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The “migrant with poor prospects”: racialized intersections of class and culture in Dutch civic integration debates

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ABSTRACT

The recent trend towards selective immigration policies is based on the racialization of certain categories of migrants into irretrievably unassimilable Others. In Europe, this trend has materialized largely through the application of integration requirements to the immigration of foreigners, the so-called “civic integration turn”. Based on an analysis of parliamentary debates about civic integration policies in the Netherlands, this paper asks which migrants are considered likely or unlikely to integrate based on which presumed characteristics. We find that Dutch civic integration policies aim at barring “migrants with poor prospects”. In sharp contrast with a long history of Dutch social policies, politicians deny state responsibility for migrants’ emancipation based on a discursive racialization of these migrants as unassimilable. While class has hitherto been largely ignored in the literature on migration and the politics of belonging, we show that class, intersecting with culture and gender, is key in this process of racialization.

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In many European countries, immigration and integration policies have been fused through what has been called the “civic integration turn”. Integration requirements are applied so as to select those expected to integrate smoothly, while denying entry or stay to those considered unlikely to “fit” in the host society. This represents a fundamental change, given that these selective policies are applied primarily to refugees and family migrants, whose admission is based on constitutionally and internationally enshrined fundamental rights.

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Until recently, humanitarian admission practices were considered incompatible with selection of the “best” or “most desirable” migrants. This paper aims to empirically assess: who is this “unassimilable Other” who must be kept out?

To answer this question we set out to identify the discursive mechanisms that underlay the turn to selective civic integration policies in the Netherlands, one of the “robust civic integration adopters” in Europe (Goodman, [forthcoming](#)). We analysed Dutch political debates about civic integration policies since the turn of the century, inquiring what shifts in the representation of Self and Other made the shift towards these highly restrictive policies possible.

We find that a central figure in Dutch debates about civic integration policies is the “migrant with poor prospects” (*kansarme migrant*). Class plays a central role in this discourse, which is so radically exclusionary that it allows for denial of any state responsibility for migrants’ emancipation. Thus, shifting conceptions of belonging produce shifting conceptions of social justice.

Theory and method

Civic integration programmes that encourage or oblige migrants to participate in courses or tests about the host country’s language and society were introduced in Europe as of the 1990s. In recent years, entry and residence rights have increasingly been made conditional on participation in or successful completion of civic integration programmes. As Goodman notes, there is a fundamental difference between traditional migrant integration policies which aim to “enable membership” and obligatory civic integration policies which *impose conditions* on membership (Goodman 2015, 1916, emphasis added). There is broad scholarly agreement that a primary goal of the latter is to “limit and control the inflow and settlement of migrants” (Goodman 2010, 767; see also Kostakopoulou, Carrera, and Jesse 2009; Strik, de Hart, and Nissen 2013). A burgeoning literature has emerged to make sense of the paradigmatic shift represented by this “civic integration turn” (for an overview, see Goodman, [forthcoming](#)).

We aim to contribute to this literature by identifying the discursive mechanisms that made this policy paradigm shift possible. In particular, we ask: who is the Unwanted Migrant these selective civic integration policies aim to bar from entry and stay? In doing so, we draw on and contribute to a second strand of literature, namely the scholarship which analyses migration policies as instances of “politics of belonging” (Brubaker 2010), that is, of “boundary work” that nation-states perform (Wimmer 2008) in their perpetual endeavour to make the population on their territories match with the imagined communities they are deemed to represent. Through migration policies, states exercise their “symbolic power” to classify people (Paul 2015, 20) as belonging to “us”, “them” or the grey zone in between, (re)producing representations of who “we” are in relation to who the “Other” is (Anderson 2013).

The existing literature on the civic integration turn focuses one-sidedly on culture and identity as axes of exclusion, as it interprets civic integration policies as a shift towards renewed assimilationism, neonationalism, communitarianism, or culturalization of citizenship (Bonjour 2013; Duyvendak 2011; Kofman 2005; Kostakopoulou, Carrera, and Jesse 2009; Mepschen and Duyvendak 2012; van Houdt, Suvarierol, and Schinkel 2011). In the broader literature on migration policymaking as politics of belonging, class has been similarly neglected, focusing instead on state practices of boundary drawing along ethnic and cultural lines (Brubaker 2010; Wimmer 2008). If class is included in analyses of immigration policies, it is almost inevitably taken to be an objective, measurable and instrumental criterion, expressed in income requirements or labour market considerations. In contrast, we argue that, like gender and ethnicity, class is a social construct, and an implicit but integral part of the representations of Self and Other which underlie policies of migration and citizenship. Chauvin, Garcés-Mascreñas, and Kraler (2013, 127) argue that in neoliberal conceptions of “civic deservingness”, the “distinction between the cultural and the economic” has been blurred, as employment, self-sufficiency and reliability have been reframed as key cultural virtues (see also Paul 2015). We aim to elaborate on this by showing how both European “imagined communities” and their “unwanted Others” are thoroughly classed.

