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## Speaking of Belonging: Learning to be “Good Citizens” in the Context of Voluntary Language Coaching Projects in Amsterdam, the Netherlands

This article explores citizenship education for adult immigrants through informal language education in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Based on data collected over thirteen months of ethnographic research among volunteer Dutch language coaches in Amsterdam, the primary methods used in this study were in-depth semi-structured interviews and participant observation. While the primary focus of this article is on the ways in which informal educational settings contribute to processes of adult citizenship education, this paper also underscores some of the perceived barriers to integration faced by adult immigrants in the Netherlands. Adopting a Foucauldian theoretical approach to governmentality, this paper considers how volunteer Dutch language coaches both reproduce and challenge contemporary discourses around citizenship and belonging in Dutch society. Experiences and expressions of citizenship among volunteer Dutch language coaches reveal how entangled discourses of cultural difference and neoliberal “active” citizenship shape state and everyday notions of good citizenship practice and integration.

### Keywords:

citizenship, voluntarism, immigration, ethnography, the Netherlands

### 1 Introduction

Public, state-funded education has long been considered key to the process of civil enculturation in contemporary nation-states. Anthropologists such as Levinson (2011, p. 280) and Stoler (1995) note that this has generally been the case whether or not educational institutions have made teaching citizenship an explicit part of the curricula. Such institutions have also been key sites for the civil enculturation of immigrant youth (Schiffauer, Baumann, Kastoryano, & Vertovec, 2004). In countries where migrant youth attend the same schools as national citizens, they learn the language, norms and values of their adopted society through the curriculum. In the Netherlands, immigrant youth become eligible for Dutch citizenship upon reaching the age of majority and successfully completing Dutch secondary education. Daily contact with members of mainstream Dutch society also make places like public schools important spaces where migrant youth learn the often unspoken expectations and etiquette for belonging in Dutch society (e.g. how to interact with peers, authority figures and bureaucracy, expectations for civic participation, or the acceptable boundaries of cultural or religious difference in the public sphere). These norms and values are learnt through seemingly unremarkable everyday encounters, yet such interactions flag a whole series of assumptions, discursive habits, and clichés through which the nation is

routinely expressed and reproduced (Billig, 1995; Anderson, 1991). Given their differing levels of exposure to spaces of civil enculturation, adult newcomers present different challenges in the realm of citizenship education. In the Netherlands, adult immigrants are widely perceived by policy makers, politicians, scholars and native Dutch<sup>1</sup> (like my interlocutors) as more isolated from members of mainstream Dutch society than their children. This is often compounded by economic and political marginalization, and is viewed as contributing to adult newcomers’ struggle with understanding and adapting to the expectations, behaviors, and attitudes of Dutch society.

In this article, I draw on 13 months of ethnographic fieldwork in Amsterdam (July 2009-2010, May 2011) to examine how practices of cultural and moral assimilation widely viewed as foundational to newcomer’s claims to Dutch citizenship are both expressed and challenged by front-line immigrant integration workers. By focusing on the infrastructure of immigration in the Netherlands, I address how the state’s program for adult immigrants’ civic integration has been taken up (and in some ways re-worked) by Dutch citizens who work as volunteers with adult newcomers. I first provide some background on how immigrant integration policies have been implemented in the Netherlands, followed by an overview of anthropological approaches to the study of citizenship, and the research design. I then draw on my ethnographic data to explore some of the ways in which model citizenship practices are conceptualized, negotiated, and expressed by the key research participants in this study: voluntary Dutch language coaches. These participants reveal some of the key discursive tensions around immigration, national belonging, and citizenship in the Netherlands. Using a Foucauldian perspective on governmentality informed by the work of Tania Li, Ann Laura Stoler, Aihwa Ong, and Mitchell Dean, I show how citizenship is made in the everyday through the ways in which this particular group of citizens consents to, rearticulates, and challenges state and popular discourses surrounding cultural and moral ideas of Dutch citizenship. In doing so, I analyze some of the impacts that the entangled discursive threads of cultural difference and neoliberalism have had on how “good”

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citizenship practice has come to be understood in the everyday.

## 2 Contextualizing citizenship education for adult newcomers

Immigration has become an important factor for policy around citizenship as well as everyday experiences of belonging in contemporary nation-states like the Netherlands. While concerns about immigrants, their role and place in national societies are shared by many countries, the differing histories of immigration (e.g. in Europe and in New World “settler societies” like Canada and the United States) have been important in how nation-states have responded through immigration and citizenship policy. The waves of postcolonial migrants, non-Western immigrants, and asylum seekers who settled in Europe during the latter half of the twentieth century have often challenged existing national identities and provoked new questions for living together in increasingly culturally plural societies. Such concerns have often been considered unprecedented in the Netherlands and across the European Union. Muslims especially have been positioned in the context of the Netherlands as having dramatically different – even incommensurable – cultural, historical, and political values and norms than the national majority (cf. Long, in this issue; Silverstein, 2005; Duyvendak, 2011; Geschiere, 2009; Stoler, 1995). The challenges for the civil enculturation of non-Western adult newcomers have contributed to the consensus across all sections of mainstream Dutch society that the Dutch government is at least partially to blame for the failure of many newcomers to demonstrate an appropriate fit through language and social skills acquisition. At the same time, support for cultural diversity (including religious diversity) has come under increasing scrutiny.

