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**Author(s)**

van Kommer, Rosanne; Hermes, Joke

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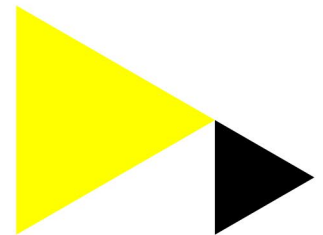
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Article

## Aspiring to Dutchness: Media Literacy, Integration, and Communication with Eritrean Status Holders

Rosanne van Kommer<sup>1,\*</sup> and Joke Hermes<sup>1,2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Media Studies, University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands

<sup>2</sup> Inclusion and the Creative Industries, Inholland, the Netherlands

\* Corresponding author ([rosannevankommer@hotmail.com](mailto:rosannevankommer@hotmail.com))

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### Abstract

Based on 13 interviews with Eritrean status holders and professionals in Amsterdam this article explores how paying attention to media skills and media literacies may help gain a better understanding of what matters in exchanges between professionals and legal refugees in the mandatory Dutch integration process. Media literacy needs to be decolonised in order to do so. Starting as an inquiry into how professionals and their clients have different ideas of what constitutes “inclusive communication,” analysis of the interviews provides insight into how there is a need to (a) renegotiate citizenship away from the equation of neoliberal values with good citizenship and recognising needs and ambitions outside a neoliberal framework, (b) rethink components of formal and informal communication, and (c) reconceptualise media literacies beyond Western-oriented definitions. We propose that professionals and status holders need to understand how and when they (can) trust media and sources; how what we might call “open-mindedness to the media literacy of others” is a dialogic performative skill that is linked to contexts of time and place. It requires self-reflective approach to integration, and the identities of being a professional and an Eritrean stakeholder. Co-designing such media literacy training will bring reflexivity rather than the more generic term “competence” within the heart of both media literacy and inclusive communication.

### Keywords

citizenship; critical media literacy; Eritrean status holders; inclusive communication; integration; reflexivity; street-level bureaucrats

### Issue

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### 1. Introduction

Starting from the dual perspectives of a media researcher and a volunteer worker, our research was inspired by the question of how communication with newcomers may become more inclusive. It led to a critical reevaluation of the role and possible uses of media literacy training. Van Kommer drew from her experiences as a volunteer moderating a “language café” for (Eritrean) “status holders”: refugees with (temporary) residency permits aspiring to become Dutch citizens. Status holders are obliged to do integration courses and find a job or start education as soon as possible. While it is the wish of sta-

tus holders to gain citizenship, “integration” is a troublesome concept, inundated with inequalities and pressure. Hermes is interested in cultural citizenship and inclusive communication. Discussing the media we use with others enables us to reflect on the norms, hopes, dreams and fears we share (or don’t share; Hermes, 2005, 2020). Professionals often ask her how they can ensure more inclusive communication with clients and citizens. She uses long interviews and participatory design methods to allow for such reflection.

Inclusion and inclusive communication have evolved into buzzwords in the past decade, especially amongst public professionals (Bouchallikht & Papaikonomou,

2021; Challouki, 2021) which requires a cautious approach. After multiculturalism and diversity, inclusion is used to voice the wish to “leave no one out.” Despite the good intentions of officials, inclusion risks becoming, what Ahmed called a “non-performative”: “the speech acts that commit [organisations] to equality...are non-performatives. They ‘work’ precisely by not bringing about the effects that they name” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 105). In an earlier project, we discovered that the wish to “include everybody” founders on the deeply embedded professional dependence on well-defined “target groups” and “clarity in your ‘message.’” Rather than define more securely or be even clearer, this suggests that reflecting on exclusion might be more productive. It offers a route to co-ownership of processes in the public and the civic domain, and of co-designing practices that allow for both shared and private identities. To belong and have the right to be different, as Rosaldo (1994) put it.

In terms of allowing “integration” to become a beneficial process for status holders, Dutch society, public servants, and other professionals involved, such a view of inclusion and inclusive communication has a high level of importance. Media literacy matters here, as media are an important force in addressing questions of homemaking and belonging through representation (Morley, 2001), and aid the establishment and recognition of uniqueness through shaping identity (Buckingham, 2003). Amongst young refugees, active engagement with media production and discussion of media practices among peers may help them to recognise power and reassert their identity, in relation to the white, Western mainstream (Leurs et al., 2018).

Our starting point was to question how ideas of what constitutes “inclusive communication” might differ between the two groups we were interested in: Eritrean status holders and professionals involved with their housing, health, employment or (additional) education, and their eventual citizenship exams. Van Kommer’s experience as a volunteer suggested that the two groups had very different relationships to communicating inclusively. Whether they had entirely different definitions, or merely differences of opinion about how to do so, was difficult to say. By interviewing the two groups, we hoped to gain further insight into understanding inclusive communication. Media use and media literacy became key in doing so. First: some background on the Eritrean status holder group in the Netherlands.

