

Making Sense of Belonging

Dynamics of Belonging among Nigerians in the Netherlands and Sweden

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From February to April 2021, we have conducted qualitative research to write a thesis that marks the end of our time as students of Cultural Anthropology at the University of Utrecht. This period has been memorable in many ways and these memories will stay with us forever. Our research period was extraordinary, being marked by the worldwide impact of COVID-19. However, even with the limitations that we were confronted with, we were able to shape this period and our thesis into something we have learned a lot from and are proud of in many ways.

This is mainly due to everybody who put his time and energy into helping us with our research and thesis. Firstly, we want to thank our supervisor Nine de Jonge for her feedback, her patience and the many discussions we have had over the months. The critical dialogue that you enabled helped us make this research what is. Secondly, we want to thank everybody who participated in this research. We could not have done it without you. You gave us not only your time but opened yourself up to let us into your lives. We are forever grateful for these opportunities. Your stories are the base of this whole research, the trees of which we only picked the fruit. We are immensely grateful.

Introduction

Danique Beun

Migration is a phenomenon of all times, but the way the relationship between migrants and natives is perceived differs throughout time and space. Within the modern, western European nation states, this relationship is often shaped through the concepts of cultural adaptation and integration (Ager and Strang 2008, 177-178; Amit and Bar-Lev 2014, 948; Pratsinakis 2017, 5). It is often expected that immigrants adapt to the new cultural norms and banish their previous cultural affinities in order to be accepted and seen as belonging to the new country (Ager and Strang 2008, 177-178; Amit and Bar-Lev 2014, 948; Brubaker 2010, 64-65). However, recent research shows a shift in this understanding to a perspective where immigrants add to their cultural background rather than replace it with that of the country of settlement (Amit and Bar-Lev 2014, 948; Pratsinakis 2017, 5). This goes hand in hand with a new focus on the perception of the immigrant and its relation to the country of settlement, rather than on the way the immigrant is perceived. On top of the tradition to look at belonging in terms of formal belonging and the acceptance of the country of settlement, the aspect of the way immigrants themselves makes sense of their belonging has been gaining attention (Amit and Bar-Lev 2014, 948; Brubaker 2010, 64-65; Mee and Wright 2009, 772; Pratsinakis 2017, 5-6; Yuval-Davis 2006, 204-209).

Within this research, these perceptions on belonging of immigrants play a key role. Belonging concerns being part of something and wanting to be part of something, both formal and informal, ascribed and affirmed (Yuval-Davis 2006, 199). Multiple mechanisms relate to these ideas of belonging. Ethnic identity plays a great role when it comes to immigrants with an ethnic background that differs from that of native people in the country of settlement, gaining importance when these differences are physically easy to recognize (Ahrens, Kelly and van Liempt 2016, 86). Through this, racism can negatively impact the sense of belonging of immigrants (Ahrens, Kelly and van Liempt 2006, 92; Pratsinakis 2017, 14). Ethnicity and ideas of belonging are thus closely related to each other, influencing the way immigrants can shape their ideas of their sense of belonging in the country of settlement. Connecting these two things gives an insight into how immigrants construct their sense of belonging given the unchangeable factor of their ethnic background. The intention of this research was to create insights in the way ethnic affiliations can influence the sense of belonging, by the first either enhancing or obstructing the latter, or both.

People with a Nigerian background are among the largest immigrant groups all over the world, of which most have settled in the ‘western’ countries (Andrikopoulos 2013, 166; van Dalen 2020, 3). Nigerians are also one of the immigrant groups that within these countries of settlement are easily recognized as being ethnically different. Within this research, people with a Nigerian background made up the focus of the research, opening up the opportunity to look at the way ethnicity and belonging are at work for this group.

This research was a comparative study: the same topic was studied in two different geographical locations, being the Netherlands and Sweden. This was done to analyze and compare how ethnicity and belonging are at interplay for the same group in different locations. Through this, it was possible to see if location plays a role in the outcome of ethnicity on ideas of belonging, through looking at possible similarities and differences. The aim of the research was thus to look at how two mechanisms influence each other in two different locations.

To conduct this research, the research question was the following:

In what way does ethnic identity relate to the sense of belonging of people with a Nigerian background in the Netherlands and Sweden?

To answer this question, three sub questions were created:

1. *How do people with a Nigerian background make sense of the idea of belonging in the Netherlands/Sweden?*
2. *How do people with a Nigerian background identify themselves in relation to the Netherlands/Sweden?*
3. *In which ways do people with a Nigerian background experience and make sense of negative situations regarding their ethnic identity in everyday life within the Netherlands/Sweden?*

The topics of ethnic identity and belonging, as introduced above, were studied through these questions, separately in the Netherlands and in Sweden. It will be argued that experiences with racism have a negative impact on the sense of belonging, while ethnic identity also carries the possibility for a positive influence on the sense of belonging for people with a Nigerian background.

While doing literature research to write the theoretical framework and context, it became apparent that there is little research done on Nigerians concerning belonging, even though

Nigerians comprise the largest immigrant group in the world. Taking into account the size of this research, we limited ourselves for this research to the Netherlands and Sweden because of their similar position in the *Human Development Index* of the VN, corresponding economies, the predominantly whiteness of the people of both countries and their similar attitudes towards immigrants, next to the accessibility of participants and data (Gyberg et al. 2018, 18; Kesic and Duyvendak 2019, 442; United Nations Development Programme 2020; Vasta 2007, 713). Not only the size of the immigrant group adds to its relevance to research this group in their countries of settlement, but it also gives insight in the relationship between black people and their sense of belonging in white dominated countries. Much research concerning belonging does not specifically pay interest in these dynamics or is centered around non-black immigrants (see for example Amir and Bar-Lev 2014; Askins 2015; Brubaker 2010 and Pratsinakis 2018). This research aimed to fill the gap in the literature and tries to add to a more accurate reflection of both countries by including the apparently in research overlooked people with a Nigerian background and also by putting emphasis on the experience of black people when it comes to the sense of belonging. This research was aimed to mainly be of theoretical relevance by filling a gap in scientific literature, but also to carry a social relevance. By looking at ideas on belonging of immigrants, an insight will be given into the ways in which the country of settlement offers opportunities or obstructs the way in which immigrants make sense of their feelings of belonging, through the eyes of the immigrants themselves. This gives valuable and new insights in the field of belonging coming from the immigrants instead of from the native people of the country of settlement.

To construct the theoretical framework and context, literature study was used. Because of the current situation with COVID-19, the fieldwork, which covered a period of ten weeks between February to April 2021, was done remotely and online from the Netherlands. This significantly limited the options of research methods that were considered fruitful for this research. To conduct data, the main research method was that of digital semi-structured interviews. This entails that topics and central questions were be decided upon beforehand following the literature, but that there was freedom during the interview to dive into subjects and issues that were raised by the participant (see *appendix 1* for the interview schedule used for this research) (Clark, Foster and Bryman 2019, 211-218). Central to this research is the concept of *sense of belonging*. Because this involves personal ideas, interviews seem to be the best way to study this subject. The last research method that was used was that of photo elicitation. With the method of photo elicitation, participants were asked to take pictures of what they consider significant in relation to the questions asked by the researcher concerning

feelings of belonging and ethnic identity. Asking participants to think about the requested topic in visual images can push them to actively think about the topic in different ways and to actively engage with the topic (Clark, Foster and Bryman, 2019, 211). As pictures can explain what words cannot, photo elicitation is a useful complementation to the semi-structured interview method. Although almost all participants were asked for pictures, only two participants from the Netherlands and five from Sweden provided the pictures.

Although a key method in anthropological studies, we did not collect any data through participant observation. Since our research had to be done remotely, we were limited to online participant observation and netnography. However, this proved to not be useful since there was little online activity that was relevant to our research and very little interaction was experienced online. Not being able to have done participant observation has an important impact on our studies, because we could not see in person how mechanisms of belonging are experienced and lived through by the participants; we could only listen to what they explicitly told us about this. We are aware of the fact that most of our data thus stems from the active memory of the participants, and more unconscious, embodied knowledge is not taken into account in this research.

The population of this research encompassed Nigerians of the first generation, living in the Netherlands or Sweden. Because this research is concerned with *sense of belonging*, one key condition was that the participants must have lived at least three years (consecutively) in the Netherlands or Sweden, to make sure an emotional connection of belonging could have been established. Next to that, the study was concerned with people currently living in the Netherlands and Sweden. Twelve participants from the Netherlands (four women, eight men; age range 23 to 61 years old) and twelve participants from Sweden (twelve men; age range 34 to 49 years old) were interviewed. All participants were found either using social media, or through personal connections of participants already found.

This thesis was done following the code of ethics of the American Anthropological Association (AAA). The participants were aware of the goals of the research, gave permission to be part of the research and for the information they shared to be used in the research, and were made aware they could resign from the research at any moment. All participants gave their oral consent. All data was handled confidential. Anonymity played a central role throughout the research. Therefore, no names or specific places of settlement were noted and shared. Merely age, gender and country of settlement were used in the research. Although following these guidelines, we are aware we cannot guarantee complete anonymity. This is because some participants were part of the same organization or were friends or family of

each other. However, the participants were aware of this. Although including specific places of settlement could give other insights in the data analysis, we preferred to keep this out since anonymity was already slightly compromised.

In this thesis, no pseudonyms are used. This is a conscious decision. Names often carry significance in Nigeria, and it therefore felt inappropriate to ascribe names to the participants. Instead, the participants from the Netherlands are referred to as participant A to L and the participants from Sweden as participant 1 to 12. With the chance of the analysis coming off as impersonal, we decided this was preferred to using pseudonyms.

It is important to position ourselves as researchers explicitly. This research, that concerns the presence of black bodies in white dominated areas, was created and conducted by two researchers who identify as being white. Although both have specialized in migration studies, postcolonial studies and even specifically (postcolonial) sub-Saharan West-Africa throughout their bachelor's degrees, their main roots lay in Western culture and society, and these roots, both through personal background as the setting of the academia through which they study, complicate the paradox of evading Eurocentrism. Awareness of this background and of our whiteness was crucial during this research. How well read into subjects we as researchers were, we could never become neutral, neither was this desired, since acknowledging our position and the privilege it carries are key. It was essential to be aware of the historical position of the relationship between the white researcher and the study of black people. It is not out of line to consider that our position as white researchers has influenced the data collected, but also the way the data was analyzed. Many experiences participants have brought up were mainly known by us through written works or experiences of others, not through our own experiences. This is for example the case with experiences of racism, but also with ethnic identification. This carries the possibility for participants to hold back on sharing these experiences and also influences the way we could feel alienated from what was presented. However, many participants expressed explicitly that they felt they had entered an open-minded space where they could share these experiences, even though we might not relate to them ourselves. Our position as researchers seems to have had a positive effect on the openness of the participants. However, it is important not to forget the way our position as white researchers carries possibilities to influence the research and the analysis of the data.

The first chapter, the theoretical framework, provides definitions and interconnections of the key concepts. General debates are described surrounding the history of identity, the process of identity formation, and the different aspects which constitute the general idea of belonging. Moreover, a focus will be placed on the way in which ethnic identity, race, and

sense of belonging mutually influence each other in the lives of immigrants. In this second chapter, the context, general information is provided about the demographic composition of the Dutch and Swedish society, and descriptions are given of the Nigerian organizations used for finding participants. Furthermore, a concise overview of the Nigerian migration into the Netherlands and Sweden will be presented, as well as a description of the ethnically diverse landscape of Nigeria. As racism can play an important role in the obstruction of the sense of belonging, the last paragraph of this chapter consists of the ways in which black people in the Netherlands and Sweden are confronted with different forms of racism. Chapter three and four present the empirical findings gained while doing online fieldwork in respectively the Netherlands and Sweden. The findings will be discussed in light of the sub questions as presented above. Next to that, the findings will also be linked to the theoretical concepts as presented in chapter one. The conclusion will give an answer to the research question by bringing together the findings from both locations and comparing them to reflect on the similarities and differences, and the relationship between these findings from the comparison and the theoretical concepts as presented in the theoretical framework. In the appendix, the interview schedule used for the conducted semi-structured interviews is included.

Theoretical Framework

Introduction

Julia van den Berg

In the theoretical framework, definitions will be given to the concepts that play a central role in this research and their underlying mechanisms will be explained. From the general debates surrounding the concepts of identity, belonging, racism, and ethnicity, it will be discussed how these concepts are simultaneously at play and influence each other. In line with the focus of this research, these concepts will be discussed in the context of the lives of immigrants.

First, a paragraph will be devoted to the history and former debates about anthropology and identity, followed by a paragraph explaining the underlying mechanisms at play regarding identity formation. Furthermore, the concept and underlying mechanisms of belonging will be explained, and a paragraph will be devoted to the interplay of ethnic identity, race, and the sense of belonging in the context of immigrants. Lastly, it will be explained in which ways mechanisms of exclusion play a role in the obstruction of the sense of belonging in the lives of immigrants.

Anthropology and Identity

Julia van den Berg

The term ‘identity’ is a complex concept which has carried numerous connotations throughout the history of anthropology. In this paragraph, different anthropological debates surrounding the concept of identity will be discussed. This history will briefly be summarized from the starting point of the debate, around the 1920s, until present day.

Culture and Personality Studies

Between the 1920s and the 1950s, anthropology’s interest in the person was primarily reflected in the concept of personality (Van Meijl 2008, 169) and the field was known as ‘culture and personality studies’ (LeVine 2001, 803). Originally, personality was defined as ‘sameness’ (Sökefeld 1999, 417) and came to be understood as the historically and culturally rooted self-image of a group of people that was predominantly sketched and sharpened in contact with other groups of peoples. This connotation emerged in the structural-functional tradition of anthropology (Van Meijl 2008, 170), which holds that, although societies differ in their evolutionary development, they are all fundamentally similar because they are based

upon the same underlying principles (Durkheim and Mauss 1963, 74). People were regarded to share the same identity because they also shared the same history. The community or society to which they belonged was consequently considered to be solid and immutable (Van Meijl 2008, 170). Personality was thus seen as a static, fixed unity of being, influenced by the way societies adhere to a set of morals, ideas, norms and values. Furthermore, it was argued that both culture and personality were subject to mutual influences: on the one hand, personality was believed to be resulting from the internalization of culture, and on the other hand, culture was regarded as the projection of personality (Van Meijl 2008, 169).

It was in the 1950s when psychologist Erik Erikson replaced the concept of personality with the term identity. In his view, identity refers primarily to a coherent sense of self or the feeling of an individual being the same as how one is viewed and identified by others (Van Meijl 2008, 169-170). Thus, identity referred to a well-adjusted personality that emerges from the same, or identical, identification of self by self and others (Erikson 1950).

