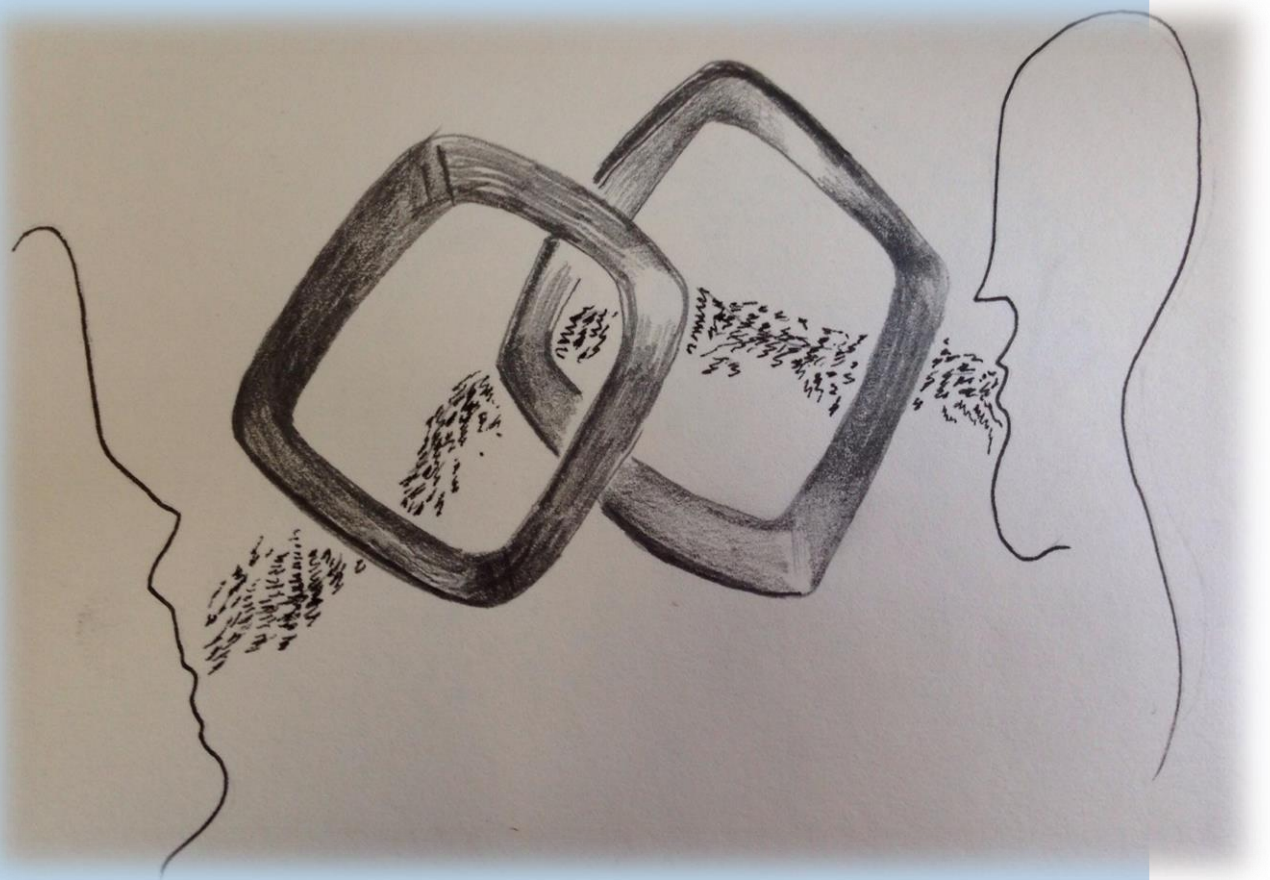


'Integration' and the social becoming of newcomers in Amsterdam



Locating Dutch integration policy in the everyday

Katherine Hannah Catling

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by Katherine Hannah Catling

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Locating Dutch integration policy in the everyday

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Cultural Anthropology: Sustainable Citizenship



Katherine Hannah Catling

Student number: 6119158

Supervisor: Eva van Roekel

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Abstract

This thesis aims to dismantle the homogenisation of 'integration' processes by Dutch integration policy. The data that is used has been collated through three months in the field at different social centres in Amsterdam: Boost, Het Wereldhuis and Casa Migrante. These social centres aim to facilitate the 'integration' of newcomers into Dutch society. I draw on key concepts involved in these processes such as cultural assimilation, social cohesion, language and friendship. As a result, this thesis navigates friction moments between the personal experiences of newcomers compared with the expectations of Dutch integration policy. I also reflect on my own positionality as a white European researcher and how this shapes my own 'integration' into Dutch society. This research is contextually situated in light of current events such as the 'refugee crisis' and the contemporary rise in migration across Europe. Societies are becoming more diverse and Amsterdam is a prime example of this, resulting in avid debate on the topic of 'integration'. Through the application of Ingold's (2011) anthropological theory that defines 'being alive' as a state of continuous becoming, I deconstruct notions of 'integration' as they currently stand. Alternatively, 'integration' is revealed as a state of continuous *integrating*, as part of the ongoing process of social becoming. This theory is employed as an act of protest against the standardised and static procedure of 'integration' by Dutch policy.

Key Words: *Integration; integrating; cultural assimilation; social cohesion; newcomers; refugees; migrants; social becoming; language; friendship; diversity; positionality*

Why should we want to know a stranger when it is easier to estrange another? Why should we want to close the distance when we can close the gate? (Morrison 2017, 38)



¹ Photograph of houses in Transvaalbuurt, east Amsterdam, taken by author.

Introduction

This thesis is the culmination of nine months of research, which has involved gathering theoretical argumentation and navigating current social debate on the topic of 'integration' in the Netherlands. I independently organised and carried out three months of research in the field, discovering friction points within the disputed meaning of 'integration' according to national policy compared with the perspective of newcomers themselves. For this reason, the central question of this thesis will be to examine in what ways current Dutch integration policy is dismantled by the real-life experiences of newcomers in Amsterdam. Dutch integration policy suggests that 'integrating' is a liminal phase that will end in the state of 'integrated' or indeed, a 'failure to integrate'. I argue that this fixed understanding of 'integration' is not reflective of the open-ended experiences of *integrating*.

*She's been in Holland 30 years or so, and she used to be a refugee,
(she pauses, and then corrects herself)*

*In fact, when do you ever stop being a refugee?*²~Saskia

This quote from a volunteer at one of the social centres where my research took place emphasises the ongoing nature of integrating. An anthropological approach works to untangle the intricacy of 'integration' experiences in people's everyday lives. In particular, this thesis draws on the recurrent themes of language and friendship as processes of social becoming, recounted by the personal accounts of informants. Within these personal accounts I integrate policy documentation as a way of unveiling its limitations and disconnection from real-life experience. Most significantly, I accentuate the notion that 'integration' is in fact a continuous process of 'integrating', with no determined end-point. To demonstrate this, I employ anthropological theory from Ingold (2011) on his conceptualisation of 'being alive'. Ingold describes *being* alive as being in an ever-evolving state of *becoming*. I utilise this theory to convey and deconstruct static understandings of 'integration' as presented by policy.

² All the names of informants that are quoted in this thesis have been changed for anonymity and the protection of their privacy.

Place of interview: Boost, 24/04/18

A critical and ever-present friction point within this topic is the lack of clarity around what 'integration' means. The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'integration' as: "The making up of a whole by adding together or combining the separate parts or elements" (Oxford English Dictionary 1973, 1088). This definition is intriguing in itself as it suggests that all the parts make up a whole, so if one takes Dutch society as the example, the combining of both Dutch nationals and newcomers is what would create the 'whole' of society. This combining notion suggests a push and pull from both sides rather than a force of action from one side to become part of the other. In comparison, the government of the Netherlands state on their website that,

"The government consistently monitors the effort migrants make to integrate. If you do not make enough effort, you may lose your residence permit. This will not happen if you have a right to asylum but even then you must still make an effort to integrate."
(Government of the Netherlands 2018)

This statement is reflective of the individualistic approach of 'integration' as set out by policy. The abstract 'effort' is monitored by the Dutch government through civic integration exams, consisting of Dutch language exams and an exam on the social values and history of Dutch society (Inburgeren.nl 2018). This method of examination towards 'integration' is specific to the Netherlands, differing from other European countries, even neighbouring countries such as Belgium (Gysen, Kuijper & van Avermaet 2009). The criticism of these exams has been that they create an individualistic responsabilization to integrate; the newcomer must autonomously integrate themselves into Dutch society (Folke & Schedler 2004; Joppke 2007; van Houdt, Suvarierol & Schinkel 2011).

Another point of tension within this strategy for assessment is that it does not take into account the myriad of different backgrounds, education and situational factors that transform an individual's ability to pass the exam within the specified time limit of three years. This scaled and measured version of 'integration' controlled by the civic integration exam thus ignores the common interruptions and disruptions that occur in daily life. Alternatively, understanding 'integrating' as a process of social becoming reveals the inherent fluidity of such life processes.

Dutch integration policy is also reductive in its failure to consider the dominance of the English language in the Netherlands and its effects on Dutch acquisition (Richards & Schmidt 2014). The vast majority of Dutch nationals are bilingual in both English and Dutch. This means that many newcomers who can speak English often learn Dutch much slower, as they can easily depend upon English to support their livelihoods (Edwards 2016). Newcomers also struggled with losing their English as a result of the pressures of learning Dutch in the specific time limit. Thus, this thesis will critically analyse how policy's neglect to consider the presence of English may endanger integration processes in Dutch society. Moreover, the role of 'friendship' in integrating will be analysed through the personal accounts of informants. This will stress the disconnection between 'integration' policy and the influence of the social environment and social bonds upon integrating.

The data used in this thesis is from time spent at various different social centres in Amsterdam that focus on facilitating 'integration'. I carried out my investigation at Het Wereldhuis, Casa Migrante and Boost. All of these centres are self-described as 'open houses'. However, they each have a different focus group, for Het Wereldhuis it is undocumented migrants, in Casa Migrante it is Hispanic migrants, and at Boost it is refugees. All three centres provide Dutch language courses, amongst other participatory activities. Over the three-month period in the field I attended Boost's language activities of 'Taaltheatre' and 'TaalCafe' every week in order to gain insight and contact with newcomers who were personally undergoing the official integration procedure. I also attended Dutch classes for Hispanic migrants at Casa Migrante, and at Het Wereldhuis I connected with undocumented migrants by volunteering to give English classes. It was in Boost and Casa Migrante that I was able to acquire the bulk of my data, building rapport with both the organisers of the centres and with newcomers attending these spaces.

My research population was a mix of refugees, both individuals and families, and migrants from diverse educational and racial backgrounds. Alongside this I also interviewed the organisers of Boost, which were made up almost entirely by Dutch nationals. This provided further insight into the parallels and diversions in perspective on 'integration' as told by the Dutch national compared with the newcomer. I believe this diversity within my research population was essential in revealing the manifold experiences in 'integrating', and works to emphasise the reductive nature of Dutch integration policy. Furthermore, I chose

to interview people who had arrived recently, and those who had been in the Netherlands for over twenty years in order to see how perspectives on integration may change along the path from 'integrating' to perceived as 'integrated'. For example, some newcomers who were interviewed were 'officially integrated' according to the Civic Integration Procedure, but in themselves still felt that they were adapting. This was often explained by the continuous and endless process of learning Dutch, and the ongoing process of making friends in order to feel settled and connected to the Netherlands.