Eritrean status holders constitute the second largest group of refugees in the Netherlands. Their integration into Dutch society is far from seamless (e.g., difficulty navigating Dutch bureaucracy, failing citizenship exams, low employment levels, and limited social networks). They struggle with the highly digitised nature of Dutch society and its expectancy of self-reliance (e.g., van der Bleeker, 2019; Voorn, 2015). The first Eritrean refugee group arrived in the Netherlands between 1980–1998, following the independence war against Ethiopia. The second group arrived between 1998–2010,

fleeing the subsequent border conflict with Ethiopia. Most of these refugees sympathise with the current Eritrean regime. They supported an independent Eritrea and aim to foster loyalty to Eritrea in the diaspora. The most recent refugee group, 2010–present, has lived under the current regime and fled its authoritarian, militarised, oppressive, and abusive rule. The groups distrust and fear each other, resulting in isolation and a lack of cultural and material means to settle (Ferrier et al., 2017; van Reisen & Smit, 2018).

In addition, over the course of the last two decades, integration policies in the Netherlands have become increasingly formalised. Challenging language and digital skills tests have become obligatory. The current integration policy perceives integration as a personal condition that determines the worthiness of individuals to belong to society. This individualisation of integration poses Dutchness as a fixed and pre-established entity that individuals must conform to in order to deserve to belong (de Waal, 2017). Current integration policy is increasingly neoliberal and strongly emphasises self-reliance. Status holders are expected to make their own way through the Dutch (integration) system. This requires a certain level of media literacy as this system is highly digitised and, as will be discussed below, “correct” use of media is expected as a part of “successful” integration. Current integration policies do not include media literacy training. Professionals in the field consider this (at the most) as an afterthought. However, Bruinenberg et al. (2018) research explores the potential of media use and media making for social integration.

## 2. Theory

Inclusive communication is a “wicked problem” (Camillus, 2008). In this case, the group of stakeholders is large and diverse and has to deal with complex problems. We see three relevant facets for our project. The first is communicating by “sending.” Communication professionals have been trained to work towards clarity, targets and sometimes efficiency or cost-effectivity (Lee et al., 2021). Governments and public organisations have to meet new public management standards which include that public means have to be used carefully and sparingly (Canel & Luoma-aho, 2019). Officials have also lost status and authority over the past half century (Fraser, 2003). The mandate to communicate is no longer uniquely theirs and they need to rebalance their interaction with citizens and citizens-to-be (Canel & Luoma-aho, 2019). Much of the work of connecting has become the responsibility of individual professionals.

Secondly, from the perspective of citizens, what are seen as “authorities” in the Netherlands are not considered trustworthy institutions. The literature documents institutionalised forms of exclusion and racism (Çankaya, 2020; Wekker, 2016). Therefore, reservations, comments, and complaints from citizens are important signals. They indicate the necessity of new forms

of self-reflective professionalism. When encountering these, professionals are faced with potentially perverse effects of existing deeply culturalist forms of diversity policy that tends to highlight differences (Ghorashi, 2017; Ghorashi & Sabelis, 2013). Professional training has long based the importance of understanding differences on respect for cultural uniqueness (Hofstede, 1980; Pinto, 2007). According to Goubin (2015), this is risky. Such a mode of thinking easily reverts to myths fed by prejudice and essentialism. Training professionals in communication limits them to adopting the mode or “sender,” rather than “partner” in interaction. Additionally, training in multicultural communication, feeds notions of uniqueness and difference that become an obstacle to self-reflective engagement and interaction.

A third facet that hinders professionals is that it is unclear how we can best “do” inclusion. Recent research suggests that “hard” and essentialised identities are a major obstacle while respect for unique selves (rather than group traits) is a must (Shore et al., 2011; Winters, 2014). Does respect equal conditional or unconditional acceptance, does it need an agonistic attitude, as Mouffe (2000) suggests or heated debate (Mindell, 1995, 2002)? Political philosophers Le Dantec and DiSalvo (2013) see “infrastructuring,” the (co)designing of new routes and connections, as a better way of reinventing public space and interaction. Doing this correctly, for them, depends on moving away from “identity” to “ways of doing.” Inclusion is embedded in processes, they argue, it is not an object or a fixed entity. Additionally, in “civic dialogue,” it is crucial to understand what objects and images are deeply meaningful for others in the dialogue (Marres, 2007, p. 774). When we understand how others participate in dialogue as “frame” or “identity” driven, it is easy to dismiss their importance. Recognising strong feelings, on the other hand, helps uncover tensions and obstacles, crucially important in interaction with status holders. Allowing others to become partners in discussion will reshape shared discourse and unite professionals and status holders into what Warner (2002) calls “publics.” However temporary, the identity of a public allows media and communication scholars to study the discourse that is built collectively (if not always in collaboration or unity). This points forward to the importance of media literacy, a crucial skill for members of a public that needs the wider media sphere as a civic environment to feed them and in which to test their experiences and assumptions about what is going on.