The Intersectional Approach

In present-day texts on identity, the concept does not seem to exist in the singular. Whereas it was once defined by sameness, unity and staticness, these qualities have given way to difference, plurality and fluidity (Sökefeld 1999, 417). Identities are seen as fluid social constructions which are experienced, performed and intertwined with other social identities such as ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, political affiliations, vocations, or relationships. Social researchers nowadays therefore prefer using an intersectional approach where one researches the intersections, co-constructions, and multidimensionality of social identities (Hankivsky, 2014).

Identity Formation

Julia van den Berg

Identity formation is a complex process which has been thoroughly studied over the years. When defining identity, one could divide this concept in two categories: avowed and ascribed identity, and two dimensions: personal and shared (or social) identity. These concepts will be explained in this paragraph.

Avowed versus Ascribed Identity

Identity is a social construct as “an individual establishes his identity through a series of meaningful actions in relations with other people” (Mach 1993, 3). As Erikson (1950) argues, one’s identity consists of one or multiple avowed or ascribed categories. An avowed identity entails the way in which one identifies themselves and is “subjectively enacted by an individual for the purpose of social identification with a group” (Antony 2016, 126). It is personal, fluid and in constant flux as identities can change over time and can be socio-culturally influenced. Ascribed identity, on the other hand, is the way in which others assign an identity to an individual “to label an individual as a member of a given group” (Antony 2016, 126). This identity is created within an inter-relational context and is likewise context dependent.

Personal versus Shared (or Social) Identity

When defining identity, one could divide this concept into two dimensions: personal identity and shared (or social) identity. Personal identity implies “the more concrete aspects of individual experience rooted in interactions (and institutions)” (Côté 1996, 420). It is argued that institutions to which you are exposed to for long periods of time (for example parents, school, religion) influence your attitudes, morals, norms and values, ideas, and thus your identity (Lubbers, Jaspers and Ultee 2009, 1717). In this sense, cultures set the parameters of identity formation, which can also be called the ‘culture-identity link’ (Côté 1996, 418).

Shared (or social) identity can be defined as “that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel 1978, 63 in Taylor and Mogghadam 1987, 60). In this sense, one’s individual position is placed within a greater social structure (Côté 1996, 420). According to social identity theory, people strive to belong to groups that have positive and distinct identities. This desire will influence individuals to make social comparisons between their group and other groups, in order to achieve both a favorable and a distinct position for their own group (Taylor and Mogghadam 1987, 60). In this sense, the concept and process of ‘othering’ is inherent in the formation of one’s social identity as an *us vs. them* narrative is created (Jensen 2011, 65). *Us* as in the dominant norm, and *them* as in the deviation from the norm. The concept of ‘othering’ carries numerous connotations, such as asymmetrical power relations, systemic inequalities, oppression, and inequity. It implies a sociological, psychological, or institutional position that is only ever negative (Southcott and Theodore 2020, 162).

The Dynamics of Identity

Identity is thus not a natural intrinsic quality of an object, but is a dynamic, processual, and contextual phenomenon (Mach 1993, 5). It is the result of classification processes (Mach 1993, 5). Throughout the decades many social scientists developed theories surrounding the formation of one's identity, as there are many processes and factors which all play a role in forming one's identity. It is therefore merely impossible to adhere one single explanation to the way identities are formed, developed and changed.

Belonging

Danique Beun

Identity is in a way always concerned with ideas about belonging, whether these identities are ascribed by others or self-implied. Since identity concerns how people view themselves for a great matter in relation to others, the question of identity becomes more important when people are uncertain where they belong (Amit and Bar-Lev 2014, 948). Three concepts together constitute the general idea of belonging: belonging itself, politics of belonging, and sense of belonging. These three are never separate and are always at interplay with one another. These concepts will be explained below.

Belonging

First of all, belonging refers to both being part of something (and not being part of other things) as to wanting to be part of something: it is both 'being' as it is 'longing to be' (Askins 2015, 474; Mee and Wright 2009, 772). "Who belongs" plays at all levels of society: from sport clubs to political parties, friends to families, neighborhoods to cities (Brubaker 2010, 64). It is politicized in both its formal (such as citizenship) and informal (such as social interactions) aspects (Mee and Wright 2009, 772), concerning power structures, unspoken rules and dynamics. Belonging is about "membership or lack of membership in particular groups" (Yuval-Davis 2006, 197).

Yuval-Davis (2006) distinguishes three levels of belonging: social locations, identifications and emotional attachments, and ethical and political values. Social locations, such as gender, race, or class, can have different meanings in different geographical and historical locations, because power relations differ both between spaces and through time (Anthias 2012, 126; Yuval-Davis 2006, 199). Individuals are always part of multiple social locations, such as gender and race (Anthias 2012, 126-128; Hedetoft 2002, 4; Yuval-Davis

2006, 200). Identifications and emotional attachments are stories about identity: narratives people tell about who they are and who not through where they belong and where not (Antonish 2010, 18). It includes both the personal construction of identity as the perception of others on the individuals belonging. Social locations and identifications are systematically valued, which is what ethical and political values refer to. They encompass attitudes towards belonging and not belonging to certain groups.

Belonging as a whole is thus about being part of something, either through self-identification or through identification by others (Yuval-Davis 2006, 199). Social locations, identifications and emotional attachments, and ethical and political values always exist next to each other and in relation to each other, laying at the base of belonging, and as a whole creating belonging.

Politics of Belonging

The second concept is that of politics of belonging. This concerns the way collectives are created, the mechanisms behind who can belong and who cannot (Antonsich 2010, 12-14; Pratsinakis 2017, 6). It is about the way the collective is not only created, but also how this simultaneously creates what stands outside of the collective. Politics of belonging are the mechanisms through which *us vs. them* is created (Brubaker 2010, 64; Hedetoft 2002, 3; Yuval-Davis 2006, 204).

One of these mechanisms is that of official citizenship (Mee and Wright 2009, 772), which “has become the focus of the political struggles of many marginalized and excluded groupings” (Yuval-Davis 2006, 206). Next to this, substantive membership also plays an important role, concerning the acceptance of people as members of society, and thus especially important when ideas on the belonging of immigrants are shaped (Brubaker 2010, 64-65). Next to this dual notion of citizenship, status and entitlement are other mechanisms that are at play within politics of belonging. This concerns what one has to do, and what is expected and required for one to be taken into consideration for belonging somewhere (e.g. the nation state) or to something (a collective) (Brubaker 2010, 65; Yuval-Davis 2006, 209).

Politics of belonging are thus the mechanisms and processes that play behind and create belonging. Because these mechanisms and processes are politicized, the politics of belonging shows that belonging is not only a matter of choice: it is in a great matter decided upon where one can belong to and where not. It is not only about inclusion, but it also creates the harshness of exclusion.

Sense of Belonging

Lastly, the sense of belonging is concerned with people's feelings, their emotional attachment (Antonish 2010, 6). Where belonging is about being part of and wanting to be part of, the sense of belonging refers to a personal experience. It is about feeling 'at home' (Amit and Bar-Lev 2014, 948; Yuval-Davis 2006, 197). This 'psychological home' is imagined, a way in which self-identity is tied to a place, whether a physical location or a psychological one (Amit and Bar-Lev 2014, 948). The sense of belonging entails less of an official and interpersonal belonging to, and more of a feeling. The question is less "do I belong or not" and more "do I feel like I belong?"

Concluding

When looking at the sense of belonging of people it is impossible to look at this on its own. Neither belonging, concerned with being part of something, politics of belonging, concerned with the (formal) mechanisms behind belonging, and the sense of belonging, concerned with a feeling of home, exist on their own, but they influence and affect each other. No individual lives outside its surroundings, and its sense of belonging is thus always influenced by the including and excluding dynamics of belonging and politics of belonging, which therefore will both play an important role in this research.

Immigrants, Ethnic Identity, Race, and the Sense of Belonging

Danique Beun

Belonging, politics of belonging, and the sense of belonging manifest themselves in specific ways when it comes to immigrants. In this chapter, ethnic identity and race will be discussed, which constitute two important parts of belonging regarding immigrants (being part of identifications and social locations). Lastly, a discussion on mechanisms behind the sense of belonging of immigrants will follow.

Ethnic Identity and Race

Ethnic identity concerns belonging because it is about identifications: it entails ideas on who one is, thus also about where one belongs or feels like they belong. Ethnic identity concerns both self-identification as "complex and multifaceted typologies informed by one's orientation and attachment toward one's ethnic heritage" (Umaña-Taylor 2011, 792). Ethnic heritage includes feelings of commitment to an ethnic group, shared values and attitudes, and

cultural aspects such as language and behavior (Phinney 1990, 500; Umaña-Taylor 2011, 792). In short, it is the identity that is shaped and formed by the membership of an individual to an ethnic group: an individual's sense of self based on ethnic affiliations (Wimmer 2004, 4).

The terms ethnicity and race are often used interchangeably, while there are important differences. While in many countries the use of the term *race* is often avoided, it is a term that especially in the American context is often used. Next to that, it is much written about in academia and is very much alive, circulating as a social concept. The term race is complex and often contested (Bobo and Fox 2003, 319). The idea of race unfolded from a term that was used as an instrument of biological taxonomy (Loury 2003, 334) to a social functional term (Wodak and Reisigl 1999, 176). Race is about physical and biological markers that carry a certain social significance (Bobo and Fox 2003, 319), to which a certain importance is attributed (Loury 2003, 334). Thus, race is in the first place about categorization: using visible markers to differentiate one from another (e.g., through skin color, bone structure or hair texture). However, signification makes race what it is. Meanings are attributed to these markers (Loury 2003, 334), creating racial hierarchy (Bowser 2016, 574-582). While its genetic and biological base has been opposed, the term *race* and the ideas it bundles still function as a social construct (Wodak and Reisigl 1999, 176). Racial struggles concern at their essence belonging because the hierarchy it entails speaks volume of who is believed to belong and who is not.

Ethnic identity and race are especially important when immigrants are studied, because immigrants can challenge the dominating ethnic identity simply by coming from a different background. Race can also become a challenge to the dominant racial ideology because immigrants do not necessarily fit into the racial ideology.

Sense of Belonging

The question of belonging is not only about wanting to belong and belonging, but also about the sense of belonging (Ager and Strang 2008, 177). To feel like they belong, multiple mechanisms play a role for immigrants. For immigrants, motives of immigration have been proven to have a substantial effect on the sense of belonging. Politically and culturally motivated immigrants often report a higher sense of belonging than those economically motivated (Amit and Bar-Lev 2014, 950-951). Next to that, years in the new country of settlement and native language proficiency has shown to have an effect on the sense of belonging of immigrants (Amit and Bar-Lev 2014, 951; Antonsich 2010, 9-10, 15).

Generally, the longer one is in a country and the better one speaks the language, the more one feels at home. Subjective well-being has shown to have a great impact on the sense of belonging among immigrants, mainly measured through satisfaction with life which “is defined as an overall assessment of an individual’s quality of life according to his/her personal judgment and criteria” (Amit and Bar-Lev 2014, 949). However, there is no consensus about which criteria have an effect on immigrants’ subjective well-being and satisfaction with life. Data collected in different locations have contradicted each other greatly, so one’s own judgement has been the leading variable without knowing its underlying concepts. Also, active relationships with friends and relatives in the country of origin have shown to create ambiguous feelings of belonging and possibly obstruct the extent to which one feels at home in the country of settlement (Ahrens, Kelly and van Liempt 2016, 91). Furthermore, religious identity has shown to affect the sense of belonging (Amit and Bar-Lev 2014, 951; Antonsich 2010, 15), where being able to be part of a (larger) religious group in the country of settlement that fits your religious identity and one that is largely accepted by the public in that country has a positive effect on the sense of belonging (Regis Cabaniss and Cameron 2017, 178). Lastly, ethnic identity can obstruct the sense of belonging when the immigrants are constructed in ideas of a ‘racialized’ other (Ahrens, Kelly and van Liempt 2016, 86; Brubaker 2010, 64-65, Pratsinakis 2017, 6, 14).

Concluding

To conclude, many factors play a role when it comes to the *sense of belonging* of immigrants, being highly influenced by the mechanisms of belonging and politics of belonging that are at play specifically for immigrants. Ethnic and religious identity, race, motives for immigration, years in the country of settlement, native language proficiency, subjective wellbeing and bonds with people in the country of origin shape the sense of belonging of immigrants.

Immigrants and the Obstruction of the Sense of Belonging

Danique Beun

Belonging is always about who belongs and who does not, who can belong and who cannot, and is thus a matter of inclusion and exclusion. The sense of belonging is about who feels like they belong. Ethnic identity and racial affiliations can be sources of bonding, for example through group formation with people alike, which can increase overall satisfaction of

life and thus influence the sense of belonging (Amit and Bar-Lev 2015, 950; Regis Cabaniss and Cameron 2017, 178). However, (ethnic) group formation often leads to ethnic segregation, which negatively influences the immigrant's sense of belonging (Amit and Bar-Lev 2015, 950). Much research on the sense of belonging among immigrants mainly mentions the negative influence of ethnic identity and race on the sense of belonging. Therefore, this chapter provides a more in-depth analysis of racism as a mechanism of ethnic and racial exclusion that plays a central role when it comes to immigrants and their sense of belonging. To introduce this, the broader term of discrimination will first be explained.

Discrimination can refer to both mental acts and actions (Matthew 2017, 894), or just actions and treatments of others (Bobo and Fox, 391; Hall and Carter 2006, 160). These thoughts and/or acts are of an excluding nature and stem from a negative attitude towards whoever is discriminated against. It is almost always directed towards individuals because of their belonging to a certain group. Discrimination is thus always negative: might they be negative thoughts or negative treatment. Next to that, there is no legitimate and reasonable justification for discrimination (Hall and Carter 2006, 160).