In the Netherlands, many contemporary social problems have been blamed on immigrants who had arrived during the “guest worker” period of the 1960s to 1980s, especially those from rural Turkey and Morocco. Such problems include the disproportionately higher rates of unemployment, dependence on the welfare state, criminality, lower educational achievement, and marginalization among members of non-Western minority groups than mainstream, native Dutch society. Violent attacks by disenfranchised migrant youth during the 1970s first put the issue of immigrant integration in Dutch society firmly on the political agenda in the Netherlands. Since then, non-Western immigrants’ perceived failure to integrate has fuelled the image of these newcomers as a potential threat to Dutch national identity and culture, as well as social cohesion in cities and local communities. Such concerns have been exacerbated as a result of neoliberal ideologies that increasingly align notions of economic productivity with morally and culturally appropriate citizenship practice (Ong, 2006; Muehlebach, 2012; Hemment, 2012; Erickson, 2012). This has meant that politicians, policy-makers, and my informants view the Dutch citizen as someone who should be self-sufficient and responsible for decreasing their burden on

the welfare state (Björnson, 2007; Ong, 1996; Muehlebach, 2012). These sentiments have been capitalized on by populist, nationalist, right-wing politicians since the early 2000s (Geschiere, 2009; Duyvendak, 2011).

The system of “consociational pillars” that had historically managed Dutch religious and social groups (i.e. Orthodox Protestant, Catholic, secular Liberal and Socialist) proved unsuitable to the needs of the increasingly diverse Dutch population. When transposed in contemporary policy interventions, this historical practice of diversity management (*verzuiling* or pillarization) appeared to hinder rather than aid the integration of non-Western newcomers into mainstream Dutch society. While this approach to managing diversity appeared to work for earlier waves of Dutch-speaking newcomers from the former colonies, non-Western newcomers who had arrived as temporary workers during the 1960s and 1970s were seen to fall through the cracks. Many of the immigrant integration and migrant-youth educational policies implemented during this period have since been deemed utter failures. For instance, under the Education in Minority Language and Culture policy migrant youth left school (often early) with poor Dutch language skills (Björnson, 2007, pp. 67-68). These failures produced or reinforced pervasive, detrimental effects throughout Dutch society that have negatively affected non-Western immigrants and their descendants.

These failures were understood as leading to and reinforcing newcomers’ marginalized position in the Netherlands, as well as creating strain on the welfare state. Located at the epicentre of what the leftist publicist Paul Scheffer (2000) famously called the “multicultural drama” was the notion that all of these social problems could be traced to newcomers’ failure to learn the Dutch language (Geschiere, 2009, pp. 136-137). From the perspective of the late-1990s, the Dutch language appeared as a salve to more recent immigrants’ problems with educational success, employment, social isolation and other anti-social behaviours.

It was not until 1998 that the Dutch government launched its first comprehensive ‘civic integration’ (*inburgering*) legislation directed toward adult immigrants (*Wet Inburgering Nieuwkomers*, Civic Integration of Newcomers Act). This legislation mandated all (non-European Union) immigrants be able to demonstrate a lower intermediate level of Dutch and a basic knowledge of Dutch society as a condition of citizenship (Entzinger, 2004, p. 7). The intention of this policy was that immigrants would become self-sufficient, (economically) productive citizens who helped to build Dutch society. Through this civic integration legislation and the development of its associated educational courses and exams, the Dutch language “emerged as *the* key technology of the Dutch state’s integration program” (Björnson, 2007, p. 65). It is important to consider that while the earliest courses highlighted entering the workforce as a key outcome of this training, the primary policy outcome has since shifted to eligibility for Dutch citizenship (Björnson, 2007; cf. Ghorashi & van Tilberg, 2006).

These transformations have occurred alongside neo-liberal interventions which have affected the relationship between citizens and their state(s). These interventions have had impacts beyond the political decisions that since the 1980s sought to increase trade between states while cutting back the welfare state (e.g. in the United States, Canada, and the Netherlands) (Kennelly & Llewellyn, 2011, pp. 898-899). Through a Foucauldian perspective on governmentality, this paper approaches neoliberalism as an expression of governmental rationale, as a systemic way of thinking that sets the conditions for people to do as they ought by following their own self-interest (Li, 2007a, p. 275; Dean, 2010). Neoliberalism has been grafted onto existing practices and programs of government, transposing a governing logic that draws on market principles into all elements of daily life (Li, 2007b, pp. 284-285; Kennelly & Llewellyn, 2011; Muehlebach, 2012). Although neoliberal interventions settle in different ways across different contexts,

neoliberal logic requires populations to be free, self-managing, and self-enterprising individuals in different spheres of everyday life – health, education, bureaucracy, the professions, and so on. The neoliberal subject is therefore not a citizen with claims on the state but a self-enterprising citizen-subject who is obligated to become an “entrepreneur of himself or herself” (Ong, 2006, p. 14).

Alongside redirecting their populations’ conduct through neoliberal rationale, many states, including the Netherlands, have experienced an erosion of federally-funded social services (cf. Muehlebach, 2012; Kennelly & Llewellyn, 2011; Hemment, 2012; Erickson, 2012). This withdrawal has increasingly placed the responsibility for service provision - including immigrant integration services - on the shoulders of local governments, non- and for-profit organizations, and individuals such as volunteers.

### 3 Studying citizenship education

While the importance of the Dutch language has been traced in the goals and materials used in formal citizenship education policy and programming for adults (Björnson, 2007; Verkaaik, 2009), this idea is also widely shared among members of the Dutch public and in civil society organizations. The value placed on the Dutch language for newcomers’ integration in Dutch society is clear in the establishment of many informal language learning projects. Of these various community-oriented initiatives, volunteer-run Dutch language coaching projects have become an important fixture in the landscape of immigrant integration across the Netherlands.