Empirically, we focus on the Netherlands. The civic integration turn is an ongoing phenomenon, spreading through Europe through processes of diffusion and Europeanization, as evidenced by recent adoption of strict language and civic requirements in Belgium and Spain. The Netherlands is one of six EU countries, along with Austria, France, Germany, Denmark and the UK, where civic integration policies have been applied first and most stringently (Goodman 2010, *forthcoming*). The Netherlands is a typical case, which allows us to explore the discursive mechanisms underlying this new type of exclusionary policy and thus to formulate explanatory hypotheses that are likely to shed light on the civic integration turn in Europe more broadly.

We have analysed Dutch parliamentary debates about civic integration from 2000 until 2015. Our data consists of 504 documents selected from the parliamentary records through keyword search, including government memoranda, legislative proposals, records of commission meetings and plenary debates, as well as parliamentary motions, questions and amendments. Applying critical frame analysis (Verloo 2005), we have coded these documents to identify the “diagnosis” (what is the problem), “prognosis” (how should it be solved) and “call for action” (by whom should it be solved). In analysing the “diagnosis” presented by different political actors, we paid particular attention to whether the “lack of integration” that civic integration policies were supposed to solve was defined in economic terms (poverty, unemployment, pressure on the welfare state, decrepit housing,

etc.) or in cultural terms (identification, loyalty, values, norms and practices, religion, social cohesion and national unity). In addition, we focused on “who” was defined as the problem, that is, which characteristics were ascribed to the persons targeted by civic integration policies. In analysing the “prognosis”, we asked in particular whether the “problem” of migrant integration was considered solvable or not in the first place, that is, whether integration was considered feasible: was the goal of civic integration policies to promote migrants’ integration, or to stop the arrival of “unassimilable” migrants? Finally, in analysing the “call for action” we asked: how is responsibility for integration allocated to the state, the individual migrant, and others?

Citizens with “poor prospects”: a short history of Dutch social policy¹

Social engineering is nothing new in the history of “integrating” groups into societies. In the Netherlands, policies targeting people “with poor prospects” developed in the late nineteenth century along with the modern Dutch nation-state, industrialization and urbanization, a new proletariat of factory workers, a working-class movement, and the first contours of the welfare state. This period was (politically) dominated by what was called “the social question” (*de sociale questie*) – the inhumane living and working conditions of the emerging working class.

Around the turn of the twentieth century, a plethora of measures were taken to improve poverty relief, unemployment relief, education, social housing, and social care. In the eyes of Liberal and Conservative reformers, poverty was due to the backwardness and moral weakness of the poor. Elites therefore introduced activities and institutions to morally uplift the poor, including evening classes, libraries, outdoor pursuits, youth organizations and alcohol-free canteens (Derksen and Verplanke 1987). This “civilizing offensive” was based on typical middle-class norms and values such as order, neatness, industriousness, thrift, and devotion to duty (De Regt 1984). The targeting of “anti-social families”, as they came to be known, to redress their lack of “integration” continued until the late 1950s.

The second half of the twentieth century witnessed a dramatic expansion of the welfare state, with a dense web of institutions targeting deprived neighbourhoods and groups with “poor prospects”. The social policies of the heydays of the welfare state – from the 1960s till the 1990s – were, on the one hand, a continuation of the interventions of the earlier decades, in the sense that these were rooted in a firm belief that third parties (social professionals, volunteers, welfare provisions, et cetera) *could* help to improve the prospects of the most disadvantaged. There was a strong belief in the *malleability* of the poor. On the other hand, the 1960s were a major turning point. Whereas in the earlier days, the poor and the “anti-social” were themselves

blamed for their “backwardness”, now a social-democratic understanding of social inequality became hegemonic (Duyvendak 1999). People with “poor prospects” were now considered victims of social injustice: proof of an unfair society in which some had more prospects than others. In other words, the “progressive turn” of the 1960s added a *moral* dimension to state responsibility for welfare: the state not only *could* but *should* help those with poor prospects in order to redress social injustice. It was not a question of a “backward *culture*” but of unequal socio-economic chances and opportunities.

At least, for the native population. In policies targeting migrants, the moralistic, culturalized and paternalistic approach remained dominant. Many of the measures to “integrate” non-natives in Dutch society today are continuations of earlier civilizing offensives (Rath 1999; Uitermark, Duyvendak, and Rath 2014). Moreover, they fit in a tradition of connecting socio-economic deprivation to moral or cultural properties of the poor. Rath (1999) has argued that like the Dutch “antisocial families” before them, so-called “ethnic minorities” of the 1980s were “problematized on the grounds of their socio-cultural maladjustment compared with the Dutch middle class ideal type”. This maladjustment was only problematized in case of lower-class immigrants, not for upper-class Japanese or American migrants. Rath (1999) emphasizes, however, that in the “ethnic minorities” policies of the 1980s,

socio-cultural features are not regarded as fixed or naturalized. As a matter of fact, the state and private institutions have done their utmost to get these Others to adjust to the dominant life style, in other words, to change them.

Thus, in the 1980s, the Dutch state was attributed both the capacity to improve migrants’ position in Dutch society (by making them adapt to Dutch culture), and the responsibility to do so.