The Excluding Mechanism of Racism

Great obstruction of the sense of belonging for immigrants is created by issues of ethnicity and race. Racism is, at its very base, discrimination of others based on race. Racism refers to behaviors, attitudes, beliefs and its manifestations (all can be blatant, subtle and covert) which harm racial minorities, (Burt 2017, 939; Matthew 2017, 901; Sellers 2003, 1079). Within classical racial theory, racism is about both the hierarchical ideas of racial domination and inferiority, and the racial discriminatory treatment of racial groups (Bobo and Fox 2003, 319). Racism entails both cultural, institutional and individual racism (Bowser 2017, 582; Hall and Carter 2006, 160). Cultural racism entails the racial ideological and hierarchical ideas that have been circulating for generations, enforced and operationalized through institutional racism (Bowser 2017, 582). "Institutional racism in turn provides reinforcement for individual beliefs in racial hierarchy and provides justification for individual efforts to maintain racial hierarchy—individual racism" (Bowser 2017, 582). Individual racism thus refers to personal ideas that are enforced through both cultural and institutional racism, while enforcing at the same time cultural and institutional racism. The three domains are existing through each other and reinforce one another, keeping racial ideologies alive.

Racial Struggles and Sense of Belonging

Racial struggles concern at their essence belonging, because they are about “what happens when people or groups do not want others to belong” (Mee and Wright 2009, 774). Whiteness is often seen as the neutral state, the one naturally belonging (Mee and Wright 2009, 776): it is neutralized. Through these power structures, whiteness becomes “the standard by which the others have to be judged” (Pratsinakis 2017, 7). Thus, the sense of belonging of non-white immigrants becomes problematized. People have very little impact on the way they are racially and ethnically perceived and valued (Pratsinakis 2017, 14). For many immigrants it is thus a given that they do not belong in the ideologies of society. In line with this, “[p]ersistent and increasing racism against immigrants” has a negative effect on the sense of belonging (Ahrens, Kelly and van Liempt 2006, 92), because they concern matters of exclusion and thus of belonging and the sense of belonging.

Concluding

Much research on the sense of belonging of immigrants brings forward racial struggles and racism as ways in which the sense of belonging is obstructed. Racial struggles and racism concern ideas about who can belong and who cannot, and immigrants have very little influence on these ideas. Because of this, when it comes to racism, they are subject to its excluding nature by default.

Conclusion

In the theoretical framework, the key concepts of this research, identity and belonging, have been discussed and definitions that will be used have been provided. Identity is a dynamic, processual, and contextual phenomenon. Identity is always concerned with belonging, which encompasses both belonging itself, politics of belonging and the sense of belonging. The latter concerns a feeling, an emotional attachment to a place. Many enhancing and obstructing mechanisms construct and influence the sense of belonging, with racial struggles having an excluding impact on the sense of belonging of immigrants. Next, a chapter that places these themes in the context of this research will follow. This chapter concerns information on the research population, people with a Nigerian background, in regard to statistics, organizations, migratory movements and attitudes towards them.

Context

Introduction

Julia van den Berg

The concepts explained in the theoretical framework will be applied to the context of the Dutch and Swedish society. Demographic compositions of the Dutch and Swedish society, as well as the Nigerian organizations in these countries that were used to contact participants for this research are described. A brief overview of the history of Nigerian migration into the Netherlands and Sweden will be given, followed by the composition of different ethnic groups in Nigeria. The last paragraph will be devoted to descriptions of racism against black people in the Netherlands and Sweden.

Demographic Compositions and Organizations in the Dutch and Swedish Society

Julia van den Berg

The Netherlands has a total population of almost 17,5 million people (CBS 2020a), from which around 24,6% has a migrant background. This includes first- and second-generation migrants (CBS 2020b). Of these 4 million people 13,216 are Nigerian (CBS 2019). Sweden has a total population of almost 10,5 million people (SCB 2020a), from which around 25,5% has a migrant background. This includes first- and second-generation migrants (SCB 2020b). Of these 2,6 million people 6,467 are Nigerian (Statista 2019). Within both countries, Nigerian organizations are founded to establish a sense of unity and enhance the social network, for educational purposes, and/or to promote the welfare of the Nigerian diaspora. The organizations that have been used to contact participants are the social media pages Nigerian Youths Netherlands (NYN), Nigerian Community in the Netherlands (NCN), Nigerians in Holland, Nigerian Community in Västerbotten and Yoruba Union Stockholm.

Nigerian Migration into the Netherlands and Sweden

Danique Beun

From the mid 1900s, Nigerians have been emigrating in large numbers mainly to the USA and the UK (Andrikopoulos 2013, 166-167), but also to many other countries, especially in Europe. Although every migration story is unique, general patterns can be found. Nigerians came for a broad range of reasons to Europe, for example as economic migrants, refugees (Ahrens, Kelly and van Liempt 2014, 88), for student and for family migration, and often a combination of multiple of these patterns (Andrikopoulos 2013, 166). In the late 1950s and

1960s, mainly colonial migration patterns persisted (thus mainly towards the UK) (Gemmeke 2013, 66). A new wave of mass immigration happened from the beginning of the 1980s onwards with the economic decline and political unstable and violent situation in Nigeria, a direct, but not sole, result from the oil crisis (Gemmeke 2013, 66; Onyeche 2004, 51).

The Netherlands

The Netherlands is one of the non-English speaking countries that host a significant number of Nigerians (Andrikopoulos 2013, 166). Scholars have noted conflicting reasons for the Nigerian migration towards the Netherlands. Some state that the main migration reason for Nigerians is family migration (Andrikopoulos 2013, 170; van Heelsum and Hessels 2006, 78). After that, mainly high-skilled migrants and students seem to come to the Netherlands (Andrikopoulos 2013, 167-172; van Heelsum and Hessels 2006, 78). However, others found that mainly low-skilled workers with little formal education come to the Netherlands (Gemmeke 2013, 72). The background of Nigerian migrants in the Netherlands is thus highly debated.

From 2003 onwards, the migration of Nigerians towards the Netherlands seems to have slowed down, mainly because of changed legislation and negative attitude towards migrants in the Netherlands (Gemmeke 2013, 74). Most Nigerian migrants seem to have come to the Netherlands during the end of the 1960s, beginning of 1970s (during the Nigerian civil war) and the 1980s, with another peak in the late 1990s and early 2000s (van Heelsum and Hessels 2006, 77).

Sweden

Another country in Europe Nigerians have settled is Sweden. Little is written about Nigerian migrants in Sweden, most likely because of the relatively small Nigerian and West-African community and bigger East-African community in Sweden. Onyeche (2004, 48) notes the same and tries to fill this gap with his research on the Nigerian community in Sweden. The Nigerian Civil War (beginning 1970s) marked the beginning of the Nigerian migration to Sweden. In the late 1970s, an influx of Nigerian students occurred. The last wave happened in the late 80s and early 90s as a result of the economic and political crisis in Nigeria (Onyeche 2004, 51). Because of this, "Nigerians in Sweden are largely in the second generation" (Onyeche 2004, 52).

Ethnic Groups in Nigeria

Julia van den Berg

Nigeria is Africa's most populous country with an estimated population of about 140 million people. The country has a diverse cultural heritage as it is home to 374 different ethnic groups that occupy 36 different states. Of these different ethnic groups, the Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo are considered the three major ethnic groups that constitute approximately 70% of the Nigerian population. Other ethnic groups constitute only smaller proportions of the population (Nwabunike and Tenkorang 2017, 2753; Oginni et al. 2010, 328).

Racism Against Black People in the Dutch and Swedish Society

Julia van den Berg

A significant obstruction of the sense of belonging for immigrants is created by issues of ethnicity and race, and its consequential racial struggles (Mee and Wright 2009, 774). The Netherlands and Sweden both agree on a passive, more or less silent consensus of not mentioning skin color or racial issues (Hondius 2014, 274). However, racism is still a prevalent structural issue in the two countries. In general, little is written about Nigerian perceptions of racism, as Nigerians only make up a relatively small ethnic group in both countries. However, there's an abundance in literature on black perceptions of racism. This paragraph will therefore be devoted to describing the ways in which black people are confronted with racism in the Netherlands and Sweden.

Color Blindness in the Netherlands

The Netherlands takes pride in defining itself as a liberal, progressive, and tolerant society (Kesic and Duyvendak 2019, 442; Vasta 2007, 713). Post-war discourse left the Netherlands with a dominant discourse that stubbornly maintains how the Netherlands is and always has been color blind and antiracist (Wekker 2016, 31). However, race critical theory "exposes how taken for granted claims of race neutrality, color blindness and the discourse of tolerance often hide from view the hidden, invisible, forms of racist expressions and well-established patterns of racist exclusion" (Essed and Nimako 2006, 282 in Wekker 2016, 51). There are various institutions that contribute to racism in the Dutch society (Hayes, Joosen and Smiley 2018, 25). In the Dutch media, black people are often perceived through a racialized lens, which emphasizes their difference in contrast with the dominant norm

(whiteness) (Hayes, Joosen and Smiley 2018, 22). ‘Black Pete’, for example, encapsulates how the society has constructed the ‘image of blackness’ (Hayes, Joosen and Smiley 2018, 16). Secondly, unemployment rates for immigrants have remained way above those of the ‘native Dutch’ (CBS 2020c; Vasta 2007, 719), as it is shown that ethnic minorities are more often rejected during job applications (Hondius 2014, 282). Similarly, levels of educational attainment remain lower for people of non-western origin in comparison to the native Dutch (Vasta 2007, 720). Furthermore, there has been a developing discourse in which black people are criminalized and seen as ‘dangerous others’ (Leun and Woude 2011, 445; Wekker 2016, 38). Lastly, many black people have also experienced more blatant racism (Hondius 2014, 274, 282). Common experiences involve racist remarks presented as humor or a joke (Hondius 2014, 282), racist name calling, bullying (Vasta 2007, 731), being spit at and getting into fights (Hondius 2014, 283).

Swedish Values versus Swedish Experiences

Sweden is known for having the most pronounced beliefs in emancipative values, having the most integration-promoting policies, and being the second most secular–rational country in the world (Gyberg et al. 2018, 18). However, the standardization of these values does not always correspond with people’s lived experiences in everyday life (Gyberg et al. 2018, 27). Sweden is marked by a polarized political climate where immigration is increasingly perceived as a threat by large segments of the population (Hellgren 2018, 2090). For a large number of people living in Sweden, their lives are fractured by the influence of racism (Hällgren 2006, 320). Everyday racism emerges through language and behavior in settings such as conversation, film, school materials, television and workplaces (Hällgren 2006, 323). Studies have shown that black people feel they are being treated differently in society in public places such as the work floor, at school and in the bus (Gyberg et al. 2018). People with an African-Swedish descent find it more difficult obtaining a job, as they often get rejected (Hällgren 2006, 329, 332). Black people are subject to racism in the institution of healthcare as well, where results indicate that healthcare providers regard their symptoms as insignificant (Hamed 2019, 301). Furthermore, in school environments, black people are exposed to negative and exclusionary treatments (Hübinette 2009, 343; Gyberg et al. 2018, 24; Hällgren 2006, 333). Lastly, black people are also exposed to more blatant forms of racism where one endures harassment and racist comments (Gyberg et al. 2018, 23). Even though less frequent than everyday racism, ethnic minorities face racist or aggressive

behavior from other young people, such as racial slurs or being physically attacked (Hällgren 2006, 329; Dovemark 2012, 24).

Similarities in Perceptions and Performances of Racist Acts

Many resemblances between the two countries can be observed: both countries stick to a discourse of silence, where debates about race and racism are muted, whilst racism is an everyday reality for many. In both countries people are confronted with indirect forms of racism, such as institutional racism, and everyday racism, which appears through institutions such as the media and language. The growing polarized political climate in both countries supports and approves institutional racism, making it a continuing prevalent issue.

Conclusion

Nigerian migration, clustering through organizations and racism have been discussed to show how concepts brought up in the theoretical framework are at play in the context of the lives of people with a Nigerian background in The Netherlands and Sweden. Next, the empirical data will be presented, answering the main and sub questions of this research.

The Construction of *Belonging* in the Dutch Society

Julia van den Berg

In this chapter, the deconstruction and analysis of the collected empirical data will be presented and connected to the theoretical framework and context. Firstly, the extent to which people with a Nigerian background feel a sense of belonging to the Dutch society is discussed. Supporting factors as well as factors that diminish these feelings will be analyzed. Thereafter, national and ethnic self-identification will be presented and connected to factors which are of strong determining influence. Lastly, the extent to which people with a Nigerian background have encountered and are influenced by different forms of racism in the Dutch society will be discussed.

Sense of Belonging

I: Has your feeling of home increased over time?

PI: Not with me. My friends often laugh at me that I was never a Nigerian. I have felt at home from day one.¹

PB: Yes, it has kinda increased. I mean, I feel more at home. Yeah, it has increased by the day.²

The extent to which people with a Nigerian background in the Netherlands have a sense of belonging in the Dutch society, as can be seen by the quotes from two participants above, is subject to unique human experience. Given the vast range of experiences a person has in their life, the scope of influential mechanisms is immense. Sense of belonging, however, can be theorized in the sense that it is concerned with people's feelings and refers to a construction of an imagined 'psychological home' (Amit and Bar-Lev 2014, 948; Antonish 2010, 646). The extent to which the participants within the research indicated they felt like they belong in the Dutch society was influenced by numerous external and internal factors. Positive contact, (the absence of) racist experiences, adaption to new cultural norms, language proficiency, interpersonal relationships, and the length of one's stay in the Netherlands are all factors which were found to be of influence in determining the extent of one's sense of

¹ Participant I, semi-structured interview (online), March 23, 2021. Participant I identifies as male, is 34 years old, moved to the Netherlands 16 years ago, and currently lives in a small city in the Netherlands.

² Participant B, semi-structured interview (online), February 23, 2021. Participant B identifies as male, is 34 years old, is married with a native Dutch woman with whom he has children, moved to the Netherlands 10 years ago, and currently lives in a big city in the Netherlands.

belonging. In line with Amit and Bar-Lev (2014), as one's sense of belonging refers to a personal experience and feelings, it was most strongly connected to the feeling of acceptance and the feeling of home.

The most salient factors which determined the extent to which one feels accepted by the Dutch society was positive contact with the native population and the absence of racist experiences. Positive contact with strangers, having an established social network, and help from governmental institutions are factors which contribute to increasing feelings of acceptance, which then leads to stronger feelings of home and feelings of belonging. This is exemplified by participant H, who describes his first experiences in 1994 in his new home country as:

[...] the Dutch is a very accommodating society, because when I came to Holland I lived in [former place of residence]. It's a village that is predominantly Dutch and I was almost like the only black person [...], but I have that sense of belonging. People on the street know me, call me by name and I stand, joke, attend the carnival or the activities of the town or the village. So that sense of inclusiveness is good.³

He thus experienced a high sense of support and friendliness from the native Dutch. This provided a sense of acceptance, which in turn heightened his sense of belonging. Participant B supported and emphasized the importance of positive contact as well. He stated: "Well, I feel accepted with my intermediate family, like my wife's family and people around."⁴ As the participant's wife is Dutch, her family gave him a sense of acceptance and inclusion in the Dutch society. On the other hand, negative contact, or the complete absence of close contact with native Dutch people diminishes the feeling of acceptance in the Dutch society. This negative contact can be through the experience of racism (Sellers 2003, 1079). Racist experiences account for a general distrust in the extent to which one thinks they are accepted by society. Although participant B experiences a sense of acceptance, he later stated: "I've had an experience that got me thinking like. So, I thought I was fully accepted, but apparently maybe I'm not"⁵. His feeling of acceptance, even though being in a sense strong due to the

³ Participant H, semi-structured interview (online), March 22, 2021. Participant H identifies as male, is married, has two children, and moved to the Netherlands 27 years ago.