#### 3.1 Research design

I first came into contact with these projects as a non-native Dutch speaker to improve my language skills. Their ethnographic significance as sites where multiple discourses and practices around citizenship coalesce drew me to focus my research on these programs. I focus in

this article on the views of ten key informants volunteering as language-coaches, volunteers doing administrative work for language coaching projects (i.e. to process and pair new volunteers and students), as well as their project coordinators.<sup>ii</sup> Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key participants, typically lasting one and a half to two hours. Some informants participated in an additional interview, or followed up on our interview by contributing additional information via email. I also draw on data gathered through participant-observation as a non-native speaker in one such language partnership (meeting my coach for two to three hours weekly between January and July 2010), and in language-coaching recruitment sessions. Additionally, I use data gathered from related secondary sources, including language coaching projects’ websites, promotional material, organizational and government policy documents related to newcomer integration. Across my data, key issues emerged through recurring themes, especially in the interconnections between ideas of problematic cultural difference, and the role of communication for immigrant integration and good social participation.

#### 3.2 Volunteer Dutch language coaching projects

The first and largest volunteer language coaching program was developed in Amsterdam in 1999 by *Gilde Amsterdam* (Guild Amsterdam). *Gilde Amsterdam’s SamenSprak* (Speaking Together) project organizes Dutch-speaking volunteers into free, informal conversation partnerships with Dutch language learners. Between 1999 and 2009, similar programs had sprung up in cities and towns across the country, with four others operating in Amsterdam at the time of my research. These projects are organized and supported by myriad foundations, non-profit and governmental bodies, especially the municipal departments responsible for implementing the state-mandated civic integration courses.

The goal of these programs is to help newcomers improve their Dutch language skills, primarily through speaking. This differs from the formal, text-oriented courses most participating language learners will have already completed. These programs are chiefly intended for those with some basic level of proficiency in Dutch, and are seen as complementary or secondary to formal lessons. Speaking partners are usually expected to meet on a weekly basis for approximately two hours over the course of a year. Volunteers typically receive some orientation training over one or two sessions at the start of these programs. This may include some intercultural training as well as advice on how to approach conversation with a language learner. Resources such as Dutch as a Second Language dictionaries or activity booklets may also be provided to new volunteers.

*Gilde Amsterdam* indicated that during 2010 the organization sponsored 327 language coaches and 333 clients from over 86 different countries – although most clients continue to be from Turkish or Moroccan backgrounds (2011, p. 10). Among the language learning clients in *Gilde Amsterdam* and other projects in the city



there were consistently more women (67 %) than men. In 2010 this gender imbalance was slightly higher among those seeking the *Gilde's* language coaching services specifically to help prepare for their civic integration exams (74 % women). Volunteers for these projects are almost exclusively native (white or ethnic) Dutch. With men and women relatively equally represented, these volunteers came from a range of age groups and occupational backgrounds. Most of these volunteers were well-educated (with college or university credentials), and many expressed an interest in both language and other cultures. Like many native Dutch I met over the course of my fieldwork, language coaches frequently spoke multiple languages (i.e. English, French, German, Spanish, Italian).

Teachers of formal language and civic integration courses often recommend voluntary language coaching services to their students, although the onus is on the student to enrol. As early as 2011, voluntary language coaching organizations anticipated the growing importance of and demand for their free services (especially among those required to undertake civic integration) as federal subsidies for formal language study were clawed back, set to be eliminated in 2014.<sup>iii</sup> In my interview with the director of *Gilde Amsterdam*, she described the program's origins as "not completely related to *inburgering*," but seeking to fill a service gap "for people coming from other countries, trying to speak Dutch." As with the formal civic integration legislation, most who seek out these services are considered non-Western newcomers, commonly called *allochtonen* (allochthons) (cf. Geschiere, 2009).

Volunteers working with language coaching projects are motivated by a variety of personal and professional interests. While some are recruited via word of mouth, most of the language coaches I spoke with decided to participate after seeing an advertisement or article in the newspaper, attending an information session, or seeking out such an organization of their own initiative. José, a native Dutch woman in her sixties, volunteered for many years as both a language coach and in helping with the coordination of new volunteers. She discussed how all new volunteers she encountered shared some common interests and motivations. In her experience, everyone who volunteers

thinks that language is important. Everyone also thinks it's important to help outsiders that are new in the society. (...) It is a sort of interconnecting, the non-native speaker and the language coach, from all the language coaches I am sure that this is the most important motivation; the sort of 'language' *plus* 'helping strangers', so that they are no longer strangers.

The widespread emphasis on language as key to social participation has meant that volunteer-based Dutch language coaching projects occupy a unique and important place in the contemporary infrastructure of immigrant integration and adult citizenship education.

#### 4 An ethnographic approach to citizenship

In elaborating upon how acceptable citizenship practice is conceptualized and taught, this article examines citizenship education as it occurs through everyday, informal experiences and relationships. In doing so, I approach citizenship ethnographically as more than simply another trope for belonging. In the Foucauldian sense of "subjectification," I follow the work of anthropologists who understand citizenship as a discursive process of national subject-making that operates as a site where a vast array of meanings and distinctions coalesce (Ong, 1996, 2006; Muehlebach, 2012; Levinson, 2011; Tonkens, 2006). Explicit and banal practices of subject-making are cultivated through complex and pervasive power relations (Ong, 1996, p. 737; cf. Billig, 1995). Citizenship is a relationship between actors in the public sphere, a marker of community membership that carries with it not only legal rights and obligations, but also social and moral expectations. While some of these expectations are dictated by the state through its policies and laws, many more are expressed, cultivated and maintained through citizen-subjects' relationships in the various social spaces in which they live. With this in mind, citizenship is to be understood as "a discursive practice in the sense that citizens actually talk citizenship into being – by defining, including, and excluding certain people and practices" (Hurenkamp, Tonkens, & Duyvendak, 2011, p. 211). Thus, citizenship education is understood broadly: as taking place not only within formal, educational spaces (civic integration or language classrooms), but also through everyday interactions and engagements with others that convey and police the norms, values, and expectations for social etiquette and behaviour among co-citizens. As such, citizenship signifies an analytical field of governmental practice. The "informal practices of compromise and accommodation, everyday resistance or outright refusal" (Li, 2007a, p. 279) by socially-situated subjects give insight into the ways in which citizenship is part of a complex process of subject-making.