Today however, this has changed: our analysis will show that the racialization of the “migrant with poor prospects” allows politicians to deny that the state either *could* or *should* intervene to improve migrants’ position in Dutch society.

The emergence of the “migrant with poor prospects” in civic integration debates

The formal target group of civic integration policies

About one in five persons living in the Netherlands has a migration background, in the sense that either they themselves or (one of) their parents were born abroad. While postcolonial migration from Indonesia and the Caribbean and labour migration from especially Turkey and Morocco were most

important in the first post-war decades, since the 1980s the large majority of immigrants are either EU free movers, refugees, or family migrants.

Civic integration policies do not apply to EU citizens or to temporary labour migrants. As a result, they apply primarily to family migrants and refugees.² In addition, so called “old-comers” (*oudkomers*) who are long-settled in the Netherlands but have attended less than eight years of Dutch education, are also obliged to pass the civic integration test. In practice, this latter requirement applies mostly to former guest workers.

1990s: first civic integration programmes

The Netherlands was among the first countries in Europe to implement policies to further the integration of migrants in the 1970s and 1980s. This “ethnic minorities’ policy” was progressively abandoned in the 1990s, when the government opted for an “integration policy” that aimed primarily at individual socio-economic independence, rather than at emancipation of migrant groups. As part of this shift, the first civic integration policies for newcomers were introduced in 1996 and laid down in the Law on Civic Integration of Newcomers (*Wet Inburgering Nieuwkomers*) of 1998. Immigrants – other than labour migrants – were obliged to participate in a Dutch language course as well as in societal and professional orientation programmes.

During the 1990s, civic integration policies were not linked to immigration policies directly. The programmes were obligatory, but failure to participate was sanctioned with a fine, not with restrictions on entry or residence rights. There was no notion of using integration requirements to select among immigrants. If Dutch politicians talked about “migrants with poor prospects” in the 1990s, it was mostly in the context of urban policies, education policies, and labour market reintegration policies. These policies – often targeting all Dutch with poor prospects – were geared towards (individual) emancipation: the question was not whether “migrants with poor prospects” were *assimilable* or welcome in the Netherlands, but which government policies were best suited to improve their prospects.

There was one exception however to this rule. During the parliamentary debates about the Law on the Civic Integration of Newcomers in 1997, the members of the GPV, a small Calvinist party, suggested that civic integration programmes might be set up in countries of origin such as the Dutch Antilles, Morocco and Turkey. They argued that this might “prevent certain groups of newcomers from coming to the Netherlands, who even after participating in a civic integration programme would have poor prospects of building an independent life for themselves in the Netherlands”.³ The GPV, with only two seats in Parliament, was not a very influential political player. Its suggestion was picked up neither by the government, nor by other political parties. Only in the 2000s would the idea of civic integration *abroad* start gaining a foothold

on the Dutch political agenda. However, it is striking that the very first time a Dutch politician put forward the idea of subjecting *immigration to integration* requirements, the figure of the “migrant with poor prospects” was present – and given a totally new meaning. The “migrant with poor prospects” was no longer someone to be emancipated, deserving state intervention to ensure a better future – like any other disadvantaged group in care of the Dutch state – but someone who should be barred from coming to the Netherlands, undeserving of a future in this country, because (s)he is considered unlikely to “integrate” in Dutch society no matter how much effort or resources the state would dedicate to promoting integration. Unlike in the 1980s, “poor prospects” were now considered a fixed and unmalleable characteristic: “migrants with poor prospects” were racialized into *unassimilable* migrants.

Early 2000s: selection through civic integration

Since the turn of the century, Dutch politics have been marked by strong and persistent pressure by populist anti-immigrant parties. In response to the electoral successes of the Lijst Pim Fortuyn, which obtained 26 out of 150 Lower House seats in 2002, parliament voted for a resolution stating that “integration policy has so far been insufficiently successful”.⁴ Ever since, the idea that the integration of migrants who had arrived since the 1960s was a failure, has dominated the Dutch debate. This resulted in new measures regarding migrants already staying in the Netherlands (who had to prove their wish and ability to integrate), but it affected chances for newcomers to enter the country even more. In 2004, Conservative Liberal minister Verdonk wrote that

too many immigrants with a too large distance from Dutch society and culture put too much pressure on our institutions and overstrain the flexibility of the population. The recent history of thirty or forty years immigration has taught us that much.