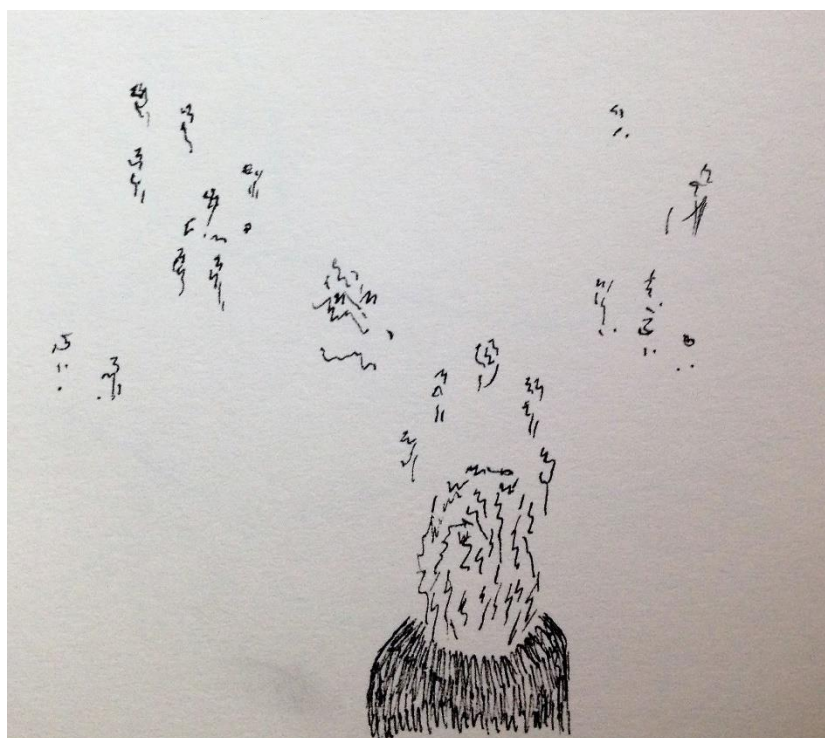
I carried out my research with the use of various ethnographic research methods. Initially I began with participant observation in order to observe the social relations between those at the centre, with the aim of creating an "elaborate venture in" to the life-worlds of the informants (Geertz 1973, 312). I also used methodology of interviews, both semi-structured, unstructured and informal conversation, which allowed for the formulation of questions around these friction points that I will analyse and reflect upon. In addition, I employed auto-ethnography as a means to engage in reflexive thought, analysing how my positionality as a foreign researcher in the Netherlands also shaped the data that I was able to collate. A researcher who is white, educated, English-speaking, female and European, with a certain position of privilege in terms of my own 'integration' process, but also one who holds similarities with the informants as a fellow attendee to the Dutch classes, 'taaltheatre' and 'taalcafe', fulfilling the same role of 'learner'. However, a continuous reminder of our contrasting social positioning was the motive behind attending the classes, I for my own academic research, and them, in order to pass their obligatory integration exam to secure their stay and acceptance by the Dutch nationals.

In this thesis I first discuss the current debate, diverse argumentation and theory surrounding 'integration' in the Netherlands as a means to situate my own findings within this discussion and demonstrate its relevance to contemporary society. I will look at both diverse perspectives and experiences of 'integration', introducing the sites of BOOST, Casa Migrante and Het Wereldhuis as spaces in which the ongoing process of integrating is played out. I critically reflect upon specific policy documentation compared with insight from integration workers and newcomers at the chosen sites of research. In addition, I will address my own positionality, reflecting upon my role as 'researcher' within the chosen field. The ethnographic methods employed will be explained and illuminated through passages from

interviews, vignettes and detailed descriptions of encounters and observations that were vital in carving the path of my research. The empirical chapters are an in-depth analysis of the dominant themes of language and friendship in order to illuminate how these recurrent topics demonstrate the ongoing process of social becoming within integrating. Through these chapters the reader is permitted to explore the life-worlds of those facilitating and experiencing 'integration' themselves. Ultimately, the argument central to this thesis, as a bright thread of warning, is to challenge policy's idealistic definition of 'integration' by revealing its nonscalability as a process of continuous *integrating*.

Chapter 1: Integration policy and processes of social becoming

“These two aspects of globalization are inseparable: capitalisms global reach is grounded in the way it introduces a radical class division across the entire globe, separating those protected by the sphere from those left vulnerable outside it. In this way, both the Paris terrorist attacks and the now constant flow of refugees into Europe are momentary reminders of the violent world outside our glass house.”
(Žižek 2017, 6)



1.1 Neoliberalist individualism and 'earning' one's place

How can we define 'integration' in the Netherlands? What threads make up the fabric of *integrating*? And is the end state of being completely 'integrated' a quixotic ideal constructed

³ Illustration by the author.

by Dutch policy makers? The worldwide effects of globalisation, the spread of neoliberalism and rise in migration as a consequence of the 'refugee crisis', all culminate in creating more diverse societies with increasing challenges around multi-culturalism and integration. As a result, in the Netherlands there has been a shift to an individualistic approach in integration policy, just as in many other countries across Europe (Joppke 2007; van Houdt, Suvarierol & Schinkel 2011). In the quote that begins this chapter, Žižek (2017, 6) states that current international neoliberal structures function to divide the world into two halves: the privileged and the vulnerable. In relation to integration in the Netherlands, the newcomer fills the criteria of 'vulnerable', due to their precarity, and the Dutch citizen as the 'privileged' in that they have a secured residence and citizenship. Neoliberalist structures segregate the interdependent existence of individual from the 'other', i.e. newcomer from national citizen. This is seen in the individualistic 'effort' involved in 'integration' as laid out by Dutch integration policy:

"The government consistently monitors the effort migrants make to integrate. If you do not make enough effort, you may lose your residence permit. This will not happen if you have a right to asylum but even then you must still make an effort to integrate."
(Government of the Netherlands 2018)

In this quote there are echoes of Herbert Hoover's mantra of 'rugged individualism' in 1930's America. The policy puts weight on the individual to make the effort in earning their place, just as 'rugged individualism' told the American citizen to work their way up and make their own opportunities. This 'effort', although subjective in meaning, is monitored by the government through an integration exam. This exam had previously been voluntary, but as of the Civic Integration Newcomers Act (CINA) in 1998, it became obligatory for all newcomers. The exam tests the newcomer's Dutch proficiency, knowledge of Dutch society and cultural values: in other words, it is a 'civic integration contract' (van Houdt, Suvarierol & Schinkel 2011). It is therefore the individual's own responsibility to prepare for this exam, in order to be accepted as officially 'integrated' into the state (Joppke 2007, 7). If a newcomer does not comply with this requirement, a financial sanction is applied which is determined by the local authority (van Houdt, Suvarierol & Schinkel 2011, 415). This strategy for monitoring and testing integration also makes the assumption that to integrate is a process with a clear beginning and end, disregarding its fluid and continuous nature.

Neoliberalist strategy presents the individual as the autonomous, free, rational and self-regulating citizen (Dean, 1999). Citizens are thereby called upon to assume responsibility for regulating themselves. This implied *responsibility* and autonomy is significant when critically analysing attitudes and approaches towards integration. Burchell named this as a strategy of 'responsibilization' (Burchell, 1993). Dutch integration policy presents the individual as isolated and in total control of creating their own opportunities. In a later sub-chapter, *Challenging the fixity of 'integration'*, I will put forward a contrasting view of 'integration'. Instead the individual is shown to be inherently bound to the social environment, continuously affected by external forces thus problematizing the individual 'effort' and responsibilization that policy dictates.

1.2 Dutch integration policy: from 'multiculturalism' to 'cultural assimilation'

"The government believes that Dutch society and the values it is based on should be central to integration policy." (The Government of the Netherlands, 2011)

Hogan-Brun et al. (2009, 6) state that due to the rises in migration many nation-states have reasserted their role as protectors of a 'national culture' by "questioning multiculturalism and promoting the management of diversity in which migrant rights are conditional upon acceptance of national values and loyalty to the state." This expectation that newcomers must take on the national values of the host country is ingrained through the assumption that cultural assimilation is an integral element of 'integration'. Van Houdt, Suvarierol & Schinkel (2011, 418) support this notion, stating that, "Since the late 1990s, Dutch discourse on integration has increasingly centred on notions of 'culture', 'norms and values' and proper definitions of 'Dutchness' and of 'Dutch society', but also on the defence of social identity and loyalty and commitment to the community and its values."

By comparison, during the 1980's the Netherlands had adopted a 'multicultural' approach to integration policy, previously named 'Ethnic Minority Policy'. The EM policy greatly differed from current integration policy in that cultural assimilation was not assessed

through exams, but instead left to the immigrant to develop themselves (Bruquetas-Callejo et al. 2011, 144). During this time, the role of the government was defined as that of facilitating, i.e. creating opportunities for minorities, such as special programmes in immigrant languages in the media (Bruquetas-Callejo et al. 2011, 144). Moreover, EM organisations were heavily subsidised, both at national and local levels, and engaging them in integration efforts became an important strategic aspect of policy implementation (Bruquetas-Callejo et al. 2011, 144). Schools were incentivised to focus on education for children of a migrant background as they received more funding, there was also financial assistance for education in the native language and culture of immigrants (Bruquetas-Callejo et al. 2011, 144).

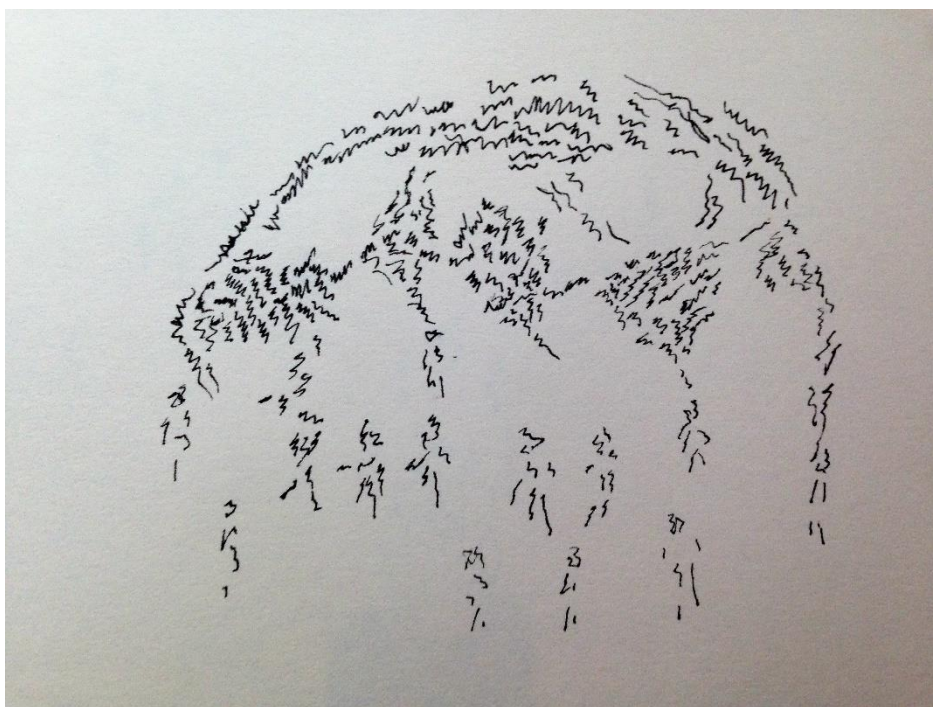
However, the 1990's saw a drastic shift in policy whereby the newcomer became responsible for not only their own economic integration, but also cultural assimilation (van Houdt, Suvarierol & Schinkel et al. 2011, 422). This time also saw changes in perceptions around dual nationality of migrants, as failing to give up one's original nationality became seen as "a lack of commitment to the Dutch society" that blocked integration (van Houdt, Suvarierol & Schinkel 2011, 419). It therefore became the responsibility of the newcomers, specifically non-western migrants, to 'close the cultural gap' (van Houdt, Suvarierol & Schinkel 2011, 422). Hogan-Brun et al. (2009, 4) go as far to claim that European states are reacting to rises in immigration by enforcing a 'dogma of homogenisation', in that there is a promotion of a view of society, "...in which differences are seen as dangerous and centrifugal and in which the 'best' society is suggested to be one without inter-group differences." This is also demonstrated in the way that European nation-states perceive and present themselves as monolingual, despite the common reality of being multicultural and multilingual (Hogan-Brun et al. 2009, 4). The beginning of the 21st century also marked a shift in approach towards minority languages in education in the Netherlands. Minority languages were no longer supported in school, instead migrants were encouraged to focus only on their Dutch and neglect their mother tongue.

"Integration of ethnic minorities was from then on basically seen as a *social economic* issue which demanded an *individual* approach of those involved. This new approach differed greatly from the previous multiculturalist phase, in which ethnic minorities

would be enabled to integrate into Dutch society while preserving their original *cultural identity*, much more a *group* approach.” (Folke & Schedler 2004, 47).

So it follows, cultural assimilation and language acquisition play major roles in societal perceptions of ‘successful’ integration in present Dutch society. The civic integration exam is employed as a method of ‘testing’ and measuring the newcomer’s cultural assimilation.

1.3 *Problematizing Dutch integration policy: the absence of the social environment and friendship*



“People who wish to live in the Netherlands are expected to contribute to social cohesion and demonstrate involvement and citizenship. The government is justified in imposing requirements on immigrants because society places the same demands on its own citizens.” (The Government of the Netherlands, 2011)

This statement from Dutch integration policy is problematic in that it demands that the newcomer must demonstrate ‘involvement’ and ‘citizenship’. A newcomer will not officially gain citizenship once they have completed the integration procedure, it requires applying for

⁴ Illustration by the author.

the naturalisation process after five years of residence before they could acquire such a status (ind.nl 2018). The demands of policy are thereby shown to be removed from the reality of the newcomer's experience. How can one demonstrate 'citizenship' in the Netherlands if they do not have access to it for (at least) another five years? Furthermore, it is now increasingly common in European countries such as the Netherlands and Germany that newcomers carry out their integration procedure before arriving into the host country. The crucial difference is that the German government has supported German language acquisition abroad with significant funding of schools and language courses, whilst no Dutch education programmes abroad exist (Joppke 2007, 8). As a result, integration from abroad often results in no integration whatsoever, making the integration exam also a tool for preventing immigration (Joppke 2007, 8).

