Decolonising civic integration: a critical analysis of texts used in Dutch civic integration programmes

Nadine Blankvoort, Margo van Hartingsveldt, Debbie Laliberte Rudman & Anja Krumeich

To cite this article: Nadine Blankvoort, Margo van Hartingsveldt, Debbie Laliberte Rudman & Anja Krumeich (2021) Decolonising civic integration: a critical analysis of texts used in Dutch civic integration programmes, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 47:15, 3511-3530, DOI: 10.1080/1369183X.2021.1893668

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2021.1893668

© 2021 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

Published online: 12 Apr 2021.

Article views: 970

View related articles

View Crossmark data
Decolonising civic integration: a critical analysis of texts used in Dutch civic integration programmes

Nadine Blankvoort a,b, Margo van Hartingsveldt b, Debbie Laliberte Rudman c and Anja Krumeich a,d

aDepartment Health Ethics and Society, Maastricht University, Maastricht, Netherlands; bDepartment of Occupational Therapy, Research Group Participation and Environment, Faculty of Health, Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences, Amsterdam, Netherlands; cFaculty of Health Sciences, School of Occupational Therapy, University of Western Ontario, London, Canada; dSchool of Health Professions Education (SHE), Maastricht University, Maastricht, Netherlands

ABSTRACT

European civic integration programmes claim to provide newcomers with necessary tools for successful participation. Simultaneously, these programmes have been criticised for being restrictive, market-driven and for working towards an implicit goal of limiting migration. Authors have questioned how these programmes discursively construct an offensive image of the Other and how colonial histories are reproduced in the constructions seen today. The Dutch civic integration programme is considered a leading example of a restrictive programme within Europe. Research has critically questioned the discourses within its policies, yet limited research has moved beyond policy to focus on discourse in texts in practice. This study presents a critical discourse analysis of texts used in the civic integration programme and demonstrates that they participate in multiple discursive constructions: the construction of the Dutch nation-state and its citizens as inherently modern, the construction of the Other as Unmodern and thus a threat, and the construction of the hierarchical relationship between the two. The civic integration programme has been left out of discussions on decolonisation to date, contributing to it remaining a core practice of othering. This study applies post-colonial theories to understand the impacts of current discourse, and forwards possibilities for consideration of decolonised alternatives.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 6 July 2020
Accepted 15 February 2021

KEYWORDS
Civic integration; modernity; coloniality; decolonisation; governmentality; critical discourse analysis

Introduction

Civic integration programmes have been increasingly implemented across Europe throughout the past decades (Suvarierol and Kirk 2015). Programmes claim to assist migrants with language acquisition and with acquiring skills thought to contribute to successful participation, focusing mainly on labour market participation (Joppke 2007b; Joppke 2007c). Immigration and integration are often connected, requiring individuals
with a temporary residency permit to successfully complete tests on language and societal values before receiving a more permanent residency status (Joppke 2007b; Joppke 2007c; de Waal 2017; Kirk and Suvarierol 2014; Schinkel 2017). Programmes are becoming increasingly restrictive and difficult to complete, considered to be reflective of an implicit goal of reducing immigration (Suvarierol and Kirk 2015). The Netherlands is considered a leader in the categorisation and measurement of integration (Schinkel 2017). Its civic integration programme has been identified as a particularly restrictive programme within Europe, requiring newcomers to earn their citizenship status through a complex, market-oriented programme (Suvarierol and Kirk 2015; Joppke 2007b; Joppke 2007a; Scholten, Ghebreab, and de Waal 2019). This programme and the three-year period within which individuals must complete it, is referred to as inburgering, or civic integration in English. Within these three years, individuals must complete six tests on language, Dutch society and preparation for the workforce (Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs) facing financial penalties if not completed in time. Researchers have studied the multiple policy shifts on civic integration in the Netherlands and have evaluated the programme using markers such as timely programme completion and employment attainment. Based on these markers, the current programme has been deemed unsuccessful (Scholten, Ghebreab, and de Waal 2019; Asscher 2016; Engbersen et al. 2015) and unwelcoming (Scholten, Ghebreab, and de Waal 2019; Ruitenburg, van Dorst, and Tio 2018) and has led to the proposal of a new programme to be implemented in 2022.

A growing body of research has questioned the underlying discourse of the current Dutch policies and programmes and the assumptions and conceptual logics which inform them. The research done has found that the civic integration programme is driven by market-based, neoliberal principles (Suvarierol and Kirk 2015; Joppke 2007c; Oomen and Leenders 2020; Bjornson 2007). The programme has been criticised as actively participating in othering, the discursive construction of an Other, an (undesirable) migrant, inherently different from the Dutch citizen (Joppke 2007c; de Waal 2017; Kirk and Suvarierol 2014; Oomen and Leenders 2020; Bonjour and Duyvendak 2017). Schinkel (2017) in his book ‘Imagined Societies’ provides an important contribution to this work. He presents an analysis of Dutch integration policies, and measurement tools, and displays how they actively contribute to imaginaries of concepts such as ‘society’ and the ‘Other’. His analysis has focused its attention on policy, leaving the question: how does this discourse operate at the level of practice? Who is integrated and who is not, is described not only in policy documents but is shaped during the everyday activities, texts and interactions within civic integration programmes. These often taken-for-granted practices are important to study as they constitute the ‘doing’ or the ‘practice of integration’ and have immediate, lived effects for those who encounter them. Kirk and Suvarierol (2014) is one example of research that strived to understand this. They found the discourse of the migrant woman, and the assumptions of them, are actively constructed during civic integration classes. Attention is dedicated to themes of gender and violence; honour killings, female circumcision and domestic abuse. Kirk and Suvarierol claim that this representation of the non-Western migrant woman has parallels with the image of the oriental woman of the colonial age and that the Dutch state discursively positions itself to become the paternal saviour (2014). Results such as these present an initial understanding of discourse in practice and also suggest that colonial logics could be reproduced in programmes today. Though important
contributions, more in-depth examination is needed to understand how concepts of integration are shaped in practice. Furthermore, we need to question where the assumptions embedded in these discourses may stem from. For this, a post-colonial and decolonial lens can be applied (Essed and Nimako 2006).