In the Netherlands, two powerful, interconnected discourses inform contemporary ideals of citizenship practice at the levels of policy through to everyday discussions of belonging in the neighbourhood, city or nation. These are what have been called the "culturalization" of citizenship, as well as the turn to market principles and logics that have been discussed as an expression of neoliberal governmentality (cf. Ong, 1996; Dean, 2010).

From my observation of statements from mainstream and populist politicians, Dutch policy documents, discussions occurring in the news, in popular journals, in social media, and across the informal social spaces that Levinson (2011, p. 334) has called the "street," aspects of "culture" have become increasingly important in determining claims to citizenship in the Netherlands (Tonkens, Hurenkamp, & Duyvendak, 2008; Schinkel, 2010; Duyvendak, 2011). Although citizenship is always cultural, this phenomenon has been described as "a process in which more meaning is attached to cultural participation (in terms of norms, values, practices and traditions),



either as alternative or in addition to citizenship as rights and socio-economic participation” (Tonkens et al., 2008, p. 6). These discursive practices draw on historical, colonial processes of difference-making wherein often unspoken aspects of race, religion, class, linguistic ability, gendered and sexual difference are rearticulated as morally-charged “cultural” attributes (cf. Stoler, 1995; Silverstein, 2005). These substantive dimensions of citizenship become increasingly privileged over legal status in discussions of belonging in the Netherlands and have become ever more central to federal immigrant integration policy.

These changes have also occurred in the context of the “shrinking” welfare state, where rather than representing a shift to something new, neoliberal rationale has reworked earlier and evolving notions of Dutch cultural practice for new purposes (Li, 2007b, p.284). In transposing the meaning of key terms through neoliberal rationale, certain behaviours and attitudes have become understood as part of a Dutch national cultural ethic – including self-sufficiency, responsibility, and active participation in Dutch society. The worthy citizen in the eyes of the state (and perceptibly among citizens themselves) has been transformed into a new kind of moral subject. This draws on a notion of “activity” presented in opposition to ideas of passivity and entitlement that are now connected to the welfare state. Among my informants, “good” citizenship encompasses contemporary notions of neoliberal “active” citizenship while maintaining ties to older forms cultural belonging (cf. Kidd, 2002; Walzer in Cattelino, 2004; Kennelly & Llewellyn, 2011). Figures in the Dutch populist Right have been quick to marshal these powerful discourses to normalize the notion that the problems associated with minority groups living in the Netherlands today (especially Muslim, Moroccan- and Turkish-Dutch) are due to their supposedly “backward,” foreign cultural or religious beliefs. In populist discourse, such beliefs have contributed to these newcomers’ failure to integrate and their burdening the welfare state.

Historically, the idea of participation or activity that informs notions of morally or culturally acceptable citizenship practice has been strongly tied to conceptions of productive or socially useful work. The most important of these forms of work continues to be remunerative labour, widely understood as key in the process of moulding individuals into proper, or today active citizens (Erickson, 2012, p. 170; Muehlebach, 2012). While remunerative work may be privileged, the idea of productive or socially useful work also encompasses forms of unpaid labour, such as voluntarism. The linkages between notions of citizenship and the growing role of volunteers<sup>iv</sup> in social service provision has highlighted how voluntarism can be understood “as an exercise in statecraft that is as much directed at the volunteers themselves as the people they ostensibly assist” (Hemment, 2012, p. 534).

## **5 Citizenship education in practice: accessing and assessing citizenship in daily life**

Based on the perspectives of language coaching volunteers and opinions expressed through media, from the mouths of politicians, and in conversations during my fieldwork, being a good citizen requires more than completing the formal civic integration requirements. In the following I explore how volunteer language coaches connect culturalized practices to moral notions of citizenship practice. Ethnographic data highlights the tensions inherent in culturalized forms of Dutch citizenship practice, where norms and values are impacted by neoliberal governmentality (Tonkens et al., 2008, p. 6; Björnson, 2007; cf. Muehlebach, 2012). This exploration of citizenship in practice underscores how communication – usually in Dutch – is viewed as key to accessing ideas of good Dutch cultural participation. This conception of citizenship practice also highlights how only certain groups of newcomers are deemed social, if not legal targets for citizenship education. While these discussions bring questions of racial, religious, gendered, and other differences to the fore, they also reveal how ideas of belonging based on these often unspoken criteria are challenged or reconciled by newer threads of citizenship discourse.

### **5.1 What does it mean to integrate?**

Many people in Dutch society, from politicians to scholars, media commentators, and my research participants have been outspokenly critical of how past Dutch governments have handled immigrant integration. Many of my interlocutors flagged how past measures lacked language requirements. Difficulty or the inability to communicate is viewed by many in Dutch society as the major hurdle to newcomers’ integration as Dutch citizens (Entzinger, 2004; Björnson, 2007; Ghorashi & van Tilburg, 2006). This is because communication, learning to speak Dutch, is thought to enable many other forms of valued social participation: holding a job, completing an education, being involved in your child’s education, or otherwise contributing to your community, as through volunteering. Among my informants, these kinds of engagements reflected how the Dutch language is an expression of Dutch cultural integration through a commitment to participating in Dutch society.

