xenophobic, we don't want Brazilian au pairs here", so what do they do? They tell the agencies like this, "look, there are a lot of Brazilian au pairs staying here", and then there were a lot of agencies that stopped working with Brazilians. Not only Brazilians, there were other nationalities who also stayed [in the Netherlands], so the agencies stopped working with them.

Thus, in contrast to the 'passive' Moroccan/Turkish woman stereotype, there is a construction of a very 'active' Brazilian woman. Together with the stereotypical depiction of the Brazilian woman as sensual, sexy, and sexualised, it can be understood that there is governmental concern that the agencies should select only those women who are really coming to work as au pairs, and not to seduce European men, in search of mobility rights through the European passport. Especially because, in this case, these women are *already* in the country. In this sense, as in the colonial past, there is an orientalisation of the Brazilian woman as a sexual promise (and threat) to the European man (Said, 1978).

Like Rebeca, Gisele also expressed a sense of disappointment with the Netherlands due to her experiences of changing her residence status or with airport controls (to prove she was not illegally living in the country). Comparing her perception from the first time she came to the country in 2010 to her current situation, she says that in her view "*the laws nowadays are much more xenophobic*", although she asks herself whether the fact that she is white has protected her from suffering more discrimination. In a similar way, Fernanda, who moved to the Netherlands in July 2018 to be with her partner, also referred to a feeling of injustice when confronted with the migration policies being applied to her:

I think sometimes I feel that I was treated unfairly because I'm contributing to society, I'm trying to do my best to integrate and sometimes I think I don't get anything in return. For example, I had to study Dutch in Belgium because it's much cheaper, because for one single module here they wanted to charge me €1000, so I think I felt I was treated unfairly about this fact, right, so then you really see, you're an immigrant. Obviously, you must be in accordance with everything, but why not try to help a person who wants to integrate, who wants to help [the society], right?

As can be seen, Fernanda also positions herself as accepting the discourse of integration and the measures that she must follow (“*obviously, you must be in accordance with everything*”), but then she realised that, despite her efforts to integrate and conform to what she is expected to do, she did not see any willingness from the government to meet her halfway. Her obligations involved completing the civic integration exam up to three years after arrival in the Netherlands, but after only six months she had already finalised them all. Now, she already has language level B2 (the integration exam requires level A2)¹⁸ and communicates only in Dutch with her partner. In addition, showing her ‘commitment’ to ‘integrating’ into the society, within one week of living in the country, she had already found a job and now has plans to obtain another university degree in the Netherlands.

Differently from Rebeca, she approached the unfairness of the integration examination from another angle: if the government wants people to integrate, it must provide the resources for it. Fernanda, who complied with all the rules and with the assimilation model advanced by Dutch immigration policies, had to do it by herself, by her own efforts. Thus, underlying her feeling of injustice is “the emphasis on the idea that the ‘responsibility for integration’ lies with the ‘newcomer’ and not with government” (Schinkel, 2017, p. 150), since s/he is the one crossing borders.

Through the lens of this assimilative model, Rebeca did no more than fulfil her obligation by searching for available alternatives to study Dutch. If she had failed to learn the language by not being able to overcome this economic barrier, she would have been the one to blame and to be held accountable. In fact, making more visible the double-bind situation of this discourse of integration is the fact she had to find alternatives not only to the economic barrier, but also to the everyday practice of the language. She said that she started to feel frustrated because she would attempt to speak Dutch, but people would answer her in English, and thus she had to insist on speaking the language: “*If I hadn’t been a bit too radical and really imposed this, I think I’d be in the same situation.*” This further shows that, while the pre-departure exam works as a ‘love test’, the whole ‘integration’ process refers to testing how much this person really wants and deserves to be in the country (further subjecting her/himself to this colonial subjugation), because s/he will have to overcome many barriers (including in social interactions), and all the difficulties will be regarded as an individual failure of integration and proof of the limits of diversity and the need for stricter measures.

¹⁸ The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) defines six levels of language proficiency: A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2.

Due to being treated unfairly, Fernanda realises that she really is an immigrant. Her account implies that being an immigrant means not having access to fair treatment, despite submitting to all the migration rules. As noted by Sharma (2020), “the racism embedded within immigration policies has not stopped international migration, but it has normalized the subordination of Migrants” (p. 172). This shows that, in the European context, the “figure of migration is always already racialized” (De Genova, 2018, p. 1769) because the status of migrants as hierarchically inferior and unwanted outsiders is constantly reified by state policy. Moreover, not only is the migrant’s status redefined, but so is its counterpart, the status of the ‘native’, who does not need to ‘integrate’ and who is naturalised as the proper representative of the nation (Schinkel, 2017; Sharma, 2020). Immigration policies thus reproduce colonial racialised meanings, where Brazilians are deemed to still be lagging behind Europeans/Dutch people, despite their ‘subjectivation’ through Western European values, and are in need of constantly subjecting themselves to those practices, further re-inscribing those racialised definitions upon themselves.

4.3. Changing labels: The Invited migrant

While their experiences with state immigration policies and policing inevitably reminded these women of their position as ‘undesirable’ and ‘uninvited’ migrants, some of them were able to escape such definitions by being ‘invited’. That is, coming over as highly skilled migrants (Cecília and Sophia), or coming together with their partners/husbands who had been offered jobs in the Netherlands (Júlia, Camila, Lara, and Yasmin), they could circumvent the restrictions imposed by the category of being non-Western. Common to their experience was the facility of the migration process, in which they all received support from their employer with everything necessary: the application for a residence permit, temporary accommodation while searching for a home, help with finding housing and schools for the children, bureaucracies in registering in the municipality. Moreover, as highly skilled migrants, they also receive other benefits, such as the 30% tax ruling,¹⁹ which also grants the possibility of switching their foreign driving license for a Dutch one without taking another driving test.

Even more clearly than the case of transnational marriage, with its restrictive rules and high financial costs, the rules applied to highly skilled migrants further reinforces a white, male,

¹⁹ When the conditions are met, foreigners recruited from abroad can have their gross salary reduced by 30% in exchange for being reimbursed with a tax-free allowance equivalent to this amount.

and middle/upper-class hegemony and privilege, especially when these workers come from countries of great inequality, such as Brazil. Although no official data regarding highly skilled Brazilian migrants in the Netherlands exists, there is sufficient evidence about the profile of who occupies the best socioeconomic and educational positions in Brazil and could eventually be hired under this definition.²⁰ Yasmin, for instance, observes a homogeneity in this group, as mostly coming from São Paulo, the richest Brazilian state and one of the largest economic poles in Latin America, and as mostly white. In fact, only she and Sophia are not from this region. Also, as the only brown woman in this group, it is telling that she was the only one who mentioned the prevalence of whites in the group. Gender also appears as a factor in the experience of these two women, who migrated as highly skilled professionals in their own right: both mentioned that their working environments were predominantly male, pointing out that this gender inequality is not only Brazilian but is also reproduced in other countries.

Critical in the analysis of this privileged category is the fact that they are not actually seen as migrants in the racialised sense discussed above. The perpetuation of this system of privilege thus reinforces a racial imaginary of who is understood as a migrant, that is, a non-white, poor, uneducated person, while these others are ‘expats’ (Kunz, 2016, 2020). Sarah Kunz (2020) shows that, although it is a contested term, the category of ‘expatriate’ is “produced as migratory classed whiteness” (p. 2149) and imbedded in a colonial logic. Although my participants’ experiences relate to movement from a former colonised country to a former colonial power, they were still identified as ‘expats’. However, this identification was mostly described as an unreflective repetition of the term most commonly used by the groups into which they are inserted, since it was not present in their vocabulary before they immigrated. For instance, even though Camila mentioned that she finds the term ‘ugly’ because in Portuguese it sounds as though the person has lost their own homeland, her assimilation of the term and its widespread use among participants reveals the dominance of this Anglophone designation in the construction of a different kind of (Western) privileged migrant (Kunz, 2016).

This group was identified, both by themselves and the other participants, as occupying a different position in society vis-à-vis other migrants, especially considering their categories as non-Western migrants. For instance, for Yasmin, especially as someone who had also found

²⁰ Besides the information provided in footnotes 16 and 17, average income shows significant difference when race and gender are considered. In 2018, the most subjugated group, black/brown women, received less than half (44.4%) of the salary of white men, the most privileged group. Moreover, white women, despite still lagging behind white men, still received more than black/brown women and men (black/brown men received 74.1% of white women’s salary and black/brown women, 58.6%) (IBGE, 2019).

a relevant job position in her area of expertise, this ‘identity’ is a way of protecting her from discrimination and racism:

In the middle of where you are, of the foreign people who came to work in a good job, I think that it already shields you a little because, in one way or another, it already raises you a little towards the level of the white American foreigner who came to work. It raises you at least in the collective view, right?

So, being an ‘expat’ means to claim a privilege that she, as a brown Brazilian woman, does not naturally enjoy in the way that the white *United Statesian* man does.²¹ In the “collective view” these women are no longer the unwelcomed migrant coming from an underdeveloped country. Thus, what the findings suggest is that the main privilege stems not only from having administrative and logistical support, but also from not suffering the restrictions imposed on other migrants. That is, while they do embody many intersecting forms of privilege experienced in Brazil, so do many of the women who are in a transnational relationship. However, by being labelled as ‘expats’ and not ‘brides’, ‘in a collective view’ they are promoted to the ‘Western’ category.