Authors in migration studies have utilised post-colonial and decolonial theories to shine a theoretical light on asylum and integration programmes, helping to better understand the underlying logics informing their discourses (Carver 2019; Rodríguez 2018; Mayblin 2017; Bhambra 2017; Mayblin, Wake, and Kazemi 2020; Lippert 1999). Mayblin (2017) draws on work by Quijano (2000) and Mignolo (2017) in her book ‘Asylum After Empire’ in which she explores the current hostility towards asylum seekers through a coloniality/modernity framework. When reflecting on this hostility she states:

… the refugee – is the embodiment of the darker side of modernity and of the global fallout from colonialism, is a figure who migrates from the ‘non-modern’ to the ‘modern’ world and is treated all over the world as not quite human enough to deserve full access to human rights. (Mayblin 2017, 6)

There are limited examples of research drawing on modernity framework within the Dutch context, specifically at the level of practice. This approach would be particularly interesting in the post-colonial setting of the Netherlands, a setting which often silences colonial histories and prides itself on being non-racist or post-racist (Schinkel 2017; Essed and Nimako 2006; Wekker 2016). Adopting a decolonial lens within this post-colonial setting would aid in a better understanding of how colonialist discourse has its after-life in integration programmes today.

Critically analysing discourses allows for a deeper understanding of how assumptions, such as those connected to modernity, have been normalised and taken-for-granted in political and public discourse. The activity of discourse analysis is a practice of making invisible assumptions visible, shining a light on and critically questioning them so that we better understand how they operate. Critical discourse analysis recognises that discourses are actively constructing and reconstructing groups. The discourse we use shapes our understanding of belonging (Bhambra 2017) of the good citizen and of the Other. These categories, continuously shaped and strengthened by discursive acts, have real-life effects for the individuals who find themselves classified within them (Bacchi 2009; Yanow and Van Der Haar 2013) impacting how they are treated, restricted and constrained (Schinkel 2017; Bhambra 2017). As described by Schinkel (2017) ‘… the problematization of who belongs to society is in the end not a matter of policy budget but of discourse’ (120).

Thoroughly understanding where the civic integration programme stands today is important when looking at changes the future may bring. This research does not aim to conclude how best to integrate refugee into society, in fact, through our analysis, we pose questions to the usefulness of integration as a concept. Instead, we aim to more clearly display how discourse on integration operates at the level of everyday integration and to do this we will focus our analysis on texts used in practice.

Conceptual framework

Colonialism can be defined as ‘a relation of direct, political, social and cultural domination’ (Quijano 2007, 168), a relation which historically has existed between the colonised and a
coloniser. Though historically we have seen many instances of this form of relation, the present-day remnants of colonialist past are centred less on the domination of countries and more on concepts of coloniality, coloniality of power (Quijano 2000) and Western Imperialism (Wekker 2016). These concepts take a more fluid form than the historical approach of colonialism, focusing on ‘imposition of cultural, economic and political customs’ (Mayblin 2017, 18) and the (re)producing of socially discriminating categories, stemming from racial and national constructs. Coloniality and the colonial matrix of power are remnants of Colonialism. Coloniality and modernity have been presented by Quijano (2007) as two sides of the same coin. It is important to note that a distinction can be made between postcolonial and decolonial approaches, though both stem from developments that strive to challenge the colonial world order (Bhambra 2014). This research draws on both postcolonial as well as decolonial literature.

Mayblin (2017) draws on the coloniality/modernity logics in ‘Asylum after Empire’, in her analysis of current asylum programmes by focusing on two main points: the worldview of modernity and the hierarchical ordering of humans. The narrative of modernity builds on moments claimed to have occurred in European history, such as the rise of democracy, secularisation, industrial revolution and capitalism, as key moments (temporal dimension) that have allowed a distinction to be made between parts of the world (geographical dimension) which are considered ‘modern’ or ‘developed’ while others are then able to be labelled to be the opposite: underdeveloped or characteristically unmodern (Mayblin 2017). Modernity logic is thus a euro-centric narrative and is fundamental to how we view the world (Mayblin 2017). As a world view, it provides a dichotomy for judgement, which maintains the relationship between the ‘West’ and the ‘Other’, as a relationship of domination (Quijano 2000). The dichotomy of modern-unmodern is not only attributed to what we understand today as nation-states (Bhambra 2017) but is further extended to inhabitants of them, drawing lines between modern-unmodern humans, creating and justifying a hierarchical ordering of them (Mayblin 2017). The relationship of dominance between the modern European citizen and the unmodern Other allows for the creation of a subject-object relationship, with the subject, the embodiment of the European modernity, as the starting point of comparison, and the Object, perceived as being inferior by the nature, and thus the focus of governing practices (Bacchi 2009; Quijano 2007; Löwenheim and Gazit 2009).

**Modernity, asylum and governing lives**

A growing number of authors have explored the connection between coloniality and modernity in present-day asylum and integration programmes (Schinkel 2017; Carver 2019; Rodríguez 2018; Mayblin 2017; Mayblin, Wake, and Kazemi 2020; Anderson 2019; Edmunds 2012). Rodríguez (2018) draws on the coloniality of power (Quijano 2000) and argues for a framework of ‘Coloniality of Migration’ (Rodríguez 2018, 16). Rodriguez demonstrates that current asylum policies in Germany have evolved from historical policies which utilised racial categorisations, for example, head taxes and bonds for black or Asian migrants into the new European colonies in North America (Rodríguez 2018). Her work demonstrates that colonial histories are reactivated today, wrapped in nationalistic discussions on ‘our values’ and are combined with new forms of governance of groups whom are assumed to not embody these same values. Similar
findings were also found in Carver’s (2019) analysis of the UK asylum system where she demonstrated the colonial categories are reproduced, subjecting asylum seekers to practices during their application process which strive to make them more ‘modern’, as defined by Western standards. Practices such as renaming using a Western name structure, recording birthdates and recording biological and social fatherhood are all routine forms of colonial power (Carver 2019).

