

# Imagining integration

A multi-actor research on the imaginaries regarding the socio-cultural integration of Afghan migrant people, practitioners of integration & neighbors of the AZC in Nijmegen.



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The picture is a picture of the building of the AZC, made from the backyard of one of the participants of this research, a direct neighbor from the AZC in Nijmegen

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## Abstract

Within the context of the current integration debate in the Netherlands, this thesis gains insights into the imaginaries of different actors regarding socio-cultural integration. A qualitative multi-actor research on a variation of imaginaries regarding socio-cultural integration and the Dutch cultural identity has been conducted in the context of Nijmegen. Within this research certain elements and concepts related to socio-cultural integration within the Dutch society are discussed. The imaginaries of Afghan newcomers, Afghan people who have lived in the Netherlands for several years; practitioners of integration policies & practices; and neighbors of an AZC have been mirrored in order to emphasize the contested nature of integration.

This thesis starts by evaluating the different ways in which socio-cultural integration is defined and imagined, showing the discrepancy in this. After this it moves on to an examination of what “Dutch cultural identity” entails, and what purpose it serves. To stress the fact that the absence of a clear definition of what Dutch cultural identity is, leads to the culturalization of citizenship, and expectations of newcomers which go way beyond citizenship. Lastly, it shows the difference on newcomers either being imagined inside- or outside society, and the consequences of these imaginaries for the Dutch society.

Based on the findings of this research, this research emphasizes the need for acceptance of this contested nature in both political and scientific debate. This thesis has shown the need for an increasing focus on the importance of socio-cultural integration, and less of the neoliberal focus on merit and accomplishment within the Dutch integration debate. It also shows the need for a more multi-actor approach to the integration debate to move forward as a society.

*Keywords: socio-cultural integration, imaginaries, participation, adaptation, Dutch cultural identity, freedom, society, citizenship, belonging, othering, inequality, (Un)deserving migrant, loyalty.*

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

The term "integration" is used by many but understood differently by most. This makes it a highly individualized, contested, and contextual concept with very little prospect for a unifying definition. There is no single, generally accepted definition, model, or theory of refugee and immigrant integration. The concept of integration remains controversial and hotly debated (Ager & Strang, 2008, p.167; Castles et al., 2003, p.13). Sometimes integration is looked upon the same as assimilation, which means 'disappearing' in society. For others, integration is something that can also occur in a multicultural setting, with aspects from the land of origin and the host society existing side by side (Musterd & Ostendorf, 2009, p.152). Due to the contested nature of the field of integration, many cultures, perceptions, frames, and different spheres of influence occur. From a state perspective, integration fulfills an institutionalized need for nation-states to manage the perceived difference between migrant people from other citizens (Dahinden, 2016, p. 2219). Some authors argue that immigration policies claim to enable the participation of migrant people, but have a counterproductive effect and even deepen the distinction between the host society and people of a particular background perceived differently than the background of the host society. According to them, integration comes very close to assimilation and is measured in terms of success in starting to look and act more like the dominant 'society' of the host land (Korteweg & Triadafilopoulos, 2013).

Integration as a concept has a lot of aspects that are hard to measure and leave room to be interpreted in different ways, this is especially the case for the social and cultural domain of integration. Resulting in different ideas on what socio-cultural integration means, and what is desired to be achieved with it. Recently socio-cultural integration has been perceived to be of more importance by Dutch citizens, in comparison to the other domains on which immigrant integration is measured: housing, education, employment, and language (Gijsberts & Dagevos, 2007). Despite the overwhelming use of the notion of socio-cultural integration as a part of integration in both policy and academic research (Ager & Strang, 2008), there appears to be much discrepancy about both the meaning of socio-cultural integration and how this is related to the Dutch cultural identity and society. What does socio-cultural integration mean? According to whom? What is the role of Dutch cultural identity in the imaginaries of socio-cultural integration? What is aimed to be accomplished by socio-cultural integration and how does this relate to the society we find ourselves in?

This thesis aims to critically assess the status of what socio-cultural integration in the Netherlands means, by taking different imaginaries of different actors into account. By doing this, it stresses the importance of a less rigid conceptualization of society and a more multi-vocal conceptualization of integration and the expectations for everyone within such a society. To do justice to the contested nature of the term "integration". The multi-vocal voice of this research is established through the empirical data collection of four sub-groups: practitioners of integration, people living near an AZC, people of Afghan heritage who came to the Netherlands over 5 years, ago, and Afghan newcomers arriving through Heumensoord in 2021. The further explanation behind the division of the four sub-groups in this research is to be found in section 1.2 societal relevance.

The following section will elaborate on how participants of Afghan heritage will be called during the course of this research. States have created a wide range of categorical differentiations concerning

integration which has been explored and frequently taken over by researchers (Anderson, 2014). This is highly problematic because by doing this, researchers adopt a certain methodological nationalism in which 'migrants' are unwanted, and above all: a threat to the national identity. Adopting the term 'migrant' can furnish the exclusion from the national imagined community of people with a migration background (Dahinden, 2016) On top of that, by calling them "migrants" it seems as if they are still "on their way" to somewhere and have not arrived yet. Being a refugee is an experience with a beginning and an end, a person should not be referred to as a "refugee" for their entire life, it diminishes their other identity markers. Continuing to call people who have been in the Netherlands for several years refugees, fosters the idea of them not having settled yet, of them still being in the process of finding refuge (Fallon, 2018).

Because of this, the people of Afghan origin who lived in Heumensoord will be called "Afghan newcomers" or in short "Afghan new". Within this research, the group of people of Afghan heritage who arrived here several years ago will be referred to as "Afghan old", or "people of Afghan heritage who came to the Netherlands several years ago". Using the word "newcomers" for people who have been living in the Netherlands for many years seems far from fitting. There seems to be no clear definition of when someone stops being "new" from the Dutch integrational perspective (Ibid). While talking about both of these two research groups together I will refer to them as "people of Afghan heritage" or in short "Afghan people". While referring to people who migrated to the Netherlands from another country than Afghanistan during their lifetime they will be called 'migrant people' or 'people with a migration background'. While doing this, there is referred to their migration background, but also acknowledged that they are multidimensional people, and underlined that there is more to their existence than solely their migration background.

### 1.1 Setting the stage

Dutch national integration policies have been marked by discontinuity. Numerous policy frames have been used over the past 30 years. The presence of migrant people in the Netherlands has been framed as a temporary phenomenon until the 1970's. The guest workers who came to the Netherlands in the period before the 70's were believed to return to their homeland eventually. The Netherlands considered itself "full" at the time due to the high population density and had no recent tradition of immigration or experience with it whatsoever. Public policies focused on temporary stay, preservation of the culture of their home country, and eventually the return of the guest workers. This approach was very exclusionist at the time, people with a migration background were kept isolated from the rest of the population, and they were encouraged to preserve their own culture and mother tongue. However, this did not happen and most of the guest workers who came to the Netherlands during this period stayed and moved their families to the Netherlands as well (Entzinger, 2013).

In the late 70's there was a drastic shift in the "preservation of one's own culture" approach. A WRR rapport published in 1979 made this very clear: "up until now the slogan 'integration with preservation of own culture was handled'; but we have noticed that this is hard to maintain when people stay in the Netherlands for a longer period of time" (Verwey-Jonker Instituut, 2004) The Netherlands moved towards a more assimilative meaning of integration. In the 'Minderheden Nota' published by the Ministry of Internal

Affairs in 1983, it states that the Netherlands has to take measures to keep norms and values from minority cultures “out”. “Once the norms and values from minority groups from their own culture are clashing with those of the established norms and values of the pluriform society, which are perceived as the foundation of our society, it will be hard to do something about it. [...] The culture of the majority is after all anchored into the Dutch society” (Ibid.) This showed the increasing fear of “other” cultures taking over, possibly becoming the culture of the majority and fading the Dutch culture away.