Social cohesion is also claimed as an aim central to Dutch integration policy (The Government of the Netherlands, 2011). Van Kempen & Bolt (2009, 458) define social cohesion to comprise of "shared norms and values, social solidarity, social control, social networks, and a feeling of belonging to each other through a common identity and a strong bonding with the place where one lives." In this description, diversity seems to hold little place. Instead a socially cohesive society is seen as one where the minority makes a conscious effort to 'blend-in' with the majority culture. This is exemplified in the above policy statement that requires the newcomer "contribute to social cohesion", implying that social cohesion is dependent upon individual effort. This disregards the role that Dutch nationals also play in creating a socially cohesive society. Moreover, this statement claims that the same requirements made to immigrants are made to Dutch citizens, however, the Dutch citizen is not obligated to take an exam to prove their knowledge of Dutch society. Therefore, there is also a visible tension within policy in that it demands both individualism and social cohesion, without considering the impact of one upon the other.

Moreover, the individualisation and 'responsibilization' of the newcomer to integrate themselves into society is distortive as it does not consider the effects of community upon settlement and social cohesion. Indeed, the impact of the social environment on 'integration' is absent in Dutch integration policy (Inburgeren.nl 2018). Thus the newcomer is presented as untouched and unaffected by their social world (van Houdt, Suvarierol & Schinkel 2011). This of course is not the case; "...coping with the struggles of daily life is only possible when

someone is part of some kind of community. This community can consist of people with the same language or ideological background and/or of people who are different" (van Heelsum, 2017, 2147).

Furthermore, the significance of friendship upon integration processes is not apparent in Dutch policy (Inburgeren.nl 2018). 'Friendship' is a challenging topic for discussion due to its ambiguity, taking many different cultural understandings (Desai & Killick 2013). Within 'friendship' also exists a myriad of different 'types' of friends, this could be loose friendships, work colleagues, childhood friends or 'bosom buddies' (Desai & Killick 2013, 2). In addition, a 'friendship' is not a static relationship, it will change and transform over the course of time (Beer & Gardener 2015, 5806). Consequently, 'friendship' becomes a variable that is difficult to scale and measure, resulting in there being little research that attempts to define the effects of friendship upon integrating. However, de Vroome & van Tugergen in their study on the settlement intentions of refugees in the Netherlands found that, "immigrants who have relatively more contact with natives will more likely have the intention to stay in the host country compared to immigrants who have relatively more contact with coethnics" (de Vroome & van Tubergen 2014, 50). Consequently, there is a clear need for social bonding with the native population for the 'integration' of newcomers.

There is significant research evidencing that 'friendship' is one of the most influential factors upon mental well-being (van der Horst & Coffé 2012). Friends may provide emotional support and also can help to navigate the complications of everyday life, these are very significant aids when integrating into a new society (van Heelsum, 2017, 2147). Moreover, friendship also has a critical influence upon social cohesion in society. It plays a key role in creating social trust amongst the population and breaks down social divisions (Misztal 1996). The newcomer can learn about social norms and values of a new society through friendship with the native population. This is part of the process of social becoming that is not learnt through the official integration procedure. In this sense, I argue that forging friendships is part of the ongoing process of social becoming within integrating. The notion of social becoming accentuates the significance of the convergence of lifeworld's in shaping life processes, such as integrating (Ingold 2011). Social becoming also reveals the level of agency between the individual and their social surroundings: "strategic actors have freedom of strategic choice, but this choice is constrained by the social structures and culture" (Roncevic

& Makarovic 2011, 457). Therefore, the individual is shown to be bound to the social in their experience of life. Hence, the effects of social bonds and friendship within the host country, and specifically, bonds with the native population, must also be considered when attempting to understand the 'integration' processes of newcomers in the Netherlands.

1.4 Challenging the fixity of 'integration'

'Integration' is defined by national policy not only as a scalable static process with clear beginning and end, it is also reductively presented as an individual process that negates social influences upon integrating. The assumption that there is a fixed point in which a person's integration process is 'completed', and they are individually 'integrated' may be interrogated through Ingold's (2011) concept on the state of being alive. Ingold argues that to *be* is actually to be in a continuous state of 'becoming':

"the movement of life is specifically of becoming rather than being, of the incipience of renewal along a path" (Ingold 2011,68)

It is these trajectories of *becoming* that comprise the texture of the world, in what Ingold describes as a "meshwork" (Ingold 2011, 80). If *being alive* is a constant interweaving, ever evolving process, what does 'integration' mean? Every individual continuously experiences new events or situations that they must adapt to, changing city, changing job, losing relations, gaining new ones. So it follows, every human experiences situations or environments in which they must 'integrate' into. However, 'integration' in terms of national policy serves as a powerfully divisive term, functioning to segregate foreigners and natives in their experiences of life. In reality, 'integrating' is part of all human experience at some point in time. Understanding 'integration' in this way, breaks down barriers between the native population and the foreigner, as one can see that even natives may encounter 'integration' in their daily life.

In his theory Ingold takes inspiration from Deleuze (1987), who originally conceptualised life as being lived along "lines of flight". Deleuze used the rhizome plant as a way of explaining this concept. The rhizome is an alternate form of life to the organizational

tree-root structure, it endlessly makes planar and trans-species connections, existing in the *middle*. It is an inter-being with no determinable beginning or end. The rhizome is thereby reflective of “the fluid character of the life process” (Ingold 2011, 82). In contrast, national integration policy in the Netherlands argues that ‘integration’ is a stage of liminality: a transitory and adaptive stage. It assumes that the individual will pass through this stage and arrive at the fixed state of ‘integrated’.

“Integration obligation:

If you have to integrate, DUO will send you a letter telling you the date on which you have to start your integration. Beginning with this date, you then have 3 years to integrate. This is called the integration period.” (Government of the Netherlands 2018)

However, when considering life forms such as the rhizome that exist in a state of continuous becoming, one is able to see an alternate way of understanding life processes, ‘integration’ being one of these. The rhizome epitomises the nature of life as a state of continuous becoming, exemplifying the possibility that, in fact, the newcomer may always exist in a state of ‘integrating’ without a determinable end state of ‘integrated’. In addition, the rhizome is also evocative of the entanglement of the individual with their social environment and how this shapes the integrating process. In the same way that the rhizome exists through trans-species connections, the newcomer who is integrating will also live and grow through their social surroundings and friendships.

Significantly, according to Dutch policy’s definition of ‘integration’, it is a process that is also bound to other processes, such as Dutch language acquisition. Language acquisition in itself is a continuous process, one never stops learning a language. There are momentary fluctuations in language ability, particularly in a second language. Sometimes one is fluid when speaking, at other times hesitant or stuttering; sporadically the accent from the mother tongue comes out strong or weak, captured by particular sounds.

“Language used for communication is not an impoverished manifestation of an idealized system of knowledge but an ongoing process of negotiation which is a product of complex interactional processes.” (Richards & Schmidt 2014, 1)

There is no fixed finish line when one has officially achieved their ultimate capacity for a language: its state is one of inherent growth and social becoming.

Integration may thus be understood in a similar way, making its definition disputable and a trial for national policy. Its complexity cannot be easily encompassed by a test, and its measurement may require continuous reassessment due to its constantly evolving state, "Life is open-ended: its impulse is not to reach a terminus but to keep on going." (Ingold 2011, 79) The weaving of a fabric is much like the integrating process, gradually making connections, tying together threads, weaving one's way through the new space, culture and language. Everyday new yarns are added to this pattern making it richer and more complex.

"...beings do not simply occupy the world, they *inhabit* it, and in doing so – in threading their own paths through the meshwork – they contribute to its ever-evolving weave." (Ingold 2011, 67)

In this chapter I have discussed and exemplified the current debate on 'integration' in the Netherlands, employing diverse theory and policy documentation in order to locate my own findings in this debate. I have also theorised my own approach towards 'integration' as a state of continuous social becoming. This acts as an anthropological critique to the individualism of neoliberal strategy in policy. An open and social approach to 'integration' accounts for other factors besides the individual's 'effort' that shape the integrating process, such as the influence of social bonds and friendship. Also it demonstrates the nonscalability of the entangled weave of it all: the individual and their social environment. The next chapter will be a reasoning behind my choice of particular research methodology, stressing the relevance and urgency for an ethnographic approach towards the topic of 'integration'.

Chapter 2: Research methodology: An ethnographic approach

I think that the people can decide when they integrate in the society, people themselves. Not the other, like if I am going to do the integration exam, and I succeed then I am 'integrated', but I think that is not...(pause)... yeah, how can I say that? that cannot be judged by the other, if I feel about myself, Ok I feel myself one of these people, or one of these people who is living here, then I feel ok, now I am integrating. But to be judged by others, I don't think that makes sense, you know, but I feel about myself, ok I have a job, I am studying, I am ok...I am participating in this society then ok, I feel like I am integrating. So in this way actually I can yeah describe what integration is, yeah. I don't think that's a little bit obvious.⁵ ~ Moaz

2.1 An ethnographic approach

The quote above is from an interview with an informant, Moaz, a Syrian refugee at Boost, reflecting the intricacies of personal experience within a particular environment and context. It is an example of the rich qualitative data and 'thick description' that is acquired through an ethnographic approach (Geertz 1973). Ethnographic research ventures into the subjective lifeworld's of those it studies. As a result, the ethnographer faces challenges in distinguishing between these lines of perception and experience whilst simultaneously untangling their own bias. Indeed, in ethnography any effort to detach oneself from one's work is bound to be quixotic (Berry 2011, 165). The ethnographer is conscious that this bias will be implicit in all their observations, interviewing techniques and interpretations of data. As Anderson (1999, 454) writes: "Qualitative data are perspectival. Ethnographers see through terministic screens, and their writings focus on some issues to the exclusion of others". In being conscious of the screens through which all humans perceive, the ethnographer strives to

⁵ Place on interview: Moaz's home, 20/04/18

critically reflect upon bias and dismantle cultural and social preconceptions around their chosen topic.

In consideration of the current international context of the refugee crisis and globalisation, divisions between nation states and the 'foreign' are only increasing (Žižek 2017). This is seen in rises in anti-immigration policy and the individualisation of integration policy across Europe (Joppke 2007, 8). Therefore, the ethnographic perspective becomes more and more urgent as it interrogates assumptions and bias founded on specific cultural values, opening up dialogue on conflictive topics such as 'integration'. This opening up of dialogue is critical to analysing and questioning both one's own and the 'other's' cultural norms and values. An ethnographic approach thereby illuminates the entrenchment of these divisive biases within national policy.

The application of ethnography towards 'integration' is also apt as it allows for the construction of a detailed and thorough account. One that is needed in order to convey the intricate and *ever-evolving* nature of 'integrating'. It permits for the collection of qualitative data over a substantial period of time, enabling the 'researcher' to embed themselves in the warp and weft of the lives of the informants. Okeley asserts that the experience of fieldwork is "totalizing," drawing upon the "whole being," and not reducible to the mere "collection of data by a dehumanized machine" (McLean & Liebing 2007, 12). This totalising effect can often blur the boundaries between ethnography and life. The immersion into the everyday is an integral part of creating the thick description, but can also cause tension within questions of ethics as the objective position of the 'researcher' becomes warped.

As a consequence, I had to be continually conscious of my role and the effect it had over my data, for example, in the informant's responses to my particular questions. Furthermore, the totalising nature of ethnography also accentuates the overwhelming fact, that *everything* in the field is data, this is a tangle that can only be unravelled through assiduous reflection, analysis and interrogation of assumption. The methodology that I chose to employ in my research were the iterative processes of participant observation, active participation, semi-structured and unstructured interviewing and auto-ethnography. Participant observation is a crucial part of ethnographic research, DeWalt et al. (2011, 3) state that it is a way of "gaining understanding of the most fundamental processes of social life." Indeed, participant observation is a means by which one can observe behaviours, customs,

gestures, tone of voice, facial expression; the multitude of different forms of interaction in diverse scales. Participant observation also allows for analysis of both explicit and tacit aspects of culture. Tacit aspects being those that remain largely outside of one's consciousness, but for the outside observer, may be perceived. I see it as the start of the long process of *tuning into* another culture, and indeed a continuous process that is part of understanding all social relations. DeWalt et al. (2011, 4) describe the sensation of entering a crowded room in which one knows no one, and how this can cause a hyper-awareness to even subtle social interactions, a glance here, a shift of the arm, it is in these situations that "our senses are on full alert". From this hyper-awareness and sensitivity, a detailed account can be collated and formed from the multitude of small but significant moments the observer has perceived. Hence participant observation is to venture into a social landscape with conscious and intellectual motives (1973, 312). Through my own observations in the field I was able to understand the social dynamics at play in the various centres for newcomers and to connect patterns of behaviour. For example, I could see how different nationalities such as Syrians and Eritreans engaged with one another in spaces like Boost, but also how interactions changed depending on cultural similarities or differences. Also I observed the different roles people played; the administrators, organisers, teachers, compared with the learners and attendees to the centres.