⁴ Participant B, semi-structured interview (online), February 23, 2021.

⁵ Ibid.

acceptance by his Dutch in-laws, is not being experienced as static. Rather, this feeling is perceived fluently, subject to his experiences. Likewise, participant L stated that she would only feel a hundred percent accepted if racism no longer existed in the Netherlands. Even though being the participant who has lived the longest in the Netherlands of all participants, since 1980, the passage of time does not take away the sense she is still not fully accepted in the Dutch society.⁶ In line with Ahrens, Kelly, and van Liempt (2006), the perception of racism can thus have a negative effect on one's feeling of acceptance and belonging. Negative experiences can create a certain consciousness of one's ethnicity to the extent that one participant avoided wearing certain clothes:

[...] if I'm wearing a hoody and I'm going on the road and it's dark, I always let my hoody down or I'm going for a run and I'm like okay what if someone attacks me because they don't want a black person in their country.⁷

The decrease in the participant's sense of safety in a certain place severely influenced her sense of belonging in the Dutch society. Past negative experience can thus invoke a change in behavior. How, on the one hand, positive contact leads to an increase in one's feeling of acceptance, encounters with racism thus leads to a decrease in this feeling.

Moving to any new country can be challenging as one must adapt to certain country-specific socio-cultural norms. When first entering the Netherlands, some participants experienced a cultural shock with the most salient differences being the interpersonal communication and the language barrier. Participant K, who is married to a native Dutch man, explained this difference of interpersonal communication in Nigeria and the Netherlands as:

[In Nigeria,] the culture, the way the people, they're open, you can easily go to your neighbor, knock on your neighbor's door, ask questions, ask things, 'do you have this?' You can walk around, you can hear people talking, doing things. It is alive. So, that I miss so much because here [the

⁶ Participant L, semi-structured interview (online), March 29, 2021. Participant L identifies as female, is 61 years old, has five children, moved to the Netherlands 41 years ago, and currently lives in a big city in the Netherlands.

⁷ Participant J, semi-structured interview (online), March 24, 2021. Participant J identifies as female, is 26 years old, moved to the Netherlands 8 years ago, and currently lives in a small city in the Netherlands.

Netherlands], you hear yourself and you walk on the road, you don't see anything, you don't hear anybody.⁸

Another participant explained this difference in interpersonal communication as: "A sense of community rather than the individualism which is dominant in Europe."⁹ Almost all the participants emphasized the way social norms are constructed in different ways in Nigeria and the Netherlands. It is not remarkable that most participants in the research emphasized this difference. In Nigeria, a collectivistic culture predominates, contrasting the Dutch individualistic culture. Unsurprisingly, many participants told me that they feel home when they are around their friends or family members. This was not only concretized in the interviews, but also shown through photographs the participants sent. Two participants provided photographs of them in a social setting, one being surrounded by his colleagues¹⁰ and another by being surrounded by people of his committee. When being asked why he chose to show this specific photograph, participant C described that: "It makes me feel comfortable and reassured of still feeling at home while I'm abroad, so I don't overly get the classic home sickness because I've met people who somewhat manage to fill that void for me."¹¹ Unsurprisingly, shallowness or absence of interpersonal relationships or communication obstructs feelings of acceptance and feelings of home. In line with Amit and Bar-Lev (2014, 950-951) and Antonsich (2010, 9-10, 15), some participants emphasized that the sense that real friendships with the native Dutch are difficult to establish due to an insufficient language proficiency level, which obstructed their feeling of acceptance. Interpersonal relationships are thus crucial to one's overall sense of belonging. Furthermore, other participants stated that they connect their feeling of home to their job, when cooking Nigerian food, the sense of certainty provided by the Dutch government or simply the acceptance of the Netherlands being their new home. A feeling of home is thus connected to a variety of factors. It is most strongly present social group or when engaging in certain aspects of daily life and is not so much connected to a specific physical location or specific time.

⁸ Participant K, semi-structured interview (online), March 24, 2021. Participant K identifies as female, is 36 years old, is married with a native Dutch man, moved to the Netherlands 3 years ago, and currently lives in a big city in the Netherlands.

⁹ Participant F, semi-structured interview (online), March 18, 2021. Participant F identifies as male, is 33 years old, is married, moved to the Netherlands 7 years ago, and currently lives in a big city in the Netherlands.

¹⁰ Participant B, photo elicitation, February 23, 2021.

¹¹ Participant C, photo elicitation, May 2, 2021. Participant C identifies as male, is 26 years old, moved to the Netherlands 4 years ago, and currently lives in a big city in the Netherlands.

Some participants felt lonely and homesick in the beginning, or even depressed. However, after living in the country for a while these feelings mostly dissolved as the participants learned to adapt to the new cultural norms, learned to speak the language and overall established a life in the Netherlands. Although some participants felt at home since day one, most participants acknowledged their feeling of home increased the longer they spend time living in the Netherlands. Even participant D, who only lives in the Netherlands for a relatively short time, noticed his growing feeling of home:

I think it is even increasing with time. So, in the beginning, I used to feel lonely. But gradually I adapted. So, to the extent that it is only once in a while that I feel this loneliness. So, I'm always feeling at home now, more at home than before. So, I think time has an effect on adapting to a new environment.¹²

Time was thus an influential factor as he needed time to adapt to this new environment before he could feel at home. Though not the case for all the participants, most participants needed time to adapt to the Dutch socio-cultural norms and establish a network. With time their feeling of home thus increased, in line with Amit and Bar-Lev (2015, 951).

Besides interpersonal relationships and other aspects of daily life, some participants attribute their feeling of acceptance to (governmental) institutions which granted them asylum or gave them the opportunity to pursue a career, go to school or start a business. These processes contribute to the feeling that one is part of and contributes to the society. The fact one is accepted by the Dutch government to be able to live here, be given opportunities to develop oneself and feels like the government cares for them can thus contribute to one's sense of belonging.

Overall, the establishment of life in the Netherlands over time contributes to one's sense of belonging. Having positive contact with the native Dutch, the absence of racist experiences, learning Dutch, establishing an extensive social network, having children, obtaining a job, buying a house, being able to study here, and obtaining Dutch citizenship are all factors that are of positive influence of one's sense of belonging. Where some participants felt lonely or depressed when first arriving in the Netherlands, they gradually adapted to the

¹² Participant D, semi-structured interview (online), March 10, 2021. Participant D identifies as male, is 35 years old, is married to a Nigerian woman with whom he has children, moved to the Netherlands 3 years ago, and currently lives in a big city in the Netherlands.

Dutch socio-cultural norms and these feelings of homesickness made place for feelings of belonging to the new society. Even though not the case for everyone, overall, one's sense of belonging increased with time.

Ethnic Identity

Identity is a complex multidimensional social construct, which parameters are set by culture (Côté 1996, 418). Due to its complexity, it was found necessary to make a distinction between national self-identification and ethnic self-identification. Moreover, within this research, a focus is placed on one's avowed identity (Erikson 1950), which is subject to contextual factors as well as personal ascriptions such as one's nationality and the ethnic group in which one was born. Identity is an ambiguous concept without a singular definition. Throughout the research it became clear that every participant had their own idea of their avowed identity, either carrying a dual or triple identification, emphasizing the intertwinement of place of birth, place of residence, one's emotional connection to a certain place, and the influence of contextual factors.

As identity is a dynamic, processual, and contextual phenomenon (Mach 1993), it was merely impossible for the participants to ascribe their ethnic identity to simply one superordinate identity. Instead, many participants saw themselves simultaneously being part of an ethnic group, a single or multiple countries, and sometimes a continent. Moreover, participants often emphasized the overlap of national and ethnic identity, regarding them not as two detached assignments, but as intertwined and of mutual influence. A distinguishing factor was that within the notion of national self-identification, unlike within the notion of ethnic self-identification, participants most often referred to their passport or the status of their citizenship, having either a Nigerian passport, a Dutch passport or having both. Identity can thus be complex concept to grasp and therefore, many participants underlined their various avowed identities as subjective to one's personal understanding of identity and context dependent. Participant F underlined: "Well, I'm Nigerian if you call Nigerian as ethnicity. Depends on how you look at it"¹³, underlining the ambiguity of the concept of identity. Supporting this statement, participant H stated: "Yes, African, Nigerian, Igbo tribe, but that is as far as it is, but it doesn't change my sense of who I am."¹⁴ As stated in the context, ethnic identity politics is a salient topic in Nigeria as it is home to 374 different

¹³ Participant F, semi-structured interview (online), March 18, 2021.

¹⁴ Participant H, semi-structured interview (online), March 22, 2021.

ethnic groups. This participant, however, did not give much weight to specifying his ethnic identity, emphasizing the relative unimportance of identifying as belonging to a specific ascribed ethnic group. Likewise, participant D underlined his Hausa heritage, but preferred to identify himself as a global citizen, not wanting to limit himself to a certain country, ethnic group, or region¹⁵. In addition, participant I explained his parents being Edo and Igbo, but he stated that: “I am from Nigeria, but I am Dutch”¹⁶. Various participants supported this statement by emphasizing their country of birth being Nigeria, therefore identifying as Nigerian, but also recognizing their identity as belonging to the Dutch society. Even though in Nigeria one’s ethnic heritage as belonging to a certain ethnic group is passed on through lineage, this assignation is thus not a determining factor in one’s ethnic identity. Moreover, some participants told me that even though the Netherlands is their new home, they refuse to let go of certain aspects of their Nigerian upbringing as this is simply a part of their identity. Losing this part by assimilating completely into the Dutch society would mean losing a part of one’s authentic self. Even though living in the Netherlands for most of her life now, participant E emphasizes this importance:

My husband always says: ‘you can take the girl out of Nigeria, but you can never take Nigeria out of the girl’ and that really is true. Some things I just can't change because if you change that then you are no longer who you are, you know what I mean? ¹⁷

For her, and many others, dual or even triple identification is only natural as their lives take place on multiple transnational axes being the Netherlands, Nigeria, and sometimes other countries or continents. Ethnic identity thus simply cannot be reduced to a singular identity but exists within a whole spectrum of simultaneous lived identities on multiple transnational axes, in line with Mach (1993, 5).

The difference in the way the participants identified themselves was highly dependent on their place of birth, socio-cultural influences, time, prospects, and mindset. Most participants were born within a certain ethnic group, therefore carrying feelings of connections based on

¹⁵ Participant D, semi-structured interview (online), March 10, 2021.

¹⁶ Participant I, semi-structured interview (online), March 23, 2021.

¹⁷ Participant E, semi-structured interview (online), March 17, 2021. Participant E identifies as female, is 23 years old, is married with a native Dutch man with whom she has one child, moved to the Netherlands 15 years ago, and currently lives in a small village in the Netherlands.

ethnic affiliations. This is in line with Wimmer (2004, 4), who underlined that identity is shaped and formed by the membership of an individual to an ethnic group. However, for some participants this membership carried more weight than for others, who felt only connected through a shared language or certain traditions, but not per definition identified as belonging to that specific ethnic group. Furthermore, many participants emphasized the importance of family members and friends while growing up. Participant D stressed the influence of his older brother on the way he identifies himself:

[...] our senior brother, adventured into the world and came back with all these new ideas about the world. So, I think it's him that influenced us to really think more of us global citizens than Nigerians or Hausa.¹⁸

The participant's social network was crucial in shaping his ideas about identity and his general frame of reference. Furthermore, the longer the participants had spent living in the Netherlands, the larger the overall connection grew to the country and the more one identified as being Dutch. Most participants who knew they were staying in the Netherlands on the long-term were occupied with connecting to the Dutch society by, for example, having Dutch friends, taking Dutch language courses, and wanting to gain Dutch citizenship. Most participants who have been living in the Netherlands for a relative short time, connected more to Nigeria than to the Netherlands. Some of the participants who did not identify as Dutch stated that they were planning to move back to Nigeria or were only staying in the Netherlands for a set number of years due to their job. As they knew their stay was coming to an end, they were not so much occupied with integrating into the Dutch society and creating a feeling of connection. Thirdly, as mentioned before, the way someone identifies themselves is based on the way one thinks, feels, and acts. Identity is personal, fluid, and subject to one's lived experiences (Côté 1996, 420; Mach 1993, 5). Therefore, the way one identifies cannot be generalized over a greater (sub-)group. Some participants emphasized their Nigerian identity, even with the prospect of staying in the Netherlands for an indefinite amount of time as they admitted having difficulties adapting to the Dutch culture or simply felt a stronger connection to Nigeria. Others stated that their friends strongly hang on to the identity of their country of birth. On the other hand, other participants identified solely as Dutch as they stated the Netherlands to be their new home country and let go of their Nigerian identity. Thus,

¹⁸ Participant D, semi-structured interview (online), March 10, 2021.

where one strongly identifies themselves in relation to their country of birth, some identify themselves in combination with the identity of the society they currently live in, and others identify themselves as Dutch. It could therefore be concluded that one's avowed identity is not only subjective to socio-cultural influences but is highly personal as well.

In short, every participant had their own interpretation when explaining the way in which they identify themselves in relation to the Netherlands. Many participants ascribed their avowed identity to multiple ethnic groups or nationalities as their lives take simultaneously place on multiple transnational axes, thereby often carrying a dual or triple identification. Moreover, it was found that one's ethnic identity is subject to certain external and internal factors of which place of birth, socio-cultural influences, time, prospects, and mindset play an important role in determining the way which the participants identified themselves in relation to certain ethnic groups.

Racism in the Dutch Society

Racism still is a very salient, problematic issue in the Netherlands. Even though invisible and insignificant to some, race and identity politics can form a serious obstruction to one's feeling of acceptance and sense of belonging (Ahrens, Kelly and van Liempt 2006, 92). Almost all participants within the research have encountered forms of racism in the Netherlands, which, for some, influenced their lives to a certain extent. However, perceptions of racism as well as their influence were found to be highly personal and variable.