Interesting in this idea of a ‘collective view’ is the fact that, at the ‘individual level’, many women narrated a negotiation between the image held by the Dutch about Brazilians and their own reality. Camila, for instance, felt invaded by the behaviour of her Dutch neighbours in a way that was reminiscent of a colonial relation when she was asked about her husband’s new car and if his company was paying their rent. Underlying her account, which was shared by many of the participants, is the generalised and essentialised idea of Brazilians as poor and underdeveloped, to which the situation of these specific women does not conform, and a sense of superiority by the Dutch. Camila understands this ‘curiosity’ as an investigation of the fact that they are foreigners *and* can live in the same good neighbourhood and live at “*the same level as they do, or even better*”. Despite that, she adds: “*maybe that’s the reason for the special treatment*”, that is, the perception that their socioeconomic status (and whiteness, as I will discuss in the next chapter) contributes to being treated well by the Dutch.

²¹ It is telling that she chose to use the white *United Statesian* man to make this comparison, since in the differentiation between who is considered to be an immigrant or not; in the separation between Westerners and non-Westerners; and in a world of white and male hegemony, *he* embodies all the positions of privilege, even if he is migrating to Europe.

For Manuela, it was during the change of quitting her previous job, which according to her was in a very unstructured and unprofessional company, and being hired by another company for a ‘good job’, that she notices the consequences of changing the categories one occupies:

When I came here, I came as an immigrant. Even though I came to work, I was in that immigrant aspect . . . Until I got this new job and entered the expat aspect and I see the difference, you know? Whatever I need, I ask from the company and it's done.

As I will develop further in the next section, Manuela originally came to the Netherlands after being hired by a Dutch company, but as a family member of a European citizen (and not as a highly skilled migrant). When changing job positions, she feels the difference. She first associates the ‘expat’ aspect (and thus, by contrast, the immigrant aspect) with having the support of her employer and not being all by herself in trying to navigate through society and manage all the troubles that a migration process involves (as is expected from the ‘other’ migrants, especially the women married to Dutchmen). For instance, she said that this new company helped her to complete her visa application as a family member of an EU citizen and offered her a Dutch course.

She also mentioned the obligations and pressures imposed upon the immigrant and the need to comply with these demands, otherwise the person will not be able to achieve any of their goals. In this sense, after her job change, Manuela identified that the pressure to learn the language was somehow lifted from her and that now she is studying it only for pleasure. In fact, since most of the participants in this situation work mostly with people of other nationalities and use English in their workplace, or have children who either study in international schools or in ‘black schools’ (*zwarte scholen*),²² many of them are barely in touch with what is considered to be the ‘native’ Dutch citizen, or speak the Dutch language (the two main criteria used to define ‘proper’ integration). As pointed out by Yasmin, “*for me there are two groups, one here, the other here, they don't touch each other.*”

Analogous to the situation of the ‘guest workers’ in the 1960s, this group of migrants carries a sense of being in the country only temporarily and consequently they live in their own ‘expat bubble’, but supposedly without the economic risk of being dependent on or ‘causing

²² Schools with a high concentration of non-Western allochthonous pupils/pupils with a (first- or second-generation) non-Western migration background (van Dijk-Groeneboer & Wielzen, 2018).

problems' for the Dutch state (which further reinforces the idea of a 'problematic' kind of migrant, excluding not only the 'expats', but also the 'native' nationals, from any problems in society) (Croucher, 2012; Hercog, 2019). Differently from those other migrants, though, they are not being blamed for not 'integrating'. Speaking the language, for instance, appears to be only a possible additional benefit in their daily lives in society rather than an absolute requirement or obligation. Thus, not only are they not subjected to state control in the same ways as the women migrating to marry a Dutchman, but they also remain invisible to the current discussions about integration into society. Hence, this kind of migration constructs a different identity for those involved in it, allowing Brazilians to maintain the privileges they 'bring' with them from Brazil, to access the privileges reserved for the dominant group (such as free mobility and the right to work and live in the country), and to escape the racialisation imposed by the government upon those migrating for family formation.

Apart from the highly skilled migrants, there are also others who exceed the non-Western allochthonous label and access the rights, opportunities, privileges, and facilities reserved to those in the dominant position. These are the women with dual citizenship.

4.4. Exceeding labels: The 'European-Brazilians'

I used a subterfuge and said, "ah, that's good that I won't need to do the exam".
(Larissa)

Larissa is one of the participants who holds a dual citizenship: Brazilian and Italian. She started a relationship with her Dutch husband in 2015 and, when she realised that she would have trouble learning the Dutch language,²³ she decided to start the recognition process of her Italian citizenship. When I asked what she thought about the integration exam, she stated: *"I think it's interesting. When I got to know about it, I almost went crazy, ai, 'it's not fair', even my husband said so, 'it's not fair, we're married'."* Then, she continued, explaining why she considered the exam important. Despite defending this immigration requirement, she initially considered it unfair when she discovered that it would apply to her and, as she stated in the quote above, found a way to escape the exam, even though it also involved a lot of bureaucratic work.

²³ Due to her age (56 years old) and the difficulty of the language.

Depending upon the constant forgetting of Europe's colonial history and Europeans' migration history, the categories established by the immigration policies are based on a totalising differentiation between Europe and the rest, when in fact many of those defined as non-Western also hold European citizenship. Intended to restrain people's mobility, these categories are porous containers that are unable to keep everyone within. This porosity makes visible the constructedness and fabrication of Europeanness, while simultaneously allowing post-colonial citizens to access the resources and privileges available to the dominant group. While in the case of highly skilled professionals, these immigration policies frame them as a desirable and welcomed migrants (Hercog, 2019), participants with dual citizenship, like Larissa, Maria, Helena and Camila in this research, can escape the restrictions applied to non-Westerners and enjoy the privileges reserved for other EU citizens. In the case of Larissa and Maria, both of whom came to the Netherlands because of a romantic relationship, that meant not being obliged to comply with the integration regulations and not being subjected to this kind of racialising practice.

In fact, Maria, a 29-year-old woman holding Brazilian and German citizenship, said that learning Dutch is not on her priority list, although her plans do involve continuing to live in the Netherlands and having children here. Asserting that she and her partner have already decided that English is going to be their common language, including when raising their future children, her position deploys the privilege that all other EU citizens have in the Netherlands – of not being obliged to 'integrate' into Dutch society, no matter how long they stay in the country. Again, this does not mean that she is not monitored in her everyday interactions, especially by her partner's family, but through her German citizenship she can simply afford to choose not to learn the language. Just like Gisele's French partner, who had lived and worked in the Netherlands for more than three years and had also not learned Dutch, Maria's sense of entitlement shows how arbitrary²⁴ these integration definitions are and how only some specific people are constructed as a 'threat' to the national sense of unity and as 'not willing to integrate'. In this sense, such distinctions, despite being naturalised, make evident and perpetuate the racist character of such policies.

²⁴ In terms of who is constructed as needing to integrate or not. In the case of highly skilled migrants, for instance, integration does not appear to be central in the discussion, and their migration is inscribed as another form of state extractivism.

About her views on the integration policies, Larissa said:

[The Netherlands] is a tiny little country like this, [and] there are a lot of people from outside. There are a lot of Turks, a lot of Moroccans. And now there are Brazilians in every corner . . . So, since it's a country this small and it has a lot of foreigners, I think it's a way for them to preserve some things.

Critical to her account is the discourse of a sovereign right to national protection mentioned earlier, and the representation of the Netherlands as a small country which needs to be protected. This relates to Wekker's argument (2016) about the Dutch self-representation as innocent: “there is the association of innocence with being small: a small nation, a small child (...) being small, we need to be protected and to protect ourselves against all kinds of evil, inside and outside the nation” (pp. 16-17). Moreover, this claim of innocence works not only to justify the need for protection, but also as a licence to be racist or xenophobic, further marking those who are constructed as allochthonous as not belonging.

In this context, it is telling that Larissa mentions the Turkish and Moroccan populations, since it shows how strongly they are represented in Dutch discourses and imagination as racialised outsiders, although many of them are Dutch and there are also other significant groups of foreigners in the Netherlands, such as Germans. Also, by mentioning Brazilians, she highlights the ambiguity generated by such essentialising categories because, in the same way as many of those Turks and Moroccans can be Dutch (and not foreigners), she is also a Brazilian with European citizenship. In this sense, she positions herself as also being one of those against whom the Netherlands must be preserved, but at the same she is excluding herself from this position, since the rules do not apply to her.

Finally, returning to Manuela, although she does not have dual citizenship, she applied for a residence permit in the Netherlands as a family member of an EU citizen (her partner holds Brazilian and Italian citizenship), under EU law. In this way, she also gained access to the rights reserved for Europeans, such as the right to live and work in the Netherlands, thus escaping the restrictions on mobility imposed by her non-Western nationality and the Dutch regulations regarding integration, since her partner is not Dutch. However, not herself being the owner of the ‘right passport’, she could not escape totally from state control.

Initially, she decided to apply for this kind of residence permit because in 2019 she received a job offer from a Dutch company, but they would not sponsor her. After having an

unpleasant experience with this company, she developed a health issue, and decided to quit, but chose not to apply for any social welfare benefits because she was afraid this might affect her process of applying for a residence permit. IND (n.d.-b) states that: “if you rely on (additional) general funds, such as social welfare benefits, this could end your lawful residence”. Although a similar warning also applies to EU citizens, it is interesting to notice Manuela’s sense of fear. In contrast to Maria and her sense of entitlement, at different times Manuela mentioned her preoccupation with complying with the rules out of fear of losing her residence permit, thus reinforcing an understanding that this is a concession offered by the Dutch government and that she is ‘invading’ a space not originally reserved for her. Despite still feeling under state control and surveillance, Manuela evaded the mobility restrictions attached to being labelled as a non-Western migrant, accessing the possibility of moving, living, and working in the Netherlands more easily than those women considered a risk of being a ‘husband hunter’.