I participated every week in the taaltheatre, taalcafe and language classes over the three-month period at the various social centres alongside my informants. This gave me direct insight into the personal experiences of the informants in their integration procedure. It also served as a space in which both I and the informants filled the same role as 'learners' of Dutch, both facing challenges of pronunciation and grappling with contrasting cultural norms to our own. I believe that this experience allowed me to build rapport with the informants and create trusting relationships, as despite all the contrasts in our positionality, in that space we were on a level playing field.

For the interviews I chose to carry out semi-structured and unstructured interviews. I aimed to draw on many parts of the informants lives and experiences in order to navigate the heterogeneous experiences of integration,

"Ethnography tends to rely on unstructured discussions in order to encourage reflexivity, to give people time to delve into their thoughts, to express their

contradictory opinions, their doubts, their fears, their hopes and so on" (O'Reilly 2005 117).

A structured interviewing strategy would not have allowed me to be as flexible in adapting my questions according to each informant. It was critical to have flexibility within my interviews due to the great diversity of backgrounds and positionality of my informants. I also intended to learn about the informants from their own perspective, which is not achieved by imposing one's own line of fixed questioning onto the interviewee (O'Reilly 2005 117). Therefore, a structured interviewing style would have been limiting to the 'thick description' that I aimed to create. Despite this, I was consistent in asking my informants to introduce themselves, specifically, where they were from and how long they had been in the Netherlands. I also asked all of my informants to define 'integration' and whether they consider themselves as 'integrated' in Amsterdam. I focused on asking questions around the prominent themes of my research, such as, cultural assimilation, language acquisition, friendship and how people experienced and understood these in the context of Amsterdam. "The purpose of the qualitative research interview is to contribute to a body of knowledge that is conceptual and theoretical and is based on the meanings that life experiences hold for the interviewees" (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree 2006, 314). I carried out interviews in a variety of locations, some in the informants own homes, some at Boost, Casa Migrante and in other public settings such as cafés. I recorded all of the interviews, except one. The interviews were recorded through an audio recorder on my phone, this gave me the freedom of not having to take rushed notes of what each informant said. I could also give full attention and maintain eye contact, observing changes in body language or expression. I felt that this benefitted the interviews greatly, as I had previously experienced in one interview where my informant refused to be recorded that he was continuously aware of my note-taking, whenever my pen touched the paper he would correct his own answer. This experience showed me the commonness of the newcomers feeling that they were being tested, on language or otherwise, therefore the audio recorder was a means to accurately record what was said, but in a less visible and distracting way. The qualitative data collected from the interviews played an integral part in understanding my empirical insights. It also provided a physical script of what the informants had said on a particular topic in that specific moment in time, thus allowing for in-depth analysis that this thesis will later explore.

2.2 *Auto-ethnography: positionality*

Ellis and Bochner (2000, 739) define auto-ethnography as “an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural.” I engaged in auto-ethnography with the aim of furthering understanding of ‘integration’ through comparing myself with the research population: “It has become common and expected practice for researchers to take an analytic account of similarities and difference between themselves and research participants, such as those structured by race, class, gender, and sexuality, and to ask how these political positions may shape research relationships.” (Elliot & Culhane 2017, 8) In this way, auto-ethnography is also critical in understanding one’s own positionality as a researcher.

I strived to be mindful of my own positionality as a white, female, European, English-speaking and western-educated researcher. Indeed, every day these factors became further engraved. I was continuously reminded of the contrast in my position of privilege in the integration process compared with those that attended the social centres, both with and without refugee status: “first resolving the situatedness of the personal in order to be able to come to terms with social phenomena is an important insight relevant to the ethnographic encounter” (McLean & Liebing 2007, 5).

My reflections on positionality further emphasised the diversity in expectation and understanding around ‘integration’ in relation to the ‘type’ of person that is integrating. Berry (2011, 167) describes positionality as vital because it forces one “...to acknowledge our own power, privilege, and biases just as we are denouncing the power structures that surround our subjects . . . When we turn back [reflexively], we are accountable for [our] own research paradigms, our own positions of authority, and our own moral responsibility relative to representation and interpretation.” Therefore, auto-ethnography was empirical to understand and reiterate the effects of my own specific positionality whilst in the field and in relation to the informants.

Indeed, all the data collated in this thesis hinges on my own particular positionality, and this must be reflected upon in order to thoroughly dissect meaning, and to locate its relevance to a wider context. An example of this is that I was able to conduct all of my interviews in English, my native language, and a language that so many speak in Amsterdam. Moreover, when attending the Dutch classes, I noticed that the teacher would translate words for me into English, an advantage which students from Eritrea, with little English, could not benefit from. I also came to learn through speaking with Eritrean's that there is no version of Google Translate in Tigrinya, an app that many newcomers', myself included, use for daily communication and navigation around the city. These are small, but significant differences that shape my own positionality compared to the informants in the integration process.

This chapter has been a reasoning behind my use of the aforementioned research methodology. It has emphasised the significance of an ethnographic approach with regards to ambiguous topics such as 'integration'. Ethnography allowed for the in-depth exploration of personal accounts of integrating and permitted for the unpacking of biases within national policy. Furthermore, auto-ethnography was critical for reflecting upon the positionality of both myself as researcher and the informants, illuminating the disparity in integration experiences. The next chapter will locate my specific research in the context of 'integration' in Amsterdam and exhibit how 'integration' looks in this contemporary setting.

Chapter 3: 'Integration' in the setting of Amsterdam

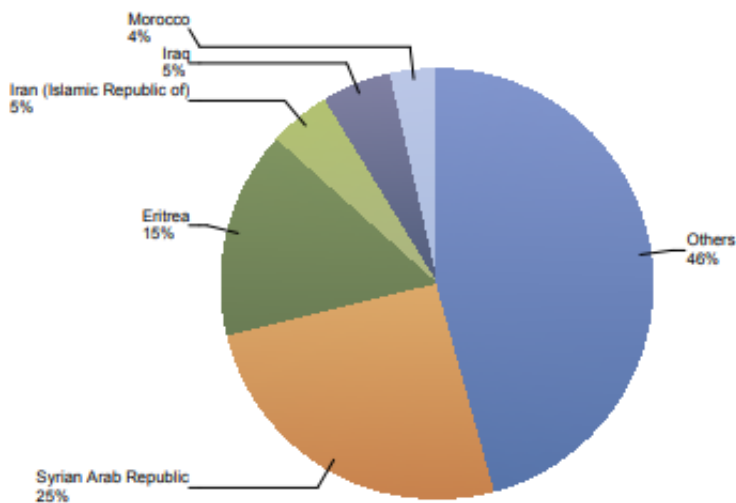
3.1 What 'integration' looks like in the Netherlands

In this chapter I further situate my specific research sites within the international context of the 'refugee crisis', through discussion of excerpts from expert interviews, policy documentation and vignettes from my time in the field. Migration flow in the Netherlands has fluctuated just as in any other country in recent times. Amongst the EU member countries, it ran in third place in 2017 for accepting the highest amount of re-admissions and relocations of refugees from Greece and Italy, behind Germany and France. In consideration of the comparable size of the Netherlands, this accounts for a relatively high asylum influx for the native population (International Organisation for Migration 2017). Thus, the Netherlands is a significant place to analyse 'integration' processes, as it is currently navigating the effects of the migration flow and ongoing requests for asylum. According to the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND) of the Netherlands, in April 2018, the total asylum influx was at 2296, this has been fairly consistent with the previous months in 2018, ranging from its lowest in February at 2159, and at its highest, 2400 in January (ind.nl 2018). Of those that have applied for asylum the majority nationalities are Syrian and Eritrean.

Top Nationalities total applications last twelve months

Period: May 2017- Apr 2018

Number of total asylum applications: 28229



6

The effects of this considerable asylum influx have thoroughly shaped Dutch integration policy in recent years. As mentioned previously, there is a growing feeling of protection around Dutch culture; a desire to preserve 'Dutchness' and the expectation that newcomers culturally assimilate (van Houdt, Suvarierol & Schinkel 2011, 418). Here lies the question of what this 'Dutchness' can consist of in relation to integration. It has been argued that the Netherlands deals with its imperialist past through "social forgetting" (Weiner 2014), which is damaging as this works to forget that notions of "Dutchness" are placed within imperial and racial trajectories (Shilliam 2018). In this way, the process of integrating into this 'Dutchness' becomes an unattainable ideal for the newcomer, in that the national identity is inherently bound up with the white race of the Netherlands. Salem (2018) states that "both the British and the Dutch case demonstrate a simple fact: the white working class can assimilate into whiteness—and indeed this was the point of social engineering—but non-whites can never *truly become white*." Consequently, the expected cultural assimilation made by integration policy negates the history of imperialism that continuous to instil perceptions on race, culture and integration in the Netherlands.

⁶ Pie chart taken from ind.nl. 2018. (Accessed 13/08/2018): https://ind.nl/en/Documents/AT_maart_Hoofdrapport.pdf

As stated in chapter one, integration policy in the Netherlands in recent years has also shifted in its focus from a group approach onto the individual; it is now the responsibility of the individual alone to integrate themselves:

“The government believes that integration policy with a more mandatory character is needed to prevent fragmentation and segregation in society, which would ultimately result in no-one feeling at home in the Netherlands...integration is not the responsibility of the public authorities but rather of those who decide to settle in the Netherlands. Every citizen is expected to contribute to Dutch society by taking responsibility for their subsistence, for their living environment and for society as a whole. For instance, immigrants are expected to learn the language and learn about Dutch society.” (The Government of the Netherlands, 2011)

As follows, a point of tension within integration policy lies in its aim for both a prevention of social fragmentation, but also a focus on increased divisive individualism. Moreover, in order to officially ‘integrate’ the newcomer must also either take out a loan, or pay out from their savings for an expensive Dutch course and the civic integration exam itself. If this exam is failed the individual must pay a financial sanction: “If you have not finished integration in time, you will have to pay a fine” (Inburgeren.nl 2018). In this way, it is possible to see the commodification of ‘integration’ through national policy, as it literally becomes a purchasable status for the newcomer. This commodification of ‘integration’, connects to Tsing’s argument that capitalist structures in modernity function to make everything ‘scalable’, “...rationally managed...calculated, adjusted, and maintained” (Tsing 2015, 208). The civic integration exam exemplifies this through its commodification and measurement of a non-scalable life experience such as integrating.

Before the newcomer starts their integration process they also receive a letter of participation that they must sign if they wish to integrate in the Netherlands.

“The municipality will send you a letter. The letter says you have to learn what is important in the Netherlands. For instance:

- Everybody in the Netherlands is equal.
- Everybody may choose their own partner.

- Everybody may choose their own religion.
- Everybody is allowed to go to school.
- Everybody can say what they think. But it is not allowed to discriminate against somebody else.
- We take care of ourselves. But we also take care of each other. The government helps when needed.” (Inburgeren.nl 2018)

This participatory statement further accentuates the pressure to culturally assimilate when going through official integration in the Netherlands. As explained in the previous chapter, I argue that cultural values are not learnt through the signing of a letter, nor the memorisation of exam content, but are instead part of a continuous process of social becoming. The signing of such a statement also exemplifies the control exercised by the state upon the newcomer in that it is an obligatory step if they wish to become officially regarded as ‘integrated’.

The individualised pressure within national integration policy was omnipresent in both the inner workings of the various social centres in which I did my research and the adaptation of the newcomers themselves. In order to paint an impression of the particular environments of my research sites I will describe the institutional histories of Boost, Casa Migrante and Het Wereldhuis. As a result, the role that changing integration policy exercises will be located in these particular spaces.

3.2 Het Wereldhuis/The Worldhouse



Het Wereldhuis was set up in 2008, first initiated by the Diaconie and Luthers of Amsterdam, it is a centre for undocumented people that provides information, counselling, education and culture for undocumented migrants (Wereldhuis website 2018). The building is open every day, but does not provide shelter for sleeping. It is located near the centre of the city and is a space in which people socialise, eat free lunch and pass the days, waiting for news on their asylum application or documentation.

My involvement at Het Wereldhuis first began through becoming a language 'buddy' for an unaccompanied minor who is illiterate. My role was to give the 17-year-old Eritrean extra support with his reading and writing. He could not follow the Dutch classes at Het Wereldhuis because they were not adjusted for those who have difficulties with literacy. I met with Jemal twice a week and would eat lunch at Het Wereldhuis afterwards with him and his friends, a large group of Eritreans who were mainly young men.