The extent to which people with a Nigerian background in the Netherlands experience racism varies heavily, from some participants having told me they experience racism every single day to others who said to have barely or even no experiences with racism. Even though living in the Netherlands now for quite a long time, participant G said not having experienced any racism since living in the Netherlands: "I've never felt discriminated against or felt unwanted. People have been nice. [...] [T]hey just treat you like a human being whether you're white, colored and all that."¹⁹ However, other participants told me that they have had several to many (blatant) racist experiences. One participant told me that a man had slapped her when she asked about buying onions on the market. Another participant told me that a security guard followed her around in a store and she had to show him her purse as he thought she had stolen something. When asking him why he chose her out of all the people in the

¹⁹ Participant G, semi-structured interview (online), March 20, 2021. Participant G identifies as male, is 56 years old, is married, moved to the Netherlands 26 years ago, and currently lives in a big city in the Netherlands.

store, the security guard blatantly replied that it was because of her looks. In another instance, when a participant was viewing a home, he heard the realtor say behind his back that they didn't want to sell the house to a black person. Other participants expressed that they often experience more subtle, indirect forms of racism in public places. Participant A, who lives in a small predominantly white village, explained it as: "It's every day [...] for example if you're walking on the street, there's a way they look at you or it's a way they respond. I don't know how to put it, but you can feel it."²⁰ In these cases, racism is not expressed in a direct way, but is more sensible in the body language of others. Perhaps the presence of indirect racism would be lower in larger, ethnically diverse cities, but being beyond the scope of this research, that can only be argued to a certain extent. How some participants thus have had several to many experiences with blatant or subtle racism, other participants underlined how they have few or even no experiences with racism.

Not only did the participants experience racism in public spaces, but also on the work floor and within the Dutch educational system some of the participants were faced with unfair treatments because of their ethnicity. Participant J, who is currently finishing her master's degree and has a professional job, tells me an experience she had on the work floor:

I had one time I was waiting for a patient to come [...] and I was like, 'hi, I'm [name] nice to meet you, come with me', and he's like, 'no'. I was like why? He told me was he was not looking for me [...], that he was looking for a physiotherapist. I was like, 'I'm the physiotherapist'. He was like, 'but how can you be a physiotherapist, you're supposed to be working at the *balie*' [counter]. I was like, '[...] I'm the one that's supposed to give you your treatment', but he was like, 'don't get me wrong, it's just that I had never seen a black person working in a professional job', and it got to me because you're already making an assumption of my competences because I have a dark skin and I said to him like, 'okay I understand, but I don't think this appointment could go any further because I don't feel comfortable treating you, because I already have this feeling that you already have this prejudice. If

²⁰ Participant A, semi-structured interview (online), February 21, 2021. Participant A identifies as male, has children, moved to the Netherlands 4 years ago, and currently lives in a small village in the Netherlands.

something should happen then you'll be like yea, it's because you're black.'²¹

She told me instances like these create an extra consciousness of her minority position in the Dutch society and that even in her professional environment, racism is present. Other participants told me they have experienced racial slurs and stereotypical jokes. Participant H gave me a vivid description of his experiences in one of his first jobs in the Netherlands:

They used this very kind of sussy language, but I made them to feel free to makes jokes about monkey to me, about anything. They could throw me a banana, and I would just, we made fun, because I told myself that in my culture, we make jokes. So, some would come in the restaurant and say, '*sorry ik heb geen banaan voor jou*' [sorry I don't have a banana for you], I'd say, '*oh jammer, volgende keer niet vergeten he*' [that's unfortunate, don't forget it next time].²²

Although he accepted and went along with the jokes made about his appearance, these instances show the way racist jokes are still salient and accepted in the Dutch society. In addition, even though racism was found to be less present within the Dutch educational system than in other environments, some participants experienced unfair grading and lower expectations by teachers in comparison to their white fellow students. These instances thus remind us that even in professional spheres, such as in schools or on the work floor, racism is still abundantly present.

Though most participants describe their negative experiences having racist motives, some participants described that they were unsure if the negative experiences they had were due to their ethnicity or due to other factors. These participants told me that they don't like to throw in the "race card". Participant I explained this as:

I would never label it as racism or discrimination. That's not my style. [...] [I]f you don't get a job, is it because of your skin color or because you didn't try your best? In Nigeria, where you have more than 300 tribes, you could always ascribe it to that too, 'I'm from that tribe so that's

²¹ Participant J, semi-structured interview (online), March 24, 2021.

²² Participant H, semi-structured interview (online), March 22, 2021.

why I didn't get the job'. Or you can do your best to go for it one hundred percent. I just see that differently.²³

The participant did not immediately ascribe his experiences as being based on racism. He explained that he has the feeling that he receives as many opportunities as the native Dutch, therefore not ascribing possible negative experience as due to his skin color. The scope of negative experiences regarding one's ethnicity has thus a wide range and is influenced by contextual factors, such as environment, but is also influenced by personal perception as some participants told me they experience racism every day while others told me they have never experienced any form of racism in the Netherlands or don't label certain instances as being racist.

The extent to which past racist experiences have an influence on lives of the participants varied greatly. About half of the participants stated that their past experiences created a certain awareness about the possibility of encountering racism. However, it was simultaneously emphasized that you should try not let this awareness influence you in the extent it hinders making certain decisions. Participant J, who previously told me about her racist experience on the work floor explains:

I think it makes me aware of a possibility that that might exist in the Netherlands, but when I say it impacts me in a negative way of how I treat people? No. Would I say it changed my perception of how I feel like there's also good people in the Netherlands? No. Would I say it changed how I react to those comments? I don't think so, but it's just that you have it behind your mind like you experienced it so it's there. Then you can use it to tell people like, 'okay I have also experienced it, try to do it this way', or give advices or just talk about it, say something like this exists, but it doesn't really have an impact on how I treat people or my perception of people or having fun in general.²⁴

She argued that one instance should not let you generalize this negative behavior as if every person would treat you this way. Moreover, she argued that you should not let past

²³ Participant I, semi-structured interview (online), March 23, 2021.

²⁴ Participant J, semi-structured interview (online), March 24, 2021.

experiences influence future decisions. This was supported by several other participants who told me that if they were to think every day about these experiences, they would never feel confident to even step outside again. Participant H, who previously told me about his various experiences with racism explains:

If somebody calls me *Zwarte Piet* [Black Pete] or if somebody throws me a banana and says ‘*aap*’ [monkey], I don’t care. I don’t look like *Zwarte Piet* [Black Pete], I don’t look like a monkey. It’s one thing that people say what you are and it’s another thing what you believe you are.²⁵

He argued that these racial slurs should not be internalized in any way. These participants thus did not let the negative experiences influence their life to the extent they based certain life decisions on the possibility of encountering any form of racism. On the other hand, the other half of the participants told me that they were very conscious of their ethnicity and that this consciousness influences the way they make decisions, the way they feel accepted and the way they feel at home in the Dutch society. These participants were to an extent constantly consciously aware of their ethnicity when, for example, entering stores, seeing police officers, or simply were aware that they must work harder to achieve whatever a white person can achieve. One participant stated: “If I was white, maybe I would get more opportunities.”²⁶ In this way, being black in a predominantly white country motivated and pushed some to achieve more. Participant E supports this statement, describing this motivation as the consequence of a racist experience she had at school:

It sounds strange, but that pushed me to such an extent that in everything I do, I always want to prove myself. Don't ask me who I want to prove myself to, but I always have the feeling that I want to prove that I can handle it because the fact that someone tried to take me down when I came to the Netherlands, that I couldn't handle it, that hurts me very badly.²⁷

²⁵ Participant H, semi-structured interview (online), March 22, 2021.

²⁶ Participant A, semi-structured interview (online), February 21, 2021.

²⁷ Participant E, semi-structured interview (online), March 17, 2021.

Paradoxically, occupying a minority position in a predominantly white society resulted in the participant achieving more. Past racist experiences lead her to work harder and therefore booking high results in school and in her own business. Interestingly enough, having less opportunities in some cases thus can eventually lead to success by working harder than perhaps a native counterpart. For some, ethnicity thus influences the way one makes decisions or moves throughout life in general, while for others this consciousness does not carry a strong influence.

Being an ethnic minority in a predominantly white country, most participants had in some ways experiences with racism, either personally or impersonally, directly or indirectly, physically or mentally. However, the extent to which one perceives racism is subject to personal conceptions of acts of racism. Moreover, most participants sensed a certain active consciousness of their ethnicity throughout everyday life in the Netherlands, but the way one makes decisions based on this consciousness is highly personal as well. Both the influence of racism as well as the perception of racism is thus subject to personal experience and mindset.

Conclusion

The extent to which people with a Nigerian background in the Netherlands experience a sense of belonging, ethnically identify themselves, and perceive racism within the Dutch society is subject to a variety of socio-cultural influences and variances in mindset. One's social network, language proficiency, and one's upbringing are examples of such socio-cultural factors which can be of great influence in one's overall experience of living in the Netherlands. As one's sense of belonging is concerned with personal feeling, the strongest indicators of this sense of belonging are one's feeling of acceptance and feeling of home in the Dutch society (Amit and Bar-Lev 2014, 948). The overall establishment of life in the Netherlands over a longer period of time contributed strongly to the increasing sense of belonging the participants felt. On the other hand, encounters with different forms of racism in the Netherlands was a determining factor in the obstruction of establishing a sense of belonging (Ahrens, Kelly and van Liempt 2006, 92) as these experiences to a certain extent contribute to feelings of exclusion, inequality, and injustice. The length of one's stay in the Netherlands thus creates an interesting paradox: the longer the participants had lived in the Netherlands, the stronger they felt at home while they simultaneously were longer exposed to the flip side of being an ethnic minority living in a predominantly white country. This creates a complex relationship in one's sense of belonging as one has extensively established a life in

the Netherlands, while they were longer exposed to racism than participants who had only been living in the Netherlands for a short time.

Factors as such are to a certain extent of influence in the way people with a Nigerian background identify themselves in relationship to the Dutch society. Highly dependent on socio-cultural influences, many participants ascribed their identity to multiple ethnic groups, mostly based on their country of birth and their current home country. In short, although impeded by factors such as racism and a language barrier, most people with a Nigerian background attach themselves to the Dutch society in terms of sense of belonging and ethnic self-identification, whilst simultaneously staying to a certain extent connected to their country of birth.

Mechanisms of *Belonging* in Sweden

Danique Beun

In this chapter, the mechanisms behind constructing *belonging* concerning people with a Nigerian background in Sweden will be discussed. First, it will be looked at how they make sense of the idea of belonging, what mechanisms contribute to this and what mechanism obstruct feeling at home. Secondly, ethnic and national self-identification will be discussed and put into perspective to the relationship between the Nigerians and Sweden. Lastly, the role of racism concerning the sense of belonging among people with a Nigerian background in Sweden will be discussed, looking at how race can play a dual role as both stimulating as obstructing the sense of belonging among people with a Nigerian background in Sweden.

Sense of Belonging

As discussed in the theoretical framework, the sense of belonging refers to a feeling of home, a psychological connection to a place (Amit and Bar-Lev 2014, 948; Yuval-Davis 2006, 197). The participants make sense of feeling at home in Sweden through both feeling at home and feeling accepted. Feeling accepted, which contributes for the participants to feeling at home, plays a double role, where for some it attributes to the idea of belonging in Sweden, while for others them accepting Swedish society plays a more important role than feeling Swedish society accepting them.

One of the major mechanisms behind both feeling at home and feeling accepted for the participants is having established a life in Sweden. Having a secure place to live, being employed, having a social life and in some cases having created a family in Sweden attributes to feeling both at home and feeling accepted in Sweden. This was not only expressed in the interviews, but also in some of the photographs the participants had sent. When asked for photographs that represented feeling at home in Sweden, participant two and five provided pictures of their wife and/or children in Sweden.²⁸ This underlined the importance of family to create a feeling of home in Sweden. Next to that, participant eight pictured his house and a

²⁸ Participant two, photo elicitation, April 29, 2021; Participant five, photo elicitation, March 10, 2021. Participant two identifies as male, is 37 years old, lives for eleven years in a big city in Sweden, and is married with a native Swedish woman with whom he has two children. Participant 5 identifies as male, is 45 years old, moved to Sweden fifteen years ago, lives in a big city in Sweden and is married to a Nigerian woman in Sweden with whom he has two children.

coffee at a café,²⁹ and participant seven sent a photograph of his first winter in Sweden.³⁰ Both underlined how an established life in Sweden made them feel at home in Sweden, both by having a secure place to live as through having created an everyday life routine. Participant eleven provided a photograph on which twelve Nigerian men were lined up and embracing each other on a football field, some looking at each other, some at the camera. “This pic was taken after the death of my dad and these guys rallied around to support me through it.”³¹ Secure and satisfactory social life shows here to strengthen the sense of feeling at home in Sweden. Both participants who made sense of feeling accepted by feeling accepted by Swedish society and those who emphasized accepting Swedish society themselves expressed the ability to create a fulfilling life in Sweden contributes to feelings of acceptance. This is in line with what Amit and Bar-Lev (2014, 949) described when they concluded that satisfaction with life contributes to the sense of belonging among immigrants. Satisfaction with life among people with a Nigerian background in Sweden was mainly framed through the positive assessment of their lives through being able to establish a secure life. An established life, created by multiple mechanisms proved to be the most important factor shaping feelings of belonging.

The place where the participants feel most at home differs from Sweden to Nigeria. Four participants expressed feeling more at home in Nigeria than in Sweden. All who expressed this attributed this to being brought up in Nigeria and preferring the way life is organized in Nigeria by being used to that life from a very young age. However, most participants expressed they feel more at home in Sweden than in Nigeria. An important factor, having established a life, was mentioned above. Next to that, many participants expressed they feel alienated from Nigeria because they have been away from Nigeria and are used to the organization of life in Sweden now. The realization that Sweden feels like home came for most participants while in Nigeria and being confronted with how used they are to Swedish life and how much they enjoy it. Participant one stated:

²⁹ Participant eight, photo elicitation, April 8, 2021. Participant five identifies as male, is 39 years old, moved to Sweden eleven years ago, lives in a small town in Sweden and is married with a Nigerian woman in Sweden with whom he has one child.

³⁰ Participant seven, photo elicitation, April 25, 2021. Participant seven identifies as male, is 34 years old, moved to Sweden eleven years ago and had lived in multiple places in Sweden, now lives in a big city in Sweden and is married with a Nigerian woman who is currently living in Nigeria with whom he has one child, who lives with him in Sweden.