In the next chapter, I will further analyse these different senses of entitlement/fear, arguing that they are related to a different sense of visibility, of the construction of being a body in or out of place, and thus of the perception of a racist functioning of society. So, while Maria, with her German passport and white body, has a sense of entitlement to the point of not worrying about Dutch demands, Manuela’s sense of preoccupation, with her Brazilian passport and black body, announces that she is in Europe’s territory, but does not belong there, and that she is actually a space invader (Puwar, 2004). Added to the fact that she is not the owner of a European passport (although, as mentioned above, EU citizens can also have their right to live in the Netherlands curtailed), her visibility as not conforming to the somatic norm of whiteness in the Netherlands reminds her of the precariousness of her situation. Thus, coming from a country in which she experiences everyday racist questionings of her occupation of space as a black woman, I understand this preoccupation as vigilance about the fact that the same rules do not necessarily apply in the same ways to different bodies.

4.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analysed participants’ experiences with immigration policies and how these measures work as a racial project, as a way to link structure to meanings in “an effort to organize and distribute resources (economic, political, cultural) along particular racial lines” (Omi & Winant, 2015, p. 125). Thus, I showed that they produce and reproduce a hierarchical boundary between ‘us’ and ‘them’ in order to defend the territory of the ‘modern’ and

‘superior’ Europe from invasion by the ‘inferior’ Other, by ascribing Brazilians to the racialised category of non-Western and by establishing mechanisms which further subjugate them to these positions (since they must conform to these mechanisms). By establishing barrier measures to migration, these regulations can thus preserve privilege and exclusivity for the dominant group.

Even in the cases of those who could escape these regulations, immigration policies further reinforce and perpetuate a gendered, racialised, and classed inequality, since those who have the option to escape the restrictions are also privileged in Brazil. In this sense, these policies once more naturalise and essentialise the abject migrant as ‘the refugee’, black, poor, uneducated, inferior, backward, etc.

Transnational, postcolonial border crossing, then, involves being subjected to a gendered, racialised, and classist mechanism of state categorisation and control. However, as pointedly put by Ahmed (2007, p. 162), “having the ‘right’ passport makes no difference if you have the wrong body or name”. In the next chapter, therefore, I will analyse the politics of visibility and how these bodies, after being disciplined by governmental racialisations, are read and understood in the Dutch context.

Chapter 5 – Visibility Matters

5.1. Introduction

I thought I was white, but here I'm labelled escurinha²⁵ (donker²⁶).

The quote above was Isadora's reply to my post on Facebook inviting people who identify as black, brown, yellow, or indigenous to participate in my research. During the interview, I asked her if *donker* was a term she had actually heard someone using to refer to her. She replied: "*Absolutely. Nowadays, at my work, when someone wants to know, 'where is that girl, die donker meisje, the 'little dark' girl who is always around here?', that's me*".

Her reply introduced a theme that would appear many times throughout the interviews: the prevalence of references to visual markers. In contrast to the assumption that skin colour is irrelevant in the Dutch context, the experiences of my participants offered a different narrative and showed that skin colour and other physical characteristics are a common and widespread feature used by the Dutch to identify and classify others. In this sense, as in Brazil, visible difference also matters in the Netherlands. Thus, in this chapter, I will discuss the insights offered by participants into this matter, trying to "make visible the practices of visibility itself" (Alcoff, 2006, p. 194).

The chapter is structured in four parts. First, I will present evidence that the realm of the visible is also important in the Dutch context. Then, demonstrating the connection with the colonial history of the invention of race, I will discuss the ways in which race is associated with origins and how white Europeanness is still positioned at the centre, by both Dutch and Brazilians. Finally, I will discuss the consequences of this white hegemony in the experiences of Brazilians that conform or not to the white somatic norm.

²⁵ *Escurinha* ('little dark') is the diminutive (and feminine) form to the word *escura*, which means dark. In Portuguese, this diminutive is used to soften the strength of the word dark (which, given the racist historical constitution of race in Brazil, is usually considered to be negative) and give a tone to this darkness. Interestingly, Hondius (2014) shows that the Dutch also make use of this linguistic device when they intend "to 'disarm' color difference by belittling it" (Hondius, 2014, p. 277), for instance, when they say '*mensen met een kleurtje*', people with a little colour.

²⁶ Dutch for dark.

5.2. The importance of colour

As discussed in Chapter 3, in the Netherlands explicit reference to race is often avoided because it is thought to be racist, and visible differences such as skin colour are considered unimportant (Essed & Trienekens, 2008; Hondius, 2014). In everyday interactions, however, race appears, even if not explicitly mentioned. Thus, making visible the practices of visibility means to bring to the fore the different meanings ascribed to the body, in order to emphasise the constructedness of the visual, and to unveil the processes of how we see and read others and how others see and read us. These practices are so naturalised in day-to-day interaction that they go unnoticed, as though no interpretation is being made on the part of the observer. But interpretations of the visible inscriptions on the body (Alcoff, 2006) are constantly in motion. The findings of my research suggest that, in fact, there is a “peculiar coexistence of, on the one hand, a regime of continentwide recognized visual markers that construct nonwhiteness as non-Europeanness with on the other a discourse of colorblindness that claims not to ‘see’ racialized difference” (El-Tayeb, 2011, p. xxiv). In this sense, although they commonly claim otherwise, Dutch people *do* see colour and *do* use it to create meaning and give meaning to reality.

An example of this recognition of visual markers is offered by Yasmin, who identifies herself as brown (and not black, by virtue of having indigenous ancestry). As well as darker skin, she also has straight black hair,²⁷ which, in her understanding, is the main marker of difference between these two racial categories:

To me, the black person is not only about the skin tone. To me, at least in my context of Bahia,²⁸ what I used to see was that mostly what made you black or not was the hair, for me it was the hair. So, if I had this skin tone and curly hair, I would be black.

In the Netherlands, she understands that she is seen as non-white and, in the example she provides below, it is possible to see that this perception is purely informed by her skin colour.

²⁷ In Brazil, straight black hair is strongly associated with the indigenous people, and it was also referenced by other participants when explaining their racial heritage and physical characteristics. This association dates back to colonial times and was already pointed out by Pero Vaz de Caminha in the letter mentioned in Chapter 3 (Biblioteca Nacional, 2015).

²⁸ A state in the north-eastern region of Brazil with a significant presence of indigenous people or their descendants.

When talking about needing a haircut and the difficulty of finding a good hairdresser, her Dutch work colleague says he is going to ask his girlfriend for the contact of her hairdresser:

He said, “she’s morena²⁹ as you are”, because he said her family is from Curaçao, “she must know, maybe her hairdresser can help you, because her hair is much curlier than yours, she does her hair with this hairdresser and she likes the result.” That is, he equated me to his girlfriend, who is a descendent of a Curaçaoan.

Yasmin’s colleague seemingly presumes that his girlfriend’s hairdresser can help Yasmin, not because both have a similar kind of hair, but because both have similar skin tone. Although the topic of conversation is hair, what is being visually registered is skin colour. This simple exchange highlights how analysis and judgement are being performed at such an automatized and naturalised level that it is not even questioned why sharing a similar skin tone would be a key factor in this case.

Moreover, differently from the racial constitution in Yasmin’s context, where the texture of the hair makes a difference in defining who is black or who is not, her quote shows that, independently of her hair type, her darker skin tone defines how she is seen. In this sense, it moves closer, for instance, to the understanding of Yasmin’s husband. She indicates that, to him, in his context of coming from Rio de Janeiro where indigenous people are not as prevalent, she would probably be classified as black. As can be seen, the same happens in the Netherlands. This demonstrates the prevalence of skin colour as an important marker for analysis and classification.

The same can be verified from the experience of Júlia, who complements the case of Yasmin. Júlia identifies as white, *despite* having curly hair “*which already is not the profile of a white person*”, and she has never considered that she might be seen as other than white in the Netherlands. In fact, as I will discuss later, by comparing her experience to other people, she realises that she is indeed treated differently from those who are visibly marked in Dutch society, although still dealing with the fact that she is not Dutch. In any case, when she claims that curly hair is not the profile of a white person, this hints at an essentialised and fixed idea of what a white person looks like (and thus an idea of pure whiteness, that does not ‘come’

²⁹ *Morena* (f) or *moreno* (m) is one of the most ambiguous (and prevalent) terms used in Brazil. It can refer to fair-skinned people with dark hair, to brown-skinned people (as a synonym to *pardo*), as a synonym for tanned, and as a euphemistic (racist) way to refer to dark-skinned people. When participants use this term, I prefer to leave it in its original Portuguese form.

with curly hair). This reinforces the importance given to skin colour, since in her case (a fair-skinned person with curly hair) or in Yasmin's or Isadora's case (a dark-skinned person with straight hair), the texture of the hair does not change the way they are seen.

In this context, which reveals the territorialisation and situatedness of race, participants with darker skin tones like Yasmin and Isadora said that they are usually identified as being from the Antilles, Suriname, or Morocco. Livia, who identifies herself as black, makes the point that Brazil, being so distant from Europe (and Brazilians not being as common in the Netherlands as other nationalities), is not usually mentioned when people try to figure out where she is from. Since there are so many Moroccans and Surinamese in the Netherlands, "*who are also morenos, with dark hair*", this is usually the guess of Dutch people.

Miguel (who identifies as brown) says that miscegenation in Brazil produced a skin colour "*very similar to the skin colours found in countries . . . such as India, Pakistan, or the Middle East in general*", and that for this reason, "*100% of the time, I'm labelled as either Indian or Pakistani*".³⁰ However, when he goes to *Latine* parties, his brownness is no longer read as Indian or Pakistani. In this context, he is understood to be Latino, which even changes the attitudes of people towards him. For example, when discussing the politics of desire, while in regular contexts he claims not to feel desired, in these settings where he is identified as Latino, he experiences open sexual interest in him. In this sense, the meaning attributed to his skin colour changes from flagging up potential danger (more on this later in the chapter) to that of an exotic and sexualised man.