To understand media literacy, we use the most recent European framework for digital competency: Digcomp 2.2 (Vuorikari et al., 2022). We understand media literacy to be part of digital competency, underlining the deep entanglement of media and data. This is in line with our material in which professionals aim for status holders to be(come) competent in both regards. Digcomp 2.2 further adds to our discussion that media literacy is situated in the interconnection between citizenship and digital competences (Vuorikari et al., 2022,

p. 4). Assessing the great many frameworks for defining media literacy (e.g., Livingstone, 2011; see also Potter, 2013), we understand it to mean the competency to critically engage with media, data, and information in relation to taking up the responsibility of being a citizen. Competencies are built on the combination of knowledge, skills, and attitude, three components that we will see return in our interview material. The Digcomp definition is as follows:

Digital competence involves the confident, critical and responsible use of, and engagement with, digital technologies for learning, at work, and for participation in society. It includes information and data literacy, communication and collaboration, media literacy, digital content creation (including programming), safety (including digital well-being and competences related to cybersecurity), intellectual property related questions, problem solving and critical thinking. (Vuorikari et al., 2022, p. 3)

While useful for contextualising media literacy in a broader frame, this definition is fully utopian when considering the interview material. Mainly because it does not make clear who is to set the standards or assess confidence, critical use, or responsibility.

### 3. Methodology

Given our broad interest in inclusive communication, for this case study 13 interviews were conducted, seven with Eritrean status holders and six with professionals. The interviews were conducted by Van Kommer and focused on interviewees’ definitions of successful integration, their media habits, their expectations, and knowledge of the other group’s media use, and how they felt about their mutual relationship. Interviewees were recruited using snowball sampling, starting from personal contacts. One of the interviewees made use of the offer to have an interpreter present. The interviews, obviously, had different salience for the researchers and the interviewees. While the interviewees recognised the obligations that come from being in a network and perhaps hoped to benefit from it, Van Kommer sought a way to deepen both her personal and professional commitment to a more just society. For Hermes, working with Van Kommer allowed her to deepen her understanding of how the call for more inclusion is so often overly naive. Good intentions will not result in a more just, accommodating, or equal society. We both count status holders and professionals among our friends and believe in transparent merging of our professional and political engagement.

All the interviewed status holders, four men and three women, were refugees who came to the Netherlands between 2010 and the present. Some of them are personal friends. Their average age was 22, ranging from 20 to 34. The majority lived in integration

housing projects in Amsterdam. All participants were single and, except for one participant, did not have children at the time of interviewing. The majority was working or enrolled in education (vocational training level), including language education.

The professionals that were interviewed worked for public organisations involved with the Eritrean demographic in the Amsterdam metropolitan area. Here too, some are considered friends. They were approached to represent different key elements of integration: “housing and social integration,” “education and employment,” “health,” and “language.” They are “street level bureaucrats,” frontline staff working within public agencies (Maynard-Moody & Portillo, 2010, p. 4). They mediate between policy directives and the life worlds of status holders, a demanding role (Lipsky, 1980).

Interviews with status holders were conducted in their homes, bar one, giving them the opportunity to share (media) objects and everyday rituals. Answers were often illustrated by media texts and practices. A good way of building rapport and insight, a media list was developed to prompt conversation. It included Dutch media like NPO (public service broadcaster) and nu.nl (online news platform), media aimed at status holders like the Helpdesk Nieuwkomers CAS Facebook page, and websites of various foundations like Ykaelo (which supports refugees in the Netherlands), media to support language learning like “woorden” (a dictionary app), Eritrean state media (EriTEL), and Eritrean diaspora media like DasnaTV YouTube channel. Throughout the interviews, this list was expanded.

Interviews were recorded with consent from the interviewees and transcribed afterwards. As a majority of interviewees were not native speakers, interview notes were of crucial importance to determine meaning and to contextualise tone, attitude, and emotion as expressed during the interview. Analytically, grounded theory was used (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This is a recursive approach, in which data collection and analysis happen simultaneously and repeatedly influence each other (Bryman, 2012, p. 387). It allowed us to understand distinct patterns of meaning making, even across this small set of interviews. This was validated by the research literature on integration in the Netherlands and the Eritrean status holder group in particular. It helped contextualise knowledge and first impressions of both interviewee groups and their relationship.

The analysis also drew on Potter and Wetherell’s insight that how people speak about things, varies according to the function they want their words to have. Wetherell and Potter’s interest is in shared cultural knowledge which can be recognised as what they call “interpretive repertoires.” They are defined as:

The building blocks speakers use for constructing versions of actions, cognitive processes and other phenomena. Any particular repertoire is constituted out of a restricted range of terms used in a specific stylis-

tic and grammatical fashion. Commonly these terms are derived from one or more key metaphors and the presence of a repertoire will often be signalled by certain tropes or figures of speech. (Wetherell & Potter, 1988, p. 172)