Everyday life at Het Wereldhuis can have a stagnant feeling, with the same groups of people sitting at their tables, sitting on their phones, either waiting for lunch or simply waiting for the day to pass. I noticed when I asked Jemal, "and what have you done today?", his response was always the same. He would recount waking up in the shelter, waiting until Het Wereldhuis opens, going there and waiting for lunch, then wait until the shelter reopened at 17.00. It was not only Jemal that was in this repetitive routine, when I spoke to other Eritreans at Het Wereldhuis they reiterated the same story. I also observed that during

⁷ Photograph of Het Wereldhuis, found online at: <https://www.napnieuws.nl/2018/02/17/amsterdams-ijverigste-studenten-hebben-geen-verblijfsvergunning/>. (Accessed 13/08/2018)

the half hour of eating lunch often the conversation would run dry, and everyone would sit silently, staring at their phones.

The undocumented migrants that attend Het Wereldhuis are often waiting for their papers to be processed or waiting to go to Ter Apel (where the Dutch application centre is located) for further 'processing'. In this way, those that attend Het Wereldhuis are in a state of limbo; they cannot work and are barred from participating in society. Het Wereldhuis aims to provide an alternate route for participation. Many undocumented migrants create the events there themselves, organising or volunteering at the centre; thus allowing them to construct some sort of routine and be active. As such, many of the newcomers I spoke to at Het Wereldhuis were not thinking about 'integration', when I asked them what it meant, few had even heard of this term before. These are people that do not have access to the 'integration' procedure and are disregarded by national policy. Despite this, many at Het Wereldhuis had taken it upon themselves to follow Dutch courses and also attempt to participate in Dutch society through alternate mediums, such as volunteering or making connections through the Dutch workers at Het Wereldhuis. The majority of them also have the intention of staying long-term in the Netherlands. In this sense, Het Wereldhuis serves as a space where one sees the process of integrating amongst the attendees there, in spite of the fact that many do not have access to any official civic integration procedure. Therefore, it is an unrecognised space in which integration is also continuously ongoing, a blind spot within integration policy.

3.3 Casa Migrante



First established in 1961, Casa Migrante has the longest history in Amsterdam of the places where I carried out my research. Similarly, it is also self-described as an 'open house' and is run solely by volunteers. Its mission is to promote the integration of Hispanic immigrants into Dutch society, offering diverse services such as: social assistance, legal advice, psychological attention, translation, interpreters and religious guidance (Casa Migrante website, 2018). It aims to create a meeting space for Hispanic immigrants in Amsterdam. As a Spanish speaker I was able to connect more easily with people at Casa Migrante in their mother tongue. I attended the Dutch course there, taught by the priest, Theo, who at over 70 years of age still volunteers his time to teach.

Through speaking with the organisers at Casa Migrante about their views on integration, some felt that 'integration' is too often confused with assimilation, claiming that there was a general attitude of "you have to learn *our* way of life" in the Netherlands. This is also reflected in the examination style of the integration procedure, not only is the newcomer expected to take on the Dutch culture, they will also be tested on this knowledge in order to

⁸ Photograph taken by author of Casa Migrante building.

prove their assimilation, “Learning Dutch is part of the integration process. In addition, you have to learn how Dutch people live and work. After this, you take the integration exam. If you pass this exam, then you are officially integrated.” (Inburgeren.nl, 2018)

Casa Migrante aims to welcome Hispanic migrants, but is open to all. It facilitates the official integration procedure through providing Dutch courses and advice to newcomers. It is also a space in which Hispanic people can connect with people from their own or other Hispanic cultures, and celebrates the diversity of minority cultures within Amsterdam. Casa Migrante also works to maintain long standing relationships with the attendees to the centre. I saw this on my first day there when a Latino couple came to visit who used to take the Dutch classes. It was clear that they held a very strong relationship with the volunteers. A vignette follows, describing this moment.

Cristina, a young Spanish volunteer, and I sat in the office of Casa Migrante. During our meeting a Latino couple entered holding hands, and Cristina instantly got up and excused herself. Her face was beaming. “¡Tanto tiempo!”⁹ she exclaimed smiling. The couple seemed equally happy to see Cristina as they embraced one another. The couple explained that they had wanted to come and visit for a while, but had been busy with work and moving house. Cristina responded by telling them they were always welcome at Casa Migrante.

This friendship and the continued support even after the Dutch courses are completed demonstrates how Casa Migrante approaches integration as a continuous process of social becoming. They understand from a wealth of experience that even once a newcomer is ‘officially integrated’ they may still need support and that *integrating* does not stop after the exam.

⁹ English translation: “Such a long time!”

3.4 Boost



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Boost was the space in which I spent most of my days in the field. Established in 2017, it is the youngest institute out of the three centres that I visited. It is organised by six full-time paid workers and around 100-150 volunteers. The volunteers comprise of language teachers, cooks, administrators, cleaners and support workers. Boost's focus is on providing language courses, advice and support, it also is an open sociable space, offering a free lunch and 'Taalcafe'¹¹ every day where people can practise their Dutch (Boost website 2018).

Many attendees to Boost are in the process of preparing for their civic integration exam, so they attend the Dutch course and Taalcafe every day. In this way, it can be seen as a centre that facilitates the expectations of 'integration' as set out by policy. In an interview with one of the workers at Boost, she stated that upholding integration policy was not the initial focus of the project, but as Boost has expanded there has been a more prevalent focus

¹⁰ Photograph taken by author of Boost building, and Boost poster.

¹¹ Taalcafe: A language café where newcomers practice their Dutch supported by the teachers.

on the integration procedure, particularly amongst the taalcoaches¹². This is due to the taalcoaches educating the newcomers specifically to pass the exam. In this way, Boost also functions as a site that contributes towards newcomers' capacity for becoming officially 'integrated'. It provides support and advice on their rights and free Dutch courses through a large volunteer workforce. Such services are not provided by governmental bodies (Mosher 2015), instead it is self-organised and grass-roots organisations such as Boost that uphold the newcomer's preparation for their civic integration exams as set out by national policy.

*Because the gemeente Amsterdam cannot do enough, they have so many files for one person, and you know it's like, we will meet in 2 months.*¹³ ~ Colin, taalcoach at Boost.

However, Boost still differs from the 'integration' aims of policy through its provision of ongoing support. The majority of staff, volunteers and organisers at Boost are native Dutch. Hence, Boost has created an environment in which newcomers can easily interact with Dutch natives. At Boost they learn about Dutch cultural norms and values through daily and ongoing interaction with taalcoaches and other native Dutch volunteers. In Dutch integration policy, this social aspect of adapting to culture is ignored and replaced with the fast and simplistic signing of a reductive participatory statement of the assumed Dutch values. In contrast, at Boost it is possible to see the vast and ongoing processes of living-out 'integration', that are not encompassed by the statement.

Boost has changed location since its creation, but has always been in Amsterdam East. It is now in a building designed by Pi de Bruin, that used to be a community centre. Pi de Bruin describes his original pride over the construction of this building in the seventies, "I could say a lot about my enthusiasm and vision. A Jewish quarter, that had fallen into disrepair after the war and had a very bad atmosphere, offering a beacon of hope and optimism. With this building, transparent, light, modern and with a welcoming appearance, I won the Merkelbach Prize in 1976"(Boost website, 2018). Boost has temporary use of this building as it is still on the municipal list to be sold for new living space, this means that it could be taken over for different use at any time. The transient nature of its existence is hard to believe considering its current state as a hub of life, people come every day, new faces

¹² Taalcoaches: voluntary Dutch teachers at Boost.

¹³ Place of interview: Boost, 04/04/18

appear and friendships are forged. The routes of Boost first began as the project, 'Host', two years ago. I interviewed Colin, one of the Dutch teachers at Boost who had been a crucial figure in forming 'Host', he retells the original idea and reasoning behind it:

Thirty-two people from Syria, families, people alone, any kind of people, but all from Syria. And we said 'OK we will give them a home', so not an AZC¹⁴ but something different; where they can meet a lot of people, where they can build up a network, where they will learn Dutch, where they will support themselves, so they were cooking and washing and doing the homework and everything.¹⁵ ~ Colin

Colin described the community that began in Host as almost a "family", comprising of Syrians and local Dutch people from the East of Amsterdam, working together and building something together. Host later became 'Boost' when more people began to come and they acquired a larger building space. Saskia volunteered from the first day that Boost opened and she described her initial impression of the diversity of newcomers that attend Boost:

It's really a mix of all different cultures together, and it really started with the Syrian people because that was the biggest group who came at the same moment, and they were in the same stage of the ...procedure I would say. But from the moment Boost began it was already, I think really from the first day I was there was a big open house thing, and I went in there, and there was a lot of Syrian people but already all Afghans and Iranian and Iraqi, so already it was more mixture.¹⁶ ~ Saskia

In this way, Boost was a significant place to research 'integration' as it was initially created by newcomers in partnership with locals, building from the ground up. Those involved describe it to "just sort of happen" through a lot of "energy" from different people. Moreover, it is an open space, meaning that there was large diversity amongst the newcomers that came there, and that continue to come. This diversity was critical to interrogating the homogenisation of the 'integration' process by national policy.

When I asked Colin what he thought were the steps a newcomer should take when integrating into Dutch society, he gave me this response:

¹⁴ Asielzoekerscentrum/Asylum Seeker Centre

¹⁵ Place of interview: Boost, 04/04/18

¹⁶ Place of interview: Boost, 24/04/18

*I know this one boy, 20 years old, and a family took him in the house. And I think that is the best way because he was in a Dutch family, and with Christmas, he is there and he also gets presents, so he is belonging to a family and they speak Dutch and he can speak Dutch fantastic, and he is not very intelligent I think, he didn't have much education, so grammar is very difficult for him. But he can speak Dutch and he can cut hair, and he works in a kapsalon, in a coiffeur, so he has a job already.*¹⁷~ Colin

In this response Colin refers to the importance of social interaction with Dutch natives in integrating. The newcomer learns about Dutch society and social norms by being immersed in that social context. In this way, the process of social becoming is shown to be critical to integrating.

Boost also exemplifies the clashes between the expectations of integration policy and the actual support that is being provided by governmental bodies. Boost provides a window of insight into how national policy and, indeed, international political tensions manifest themselves on the ground and at a local level.

*You're part of also the political decisions, and it has their reaction on Boost, the decisions that are made in politics. And first it was only Amsterdam politics, but now, I see it's national and now it's also international.*¹⁸ ~ Saskia

For example, the Dublin Regulation which is an EU law, now states that if an asylum seekers' finger prints are taken in any one EU country, then it is this country that must deal with the particular asylum application. Saskia explained that this was a recurring issue at Boost, as there are many people who come to Boost whose fingerprints had already been taken in another EU country. This means that they are locked out of applying for asylum in the Netherlands. Boost remains open for their use but there is little they can do to help these people's 'integration', as officially they cannot integrate in the Netherlands and do not have access to services. In this way, Boost is a space where one is able to see how international law and national policy intervene in the personal experiences of integrating.

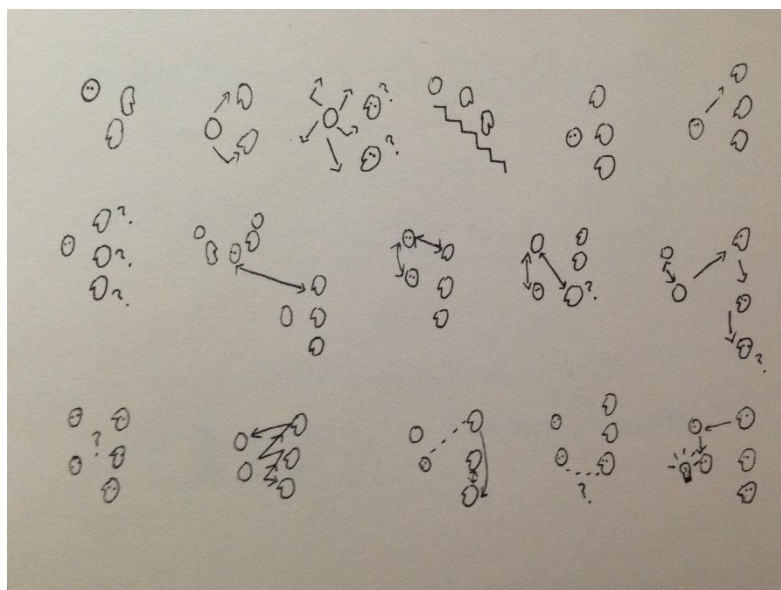
This chapter has exhibited the flow of migration to the Netherlands and sets the context for how 'integration' looks in Dutch society. It emphasises the impossibility of

¹⁷ Place of interview: Boost, 04/04/18

¹⁸ Place of interview: Boost, 24/04/18

assimilating to 'Dutchness' and the commodification of 'integration' through national policy. The examples of the participatory statement and the cost of the official integration procedure are used to demonstrate this. In addition, it has described the historical histories and approaches to 'integration' of the three social centres in which my research took place. This has been done to reveal how national policy and international events carve their mark into the everyday experience of integrating. The next chapter will delve into the empirical data, making an in-depth exploration of the role of language in 'integration' in the Netherlands.