The women's identification as Moroccan is particularly interesting. According to Alcoff (2006):

this mediation through the visible, working on both the inside and the outside, both on the way we read ourselves and the way others read us, is what is unique to racialized identities as opposed to ethnic and cultural identities. The criteria thought to determine racial identity have ranged from ancestry, experience, self-understanding, to habits and practices, yet these sources are coded through visible inscriptions on the body. The processes by which racial identities are produced work through the shapes and shades of human morphology, the size and shape of the nose, the design of the eye, the breadth

³⁰ He was the only one who mentioned being identified as Indian or Pakistani, which made me wonder about the intersection between racial identification and gender. That is, whether the brown colour in a male body is read differently from the brown colour in a female body. However, since he was the only man I interviewed, I cannot take this analysis further.

of the cheekbones, the texture of hair, and the intensity of pigment, and these subordinate other markers such as dress, customs, and practices. (p. 191)

In a context where culture is believed to be the main focus of analysis, and where cultural markers are essentialised and generalised to all people from a group, as in the case of Moroccan women wearing the headscarf, the absence of this element is not enough to stop Brazilian women with a darker skin tone from being identified as Moroccan. This suggests that, in fact, skin colour (and the racial meanings associated with it) is the first element used to order reality. In this case, “race trumps culture” (Alcoff, 2006, p. 238), showing that the identities ascribed to these Brazilians are firstly mediated by skin colour and not by “dress, customs, and practices” (p. 191).

Isadora, for instance, informs me that her initial years in the Netherlands were particularly difficult because of the way she was seen. Having arrived in the country in 2007, she says: “*My appearance is of someone who comes from Morocco or Turkey. At that time, nobody would identify me as a Brazilian, as a Latina. I was seen as an Arab.*”³¹ Through practices of reading the visible inscriptions on her body, Isadora was in fact recategorised into a new racialised ethnicity and faced the consequences of being positioned in this new group. This provoked much personal pain because she could not understand why people were discriminating against her: “*I felt people did not sit beside me on the bus, so that made me very sad because I used to think ‘why don’t they want to sit beside me? I’m white, why?’*” Nowadays she has managed to leave this racialised ethnicity initially ascribed to her by occupying a position of non-threatening blackness (Alcoff, 2006), as I will discuss later in the chapter. However, as mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, her skin colour continues to be used to identify her in her everyday life, which shows that race is manifested and lived through the markers of skin colour, despite the general denial of its relevance in the Dutch context.

5.3. The relations between visible marks and origins

5.3.1. *Black Brazilianness/Otherness*

What these experiences also demonstrate is that the imaginary is marked by “constructions in which ‘race’ is imagined within specific national boundaries, and nationality in terms of ‘race’” (Kilomba, 2010, p. 64). As we have seen so far, the brown or black bodies

³¹ Although Turks are not Arabs.

of Yasmin, Livia, Isadora and others are thought to have a different origin, one that is not Dutch and can only have come from somewhere else. These racialised bodies are then understood to originate in nations from where people previously migrated to the Netherlands – Suriname, Morocco, the Antilles – in a further process of racial territorialisation (on the understanding that Surinamese, Moroccans, and Antilleans are *all* black or brown).

Participants' accounts suggest that, in the Netherlands, blackness comes to mean foreignness, because foreigners are defined as black. In Isadora's experience from when she first moved to the country, "*there were two groups, the whites, [who are] the native people, and the blacks, the blacks were everything that was different from white, it's black. And I fitted, since I'm not white, I fitted in this other group, of people who are black.*" Here Isadora suggests the intertwining of marks and origin when she both expresses an equivalence between whiteness and the 'native' people and the fact that everyone else is defined against this norm. In this sense, skin colour is used as a proxy for defining who is 'really' Dutch, 'really' native, and who is not. However, in specific cases, origin, besides the marks of skin colour, also appears to define blackness. Livia comments:

I always notice when he [her Dutch husband] is going to refer to Turks, he says, "ah, the black guy", and then I say, "is he of my colour?", and then he says like "no, he's Turkish". Then I said, "then why do you call him black? What is black for you?", and then he says, "ah, black because he's not Dutch, because he's not from here."

In Livia's account, the 'Turkish guy', although apparently not having a dark skin tone like Livia's, is also 'black'. As in the case of schools with a majority of 'allochthonous' pupils being defined as 'black schools', foreignness is equated with blackness. This discursive move only reifies the other part of the dichotomy, that is, that blackness is incompatible with Dutchness.

In a Dutch language class, after saying that she was in the Netherlands because of her relationship with a Dutch man, Livia was questioned by the teacher: "*but is he Dutch with a Surinamese parent?*", and I said, "*no, he's Dutch, born here and his whole family is from here*" and then she was like "*ah, then he's Dutch Dutch*". To be 'Dutch Dutch', then, means to be the *autochthonous* white Dutch, the *authentic* Dutch. This highlights the colonial understanding of a *pure* Dutch, different from the 'mixed' Dutch, which is represented in the contemporary definitions of autochthony and 'person with Dutch background'. More interesting is the directing of this question towards a black body. Livia believes the teacher

asked this because Lívia is a foreigner, thus implying that, if she is in a relationship with a Dutch man, then he is probably ‘*mestiço*’. However, the teacher could have asked about any different background. Why did she choose to ask specifically about a Surinamese background? It appears that Lívia’s black body evokes an association between blackness and Suriname, and thus the conclusion of a relationship between a black woman and a (black) Dutch man of Surinamese descent.

If the yardstick for defining blackness is the white Dutch, and Brazilians who have non-white bodies are immediately associated with being from somewhere else, what happens to Brazilians who carry the marks of whiteness? Many participants said that they face dismay or surprise from the Dutch when they disclose their origins. Cecília, who identifies as yellow, says that she has many stories about people’s reactions when she says she is Brazilian: “*The thing that I hear most when I say I’m Brazilian is ‘wow, but you don’t look Brazilian!’*, and my answer is usually, ‘*huh? But what does a Brazilian look like?*’” Like many others, she explains that, from what she understands by talking to people, the dominant fantasy around Brazilians is marked by blackness, and more specifically, by the imaginary of the ‘*mulata*’, with all the racist and sexualised connotations that this term carries. “*So, when I arrive from the top of my 1.60m with this Japanese face, everyone looks at my face and says ‘what?’*, and I generally ask, ‘*what did you expect?*’”

If her “*Japanese face*” provokes astonishment, so does white skin colour:

“Are you Brazilian? But you’re white!”, they think like that. (Gisele)

They ask where I’m from and when I say I’m Brazilian, “uh, but so white?” (Rebeca)

“You’re too white, you were born in Rio and you’re white as the wall, it can’t be, you’re not Brazilian”, I’ve heard that. (Fernanda)

In Yasmin’s account, her husband’s whiteness is contrasted with her own brown skin as another piece of evidence that he cannot be Brazilian, marking the sense of superiority among the Dutch as being the one who defines what a person looks like, despite the person’s own knowledge:

My husband is very white, from a Portuguese family, blue eyes, light-coloured hair, and when he says he’s Brazilian, everybody is like, “no, she’s Brazilian, you’re not!” They

don't believe he's Brazilian; I've heard that already in a million ways. "How so? She's the perfect cliché of a Brazilian that I would expect, but you're not."

The recurrence of 'buts' and negatives reinforces the opposition between whiteness and Brazilian origin. Yasmin's brown body meets the expectation about Brazilians in the Dutch imaginary, while the white bodies of the others do not. To the Dutch person, if this whiteness cannot be Brazilian, its source must be somewhere else.

5.3.2. *White Dutchness/ Europeanness*

In the face of the intersection between race and origins, the Dutch usually locate the white participants' origins in Europe, indicating that their whiteness can only be European:

Everybody I ever talked to, ever met here, thinks at first that I'm a Spaniard. It's the first thing. I have Spanish ancestors, I have Portuguese ancestors, and when I say I'm Brazilian, "wow, you're Brazilian, you don't look like one!" And they really say that I don't look like one. (Fernanda)

In some places, it had already happened that people assumed I was a foreigner, but normally they assume I'm a Polish foreigner, or Italian, or Spanish, they don't guess Brazil at first. (Rebeca)

In these two situations, whiteness is confined to the realms of Europe. The reactions of surprise to a Brazilian's whiteness reveal the constant forgetting of the European colonial history, when whiteness was 'imposed' upon the colonies and, in the case of Brazil, effectively reinforced through the ideology of whitening. This wilful amnesia makes it inconceivable that fair-skinned bodies can now 'come' from many different places than Europe. Moreover, the erasure of the memory of colonialism further reinforces the exclusion from the "archive of racial images" (El-Tayeb, 2011, p. xxv) the possibility that Europeans may also not be white.

In the case of Beatriz, her Brazilian origins not only provoke surprise in the face of her whiteness, but are also 'denied' once she claims her Polish heritage:

When I say I'm Brazilian, people are like "wow, but Brazilian, so white?" They imagine a Brazilian as someone with a darker skin tone, "but Brazilian so white like this?" Then

I say, “ah, that’s because I’m a descendant of Polish [ancestors]”, “ah, well, so you’re not Brazilian, you’re Polish.”

Beatriz’ European origins are taken to explain her mark of whiteness. When she justifies the apparent ‘inconsistency’ between her looks and what is expected by the interlocutor through her Polish descent, she is consolidating the understanding that whiteness can only be European. However, when the other person hears this explanation and not only accepts it as plausible but also concludes that she is thus not Brazilian but Polish, the boundaries of racial territorialisation and the European exceptionalism of whiteness are once again reinforced.