Looking to the Netherlands, authors have demonstrated that the hierarchical ordering of humans is not a recent phenomenon (Yanow and Van Der Haar 2013; Jones 2016). Hierarchies formed the basis of colonial actions historically and were justified with discourses defining natives as possessing peculiar ‘biological and cultural traits and different legal needs’ (Jones 2016, 609) and positioning ‘Europeans’ as a group with a special mission for uplifting ‘the natives’ (Jones 2016, 609). Throughout this history, the statuses of personhood and citizen were reserved for only native ‘Dutch’, solidifying one of the most important hierarchies between humans within the Dutch empire. Even after the abolition of slavery, new hierarchies were developed allowing for designations to be made between ‘native’ Dutch subjects and ‘European’ Dutch citizens, privileging European Dutch in questions of socioeconomic and political relations (Jones 2016). In more recent history, division of groups along cultural lines was part of the pillarisation programmes of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and seen again with the introduction of policy focused on ‘minority cultures’ during the 1960s and 1970s (Schinkel 2017). The hierarchical ordering of humans in the Netherlands was also seen in the designations ‘autochthon’ (of Dutch descent) and ‘allochthon’ (of foreign descent) (Jones 2016; Ghorashi 2015). This opened the door to culturist discourses in political debate and policy in the late-twentieth century, grouping ‘allochthon’ cultures as specific groups associated with higher unemployment, higher welfare dependence and higher crime rates (Schinkel 2017). These categories seen throughout history imply a racialised idea of true Dutchness, utilising signifiers to construct sameness and to contribute equally to the imagined differences of the Other. These categories, still seen today in population records and in surveys on integration (Schinkel 2017), contribute to an understanding of a group of people who will never truly be ‘Dutch’. Presented by Wekker as the cultural archive,

the history of Dutch colonial practices continues to live on in the heads and hearts of people in the metropole, but its content is also silently cemented in policies, in organizational rules, in popular and sexual cultures, and in common sense everyday knowledge. (Wekker 2016, 19)

This research draws on these theoretical and historical works in its exploration of the Dutch civic integration system, acknowledging that the hierarchical ordering of humans along an axis of modernity has been common practice in Dutch and global history and that governing technologies are exercised in a disciplinary way to those finding themselves at the bottom of this hierarchy.

**Methods**

This research is part of a larger project exploring the formal and informal programmes in the Netherlands claiming to aid the integration of refugees. This study therefore presents a first step focusing on the texts refugees encounter while in formal integration
programmes. *Formal* for this study is defined as programmes which are government designed and operated, or which are formally supported by the government. For example, DUO is the government arm responsible for communicating information on the civic integration programme in the Netherlands and therefore is considered part of the formal programme. The recent years of civic integration policy shifts have also resulted in the outsourcing of government activities to private companies (Oomen and Leenders 2020; Bjornson 2007). Therefore, documents created by private companies, are government-approved or mandated extensions and are also considered part of the formal programme. This study focuses on refugees, but it is important to note that refugees are only one category of migrants required to participate in the civic integration programme. Some documents selected in this study are targeting refugees, and others a broader audience, and thus the results of this research could apply to other migrant groups. Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the University of Maastricht Ethics Review Committee Health, Medicine and Life Sciences.

**Methods of analysis**

This study utilised a multi-stage iterative critical discourse analysis. Documents were selected based on the criteria of a formal programme as described above. Communication documents written by DUO which refugees receive when beginning their civic integration were selected. Additionally, documents used in mandatory workshops and ceremonial moments all refugees encounter, such as the signing of the Participation Statement, were selected. Test questions offered as practice questions by DUO, the formal government responsible for testing, were selected as representative of questions refugees encounter during exams. Lastly, course books were selected and analysed based on informal input from teachers on their most-used books, input gathered during a workshop at their national conference.

Texts were analysed individually, firstly through a round of free reading, followed by an analysis which critically questioned the texts. A set of questions were composed inspired by Bacchi’s (2009) *What’s the Problem Represented to Be Approach*, which aided in identifying the main problematisations and discourses present within the texts. Each individual analysis of the first three texts was discussed with the research supervision team to ensure agreement on interpretation. Once a point of saturation was met with the question guide, a secondary theoretical analysis took place. This was a cross-cutting analysis of the findings of all documents using the theoretical framework of modernity/coloniality. Reflective journaling was utilised throughout this process to understand the theoretical connections between the results and existing theories, and to draw awareness to the positioning of the researcher in relation to the texts.

**Findings: practicing integration**

The findings tell a story of ‘practicing integration’; how integration is shaped in discourse in the everyday texts used in practice. This story will be told using three themes: *The Construction of The Us: An Embodiment of Modernity*, *The Construction of the UnModern Other as a Potential Threat* and *The Hierarchical Relation Between the Us and the Other*. The findings will be presented in a way which stays close to the texts, drawing
on concepts introduced in the conceptual framework. Presenting our findings in this way demonstrates that texts used in practice are not objective but are reproducing damaging assumptions and categorisations. By critically analysing these findings further in the discussion we contextualise these reproductions and their effects.