Therefore, the Centre-Right second Balkenende government fundamentally revised its immigration policies which were to be “not only restrictive but especially also selective” as “immigration will be tied to integration requirements through civic integration”.⁵

This principle was implemented in the Law on Civic Integration of 2006, which replaced the obligation for newly admitted migrants to participate in a civic integration course by an obligation to pass the exam. Failure to pass the exam was sanctioned not only with a fine but also with the denial of a permanent residence permit. So-called “oldcomers”, that is, all immigrants who had not been educated in Dutch schools, were also obliged to participate in and successfully complete civic integration courses, regardless of their length of stay in the Netherlands.⁶ In addition, the Law on Civic Integration

Abroad of 2005 introduced the requirement for family migrants to prove a basic knowledge of Dutch language and society before being granted entry to the Netherlands. The government stated that the purpose of its new integration abroad policy was not only to ensure “a more efficient and effective integration process” but also to function as a “selection criterion”, aimed at “the reduction of the inflow of migrants whose integration in the Netherlands can be foreseen to lag behind”.⁷

While initiated by the Centre Right, these reforms enjoyed very broad political support: 149 out of 150 members of Parliament voted in favour of the Law on Civic Integration, while the Law on Civic Integration Abroad was rejected only by the far-Left Socialists and Greens. The Social Democrat PvdA, although in opposition, was fully supportive of the government’s wish to select migrants based on integration criteria. In its 2006 electoral programme, the PvdA stated that:

No society has an unlimited absorption capacity for newcomers and an endless capacity to fight disadvantage and emancipate people. Therefore the PvdA pleads for selective migration. This selectivity means that we [...] are reticent to admit people who in view of their education or otherwise have little chance of succeeding in the Netherlands. This implies that we actively support the welcoming of talented people, *highly or lowly educated* (e.g. Salomon Kalou), who will enrich Dutch society. (PvdA 2006, emphasis added)

The awkward reference to very well-paid football player Kalou reveals how difficult it is for the PvdA to reconcile its endorsement of selective immigration policies with the traditional Social Democrat commitment to the emancipation and inclusion of the lower educated *and* poorer classes.

Similar tensions were visible in the debates on civic integration abroad, in which Social Democrat MP Dijsselbloem, far from resisting the notion of selecting on integration criteria, proposed that family migrants be required to prove literacy in their own language. He argued that “having the courage to impose education requirements on immigrant partners fits with our goal of full and independent participation of migrants, and with the [...] selective migration policy”.⁸ Green MP Azough attacked Dijsselbloem fiercely, appealing to the traditional left-wing ideal of emancipation through education, by stating that “it’s unacceptable to use education as an exclusion mechanism”. In response, Dijsselbloem blamed Azough for treating illiteracy as “an incurable illness”, thus likewise appealing to the idea that people can be “improved” through education.⁹ However, he added that “in our view the responsibility for this lies primarily with the migrant himself and the government of his country of origin”.¹⁰ This denial of the Dutch government’s responsibility sits rather uncomfortably with the traditional Social Democrat view that it is the government’s duty to promote equal chances for all through education. However, since the “backwardness” of the migrant is considered not to be caused by the Netherlands – it only

becomes “visible” because of the migrant’s (wish to) move to a “modern country”- it should be dealt with by him- or herself. The potential migrant remains perhaps assimilable in the long run, but on the condition that he or she invests in him- or herself.

2007–2012: the heydays of the “migrant with poor prospects” discourse

The populist anti-immigrant Freedom Party (PVV) played a crucial role in putting the “migrant with poor prospects” central stage in Dutch civic integration debates. The PVV was founded in 2006 by Geert Wilders and won nine seats in Parliament that same year, and twenty-four seats in 2010. In 2007, PVV parliamentarian Fritsma stated that the “immigration disaster of the Netherlands” had led to a “downright disruption of our society and way of life” and deplored the enduring failure of the government to restrict “the massive entry, so damaging to our country, of (usually non-Western) migrants with poor prospects”.¹¹ As a solution, the PVV demanded a “Muslim immigration stop”.

The Conservative Liberal VVD immediately responded by stating that it was “not logical and not proper” to bar people based on their religion. Instead, the Conservative Liberals wanted to “curb the immigration of people with poor prospects”. Three months later, the VVD filed a motion – in line with previous motions arguing that “integration had failed”- stating that “the admission to our country of a large number of immigrants with poor prospects has led to serious integration problems” and asking the government to restrict admission to the Netherlands to persons with adequate education and language skills and with a “positive attitude towards our society”.¹² The reference to education and language skills on the one hand and “positive attitude” towards Dutch society on the other hand, as if these were two sides of the same coin, is typical for the conflation of class and culture in the construction of the “migrant with poor prospects”. From this moment onwards, the “migrant with poor prospects” who was to be prevented from coming to the Netherlands was a central figure in Conservative Liberal discourse. Thus, the discourse on the “migrant with poor prospects” should, at least partly, be understood as a response of Dutch mainstream political parties to the challenge of the populist Right: barring migrants with “poor prospects” was presented as a reasonable and morally justifiable alternative to barring Muslims.

Underlying the VVD plea for barring the entry of “migrants with poor prospects” is the perception that migrants admitted in the past had proven “unintegrable”, which is why similarly “unintegrable” migrants should be barred from coming in the future. Thus, in its 2010 election programme, the VVD wrote that: “Past decades have shown that a large inflow of migrants with poor prospects can have a disruptive effect on society. That is why the VVD wants to push this inflow back to zero” (VVD 2010, 6).