It is striking that, in these accounts, my participants’ whiteness is not taken to be Dutch, suggesting that there are some other physical elements, apart from whiteness (or different from this whiteness), that are missing from this idealised image of Dutchness. So, at first, judging by their looks, they are assumed to be foreigners, but from somewhere nearby in Europe. In a reference to the past racialised system of division among the white ‘race’, where “only the ‘Nordic’ was assumed to be fully white, while Eastern Europeans were believed to be tainted with ‘Asiatic,’ [and] Southern Europeans with ‘Semitic’ and ‘black blood’” (El-Tayeb, 2011, p. 181), these Brazilians were constantly referenced as Italians or Spaniards. In this regard, Helena mentioned a conversation with a Dutch colleague, in which he said to her and her Spanish colleague that, *although* they were not from the North, they were still white. In this context, differently from the ‘Turkish guy’, those Brazilians were not named as black, even though they are ‘not from here’, pointing to a European exceptionalism of whiteness.

In this context, it is revealing to see the reaction of Valentina’s Dutch husband when they first met, and she asked him to guess where she was from:

At first he said, “your phone number is from Germany”, my number was still from Cologne, “but I don’t think you’re German” . . . then he tried... he said Italian, I said, “no, I’m not Italian”, then he guessed Spanish.

Valentina, who describes herself as brown because her skin tone is different from that of her husband and other Dutch people (although it is still quite fair), is not believed to be German, despite her phone number being from there. Why not? Again, as discussed above, this could connect to some missing elements of imaginary Germanness, defined by this kind of ‘Nordic’ whiteness (Kilomba, 2010). In face of a light-brown-skinned woman, he would not guess her origins to be German, even though her phone number was from there. He then guesses Italy or

Spain, that is, Southern European countries where physical features such as darker-coloured eyes and hair can exist alongside fairer skin tones.

In the case of Sophia, her fair skin, light-coloured eyes, and blonde hair are commonly interpreted as Dutch, indicating the persistence of a certain kind of typical Dutch appearance in the collective imaginary. In the presence of other cues besides her physical appearance, like her name, this is used to help locate her origins, but still that helps to explain her whiteness which again is re-inscribed as not being Brazilian:

Many times people would come to talk, “ah, wow, I thought you were Dutch, because your appearance is like a Dutch person”, or because, I don’t know, when they see my name, they’d think, because of my family name, that I was from Germany, or, because of my first name, that I was from Italy, several times like this, but never the guess of someone... or when I’d say “guess where I’m from”, they would never say Brazil, never.

In contrast to Valentina, Sophia has the appearance of a Dutch person and can *pass* not only as Dutch, but also as German. This means that her family name not only ‘sounds’ German, but her appearance ‘looks’ German, and therefore she *could* be German. Also, interestingly, even though first names can be very internationalised and not a reliable proxy for origins, people still consider them. This shows the ‘need’ for people to explain in a ‘logical’ way her ‘white skin, blonde hair, light-coloured eyes’ appearance. This is another piece of evidence for how a colonial construction of the ‘white race’ as European still informs Dutch understandings and is naturalised in people’s imaginations: since Sophia is white, she can only be European. One could argue that it is natural to use appearance and last names to indicate origins (although I am actually problematising this by showing that white skin colour does not necessarily indicate Europeanness); however, the use of Sophia’s first name demonstrates the existence of a need for coherence between the imaginary and the reality, that is, between her whiteness and her origins. Grada Kilomba (2010), while investigating the experiences of Afro-Germans, showed that Germans are “invested in the fantasy that only whites can be German and that Germany is white – a fantasy that rules their reality” (p. 67), and the multiple attempts to place Sophia’s and the other participants’ white looks inside Europe show that Dutch are also invested in the maintenance of this white European/Dutch fantasy.

What is enlightening about this case is that it permits reflection about the opposite situation. It shows why questions seeking for ‘real’ origins are posed to the Dutch/European black body who carries other markers of Dutchness/Europeanness, such as the national

language or the national passport (El-Tayeb, 2011; Essed, 1991; Essed & Trienekens, 2008; Hondius, 2014; Kilomba, 2010). That is, by not conforming to the white fantasy, black Europeans/Dutch are looked at and questioned about their ('real') origins, despite the presence of markers of national belonging. Or the assumption is made that this person is not 'really' Dutch, as the case of Lívía's language teacher shows. Or, even when those postcolonial citizens are *accepted*, "they are still designated as 'people with foreign looks'" (Jones, 2014, p. 332), marking a different origin. In all these cases, a colonial relation of power is reinforced whereby the black person is subjugated to the white gaze and forced to explain herself/himself (Kilomba, 2010), and is positioned as an outsider/'not really' an insider.

Other participants' accounts confirm this combination of whiteness with other physical characteristics that represent typical Dutchness. Manuela's husband, whom she describes as white, with light-coloured hair and blue eyes, is mistaken for being Dutch: "*I see that sometimes they have a thing with my partner, like, 'oh, are you also Dutch? No, you're not? Where are you from? Are you Brazilian? How so?'*" The same thing happens with Júlia's husband: "*My husband is white with blue eyes, right, so he's the spitting image of a European, so him... everyone, every time they see him, say: 'I thought you were also Dutch', no, my husband is Brazilian.*"

What is being communicated is that, not only does the 'package' composed of fair skin colour, light-coloured hair, and blue eyes stand for Dutchness and the brown body for Brazilianness, but also that the Dutch body cannot be brown. As argued by many scholars (Jones, 2014; Wekker, 2016), these accounts reveal that whiteness is still one of the essential conditions of 'real' naturalised Dutchness, and that origins are understood to be 'see-able' through the marks on the body (Yanow et al., 2016). This shows that the taxonomic logic of past understandings of 'race', such as Linnaeus' classification of humankind, are still present. This reinforces El-Tayeb's argument (2011) that there is a shared iconography among Europeans that remains unmentioned, but continues to be used to define who belongs to Europeanness and who does not. In this sense, postcolonial populations "challenge the European narrative of racelessness by continuously bringing the forgotten history to the fore" (El-Tayeb, 2011, p. xxvi). My participants' experiences in this research show that, not only do postcolonial black/brown bodies question this 'not seeing race', but so do white bodies, insofar as their whiteness is repeatedly considered to be European. It uncovers how this shared iconography is indeed marked by a European white self-image and identity, which ultimately excludes those who do not conform to this imaginary and subject them to experiences of racism in their own homelands (Essed, 1991; Kilomba, 2010).

5.4. Being the norm: the European power to define

As discussed in Chapter 3, racial thinking first emerged from European encounters with a sense of difference in the context of imperial expansion (Hall, 2017). Racial classification from the Enlightenment period established white Europeans as the centre from which the world was analysed, classified, and categorised, and against whom all others were compared. However, as posited by Quijano (2007), although political colonialism is over, the colonial domination of Europeans over others continues.

In this sense, not only do Dutch people read and classify whiteness as European, but Brazilians constantly reinforce this understanding. In many of the above quotes, participants would characterise their experiences of Dutch surprise in the face of their whiteness by mentioning it alongside their European heritage, as a way to show that they were white or to typify their whiteness. As expressed by Júlia in the last quote, to be “*the spitting image of a European*” is to be white. Or, as told by Beatriz regarding her daughter, who was born in the Netherlands³²: “*in Brazil, when she says, ‘I’m Dutch, I was born in the Netherlands’, [people say] ‘ah, Dutch, I’ve never seen a black Dutch person, Dutch people are white’.*” There is a colonisation of the imagination whereby the white European is positioned as the norm and the yardstick for comparison, which ultimately excludes non-white Europeans from Europeanness and defines who is taken to be white/European.

This colonisation of the imagination is informed by essentialised racial constructions that are permeated by purity and miscegenation, more specifically by pure (European) whiteness contrasted against a mixed (Brazilian) whiteness that always needs to be contextualised in reference to Europe. Many participants said that white Brazilians were not considered to be ‘really white’ in Europe. Valentina, for instance, passed through a process of racial reflection after moving to the Netherlands and having a child with her Dutch husband. She realised that, although in Brazil she could be called white, here “*we’re different than white*”. She noticed that her two-year-old child has many physical features inherited from the father, but her “*colours*”: “*he’s branco pardo, this yellowish white that for sure if he sunbathes, he would get just like me. When I sunbathe, I really get super morena, tanned, brownish.*”³³ Moreover, although before, when she lived in a multicultural neighbourhood, she did not notice

³² The Brazilian father, according to Beatriz, is *pardo*, and the daughter, “*when she sunbathes gets really [emphasis] tanned, not black, but she’s more morena than I am*”.

³³ Literally ‘*marronzinha*’ (little brown).

any difference, after moving to a neighbourhood composed mostly of white Dutch, she noticed that she was standing out.

Helena, who also uses the word ‘yellow’³⁴ to refer to herself, says that she had never considered herself to be white even in Brazil because of the history of miscegenation both in her family (Spanish great-grandfather and black great-grandmother) and in Brazil more generally. In fact, after moving to the Netherlands, she confirms that this understanding became even stronger. Although she recognises that in the Brazilian construction of race she might be read as white, in the Dutch context she understands that she is not white, for political and phenotypical reasons (although she is quite fair-skinned, even more so than Valentina, for instance). This is particularly interesting in the face of the example she provided in which her Dutch colleague identified her as white – although not from the North.

Parallel to the understanding that ‘mixed’ Dutch are not really Dutch, both accounts suggest that the history of miscegenation in Brazil produced a whiteness that is not real – not as real as the ‘pure’ European whiteness is taken to be at least. In this sense, Europe continues to be the centre of knowledge production, as expressed by Helena: *“If you look at the history of colonisation, at the way the Spaniards arrived, the Portuguese, and defined what is, who is white and who is not, and this got perpetuated.”* The white European thus remains the norm, which reinforces their white self-identification, and gives them the power of definition.