Construction of The Us: An Embodiment of Modernity

The texts used in civic integration programmes provide information to the reader to inform their understanding of the Dutch nation-state. Test questions and books focus on what contributed to the Netherlands become a nation-state, identify countries who are allies, countries which fall under the kingdom of the Netherlands (Bakker 2016) countries that freed the Netherlands from occupation and emphasise times of great wealth for the nation of the Netherlands (Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs 2020a; Gathier 2015). These presentations often silence the colonial histories of the Netherlands. This is an often-occurring silence in the presentation of the modernity narrative yet as stated by Mignolo ‘there cannot be modernity without coloniality’ (Mignolo 2007). These discursive acts aid in the unproblematic acceptance of the concept of the nation-state as a reality and are necessary, as then the texts can further the narrative by explaining the modern values which the nation-state has acquired over time. ‘The Netherlands is a democracy and a constitutional state. This means that everyone has the same rights and that everyone must abide by the same rules. In the Netherlands, freedom, equality and solidarity play a central role’ (Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs 2016b). Texts depict a history of the Netherlands as one including a struggle towards modernity: ‘After 1960, more women worked and studied. There was also more freedom for children. Less people went to the church’ (Gathier 2015, 203) and present the Netherlands as a modern nation embracing secularisation. ‘In the Netherlands everyone lives by the law. The law is more important than religion’ (Gathier 2015, 222). Concepts using words such as the modern family, the modern kitchen or the modern women, are described (Appel 2015; Appel 2017). Values of democracy are presented as universally positive and individuals are encouraged, through test questions and course books, to understand electoral systems (Bakker 2016; Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs 2020a) thus promoting the democratic nation-state structure. These are important actions as the narrative which presents European nation-states as the example of modernity allows us to construct modern citizens who resides within them (Mayblin 2017; Mignolo 2017). Citizens who enjoy the rights connected to this status of modernity, a first step to be able to identify the non-citizen, not privy to these same rights.

The ideal modern citizen presented in the discourse will be referred to in this section as: The Us. The photos used in the texts present a homogenised version of The Us, presented as mostly white, in comparison to the often racialised Other (Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs 2020a; Appel 2015). The texts encourage the reader to understand the values of the Netherlands, presenting these values as universally embraced by The Us, values critical to the success of society (Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs n.d.-b).

Have you learned what is important in the Netherlands? Then you sign a piece of paper. This paper is called a participation statement. By doing so, you state you will actively participate in Dutch society and that you respect what is important in the Netherlands. (Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs n.d.-b)
The Us is presented as embracing concepts which are associated with modernity: such as sustainability ‘Zara always turns all her lights off’ (Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs 2020a) an individual responsibility for health: ‘Smart people eat fruit’ (Appel 2017, 105) and an adoption of new supposedly modern ways of living, providing benefits to the modern citizen such as more time. ‘These days, doing groceries is easy … . There is an online supermarket. A strong man brings the groceries to the house of the housewife ... the housewife now has time and energy left. She goes one hour per day to the gym’ (Appel 2017, 93).

The Us is further presented as embracing concepts related to a market-based society, characteristically attributed to the imperial modern nation-state, such as productivity, well-earned leisure activities and life-long learning. Paid employment is presented in the texts as the central modus of participation in society, expected of all citizens:

In the Netherlands, most people between the ages of 15 and 65 have a job. Men and women work, also women with small children. If you work you can earn your own money, have contact with other people, learn new things and learn the language better. (Gathier 2015, 151)

The Us demonstrates the embodiment of these concepts in their daily activities and in turn contributes to the success of the overall society. ‘In the Netherlands, we ask all citizens to contribute towards a pleasant and safe society, e.g. by working, going to school or by taking part in voluntary work’ (Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs 2016b). These exerts demonstrate how discourse actively constructs the native Dutch as the ideal citizen, the embodiment of modernity. As stated by Mayblin ‘Certain human bodies exist in the past, while others inhabit a modern present and embody the future’ (Mayblin 2017, 78). The Us is presented as the future to which the unmodern newcomer should strive to reach.

The modern Us are not only economically productive but are also self-sufficient and self-governing. The texts themselves serve the purpose of producing these kinds of citizens by informing the reader on how to independently navigate the systems in society (Stichting Blik op Werk 2019; Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs 2016a; Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs 2019). The texts extend on this by discursively placing emphasis on independence: ‘Family in the Netherlands is not as important as it is for example in Turkey or Africa’ (Gathier 2015, 45). The texts promote self-reliance behaviours for oneself and towards fellow citizens such as the elderly, (Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs 2020a; Bakker 2016) all to avoid reliance on government supports. ‘We take care of ourselves. But we also take care of each other. The government helps when needed’ (Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs n.d.-b). Dutch citizens are presented as embracing behaviours which contribute to the ‘pleasant’ functioning of society, simultaneously implying the assumed problems associated with people who are not Dutch:

Most Dutch people find it important that their house and garden look neat ... They make sure that the outside of their garden looks clean ... the garbage is in the right container and that there is no clutter in front of the house or in the garden. (Gathier 2015, 90)

This self-sufficiency towards oneself and one’s neighbours is continuously presented, strengthening the understanding that welfare programmes are systems which the successful modern citizen does not need. ‘Citizens must, in principle, maintain themselves.
If this is not possible, and nobody can help, the government will provide assistance’ (Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs 2016b).

**Construction of the Unmodern Other as a Potential Threat**

Once the documents have clarified the Netherlands as a nation-state, its borders and its modern citizens, it presents dichotomies between this ideal and those not embodying these values of modernity: The Other. The creation of The Us and the Other is a co-productive process, where each time one is described, the assumptions about the opposing party are brought to light. The analysis shows that the texts not only contribute to the discursive framing of an unmodern Other but extend this imaginary by presenting individuals embodying this Otherness as a potential threat to services and values.