As of 2009, the Christian Democrats also adopted this discourse, stating that admitting “too many people with little prospect of keeping up with the others in society” was “not good for society and not good for these people themselves either”.¹³ This paternalistic framing of exclusion as protection was recurrent in Christian Democrat discourse: “People have a hard time if they end up in this complex society without speaking the language and without any education. Sparing the rod will ruin the child”.¹⁴ In a similarly paternalistic vein, Social Democrat parliamentarian Van Dam justified restricting marriage migration by arguing that “it is good to protect people to prevent them from ending up in a situation of dependence. A situation where they have poor prospects”.¹⁵

The center-Left Balkende IV government which had entered office in 2007, composed of Christian Democrats, Social Democrats, and the small Calvinist ChristenUnie, resisted the notion of barring “migrants with poor prospects” at first. State Secretary of Immigration Nebahat Albayrak, a Social Democrat, stated that barring family migrants with poor prospects was wrong by “matter of principle. Having good prospects is not a criterion in the Netherlands to have access to human rights”, such as the right to family life. Albayrak did support integration requirements at entry but argued that these were aimed not at restricting family migration but at facilitating family migrants’ integration.¹⁶ Albayrak thus stuck to the traditional Social Democratic philosophy that state policies have to support people with “poor prospects”: the state *could* do so effectively (migrants were considered assimilable) and *should* do so, given its moral obligations (the human right to family life).

Soon however, the Balkenende IV government changed its mind, driven primarily by Social Democrat minister of Integration Eberhard van der Laan who pushed for restrictions on family migration, including a written language test where there had been only an oral test. These measures were intended not only “to improve the starting position of new family migrants in all respects” but also to ensure “that fewer people with unfavourable perspectives will embark on marriage migration”.¹⁷

The notion of the “absorption capacity” of society was central in Minister Van der Laan’s justification of barring “migrants with poor prospects” from coming to the Netherlands. The word he used was “*spankracht*”, which literally means “elasticity” or “recovering strength”, stating, for instance, that “the *spankracht* of society, of our institutions and neighbourhoods that have to take in many migrants, has its limits” or that “disproportionate demands are put on professionals working in schools, police or care as a result of substantial deprivations and cultural diversity with corresponding tensions”.¹⁸ While this argument is framed rather technocratically, in terms of society’s institutions and professionals, the worries about the “*spankracht*” still rest largely on the assumed problematic difference of the migrant(s), defined both socio-economically (“substantial deprivations”) and culturally (“cultural diversity”). In

the perspective of almost all political parties, overly lenient policies towards migrants in the past had overlooked these differences, causing a lack of integration of migrants who had arrived since the 1960s, overburdening the "spankracht" of society. Thus, minister Van der Laan argued that a selective entry policy was all the more necessary since "we are still busy catching up with arrears that date from decennia back".¹⁹

Van der Laan's statements were not always without ambiguity, probably due to the tension between his rather straightforward exclusionary policies and the emancipatory ideals of Social Democrat ideology. For instance, he stated that: "By selective admission, we intend primarily to indicate that long-term migrants [...] are equipped in such a way that they can integrate successfully".²⁰ Here, selective entry policies are presented not as excluding certain categories of persons from coming to the Netherlands, but as pushing migrants to be "better equipped" for integration in Dutch society before moving to the Netherlands (placing the responsibility with the migrant).

Such ambiguities were hardly to be found in the positions of the Rutte I government which entered office in 2010, composed of Conservative Liberals and Christian Democrats with minority support from the Freedom Party. The Rutte I coalition agreement stated that: "Migration policy, especially family migration policy, is aimed at reduction of the entry of migrants with poor prospects".²¹ Instead, the new government wanted "migration which contributes to society, in the field of knowledge, labour, science, services".²² Members of the Rutte I government repeatedly confirmed that they would "reduce the entry of foreigners who cannot or will not participate".²³ The racialization of "migrants with poor prospects" into an essentially and permanently unassimilable group was particularly strong in the discourse of this right-wing government.

After the Rutte II government composed of Conservative Liberals and Social Democrats entered government in 2012, the figure of the "migrant with poor prospects" became much less prominent. Migration was one of the issues on which the VVD and PvdA coalition diverged most sensitively. This may explain why the Rutte II coalition did not place too much emphasis on barring "migrants with poor prospects". The reduced populist pressure, as the Freedom Party went down from twenty-four to fifteen seats after the parliamentary elections of 2012, may also have played a role. However, the notion of keeping "migrant with poor prospects" out did not totally disappear. Minister Asscher of Social Affairs and Integration, a Social Democrat, argued very similarly to his predecessors that "there are limits to the inflow of low-educated and ill equipped migrants which a society can cope with" and that therefore a restrictive immigration policy was necessary to "prevent the progress made [in the field of integration] to be wiped out by a new inflow of mostly low-educated migrants who are insufficiently prepared for a successful future in the Netherlands".²⁴

Who is the “migrant with poor prospects”?