With its mandatory language training the introduction of civic integration legislation in 1998 was heralded as an important and overdue measure by many in Dutch society. It has nonetheless received much criticism (cf. Björnson, 2007). It was felt, as by my informants, that the law did not integrate newcomers as active participants in Dutch society in a meaningful way. Research participants’ beliefs about what kinds of knowledge and social behaviours were important in order to participate and contribute to Dutch society differed from (and in some cases even clashed with) the criteria tested through the formal civic integration process. While the civic integration tests emphasized learning Dutch (to a basic working proficiency) and acquiring a rudimentary knowledge about living in Dutch society (i.e. key historical events,



social norms and values, selected legal rights and bureaucratic procedures),<sup>v</sup> there was a general feeling among my informants that “civic integration” (*inburgering*) and “integration” (*integratie*) were qualitatively different; passing the civic integration exams was not equivalent to being integrated into Dutch society. As José framed it,

To civically integrate is an etiquette. You get a sticker on your forehead: naturalized. *So what?* Integration, you see, integration is about seeing how you behave. And that has nothing to do with civic integration. Civic integration is very flattened, very arbitrary criteria.

Other language coaches were also critical of aspects of civic integration, particularly as they related to immigrants’ social integration and participation, their behaviour as citizens. In their critiques, language coaching volunteers recognized some of the structural difficulties that adult newcomers faced that the civic integration requirement was unable to completely resolve.

Civic integration courses did not offer immigrants a “way in” to creating connections with their native Dutch neighbours or other members of mainstream society. Drawing together her past experience as a high school teacher with her experiences as a language coach, Susanne (in her late twenties) commented that integration into Dutch society is often much easier for immigrant children than their parents. In part, this is because youth do not face the same structural barriers to integration. Since these children are enrolled in the Dutch educational system, they learn to speak Dutch and are exposed to many aspects of Dutch society that their parents might not have learned about or experienced. Formal civic integration courses were unable to match the everyday processes of civil enculturation that immigrant and Dutch youth underwent together in the public education system (cf. Schiffauer et al., 2004; Billig, 1995). This is complicated by the recognition by many working in this service sector that Dutch society is not necessarily seen as welcoming from the perspective of newcomers. As Anouk (also in her late twenties) commented, integration or ‘mingling’ as she called it has to go both ways and both sides must be able to accept some cultural differences. Anouk noted how she introduced her partner to other resources, like the neighbourhood community centre (*buurthuis*) where she could meet other people, follow classes and practice her Dutch (for more on these community centres, see Long’s article in this issue). Reflective of Byram’s (2009) advocacy of the “intercultural speaker” approach in foreign language education, my informants described the kind of connections that volunteer language coaches make with newcomers as one way that meaningful social integration can be fostered through language learning.

The importance of volunteer language coaches in facilitating integration as a two-way street is also reflected in how language learning is thought to enable communication, and importantly, cross-cultural understanding. Volunteers come to play a dual role as Dutch

language teachers and as front line citizenship educators. As Bart, a language coach in his sixties, expressed: “when learning the language, you automatically pick up many Dutch things.” That language learning in these partnerships was about more than just speaking Dutch was echoed in the experiences of all of the language coaches with whom I spoke. Through teaching and practicing the language volunteer coaches helped their partners understand Dutch society, its values, norms, and expectations for conduct (cf. Byram, 2009). The significance of Dutch language coaches as informal citizenship educators arose in my research participants’ realization that they were usually one of the only native Dutch people with whom their non-native speaking partners had regular contact. Susanne discussed how in learning to speak Dutch with a language coach, the clients of these programs “also learn from us. So our culture, stuff they do not know about.” In everyday conversations and encounters, language coaches both deliberately and inadvertently flagged modes of participation in Dutch society that they viewed as appropriate, socially meaningful, and productive. What participants described as good citizenship practices were deeply resonant with what has been called neoliberal or active citizenship in policy and scholarship (Kennelly & Llewellyn, 2011; Ong, 2006).

The importance of language coaches as resources and cultural interpreters surfaced in many guises. Anouk found that the husband of her speaking partner would often demand her help to understand or answer letters from the municipal government. Although she found this “annoying,” and a distraction from her partner’s lessons, Anouk felt that she was obliged to help since those letters also concerned her partner. Other language coaches also commented on helping their partners with similar issues, such as writing and formatting a résumé or job application. In addition to assisting their partners in these areas, language coaches acted as guides, helping newcomers understand the idiosyncrasies of Dutch sociality (cf. Byram, 2009, p. 331).

The behaviours and expectations that may constitute important expressions of Dutch sociality are taken for granted by many, and may not be taught in more formal language education or even in civic integration courses. This may be because they are not seen as potential sources of confusion or conflict by native Dutch teachers. José was surprised by a dilemma faced by one of her partners, an Egyptian woman. José’s partner and her husband had recently bought a house and were suddenly thrust into frequent contact with their native Dutch neighbours. José explained that “At a certain moment she came here and sat at the table, and she said, ‘My neighbour came over to me, and he said ‘Hello neighbour.’ And she said, ‘Now, is that good? Or is that not good?’” José was surprised at this question and her partner’s apparent distress over this everyday social interaction. While José explained that in the Netherlands saying hello to your neighbours is “very kindly intended,” in Egypt the same sort of exchange was potentially insulting. As José recognized, these conversation part-

nerships are important resources for newcomers to raise and make sense of cultural differences that may keep them from socializing in ways that native Dutch expect and take for granted.

In their discussion of the benefits of conversation partnerships for immigrants, Anouk and José critiqued the state's civic integration program as inadequate for meaningfully integrating newcomers as good citizens. Yet, through their voluntarism, language coaches effectively extend the reach of the government into the private lives of these potential citizens, while consenting to its operation in their own lives (Hemment, 2012, p. 534; cf. Dean, 2010, p. 38). Newcomers have someone knowledgeable to help comfortably guide them through things like Dutch civil bureaucracy, or making sense of Dutch sociality and culturalised citizenship practice. Meanwhile, language coaches conduct themselves as active members of local and national communities. These partnerships empower volunteers to act, as one program coordinator explained, as (inter)cultural ambassadors in the neighbourhood. By facilitating newcomers' language skills, these coaches helped mitigate what Bart described as a sense of "unease with people you don't understand at all. Not the language, not heritage, customs." In lowering the hurdles to contact between neighbours, volunteers and coordinators understood communication as the ability to speak with others and make oneself understood, but importantly, also a way to convey meaning across cultural difference.