Chapter 4: Language and 'integration'



Natalia: Bueno, en 'Dutch' me siento como una niña preescolar

Josefina: ¡allí me siento inmigrante! (She laughs)

Natalia: total, total (nods in agreement)¹⁹

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In the integration exam language is used to exemplify and establish how far the individual is or isn't 'integrated'. I do not negate the fact that language is critical when adapting to a new society and culture, but instead emphasise the irony of assessing a state of 'integration' through a language exam. The irony lies within the inherent nature of both 'language' and 'integration' being of continuous becoming. Language acquisition is a process that is never 'completed', just as *integrating* is not. In this way, what can an A2 grade in Dutch actually mean for a person's process of adaptation to a new country? This is a question I will reflect upon with reference to the lived experiences of newcomers in Amsterdam. The language exam reductively analyses the newcomer's language capacity in that it does not account for the dominance of English within the Netherlands and its effects upon Dutch acquisition, nor does it consider the situational diversity of those attempting to integrate. In addition, there are also glaring discrepancies in the integration process and expectations around *who* is expected to learn Dutch. Many foreign people, such as EU member citizens, are able to live completely in English in the Netherlands, without any obligation through integration policy

¹⁹ *English translation:

P: Well, in Dutch I feel like a preschool girl

S: That's where I feel like an immigrant!

P: Totally

²⁰ Illustration by author.

to learn Dutch (Razenberg 2015). These are friction points within integration policy that I was made continuously aware of when speaking to newcomers and professionals at the social centres.

4.1 English interruptions in Dutch

Moaz is a young Syrian refugee in his mid-twenties who has lived in the Netherlands for two and a half years. He is engaged in the political debate on integration and from a well-educated background. Moaz studied at university in Syria and arrived in the Netherlands with a fairly high level of English. He is now fluent in Dutch. He spoke about his experiences of the language exam in the integration procedure:

To be obligated to learn the language...yeah has also some disadvantages, like for me when I came here, my English was quite better than now. But I have completely stopped with English and just started learning Dutch, you know, but now OK my Dutch is quite good, you know, I can have a good conversation in Dutch, but my English got worse. But if maybe I had the time, or, more time to improve my English and then started learning Dutch that could be better than completely to stop with English. Because now I need to get a high English level to start the university, you know.²¹ ~ Moaz

Moaz said that he tried to learn Dutch and improve his English at the same time, but that this did not work at all: *“you cannot learn two languages at the same time, I tried to learn like improving Dutch as English, but yeah, it doesn’t work like that. So I had to stop with English.”* This exemplifies the difficulties within having to achieve a certain level of Dutch in a fixed time period, as it can cause the neglect of another language. In this way, the fixed time limit can disadvantage the integration process of some individuals as it does not account for the presence of English in the education system in the Netherlands. Indeed, many newcomers who aim to stay long term and go through the higher education system will often also need to have a high level of English to study. In the Netherlands, many education and work

²¹ Place of interview: Moaz’s home, 20/04/18

opportunities also involve English. The newcomer is thus put at a future disadvantage compared with other bilingual Dutch citizens.

Some newcomers also felt that their English ability was a barrier to them in that many Dutch people would not necessarily be patient with their poor Dutch, especially when they are aware that they could have a perfectly fluid and efficient conversation with them in English instead. Conversations in Dutch are therefore rushed, or intervened with English.

Normally once they realise I am an English speaker and that I am stumbling over words...then they just go to English because it's more convenient, which I understand, but curiously enough my only relationships that are only in Dutch are the people at Boost, the newcomers, its only there that I have friendships that are born only from our common language of Dutch²² ~ Will, volunteer at Boost

This quote demonstrates the interruption of English in both learning Dutch and in socially connecting to Dutch natives in their mother tongue. The significance of 'friendship' in integrating is also apparent in this quote. This is a theme that will be analytically discussed in the next chapter.

One interlocutor who was at Boost every day, a committed learner of Dutch and who has lived in the Netherlands for over three years, said that whenever he goes to the supermarket he still always speaks in English simply because it is quicker and to avoid "awkward" moments of miscommunication. Indeed, from my own personal experience, it is daunting practising a new language with a member of the native population, but even more so when the native population are skilfully bilingual themselves. This bilingual skill seems very much entrenched in Dutch culture and can create a certain lack of patience around language learners, as for the Dutch it seems such a natural part of life (Edwards 2016, 17). As a consequence, processes of Dutch acquisition can be a significant challenge for the newcomer, as they do not feel encouraged to practice with natives. One interlocutor told me that when he had tried to speak Dutch before, the Dutch person who he was speaking with criticized his accent. This made him feel embarrassed to continue the conversation in Dutch so they changed to English.

²² Place of interview: Café in East Amsterdam, 25/04/18

When conversing with a member of the native population in Dutch, one is not limited to Dutch, English provides an easy fall-back as almost everyone will understand. In this way, the learner must have a certain level of determination to insist that the conversation remain in Dutch in order to exercise their survival skills in the Dutch language. For example, when the learner does not know a word, instead of searching for another Dutch word that may translate a similar meaning, too often the English word is used instead, meaning that the learner is not forced to be resourceful in their communication methods. I believe these moments of searching for a word and navigating meaning are critical when improving understanding of a new language. Many newcomers spoke about how their conversations would often begin in Dutch, but always finish in English. Layal, a Syrian transgender refugee of 40 years of age also spoke about the challenges of navigating English and Dutch in the Netherlands. Layal has a fairly high level of Dutch but has not passed the exam yet. When I asked her how much of her daily life was in Dutch, she gave me this response:

Now it's much better than before, before it was completely English, even when I tried to speak in Dutch I shift because I don't understand, I tried recently for a while when I don't understand only speak this word in English, because I don't know it, but I'm trying not to break the conversation and go back to English, unless I can't understand the person. Or sometimes, like I want to, if it's a serious appointment or something I do it in English because I want to understand, I don't want to 'yeah, yeah, yeah' (nodding smiling) and I don't understand anything (laughs) Yeah but it's getting better, but yet not as I wish.²³

~ Layal

The presence of English in Dutch society, and more specifically, in Amsterdam, can provide short-term advantages for the integration process of newcomers who have some level of English. For example, in daily communications such as asking directions or even going to the doctors. However, in the long-term, English ability can slow down the process of Dutch acquisition as the newcomer is not forced to practice their Dutch on a daily basis, they can survive in English. This in turn slows down other processes critical to 'integrating', such as forging relationships and connecting with the social world of Dutch culture. As one Syrian refugee told me, people treated him differently when he speaks in English with them, he

²³ Place of interview: Boost, 26/4/18

feels he becomes seen as “more foreign”. In comparison, when he speaks in Dutch he felt people treated him with “more respect”. So it follows that the English language can sometimes act more as a barrier than an aid to ‘integration’, slowing down ones learning of Dutch as the learner has an easy fall-back in the moments that they cannot find the Dutch word. The fact that integration policy does not take such factors into account further demonstrates its reductive nature. The policy focuses on condensing and instilling the short-term survival skills of a basic Dutch level and a selective knowledge of Dutch society, not considering integration processes in the long-term.

4.2 A mouthful of Dutch

In the interviews with my informants I asked them to define ‘integration’. In response, many believed that language was a critical element of integrating and adapting to a new country:

Yeah actually language ...like plays a very big role in integrate or participate, if you don't speak the language, how can you communicate? So language is a very important thing for the beginning, and in participating you know?²⁴ ~ Moaz

Indeed, communication and participation are vital, but how can an A2 level of Dutch actually account for the particular newcomer’s communication or participation in society? Many informants did not refer to this level when defining ‘integration’, but instead spoke about reaching a level of fluency of never having to interrupt the conversation and switch to English:

To speak the language, perfect Dutch, and have no problems because sometimes sorry 'I don't understand you' and we shift to English.²⁵ ~ Layal

Others referred to an abstract ability of language, that extended further than fluency of communication, but of also understanding everything in their environment:

²⁴ Place of interview: Moaz’ home, 20/04/18

²⁵ Place of interview: Boost, 26/04/18

*I want wake up in the morning, I open my door, I go outside I am talking my language with everybody, I want to understand everything.*²⁶ ~ Mohammed

This ability of understanding *everything* in the social space goes further than language, this can also refer to social and behavioural norms. This clearly transcends the aspect of language that is tested through the integration exam. It is the language of culture, that resides in subtle movements, expressions, humour. These are the elements of language that exist on a different plane and can only be understood and learnt through the ongoing process of immersion into the new culture (Tang 1999). This is a language that has no end point, that is continuously becoming and evolving (Richard & Schmidt 2014). The processes of communication and participation that are intrinsically linked to language also continuously evolve and change throughout life. Therefore, the language exam is an impossible attempt to assess such processes, processes which cannot be simplified to a test format due to their ever-changing nature.

4.3 Diversity and heterogeneity within 'integration' experiences

K: Do you feel like you belong, or are part of Dutch society?

M: yeah, this is true. Yeah because here-

(Mohammed translates a phrase he wants to say on his phone, I read it out)

K: 'is a diverse society'

M: and I am...

(he types something to translate, and I read it out again)

K: ...and 'I am part of this diversity'

²⁶ Place of interview: Mohammed's home, 23/04/18

A further friction point within policy is its standardisation of the integration process, not accounting for the diversity within integration experiences. Layal's story is an example of the diversity of situations that effect language acquisition. She recounted to me how originally she had paid for a Dutch course at the university, but this was around the same time that she was waiting to take the hormones for her gender transition. The effect of the multitude of drugs that Layal was taking meant that she could not concentrate during the classes, so after a few weeks, she dropped out of the class:

... because for me, I was waiting for hormones and this was huge...heavy on me because I want to start, I don't want to feel myself masculine, and I start hating myself, I don't want to go out. Even once I had registered in a course and almost in two weeks over, I stopped going to school. I felt too much stress because I'm waiting hormones and at the beginning I was so happy going study and then by time I cannot wait, I want to start, I want to start, so I lost control. And when I start hormones, you know hormones problem, you know how heavy they are. I cannot also delay the hormones because I might kill myself, and with hormones I will have problem. So, for me, I need time.²⁷~ Layal

Layal is half-Palestinian, half-Lebanese and grew up in Jordan. She is from an educated background, and is fluent in Arabic, English and French. She is extremely capable in her language abilities under normal circumstances, but due to her undergoing her transition period she does not feel able to reach the Dutch level required in this time period. Whilst interviewing her it was clear that the civic integration exam was causing her a significant amount of anxiety.

Layal's case is one of a multitude, in which people feel their particular situation does not allow them to learn Dutch in the specific time limit. Marieke, a worker at Boost, explained that the time limit was problematic due to the range of people that take this exam, for example, some newcomers will have never learnt another language in their life, making the A2 level of Dutch a considerable challenge. Marieke also said that indeed some newcomers invest all their time into learning Dutch, and when they do not pass the exam, they feel deflated and often become depressive. In this way, the standardisation of the language exam

²⁷ Place of interview: Boost, 26/04/18

for all newcomers does not contemplate the manifold of diverse personal circumstances that may affect language acquisition:

Yeah, actually I don't think that...erm... there should be specific rules for the whole people, because you know, the refugees or the newcomers, are so diverse, so different you know, you have old, young people, you have man and women, you have people with a high education level, people with a low education level. So you cannot have one specific rule for all these people, you have to, yeah I think that you should have different rules, or different processes for different groups.²⁸ ~ Moaz

This quote accentuates the heterogeneity of newcomers and their experience of integrating. Therefore, the homogenisation of 'integration' through the exams negates the very nature of life; that each person lives out different experiences which in turn shape their ability to succeed: as Tsing (2015, 241) so eloquently describes, "lines of life are pursued through senses, movements and orientations...not all the dances are alike...each dance is shaped by communal histories, with their disparate aesthetics and orientations."