From the 1990’s on, the minority policies shifted towards integration policies. Integration policies aim at enlarging participation in the job market and education, with an increased focus on the individual. This led to the first official integration duties for migrant people, or as they were called during that period: “strangers” (Staten Generaal, 2009). Migration is no longer perceived as to be something temporary, the Netherlands is de facto considered to be an immigration country. The focus becomes more and more on the individual and the individual’s responsibility to society (WRR, 1998). In this integrationist approach the emancipation of minorities was no longer perceived as the responsibility of the government. Cultural matters were to be considered as a private matter rather than a concern of the government (Bonjour, 2013).

At the turn of the century, both the parliamentary and the public debates shifted from socio-economic participation to socio-cultural integration (van Heerden et al, 2013). After the terrorist attacks on 9/11 the incompatibility of cultures was emphasized, and “other” cultures were seen as a threat to the ‘western’ cultures. This led to several policy choices which focused even more on individual responsibility of migrant people, and adaptation to ‘the Dutch ways’ (Verkaaik, 2010). During this time social-cultural differences came to be viewed as barriers to ‘immigrant integration’, stressing the importance of the preservation of national cultural identity within the Dutch society. Polarization and politicization on the subject of integration increased (Scholten, 2011), showing the occurrence of different underlying social imaginaries of Dutch national cultural identity. Social imaginaries of integration based on a ‘society under threat’ became actively present (Haile, 2020).

## 1.2 Societal relevance

Very often problems that are labeled as problems of people with a migration background, are problems of society as a whole and affect everyone who lives in that society. Some “immigrant” problems can even be used to determine and detect issues for the host society later on. This is the case because they often enter at the “bottom” of the host society and thus encounter the most societal issues. However, societal problems often move up to the top of the society and become more pressing issues at different levels of society, which stresses the importance of framing certain problems not just as “immigrant” or “integration” issues (Korteweg, 2017). Coherent policy development and productive public debate are threatened because the concept of integration is framed with different meanings and is defined differently by different actors (Ager & Strang, 2008).

*I am very hopeful that a young, Dutch, educated woman like yourself picked integration as a research topic, this leaves me with high hopes for the future [...] I truly do not believe the government itself even knows what integration means (Interview, Sina, Afghan Old, 24-5-2022).*

Sina is one of the participants that has been interviewed for this research. She fled Afghanistan 26 years ago and came to the Netherlands. She shows her current discontent about integration and questions the government and its integration policies. Indeed, as Sina points out, the Dutch government policy regarding integration is marked with discontinuity. Since the late 90's immigrant integration and its policies have been perceived as a failure. This perception of integration as a failure takes a place at the heart of both the Dutch policy & public debate, and is often "attributed to the immigrant's unwillingness to adapt to their new situation" (Belabas, 2020. p.33).

Several economic and social situations migrant people find themselves in such as socio-economic participation, wearing a headscarf or hijab, and having a double nationality are highly politicized and used as a source to frame both policy and public debates. This creates situations in which even second or third-generation migrant people are still perceived as outsiders in the host society. Integration, and in particular socio-cultural integration plays an important role in the focus and framing processes of virtual boundaries in imagined societies and other imaginaries (Korteweg, 2017).

A Social-cultural-plan bureau (SCP) research on citizens' perspectives published in 2019 showed that Dutch citizens who do not have a migration background themselves, worry a lot about social and cultural matters of integration. This research showed the strongly voiced opinion amongst Dutch citizens without a migration background that newcomers should adapt to their new surroundings. It also showed that citizens without a migration background often state that 'foreigners' need to integrate, not realizing that they have to also put effort in themselves to accept, respect, and help newcomers (Dekker & Ridder, 2019). The term 'foreigners' and newcomers are used interchangeably in the responses of the non-migrant Dutch citizens in the SCP research as if the two terms have a shared meaning. While talking about 'foreigners' or 'newcomers' this is sometimes also directed at second or third-generation migrant people. A newcomer is "someone who has recently arrived in a place or became involved in an activity" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022b), and a foreigner is "someone who comes from another country" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022a).

This shows the importance of imaginaries - imaginaries being understood as a certain set of values, institutions, laws, and other kinds of symbols through which people imagine their (social) surroundings - while discussing the meaning of integration (Taylor, 2004). According to the definition of 'foreigner' and 'newcomer', they most certainly do not share meaning, and neither of them is a correct way to address second or third-generation migrant people. Nevertheless, because they are imagined to be the same, processes of belonging and othering within the society came to be based on the imaginaries of the meaning of those concepts (Spencer & Charsley, 2021) Even though, formally speaking they do not share meaning, it has a big effect that they are imagined to be the same, and the analytical importance of whether we imagine the same while discussing integration issues comes forward. Within this thesis, these issues will be dealt

with through the notion of imaginaries, being approached as how Charles Taylor (2004) puts it: “something much broader and deeper than the intellectual schemes people may entertain when they think about social reality in a disengaged mode”. An imaginary is a visualized ideal of a situation, which often varies even more than a perception, and is harder to explain to others for whom it is not possible to visualize the exact same thing you are visualizing. (Gregory, 2009).

This cultural concern, or cultural anxiety as represented in the SCP research discussed above, comes from a growing fear of ethnic diversity and immigration, currently happening all over Europe. It can be explained as the fear that ‘outsiders’ are robbing ‘us’ of ‘our own’ culture (Vertovec, 2011). This creates a very homogenous and static idea of both the Dutch cultural identity and the cultural identity of people with a migration background. Increasing tensions and polarization are leading to a situation in which the perceived “Dutch culture” is being forced on migrant people (Entzinger, 2013). Consequently, this increased focus on “The Dutch cultural identity” and “having to adapt to this” makes migrant people responsible to adjust “their” culture as if culture is not diverse, and constantly changing (Korteweg, 2017). This lack of enthusiasm for a culturally diverse society coincides with the current ruling territorial imaginary in which a solid European political order is only possible with culturally homogeneous states which are horizontally arranged and interlocked. Such an imaginary (re)produces a so-called ‘isomorphic’ relationship between the state, people, culture, and territory (Feldman, 2005).

Migrant people are very often portrayed as passive subjects of integration in both the scientific and the political world. However, self-identification and the migrant people’s own perception of integration is the precondition for other dimensions concerning integration such as national identity, feelings of belonging, commitment, and attachment. National self-identification, and the feeling of being in the process of successfully integrating, and starting to belong, concerns the identification of oneself as a member of the host society. Identification of oneself as a member of the host society increases socio-cultural integration, therefore it is important to take migrant people’s perspective on integration into account. Integration is a multi-actor activity and should thus be analyzed as one within the scientific world (de Vroome et al, 2011).

This research takes a multi-actor perspective to collect, mirror, and put these different imaginaries on socio-cultural integration and the role of culture in integration in dialogue, from different societal angles. To mirror the various imaginaries and create an in-depth analysis of the meaning and consequences of those imaginaries. Through semi-structured interviews in a safe and open environment, this research explores the subjective imaginaries of not only subjects of integration policies, but also practitioners of it, and citizens who are a part of the “imagined community” already obtaining this “Dutch cultural identity” migrant people supposedly have to integrate into. To narrow this down the focus has been on people living in Nijmegen and practitioners working in Nijmegen. There has been a specific focus on the Afghans as a migrant group in this research.

Afghan newcomers are a big group of asylum seekers for whom cultural difference is often imagined to be a theme of importance and a “problem” regarding their integration (Rezaei et al. 2021) This, next to the recent rise of the Afghan newcomers in the Netherlands, makes them a relevant migrant group to focus on. Before the recent rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan at the end of 2021, Afghans were already the fourth biggest group of asylum seekers in the Netherlands in 2021. When the Taliban took over the country, the Netherlands evacuated people who worked with the Dutch government in Afghanistan to the

Netherlands. The estimated number of Afghans who came to the Netherlands in 2021 after the rise of the Taliban is 3000-3500, and 1200-1300 of them received a permit to stay by December 2021. The total number of people asking for asylum in the Netherlands in 2021 was 34.860, and more than 10 percent of them are Afghans (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2022; VluchtelingenWerk Nederland, 2021).