When I asked Isadora when she first realised that she was not seen as white in the Netherlands, she said that it was right after she arrived, when she first met her ex-father-in-law. On that occasion, he was trying to figure out where she was from:

He said, “look my daughter, I don’t know, because you have the height of a European, but you have the butt of a Black woman, you have thick lips like a Black woman, but your hair is long and black like the indigenous” . . . so, he said, “you’re like a mongrel dog.”

She says that at first she was shocked, but then she concluded that he was right: *“not that I’m a mongrel, but my race is a mix of everything, it’s not a defined race, so it’s as if I was a mongrel, indeed.”* This contrasted with him, who was from a defined and ‘pure race’: *“he said, ‘look, I’m white, I’m European’.”*

³⁴ In this context, not related to being of Asian heritage.

In this passage, we have another clear reference to the historical past of ‘race’ where the different ‘races’ were understood as clear and distinguishable, and that mixing them would produce a ‘mixed-race’ or mongrel identity (Omi & Winant, 2015). In this sense, more than just a game of guessing where a person comes from, the visible inscriptions on her body are taken to identify the different ‘races’ and Isadora is turned into an object of analysis by the Dutch gaze, which fixes her in a mongrel-like *identity*, using and reinforcing stereotypical racialised descriptions of the body. ‘*Visibly*’, she was of a ‘*mixed race*’, somehow undefined, and therefore she could not be European (as the other Brazilians experienced). In this sense, in contrast, Europeans are positioned as having a defined and not mixed ‘race’ (the white European ‘race’), and her ex-father-in-law’s whiteness is left unquestioned and unproblematised, transformed into the norm against which the comparison is made. She is different from him, but “one only becomes ‘different’ because one ‘differs’ from a group who has the power to define itself as the norm – the *white* norm. All those who are not *white* are constructed as ‘different,’ and whiteness constructed as the reference point from which all racial ‘Others’ ‘differ’” (Kilomba, 2010, p. 42).

Reinforcing the idea discussed earlier that race is constantly being evoked to define belonging or exclusion, Isadora also has European heritage; however, this does not serve as a basis for her to be identified as European. She explains that her grandfather was German, and her grandmother was Italian, but her mother is *parda*. In this context, she says:

Some children are lighter, right, and others are darker. I’m one of the slightly darker daughters, but my sister is blonde. My sister is blonde with blue eyes due to the German and Italian descent, and I took after my [other] grandmother and my mom.

Moreover, reinforcing the coloniality of power between Europe and Brazil, which positions Europe at the centre, Isadora is the one who must argue and explain that she is not *donker*, which she says costs her much energy. As in a colonial dynamic, where the black person is trapped in an endless cycle of explanation (Kilomba, 2010), Isadora explains that, if the person has never left the Netherlands and “*does not have a basic knowledge*” (denouncing the forgetting/lack of knowledge of many Dutch people about European/Dutch colonial history), she must explain everything about Brazilian history and the history of slavery in the country, so she just accepts the denomination given to her. She denounces the position of power of the Dutch, which ‘forces’ her to accept and reinforce the definition ascribed to her. But then, Isadora goes on to place Europe at the centre again: when I ask whether after this explanation,

people ‘accept’ her whiteness, she says: “*Yes. And when you see my last name, because my last name is German, I can prove that I’m white.*” Again, white Europeanness is reified and naturalised.

5.5. “*The world is white*”: Whiteness and racism

She wishes to wear blue contact lenses and dye her hair blonde. And her hair was curly, so she had it straightened. I don’t think she’s against her skin colour, but she wants to be like the Dutch women, she wants to be blonde. . . . She thinks that, since she was born here, she must be white, she must be blonde with blue eyes. But only because she finds it more beautiful. She thinks she is beautiful, but she would prefer to be like that, if she could choose, she would prefer to be Dutch. (Beatriz)

This could be a description of the desires of Pecola Breedlove, the black girl in Toni Morrison’s novel *the Bluest Eye* (Morrison, 1970/2007), who dreamed about having blue eyes and thus to fit the white beauty standards of US society in the 1940s. Nevertheless, it is Beatriz’ account of her 13-year-old daughter and her process of adaptation to living in the Netherlands.³⁵ This quote represents a bridge between the construction of whiteness as a norm in the Netherlands that I have been discussing, and the everyday experiences of racism lived by those bodies who are made visible by their difference and do not fit this somatic norm (Puwar, 2004).

Although Beatriz does explain to her daughter that simply being born in the Netherlands does not mean she will have such physical characteristics, what she appears to not problematise is why her daughter “*would prefer to be like that*”, or why it is worrisome to have a teenage girl thinking that ‘white’ physical characteristics are more beautiful than hers (even if she does think that she is beautiful). As a white woman, she does not grasp the consequences of not racially conforming to the norm and having privilege of not standing out.

Most women, though, recognised the influence of their whiteness. As shown in the title, when discussing with Larissa whether being white somehow helped her in her everyday life in the Netherlands, she answered: “*In the moment we live, absolutely, we’re in Europe, right? It’s real. . . . I mean, the world is white, right?*” The world being white points to the dominance of whiteness as a category of power over all the others. It relates to what Ahmed (2007) describes

³⁵ Beatriz left the Netherlands when her daughter was one year old and returned ten years later.

as the social and bodily orientation of whiteness: in a world oriented by whiteness, some bodies feel more at home than others.

Júlia, for instance, told me how satisfied and happy she was living in the neighbourhood where she and her husband had decided to buy a house. She told me that they were warmly welcomed by the neighbours and have even been invited to visit their houses, so she was finally having a chance to socialise with Dutch people. It was only when talking to others that she realised there was a difference in treatment:

I was giving a ride to an Egyptian woman who also lives here, . . . I was telling her how happy I was here, that I had been super welcomed, that people are super open here, and she said, “wow, where did you find this, because no Dutch person ever talks to me.” And she was one of those who wears a veil, so then I realised that it does exist, they really are prejudiced. The same way, I gave a ride to a guy from Trinidad and Tobago, and he’s black, . . . and he said the same, that people did not talk to him.

After these experiences, she realised that: *“the fact that I’m white, and maybe even the fact that my husband is so close to their physiognomy, to their [physical] characteristics, it makes it a lot easier.”* As argued by Ahmed (2007), “to be comfortable is to be so at ease with one’s environment that it is hard to distinguish where one’s body ends and the world begins. One fits, and by fitting the surfaces of bodies disappears from view” (p. 157). Due to her ‘likeness’ to the white norm and her husband’s white Dutch ‘likeness’, Júlia feels at home, her body allows her to feel welcomed in this space, even though she does not speak the language, and is ‘non-Western’. In her case, it is only by accessing the constraints lived by other bodies that the surface of her body becomes evident.

To be non-white where whiteness is the norm, then, means to have one’s own space and mobility curtailed. It means to be stopped (Ahmed, 2007). Isadora, for example, narrated an experience she had in the airport, one of the main loci of bodily control, which she also recognised: *“at the airport, you’re very vulnerable, the coloured woman in Europe is very, very vulnerable”*. She tells me that, when returning to the Netherlands after visiting Brazil, she realised that she was always stopped by customs, while her (white) Dutch ex-husband would pass freely. On one of these journeys, then, she decided to do a test: she put everything that she was not allowed to bring from Brazil (like meat and fruit pulp) in his bag instead of hers (and without him knowing). As she was expecting, she was stopped and *“he left with the bag that was full”*. While she perverted the racist system in her favour, her experience demonstrates

what happens to bodies that do not conform to the white somatic norm, even for someone who lives legally in the country and speaks the language. It also shows how whiteness is rendered invisible to those who embody it, who do not recognise how it extends their bodies into the world (Frankenburg, 1993). Isadora's husband, for instance, did not agree that this had happened because he is white and she is not, and believed that it was only a coincidence. He did not recognise the privilege of not being stopped, since, as argued by Peggy McIntosh (1988/2020), "the pressure to avoid (recognising white privilege) is great, for in facing it I must give up the myth of meritocracy" (p. 21). That is, recognising white privilege means acknowledging that many accomplishments are facilitated by whiteness and not by merit, hence the resistance on the part of many white people.

Miguel also presented an account of the workings of structural and individual racism, and the lack of acknowledgment by white people of racism and their privilege as whites. He told me that one time he went to a store with his Russian girlfriend (whom he described as "*white, blonde, light-coloured eyes*") and they separated to find what they were looking for:

Then I realise that there's someone following me, I had already told her about that and she was like, "no, this is something in your head", so this time, I sent her a message and I said, "look, there's someone following me now, if you come in this direction, you're going to see", and then she saw, and she was like, "look at that", . . . and then she joined me and the person left, because now I was 'white approved'.³⁶

As well as being another example of how experiences of racism are discredited and denied as 'something in your head' by white people, Miguel's account also alludes to how his brown male body is read as a 'stranger danger' (Ahmed, 2000) and how his girlfriend's whiteness extends to him, granting him 'white approval' and making him no longer a danger. It grants him the right to move and the right to be.

An intersectional relation between gender and race, but also nationality, was offered by Beatriz in relation to her Brazilian ex-husband:

My second husband was black. Brazilian and black. So, that's what happened, he couldn't find work alone, I think maybe due to being a man also, but he couldn't find

³⁶ He used this expression in English.

it. People didn't trust a man, and above all a black and Brazilian man, they didn't want him.

Among people 'living illegally' in the Netherlands, the kinds of jobs available are highly gendered: women are usually domestic workers, while men are construction workers. Beatriz informs me that he was only able to work as a cleaner once he was with her. This was confirmed later when she gave birth and had to stop working for a while:

When I had the baby, even though we worked in those houses for so many years, when I had the baby, I was away for a while and many people didn't accept him. And I think that [his skin colour] was the reason, because they were already used to our service, they knew that he worked well, that he did the job well, but perhaps due to of a lack of confidence. "Oh, no, not him alone, if you were together, fine, but not him alone." Then we asked: "Why? We've worked here so many years, don't you trust us?" Yes, but alone they didn't trust him any longer, so I think it was prejudice, it wasn't about the communication because it wasn't needed, they were already used to our work, we already had the house keys.