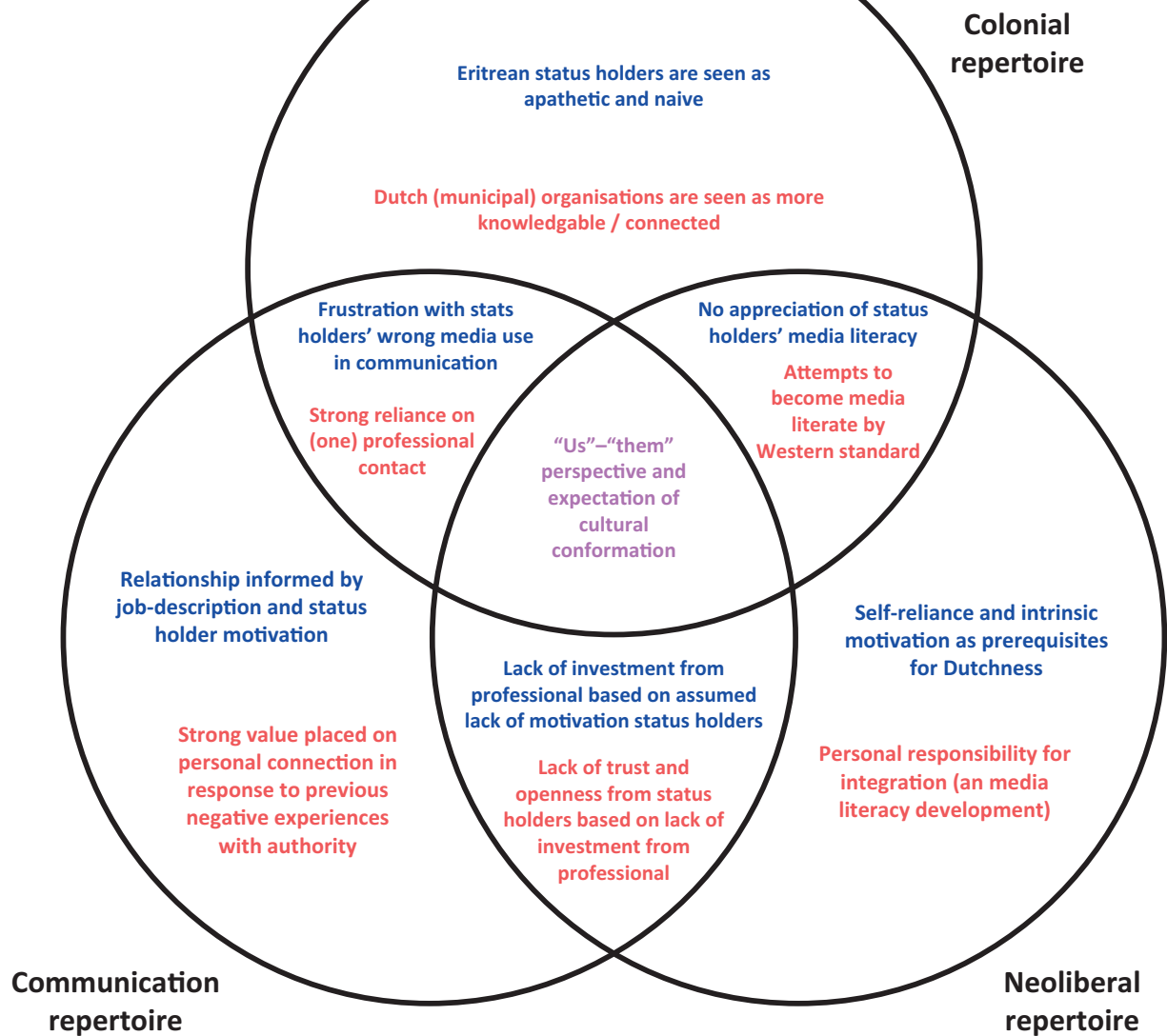
Following Strauss and Corbin (1990), open codes were used to indicate potentially interesting moments in the interviews. These were re-examined and grouped to form themes (axial codes) that functioned as sensitising concepts to develop selective codes. They are presented in the mind map see Figure 1. The mind map indicates three main interpretive repertoires, which correspond with three main areas of (mutual) exclusion in communication processes between the two groups. These were: (a) the neoliberal repertoire, reflected in professional frustrations about (lack of) motivation and in the status holders’ expectations of the professionals who are their contact person; (b) the communication repertoire, reflected in frustrations about the nature of communication (which both parties experience); and (c) the colonial repertoire, reflected in frustrations with the difficulty to reach the Eritrean group for the professionals and misassessing the power and status of professionals on the part of the status holders. In Figure 1, the selective codes are plotted as a Venn diagram that shows the three repertoires, the overlapping areas point to three areas of exclusion and misunderstanding. Assumptions about and expectations of media literacy appear to be the key to a mutually held “us versus them” perspective and lack of socio-cultural confirmation at the heart of this model.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. The Neoliberal Repertoire

One of the main frustrations of the professionals was the perceived lack of motivation from Eritrean status holders to complete their integration, pass citizenship exams, establish meaningful connections, and adapt to Dutch society. This frustration was informed by what appears to be an overemphasis on personal motivation as a means of asserting worthiness and assumptions of what it means to be motivated. This emphasis on personal motivation is deeply embedded in the Dutch integration process which in recent years has become increasingly contractual in nature, emphasising the responsibility of the individual against a decreased responsibility of the state (de Waal, 2017). Dana, a participation officer: “[a]t the end of the day Dutch society expects that they can do certain things by themselves. At least ask for help independently.” The expectation of individual responsibility is presented here as a core component of a communitarian ideal of Dutch society. The focus is on the community, an “us” who share common morals and values and commitment of individual citizens to endorse and defend these morals and values (van Houdt, et al., 2011, p. 411). “The housing project works, because here status holders