The most often mentioned characteristic of the “migrant with poor prospects” is a low level of education. Dutch politicians consider education a key predictor for fitting into Dutch society. For instance, the Conservative Liberal VVD urged the government to distinguish between those “for whom integration is crucial, because otherwise their prospects would remain poor” and “highly educated migrants who are fluent in English and thus will be able to get by just fine in Dutch society” for whom “an integration program would have no added value”.²⁵ Likewise, the Christian Democrats assumed that “highly educated migrants find their way relatively smoothly”.²⁶

More specifically, level of education is considered a predictor of economic contribution, participation and financial independence. As the Centre-Left Balkenende IV government put it, “the level of education is a key determinant for successful integration and participation on the labour market”.²⁷ According to the VVD,

immigration policy needs to be reformed into a system that is only accessible for individuals who will be successful: migrants who speak the language, have an education or an expertise for which there is a true demand on the labour market, and are capable of making money by themselves. Non-educated migrants with poor prospects don’t get a chance anymore.²⁸

A crucial characteristic of the “migrant with poor prospects” then is that he or she is likely to be unemployed and dependent on welfare.²⁹

Besides being low-educated and likely to be unemployed, the “migrant with poor prospects” also has specific psychological and cultural characteristics, which are presumed to be connected to his or her socio-economic features. The Conservative Liberals and Christian Democrats describe the “migrant with poor prospects” as a welfare profiteer. The VVD stated that for “migrants with poor prospects”, a Dutch residence permit represents “a free ticket to a welfare-paradise. They do everything to get their hands on a permit”.³⁰ Christian Democrat Minister Leers of Immigration wanted to put a stop to the admission of “low-prospect individuals – who [...] only seek to profit from our community services”.³¹ This alleged lazy, abusive mentality is associated with a general negative attitude towards Dutch society and its norms and values. Thus, minister Leers argued that “we don’t want to open up to people who want to profit from our welfare state and have no interest in our society”.³² Conservative Liberal MP Van Nieuwenhuizen stated: “Many migrants reject Dutch society. They only seem to be interested in our welfare provisions”.³³ Here as in the regularization policies analysed by Chauvin, Garcés-Masareñas, and Kraler (2013), work ethics are thus framed as crucial aspects of cultural fit or misfit in society, indicative of a broader “civic deservingness”.

The lazy and parasitic attitude of the “migrant with poor prospects” opposes him or her to the idealized Dutch citizen. This “*hardwerkende Nederlander*” or “hard-working Dutch (wo)man” is a recurring figure in broader discussions about the economy and income distribution. In political discourse, the hard-working Dutch are presented as the “normal”, “average” Dutch families: not lower class but middle class. As the leader of the Social Democrats framed it in 2009: “We’re talking about normal people, families with kids and dual earners [...]. They keep our country going: teachers, administrative employees, police officers, construction workers, nurses, civil servants, and so forth. They are the backbone of The Netherlands”.³⁴ The notion of “hardworking *Dutch*” indicates that the opposition here is not between undeserving native Dutch on welfare and deserving native Dutch who work hard, but between hardworking *Dutch* citizens and undeserving *migrants* with poor prospects. Being “Dutch” is defined as being middleclass and participating in the (Protestant) culture and ethos of hard work. Native Dutch lower-class people are made invisible. Class is highly culturalized, in the sense that all lower class people in the Netherlands are assumed to be of migrant origin.

Low education allegedly produces many ills, such as gender inequality. Besides work ethics, norms and practices related to gender and family are the aspect of the culture of the “migrant with poor prospect” most often specifically named as problematic. The assumption is that the “migrant with poor prospects” comes from a traditional, paternalistic, authoritarian, misogynistic culture. Thus, the Christian Democrats (CDA) argued that the position of women “in migrant families [...] is so precarious that it resembles slavery and apartheid. That is why we resist this unrelenting inflow of women with poor prospects”.³⁵ In the eyes of the CDA, the chance of a loving marriage and the risk of domestic abuse are related to level of education:

Let’s make sure that – in their country of origin – people can achieve a certain level of education [...]. When they have achieved that level, they can truly invest in a loving relationship and a bright future. The way we handled this until now has led to a lot of domestic misery.³⁶

Thus, culture is classed: education level is assumed to coincide with family and gender norms and practices.

According to the Conservative Liberals the purpose of “minimising the inflow of migrants with low prospects” was “no more import brides stuck at home”.³⁷ As Conservative Liberal Prime Minister Rutte put it,

when mostly young women come from faraway places to the Netherlands to live a life of dependency and isolation, then that’s no good. Not for these women. Not for their children. Not for the integration process, nor for the Dutch society at large.³⁸

Importantly, whereas in the political discourse on work ethos the “migrant with poor prospects” is assumed to be male, in the political discourse focusing

on gender and family norms, the “migrant with poor prospects” is a *woman*, who, in a paternalistic move, must be protected from the situation that awaits her in the Netherlands for the sake of herself, her children, and Dutch society. Thus, culture and class intersect in heavily gendered ways in the discourse on the “migrant with poor prospects” to construe two distinct figures: the lazy, parasitic and oppressive migrant man on the one hand, and the vulnerable, un-emancipated migrant woman secluded at home on the other hand.