4.4 Discrepancies on who is required to 'integrate' and why

In addition, it is important to point out that the integration policy does not apply to *all* newcomers, in the true sense of the word, Europeans have a free-pass to work and study in the Netherlands, with no expectation that they take on the civic integration exam (Razenberg 2015). Many English-speaking Europeans or 'expats' do not feel any pressure or desire to learn Dutch, they understand that they can live efficiently in English, particularly in the international city of Amsterdam (van Bochove et al. 2013) I experienced this due to the privilege of my position; as a white English-speaking European, I am exempt from the label of "migrant" or "refugee", and so am not required to demonstrate my 'effort' in integrating. For example, there were many instances in Boost in which people would switch to English in order for me to understand, something which I noticed taalcoaches did not do with other newcomers, forcing them to exercise their Dutch. The difference in positionality of my

²⁸ Place of interview: Moaz' home, 20/04/18

informants compared with my own is also reflected in how many of them spoke about learning Dutch as an example of their gratitude to Dutch society:

But I feel also about the language like when you are grateful for someone, it's kind of gratitude that you are learning the language, it's something good to show that you are grateful.²⁹ ~ Bilal

Yeah because they give you chance to live here not to speak any other language, to learn their language, to speak their language, so it's important to show that they gave me new life, especially for me.³⁰ ~ Layal

In contrast, as an English-speaking European, my acceptance into the Dutch nation is not only expected, but also part of my rights due to my British nationality. In this way, the language exam works to test the newcomer's 'effort'; a way of assessing their active investment into the country and their culture. This is a token that is not demanded from other newcomers to the Netherlands. Newcomers that I interviewed also reflected on the patronising nature of being tested on their language ability; in that being 'tested' ignores the relevance of their own desire to integrate:

I know that I have to learn the language, not because I have to 'integrate', no, because I would like to learn the language to have a good life, so for me, I am learning a language, or I would like to learn more about the Dutch society because I am curious about that, not because I am supposed to know, or I have to know. No, because I would like, I am living here, I like to speak the language I like to learn about the society, so it doesn't matter what I have to do for my inburgeren³¹, no, I am doing that because I like to do that.³² ~ Moaz

Therefore, the fact that the integration exam is not only discriminatorily required from a select group of non-EU newcomers, it may also seemingly undermine a newcomer's desire to learn Dutch and about Dutch society themselves, by pre-emptively obligating them to do so.

²⁹ Place of interview: Boost, 26/04/18

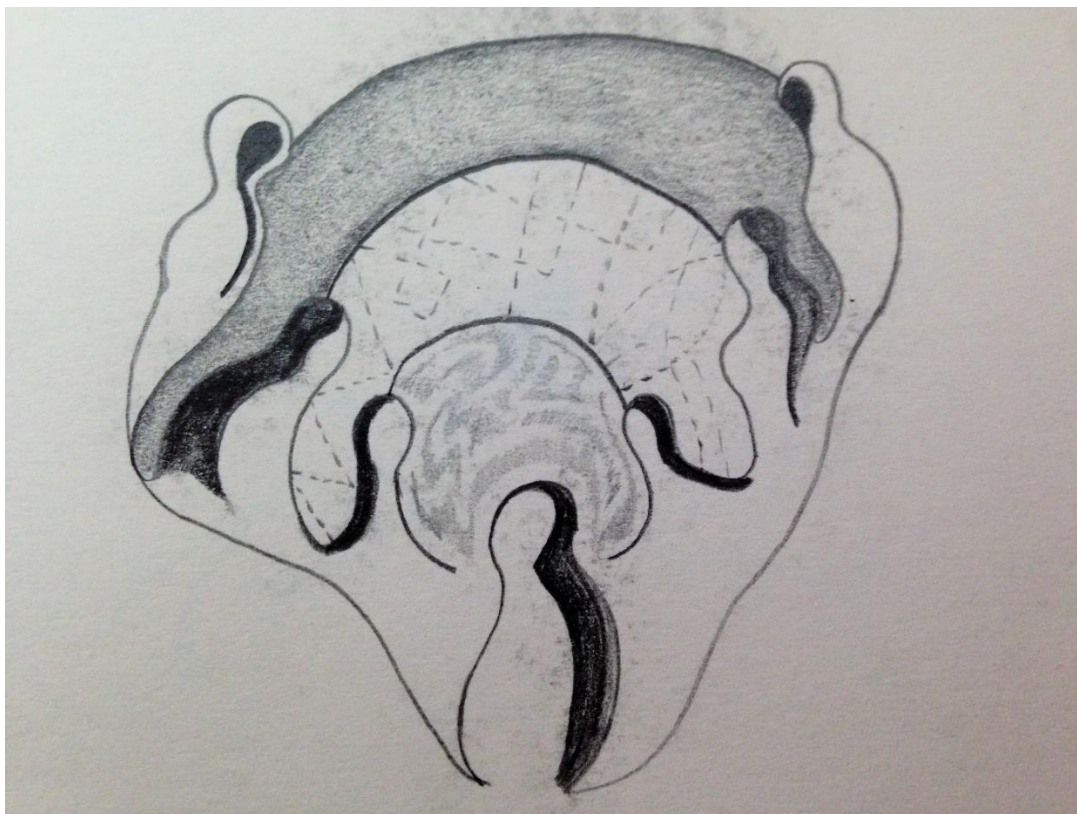
³⁰ Place of interview: Boost, 26/04/18

³¹ English translation: Integration

³² Place of interview: Moaz's home 20/04/18

To summarise, the limitations of Dutch integration policy can be seen in its disregard for the effects of English in Dutch acquisition, ignoring how it can interfere and endanger 'integration' processes in connecting to the Dutch social world. In addition, the standardisation of 'integration' through policy does not allow for the diversity of situational circumstance which may influence language capacity and acquisition. Moreover, in interviews, newcomers reflected on the role of language in 'integration' as an abstract fluency of understanding 'everything' in their social surroundings. This is evocative of language as a process of social becoming, which is not encompassed by the A2 level that the exam demands. There are also discrepancies on *who* is expected to integrate and *why*. This is echoed in the contrast of newcomers' relationship with Dutch, some newcomers showing their gratitude through Dutch acquisition, whilst others with no pressure to learn Dutch at all (Razenberg 2015). Another aspect of integrating that is absent in Dutch policy but was recurrent throughout my time in the field was 'friendship'. As a result, the next chapter will involve a critical investigation of the perceived role of 'friendship' in integrating.

Chapter 5: Friendship



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Katie: So, can you describe what 'integration' means to you?

Mohammed: Yeah. I think that first, you need to start with language. And the second you need try to make friends, it is very important if you can make friends. Because also the friends help you about many many story, because where you travel from any country to any country, particularly from middle East to Europe, we are different for everything, for the system life, for the family, for everything (pause) also it is very important to understand the people here, how live, what is important for the people, what you can talking about, and what you not talking about. Nobody teach you this here in Netherlands, but if you have friends, your friends help you about all these things. I think like this.³⁴

³³ Illustration by author.

³⁴ Place of interview: Mohammed's home, 23/04/18

A critical aspect of integrating and becoming part of society that Dutch policy neglects is the effect of social bonds and friendship upon this process. This is a result of the individualistic approach brought about by neoliberalism, whereby the individual is presented as autonomous and must integrate themselves into society (Bruquetas-Callejo et al. 2011). From my time in the field, it became apparent that everyday social interaction and forging friendships with the native population were integral aspects of the newcomer's ongoing experience of integrating. Any person who has moved to a new city, let alone a new country, will understand the importance of knowing people and having friends, whether that be for creating a support network or for work opportunities, there is considerable research evidencing the benefits of social contacts and friendship.

“The positive effects of support are rather intuitive: networks can provide migrants with tangible resources (money, a plane ticket, visa, information on work, housing, moral support) and with additional contacts. Contacts extend the volume and quality of a migrant's network and are likely to open new doors and lead to fresh opportunities.” (Chelpi-den Hammer & Mazzucato 2009, 37)

The ongoing process of making social connections and forging friendships is intrinsic to the continuous process of social becoming. By examining the effects (or absence) of social bonds upon integrating it is possible to see how the convergence of lifeworld's shape life experience. Relationships transform and change over time, informing identity and contributing to the ever-evolving weave of being alive (Ingold 2011). In contrast, Dutch integration policy reduces this social aspect of integrating into a list of rules that must be accepted through the integration participation statement.

“The participation statement welcomes newcomers to the Netherlands and informs them of their rights and obligations and of the fundamental values of Dutch society. These values are the written and unwritten rules of social interaction.” (Government of the Netherlands, 2018)

The claim that the signing of a document may represent the understanding and acceptance of the “written and unwritten rules of social interaction” is challenged in this chapter. By examining the role of ‘friendship’ in integrating, these social ‘rules’ are shown to not be learnt

through the signing of a document, but through the ongoing process of forming social bonds and friendships.

5.1 Differences in cultural perceptions of 'friendship'

The concept of 'friendship' is ambiguous, signifying both "fixity and fluidity in diverse social worlds" (Desai & Killick 2013, 1). There are many different 'types' of friends, each with their respective nuances, "friendship can vary greatly in intensity, from simple well-wishers to familiar, close, dear, intimate, bosom, boon-companion friend, each with its own subtle quality" (Firth 1999, xiv). In addition, Friendship changes through the ongoing process of social becoming and throughout time.

"The 'growth' of friendship has also been an underestimated aspect in research. A friendship does not only change in the course of time, it also changes due to the period of its existence: after 20 years a friendship, like all other emotional relationships, is no longer the same as it was in the beginning." (Beer & Gardener 2015, 5806)

'Friendship' thereby evades a singular fixed definition, and for this reason I choose to focus not on the impossible task of defining such a term, but instead on exploring the nature of its continuous 'growth' and affect upon integrating. One facet of 'friendship' that is seemingly ubiquitous in many disparate cultures is the element of sharing, "Friendship is based on sharing: besides matters of material value friends share their time, their problems, plans, hopes, and thoughts" (Beer & Gardener 2015, 5806). Therefore, this chapter analyses the diverse cultural understandings of what the sharing within 'friendship' entails.

In my personal experience with newcomers in the field it was often difficult to navigate expectations of 'friendship'. For example, one Syrian refugee called Zarah, became a person that I saw almost every day at Boost. We had coffee together, I went shopping with her and her family and she cooked dinner for me at her house on several occasions. In the time we spent together we bonded by sharing personal stories of our lives. Zarah would text me most days asking what I was up to. I was aware that she was new to Amsterdam and did

not have work yet, so had time on her hands to socialise. I felt guilt as sometimes I could not meet with her due to my studies or work. If she didn't see me at Boost she would often text asking why I did not come. I felt a pressure that in order to maintain the friendship, Zarah expected to see me every week. Hence, the different circumstances of our own routines affected the formation of our particular 'friendship'. This experience also accentuated to me the differences in expectation of how a 'friendship' should be, for instance how often one should see the other and how much time is invested.

*Because I think here the people not everybody, I cannot talk about everybody, but the people don't have the time to talk with you, about yourself, nobody has the time. If you have the language you can say for yourself, if you don't have, nobody gives you the time.*³⁵ ~ Mohammed

The Dutch "not having time" for socialising was a recurrent perception amongst the newcomers that I interviewed. For instance, in a discussion of 'friendship' with two young Syrian refugees called Sayid and Aimar, I asked them how they would define a 'friend'. They described a 'friend' as someone who one would "see almost every day", "you can always call them", and "you share everything". Another newcomer from Iraq agreed with this understanding, telling me that in Iraq he even shared a car with his friend. This definition of a 'friend' seemed a lot more of a commitment than my own understanding, emphasising the different perceptions of 'friendship'.

Significantly, Eric R. Wolf (1966, 13) makes the distinction between 'emotional' and 'instrumental' friendships. Wolf defines 'instrumental' friends as weaker relations that function as potential connecting links to new social connections, whereas 'emotional friends' make up the "closer dyad", providing emotional support. This distinction is somewhat limited, as one may still share emotions with an 'instrumental' friend, or create connections through an 'emotional' friendship. However, this concept is still useful in that it highlights the subtle nuances in friendships. For example, is a friend only 'close' if there is a sharing of more emotion or more time? Depending on the individual, both could be experienced as 'true'. So it follows that the repeated theme of the Dutch not "having the time" to make friends, may be connected with a clash in cultural perceptions of how much time and how often one

³⁵ Place of interview: Mohammed's home, 23/04/18

should spend time with a friend. Moreover, the different daily routines of a newcomer compared with a Dutch native also affects the forming of a friendship. For example, most newcomers will initially be in a much more precarious situation, looking for work or looking for accommodation. In contrast, the average Dutch native will often have more stability and support, whether that be socially, professionally or economically. In this sense, the contrasting routine of their daily lives also shapes how a friendship can grow.

There is significant anthropological research on the nuances of 'friendship' and 'kinship' in modern society. Desai & Killick (2013,2) argue there has been a rise in the contemporary importance of friendship, particularly in Western societies, associated with the rise and spread of capitalism since the eighteenth century, "in this view a more collective past has given way to a more individualized present in which kinship is reduced to the nuclear family and ties of friendship have increased in importance." In this way, newcomers that are integrating into western societies, such as the Netherlands, face contrasting perceptions on the value of kinship as opposed to friendship. Mohammed referred to these differences in his view of European culture compared with the Middle East:

About the difference for the Middle East and Europe, we are different for everything (pause) we live the family style, we don't live alone, we have contact with mother and with father every day, with grandmother, grandfather, with all the family, the big family, this is the system for Middle East, here something is different, the best here is the friend, number one, and the second is the family.³⁶ ~ Mohammed

This perceived cultural difference in the significance of familial bonds as opposed to friendship also presents a contrast in how people may understand relationships and social behaviours. For instance, how often one interacts with their friends or family, or what their expected responsibilities to this person are. When there are such diverse understandings around what it means to be 'friends' with someone, and the significance of relationships, this can also cause confusion around social interaction and on *how* to make friends.