Perspective (municipal) organisations  
 Perspective Eritrean status holders



**Figure 1.** Venn diagram illustrating the overlap and interaction of the neoliberal, the communication, and the colonial repertoire.

are confronted with Dutch culture. It’s extra motivation to adapt to Dutch norms, values and rules,” says Tom, community builder at an integration housing project. Core components of this sacralised community are then linked to neoliberal values of personal entrepreneurship and equated with Dutchness. Van Houdt et al. confirm that ideal Dutch citizenship is increasingly phrased in terms of individual responsibilities, active contribution, and self-reliance (2011, pp. 415–416). At its exclusive communitarian core, strangely, is the neoliberal ideal citizen as an individual who is autonomous, free, rational, and self-regulating (van Houdt et al., 2011, p. 411).

According to interviewees, it is exactly this “intrinsic motivation” that is lacking among Eritrean status holders which places them at a distance from Dutch society.

Dana explained that “we have been raised with this idea that you will work to become your best self or achieve the most. That is part of our society. With the Eritrean group...that is just not where they come from.” The colonial repertoire will further clarify how the cultural difference between “the Eritrean group” and Dutch society is significant. The official “approach” meanwhile, reflects the perceived need to address this lack in motivation:

We have a specific approach for the Eritrean group with a variety of tailor-made projects. These include mind-set training....An important question is the concept of freedom and connected to that we ask them “What do you want?” (Bianca, project manager integration at the municipality)



Asking this question assumes that Eritrean status holders have not developed an adequate idea of what they want or desire and do not (yet) meet the standards of “Dutchness.” Being a Dutch citizen is strongly tied to being motivated, which in turn is heavily coloured by neoliberal ideals of self-improvement and self-reliance, and individual goals and desires.

Status holders echoed these neoliberal values and relied on the same repertoire when discussing their integration. In contrast to the professionals, however, they did express a variety of goals and desires, including the desire for bigger social networks (particularly with Dutch social contacts), increased Dutch language skills, more control over their own situation, and better digital/media literacy skills:

In Eritrea my life was very social....if you have a problem people help you out, there is always somebody around....Here I have to do everything by myself. I have no Dutch friends yet, so I feel alone. (Dawit, retail student)

[Eritrean] people don’t have time to focus on themselves. They are preoccupied with communal goals, like helping their family. (Yonas, key figure in the Eritrean community)

Professionals mostly failed to identify motivation as motivation, because it was expressed through an unfamiliar frame while status holders did not always express themselves straightforwardly. Only one (Senait) verbally expressed the need for increased control over her personal situation. Others expressed this indirectly: “before I go to [Dynamo social work’s office hours] I try to translate and comprehend the letter I have received. That way I understand what we are talking about when I ask for help” (Betiel, home care student). Rather than a passive approach, this indicates a desire for gaining control over her own situation and acquiring the skills to address issues that arise. The professionals however, mostly experienced status holders as relying on their services without actively investing in their own situation. Here the neoliberal and communication repertoires overlap as assumptions about motivation and correct forms of communicating come together.

#### 4.2. Communication Repertoire

The frustrations expressed by professionals reflect their assumption about what constitutes meaningful communication. Expectations of each other’s responsibilities in the communication process differed significantly. These differences are central to the communication repertoire.

As “street level bureaucrats,” “public service workers who interact directly with citizens in the course of their jobs, and who have substantial discretion in the execution of their work” (Lipsky, 1980, p. 3), the professionals navigate (new) policies and the real-world con-

texts of status holders. Previous research indicated that street-level bureaucrats in the Dutch integration process strictly adhered to rules set by authorities, which seems to be a direct result of the bureaucratic burden placed upon them. They are, e.g., required to meticulously document their interactions with status holders. Professionals indicated annoyance and dissatisfaction with this system and the limitations it places on their ability to help their clients (Belabas & Gerrits, 2017, p. 140). In general, all professionals expressed that they felt their responsibility went beyond the assistance they were able to offer:

Status holders are only a small part of the benefit recipients, and the policy is not to deviate for special needs of a particular group. We would really like to be attentive to the language gap, but that is not how things are done. (Bianca)

To compensate for frustration with “how things are done,” street-level bureaucrats (re)negotiate the limits of their own and status holders’ responsibility. When the perceived motivation of clients is high, professionals are likely to pursue additional possibilities or “bend the rules” to accommodate them (Belabas & Gerrits, 2017, p. 143). What is defined and recognised as motivation thus becomes crucial for achieving meaningful communication.