It is through learning about expectations for living in Dutch society that individuals' claims to belonging in the polity are ostensibly assessed by fellow citizens. This comes into sharp focus when one considers the centrality of the cultural and moral dimensions of citizenship practice in the everyday. Volunteer language coaches come to play an important role in how their partners understand Dutch society, how they may construct their identities as Dutch citizens, and in orienting their "moral conduct for group life" among their neighbours and co-citizens (Levinson, 2011, p. 280).

### 5.2 Citizenship is about "seeing how you behave"

The image of citizenship as a complexly layered social, political and economic relationship between people as well as the polity emerged in many different conversations with my interlocutors. José expressed this best when she elaborated on the differing facets of citizenship through what she called the "state citizen" and the "good citizen." She viewed both of these aspects as necessary to understanding the full meaning of citizenship and belonging. The state citizen, predominantly a legal relationship with the nation-state, upheld the laws and "most important norms" of the society, and engaged with the government through the democratic process. For José, the core meanings "regarding the state-citizen are: freedom, equality, fundamental rights, and law and order." To this, José added her idea of the citizen as a culturalised, moral category, as an ethic and engagement with others in society, and not only a formal relationship with the machinery of the state. The good citizen

is a person who to the best of their ability participates in the social and economic life. She wants to trust her fellow citizens, and finds a good upbringing, education and living environment important. He is mindful of his own behaviour and that of others in the public domain. The core meanings here are: solidarity, respect and ethics, including the idea that you treat others in the same manner that you would like to be treated. (José)

For newcomers, access to productive forms of citizenship participation hinged on the ability to communicate. For non-Western immigrants, this meant learning Dutch in order to hold (legal) employment, pursue education, be active in your children's education and upbringing, participate in voluntary work, and build good social relationships with the people you came into contact with on a regular basis, such as neighbours. Bart offered the example of his neighbours to describe when newcomers might be considered Dutch. He viewed his neighbours, former refugees from Croatia who arrived in the Netherlands in 1992, as "fully integrated," having

learned Dutch very quickly. She is a psychologist and he is a technician. They both have work here. Are they Dutch? *Ja*, they have Dutch passports. They speak Dutch. They have a daughter in school here around the corner. They have a double feeling, of course, but I don't object to people having two or more passports. And their home country in their heart. Why not?

In Bart's opinion, good citizens are recognized through how they behave in daily life, where culturalized forms of participation are often seen as more important than legal citizenship status. As José similarly commented, good citizenship practice is more "a qualification of good behaviour" than an question of passport credentials.

The idea of bad behaviour making bad neighbours and citizens is often linked to (potential) Dutch citizens who have non-Western backgrounds. This image was usually connected by language coaches both to individual immigrants' short-comings and to wider structural problems. In particular, language coaches saw many of the social problems faced by Dutch minority groups today as owing to past immigrant integration and migrant-youth educational policies that have left these individuals, as Susanne expressed it, "trying to manage." José felt that these past policies and policy gaps were responsible for "all those Moroccan bastards [*klootzakken*]," who are now "really just criminals." In her opinion, these (often second-generation) Dutch minorities "don't have a cultural problem. They have a social problem." For José, these individuals' poor language skills meant that they did not succeed at school, and in turn were unable to train for a good job. As a result, they resorted to illegal income strategies, such as dealing drugs. "But," José concluded, challenging the populist Right's xenophobic rhetoric, "that is for the most part due to their lack of education. It is really not a cultural problem."

Bart likewise connected adult immigrants' poor Dutch language skills to the creation of social problems among these marginalized groups from an early age:

When you hear or see, for instance, young Moroccan people for instance, you think, "What do the parents do to influence their children?" And we know that parents from Moroccan or Turkish children don't like contact with the schools from their children. Like Dutch people do. It's important to be there, to be in contact with the teachers and the school. And to do the things for *feests* [celebrations] or *voorlezen*.

Pausing briefly to think about a translation for *voorlezen*, Bart explained that *voorlezen* was when volunteers, usually parents, came to

read for children in schools. For children, especially for children from Moroccan and Turkish people who know not enough Dutch when they start at school, that's very important to do. But you can't ask it of their parents, of course.

Bart continued, expressing frustration on two interconnected points: with what he saw as the government's short-sightedness in bringing low- or uneducated workers to the country and not requiring them to integrate; and with these immigrants' lack of initiative and personal responsibility for learning the local language of their new home country. Both of these points strongly reflected the impact of neoliberal governmentality on ideas of morally and culturally acceptable citizenship practice (cf. Ong, 1996).

### 5.3 Targeting "migrant women"

Of all the disadvantaged, marginalized groups of newcomers to Dutch society, non-Western "migrant women" were seen as particularly vulnerable. In this group, Muslim women were frequently considered the most vulnerable, as Islam was connected in the popular imagination (in the Netherlands, and across Europe) with strong patriarchal values and control of women's bodies (Verkaaik, 2009). When language and host-society orientation training was mandated for all newcomers, the civic integration policy architects did so with the intention of specifically targeting "traditional women of Muslim origin" who were seen as at risk of ongoing isolation without policy intervention (Entzinger, 2004; cf. Long's article in this issue; Wikan, 2002; Pratt Ewing, 2008).