Implicit but omnipresent is the assumption that the “migrant with poor prospects” is a Muslim. Political actors do sometimes explicitly connect the “migrant with poor prospects” to a specific geographic origin, most notably Turkey and Morocco. Thus, minister Verdonk in 2004 stated that certain migrants have “characteristics that are a hindrance for a good integration into the Dutch society. The most prominent group – also in size – is made up of family migrants from Turkey and Morocco”.³⁹ In 2010, a Christian Democrat MP explained that a trip in North-East Morocco had made her wonder

how hard it must be to adapt to modern Dutch society. I truly respect the people who can successfully do this, but I also regretfully have to say that a large group cannot. They simply don't have enough in their backpacks to be able to build their future in The Netherlands.⁴⁰

The depiction of the Netherlands as “modern” and Morocco by implication as “backwards” suggests both socio-economic deficiencies and lack of cultural capital (“not enough in their backpacks”).

The same conflation of socio-economic and socio-cultural factors is manifest when migrants are labelled as “non-Western”. The VVD, for instance, stated that “if you want to solve issues of integration, you have to restrict the inflow of low-prospect migrants from non-Western countries”.⁴¹ “Western” and “non-Western” are standard categories in Dutch official discourse and statistics, explained by the Netherlands Statistics Office as based on “social-economic and social cultural position” (Netherlands Statistics 2016). The conflation of culture and class in the categories of Western and non-Western is visible in that “Western” immigrants are assumed to be highly educated, coming from developed countries (therefore migrants from Japan are considered to be Western while Dutch-Surinamese are counted as non-Western), while “non-Western” migrants are assumed to have “poor prospects” since they come from poorer countries (although these include countries like Russia, China, India, Argentina and Brazil). The presumed socio-economic background of “Western” migrants is seen to warrant (sufficient) cultural proximity particularly in terms of having “modern” views, whereas the presumed lack of skills and education of the non-Western immigrants are associated with cultural distance and traditional norms (particularly in the case of Muslim immigrants). It is no coincidence then, that migrants

from specific countries including Australia, Canada, the US, Switzerland, New Zealand, Iceland, Japan and South Korea are exempted from the civic integration abroad requirement: they are expected to “fit” smoothly.

Discussion and conclusion

The notion of “people with poor prospects” has a long history in Dutch social policies. Since the 1960s, the dominant understanding has been that the (welfare) state bears full responsibility to give all people equal chances. “Poor prospects” were a matter of social injustice which could and should be corrected by the state. The Dutch also have a long history of connecting poverty to moral or cultural characteristics. Native Dutch “anti-social” families were problematized in these terms until the 1950s, just as “ethnic minorities” were in the 1980s. However, both these cultural and these class characteristics were considered malleable: the government could and should improve both the moral character and the social position of those with “poor prospects”.

Today however, this no longer holds true. In the policies developed in the past fifteen years, the idea that the Dutch government bears (co)responsibility for emancipating immigrants with poor prospects has almost totally disappeared. The contemporary culturalization of economic deprivation results in shifting the responsibility away from the state towards the individual migrant: it is not deemed “our” fault that (potential) immigrants lack the necessary skills and values to successfully integrate in the Netherlands but their own. This denial of state responsibility is based on a radical change in perceived assimilability of “migrants with poor prospects”. Migrants labelled “non-Western”, both those who are Dutch citizens and those who aspire to come to the Netherlands, are seen as characterized by arrears that cannot be overcome, in terms of deficient socio-economic skills and cultural deviance. While parties on the Left may sometimes adopt ambiguous discourses revealing the tension between emancipatory ideals and the exclusion of vulnerable social groups, overall the overwhelming political support for policies aimed at keeping out “migrants with poor prospects” reflects a clear political rupture with the idea that state policies *could* and *should* emancipate “migrants with poor prospects”.

Thus, shifting conceptions of belonging enable shifting conceptions of social justice. The racialization of migrants in terms of culture and class allows Dutch policymakers to abandon longstanding policy approaches to migrant integration and to social justice more generally. In presenting “poor prospects” as an inevitable characteristic of the unassimilable migrant Other rather than as a societal problem, Dutch politicians enable themselves to decline any responsibility on the part of the Dutch state to ensure social inclusion and equal opportunities for migrants.

Our notion of *racializing* draws on Etienne Balibar's notion of "neoracism", that is, a form of racism that is based not on presumed biological or physical features but on naturalized and essentialized notions of cultural incompatibility. Balibar (2007, 85) writes that

biological or genetic naturalism is not the only means of naturalizing human behaviour and social affinities. [...] *Culture can also function like a nature*, and it can in particular function as a way of locking individuals and groups a priori into a genealogy, into a determination that is immutable and intangible in origin. (*italics in the original*)

Our findings confirm that besides culture, class is a crucial aspect of racialization and the politics of belonging. Political constructions of migrants as wanted or unwanted are barely, if at all, driven by economic instrumentality, in terms of rationally calculated labour market needs or economic profits. Rather, such representations are about whether a migrant is perceived as "like us"; perceived to "fit" in societies that think of themselves as middle-class. Discourses on the "failure of integration", common among almost all political parties since 2002, and the exclusion of the "migrant with poor prospects" are based on the implicit representation of Dutch society as a middle-class, hardworking, highly modern and progressive "community of value" (Anderson 2013), in which there is no place for people who do not share in those practices and values.