When motivation is interpreted incorrectly, as in Betiel’s case, status holders are wrongfully perceived as passive, unmotivated and uneducated on bureaucratic norms of communication. However, their “incorrect” forms of communication are not the result of a lack of motivation or knowledge, but of conscious choices that follow from what for them constitutes meaningful communication. Professionals expressed frustration with the status holders’ tendency to present questions to them that were not within their field of influence. However, this was not due to a lack of understanding of the system. The status holders’ selection of one bureaucratic contact generally reflected either a wish for personal attention from a specific professional or a previous positive experience with them.

Senait, a single mother of four, stated that her contact did not feel trustworthy: “I do not know who to ask these questions. Who provides guidance for me? Who has the time or energy to explain things? I need somebody who gives me the proper attention.” She was waiting for somebody she could personally connect with to ask her questions. The colonial repertoire below illustrates that the emphasis on personal connection is reflective of status holders’ methods for source verification, which are based on their previous experiences with authorities. Additionally, Senait was anxious about the language barrier: “I don’t know if my message has come across and I am afraid the other person will feel negatively towards me or the things I do.”

Personal attention and interest from street-level bureaucrats was crucial in overcoming such anxieties, as

illustrated by Asmeret (hospitality and care student). She explains her choice of bureaucratic contact: “[My language coach] always helps me. I also have a client manager, but I don’t really ask her anything. I usually ask my language coach, because we have a better connection. I feel that she looks out for me.” The fact that the language coach “looks out for her” makes Asmeret feel comfortable. She sees the coach as a trustworthy contact. The language coach was not interviewed but may well at times be somewhat overburdened and not in a position to do more than give advice.

Another important way in which relationships to professionals become meaningful to status holders is through positive previous experiences:

My client manager asked me if I wanted to do some volunteering and I enjoyed the job he got me....Later I told him I want to work with older people and he organised a job for me in home care. (Betiel)

After her previous positive interaction, Betiel felt she could ask her client manager for work, as he had been helpful before. Previous positive interactions make status holders assume knowledgeable ability and connectivity on behalf of the professional.

While the above examples illustrate clear intent and motivation on behalf of status holders, professionals mostly misinterpret these interactions. Their strong emphasis on (perceived) motivation, turns the requirements for meaningful communication for both parties into unattainable prerequisites for the other. Status holders required a personal connection to feel secure and empowered enough to address their own situation. The professionals required the distance signified by status holders having their own goals and ambitions. The status holders’ strong reliance on one contact and their reserved attitude towards other institutional contacts were interpreted by professionals as lack of independence, insight, and motivation. Their conscious strategies for communication and source (negatively) affected how professionals negotiated their responsibility towards them. The colonial repertoire discusses how the failure to recognise the conscious strategies of status holders leads to professionals reading them as apathetic and naive.

#### 4.3. The Colonial Repertoire (and Choices in Using Media)

Status holders’ media use and approach to information and communication are embedded in their experience with media in the context of a highly unreliable political regime with high levels of censorship. They are cautious towards government sources and develop specific strategies for source verification. Generally, status holders had a tendency to value information from personal contacts as more trustworthy than information found via search engines or from authoritative sources such as gov-

ernment websites. As Eyob, a retail student, said: “your network, your friends and family, are the best source.” Other interviewees also consciously used the one-person strategy observed above in interaction with street-level bureaucrats when verifying information:

I follow one person. He is trustworthy. In the past I was more gullible, but a lot of people lie. With this guy I know he speaks the truth....When I read something online and I am not sure if it is correct, I check his videos. (Meron, supermarket worker)

Interviewees also used social media strategically. Dawit blocked messages from politically active friends on his newsfeed. Tesfay (Dutch language student) used Instagram to find new people with shared interests: “When they do a live, I feel like I can write in the comments and communicate with them. I can learn from them too.”

Others used media to overcome language obstacles. Although Google Translate has no Tigrinya translations, most interviewees found other ways to use it:

When I don’t know how to spell a word, I use the audio input function on Google Translate. I say the word and Google writes it for me. (Betiel)

I translate from Dutch to English (using Google Translate) and then from English to Tigrinya (using Microsoft Translate). (Dawit)

Interviewees also had strategies for communicating over unstable and changing media landscapes, like Eyob: “I use different media to talk to my family, depending on where they live. In Eritrea we can only call, but my brother and sister live in Sudan, so we use Messenger.” These choices showed clear awareness of media affordances. “Imo uses less data when you call, so it is cheaper. That’s why I use that instead of Messenger” (Dawit). Some also expressed that they had gained new media literacy skills through their school environment, which taught them to use video calling software, job market platforms and online learning spaces. Those who mentioned this also actively reached out to their teachers for support: “I could log in by myself, but I didn’t understand how to start or enter a meeting, so I asked my teacher for help through WhatsApp” (Dawit).

Professionals failed to recognise these as communicative media literacy skills. They relied strongly on their Western definition of media literacy. If, however, media literacies are understood as cultural constructions that reflect the norms, conventions and expectations of various actors that shape how we “should” live with media (Bruinberg et al., 2021, p. 31), a different picture emerges. It suggests that normative assumptions of media literacy are likely to reflect cultural assumptions about what qualifies as valuable information, trustworthiness or credibility, and which media



environments are worth engaging with. Gaining an understanding of deeper entangled layers of attitude, knowledge, and skills in engaged discussion, could result in collective reflexivity.