³¹ Participant eleven, photo elicitation, May 09, 2021. Participant eleven identifies as male, is 43 years old, moved to Sweden about fourteen years ago and lives in a big city in Sweden. He has children from a previous relationship with a Swedish woman and is currently in a relationship.

So, yea, for some time, two years ago I was in Nigeria, and that was very funny, when I was going, I was telling people that “I’m going home, I’m going home”. So I went to Nigeria, after like four weeks, I was so tired, I was tired of the sun, I was tired of the people, I was tired of everything that I started telling people “no I’m going back, I’m going home”. So then I realized this [Sweden] is kind of my home, you know.³²

This sentiment of realizing Sweden is home while being in Nigeria is shared by most participants who expressed they identified Sweden as their home. This quote also shows that the participant identified Nigeria as home while being in Sweden, only to realize Sweden feels like home while being in Nigeria. Many others shared this sentiment. Participant five phrased it in the following manner, showing the conflicting notion of feeling at home in two places:

And ironically, when I go to Nigeria, I always feel like I have to, after a couple of weeks, one or two weeks, I always feel no, I have to go home. Home being Sweden now, you know. And then when I want to go on holiday back to Nigeria, I feel like I am going home, but when I get home, I feel this place is home. So it can be very conflicting, you know.³³

Although most participants expressed feeling most at home in Sweden, it is for none except one a straight-forward notion. Missing Nigerian life and the life the participants grew up with makes that Nigeria continues to play an important role concerning feeling at home. Part of this is created through the bonds with people in Nigeria. This is in agreement with the findings of Ahrens, Kelly and van Liempt (2016, 91), where it was presented that active relationships with friends and relatives in the country of origin can create ambiguous feelings of belonging. However, all those who expressed Sweden feels more like home identified having established a life in Sweden as the main mechanism behind this feeling. In general, the

³² Participant one, semi-structured interview (online), February 17, 2021. Participant one identifies as male, is 44 years old, moved to Sweden eleven years ago and ever since has lived in a big city in Sweden. He has a son living in Sweden.

³³ Participant five, semi-structured interview (online), March 4, 2021.

participants stated that their feeling of home in Sweden has increased over time. This is linked to a more established life in Sweden which is created over time.

Another mechanism behind feeling at home in Sweden is language proficiency. As noted, Amit and Bar-Lev (2014, 950-951) and Antonsich (2010, 9-10, 15) showed that native language proficiency can have an important, both positive and negative, effect on the sense of belonging of immigrants. Participants underlined this by pointing at the feeling that language proficiency increases feeling of acceptance by being able to speak the language of native Swedes and through this feeling included. A better language proficiency also increases feeling at home because it is experienced to increase the likelihood of being employed. Being employed made up an important aspect of establishing a life in Sweden and thus increases the feeling of feeling at home. In line with this, lacking language proficiency has a negative effect on feeling both accepted and feeling at home. Language thus plays a twofold role; both being about feeling accepted and feeling at home.

Next to the possible negative effect language proficiency can have on feeling at home and feeling accepted, another important mechanism for this was experiences with racism. Negative experiences regarding ethnic identity decrease the feeling of feeling at home and acceptance of the participants. This is for example felt through lacking opportunities, experiencing negative remarks and struggling to find a job because of being black. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, ethnic identity can obstruct the sense of belonging when the immigrants are constructed in ideas of a 'racialized' other (Ahrens, Kelly and van Liempt 2016, 86; Brubaker 2010, 64-65, Pratsinakis 2017, 6, 14). However, many expressed the feeling that race is not very pronounced in Sweden increased the feeling of feeling at home and accepted. Like language proficiency, race thus plays a twofold role concerning feeling at home and accepted; it can be both a reason to feel more at home and accepted by not being very pronounced, while also carrying the danger of having a negative effect when pronounced in a negative way.

To conclude, people with a Nigerian background in Sweden make sense of belonging by the level at which they feel at home and feel accepted. The main mechanism behind this is having established a life in Sweden, composed by smaller factors such as having a job and speaking the Swedish language. Language proficiency and race are two factors which are experienced to be able to have a negative effect on both feeling at home as feeling accepted. However, both also carry the possibility to have a positive effect on feeling at home and accepted.

Self-Identification

People with a Nigerian background identify themselves in different ways in relation to Sweden. For this research, national and ethnic self-identification are taken into account separately. A focus is placed on avowed identity. The participants expressed a complex and not straightforward relation with one's avowed identity, which is at interplay with the extent someone feels at home in a certain place. Ethnic background, cultural background, emotional connection and identification with a place are such factors that influence one's avowed identification and at the same time parts of feelings of belonging.

The ethnic self-identification of the participants ranged from Nigerian, ethnic groups in Nigeria, African to Swedish. The participants that identify with an ethnic group from Nigeria identified either as Edo, Igbo or Yoruba. The two participants who identified as Edo mentioned a clash between cultural background and ethnic identity. Edo is one of the small minority groups in Nigeria. The two participants grew up in Yorubaland and culturally identify more with being Yoruba, but ethnicity in Nigeria is determined by the ethnicity of the parents. Even though they culturally do not identify with being Edo, they felt like they could not claim being Yoruba. Participant five mentioned: "So by culture, by attitude, by everything I am very Yoruba, because I was born in Lagos, but because my parents are from Edo, I have to claim that."³⁴ The same sentiment is expressed by participant nine, who said: "[...] I'm closer to the Yoruba in Nigeria than any other tribe. But I don't really see myself as a Yoruba person, because ethnicity is very strong."³⁵ Cultural background and ethnic identity are thus not necessarily the same for the participants. The same is the case for participant eleven, who identified more as British, but still acknowledged coming from a different ethnic background.³⁶ Merely one participant identifies as Swedish, because he feels he has internalized the Swedish culture. Again, this shows the importance culture plays regarding ethnic self-identification. As described by Côté (1996, 418), cultures set the parameters of identity formation. Both Nigerian and Swedish culture play an important role in the self-identification of the participants.

Next to that, multiple participants noted their ethnic self-identification depends on the situation, which is in line with the theory of identification being a contextual phenomenon (Mach 1993, 5). They all made a difference between identifying either as Nigerian in some

³⁴ Participant five, semi-structured interview (online), March 4, 2021.

³⁵ Participant nine, semi-structured interview (online), March 11, 2021. Participant nine identifies as male, is 43 years old, moved to Sweden thirteen years ago, lives in a big city in Sweden and is married with a Nigerian woman in Sweden with whom he has one child.

³⁶ Participant eleven, semi-structured interview (online), March 16, 2021.

situations or as a specific ethnic group in Nigeria. This mainly depends on the expected knowledge of the receiving end of the information. Participant eleven expressed this by saying: “[W]ith other Nigerians I would profile myself directly as Yoruba. But with, with the wider world I tend to identify more as Nigerian.”³⁷ This was also experienced during the interviews. Some participants first noted they identified as Nigerian, only to specify a specific ethnic group once aware the interviewer had knowledge about the ethnic makeup of Nigeria. Ethnic self-identification thus was also not the same all the time but depended towards who one had to identify themselves.

Ethnic self-identification with either an ethnic group or with being Nigerian in general played an important role within the everyday lives of the participants. Almost all participants stated that their social circle in Sweden consisted either partially or completely of other Nigerians. In this way, having friends the participants could identify with contributed to them feeling more at home, since having a fulfilling social life contributes to the feeling of an established life and thus the sense of belonging among the participants as mentioned above. As mentioned before, ethnic identity and racial affiliations can be sources of bonding which can increase overall satisfaction of life and thus influence the sense of belonging (Amit and Bar-Lev 2015, 950; Regis Cabaniss and Cameron 2017, 178). The participants shared this sentiment. Interestingly, the participants did not mention the segregating aspect of ethnic-based group formation that is often mentioned in the literature on the sense of belonging among immigrants (Ahrens, Kelly and van Liempt 2016, 91; Amit and Bar-Lev 2015, 950). It seemed that it was mainly experienced as a positive factor concerning the sense of belonging of the participants.

Many participants also expressed that their cultural background still played an important role in their everyday life in Sweden. This could for example be seen in their relationship with food. Many expressed either still mainly eating Nigerian food or greatly missing the food and eating it to feel more connected to their roots again. Participant three sent photographs of several Nigerian dishes.³⁸ During the interview, when asked about feeling at home in Sweden, he expressed:

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Participant three, photo elicitation, March 28, 2021. Participant three identifies as male, is 49 years old, moved to Sweden nineteen years ago and ever since lives in a big city in Sweden and is married with a native Swedish woman with whom he has two children.

If I wasn't doing this interview, I would be in an African store now. I like to buy African food and cook African dishes. That gives me a very good connection back to my roots. So, by getting myself stay connected to food I maintain my connection to Nigeria.³⁹

An active effort to stay in touch with his ethnic self-identification thus remained to play an important role in his everyday life in Sweden and helped him to feel more at home. Besides food, other cultural elements remained important for the participants. Participant eight expressed sometimes wearing the cloth his father gave him, accompanied with the words: "Yoruba is part of me."⁴⁰ Many expressed that speaking their ethnic language, either with Nigerian friends in Sweden, their partners or family members, remained an important aspect of their daily lives and a way to reinforce their ethnic identity in Sweden. Lastly, music was often rereferred to as in what ways ethnic identity played a role in the everyday lives of the participants. "[I]n terms of entertainment, the music and stuff like that"⁴¹, was the response of participant six when asked about the representation of his ethnic identity. "I even listen to of Igbo music a lot"⁴², expressed participant seven. The presence and active using of cultural elements related to the ethnic self-identification with an ethnic group or with being Nigerian among the participants made that ethnic self-identification has a visible presence in the everyday lives of the participants. Their ethnic self-identification is through this actively negotiated and actively present in Sweden.

Besides ethnic self-identification, the participants were asked about their national self-identification. The answers ranged from a global person to British, Nigerian, Swedish, or a combination. Some noted their national self-identification depends on the situation or has changed over time. The participants that expressed their national identification has changed from Nigerian to Swedish either contributed this to feeling ashamed of the current social-political situation in Nigeria or to gaining Swedish citizenship. However, most who identify as Swedish have a double national self-identification of both Swedish and Nigeria, but first and foremost identify as Nigerian. Swedish self-identification is established both through gaining Swedish citizenship and having established a life in Sweden.

³⁹ Participant three, semi-structured interview (online), March 3, 2021.

⁴⁰ Participant eight, semi-structured interview (online), March 10, 2021.

⁴¹ Participant six, semi-structured interview (online), March 6, 2021. Participant six identifies as male, is 38 years old, moved to Sweden eleven years ago, lives in a big city in Sweden and is married with a Nigerian woman in Sweden.

⁴² Participant seven, semi-structured interview (online), March 6, 2021.

Feelings of being Swedish and an outsider were often expressed. Dual self-identification took the form of combining Swedish and Nigerian self-identification, switching between them or having them exist next to each other, to feelings of being Swedish and an immigrant. For the latter, self-identification depends greatly on the situation. This could be explained by the connotations a certain identification can carry in a certain situation (Côté 1996, 420; Taylor and Mogghadam 1987, 60). In some situations, it can be more favorable to identify as part of one group as in another situation. Participant nine noted: “I can call myself a Swede when I’m outside, but when I’m inside I don’t call myself a Swede.”⁴³ Although not solely, participants often identified with being Swedish in some way.

Dual self-identification, both ethnical and national, came from the shared feeling among the participants of never being able to become fully Swede. As much as cultural values were ingrained into their being and a fulfilling life was established, the feeling of being an outsider continued to be present. This was partially expressed as due to never being able to speak Swedish like a Swede, actively negotiating their ethnic and cultural background in their Swedish lived and an upbringing in Nigeria, but the main reason was found to concern being black. The blackness of the participants was felt to stand out compared to the neutral whiteness that makes-up the majority of the country (Mee and Wright 2009, 776; Pratsinakis 2017, 7). Since they cannot impact this factor (Pratsinakis 2017, 14), the participants felt that it would never be possible to completely be Swedish. This underlines that identity is established through relationships with other (Mach 1993, 3). Racial struggles thus influence the extent to which one identifies himself with the country of settlement.

Self-identification is not uniform among participants. What greatly contributed to this is self-identification not being straightforward for the participants and depending on things such as the situation and location one finds oneself in. In line with that, many participants identify themselves in multiple ways, both between ethnic and national identification as within these categories. Having Swedish citizenship is not a reason that necessarily leads to solid identification with being Swedish. However, it often does make participants identify in some way with being Swedish, although they often combine this Swedish self-identification with another identification. Most participants identify in some way as Nigerian, either generally concerning ethnical or national identity, or specifically with an ethnic group within Nigeria. Although almost all express feeling at home in Sweden, almost none identify as solely

⁴³ Participant nine, semi-structured interview (online), March 11, 2021.

Swedish. Nigerian identification appears to play a prominent role for many of the participants' self-identification.

Experiencing Racism

It is a sunny day at the very beginning of March when I receive a phone call. I am just driving away from my apartment to have dinner at my parent's house when I see an unknown Swedish number pop up on my dashboard. When I answer, the sound creaks through my car's speakers. I suspect I am on speaker on the other end of the line. The man who calls was informed about the research by another participant and wants to participate. Although the sound remains very unclear, I manage to roughly understand the questions he asks, and we quickly discuss the research. We agree to do a videocall the next day. When I call him the next day at the agreed upon time, he answers with a black screen. I am a bit puzzled, since I asked him the day before if he wanted to do the interview through audio- or videocall and he agreed to a videocall. I ask him if he wants to switch to audio, and he explains he just does not want to turn his camera on because he just came home from the gym, but he prefers to see me so it feels more like an actual interview. The interview goes smoothly, and the participant answers all the questions. When I ask him about his negative experiences in Sweden, he first quickly brushes it off saying "Of course, but who has not?". After a moment of silence, he starts talking about his experiences with racism in Sweden. I sense a change in his attitude. Since I cannot see him, I start to wonder if I am just imagining it, or if his voice and way of talking have really changed. His voice breaks slightly, and it seems talking about the experiences put him down. Although he answers the questions and describes situations to me, it becomes clear how much he is comfortable sharing. While with others I sometimes pushed and pulled a bit, and different formulated questions led to new answers, I decided not to try to get more out of this participant and respect his boundaries. What he had told me was already extremely helpful and other interviews would fill up what I would not get out of this interview. After discussing the topic a bit, I change to the next topic. After the interview, which overall ran smoothly, I ask him how he thought the interview was and how he thought it went. He responded delighted and positively and said he thought all went well. I thanked him for his participation and told him he could contact me whenever he had any comments or questions later on.