Focusing on people of Afghan heritage who came here through the recent relocation in 2021, and people of Afghan heritage who came here longer ago, provides a unique opportunity to mirror differences between the imaginaries on socio-cultural integration of Afghan newcomers who've just arrived in the Netherlands, and people from Afghan heritage who have been here for years. Next to Afghan migrant people, practitioners of integration policy and practices, and neighbors of the AZC in Nijmegen have been interviewed. By focusing on practitioners of integration policy and practices this research aims to map the imaginaries of those partaking in the implementation of integration policies and practices as well. Neighbors of the AZC in Nijmegen have also been interviewed, to also include people who encountered newcomers in their daily life and a personal setting. By focusing on these four different groups this research is able to analyze a wide variety of imaginaries concerning integration from different perspectives and levels of involvement within the society.

### 1.3 Scientific relevance

*"Integration in itself is not a political program. Conversely, it is and always has been an extremely vague concept. It is exactly its looseness, and the extensibility of the concept 'integration', that renders it (politically) successful" (Leila Hadj, 2019, p. 3.)*

As mentioned in this quote by Leila Hadj (2019), the vagueness of the concept integration makes it possible to draw upon it in a lot of different ways. Integration is considered a selective gatekeeper to becoming "proper EU citizens", but there seems to be no clear definition how you can become one, and it seems to be even harder if you are not already western and white (Wolf & Ossewaarde, 2009) There has been a considerable increase in scholarly attention to integration. Penninx (2019) recognizes the problematic conceptualization of the concept of integration and the way it is used as an analytical tool in the scientific field. It is important to find clarity on this concept, in both societal and scientific contexts (Klarenbeek, 2019). Schinkel (2018) even vouched to get rid of the concept of integration altogether. Authors such as Lea (2019) and Penninx (2019) think that is a bit extreme and criticize his lack of providing solutions. Spencer (2021) adds to this that the preference of some scholars to avoid the word 'integration' can also lead to a lack of coherence in terminology in scientific literature. The failure to conduct research in this area by avoiding the term or the concept altogether could result in leaving inequality and power issues unstudied and thus unresolved (Klarenbeek, 2019).

In the past decades, we have experienced a neo-liberal change, meaning a bigger focus on marketization, personal responsibility, and individual action when it comes down to individual well-being (Korteweg, 2017, pp .433-435). This could lead to more 'segmented integration' and an increasing lack of understanding of the concept of integration as a whole, as multi-actor activity with communal responsibility

(Leila Hadj, 2019). That is precisely why this research focuses on integration as a multi-actor activity, in an attempt to contribute to an understanding of integration as a multi-actor activity with communal responsibility.

This research explores these different imaginaries of integration and their relation to “the Dutch cultural identity” and the concept of society. This research is unique because it combines contextual and individual-level empirical data within a multi-actor framework. It adds an empirical multi-actor element to the discussion of imaginations on integration and how these fit into the imagined society. According to Schinkel (2017) the concept of ‘society’ selects its members and delimits its boundaries, while reproducing an imagination of having insiders and outsiders as two categories at the same time. It thus creates the existence of the imagination of shared values and characters which set the insiders apart from those who do not really belong to the society: the outsiders. Newcomer’s own understanding and interpretation of what is necessary to become part of the Dutch society plays a vital role in the way they value their own place within this society (Haile, 2020. p.51). This multi-actor, looking at people’s imaginaries who have different levels of personal/professional connectedness to the results of integration in practice seals a theoretical blind spot. The multi-actor element of this research is very important, the experiences of migrant people in the Netherlands cannot be studied independently. There is a constant liaison between broader structures and everyday practices, continuously influencing the imaginaries and practices of everyone operating within the Dutch society (Vertovec, 2018).

Furthermore, this research will also take the fluidity of identity and the interchangeable process of constantly (re)creating one’s identity based on influences from the situation a person finds themselves in into account (Vertovec, 2011). It will focus on migrant people as active participants in the processes of their own negotiations of identity, already being part of the society they find themselves in. By conducting interviews this research adds empirical insight to the debate by discussing the subjective experiences and imaginaries of the participants and linking this to the broader societal context.

#### 1.4 Research objectives and questions

As discussed in the introduction, coherent policy development and productive public debate are threatened because the concept of integration is used with different meanings and is defined differently by different actors (Ager & Strang, 2008). This research project seeks to identify and mirror different imaginaries of the meaning of socio-cultural integration and Dutch cultural identity, in order to foreground the variety of imagined meanings of these concepts in relation to the society .

With these objectives, this research aims to contribute to a world in which 'coherent development and productive public debate' is less threatened because the actors involved are more aware of the multiplicity of imaginaries on the societal imagined construct of integration, and consider integration more as an issue for everyone in society, with a less rigid conceptualization of “Dutch cultural identity” and “society”. To accomplish this, this research aims to answer the following research question:

*In what way do the contrasting imaginaries of socio-cultural integration of Afghan migrant people, neighbors of an AZC and practitioners of integration relate and contrast to each other, and how does this relate to how they imagine society?*

By focusing on different actors involved in the Dutch integration process, this thesis creates a diverse insight and understanding of different (re)productions of imaginaries, mirrors them, and links them to how the concept of society is imagined. To answer the main research question this research has been divided into three sub-questions:

1. *What are the different imaginaries regarding the meaning of socio-cultural integration?*
2. *What are the different imaginaries regarding the “Dutch cultural identity” within which the socio-cultural integration takes place?*
3. *How is the concept of society represented and reproduced in the imaginaries on what socio-cultural integration in the Dutch culture means?*

### 1.5 Thesis outline

This thesis consists of seven chapters. In Chapter 2 the theoretical framework will be discussed, covering the topics: socio-cultural integration, citizenship, imaginaries, and society. Chapter 3 outlines the methodological set-up of this research, providing an explanation and argumentation of the research methods, and ethical considerations. This research empirical section consists of three Chapters. Chapter 4 examines how socio-cultural integration is defined in order to explore the underlying imaginaries and expectations of both the Dutch government and the participants of this research. It does so by answering the question: “What are the different imaginaries regarding the meaning of socio-cultural integration?”. Chapter 5 will build upon this and analyzes how the Dutch cultural identity imagined, with a strong emphasis on both the diversity and the fluidity of the imagined concept of Dutch cultural identity. This is done by answering the question “What are the different imaginaries regarding the “Dutch cultural identity” within which the socio-cultural integration takes place?”. Chapter 6 dives deeper into the role of the concept of society in the integration debate to build upon the first two empirical chapters and argue for the need for a less rigid conceptualization of both integration and society in order to successfully integrate a society. In this chapter, the central question is “How is the concept of society represented and reproduced in the imaginaries of what socio-cultural integration in the Dutch culture means?”. The final Chapter 7 contains the conclusion and discussion, answering the main research question and reflecting on the limitations of this research.

## Chapter 2: Theoretical framework

This chapter will outline the current academic debates on which this research has been built, and discuss the theoretical concepts that have proven to be relevant. The theoretical framework outlines four concepts: socio-cultural integration, citizenship, imaginaries, and society.

### 2.1 Socio-cultural integration

There seems to be no agreed definition of integration. Sometimes it is viewed as a linear process, sometimes as a multidimensional process which is a two-way street between migrant people and citizens of the host society. Some see it as a linear process, in which the migrant has to adapt to the host society. Others believe that the process is multidimensional, meaning that both the migrant people and the citizens of the host society have to adapt to each other. Another view comes from Bathia & Ram (2009), who believe integration is a negotiation between a wide range of variables in which identity is constantly moving and contested. Or should integration be understood in a double sense, as Entzinger (2013) argues: *“It is a process in which individuals or groups with an immigration background are integrated into a ‘receiving society’ that in itself is integrated according to its degree of social cohesion”* (Entzinger, 2013, p. 693) Others see it as a negotiation between a wide range of variables in which identity is constantly moving and contested (Bhatia & Ram, 2009).