Firstly, the question arises: what kind of women's emancipation do the Dutch refer to as a feature of their national identity? While Brazilians migrating for family formation are constructed as coming from an underdeveloped country and thus need to be *taught* that in the Netherlands there is gender equality, Beatriz' account reveals the persistence of the association between domestic work and women. If in the Netherlands both men and women are responsible for domestic activities, as discursively reinforced by the Dutch government in the integration material and examination (Prins & Saharso, 2008), why could a man not be 'hired' to undertake such a service? Moreover, in the intersection between gender and migration, it can be seen that, for those who can afford it, Dutch gender equality is also achieved by 'hiring' third-world women to do the domestic work, in parallel with what happens in Brazil between middle-class white and poor black women. That is, Dutch women are supposed to be equal to Dutch men, but not all women are supposed to be equal.

The other element in this equation is the race and nationality of Beatriz' ex-husband. As a Brazilian, Beatriz means that the stereotypes associated with Brazilians refer to them being unreliable and criminals, and as a black man these are further reinforced by the racist stereotypes of danger associated with blackness. Bearing in mind that this activity takes place

within the private sphere and involves accepting someone inside one's own home and usually giving them the keys to the house, as mentioned by Beatriz, it says a lot that a black man is not accepted alone in the house, but she, a white woman, is. In this case too, her whiteness is able to 'white approve' him, even though she is also Brazilian and also 'living illegally' in the country.

These experiences show that whiteness as an 'invisible knapsack' (McIntosh, 1988/2020) is indeed valid in the Dutch context (Essed & Trienekens, 2008) because, despite being migrants and not European, that is, despite the cultural markers of difference and political power, white participants still benefited from it. This was true among all the white women, although they had distinct reasons for migrating, and even in the case of Beatriz, who occupies the critical location of 'illegal migrant'. Although she did encounter many difficulties because of her migration status, it was striking to see the different experiences between her and the other women in the same situation, but who are brown. As discussed in the last chapter, Beatriz exhibits a sense of entitlement that I understand as being connected to the confidence of inhabiting a body that extends into space and that spaces are oriented around. For instance, she was even able to open a Dutch bank account and be issued a BSN (*burgerservicenummer/citizen service number*) even though she does not have a residence permit to live in the country. One could compare this carefree attitude to the preoccupation described by Manuela about following all the rules so as not to lose her residence permit, although Manuela occupies a comparatively much more privileged position, since she lives lawfully in the country and thus can enjoy the privileges associated with legal residence.

On the other side of the coin, Isabella narrated several serious stories of sexual harassment, especially because of her brown body and the vulnerability of her situation:

[The women] *of my colour and the darker ones, I see that we're much more often attacked by the Dutch. One day I can show you my messages saying "no, no, no", "but, Isabela, why do you give up on this? Look, I'd give you everything, I'd give you a house, I'd give you a car, I'd give you documents, marriage."*

Isabela asks herself why "*even though the Dutch women are so independent, the Dutch [men] think they can buy us*". Within this power dynamic, several locations intersect: being a non-white, non-Dutch woman, living illegally in the country, and working as a cleaner. Echoing a colonial relation of power between the superior white European man and the oppressed and deprived black/indigenous woman, Isabela observes that a Dutch woman who

is single is seen as independent and autonomous, but she is not. Doing a gendered and classed job, living alone in a country where she does not have the ‘right’ to be, Isabela is not taken to be independent and autonomous, but vulnerable, and this vulnerability is understood as an ‘invitation’ to be ‘saved’ by the Dutch man who would give her “*everything*”. Hence, she says that she must take care of herself at work and that, because of this sexualisation and exoticisation of her body, “*we become more constrained, we don’t feel free to do certain things*”. This intersectional gendered, racialised, and classed experience refers to what Ahmed (2017) has called “a form of body politics, or as a speech politics: you have to be careful what you say, how you appear, in order to maximize the distance between yourself and their idea of you” (p. 131). Moreover, it is telling to notice the word that Isabela uses, of becoming ‘constrained’, because it relates exactly to how her counterpart – the white (male) Dutch body – spreads out and, in this case, invades (her) space.

This form of body politics was the strategy used by Isadora to deal with her ‘newfound’ blackness in the Netherlands. As mentioned previously, Isadora was ‘re-classified’ as black upon her arrival in the Netherlands and thus has lost all the social and economic status and white privilege that she enjoyed in Brazil:

I arrived here thinking like a white executive secretary, a person who had never needed to cook, had always had a maid, had always had everything, and I arrived here and I had to do everything, right, I had to work as a cleaner, because I didn't know how to speak another language, so I had to work as a cleaner... my colour was also an obstacle in my daily life, because unfortunately here in the Netherlands there's a lot of discrimination, right? . . . And nowadays I have come to accept myself, I am... I am... I do what I do, nowadays I work in the health system, I no longer work as a cleaner... and... I live as they do, I behave as they do, and I've accepted that I'm brown, or that I'm black, or any other colour, and I'm proud of what I am.

Assimilating, living and behaving as the Dutch do, works as a survival mechanism for dealing with the negative consequences of the new racial category to which she was ascribed. As well as learning the Dutch language, she narrated for instance how she has become as ‘direct’ as the Dutch are, by saying “*the same hairy things*” but “*with no alteration in the voice*”, using the same tone of voice. In this sense, instead of being labelled as a “*crazy*”, “*temperamental*” Brazilian woman/Latina, she is heard and taken seriously:

They identify, right, they identify with my way of talking and they think, “look, this is a coloured woman, but she has studied, she has taken a good Dutch course, or she lives with someone who speaks the language, so it’s better to do what she’s saying because she’s not a crazy person who’s here screaming or doing something else, she’s a person who really went to school and learned.”

As argued by Fanon (1952/2008), “the colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country’s cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle” (p. 9). By behaving like the Dutch, Isadora shows that she has left her jungle, that she ‘has gone to school and has learned’.

Manuela, who also mentioned the “*animalisation*” associated with the black and *Latine* body versus the “*rationality*” associated with the white European in this politics of speech, also gave an account of how otherness can be “subsumed under a number of nonthreatening categories, from the compliant servant to the assimilated other who demonstrably accepts a white worldview as the truth” (Alcoff, 2006, p. 193). Telling me how she is seen in the Netherlands, she said:

I’m kind of a nerd, I always wear glasses, I like to wear social clothing a bit, so people they’re like, “oh, she must be a Dutch woman, a Surinamese who...”, like these friends [of Surinamese background] I told you I had, their mother made a lot of effort to lose her accent, to behave like one [Dutch person], you know, she forced herself to integrate, so they think, “ah, that’s someone who surrendered to our way”.

In this sense, her black body is not read as a ‘stranger danger’ as Miguel’s is, but as a body marked by the signs of ‘domestication’ to the ‘Dutch way’, as someone who has ‘left her jungle behind’. Interestingly, she did narrate a different perception of how she occupies space, saying: “*I think they [Dutch people] have some notion that if a person enters a store, she does have the financial means to do it*”. Comparing her experience with Miguel’s and considering her racial performativity and practices of body politics, which she recognises as having learned and brought from Brazil, it is possible to see how this behaviour is also relevant as a survival mechanism for non-white people in the Netherlands.

5.6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown that, despite claims in the Netherlands that “we don’t do race” (Hondius, 2014, p. 274), people are actually implicated in constantly producing and reinforcing a racial grammar. In this context, it is important that the realm of the visible is used not only to interpret reality, but also to reinforce the meanings attached to the visible marks on the body. Whiteness, constructed in the past as European, is rendered European again and again when the Dutch believe that white Brazilians are Europeans, but that non-white Brazilians are not. The latter are read as Moroccans, Surinamese, Antilleans, further marking a duality and dichotomy between ‘us’ and ‘them’, white Europeans and non-white Others, autochthonous and allochthonous.

The imperial conquest of the imagination means that people who do not conform to these static images can never truly be *part* of the society. As pointed out by El-Tayeb (2011), “there are few signs that the non-white European presence is becoming normalized in the majority’s perception. Instead, racialized populations, while numbers are substantial and rising fast, are still frequently presented as incompatible with the very nature of Europeanness” (p. xx).

Dutch people do see colour and their self-proclaimed colour-blindness and denial of the existence of race does not make it go away. As already verified by Hondius (2009, 2014) in her research with black Dutch men and women, skin colour is a relevant factor in Dutch relations. Beyond the importance given to culture in the Dutch context, phenotype is likewise used to establish difference/similarity and to refer to ethnicity (if one is brown/black and has dark-coloured eyes and hair, one is Moroccan/Surinamese/Antillean; if one is white and has light-coloured eyes and hair, one is Dutch). In this sense, “culture and phenotype are not separated” (Yanow et al., 2016, p. 215), and since one contains the other, difference is established using both dimensions.

Moreover, although it is denied, everyday practices of racism against racialised non-white Others still persist in the Netherlands (Essed, 1991). Additionally, whiteness still grants the privilege of feeling at home in the world (Ahmed, 2007; McIntosh, 1988/2020), of possessing “an invisible package of unearned assets” (McIntosh, 1988/2020, p. 17), of not living the consequences of racism (Eddo-Lodge, 2017), and of ignoring and denying the very way in which those recognised as whites benefit from this whiteness (Alcoff, 2006). It was also possible to see, parallel to what happens in the Netherlands, where the word ‘racism’ is avoided and substituted by discrimination or exclusion instead (Hondius, 2009), that my participants

also rarely used the term racism. Although they did discuss racist situations they had lived or seen happen, they usually named them as discrimination or prejudice.