This vignette describes a situation early on in my fieldwork period. Racism can be a difficult and painful topic to discuss for those who have experienced it and its influence in

their lives. Although no specific questions about racism were asked, participants would bring it up themselves when asked about negative experiences in Sweden. The participants framed negative situations regarding their ethnic identity through the lens of racism. Almost every participant expressed confrontations with racism. The amount of confrontation and severeness differs from person to person. A distinction was made between negative experiences in the workplace, the educational system and public spaces.

The degree to which participants have dealt with racism in Sweden varies from occurring exceptionally to taking place often and covers experiences with direct, indirect and systemic racism, which encompasses the manifestations of racism in general (Burt 2017, 939; Matthew 2017, 901; Sellers 2003, 1079). All but one participant stated having experience with racism in some form and to some degree in Sweden.

Most racism is experienced in the workplace setting. It includes direct, indirect and systemic racism, and both racism by Swedes and non-Swedes. The most experienced effect of racism in the workplace is the lack of opportunities for black people. This was also described earlier by Hällgren (2006, 332). Next to that, participants noted having to work harder than others, getting paid less, feeling undervalued and struggling gaining respect. Participant five noted: “[...] [T]here is no justification for it, I am more educated, I, I deliver more, yet I am still not as paid as my colleagues.”⁴⁴ All who addressed racism and inequality in the workplace to people in higher positions felt unheard and felt it did not lead to any changes. The same participant had proof of his underpayment, yet still did not get the proper salary when confronting his boss with this proof. All experiences with racism in the workplace were contributed to blackness rather than being Nigerian.

Next to racism in the workplace, participants noted experiences with racism in the educational system, varying from little to no experiences to some experiences. Most experiences were expressed through less opportunities in the educational system, for example the lack of representation in higher education or being the only one not getting a PhD offer. Other experiences concern the knowledge of the participant not being trusted by classmates. Participant eleven recalled a moment one of his white classmates required help. He recalls:

I was the only one with higher education there. So when it came to asking for help about a particular problem, when I gave this person [advice], I was like oh, this is the way you do this, she had to confirm

⁴⁴ Participant five, semi-structured interview (online), March 4, 2021.

from her fellow white Swedes, like, ah, he doesn't know what he was talking about, do you know this thing? And I'm like ok, that's interesting.⁴⁵

Similar to experiencing difficulty in gaining respect in the workplace, similar cases are thus experienced in the educational setting, where one's proficiency is questioned even when being qualified. This is a clear example of what was described in the context chapter, where it was mentioned that studies showed that black people are exposed to negative and exclusionary treatments in the educational setting (Hübinette 2009, 343; Gyberg et al. 2018, 24; Hällgren 2006, 333).

Overall, less confrontations with racism in the public space were reported. Half of the participants expressed they have never experienced racism in the public space. This was attributed to race not being very pronounced in Sweden. The other half who did report experiences with racism in the public space differed in degree from exceptional cases to regular experiences. Racism in the public space was mainly expressed by racial remarks made by strangers, funny looks from strangers and being denied access to places. The latter was always indirect and hidden by reasons such as wrong clothing, even when there was no difference in this regard compared to native Swedes. One participant who noted experiencing racism often in the public space even noted sometimes leaving the city he lived in to go to other places to avoid racism.

Place thus plays a part in experiences with racism. Although this participant noted leaving a big city because he experienced more racism there, most participants who had experiences with racism noted that racism occurred less in more multicultural environments in Sweden, most often being bigger cities. Racism was often contributed to a lack of exposure from Swedes to black people, which is experienced to be less the case in bigger cities where not only the makeup of the population is more multicultural, but people are also often more traveled.

Another reason given to make sense of the experiences with or lack of experiences with racism is the physical appearance of the person. Concerning some participants, a strong physical appearance contributed to less experiences with racism than others. Participant one stated: "[...] I don't think I look that fragile that everybody can just attack or something like that."⁴⁶ In line with this, participant eleven noted:

⁴⁵ Participant eleven, semi-structured interview (online), March 16, 2021.

⁴⁶ Participant one, semi-structured interview (online), February 17, 2021.

[S]o for example they view you as a weak black person, then they feel more comfortable to say things that they would normally feel could hurt them. So they use you to sort of like vent their frustrations kind of, because they don't see you as a threat. They throw all the threatening behavior that they would like to throw on someone who looks a bit more fierce on you.⁴⁷

Thus, being conceived a certain way because of one's physical appearance was felt to have an impact on the degree to which one has to deal with racism.

On top of that, the indirect and guarded personality traits that participants ascribed to Swedes were noted to have an effect on the degree of experiences with or lack of experiences with racism. Participant ten says about this: "Yea, I mean, everywhere I go, I never hear someone say something bad beside me. I mean, probably they say it when I'm off the place."⁴⁸ Even though he said he does not experience racism, he noted throughout the interview this does not mean he did not think it did not happen in Sweden. Rather, it was not direct and would happen behind his back. This sentiment was shared by other participants. More indirect and covered racism was noted by participants, and on top of this many feel the existence of racism while (actively) being unaware of it.

Interestingly, almost all who noted experiences with racism contributed racism to individual attitudes rather than it being a systemic problem in Sweden. This does not mean systemic racism was not acknowledged, for example in the lack of opportunities in the educational setting or workplace. However, the participants contributed most experiences with racism to the individual attitude of the other. This made that many feel that racism is more an attitude, which thus can be changed over time. Fueled by a lack of exposure, time and active interaction could change racist attitudes. Through framing racism as an individual attitude, many participants noted they were able to not let experiences with racism have a major negative effect on their lives. However, most noted it does in some way have a negative influence on their lives. This was mainly expressed through both feeling less at home and feeling less accepted. Next to lacking language proficiency, racism was experienced to be a major factor in influencing the sense of belonging in a negative sense. This was also described

⁴⁷ Participant eleven, semi-structured interview (online), March 16, 2021.

⁴⁸ Participant ten, semi-structured interview (online), March 12, 2021. Participant ten identifies as male, is 41 years old, lives in a big city in Sweden and is married with a Latvian woman in Sweden with whom he has one child.

by Hällgren (2006, 320), stating that the lives of black people in Sweden is fractured by the influence of racism. As noted before, Ahrens, Kelly and van Liempt (2006, 92) concluded that racism can have a negative effect on the sense of belonging because it concerns matters of exclusion, and thus of (not) belonging. Although racism is thus also in literature mentioned as something that can have an effect on the sense of belonging, it often plays a mere role in the research and is often only shortly discussed (see for example the work of Ahrens, Kelly and van Liempt 2006). However, the participants of this research showed that racism plays a substantial role when it comes to ideas of belonging, and thus deserves a more prominent place in studies on belonging.

Almost all participants had at least dealt with racism to some extent in Sweden. Even though the level of racism that is dealt with differs, every participant that experiences racism had noted it has a negative impact on their life. Racism is experienced both in the workplace, the educational system and in the public spaces, which is in agreement with other research such as Hällgren (2006), with the first being the most common place for confrontations with racism. Although acknowledging the existence of systemic racism, expressed through for example a lack of opportunities in the educational setting or workplace, most experiences with racism are ascribed to individual attitudes of others. This enables the participants to see possibilities for changes over time concerning these specific experiences.

Conclusion

People with a Nigerian background in Sweden make sense of the idea of belonging through the mechanism of feeling at home and feeling accepted. In line with Amit and Bar-Lev (2014, 949), the sense of belonging is stimulated by satisfaction with life. The participants framed this through valuing the possibility to (successfully) establish a life in Sweden. Although language proficiency and race carry the possibility to enhance the sense of belonging, by a high language proficiency and by the lack of pronunciation of race in Sweden, they also have a negative effect on the sense of belonging. Opportunities are harder to get by when lacking Swedish language skills and not being able to speak Swedish on a certain level also leads to feeling excluded. Racism also ensured less opportunities for the participants. However, unlike language skills, the participant could not easily change this established mechanism single-handedly.

All participants expressed feeling at home in Sweden. Although most felt alienated from Nigerian life, almost all expressed still being strongly connected to Nigeria, either through

their social life in Sweden, people living in Nigeria, visiting the country regularly or through their history in the country. This made that even though Sweden was mostly described as home, Nigeria remained to play an important role considering the ethnic self-identification of the participants. This is reinforced through not only their close bond with Nigeria as mentioned above, but also through the cultural elements that come from their ethnic self-identification that play an important role in everyday life. Because of this and the outsider effect of the presence of blackness in a mainly white country, most had a complex self-understanding of their relationship with Sweden, where Nigeria remained to play an important role, even when feeling at home in Sweden now. Although most data was in line with the literature on the subject of belonging, it became apparent that the influence of blackness and racism are given too little attention in these works, while they do play an important role when it comes to the sense of belonging for the participants of this study. Next to that, the participants expressed a paradoxical relationship concerning belonging with the country of residence and country of origin. Again, this is something that is often not expressively discussed in the literature. The relationship with the country of origin, the paradoxical relationship this creates in relation to the country of settlement and the influence of ethnic and cultural identification was shown by the interviews with the participants to deserve a more substantial attention when studying the sense of belonging than is the case in previous studies.

Conclusion

Julia van den Berg

This research aimed to create insights in how people with a Nigerian background in the Netherlands and Sweden make sense of the construct of *belonging* in their country of settlement. Based on comparative deductions of collected data in these two different geographical locations, we will answer our main question: *In what way does ethnic identity relate to the sense of belonging of people with a Nigerian background in the Netherlands and Sweden?* Herein, we have explored how Nigerian migrants construct their sense of belonging and which mechanisms can either enhance or obstruct this feeling. By looking at ethnic self-identification, we have analyzed the construction of avowed identity through the eyes of ethnic minorities in two predominantly white countries. Being physically easy to recognize in the Netherlands and Sweden and being born in a country where ethnic identity politics is a salient topic, many people with a Nigerian background have created a certain consciousness regarding their ethnicity, especially when encountering acts of racism. Ethnic identity and racism, both being mechanisms of influence in determining one's sense of belonging, thus carry a reinforcing relationship wherein the latter can influence the former. The relationship between ethnic identity and sense of belonging is of a mutually reinforcing nature, either through enhancing or obstructing one another. Sense of belonging and racism have a more complex relationship as people can have a high sense of belonging but still suffer from racist encounters. Racism can to a certain extent thus obstruct, although not completely take away, this sense of belonging in one's country of settlement. In addition, even though the data was collected based on three predetermined sub-questions, all researched mechanisms are in conjunction and are indispensable when researching the concept of belonging. Moreover, although research was carried out in two different geographical locations, similar results were found when collecting our data. Therefore, lying the results side by side, an analysis and deduction could be made to research in what way the same mechanisms are at play when researching sense of belonging in two different countries.

In the following paragraphs we will connect the insights of the theoretical framework to the conclusions of the deconstructed analyzed data along the themes of the three sub-themes: ethnic identity, racism, and sense of belonging, in which the former two are important mechanisms in determining the latter, the extent to which one makes a sense of belonging in the Dutch or Swedish society. Moreover, an answer to the research question will be given, connecting the mechanisms of ethnic identity and racism to the sense of belonging.

Self-Identification

In line with Mach's (1993) construction of identity as a dynamic, processual, and contextual phenomenon, it was found in both countries to be merely impossible for people with a Nigerian background to ascribe their ethnic identity to simply one superordinate identity. Rather, identity was found to be an ambiguous context-dependent construction, carrying multiple assignations. Both in the Netherlands and Sweden people with a Nigerian background carried a double or sometimes triple identification, wherein the country of birth, ethnic group, sometimes continent, and sometimes country of settlement plays an important role in self-identification. Even though Nigeria is made up of many different ethnic groups and many participants in this research were born within a specific ethnic group, this assignation was thus found to not be a determining factor in the ethnic self-identification of participants in both countries as none of the participants identified with a singular constructed ethnic identity. For the participants in both countries this was only natural, as their lives take place on multiple transnational axes being the Netherlands or Sweden, Nigeria, and sometimes other countries or continents through transnational connections such as music, language, food, organizations, clothing, and extensive social networks. In both countries it was found that almost all participants identified ethnically with Africa, Nigeria, or an ethnic group in Nigeria. In addition, in the Netherlands three participants identified as Nigerian-Dutch as they regarded both their country of birth and their country of settlement as determining factors. In Sweden one participant identified as Swedish, because he feels he has internalized the Swedish culture. Both Nigerian and Dutch/Swedish culture thus plays an important role in the ethnic self-identification of the participants, which is in line with Côté (1996, 418), who argues that cultures set the parameters of identity formation. Moreover, in both countries, participants noted their ethnic self-identification depending on the situation, in line with the theory of identification being a contextual phenomenon (Mach 1993, 5). In Sweden, this was expressed through differentiating between identifying either as Nigerian in some situations or as a specific ethnic group in Nigeria. In the Netherlands, this was expressed through underlining one's ethnic affiliations with a specific European country to avoid having a conversation about heritage when one doesn't feel like it.

Besides ethnic self-identification, the participants were asked about national self-identification. Surprisingly enough, in both countries the diverse scope of answers was similar. The answers ranged from a global person to British, Nigerian, Dutch/Swedish, or a combination. Being born in a former British colony and currently living in either the Netherlands or Sweden, the similar answers were deemed explainable. Moreover, often when

asked this question, the participants referred to the status of their citizenship, carrying either the Nigerian, Dutch/Swedish passport, or both. In addition, in both countries participants often emphasized the overlap of national and ethnic identity, regarding them not as two detached assignments, but as intertwined and of mutual influence.

Carrying multiple identity assignments, both ethnical and national, the participants experienced a shared feeling of never being able to become or to wanting to become fully Dutch/Swede due to never being able to speak like a Dutchman/Swede, but mostly due the feeling of standing out as a black person compared to the neutral whiteness that makes up the majority of both countries (Mee and Wright 2009, 776; Pratsinakis 2017, 7). In Sweden, participants felt that it would never be possible to completely be Swedish, while in the Netherlands participants refused to be completely Dutch as they experienced it as possibly losing their ethnic heritage by assimilating completely into the Dutch society. As race is often not pronounced in Sweden, its population density being extremely low compared to the Netherlands, and most ethnic minorities being white (SCB 2020), it could be argued that black immigrants struggle more to completely feel at home in their country than in the Netherlands which has a much higher population density and most ethnic minorities being non-white. However, as many factors are at play concerning self-identification, this can only be argued to a certain extent.