The origin of the concept of integration comes from Latin and originally means ‘unscathed whole’. It had to do with the internal adjustment of several parts of a whole but was a property of the whole in the end. Integration as a sociological concept is indeed often referred to in the way Entzinger explained above; with a reference to a social whole (Schinkel, 2018, p2). As mentioned in the introduction above, there are several domains on which the integration of immigrants is measured: housing, employment, education, language, social connection, and cultural knowledge. This research focuses on the socio-cultural domain, specifically because the social domain is often overlooked because of the neo-liberalist hyperfocus on the socio-economic within our society. Socio-cultural integration is often defined as the level of connection an immigrant has with the “native” population (Ager & Strang, 2008). Gijsberts & Dagevos (2007) defined socio-cultural integration as something concerned with whether the so-called “ethnic minority groups” remain distinct, or are becoming part of the receiving society. Policy analyses and documents also frequently use this as one of the main indicators of successful socio-cultural integration (Korac, 2001). These publications both talk about “ethnic minority groups” or “native”

This is a very problematic and exclusionist operationalization. The only people who are assumed to be the “native” population of the Netherlands are the Dutch non-migrant population, as shown in the SCP report (Huijnk & Andriessen, 2016). According to Schinkel (2017) integration does much more than just make a distinction between “well” integrated individuals and individuals who are “not well” integrated. The concept of immigrant integration makes a distinction between individuals for whom integration is not an issue, and those who need the concept of integration to be a part of and be accepted into society. Schinkel (2018) calls this a ‘dispensation of integration’, meaning that white citizens are not researched in terms of their integration. Second or third-generation migrant people, on the other hand, are apparently assumed to

still not be properly integrated, since they do not get this 'dispensation of integration'. The definition of socio-cultural integration as followed by de Haas et al.,(2015, p.421) as "the cognitive, attitude, and behavioral changes in conformity to the dominant norms of receiving societies" is an example of the move away from using terms such as "native" and "ethnic minorities" and referring to the "dominant norm in society instead". Which still leaves us with the question: what is this dominant norm in society and who decides or measures that?

The occurrence of a recent trend towards selective immigrant policies stems from the racialization of migrant people, or more specifically, certain categories of migrant people into irretrievably unassimilable Others. This trend has materialized mainly through the application of integration requirements to immigration, this is called the "civic integration turn" and is happening all over Europe (Bonjour & Duyvendak, 2017). Goodman & Wright (2015) points out that there is a fundamental difference between the nowadays obligatory civic integration policies which impose conditions on membership and the more traditional migrant policies with a focus on "enabling membership".

## 2.2 Citizenship

Citizenship has become a starting point in designing integration policy, with a big emphasis on the norms, values, and languages of the host country and considerations beyond its legal definition. In this approach, citizens are often framed as individual citizens of the national imagined community (Anderson, 1983). It appears that the framing of integration has increasingly become a matter of redefining, what Anderson called the "imagined community", instead of a matter of the involved migrant groups. This so-called citizenship approach is supposed to make sure a "clash of civilizations" does not occur during immigrant integration (Poppelaars & Scholten, 2008, pp. 335-337).

*"A citizenship approach implies that once trickled down to the local implementation level where the actual integration is to be achieved, no policies or measures specifically aimed at certain communities of migrants should exist." (Poppelaars & Scholten, 2008, p. 336).*

The Dutch integration policy is stressing the "good", "active" and "common" citizenship of individual migrant people instead of focusing on the social-cultural emancipation of migrant groups (Scholten & Hozhacker, 2008). By doing so, they tried to stimulate individual migrant people to fulfill their civic duties and live up to their civic rights to become economically independent participants in Dutch society (Joppke & Morawska, 2002). According to some, like Joppke & Morawska (2002), this Dutch exceptionalism originates from the radical way in which the Netherlands turned towards a more assimilation based approach in the early 2000's. They state that, above all, this stems from the limited extent to which this official policy discourse has taken effect in concrete policy practices.

The integration policy stressing "good" and "active" citizenship was considered relatively successful in the social-economic areas. However, a nationwide debate about the "multicultural tragedy" drew focus to the policy failures of this approach in the social-cultural debate. Sheffer (2011) states that Dutch society has never really been multicultural, he argues that a stronger shared national identity can

balance the impact of factors such as globalization with a combination of openness and identity. His book suggests a nationwide task to understand multiculturalism better and engage in it more intensely instead of abandoning it. Scheffer's (2011) ideas about multiculturalism were part of a new frame that had emerged in both public and political discourse from which integration policy was yet again evaluated as a failure. The citizen approach was framed differently to focus more on the social-cultural dimension of integration as well. The term "common citizenship" was brought into life, as the term already suggests, policy based on this term had a big emphasis on what citizens have "in common". The focus lies on the fact that they are all members of "one society", and thus demanded acceptance of basic values and norms, as well as knowledge of the national language (Poppelaars & Scholten, 2008, p. 341).

The integration of immigrants has been connected to a very broad nationwide debate about the norms and values in the Netherlands since the discussions on multiculturalism started around the year 2000. This era is characterized by growing globalization, migration, individualization, and Europeanization, which leads to growing feelings of uncertainty about national identity (Poppelaars & Scholten, 2008, P. 346). Two lessons are usually drawn from the recent Dutch experience of multiculturalism and migration according to van Krieken (2012). According to him these two things are that it is an example of the multiculturalist failure, and neglect to give sufficient recognition to national identity. Some argue for a stronger concept of what national identity is or should be. They say that a common identity helps create inclusion, putting the focus on how the differences in ethnic and religious identity actually creates a more exclusionist reaction (Slootman & Duyvendak, 2015). During this research, national identity will be approached as an important element in imagining socio-cultural integration. It will analyze whether national identity is imagined to be something rigid, or something fluid, and question its meaning in society.

The current discussion in Western Europe about to what extent diversity in the public domain is allowed is an ongoing one. In the Netherlands, culture is often seen as something static, something prominent, especially by those who are fearing the increase in Islamic influence and power in the Netherlands. These concerns lead to a culturalization and emotionalization of citizenship. This means that citizenship is increasingly less about political and social rights and more about the norms and values of a culturally defined society (Ibid.) This culturalization and emotionalization of citizenship are also portrayed in the Dutch civic integration discourse. Within this discourse there is an idealized image of a good citizen, being someone who is participating and contributing to society by working and making money. However, the failure of immigrants to do so, and participate economically is often explained culturally (van Houdt et al. 2011, p.422).

By putting the responsibility on migrant people by stressing "good" and "active" citizenship a certain "deservingness" frame arises. In order to earn their place in society, migrant people are expected to do much more than passing their citizenship test and gaining formal citizenship to the Netherlands (Bonjour & Duyvendak, 2017). Culturalization and emotionalization of citizenship leaves more room for different imaginaries of what citizenship is beyond its legal definitions.

### 2.3 Imaginaries

Imaginaries are concerned with imagining things that are absent, but at the same time have a possibility of creative potential, sometimes even the potential to create institutions (Casey, 2000). Adding to this Maguire (2006) calls imagination, especially through acts of reading and writing, the “agent of persuasion” and a possible creator of justice; law & happiness in the world. People imagine the broader social context in which they move and identify themselves by. Social imaginaries, as Charles Taylor (2004) defines them are:

*“The ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations” (Taylor, 2004, p.23).*

The essential difference between imaginaries and perceptions is that perception involves an observation of the thing being perceived, whereas imagination involves merely a ‘quasi-observation’. If one is perceiving an object or a situation one can discover new things about it while it is being observed. An imaginary is merely a visualized ideal of a situation, which often varies even more than a perception, and is harder to explain to others for whom it is not possible to visualize the exact same thing as the explainer (Gregory, 2009).

The concept of integration is very geographical and geopolitical in the imaginary sense of identity. Framing and the “us” versus “them” divide plays a big role and is often seen as something negative in integration policies and practices because it amplifies the difference between migrant people and non-migrant people, this divides them (Poppelaars & Scholten, 2008, p.342). The “us” versus “them” divide is an example of imaginaries that will be analyzed in relation to imaginaries regarding integration during the course of this research. Imaginaries are socially transmitted representational assemblages that are culturally shared and interact with personal imagination, such as the “us” versus “them” divide. They are used to determine the meaning and mediate how people act, cognize and value the world around them (Salazar, 2020). According to Baeza (2008) imaginaries are an important part of the glue that holds groups together, if you share the same ideas or values as others this can make you feel connected to them. For this it does not matter what kind of ideas or values they are, they can be fully subjective and sometimes even completely factually incorrect. Imaginaries can act as an ‘energetic source’ that inspires people’s social life.