Class and culture intersect in Dutch political discourse in the sense that they are "mutually constitutive" (Yuval-Davis 2007, 565). Poor socio-economic prospects are assumed to coincide with national origin (non-Western) and religion (Muslim). A low level of education is assumed to coincide not only with welfare dependence but also with poor work ethics and oppressive gender and family norms. This discursive racialization is heavily gendered in that it construes two distinct representations of the "migrant with poor prospects": the lazy, parasitic and oppressive migrant man on the one hand, and the vulnerable, un-emancipated migrant woman secluded at home on the other hand.

The "migrant with poor prospects" is not only on the outside, wanting to come in; he or she is also present within the Netherlands. As we have seen, the discourse on "migrants with poor prospects" is fundamentally based on the notion that in the second half of the 20th century, Dutch governments have admitted the wrong kind of people, who have failed to integrate into Dutch society, which is why similar kinds of migrants must no longer be admitted. In other words, Dutch residents and citizens of migrant background are also perceived as "migrants with poor prospects" whose very presence disrupts Dutch society. The figure of the "migrant with poor prospects" represents certain prospective migrants as unwanted because of the assessment, by a majority of Dutch politicians, that a very sizeable part of the Dutch population with roots elsewhere has proven to be "unassimilably Other".

Other European countries which participate in the civic integration turn have different histories of dealing with both social inequality and cultural diversity. However, in the French discourse on *immigration subie* or the German discourse on *Parallelgesellschaften*, concerns about unemployment and welfare dependency are merged with concerns about forced marriages and rejection of “national values”, just as they are in the Dutch discourse on “migrants with poor prospects”. The intersection of culture and class appears to be key to the politics of belonging in Europe today. Comparative research is called for to refine our understanding of classed, culturalized and gendered constructions of Self and Other in the politics of migration in Europe.

Notes

1. This section draws on Uitermark, Duyvendak, and Rath (2014, 174–176).
2. Since refugees cannot be expected to learn Dutch before leaving the country where they are in danger, the requirement of passing a civic integration test before admission to the Netherlands only applies to family migrants (and religious ministers).
3. TK 1996–1997 25114 (5).
4. TK 2002–2003 28600 (24).
5. TK 2005–2006 30304 (2)
6. TK 2003–2004 29700 (3)
7. TK 2003–2004 29700 (3), p. 4-6.
8. TK 2004–2005 29700 Plenary 16 March 2005, p. 60-3885.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 60-3896-3897.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 60-3886.
11. TK 2007–2008 31225 (1).
12. TK 2007–2008 29700 (50).
13. TK 2009–2010 32123 Plenary 16 September 2009, p. 2-36
14. TK 2008–2009 31700–XVIII Plenary 2 December 2008, p. 31-2650.
15. TK 2010–2011 32175 (16), p. 13
16. TK 2008–2009 19637 (1266), p. 29.
17. TK 2009–2010 32175 (1), p. 2.
18. TK 2009–2010 31268 (25), p. 5-6, 11.
19. TK 2009–2010 32123–XVIII Plenary 25 November 2009, p. 29-2646.
20. TK 2009–2010 32052 (7), p. 5.
21. TK 2010–2011 32417 (15), p. 20.
22. TK 2010–2011 32500–VI Plenary 1 December 2010, p. 29-6.
23. TK 2010–2011 32500–VI Plenary, 1 December 2010, p. 29-13
24. TK 2012–2013 32824 (7), p. 5-6.
25. TK 2007–2008 31318(5), p. 7.
26. TK 2009–2010 32005 (4), p. 13.
27. TK 2009–2010 32175 (1), p. 3.
28. TK 2009–2010 32123–VI Plenary 4 November 2009, p. 20-1611.
29. E.g. TK 2008–2009 30573 (15), p. 10; TK 2009–2010 32175 (1), p. 3; TK 2010–2011 32824 (1), p. 3, 8-9.
30. TK 2008–2009 30573 (14), p. 5.

31. TK 2010–2011 32175 (16), p. 30.
32. TK 2010–2011 32500-VI Plenary, 1 December 2010, p. 29-6.
33. TK 2010–2011 32500-VI Plenary, 1 December 2010, p. 29-69.
34. TK 2010–2011 32500 Plenary, 26 October 2010, p. 13-8.
35. TK 2008–2009 31143 (65), p. 8.
36. TK 2008–2009 31700-XVIII Plenary 2 December 2008, p. 31-2650.
37. TK 2009–2010 32123 Plenary 16 September 2009, p. 2-50.
38. TK 2010–2011 Plenary 26 October 2010, p.
39. TK 2003–2004 29700 (3), p. 4-5.
40. TK 2009–2010 32005 (4), p. 13.
41. TK 2007–2008 31200-VI Plenary 14 November 2007, p. 23-1712.

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