Discussing media literacy, professionals tended towards two instrumental definitions. Firstly, the ability to understand and navigate digital devices and secondly, the skills for creating and interpreting media, including the ability to assess the trustworthiness of sources and navigate platforms or webpages to satisfactory levels. The anxieties of the professionals focussed primarily on the latter:

Rumours often spread easily. People hear a story from others, or they pick up something in the media, they create their own version of the story....They have difficulty assessing the trustworthiness of information or determining what is important. (Jeroen, creator and moderator of the GGD's Eritrean-focussed Facebook page)

His anxiety was echoed by professionals, who all had strategies to disseminate alternative information to prevent the uptake of fake news. Beyond the assumption that status holders were unable to verify sources themselves, this reflected an assumption that reliability was a quality that came with being a professional. In other words, they tried to correct for an assumed lack of media literacy by following the logic of that exact media literacy.

The patronising nature of the responses from professionals assumed that status holders are naive and lack the competency to detect fake news. This assumption followed a colonial logic that Hall described as a particular discourse and a mode of power. "The West," he argues, is a historical, not a geographical construct. By "western" we mean:

The type of society...that is developed, industrialised, urbanised, capitalist, secular, and modern....They were the result of a specific set of historical processes—economic, political, social, and cultural. Nowadays, any society which shares these characteristics, wherever it exists on a geographical map, can be said to belong to 'the West.' The meaning of this term is therefore virtually identical to that of the word 'modern.'" (Hall, 1992, p. 186)

Therefore, any non-Western country from which refugees come to the Netherlands (including Eritrea) is automatically relegated to the category of the Rest, as "less" in all ways that count.

The professionals felt informed by what to them are meaningful status markers. In the context of integration, prominent markers are those that pertain to Dutchness or a cultural sense of citizenship. Despite the Netherlands' long history with migration and discussion of decolonisation, to be a migrant is understood as deviating from Dutchness, which produces discomfort

and is to be eliminated as fast as possible, as is illustrated in the neoliberal repertoire. Wekker (2016) linked Dutchness to Whiteness and Christianity. This makes Eritrean migrants with non-Dutch markers—based on race and non-Christian religions—illegitimate (Wekker, 2016, p. 7).

Competency is also embedded in this system of status. Competence is a neoliberal pipedream according to McMillan Cottom (2019, p. 78) and even more structurally unattainable for those who have the "wrong" status markers than the more privileged. The opinion of the professionals seemed to be that status holders were incompetent when it came to media literacy, but they did not show any urgency to help them improve this competence. Bianca said that media literacy simply was not a priority at this point, because the focus was on "building cultural bridges." Similarly, Dana expressed that she thought "media [could] be useful, but maybe at a later stage." Suggesting that competent media use was conditional upon achieving Dutchness, which, in colonial logic is not likely to ever happen unless under exceptional circumstances that involve defending the (Dutch) national honour in sports or culture.

Beyond anxieties surrounding status holders' competence, professionals expressed frustration with reaching the group. The interviews indicate an observable difference in media behaviours and media platforms used. Status holders showed awareness of these differences and tried to bridge them. Meron used various direct messaging apps. He explained: "[in the Netherlands] you just have to have WhatsApp." He only used it in group chats and contact with Dutch (official) contacts. Professionals showed some awareness of Eritrean media behaviours, but this was mostly expressed through frustrations about Eritrean's inability to engage with "correct" media:

Their main way of communicating is WhatsApp....They do not read the things that are posted on the Socie-app, so when I see things that are important there, I forward them to my [hallway] WhatsApp group, so they get this information too. (Tom)

Tom tried to cater to the status holders' media behaviour while clearly feeling that the Socie-app is the "correct" one to use. This again illustrates an "us" versus "them" attitude and the expectation of adaptation that accompanies it. Explicitly labelling status holders' media behaviours as "incorrect" further ignores the good reasons they might have for these behaviours or the mechanisms of exclusion these may indicate.

## 5. Discussion: Co-Designing Media Literacy as a Route to Citizenship

If professionals want to act on their wish to communicate inclusively, that is, to actively invite and engage Eritrean status holders to "co-own" meeting and working with them and to co-own "how to be Dutch," they face

the major hurdle of three interrelated repertoires that hold them captive. Eritreans are seen as lacking motivation (the neoliberal repertoire), overly dependent on their bureaucratic and professional contacts (the communication repertoire) and opening themselves up to misinformation by naively relying on informal news networks (the colonial repertoire). Surprisingly, the status holders held similar views. They too pictured themselves as in need of help, in need of adapting to Dutch culture in order to “integrate,” and as (socially) isolated. Their quotes showed frustration with the (lack of) offered support and guidance and how they felt irritated, anxious, and frustrated. In their media experience they further faced a variety of exclusionary mechanisms, such as the strong reliance on written communication that emphasised language barriers and (il)literacy or the primary use of computer-based media sources such as webpages and email that were not accessible to many without a computer or computer navigation skills.