The influence of social networks on imaginaries is substantial, sustained by (social) media and communication technologies such as mobile phones. Huijnk & Andriessen (2016) note in their report that there is a discrepancy in the media framing concerning integration into the Dutch society. The way the media and the political landscape frame integration issues suggests that the resistance against non-western migrant people in the Netherlands is continuously increasing. However, the contrary is the case, the percentage of autochthonous Dutch citizens who feel like there are too many non-western migrant people in the Netherlands has lowered since the shift of the millennial. Ironically, Mobile phones and (social) media are considered key survival tools for migrant people both during and after their journey to a different country. They are used to maintain ties through a social-cultural network with people who are not

geographically near you (Frouws et al., 2016). This is of course not only the case for migrant people, people all over the world use it to stay up to date within the globalized world we live in.

From the perspective of people with a migration background, self-identification perception in integration is the precondition for other dimensions concerning integration, such as national identity, feelings of belonging, commitment, and attachment. National self-identification, and the feeling of being in the process of successfully integrating and starting to belong, concerns identification of oneself as a member of the host society (de Vroome et al, 2011). According to scholars such as Wimmer (2008), migrant policies are an example of “boundary work”, where nation-states often do not take the self-identification of migrant people into concern and which deepens the divide between those being integrated into society and those still in need of integration. Migrant policies can be viewed as “politics of belonging”, in which the migrant itself often has very little agency and is perceived as the “object of integration” within “society” (Brubaker, 2010). Throughout this research, the term imaginaries of integration is used to refer to people’s different imaginaries of both integration and what the Dutch culture is, to show it (re)produces an imagined “other” within the “society”.

#### 2.4 Society

The conceptualization of ‘society’ does not exist independently of its imagination. For a society to exist, to have effects and to be a concept both states and citizens can act upon, or in the name of, it needs to be imagined. States exercise their symbolic power in shaping this imaginary through migration policies by classifying people as belonging either to “us” or “them” or in the empty void in between, in the process of becoming “something’ within a society (Paul, 2015). This is a reproduction of a certain representation of who belongs to the “we” in relation to who belongs to the “other” (Anderson, 2014). Within the field of migrant studies, imaginaries about the concept of ‘society’, and what is accepted as being part of a society in a specific country, have deep roots in selective boundaries created and maintained by sociological imaginations (Schinkel, 2017). According to Schinkel (2017) the concept of ‘society’ selects its members and delimits its boundaries, while reproducing an imagination of having insiders and outsiders as two categories at the same time. It thus creates the existence of the imagination of shared values and characters, which set the insiders apart from those who do not belong to the society: the outsiders. He also notes that regardless of the continuously changing policies and integration practices, it is always the immigrants who are held accountable for not fitting into the society that they live in.

This is represented in the “migrant with poor prospects” concept. People with “poor prospects” were a communal concern within the society in the welfare state in the 80’s. This concerned Dutch citizens who were struggling and needed (individual) emancipation. Policies based upon this focused on this portrayed a certain deservingness of the help they were getting from the government. During this time the question was which government policies were best suited to improve the prospects of the “migrants with poor prospects”. This, however, shifted to the question of whether the “migrant with poor prospects” even is assimilable or welcome in the Netherlands at all. As a result of this they were racialized into unassimilable migrant people and a danger to the Dutch society (Bonjour & Duyvendak, 2017, p. 888). The “migrant with poor prospects” is the opposite of the idealized Dutch citizen. The idealized Dutch citizen is a hardworking

man or woman, and this hardworking (wo)man is presented as being “average” or “normal” within the Dutch society, a member of the middle class. The idealized Dutch citizen is an image that excludes lower-class citizens and consequently holds migrant people to a higher standard than Dutch people themselves (Ibid, p.893).

This not only holds migrant people to a higher standard, but the individualization of integration also changes the concept of integration from a system state to an individual's state of being. This leads to individuals being racialized in particular ways by putting the imagined social construct of ‘society’ as a static object first (Schinkel, 2018, p.3). Immigrants are put outside ‘society’, and society is imagined as a domain without problems since the existing problems are relegated to the individual level of immigrants. The rhetoric of ‘bringing immigrants into society’ illustrates the idea that migrant people are still in the process of arriving, even though some of them have been born here (Boersma & Schinkel, 2018). In conclusion, one could say that this ‘society’ into which immigrants need to integrate is everywhere and nowhere at the same time. It is everywhere in the way that it is used as the benchmark to which we measure immigrants' alleged integration, but it is nowhere because it is undifferentiated and static and an imagined whole at the same time (Schinkel, 2018). The static representation of the concept, while possibly varying imaginaries on citizenship, socio-cultural integration, and society exist is exactly the contradiction this research aims to outline.

## 2.5 Conclusion

The theoretical framework of this research consists of a few core academic insights. It discusses the discrepancy between the meaning of socio-cultural integration and the exclusionist notion of who has to integrate and the us/them divide. The civic turn has led to citizenship definitions beyond its legal meaning, individualizing it and focusing on the “deservingness” of people with a migration background. The key word in this is: imaginaries, in the way integration and culture are framed. Certain seemingly rigid imaginaries on socio-cultural integration and the society reproduce the concepts of “good” citizenship and deservingness, without raising the question of what the “cultural norm” within the society is. These imaginaries actively put people with a migration background outside the society they find themselves in. In this study, questions aiming to understand and mirror different imaginaries regarding socio-cultural integration, Dutch culture, and society will be asked.

During this research, national identity will be approached as an important element in imagining socio-cultural integration. This research will analyze whether national identity is imagined to be something rigid, or something fluid. The imaginaries of Afghan migrant people will have a central place in this research, and the multi-actor approach will provide a wide scale of imaginaries on topics regarding socio-cultural integration, Dutch national identity, and how these two are imagined in relation to society.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

This research is an elaboration of different imaginaries about socio-cultural integration in the Netherlands. It sheds light on how people with diverse personal/professional & situational backgrounds have different, and sometimes similar, imaginaries of what socio-cultural integration is or should be. This chapter describes the research methodologies used and how the data has been collected, documented, and analyzed. It ends with a reflection on the methods used, their limitations, and my personal positionality.

### 3.1 Research approach & justification

The focus of this research is on imaginaries regarding socio-cultural integration, from different perspectives and different actors all situated in Nijmegen. This research takes a multi-actor approach, meaning that this research has taken the perceptions of multiple actors into account, helping to mirror the different perspectives of participants who belong to various groups (Della Porta & Keating, 2008). Most societal problems require attention to be paid to multiple actors involved in the social process. The strength of the multi-actor approach lies in the multiplicity of perspectives gathered and analyzed to create a diverse image of how the research subject is perceived (Pruyt, 2010).

This research consisted of two phases: the exploring phase and the in-depth phase. The exploring phase of this research had some ethnographical components. Ethnographic research involves studying people in their normal/natural context and is focused on people's experiences of actions, phenomena, and events in this context (Wilkinson, 2013). During this phase, I worked for COA at the Afghan refugee camp Heumensoord and Bureau Wijland, a local project and advisory bureau, focused on issues concerning integration in the municipality of Nijmegen and Arnhem. Next to that I also conducted an exploration of the streets around the AZC. The purpose of this exploring phase was to understand the research group better in an everyday setting, and to possibly already unveil some of the imaginaries regarding integration. This helped to determine the specific direction of the semi-structured interviews in the in-depth phase of this research. The interview-guide for the in-depth phase has been created based on some of the observations in the exploring phase in combination with literature research.

The importance of the exploring phase lies in the exploration of different imaginaries from different perspectives, and the exploration of the context within which the imaginaries were shaped and came to be. Imaginaries are constantly changing and are very context specific, if a researcher desires to investigate the imaginaries of a certain sub-group he or she needs to truly understand the surroundings of this sub-group (Strauss, 2006). The importance of the in-depth phase lies in analyzing the complexity and interchangeability of imaginaries about integration, and relating these imaginaries to the imagined broader context of society and Dutch national identity. During the in-depth phase, semi-structured interviews with participants from the different sub-groups have been conducted. Combining the ethnographical components of the exploring phase of this research with the multi-actor approach creates a pluralistic approach that leads to a more in-depth and complete image of a social phenomenon (Della Porta & Keating, 2008).