³⁶ Place of interview: Mohammed's home, 23/04/18

5.2 Making Dutch friends

You see if you meet people, refugee people, you see the people every time in the Facebook, why? You live with the Facebook, you talking with the friends in the Facebook, he sees the friends, he sees the country, every time. He doesn't want to leave this world because he lives there. Must you be strong, yeah, must you be strong, inside.³⁷ ~ Mohammed

One newcomer that often spoke about the importance of 'friendship' in integrating was Mohammed. Mohammed is from Syria and brought his wife and son to the Netherlands with him after being there alone for one year. He is a man that describes himself to have "about one million" friends in Syria, but in the Netherlands he said that he can count his Dutch friends on one hand. The fact that Mohammed imagines his social life in Syria in this way, illuminates the stark contrast to how he perceives his social support and friendships in the Netherlands. Mohammed is a charismatic and confident man, a well-known musician in Syria, and in Amsterdam he organises and orchestrates Arabic music concerts. When I visited his home he often had other Arabic speaking friends there and in Boost it was clear that many knew him. Mohammed was open in inviting me to the music concerts and to go for drinks with his family. Whenever we met he would repeat to me stories about his "many many friends" in the Middle East. By comparison, in the Netherlands Mohammed said he found it difficult to connect with the culture in Holland, the language, and most significantly, the people themselves. He found the Dutch people to be "closed" and also felt that his level of Dutch was not strong enough to connect and establish friendships. Indeed, language also plays a critical part in forging friendships, "...without knowledge of English or Dutch...finding Dutch friends easily becomes one of the disillusion of the new arrivals" (van Heelsum, 2017, 2147). In this way, the continuous process of learning a language is bounded to the continuous nature of making friends, and both are intrinsic to the process of social becoming in integrating.

Two young Syrian refugees that I met and, by my own perception, also became my friends, were the previously mentioned, Sayid and Aimar. They recounted the trials of

³⁷ Place of interview: Mohammed's home, 23/04/18

making friends with Dutch people. Sayid who has been in the Netherlands three years, said making Dutch friends was hard, but possible, whereas Aimar who has been in the Netherlands just over a year, seemed angry and frustrated with the social barrier he was encountering. According to Aimar's experience, at first Dutch people were friendly with him, but they "never have the time" to meet up. He said that he often tries to make plans to meet with people in the evenings, and they always say they are "busy". Also he found Dutch people to not be spontaneous, in order to meet with a Dutch person, he would have to plan it weeks in advance. Aimar explained to me this was a huge contrast from the friendships he had in Syria, where calling someone on the day and meeting up was typical. When I asked an American volunteer at Boost whether he found it easy to make Dutch friends, his response was: "put simply, no. Once you speak Dutch you can. But I feel like if you don't speak the language they are not as likely to engage in conversation with you...I find it difficult personally, yes."³⁸

Another refugee that I interviewed who has lived in the Netherlands for over thirty years told me that he still sometimes feels there are "clashes" within his friendships with Dutch people. He used 'going Dutch' as his example, i.e. splitting the bill. He said that he found this an uncomfortable and ungenerous social norm. In his home country, he was accustomed to taking it in turns paying the bill. This may seem a small element of social interaction, but when forming friendships, it is a moment that comes after every drink or meal out together. 'Going Dutch' may also be reflective of the individualistic culture of Dutch society; each person pays their own way.

In interviews with newcomers in Casa Migrante it was clear that many also found making Dutch friends a struggle. Josefina, a young Mexican women of 25 years, said that Dutch people socially interacted in a different way to what she was accustomed to. She felt that Dutch people were less open than in Latino cultures and that they were more distant, both emotionally and physically.

*mi novio me decía que el espacio personal acá es muy importante*³⁹ ~ Josefina

³⁸ Place of interview: Café in East Amsterdam, 25/04/18

³⁹ English translation: 'My boyfriend told me that personal space is very important here.'
Place of interview: Café in Amsterdam, 18/04/18

It is also significant to note that Josefina has a Dutch partner, which gives her greater access to meeting Dutch people. Despite this, she told me that most of her friends are of a Hispanic background and she still finds it a challenge to “connect” with Dutch people.

In this way, there are indeed many clashes in perception and interferences when it comes to establishing friendships in the Netherlands. Firstly, and most obviously, there is often the barrier of language. There is also the difference in personal circumstance between the newcomer and the Dutch citizen, for instance, how stable or precarious their respective situations are. Alongside this, there are clashes in cultural understandings of what it means to be a ‘friend’ and *how* to make friends. This is seen in the expectations of sharing, for instance how much time or emotion is shared, and how much physical contact is deemed appropriate. The complexity within ‘friendship’ and its effects upon processes of integrating are thus brushed over by policy as a way of reducing the continuously becoming nature of ‘integrating’ into a scalable time period that can be assessed and officially decided.

5.3 *Friendship, a process of social becoming*

“Friendship is patterned according to social conventions whose roots lie in the broader social and economic milieus in which the individuals involved are located. Inherent in this is the notion that friendship is a variable relationship, with the particular form it takes being influenced by the specific context in which it develops” (Graham 1998, 687)

It is important to understand ‘friendship’ as social rather than just personal. The social context of ‘integrating’ in the Netherlands, which is shaped by Dutch culture, and by the social impacts of integration policy, inform how ‘friendship’ is experienced by newcomers in Amsterdam. There is a discordance within Dutch integration policy in that it expects the newcomer to demonstrate ‘social cohesion’ for their integration, but simultaneously evades the role of friendship within a socially cohesive society. Friendship is a critical element to a socially cohesive society as it builds social trust and enables people to share with one another (Misztal 1996). Whilst I was in the field many Dutch people spoke about the difficulties of integrating newcomers, claiming they “stick together” in their communities. The cultural clashes that affect the forming of friendships mean that ties between people of a similar

background are strengthened. This divisive pattern is further enforced by the individualistic approach of integration policy (Bruquetas-Callejo et al. 2011, 144).

In addition, processes of 'friendship' unveil the continuous nature of social becoming in integrating. For the newcomer, making Dutch friends is critical to settling and creating a support network in the new country (De Vroome & van Tubergen 2014). This is a process that is continuous throughout life, just as the newcomer who described that after 30 years of living in the Netherlands, he still faces cultural clashes in social norms of friendship such as splitting the bill. Moreover, friendships evolve throughout time, they are not static, but ever changing (Beer & Gardener 2015, 5806). In this way, making friends is a continuous process that shapes all life experience, but still remains utterly absent in official Dutch integration policy (Inburgeren.nl 2018). Instead, policy reduces and scales down the inherent ongoing social becoming of life into a measureable criterion:

"you have 3 years to integrate. This is called the integration period." (Government of the Netherlands 2018).

Thus the relevance of the newcomers' actual experience of integrating is negated by policy. This chapter has revealed the complexity and disparity between cultural understandings of friendships and the difficulties of making Dutch friends for the newcomer. It has also highlighted the significance of 'friendship' as an integral element of all human's social becoming. By presenting the lived-out experiences of newcomers it has demonstrated that social norms and values cannot be learnt through the civic integration exam nor in the signing of the participatory statement. But in fact, are absorbed through ongoing processes of social becoming and friendship within integrating.

Conclusion

This thesis has explored and exemplified the heterogeneity of 'integration' experience, revealing the continuously becoming nature of *integrating*. Integrating into a new society is a process that has no fixed end or beginning. Such a focus on open-endedness challenges the current integration policy in the Netherlands. As a mode to conclude, I critically analyse integration policy, navigating how its effects shape newcomers' experience of integrating in Amsterdam.

The civic integration exam works to establish whether the newcomer is 'integrated' or not, it creates a time limit on this process as a way of standardising, limiting and scaling the complexity of social becoming. In other words, it makes 'integrating' measurable and fitting for contemporary neoliberal systems to manage (Tsing 2015, 208). Through policy 'integration' becomes commodified as newcomers are obligated to take out loans or pay from their own savings for expensive Dutch courses, and in the potential occurrence that they do not pass the exam, they are fined. Thus demonstrating how the status of 'integrated' becomes a purchasable commodity for the newcomer. This epitomises the consequences of neoliberal individualist structures in society, in that the individual must pay their way (Folke & Schedler 2004; Joppke 2007). This thesis has challenged the individualisation of integrating by displaying how it is inextricably bound to the social environment.

Through policy, 'integration' becomes culturally instilled as 'earned' by the newcomer by demonstrative tokens of effort (van Houdt, Suvarierol & Schinkel 2011). This 'effort', although subjective in meaning, is defined by the civic integration exam as achieving an A2 grade in Dutch, correctly answering questions on Dutch society and accepting the social norms and values as stated in the participatory statement (Inburgeren.nl 2018). Ironically, in the participatory statement, one of the Dutch values is defined as "Everybody is equal in the Netherlands", despite only certain newcomers being obligated to endure the official integration procedure (Inburgeren.nl 2018). The discrepancy in expectation of what 'type' of newcomer must pass the official integration procedure displays the imperial colonial past of the Netherlands that continues to remain; as other European newcomers are exempt from enduring the integration exams (Razenberg 2015).

Cultural assimilation is a recurrent theme throughout the debate on 'integration'. Consequently, I challenged the abstract notion of what 'Dutchness' can mean, questioning its achievability for the newcomer (van Houdt, Suvarierol & Schinkel 2011; Shilliam 2018). Dutch culture is not a fixed concept that can be learnt and 'completed', it is something that evolves through time and life experience, just as processes of 'integrating' do (Salem 2018). Consequently, the idea that the newcomer is expected to finish their 'integration' by completing their cultural assimilation reveals the status of 'integrated' as an unattainable ideal.

This thesis has demonstrated the impossibility of 'finishing' one's integration process by closely examining the central themes of language, social interaction and friendship that are inherently bound to 'integrating'. In doing so, it has displayed the reductive nature of policy, in that it ignores vital contributors to the newcomer's adaptation to the Netherlands. Language is recognised as 'important', through the language exam, however, what this fails to contemplate is the ongoing nature of language learning. One learns language every day, new vocabulary, navigating different accents and, significantly, the imbedded cultural meaning within language that is intrinsic to communication (Tang 1999; Richards & Schmidt 2014). Indeed, this expands longer than a lifetime.

In addition, this assessment of language does not account for the dominance of English within the Netherlands, which has a critical effect upon Dutch acquisition. Many newcomers that arrive with some level of English can survive easily, and learn Dutch at a much slower rate. This in turn slows down the 'integrating' process of connecting with the Dutch social world. On the reverse side, other newcomers may neglect their English in order to learn Dutch in time for their integration exam. The result is that they may pass the exam, but due to the entrenchment of English in Dutch society many opportunities in work and higher education also require English, so they can be put at a future disadvantage to the bilingual Dutch native. Hence the newcomers' long-term integration can be endangered.

I also exhibited the heterogeneity of situational circumstance that effects the newcomer's ability to pass the civic integration exam in the expected three-year deadline. I showed through diverse personal accounts of newcomers, displaying the manifold ways in which people grapple with this time limit. This was essential in problematizing the

standardisation of 'integration' within policy, as it ignores the vast array of factors that interfere with a newcomer's ability to pass the test in time.

A further fundamental aspect of integrating is the role of friendship upon the ongoing process of social becoming. It has been evidenced that contact with the native population vastly benefits the newcomer's settlement into the host country (de Vroome & Tubergen 2014). I discussed the different effects (and absence) of friendship upon the newcomer and how this shaped their 'integrating' process. The diverse cultural conceptualisations of 'friendship' and the processes of making Dutch friends were analysed in order to highlight the critical role of 'friendship' in social becoming within integrating. The complexity and multidimensional nature of 'friendship' makes it nonscalable and unfitting with the fixed and individualistic version of 'integration' that policy dictates. In this way, the overall reductive approach of Dutch integration policy negates variable factors in order to create a simplified and scalable version of integration for its subsequent commodification.

In reality, all humans experience 'integration' at some point in their lives, as creatures that continuously adapt and change to new circumstances. This must be recognised in order to close the gap between the newcomer and the native. It is only through the illumination of the continual nature of *integrating* that the impossibility of becoming 'integrated' is understood, and empathy with the newcomer can occur. This is vital in consideration of the current climate of the refugee crisis and rises in migration. Hence, a proper and fitting understanding of 'integration' becomes increasingly necessary for the creation of future socially sustainable societies. For this reason, this thesis has been an anthropological critique that dismantles the specific rhetoric and national policy on 'integration' in the Netherlands. The result is a reconceptualization of 'integration' as a heterogeneous and ongoing process of *integrating*, as told through the lifeworld's of newcomers in Amsterdam.

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