This shows a tendency among both Brazilians and Dutch people to recognise racism only as individual acts involving racist slurs and violence and ignoring the racist logic structuring society and defining different experiences for whites and racialised others. As pointed out by Ahmed (2012), racism should not be only about recognising the ‘bad apples’, because this “way of thinking underestimates the scope and scale of racism, thus leaving us without an account of how racism *gets reproduced*” (p. 44). It is only by facing the ghosts and making visible the practices of (in)visibility that we can develop strategies to stop its reproduction and naturalisation.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion

Between (in)visibilities is a project that was conceived to investigate how race is manifested and experienced by Brazilians in the Netherlands. The title denotes relational practices of visibility and invisibility and how they are co-constituted. In this sense, it was envisioned as an approach to capturing the multiple ways in which the plurality of identity locations inhabited by the participants signified different experiences of (in)visibility: visibly being in the spotlight, or invisibly escaping racism, and social and governmental control. It also refers to the practices of (in)visibility brought up by governmental racialisations, by marking certain Brazilians (especially those migrating for family formation) as undesired, inferior, backward, and needing to catch up with the Western world, while unmarking and thus reinforcing the marks of privilege carried by others. Additionally, it refers to the ways in which race is made present by the persistent reading of the visible inscriptions on the body as a way to identify origins and a cue for other cultural meanings. In this sense, (in)visibilities relate both to being (un)marked by whiteness and enjoying the mobility conferred by it, and/or standing out and having to deal with feelings of non-belonging and everyday practices of racism.

At the beginning of this thesis, I pointed out that my interest in this project emerged from my observations of how the Netherlands deals with race in a familiar way compared to how it is dealt with in Brazil. Thus, in Chapter 2, I described the methodological path that I took to achieve my research aims. Drawing upon a feminist approach to science, I interviewed 24 Brazilians living in the Netherlands and described and reflected upon the steps taken in this process.

In Chapter 3, *Race here and there*, I presented two strands of discussion related to my research interest. I first outlined why race must still be a central category of analysis, despite the scientific consensus about the nonexistence of distinct *biological* human races, insofar as it is around the idea of race that power relations in society are organised (relations of belonging and exclusion, be it of territory, citizenship, social justice, or imaginaries), and thus it has a concrete effect on people's lives.

Then I moved on to discuss how race is understood in each of the Dutch and Brazilian contexts. While engaged in this literature review, the more I read about the immigration policies of the Netherlands and their relation to race, the more I drew parallels between the

ways in which the Netherlands deals with the phenomenon of migration and Brazil dealt with the end of slavery. Thus, I showed that, in order to define a national identity, and fearing the cultural and racial plurality in the country, the Brazilian elite and politicians promoted a project of ‘whitening’ the population. This project involved not only incentivising white European immigration to the country, aiming at ‘biological miscegenation’, but also a practice of cultural assimilation of any difference into the dominant white group, in a model that Munanga (1999, p. 110) calls ‘universalist racist’ (*modelo racista universalista*).³⁷ This model, thus, “assumes the absolute negation of difference, that is, a negative evaluation of any difference and suggests at the limit an implicit ideal of homogeneity that should be achieved through miscegenation and cultural assimilation” (p. 110, *my translation*). From this perspective, to ‘survive’ in society meant to ‘whiten’, not only phenotypically, but also culturally.

Regarding the Dutch context, I have presented how immigration policies moved towards a more assimilative approach, wherein the migrant is expected to conform and assimilate to Dutch norms and values. Whereas in Brazil this was developed as a way to construct a national identity, in the Netherlands it was an answer to the fear of losing national identification in the face of the arrival of (black) postcolonial migrants and ‘Muslims’. Difference is negatively evaluated, and migrants are expected to abandon their own (backward) culture and values in order to integrate into society. Making the parallel more evident, it is interesting to note that a ‘mixed’ marriage, defined as marriage between a Dutch citizen and a migrant, is considered to be a sign of integration on the part of the migrant. As shown by my analyses in Chapter 5, blackness is equated with foreignness, so immigration policies in the Netherlands also work as a project of ‘whitening’ the migrant population in the country.

In Chapters 4 and 5, I analysed my participants’ experiences. The collected data provides evidence of the structural and individual impact of race and how it operates even when it is not named, a common feature in the Netherlands specifically, and in mainland Europe in general. In Chapter 4, *Visa Matters*, I addressed the racialisation of Brazilian migrants through the mechanisms of border control. Defined as non-Westerners, Brazilians suffer restrictions on their mobility and do not enjoy the same liberty to migrate as nationals from countries defined as Western. In particular, those who migrate for family formation are subjected to stricter measures of control in an attempt to ‘wear them down’ and thus to select those who ‘pass the

³⁷ In contrast to the ‘differentialist racist model’ (*modelo racista diferencialista*) (Munanga, 1999, p. 115) which was present in the USA and South Africa. This model, instead of seeking to assimilate the ‘different’ through miscegenation and assimilation, proposed the opposite, the absolutisation of difference (through segregationist practices).

test' of 'real love' and merit being allowed to cross borders. In the case of women who enjoyed free mobility and privilege in Brazil, those measures meant becoming racialised within a category which limited them. Hence, immigration policies work to exclude and control people, to impose assimilation to the white Dutch norm, to produce and reproduce identities and distinctions between 'us' and 'them', and to define and reinforce borders between belonging/non-belonging and inclusion/exclusion. By analysing the experiences of Brazilians with European citizenship or migrating as highly skilled workers, I showed that these measures also reproduce unequal relations of gender, class, race, and nationality, and further reinforce the fixed and essentialised idea of 'migrants' as non-white, poor, uneducated, underdeveloped, and inferior.

In Chapter 5, *Visibility Matters*, I addressed how the inscriptions on the body are indeed read and analysed by the Dutch, despite general claims that they do not see race and that skin colour does not matter. Blackness is constructed as foreign and whiteness as European, indicating a white European exceptionalism whereby white Brazilians are taken to be Europeans. Moreover, I presented how a colonial logic of dominance, superiority, and centrality is still present in everyday interactions, in which the Dutch person is the one who defines who is Brazilian or not based on their appearance. Whereas in Chapter 4 I illustrated the governmental practices of definition, in this chapter I showed that racialised categorisations are also exercised by Dutch people in social relations. These results indicate an iconography that remains untouched, despite the rising numbers of black/brown European citizens.

The findings revealed that, indeed, the movement of people from the Global South to the Global North, or from the 'non-West' to the 'West', cannot be understood using a fixed framework. My assumption that Brazilians' contextual and racial ambiguity could provide rich and interesting reflections seemingly proved correct. It helped to emphasise the importance of an intersectional analysis of reality, one that takes into consideration the multiple axes of oppression/privilege, subjugation/dominance, exclusion/belonging, and how they can all be present and interacting at the same moment and/or change according to each context, and thus impact upon the individual experiences and realities of living in a new country.

While structural practices of exclusion through visa regimes 'otherised' Brazilians coming to the Netherlands by defining them as undesired migrants (as inferior, backward, underdeveloped people), they would be differently racialised once they had arrived in the country, depending on whether their bodies conformed to the white norm or not. Within this dynamic, white women who had felt the effects of governmental practices of racialisation and

control, especially those in a transnational relationship, once in the Netherlands, could still enjoy the privilege of their whiteness by not ‘standing out’. In a country where the idea of ‘*doe normaal*’ is the norm (the norm is to conform to the norm), *physically* not standing out (being invisible) provides a level of adaptability (and thus, improves quality of life due to not suffering everyday ‘micro’-aggressions) not enjoyed by those who are phenotypically ‘*not normal*’ (visible). Since their white bodies would be taken to represent Europeanness/Dutchness, they could enjoy mobility without being halted. To those not conforming to the somatic norm, everyday practices of racism and of being constantly reminded that they are not ‘from here’ were present, even among Brazilians who were not subjected to the strictest governmental practices of control (for instance, those migrating for different reasons than family formation). In this case, even with the (‘visa’) permission to move, their mobility could be hampered because of their black/brown bodies.

Unfortunately, it was not possible to further investigate the experiences of Brazilian men and how their gender intersects with race and migration. Insights offered by the only male participant hint of a distinctly gendered racialisation, experiences of racism, and ways he is seen in the Netherlands as a brown man, compared to the experiences of the black or brown female participants. Moreover, it would be interesting to investigate how men migrating for family formation experience governmental restrictions and racialisation, especially considering that those practices are generally marked by a gendered focus on women.

Similarly, due to the limits of time and space of a master’s thesis, I could not discuss at any length the experiences provided by the participants who were living ‘illegally’ in the Netherlands and narrated how their arrival was marked by scams trying to lead them to prostitution. Further research focusing on the experiences of these migrants could provide significant knowledge about sex trafficking and sexual exploitation and its intersections with race and class. Also, an in-depth investigation of this group could further develop the findings of this research about the impact of race and gender on their experiences of living in the Netherlands, finding work, and how they are treated in interpersonal relations.

Between (in)visibilities tracks the experiences of Brazilians and shows that practices of racialisation and racism are present in the social structures and everyday life in the Dutch context, even though not named or recognised as such. As the Brazilian case shows, merely denying the existence of racism in the belief that ‘we are all the same’ does not prevent the practices of differentiation and exclusion from being enacted. Since patterns perpetuating exclusion are connected to a historical process and date back to colonial experiences, it is only

through engaging with the constructedness of race and its effects, and through active anti-racist practices, that we can rethink and re-elaborate concepts of citizenship, belonging, and justice. Ultimately, as expressed by feminist scholar Linda Alcoff (2006):

only when we come to be very clear about how race is lived, in its multiple manifestations, and only when we can come to appreciate its often hidden epistemic effects and its power over collective imaginations can we entertain even the remote possibility of its eventual transformation. (p. 179)

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