### 3.2 Data collection

The data collected during the exploring phase of this research has been collected by taking field notes in a research diary. The semi-structured interviews for the in-depth phase of this research have been recorded and put into transcript. The following sections will describe how the data collection has taken place during the two phases of this research, followed by an argumentation of the methods that have been used.

#### 3.2.1 Participant observation & small talk – Exploring phase

The participant observation & small talk techniques have mainly been used during the exploring phase of this research. The concept of participant observation involves finding the setting in which the social or cultural thing you want to research is happening and becoming intimate with the group that populates that setting. Participant observation is a method that collects local and contextualized knowledge of groups, events, and places (Laurier, 2016). The goal of participant observation is not to collect standardized data, but to identify patterns, uncover differences and show similarities (Gobo & Molle, 2017; Clifford et al, 2016). Small talk has been used as an important research method to gain trust and discover a deeper layer of thoughts, perceptions, and underlying norms, which contribute to certain imaginaries. Small talk methods provided me with space for serendipity, the unexpected occurrence of certain underlying imaginaries. Often while conducting interviews or having conversations with participants of this research, small talk turned out to be an vital ingredient of a way to open up communication (Driessen & Janssen, 2013).

To get in touch with the three research groups, they have been approached and observed within a certain context. While working for Bureau Wijland and COA I got in touch with the practitioners of integration in their professional setting, which provided me with the possibility to observe how certain imaginaries were portrayed while practicing their profession. Both the Heumensoord residents and the neighbors of the AZC were first approached in a personal setting, the surroundings of their own living spaces. Providing me with the opportunity to observe them in a more personal setting. All three groups have thus been approached and observed within the pre-determined context of interest for this research.

While attempting to explore the imaginaries regarding integration of the Heumensoord residents, and to let us get used to each other outside the Heumensoord camp, we did some activities together outside the camp. I had tea with them for a while before they felt comfortable discussing the topic. At one point we were in the public library together and there was a children's book about the Netherlands. We actually ended up using that book to get our first real conversation about what their imaginaries of the Dutch culture were (Personal communication, Heumensoord, 6-1-2022). A two-day exploration of the area surrounding the AZC was conducted to get to know the context in which Neighbors of an AZC in Nijmegen found themselves and to get insight into their possible imaginaries regarding integration and/or how this they could be affected by it.

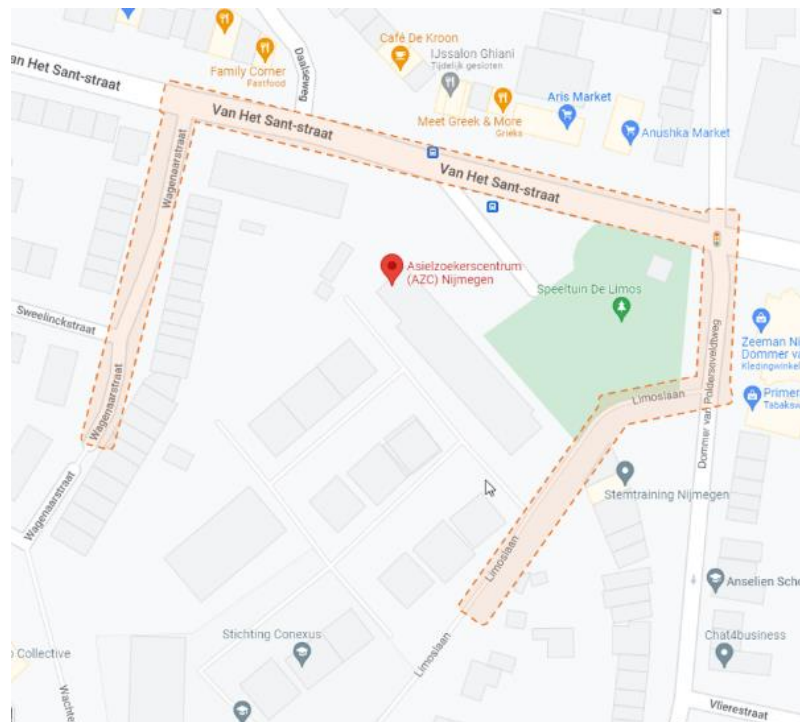
#### 3.2.2 Exploration of the area around the AZC – Exploring phase

There has been an exploration of the streets next to the AZC in Nijmegen to talk to people about what they thought integration was and if they experienced something concerning integration with the people who lived at the AZC in Nijmegen. Before entering the field I decided to start by trying to talk to people living in the streets directly surrounding the AZC. The first time observing the neighborhood, it was a sunny day and

a lot of people were sitting in their front gardens or gardening. Those people were significantly more approachable in comparison to the people who opened the door after I rang their doorbell. The day was spent helping people in their gardens while they were willing to discuss their opinions on integration. There were some conversations with people living in the streets surrounding the AZC. It, however, turned out to be hard to find people who were willing to participate in a full interview.

The only person I talked to that day who was willing to be interviewed showed me the neighborhood and pointed me towards the diversity of the streets around the AZC. The population of the neighborhood was quite diverse; some young upcoming urban professionals, students, young couples, people living in social housing, and people who had been living there for over 40 years. The next day I came back with letters to put in people's mailboxes with a short explanation of my research topic and the question if I could interview them. These letters were put in the mailbox of people who were either direct neighbors of the AZC building and surroundings or living across the street. This was done because during the exploration of the neighborhood I quickly noticed that people living just as little as two streets away from the AZC were seemingly less aware of the fact that there was an AZC in their neighborhood, or at least less interested and engaged to discuss

it. Not everyone in the street received a letter, I only put the letters in the mailboxes from houses that did not have a "nee, nee" sticker on their mailbox, since that indicates they do not want to receive door-to-door magazines or other kinds of advertisement. A total of 50 letters were printed and divided over the streets. The orange lines on the map show the streets that received the letters. Both my phone number and email address were included at the bottom of that letter. This way they could choose the method of communication of their preference.



### 3.2.3 Semi-structured interviews – In-depth phase

This study conducted semi-structured interviews with 19 people of the research population, of which three were group interviews. Semi-structured interviews are about talking to research participants in ways that are orderly, partially structured, and self-conscious (Kreuger & Casey, 2000). The purpose of the interviews is to map the imaginaries concerning socio-cultural integration in Dutch society from different perspectives, to mirror them and to see how/if they possibly relate to each other. Because of the sensitivity of this subject, not all of the interviews have been recorded. When it was made apparent that the participants felt

uncomfortable with the interview being recorded, I had to write along while conducting the interview. It was most important that the participants felt like it was a safe space to share their thoughts, opinions, and experiences. Some participants have been interviewed in a group setting, because they felt more comfortable with this. By creating a safe space I hoped the participants would be most open about their imaginaries of integration and Dutch national identity. Previous studies on imaginaries have shown that to discuss this topic with participants, creating a safe space is of the essence (Arruda, 2015). That is also why all participants have been made aware of the option to retract their interview at any point, or skip questions if they did not feel comfortable with it. All the names of the participants of this research are replaced with pseudonyms to preserve their anonymity.

The topic list on which the interview guide is based, and the interview guide itself are added in Appendix A. As explained by Valentine (2005) while discussing the importance of semi-structured interviews, the strength of semi-structured interviews lies within the flexibility of the researcher to explore their topic based on the input provided by the participant as well. This way the interview is less static and also contributes to participants speaking freely, because of the resemblance it has to regular social-interaction. The interviews started with questions about integration, what participants thought integration and socio-cultural integration were, how it was going with integration in Nijmegen, the barriers of integration, the influence of media and politics on this, and also what they thought others thought about integration. From this, we moved on to questions about what Dutch culture, norms, and values are, and whether or not it is important to follow them as newcomers. At the end of the interview guide were some statements that came out of an SCP research to be the most controversial statements about integration in The Netherlands (Dekker et al., 2019). These were used during interviews when a participant was struggling to answer the questions, or seemingly holding back in their honesty. By using some more controversial and clear cut statements, to which they had to respond with either “yes” or “no”, participants were stimulated to engage in the conversation. These statements provided me with the possibility to ask participants why they did or did not agree to that specific statement, and go a bit more in depth based on their explanation. Very often it was not necessary to use these statements in the interviews as the relevant topics would already have been discussed sufficiently during the rest of the interview.