The texts present assumptions that the Other is inherently different from the Dutch citizen and engage in discursive acts which strengthen the distance between them: (Bakker 2016; ProDemos 2016). ‘The contact between Dutch people and people with a different background – allochthone – is often a problem. Some people think that there are too many allochtonen in the Netherlands’ (Gathier 2015, 203). This assumed difference is a foundational colonial concept seen throughout history and as described by Mayblin is ‘informed by histories of “race” sciences but endures today because of the continued logics of coloniality’ (Mayblin 2017, 73). The texts partake in this by often depicting the Other in a racialised way, presenting an assumed state of non-whiteness. Books present study questions such as ‘what do we call someone who is not Dutch?’ (Appel 2015, 75) next to a photo of a black individual or present a photo of a black child with the text ‘I was born in Africa’ (Appel 2015, 77). Texts present the commonly used Dutch term of ‘black school’ as ‘schools with children who speak a different language then Dutch’ (Bakker 2016, 76) and present this further in a negative light: ‘But children in black schools all have a learning delay right?’ (Bakker 2016, 76). Texts show an assumption of a Muslim identity of the Other, with questions focusing on Islamic dress, emphasising discussions on topics such as the use of headscarves (Gathier 2015; Appel 2017). The texts display the assumptions that the Other lives their daily life differently from the Us, and therefore explain what adjustments need to be made in order to assimilate. Explanations of how the Us carry out daily activities further strengthen the assumed unanimous identity of the Dutch citizens, silencing any possibilities for diversity in how Dutch citizens interact or participate in celebratory moments (Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs 2020a; Gathier 2015; Appel 2015; Bloks-Jekel et al. 2016). ‘Apple pie is part of a Dutch birthday’ (Appel 2017 238).

The Other is not only presented as different as such but is presented as an embodiment of un-modernity. As described in the previous section, texts explain the values described as universally embraced by the modern Dutch nation-state and its citizens. Some of these values are repeatedly brought forward in the texts, displaying an underlying assumption that the intended audience of these texts does not inherently possess or understand these modern values. For example, the texts continuously emphasise Gender rules and norms (ProDemos 2016) displaying an assumption that the reader embodies a pre-modern view of women and gender when compared to the claimed Dutch modern standards: ‘A Muslim would like their children to be circumcised. According to Dutch law, this is allowed for boys but not for girls. His daughters therefore are not allowed to be
circumcised’ (Gathier 2015, 222). Beyond the presentation of gender, the texts also display an assumption that the Other potentially embraces tendencies towards violence. This assumption is displayed by emphasising specific parts of the Dutch constitution ‘Only the state can use violence’ (ProDemos 2016, 20) and as conditions for taking the integration exams. ‘Aggressive behaviour, such as swearing or threatening to hit, will not be accepted’ (Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs 2020b, 4). The texts demonstrate an assumption that the Other is low-skilled or low educated and destined to participate in low paid positions in the labour market (Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment). Example test questions explain situations of working illegally or below the minimum income (ProDemos 2016) and options for schooling presented in books often do not include higher education such as universities (Gathier 2015; Bloks-Jekel et al. 2016; Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment) displaying an assumption that this level of education will be unattainable.

The Other is therefore presented as an embodiment of the traditional values presumed to be embraced by the unmodern nation-states from which they have travelled. Values which are concerned as ‘modern’, such as openness towards homosexuality and gender rights, are presented as universally embraced. This universality is left unquestioned yet is presented as fact. The continued repetition of them serves the purpose of co-production: reproducing the image of the modern Dutch nation-state, while also discursively describing the unmodern Other, assumed to not adopt the same values. ‘Everyone is equal: all people have equal worth, and the same rules apply to everyone. Doesn’t matter if you are man or woman, gay or straight, if you were born in the Netherlands or in another country’ (ProDemos 2016, 12).

Once this unmodern Other is discursively produced, the texts further extend this imaginary by presenting it as a potential threat; to how Dutch society functions, and to its shared values: ‘These values can only be maintained if everyone actively contributes toward society’ (Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs 2016b). The Other is assumed to be a potential threat if they do not learn to navigate systems independently, beginning with the civic integration system itself: ‘You have to arrange your own integration process. You are the one who has to learn, and you are the one who has to seek help. You must also arrange the integration examination yourself’ (Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs 2016a, 4). The construction of a threat is also focused on the welfare state with texts emphasising that reliance on welfare is a last resort:

The money for welfare is paid for by people in the Netherlands who pay taxes, it is meant to help people who really need it. If you have partly your own income, then the government should know that and lower your welfare payment. (ProDemos 2016, 18)

The view of the refugee as a potential threat to the system is strengthened by the portrayal of the ‘successful’ refugee in the texts. The success stories show refugees who embody the modern values being presented to them, who have independently completed the necessary administrative work on time and successfully passed all exams (Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs 2020a; Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs 2016a). The successful refugee is not lazy and is helpful towards their fellow refugees (van de Craats and Deutekom 2018) ‘Anything is better than doing nothing’ (van de Craats and Deutekom 2018, 129). The successful refugee demonstrates the self-sufficiency valued in Dutch citizens by solving problems themselves rather than asking for help (Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs 2020a;
Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs 2016a). ‘You are responsible for passing the exam. You have to study for your exam. If you need help, make sure you get it’ (Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs n.d.-a, 2).

**Hierarchical Positioning Between The Us and The Other**

The creation of this potential threat justifies the utilisation of governing strategies placing the Us in a hierarchical positioning in relation to the Other: confirming their imagined differences and presenting these strategies as tools to minimise the assumed risk. The texts participate in the construction of this hierarchy by presenting the ‘integrator’ in examples and exam questions as subservient – never in a position of authority, often asking for permission or guidance from the Dutch superior (Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs 2020a). This hierarchy, and the possible negative consequences of it, is presented in texts as something that must be accepted, even expected, and as something that can improve if the Other demonstrates desirable behaviours:

> Sometimes as a foreigner you may encounter discrimination at your workplace. For example, you are a Muslim and your colleagues are annoyed that you want to pray. It can help if you don’t get mad too quickly. Sometimes it’s just a joke and something that’s not that important. Often it stops if you are a good colleague yourself. (Gathier 2015, 167)

The hierarchy is further strengthened by positioning the Other in a situation of having to forever demonstrate or display to the Us that they are striving to adopt the values of the modern Dutch society: ‘You have to show that you know enough about the Netherlands, you speak the Dutch language, and you know what life is like in the Netherlands’ (Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs 2016a, 5).