Racism

The Netherlands and Sweden are both countries which are known for their advocacy of liberal, progressive, and tolerant values (Kesic and Duyvendak 2019, 442; Vasta 2007, 713). However, being a black ethnic minority in two predominantly white countries, people with a Nigerian background felt to stand out and almost all have had to some extent past experiences with racism, in line with past research regarding racism in the two societies (e.g., Gyberg et al. 2018; Hällgren 2006; Hayes, Joosen and Smiley 2018; Hondius 2014). Through the eyes of the participants, it is shown how racism is still a prevalent and structural issue in the two countries, even though the degree of their contextual prevalence varied heavily between the two countries. Moreover, the degree to which the participants in both countries had past confrontations with racism and its severeness varied highly from person to person. In addition, the extent to which the participants were impacted by their past experiences with racism varied highly between the two countries as well.

Within this research, a distinction of contextual settings was made to emphasize both the cultural and institutional racism embedded in both societies as well as encountered individual racism (Bowser 2017, 582; Hall and Carter 2006, 160). In both countries, racism is experienced within the workplace, the educational system, and in public spaces. However, the degree to where people with a Nigerian background often experienced racism varies highly between the two countries. In the Netherlands, public spaces were often pronounced as locations where most racism was experienced by the participants. In line with Hondius (2014) and Vasta (2007), common experiences involve racist remarks presented as humor or a joke, racist name calling, or is more sensible in the body language of others. Racism is also experienced in the workplace and in the educational system, although of a lesser extent, with the participants having experienced unequal treatments and lower expectations set by others. In Sweden, however, the workplace was found to be the most common place for confrontations with direct, indirect, and systemic racism, and both racism by Swedes and non-Swedes. In line with Hällgren (2006), the most experienced effect of racism in the workplace is the lack of opportunities for black people. Racism is also experienced in the educational system and in public spaces, which was expressed through less opportunities in the educational system and racial remarks made by strangers, funny looks from strangers and being denied access to places, but all occurring to a lesser extent. It is unknown why there is an existence of a large discrepancy between the two countries concerning environments in which racism was most often experienced. Perhaps due to a mere coincidence or underlying structural factors in which ethnic minorities are more often at a disadvantaged position in Sweden than in the Netherlands, but arguing this is beyond the scope of this research. Moreover, the extent to which participants in both countries have dealt with racism varies from occurring exceptionally or not at all to taking place often. In both countries, all but one participant explicitly stated having experience with racism in some form and to some degree. Moreover, in the Netherlands some participants explained that they dislike throwing the 'race card' when evaluating their negative experiences, thus not ascribing these instances as being racially motivated.

In both the Netherlands and Sweden, participants contributed racism to individual attitudes rather than it being a systemic problem, without downplaying the existence of institutional racism in both societies. However, the extent to which participants were impacted by racism in the two countries varied. In Sweden, although downplaying the gravity of their experiences, all participants noted it does have a negative impact on their life. In the Netherlands, half of the participants acknowledged racism to have a negative influence on

their life in creating a consciousness of their unequal position in society. In both countries, this negative impact was mainly expressed through both feeling less at home and feeling less accepted. The other half of the participants in the Netherlands expressed how their past experiences with racism does not influence their lives in any way, thus partially contradicting Ahrens, Kelly and van Liempt (2006), who argue that racism has a negative effect on the sense of belonging. Again, there is no clear-cut explanation for the discrepancy of impact on the participants in the two countries, as this involves personal feelings that are subject to unique human experience.

Concluding Sense of Belonging: It's Main Mechanisms

In this research, the perceptions on belonging of people with a Nigerian background in the Netherlands and Sweden provided the focal interest. Herein, the concept of sense of belonging played a key role, which refers to a feeling of home, a psychological connection to a place (Amit and Bar-Lev 2014, 948; Yuval-Davis 2006, 197). In line with Amit and Bar-Lev (2014), many factors were found to play a role concerning the sense of belonging of people with a Nigerian background in the Netherlands and Sweden. However, as one's sense of belonging refers to a personal experience and feelings, it was found in both the Netherlands and Sweden to be most strongly connected to feeling at home and the feelings of acceptance.

Having established a life in the Netherlands or Sweden was found to be one of the major mechanisms behind both feeling at home and feeling accepted. This notion was supported and composed by smaller factors such as having an established social network in the country of settlement (with either natives or people of one's own ethnicity), being employed, having adapted to new cultural norms, having positive interactions, and having a secure place to live. In both countries, although to varying extent, these factors played an important role in the way in which participants felt at home and accepted. Moreover, in line with Amit and Bar-Lev (2014, 951), years in the new country of settlement and native language proficiency has shown to have a positive effect on the sense of belonging of the participants. In both countries, these factors have shown to be salient in the obstruction of one's sense of belonging when being present to a lesser extent. Playing a perhaps more ambiguous role in the obstruction of one's sense of belonging was found to be experiences with racism. Both in the Netherlands and Sweden, experiences with racism obstruct or can even diminish one's sense of belonging. Partially in line with Ahrens, Kelly and van Liempt (2006, 92), experiences with racism were found to have a negative effect on the sense of belonging,

because they concern matters of exclusion and thus of belonging and the sense of belonging. Nonetheless, in both countries, racism was found to play a twofold role concerning feeling at home and feeling accepted; some participants found it not to be an obstructing factor in their sense of belonging, while for others it did negatively affect this through mechanisms of exclusions.

Concerning both dynamic, processual, and contextual phenomena, ethnic self-identification and sense of belonging carry an ambiguous twofold relationship, wherein the former can both obstruct and enhance the latter. In a sense, one's ethnic identity can create strong affiliations with people carrying the same ethnic affiliations in both the country of birth and the country of settlement. Being able to support one another by carrying mutual attachments to their country of birth, ethnic identity can strengthen the feeling of home in the country of settlement by establishing a social life centered around people with the same background. As sense of belonging concerns a 'psychological home' (Amit and Bar-Lev 2014, 948), bringing one's home country through intersubjective connections to the country of settlement can in this way increase the sense of belonging. In addition, ethnic identity can be contextually influenced by the sense of belonging as well, therefore also carrying a reinforcing relationship. By creating a feeling of home in the country of settlement through various supporting mechanisms and the notion of identity having a dynamic nature, people can over time adopt to the superordinate identification of their country of settlement. Feeling accepted and at home in their new home country, many people with a Nigerian background have in a way embraced and appropriated multiple assignations, among which the identity of the country of settlement can be carried. Nevertheless, ethnic identity can also be a critical factor in obstructing the sense of belonging. Race, though often not being pronounced, is a salient topic in the Netherlands and Sweden. The blackness of people with a Nigerian background, living in two countries where the majority of the population is made up of a whiteness that is considered neutral, often result in racial struggles. Being able to strongly affect one's feeling of acceptance and home, experiences of racism can ultimately engender feelings of exclusion and simultaneously diminishing one's sense of belonging. In addition, enjoying strong transnational ties with the country of origin or with people carrying the same ethnic affiliations can result in the inability to feel at home in the country of settlement or even to experience a certain alienation in society. By instigating feelings of homesickness, being unable to establish a social network in the country of settlement, or feeling excluded due to past experiences of racism, these ties could obstruct the way in which one feels at home in the country of settlement, therefore diminishing one's sense of belonging. Ethnic

identity and sense of belonging have thus proven to hold an ambiguous, dynamic, non-linear relationship wherein both can be of obstructing and enhancing mutual influence.

Limitations and Recommendations

As both processes concern personal feelings, the relationship between ethnic identity and sense of belonging can only be researched and theorized to a certain extent, at all times being subjective to unique human experiences and emotions. Therefore, we are aware that there are many more supporting mechanisms at play concerning sense of belonging. However, due to the limited scope of the research, a choice had been made to specifically focus on these two mechanisms. Moreover, the strict measures regarding the COVID-19 pandemic had a major impact on the extent to which we could do our fieldwork to collect empirical data. As the fieldwork had to be done remotely, we were not able to execute the preferred the anthropological research method of participating observation. Solely relying on social media to approach and recruit participants, we were both greatly hindered in collecting as many participants as we desired. Only a small percentage of possible participants in both countries responded to our sent messages, whereas most people did not respond to our request. As anthropological findings are based on qualitative data, it is preferred to have as many participants as possible to draw generalizable conclusions or even establish theories. Although establishing theories was beyond the scope of this research, we are both aware that the limited amount of twelve participants per country is not a firm base to draw generalizable conclusions. Furthermore, the inability to execute the method of participating observation left us with limited research methods to collect data, being qualitative semi-structured interviews, focus groups, photo elicitation, and netnography. Though the method of semi-structured interviews was deemed a highly useful method, the other three methods only provided limited or no useful empirical data. Again, solely relying on social media to reach participants, many people did not respond to our message asking to send photographs. In the Netherlands only two participants and in Sweden only five participants provided photographs, which greatly hindered using this method for drawing firm conclusions. Moreover, the methods of focus groups and netnography were deemed highly unsuitable for our research as the former was simply unfeasible regarding COVID-19 restrictions and the latter provided us only very little useful data for the purposes of this research. The deconstructed data and drawn conclusions thus only provide a representable image of the research population to a certain extent,

whereas beyond the scope of our research lie presumably many more mechanisms supporting the sense of belonging.

Keeping these limitations in mind, it is recommended for future research on this subject matter to establish a much larger sample size and successfully using different research methods to establish a data triangulation. Relying on a single source of data and few participants can obstruct assessing the legitimacy of the results (Clark, Foster and Bryman 2019, 108), hence obstructing the reliability of the research. Moreover, as the limited scope of this research obliged us to restrict the quantity of mechanisms at play concerning sense of belonging, it is recommended for future research to extend this scope. Past research (e.g., Amit and Bar-Lev 2014; Antonsich 2010; Regis Cabaniss and Cameron 2017) has demonstrated that many mechanisms play a role for immigrants concerning sense of belonging, such as religious identity, motives of immigration and subjective well-being, which were beyond the scope of this research. Researching the complete scope of mechanisms or a focus on the relationship on other mechanisms than was done in this research would increase the validity of the results of the research and can lead to new insights on the way the sense of belonging is at play among immigrants. Moreover, doing research on this topic in countries where English is not widely spoken could lead to interesting findings. The participants of this research had noted that the high language proficiency of English in the Netherlands and Sweden contributed to them being able to establish a fulfilling life more quickly. Therefore, this experience could greatly differ in countries where this is not the case, which could lead to interesting, possibly differing insights on this subject.

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Appendices

1 Interview schedule for semi-structured interviews

This interview schedule was created to make sure both researchers would treat the same subjects in more or less the same way. However, these questions were merely created for guidance. The way questions were asked depended on the interview itself. The so-called closed questions proposed in this interview schedule were followed up by more in-depth questions which were dependent on the answer of each participant.

Introduction to the research

Informed consent

Demographic detail

Age

Gender/Preferred pronouns

Place of residence

Job/Study

Date

Context

How long have you been living in the Netherlands/Sweden?

OR How long has your family been living in the Netherlands/Sweden?

(If applicable) Why did you choose to migrate to the Netherlands/Sweden?

(If applicable) Have you, since arrival in the Netherlands/Sweden, been living in [name city]?

What do you enjoy most about living in [name city]?

What is your favorite place in [name city] and why?

Does your family also live in the Netherlands/Sweden?

If not, do they live in Nigeria?

Which languages do you speak?

How would you identify yourself when it comes to nationality?

And how would you identify yourself when it comes to ethnicity?

Belonging - personal

Do you have strong ties with your family, friends or other contacts who live in Nigeria?

In what ways?

Do you travel to Nigeria?

If yes, how often?

(If applicable) What do you miss from (living in) Nigeria?

If yes, why? What aspects do you miss? When do you miss (living in) Nigeria?

If not, why not?

What are your thoughts on migrating (back) to Nigeria?

Could you describe your close friend group?

Do you have some/a lot of Nigerian Dutch/Swedish friends?

Do you have some/a lot of native Dutch/Swedish friends?

If yes, in what ways do you experience cultural differences?

In what way do you feel at home in the Netherlands/Sweden?

When do you feel at home in the Netherlands/Sweden?

Where do you feel at home in the Netherlands/Sweden?

Has this feeling (of feeling at home) changed over time? (Increased, decreased?)

Are you a member of a Nigerian organization, established in the Netherlands/Sweden?

If yes, for which reasons?

If not, would you feel the need to become a member of such an organization?

(If applicable) Have you ever regretted making the decision to migrate to the Netherlands/Sweden?

(If applicable) Which aspects of life in the Netherlands/Sweden do you find difficult to adapt to?

Do you wish you could change these aspects of life? And in what ways?

Belonging - professional

(If applicable) Have you, since arrival in the Netherlands/Sweden, been working as [job]?

If not, what were the reasons for switching jobs? What were your previous jobs?

How would you describe your relationship with your colleagues?

Have you ever had negative experiences in the workplace?

If yes, could you elaborate on these negative experiences?

Have you gone to school in the Netherlands/Sweden?

Have you studied (gone to college) in the Netherlands/Sweden?

Have you ever had negative experiences regarding the Dutch/Swedish educational system?

If yes, could you elaborate on these negative experiences?

If not, could you give an insight into your life during these times?

Do you still often think about these experiences (either workplace or school, or both)?

In what ways do these experiences impact your life?

Belonging - public

When you are out in public, do you feel safe?

Have you ever had negative experiences in public spaces (public transport, restaurants, law enforcement)?

If yes, could you elaborate on these negative experiences?

Do you feel accepted in society?

If yes, what attributes to these positive feelings? What experiences contribute to this?

If not, why not? What attributes to these feelings of exclusion?

When do you feel accepted in society?

(If applicable) When do you not feel accepted in society?

Photo elicitation (possible after interview, possibly even in written form, in case photo is provided after the interview)

Can you describe the photograph you have made?

Why did you choose to photograph [description photo]?

In what way is [description photograph] important for you?

In what way does this photograph represent your feeling of home?

How does this relate to your ethnic identity?

Concluding

Where do you feel yourself most at home?

Are you consciously aware of your ethnic identity throughout everyday life in the society you currently live in?

Do you think your ethnic identity influences your experience/the way you experience living in the Netherlands/Sweden?

Do negative experiences you've had in [applicable field] influenced your life?

Do these experiences influence the extent to which you feel at home in the Netherlands/Sweden?

Do these experiences influence the extent to which you identify as [ethnic self-identification]?

What do you enjoy most about living in the Netherlands/Sweden?

Would you like to continue living in the Netherlands/Sweden in the future?