### 3.3 Data documentation & data analysis

The data of this research is analyzed based on a qualitative content analysis, using coding in atlas-ti to identify factors/elements related to answering the research questions. The main risk of this research method is that it is very subjective; you always have to be aware of the fact that you yourself are your own research tool (Oost & Markenhof, 2006). To monitor the research process, I have kept field notes. Field notes or a research diary can provide the researcher with detailed notes and representations of the situations that are observed while conducting the fieldwork.(Muhall, 2003).

After transcribing the interviews I used atlas-ti to code the interviews. In order to see the patterns in a series of transcripts, qualitative researchers use coding to organize the transcripts and try to discover patterns within that organizational structure. While starting to code it can be useful to let go of your research codes and focus on what the participants have been trying to tell you, instead of the answers you

were expecting due to your own background in the field (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003, 31). The three phases of coding as described by Gobo & Molle (2017) have been used to increase the validity of the coding. These three phases of coding are open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. These codes and the code groups were used to help create a bridge between the theory and the practice. There have been 43 codes established after coding the transcripts. They were allocated into 5 different groups: 'Dutch culture', 'what integration is', 'things to do to integrate', 'barriers of integration', and 'citizenship'.

### 3.4 Research setting

This research has been conducted in the geographical context of the city of Nijmegen. All the participants interviewed for this research either live in Nijmegen or work in Nijmegen. This decision is made because both camp Heumensoord and Bureau Wijland are located in Nijmegen, and there is an AZC in Nijmegen. This provided me with enough possible people to interview, and the opportunity to narrow it down to Nijmegen

#### 3.4.1 Research group

Since this is a multi-actor research, interviewees are divided into several categories. Of each category 4-6 people have been interviewed. The interviews lasted 30-60 minutes. With some participants, there have been follow-up interviews of some sort, or the interview topics have been discussed with them spread out over numerous occasions. These are the following categories based on which participants have been selected:

- ❖ Afghan newcomers who came to Heumensoord in 2021, and live in Nijmegen.
- ❖ Afghan migrant people who came to the Netherlands over 5 years ago, and live in Nijmegen.
- ❖ Practitioners of integration policies and practices in Nijmegen.
- ❖ Neighbors of the refugee center in Nijmegen.

The distinction between these four groups made it possible for me to gather information regarding imaginaries on socio-cultural integration in the city of Nijmegen from different angles. During the exploring phase of this research, I started to talk to people living in Nijmegen about the subject. However, it turned out that many of the people I talked to did not seem to be able / to be interested to discuss integration because they felt they had no personal affiliation with it. Apart from that the group "citizens of Nijmegen" also seemed too broad for a research group to focus on. Because of this, the decision to specifically focus on neighbors of an AZC came to be. Under the presumption that they might have some more imaginaries regarding integration since they are acquainted with newcomers in their daily life. By focusing on neighbors of the AZC I also created a more focused research sample, in comparison to a focus on citizens of Nijmegen.

The original focus of the practitioners of this research regarding practitioners of integration was solely going to focus on policy writers and advisors for the municipality of Nijmegen. This however shifted during the exploring phase of this research. While working at both Heumensoord and Bureau Wijland I came across many practitioners of integrations on different levels and in different ways, who brought a

variety of different imaginaries with them. Consequently, I decided to not solely focus on the policy writers and advisors from the municipality of Nijmegen, but broaden my range to practitioners of integration of any kind, also including a COA worker, someone teaching the participation course, and people working for an project and advisory bureau on integrational issues/projects.

The argumentation to focus on people of Afghan heritage is to be found in the societal relevance of this research. The decision to make a distinction between people of Afghan heritage who came to the Netherlands in 2021 and people of Afghan heritage who came to the Netherlands over 5 years ago is made based on the following. The first step towards the possibility of Dutch citizenship for an asylum seeker is to apply for a residence permit. An asylum seeker is supposed to hear from the IND within 6 months if they are getting a residence permit. The IND can prolong this term to a maximum of 15 months if they feel the need for more investigation (Ministerie van Justitie en Veiligheid, 2022). The first residence permit you get expires in 5 years, within those 5 years you have to live up to a certain integration obligation to be able to obtain an indefinite residence permit (Naturalisatiedienst, 2022). A newcomer can put in a request for naturalization in order to receive a Dutch passport if they are above age, have an indefinite residence permit, have finished their citizenship exam, have not committed a felony in the past 4 years and after they have lived in the Netherlands for 5 years (*Naturalisatie: Hoe Word Je Nederlander?* n.d.). This information combined would mean that a newcomer can theoretically be eligible to obtain Dutch citizenship somewhere between 5 to 6 years after their arrival to the Netherlands. Being able to obtain formal citizenship is often used to determine someone's belonging in the Netherlands (Anderson et al. 2011). Because of this, the decision is made to sample based on migrant people who theoretically can be eligible for Dutch citizenship.

#### 3.4.2 Access to the field

During a period of time between October and December 2021, I worked at the dining hall at Heumensoord, this was part of the explorative phase of my research. During this time 750 to 1000 people lived there, in four big sleeping barracks that are usually only used for the temporary stay of military people during the 4-day march in June. The facilities turned out to be insufficient for the number of people staying there, and the cold and snowy weather during these months. The children quickly went to school, but there was not much to do during the day for the adults. This often led to them coming to talk to me while I was working, asking me questions about stuff in the Netherlands, and voicing their concern and growing amount of discontent regarding their current situation (Personal communication, Heumensoord, 20-10-2022; NOS, 2021). This provided me with the opportunity to discuss the Dutch society and integrational issues with them, and explore certain imaginaries on that topic.

While working there I already knew that I was going to write my thesis on imaginaries and integration. During my work there, I got inspired to focus this research specifically on imaginaries of socio-cultural integration with a focus on Afghan newcomers. After I stopped working there I approached some of the people who lived there if I could interview them. They were reluctant to be interviewed about it, afraid of saying something wrong, or even something which would affect their current position in Dutch society. Eventually, I found participants through a connection to the foundation Goshamadeed. Golshamadeed is: “[...] a foundation that works with Afghan newcomers and integration in Nijmegen, with a specific focus on “concrete and practical issues for Afghani refugees” (*Stichting Goshamadeed*, 2018). The

safety of the foundation helped give participants the impression that it was an open and safe space to discuss such delicate topics.

Last year I did my internship at Bureau Wijland, a local project and advisory bureau on diversity/integration topics in the municipality of Nijmegen & Arnhem. This also was part of the explorative phase of my research, to focus more on the practitioners' side of the integration processes. After I finished my internship I stuck around to keep working for them. Many of the contacts approached for this research have been made through my work at Bureau Wijland, or the organizations I got in contact with while working for bureau Wijland. A combination of the snowballing method (Gobo & Molle, 2017) and my own personal and professional network has been used to find participants to interview.

### 3.5 Positionality

There have been multiple ethical considerations taken into account while conducting this research, starting with positionality. Positionality implies that the social-historical-political location of a researcher influences their orientation; a researcher is not separate from the social processes he/she studies (Holmes, 2020). During the course of this research I have tried to be as culturally aware as possible. But also had to be aware of the fact that I do embody a certain (cultural) Dutch position in society, which can create certain power dynamics, and a certain position while discussing the question of integration. The position I, as a Dutch person without a migration background have in both the society and the current integration debate. I need to take into account that I am part of the "dominant" group in the Netherlands which newcomers are trying to integrate. Which is a factor that can play into how the participants position themselves towards me in the interviews or the answers they give me. This of course also affects the way I look at things and perceive the reality around me.

An example of such cultural differences can be seen in the perception of my 'Dutch directness'. During my first few encounters with people of Afghan heritage for example, I noticed that my directness could sometimes make them feel uncomfortable. This in particular came forward when some of the participants named Dutch cultural habits, the first thing they said was "Dutch people are direct, like you haha". That showed that even when I was trying to be culturally aware, and aware of my own position, I also bring my own set norms, values, and habits with me while conducting research. It made me reflect on how typical Dutch I was myself, and what my personal imaginaries were concerning Dutch national identity and integration.