The government, the formal body representing the Us, is discursively positioned as responsible to minimise the risk the unmodern Other represents until they have proven they can be trusted, for example, by controlling for fraud during testing (Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs 2020b) or by controlling their finances: ‘You will not receive the money yourself. DUO will pay the school, using your loan. DUO will only pay original invoices, not a copy of the invoice’ (Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs 2016a, 10). The government is justified in the use of disciplinary measures against those demonstrating they are not actively embracing modern values. This can be seen in the texts described the signing of the participation statement, whereby the participant agrees to embrace Dutch values: ‘Did you not sign the participation statement within 1 year? If so, you will have to pay a fine to DUO. And you will not be able to borrow money from DUO anymore’ (Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs n.d.-b). The value of time is emphasised in the texts and punitive actions are appropriate against the Other who demonstrates they don’t embrace it (Bloks-Jekel et al. 2016; Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs 2020b). ‘If you are late, you will not be permitted to take the examination. You will have to re-register and pay again’ (Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs 2016a, 7). Additionally, the government and its formal institutions are positioned to make decisions about knowledge legitimacy, classifying specific sites of knowledge acquisition as acceptable, and further linking the opportunity for financial support to this classification: (Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs 2019) ‘On this website you find schools that have been checked by Blik op Werk. These are good quality schools. You can only lend money from
DUO for courses from schools with a Blik op Werk approval’ (Stichting Blik op Werk 2019).

Integration is thus operationalised in a way that makes the regulation of the actions of the Other easier. The effort one put towards their integration is measured in hours spent in class (Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs 2019). Integration is measured with a beginning: ‘The integration period begins: when you receive a residency permit from the IND’ (Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs 2016a, 4) and end point ‘If you pass this exam, then you are officially integrated’ (Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs 2019). Integration is presented as a status that can only be achieved by navigating the system that has been set in place by the nation-state: ‘Only then you are officially integrated’ (Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs 2019). These quotes also demonstrate the discrepancy and inter-changeable use of the term integration within the texts, presenting a broader concept of integration when actually referring to a specific civic integration programme.

This hierarchical relation within civic integration is embedded in concepts of neoliberal logics. Contractualisation appears throughout the programme, when signing up for courses (Stichting Blik op Werk 2019) or when signing of the participation statement ‘By doing so, you state that you will actively participate in Dutch society and that you respect what is important in the Netherlands’ (Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs n.d.-b). Furthermore, the texts present the pathway to integration and in such to modernity, as a pathway to economic participation. Employment or activities which will assist in obtaining employment, such as building a network (Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment) are presented as central to the concept of integration. Test questions focus largely on activities related to seeking and acquiring work, developing a successful business, long-term career planning and lifelong learning (Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs 2020a). In contrast with The Us, un-paid volunteer work is not a valued form of participation for the Other (Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment). Dutch language acquisition is promoted as non-negotiable in the process of integration as it is a necessary tool to participate in employment: (Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment 2016) ‘Speaking the Dutch language is vital in this context’ (Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs 2016b).

**Discussion**

Our research had two aims: to critically analyse discourse in texts in the civic integration program and to explore the usefulness of a post-colonial lens in understanding how this discourse has come to be. Considering the findings of previous research done on the Dutch integration program, the results we have presented of Othering and hierarchical ordering of humans may be considered unsurprising. We argue that the familiarity of our results is in fact what makes them surprising: the discursive acts previously displayed in research examining Dutch policy are actively being reproduced within texts used at the level of practice, without being ‘watered down’ or adapted. Our research therefore demonstrates how indestructible the practice of Othering is across multiple levels of integration programmes. Additionally, our decolonial lens allows us to explore how indestructible the practice of Othering is over time.

Recognising our aim of exploring alternative discourses, we would like to recognise decoloniality. Decoloniality embraces processes of acknowledging histories and delinking from legacies which have contributed to silences within the dominant narrative of
Western modernity (Mignolo 2017; Quijano 2007). Processes of decolonisation have been growing in importance across fields such as the arts, science and education. The civic integration programme is an education programme falling under DUO, the government arm responsible for education, yet it has been largely left out of these discussions of decolonisation. Therefore, our discussion aims to further unwrap our results by questioning: What would a decolonised civic integration programme look like? Furthermore, at the end of our discussion, we will look to the future by applying this analysis to the discourse of the new civic integration programme.

Mayblin (2017) acknowledges the role that modernity logics have played over time in shaping a hierarchical ordering of humans. Using this lens, we can consider the civic integration programme as a core practice of othering (Oomen and Leenders 2020). By categorising groups as required to participate, and further constructing the Other in texts as our research has demonstrated, the programme is participating in the strengthening of the subject-object, culturist hierarchies that have been seen throughout history (Rodríguez 2018; Mayblin 2017; Bhambra 2017). This discursive shaping of minority cultures and the further presentation of them as potential threats requiring specific modes of governance is not unique to the Netherlands, the same practices can be seen increasingly across many European countries. This increased focus on culture has been described by Schinkel as a practice that combines race and culture into new forms of neo-racism or cultural racism (Schinkel 2017) all while claiming to be non-racist. Cultural aspects have replaced the ‘biological’ understanding of difference seen in racism of colonial times, but still operate in a way that attributes inherent traits to cultural groups which are later pinpointed as reasons for their failed integration (Korteweg 2017).

The results of our analysis display how modernity and modern values are unquestionably attributed to the discursive representation of the Dutch nation-state and its citizens. In this way, the texts simultaneously attach inherently unmodern traits to the Other on a collective level. This co-production is highlighted by Schinkel in his statement ‘One of the ways in which Western European national societies (re)articulate their identities is by highlighting what supposedly does not properly belong to them’ (Schinkel 2017, 2). Texts used in practice are actively contributing to how the Netherlands is discursively ‘bordered’, not only as a nation-state, but as a society (Schinkel 2017). This is an important, often ignored process (Bhambra 2017; Anderson 2019). By discursively shaping the values of Dutch ‘society’, there remains the possibility for individuals living within the borders of the Netherlands to still be hierarchically arranged in terms of their assumed distance from these societal norms (Boersma and Schinkel 2015). In this way, individuals may have crossed physical borders, but socially they remain ‘on the other side’ (Schinkel 2017, 151). Those existing on the ‘other side’ are considered to a challenge to who ‘we’ are and what ‘we’ value (Mayblin 2017; Jones 2016; Walters 2004). Thus the Dutch nation-state, it’s society, it’s citizens and the Other as a potential threat, are a result of continuous, ever-changing constructions (Oomen and Leenders 2020; Rodriguez 2018; Wekker 2016; Löwenheim and Gazit 2009; Jones 2016) a process which texts in the civic integration programme actively contribute to.