The view that migrant women faced multiple barriers to integration and were perhaps in need of more support than other newcomers was visible in the language coaching projects as well as policy. Interestingly, these organizations were more likely to recognize structural barriers to integration alongside cultural impediments to women's learning: the distance of the school, lack of childcare, or physical or psychological illness. By bringing lessons to these women in their homes, the language coach seeks to draw them out of their isolation and enable them to become productive, or at least engaged

members of Dutch society. This view is exemplified in the discussion I had with Anouk. In looking for voluntary work, a women-only language coaching program spoke to Anouk's interest in teaching, but also appealed to her concern for helping migrant women participate in Dutch society. She felt that the lessons might help such women to "also have Dutch friends, and not focus only on their own people." Anouk explained that although she recognized it was a generalization, she saw that some of these women have additional difficulties in "connecting with the Dutch community. ... They're very limited to their possibilities to, you know, have a bike and go out, so you know. So, I'm like, maybe I can narrow that gap. Bridge."

Many of the migrant women José saw come through her organization were often older Moroccan and Turkish women who had lived in the Netherlands for decades but spoke Dutch poorly or not at all. It was José's impression that these individuals come to language coaching projects for help only because they are required to undertake civic integration. These participants are welcomed by language coaching programs, but as was clear from my discussion with José, volunteer language coaches' ability to help them succeed in learning the language is hindered by their coming to this task so late in life. Even so, these projects and their volunteers oriented non-native speakers toward active or good citizenship practices, and helped to narrow the gap between these individuals and others in the city in which they live.

It was the opinion of many volunteers and language program coordinators with whom I spoke that now that more and more non-native speakers are venturing to learn Dutch and to connect with mainstream Dutch society, it was important to provide support and encouragement for them. For some participants, especially non-Western women, this often meant accommodating requests for a coach of the same gender as a cultural or religious condition of their participation in the program. For some of these women it was a matter of comfort, whereas for others I was told that their husbands would not permit their participation unless their speaking partner was female.

Although many volunteers (and other native Dutch interlocutors) felt that gender segregation practices went against their own beliefs and the norms of Dutch society, these requests were viewed as a necessary evil. Gendered segregation would help to "emancipate" these women and through learning to speak Dutch these women would have the skills to participate in the society in which they now lived. As José elaborated, many of the older female language students she and other language coaches had worked with would

never really get the hang of the language, but they are suddenly very outwardly focused. Listen; they carry the burdens of the world on their backs. But they discover the world where they have lived for thirty years. And we help them do that. It is always about the language, naturally. And it is also about where you really live. How is it here, and have you— do you have



the self-confidence to move out of that place [of social isolation]. That mostly happens.

Moving out of that place of social isolation, discovering and most importantly, participating in mainstream Dutch society is understood as being made possible by learning the Dutch language. For all participants regardless of gender, these programs considered fluency as less important than building competency and the confidence to speak Dutch with others. Even these modest out-comes were considered to have an important effect: “contact with a Dutch neighbour and through this contact learning about the neighbourhood, local habits and ways things are done” (Program Coordinator). These important ways of practicing citizenship in the neighbourhood, city, and nation are mostly encountered and learned through everyday experiences, but can be made sense of through contact with voluntary language coaches. As local cultural experts, language coaching volunteers are positioned to intervene in the conduct of their newcomer partners, improving and adjusting their behaviour so that they are able to do as they ought (Li, 2007a, p. 275; Li, 2007b).

#### 5.4 Exceptions to the rule for citizenship education

The understanding that communication enables the kinds of participation associated with good Dutch citizenship practice draws attention to how certain groups of newcomers were considered in need of citizenship education, but also how others were viewed as exempt from such training. In talking about the different modes of participation that were considered socially meaningful and examples of good citizenship practice, language coaches had underscored the importance of being able to communicate with those around you, and the practices that such communication made accessible. This articulation of belonging challenged (or reconciled) discursive processes of citizenship circulating in Dutch society that incorporated notions of religious, racial, and other forms of social difference (Ghorashi & van Tilburg, 2006; cf. Silverstein, 2005). In my observations among both broader Dutch society and language coaching volunteers, the tensions and contradictions of citizenship in the Dutch context emerged in how native- or fluent English-speakers were treated and located in Dutch society. In stark contrast with non-Western immigrants, Western migrants – predominantly English speakers – were widely considered exempt from both learning Dutch and the citizenship education in which such language learning has become embedded.

English has emerged as a second *lingua franca*, not only in Amsterdam but across the Netherlands in international business, science and academic spheres, especially when located in urban centres. As I saw during my experiences in Amsterdam on a daily basis, conversational (if not professional) knowledge of the English language is a valued and widespread skill among the Dutch (European Commission, 2006, pp. 12-13). The prevalence of English in Amsterdam has had the effect of making it a sociable language in the city, and arguably

elsewhere in the country. Quite unlike English, non-Western languages spoken by other immigrants created and marked spaces that native Dutch might avoid or feel uncomfortable in; non-Western languages excluded most native Dutch from the conversation in ways that English (frequently) did not (Duyvendak, 2011). As Bart expressed in his comment about how uneasy people may feel when all of their neighbours suddenly become linguistically and culturally unfamiliar, the social distance and difference that native Dutch associated with non-Western languages produced negative feelings for many in the neighbourhood and across the city. This was especially the case in the peripheral, lower-income neighbourhoods that have attracted many recent immigrants to settle. Although research participants conceded that it was important that people who planned to make the Netherlands their home learn Dutch (even English speakers) this went almost without saying for non-Western newcomers, however long they intended to stay.