The dynamic of the three repertoires produces an intricate constellation of beliefs about the self and others, Dutchness, and meaningful communication that results in a vicious circle of miscommunication. By addressing the professionals’ question of how to turn these interaction patterns into inclusive communication, we want to try and sidestep the framework of efficiency and expediency that puts pressure on street-level bureaucrats. Could “integration” also be understood as a reciprocal process of lifelong learning? Could such a process, secondly, be fed and energised by discussion of media (whether to do with news or entertainment, or the attractions and downsides to platforms)? When professionals and status holders start to understand how and when the other party trusts media and sources, “open-mindedness to the media literacy of others” can be built as a dialogic performative skill that is linked to contexts of time and place. We recognise that media literacy extends beyond trust and source verification, but these were the main points that surfaced in our discussions of media literacy with the Eritrean group and involved professionals. Building such a skill requires a self-reflective approach to the integration process, and to the identities of being a professional and being an Eritrean stakeholder. Co-designing a mode of working together will move understanding media literacy from “competence” to reflexivity and bring reflexivity into the heart of both media literacy and inclusive communication.

Aiming for reflexivity will also, ultimately, bring about a more level playing field that allows for difference. Currently, such reflexivity is hindered by the colonial repertoire that suggests status holders lack the will and ability to act wisely. Only by stepping outside the colonial and neoliberal repertoires and their assumption of the ideal citizen as independent and autonomous, will professionals be able to find a route to helping their clients find the power to act. Making room for diversity and achieving inclusion will not be easy. It needs

to be a constantly reflective process in which a difficult balance is maintained between valuing the particular behaviours and motivations of Eritrean status holders as important pieces of information in the communication process. At the same time, it must avoid essentialising Eritrean status holders by highlighting their difference and uniqueness.

Shaping participatory co-design of media literacy programmes starts with recognising Eritrean status holders as equal and worthy contributors in shaping the communication process. For professionals this means that they have to hand over status and authority, as well as their current toolbox to achieve their organisations’ goals. An important element is to recognise and value existing media behaviours of the status holders, understanding their previous engagement with media in a different media landscape, and challenging one’s own expectations and assumptions regarding “correct” media literacy. Doing so consists of talking about news and entertainment, platforms, channels, and forms of communication in order to inform, discuss, learn, share, and bond. To move beyond understanding into designing a programme requires identifying interests beyond the basic needs of newcomers and the panic they may feel when confronted with unfamiliar surroundings. It requires challenging assumptions as outlined in the colonial repertoire. In the interviews with the status holders, we noticed how talk of media provided an easy connection in which the status holders felt (more) confident and secure. Such open discussion provides a gateway towards media, information, and data literacy, and to shared understanding of what that means rather than one-sided assumptions, rules and norms.

Inclusivity demands that spaces of commonality and difference are identified and negotiated rather than imposed or accepted without understanding or support. Although such foundational citizenship exercises are implied in most definitions of media literacy, these fail to define how to reach this common ground and do not recognise media literacy’s situated nature as a cultural construct. Rather than thinking of media literacy as a static skill that has to be taught or practised “correctly,” media literacy as a cultural construct allows for it to be a space where attitudes, knowledge and skills can mutually emerge and be shaped. This is to suggest that we rethink media literacy for an inclusive society as world-building or (virtual) placemaking:

Placemaking inspires people to collectively reimagine and reinvent public spaces as the heart of every community. Strengthening the connection between people and the places they share, placemaking refers to a collaborative process by which we can shape our public realm in order to maximise shared value. (Project for Public Spaces, 2004)

Of course, unlike diversity, inclusion cannot be mandated and legislated (Winters, 2014, p. 206). It depends on

voluntary engagement, on all parties' ability, will, and power to act. Using media texts and experiences should make such engagement easier even though power imbalances will remain a major challenge. Focusing on how one uses media helps avoid the pitfalls of taste that can turn media talk into an arena of distinction and exclusion. It should, eventually, allow for openness to disagreeing on content while building democratic procedure, as participatory design researchers Björgvinsson et al. (2012, pp. 129–131) suggest. They found that it is possible to encourage passionate engagement from very different social positions in projects with immigrant families in Sweden. Such engagement builds skills and empowerment for all involved and delivers insight into the “wider systems of socio-material relation” that include the repertoires and ways of making sense of the world that we found (Björgvinsson et al., 2012, p. 130). This may seem like circular logic, in that we need media literacy to break out of a neo-liberal/colonial logic, which that very logic will make hard to do. However, adopting the principles of participatory co-design as a laboratory setting of sorts will allow all participants the safety of their convictions while also allowing them to test new connections and creating Dutchness as a shared material-ideological space.

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## About the Authors



**Rosanne van Kommer** is a junior researcher at the faculty of urban social work with the Hogeschool van Amsterdam (HvA). She has a degree in media studies from the University of Amsterdam (2019) and worked as a junior researcher at Inholland University of Applied Sciences.



**Joke Hermes** is a professor of inclusion and the creative industries at Inholland University of Applied Sciences. She is co-founding editor of *European Journal of Cultural Studies*.