This division of groups draws on the belief that there is a taken-for-granted norm (de Waal 2017; Wekker 2016) and something which deviates from it. As described by Mayblin (2017) and Wekker (2016), the concepts of ‘Man’ and ‘Whiteness’, respectively, were introduced along with European modernity and presented the ‘norm’ of white
European, allowing for the mistreatment of people who differed from this imaginary (Mayblin 2017; Quijano 2007). In the present day, these culturist notions of Man and the unmodern Other are embedded in multiple layers of the civic integration programme. In surveys measuring integration (Schinkel 2017; Boersma and Schinkel 2015), in policies, and in the texts in practice, the Dutch identity is presented as the norm, a non-ethnic identity, while the Other is marked in regards to their ethnic groups, across a continuum of modernity. Our study displays that texts promote forms of governance for those how have been ethnically marked as primitive along this continuum and display assumptions that the Other must be ‘taught’ in order to understand modern, liberal values (Joppke 2007c; Bonjour and Duyvendak 2017; Lippert 1999; Löwenheim and Gazit 2009). Assumptions that further define the Other by placing focus on particular ethnic groups, or groups such as refugee women, as especially lacking in modernity (Kirk and Suvariero 2014) and in need of emancipation (Schinkel 2017; Bjornson 2007; Edmunds 2012; Ghorashi 2015).

The Othering and culturist notions seen in the Netherlands and across European integration programmes have real effects for those who find themselves falling outside them (Bacchi 2009). The texts presentation of ‘out-of-place’ humans, as a potential threat, justify reactions that aim to restrict mobility both at or within borders (Bonjour and Duyvendak 2017; Edmunds 2012). A mandated integration programme is one of these reactions, existing as a discursive programme that protects and maintains the boundaries of the society (Scholten, Ghebreab, and de Waal 2019). Texts must be recognised as tools of responsibilisation (Löwenheim and Gazit 2009) tools outlining how one should, and how one should not, live their lives (Joppke 2007c; Mayblin, Wake, and Kazemi 2020). Therefore, texts in practice are actively contributing to the continued project of transforming the ‘primitive Other’, into a productive, modern citizen. Aligning with the concept of active citizenship (Schinkel 2017) this displays how neo-liberal rationalities are contributing to (re)production of colonial histories and to the presentation of citizenship as something to be earned.

**Decolonising civic integration**

Understanding these constructions of the Us and the Other along continuums of modernity, we can consider that integration is being constructed as ‘a process of becoming modern’ (Schinkel 2017, 31). Accepting this construction of integration, we return to the question: What would a decolonised integration programme look like? Prior to answering this question, we critically reflect on our own positions. It is not our intent, nor our place to decide what a decolonised integration programme would be. To answer this, based on our analysis, from our positions, would be counter to the decolonial project. To answer these questions we require decolonised methodologies, centring the voice of the Other in the exploration of alternatives. What we will present therefore is not a recipe for a decolonised civic integration programme but an analysis showing which processes must be undertaken to work towards this goal.

Firstly, decolonising civic integration would require a process of critical reflection and openness over the culturist and racialised representations embedded and normalised within the current programme. It would require us to acknowledge that the division of the modern native Dutch in opposition to the un-modern Other is a division repeated
throughout history, based on logics of Western modernity and a normative, patriarchal concept of Man (Schinkel 2017; Mayblin 2017; Lippert 1999; Wekker 2016). It would recognise configurations of the modern white Dutch and the racialised Other as not unique to the Netherlands, but that ‘a similar configuration is operative in other international settings that have an imperial history’ (Wekker 2016, 1). Recognising this is critical, as a civic integration programme based on constructions of the Other, (Suvarierol and Kirk 2015) group targeting, (Joppke 2007c) and hierarchically positioning is a contradiction in itself (Yanow and Van Der Haar 2013) never contributing to integration, instead contributing to an impossible project for the Other of striving for a status modernity, deemed as inherent to The Us (Schinkel 2017). Decolonising civic integration requires a decolonisation process across all levels of integration, from policy to the texts used in practice, recognising how they all contribute to the indestructible Othering we see today.

Secondly, a decolonised view on integration in the Netherlands and other postcolonial settings would require recognising how colonial powers shaped conceptualisations of migration and asylum historically, and how those conceptualisations continue to operate today. For example, international frameworks such as the 1951 Geneva Convention for the Status of Refugees were initially written to protect only those refugees who were displaced within Europe, reflecting the colonialist powers responsible for its implementation. This protocol was eventually expanded in 1967 to cover other International contexts (Mayblin 2017) and to include others under the definition of ‘refugee’ but this silence continues to shape present-day notions of who a refugee is (Mayblin 2017). It must be acknowledged that the postcolonial era introduced new forms of migration. As former colonies became more mobile, arriving at the shores of their former colonisers, ‘legal and practical barriers have been developed to re-inscribe that very immobility which characterised colonial subjugation’ (Mayblin 2017, 34). This history is largely silenced yet continues to have its afterlife in programmes today. For example, the Dutch Civic Integration Abroad programme, introduced in 2008, requires that individuals pass the first tests of the civic integration programme prior to being allowed to leave their home country (Joppke 2007c). Countries such as Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Japan, Monaco, Vatican City, USA, South Korea, Switzerland and EU/EER countries are exempt from this (Immigration and Naturalisation Service 2020). Countries required to participate are often labelled as ‘non-Western’, regardless of the geographical position in relation to the Netherlands. A decolonised civic integration programme would recognise that labels such as ‘non-Western’, are examples of cultural selection, (Schinkel 2017) with ‘non-Western’ meaning ‘non-modern’ (Yanow and Van Der Haar 2013; Ghorashi 2015). It would recognise these forms of hierarchy as new racism, presented as seemingly innocent (Wekker 2016) but which are damaging in their effect, (Schinkel 2017) operating as tools to prevent the ‘unwanted migration’ of the unmodern Other (Joppke 2007b; Bonjour and Duyvendak 2017).