The English speakers’ exception to the rule that all (non-EU) newcomers must learn Dutch brings to the fore some of the deep-seated assumptions in the Dutch grammar of difference (cf. Cooper & Stoler, 1997, p. 3). These pertain to how cultural, classed, racial and religious differences continue to undergird ideas pertaining to who, in fact, is in need of citizenship education. As a white, English-speaking, Canadian researcher I encountered many of these assumptions during my fieldwork. My Dutch interlocutors consistently switched from Dutch into English upon realizing that I was not (a native-speaker of) Dutch. English speakers, I found, were often assumed to be temporary, highly-skilled migrants, commonly called “expats.” It was assumed that English speakers were citizens of Western countries, such as those in the European Union or white “settler societies” of the United States, Canada, Australia, or New Zealand. These countries were thought to share important historical and cultural similarities with the Netherlands, including progressive social values and norms, attitudes and experiences regarding appropriate social, economic and political participation. Expats were widely understood to live in the Netherlands for specific purposes that reflected the forms of meaningful participation in Dutch society that my research participants described: they worked at international businesses, were attending post-secondary educational institutions, or even volunteering. Moreover, English language facility often aligned with other culturalized markers of racial, ethnic, religious, gendered, and classed difference that are still quietly but powerfully used to mark out the targets of citizenship and integration policy interventions.

In spite of not being able to speak Dutch, English-speaking expats were nonetheless able to communicate in Amsterdam. With their ability to communicate exemplified through their relationship to labour, and often flagged by other culturalized markers associated with Dutchness or Western-ness, it was widely assumed that expats were able to practice good citizenship (Ong, 1996). Through the connections commonly drawn

between speaking English and contemporary discourses of good citizenship in the Netherlands, English speakers in Amsterdam have become an exception to the rule that all newcomers must undergo citizenship training (cf. Ghorashi & van Tilburg, 2006; van Nieuwkerk, 2004).

### 6 Concluding remarks: Teaching citizenship, speaking of belonging

Dutch cultural values, traditions, practices and norms have become integral to the discursive practices that undergird calculations of citizenship in daily life (Tonkens et al., 2008; Hurenkamp et al., 2011; Schinkel, 2010). My work among volunteer language coaches underscores how neoliberal governmentality impacts understandings of Dutch culture through the kinds of behaviours considered key to staking claims to citizenship in daily life (cf. Ong, 1996, 2006; Muehlebach, 2012; Li, 2007a). The fetishization of the Dutch language as the key to newcomers' integration has transformed communication into the pivot upon which these discursive layers of good citizenship practice may turn. These include a broad range of banal but morally-charged practices and attitudes (cf. Billig, 1995): from holding legal employment, to pursuing an education, engaged parenting, volunteering, as well as how one interacts with neighbours and others with whom one has regular contact. These everyday "common sense," but highly politicized interactions have become increasingly important as meaningful forms of Dutch cultural participation. These are in turn widely used across mainstream Dutch society to assess individuals' cultural and moral fit in the polity. However, these important modes of culturalised participation also draw in historically established and morally-charged markers of difference such as race, religion, class, gender and sexuality (Stoler, 1995). This wide web of overlapping markers of Dutchness and difference has created a problematically exclusive set of conditions for belonging; lower-classed, racialised and religiously different newcomers are targeted by citizenship education projects, whereas many white, English-speaking, well-educated migrants are considered to already practice culturally appropriate citizenship.

In the wake of the state's withdrawal from multiple areas of service provision, including adult citizenship education, citizens have themselves been called upon to step into the fray to remedy the problems of contemporary Dutch society (cf. Tonkens, 2006). In doing so, such individuals are seen to embody aspects of neoliberal logic that reshape the meaning and range of vaunted citizenship practices, including accepting citizens' responsibility for social service provision. The effects of this shift are clear among volunteer Dutch language coaches who have become important figures on the frontlines of citizenship education for adult immigrants.

In their capacity as informal citizenship educators, these volunteers provide a window onto how multiple discourses have become entangled in the conceptualization of contemporary citizenship, from the levels of policy to how notions of participation are grounded and taught in everyday lived experience. Significantly, as

my ethnography among Dutch language coaching volunteers in Amsterdam suggests, this neoliberal reconfiguration of citizenship practice also positions certain citizens to potentially challenge and partially rearticulate the meaning and criteria of good citizenship (cf. Hemment, 2012). This is clear in how language coaches appear to draw more heavily on neoliberally-informed aspects of citizenship discourse to reconcile and/or trouble the "culturalised" criteria of racial and religious exclusion – even if they do not disrupt the structures of hierarchy deeply embedded in Dutch citizenship. Nonetheless, language coaches illustrate how citizenship is a dynamic and discursive process that is re/produced and taught through social relationships in the everyday.

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## Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> I draw the term "native Dutch" from my research participants, who use *autochtone* (autochthonous) to describe people who are racially white, Dutch by ethnicity or heritage. Like many of my research participants, I am critical of the problematic nature of the *in vivo* and policy category of native Dutch and its deep entanglement with notions of racial, religious, cultural and linguistic difference and exclusion (cf. Geschiere, 2009).

<sup>ii</sup> I spoke with the *Gilde Amsterdam* director, as well as language coaches Anouk, Bart, and Susanne in English and quote them directly. Quotations attributed to language coaches José, Casper, the other program coordinators quoted were originally in Dutch. All individuals have been given pseudonyms, while the names of the organizations and their projects appear in the text.

<sup>iii</sup> At least one of these organizations, *Gilde Amsterdam*, has responded to these cuts by implementing a one-time inscription fee of €25 to make up this new budget shortfall. During our interview in May 2011, *Gilde Amsterdam's* director indicated that this organization already had one of the lowest operating costs for language coaching partnerships, at just €150 to support a coach-learner couple for a year.

<sup>iv</sup> Not all unpaid work is necessarily considered voluntarism. In line with scholarly and policy-oriented research groups in the Netherlands, I use the term voluntarism to refer to unpaid labour that is mediated by a formal organization. In this understanding, while caring for an ill relative or neighbour does not qualify as voluntary work, similar activities that are mediated through a nursing home would qualify as voluntarism. Given the strong moral and civic value attributed to voluntarism by the state, this definition has important implications for understanding who volunteers.

<sup>v</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the *inburgering* process and criteria, see Entzinger's (2004) reflection on developing the policy, and Björnson's (2007) ethnographic critique.