Building on this, decolonising civic integration requires us to question if a decolonised civic integration programme can even exist, or if integration programmes are themselves a result of the colonial project, a continued attempt to solidify the boundaries between the Us and the Other, between the modern and the unmodern (Schinkel 2017). It would require us to recognise concepts such as integration and citizenship as products of modernity (Mignolo 2017). The question on whether to then reject these concepts, or what less harmful alternatives could exist, must be part of a decolonial approach to
civic integration but must not be done through speculation, failing to involve those who find themselves as newcomers. This requires us then to also turn a critical eye to research in this field. Decolonising civic integration requires a decolonisation of the knowledge and approaches within integration research. It requires acknowledgment of how race and colonial histories are perpetuated in current research, leaving concepts such as integration or the integrator unproblematised (Essed and Nimako 2006). We align ourselves with suggestions made by Schinkel (2017) and Korteweg (2017) that research on social issues such as unemployment, should not be further clouded with a label of ‘integration’, as this label does not provide solutions to the root cause of these issues, and instead increase the burden on the integrator (Schinkel 2017; Korteweg 2017). There is thus a need for openness to new methodologies while exploring civic integration alternatives, methodologies which centre – not silence – the voices of those who find themselves in new unfamiliar surroundings, those who are actively attempting to create ruptures and/or those who are striving to delink (Mignolo 2017) from the integration system as it has been presented today.

Considering this, do proposals for the new 2022 civic integration programme display an attempt to separate from the histories and discourse we’ve described above? An examination of government communication unfortunately suggests the opposite, displaying a continued strengthening of the above-displayed discourses. The program mandates integrators spend more time understanding values presented as ‘universal’: ‘By signing the participation statement, the person required to integrate demonstrate their involvement in the Dutch society … In the new program the participation statement trajectory (PVT) will be intensified’ (Koolmees 2019). The new programme also reconfigures its representation of the Other, adding Turkish migrants as a group required to integrate, justified with the fact that their Dutch language abilities and knowledge of ‘how the Dutch society is constructed’ (Koolmees 2020) is limiting participation, especially in paid work (Koolmees 2020). The focus on women as particularly unmodern is emphasised, stating they are in a ‘worse position in comparison to men’ (Koolmees 2019) and ‘… their participation remains delayed and they socialize predominantly within their own circles’ (Koolmees 2019). The hierarchical positioning between the Us and the Other is also strengthened. A plan for ‘unburdening’ in presented, in which government controls all spending of refugees receiving welfare payments for a period of six months, with the justification that they are ‘extra vulnerable due to factors such as language, cultural differences, traumas and a limited social network’ (Koolmees 2019). Furthermore, there is a stronger focus on contracts as tools for self-governance and for justifying disciplinary measures. ‘The Plan Integration and Participation (PIP) takes the form as an official agreement. This makes it possible for the municipalities to take action such as fines if the agreements in the (PIP) are not met’ (Koolmees 2019). Seeing this discourse in the governmental documents for the new programme, we can assume that texts used in practice will be developed to align with these goals and will thus be reproducing this discourse in practice.

Conclusion

Our study has presented a critical discourse analysis of texts used within the Dutch civic integration programme. We have demonstrated that texts actively reproduce categories
which stem from colonial histories. We have highlighted how logics of modernity operate
within these texts and have questioned the inherent ambivalence that exists between inte-
gration, and a programme which separates humans into hierarchical groups. We have
suggested that this contradiction contributes to the lack of success of the programme
in relation to its own limited markers of integration, as well as to the discrimination
of those who find themselves Othered by it. Discourses today may have dropped classifi-
cations of autochthon or allochthones, but have replaced them with a vague concept of
‘civic integrators’ (inburgerers in Dutch). This group is presented as embodying the
assumptions and negative stereotypes that have been attributed to their counterparts
throughout history, becoming the new Other, the un-modern citizen needing to be sim-
ultaneously surveilled and emancipated (Yanow and Van Der Haar 2013; Jones 2016).
The group which is the focus of governing technologies, some explicit in their use of pun-
ishments and sanctions, and others implicit, aimed at promoting self-governance
towards desirable behaviours (Bacchi 2009; Löwenheim and Gazit 2009). The group
which remains in limbo: ‘racializing people of color for endless generations, never
getting to belong to the Dutch nation’ (Wekker 2016, 15). We can conclude that if the
civic integration programme continues to be left out of decolonisation discussions,
then it will continue to Other and discriminate. Discourse presenting the new pro-
gramme of 2022 shows a continued silence in these areas. Further research applying
methodologies which stay true to the decolonial project is needed to understand how
these concepts will operate within the new integration programme and how these pro-
grammes could become ‘decolonised’. Discussions such as this facilitate the creation of
spaces for new narratives and contribute to potentially embracing new approaches to
understanding and responding to human mobility.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by the Dutch Research Council (Nederlandse Organisatie voor
Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek, NWO) [grant number 023.014.012].

ORCID

Nadine Blankvoort http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2037-7887
Debbie Laliberte Rudman http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5486-8994
Margo van Hartingsveldt http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8288-0002
Anja Krumeich http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5399-3868

References

Anderson, B. 2019. “New Directions in Migration Studies: Towards Methodological De-
Appel, A. 2017. Inburgeringsexamen A2: Studieboek voor het inburgeringsxamen. Aardenhout:
Uitgeverij Appel.