Throughout the fieldwork, I also had to remain aware of the fact that my first encounters with my research participants was while I embodied a certain position. The position I embodied was different for the four groups that have been interviewed for this research For all four research groups I possibly represented both the "dominant group" in the current integration debate within society and a representative of the Radboud University since that is the institution in which name this research has been conducted. For the Afghan newcomers living in Heumensoord and the practitioners of integration I possibly also represented something else. My first encounter with Afghan newcomers was as a worker for the "Centraal Orgaan Asielzoekers" (COA), which obviously also brought a certain power relation with it. The first encounter I had with practitioners of integration was often as a representative of Bureau Wijland.

While conducting this research I also worked with most of the practitioners of integration that have been interviewed on several work projects, this also brought a different layer to the relationship I had with them while conducting the interviews

I have been aware of my position, you can never be fully objective as a researcher. Very little research in the social or educational field is or can be value-free (Holmes, 2020). By being inter-subjective, and following the belief that research is neither fully objective nor subjective, I recognized that I had to be aware of my position of reference and how this is socially mediated through interaction. Intersubjectivity refers to the shared subjective experience between people, and is essential to the production of social meaning and thus also imaginaries (Levitt et al. 2021). Ethical research is carried out in an informed and thoughtful way by people who act honorably because it is the right thing to do, not just because someone is making them do it (Dowling et al. 2016). Conducting your research ethically protects the rights of those you are researching and their surroundings and it helps assure a favorable climate to conduct your research (Clifford et al, 2016). In an attempt to conduct this research as ethically as possible, the anonymity and safety of the participants have been protected.

Apart from being aware of my position and what I possibly embodied, I also had to be sensible of the position and feelings of the participants. It was my job as a researcher conducting ethnographic research to create a safe space for my participants. During this research, I have been open and transparent about the aim of this research, what this research would be used for, and checked if they were okay with that. At the beginning of the interview, they have been told that they have the right to withdraw from my research at any point or to request something they said to be removed from the transcript of the interview. This also adds to the ethical execution of this research.

During this research, I sometimes feared that I was getting too close to the participants, or became too emotionally affected by the things they told me in combination with the recent news of the current status of newcomers and their lack of proper help and shelter in the Netherlands (NOS, 2022b). The longer I worked on this research the more frustrating and complex the topic became in my mind. Especially because I was so closely involved from different angles. During a work lunch for Bureau Wijland, someone commented on Afghan newcomers, about how “they” all had such a different culture compared to us, I could feel the frustration about this from my Afghani colleague, and shared this frustration more than ever. After having an interview with an Afghani newcomer who was very optimistic about becoming a “real Dutchman”, and an interview with two Neighbors of the AZC who both claimed that newcomers can never really become a “real Dutchman” on the same day. I noticed I was very frustrated by that contradiction and decided to take some time off from this research to let it sink in.

Last but definitely not least it should be noted that even though there have been different groups interviewed for this research this is not a comparative research, nor is it a proper portrayal of the whole Dutch society. Instead, this research outlines the different imaginaries of and seeks to possibly find common ground of unification on what socio-cultural integration is.

## Chapter 4: What is socio-cultural integration?

What is socio-cultural integration? What are the underlying imaginaries about the meaning of socio-cultural integration? How is socio-cultural integration defined, what does this say? As discussed in the conceptual framework of this research, the term "integration" is a term used by many but understood differently by most. This makes it a highly individualized, contested, and contextual concept with very little prospect for a unifying definition according to some (Ager & Strang, 2008, p.167). Some call it "assimilation", others call it "integration", the fundamental question: 'What does this mean, integration? of whom? into what?' - remains unresolved (Favell, 2019).

This chapter attempts to explicate the imaginaries underlying the definition of socio-cultural integration, and answer the first part of Favells question: what does integration mean? First, this will be examined in the way this is represented and imagined by the Dutch government, to provide a broader context. After that, we will be moving on to how the people who have been interviewed for this research define it, and their imaginaries about what it means in practice, to put this in relation to each other.

### 4.1 Official definition

On the website of the Rijksoverheid integration is defined as follows: "immigrants who are staying in the Netherlands for a longer period of time or even permanently have to participate in the Dutch society. They will learn the Dutch language among other things." Integration is defined as "to participate and to respect" (Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, 2021). This seems to point to some kind of obligation for an individual's best efforts: you have to participate in/contribute to both the written and unwritten rules of the Netherlands. This obligation is joined by the expectation to not cause any inconvenience or trouble, and to make sure they do not fall behind (van Dam, 2017).

Socio-cultural integration often concerns the unwritten expectations of the receiving country. There can be several expectations about different elements of socio-cultural integration. The level to which these expectations are being lived up to often determines an individual's perception of the current state of integration. These expectations can vary based on the group the individual you talk to belongs to, even people who belong to the same group can have different expectations (Dekker & Ridder, 2019). That is why imaginaries are so important when it comes down to integration. Imaginaries go far beyond integration laws and the definitions on paper. Imaginaries are to be found when one digs deeper, trying to find the underlying norms, values, and ideals about what integration should be and how it should work. By putting the focus on imaginaries one provides oneself with the possibility to focus on the unwritten rules, and to find the underlying meaning or purpose of the written rules (Biebuyck, 2010).

There are different dimensions on which the current state of socio-cultural integration can be determined. The Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau (SCP), the Dutch institute for social research explained these different dimensions in a publication about the social and cultural position, polarization, and distance of migrant groups in the Netherlands. They have made a division into 3 dimensions to determine the current state of socio-cultural integration: social, emotional, and cultural. The social dimension is measured by the amount of social interaction between migrant people and people of their own group and other groups. The

emotional dimension is measured by the way migrant people feel connected to the receiving society and the country of origin. The cultural dimension refers to the difference in culturally bound orientation and behavior between different ethnical groups. Socio-cultural integration can be measured through a combination of these 3 dimensions. Socio-cultural integration focuses on issues about orientation and identification and the coexistence of different norms and values within the society (Huijink et al., 2016). Becoming part of, adapting, and participating in the receiving society seem to be the keywords when it comes down to the definition of socio-cultural integration. Or as our own prime minister Mark Rutte once said “act normal or go away” while talking about “everyone who rejects the Dutch values” (Walsum, 2021).

#### 4.2 Dutch integration policy

Status holders are called upon to adapt as best as they can to the Dutch society. It is expected of them to both economically and socio-culturally participate and adapt to the Netherlands and its culture and learn the language. This is even lawfully required from status holders with laws such as the participation law, the law COA, and the Labor law newcomers (Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, 2022). The government thus has created a certain expectation pattern for the Dutch society which pleads for the ‘participation’ of newcomers as ‘best as possible’. But what does that mean when it comes down to socio-cultural integration? What is expected of newcomers?

In the latest coalition agreement of the Dutch government, it states that successful integration requires taking your own responsibility, as well as a society that offers the chance to let people develop their own talents. After this sentence, they state “Meedoen dus” which translates to “So, participate”. The English translation does not fully cover the “don’t complain, just do it” attitude which is displayed in those two words. Even though the second part of the sentence states that society should offer everyone the chance to discover their talents, there is very little attention to this in the rest of the text. The main focus lies on the newcomer having to take responsibility (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2022). People with a migration background themselves are being held responsible for their own integration, this is central aspect of the integration policies since 2013. Newcomers have to shape their own civic integration program and pay for it themselves. The government plays a very small role in this. (Klaver et al, 2016).

The integration exam became obligatory for all newcomers in 1998 with the Civic integration newcomers act. It tests Dutch language proficiency, cultural values, and knowledge of Dutch society; in other words: a civic integration contract (van Houdt et al., 2011). It is the migrants’ own individual responsibility to get lessons, pay for these lessons, and to prepare for the exam, in order to officially be labeled as ‘integrated’ into the state (Joppke, 2007. P7). This monitoring and testing of a newcomer's integration shows the assumption of integration as a process with a clear ending, not taking the fluid and continuous state of integration into account (Catling, 2018.). Even though one would officially be integrated into the state after passing this exam, multiple policy- or other government publications still contain the implication that after passing this integration test, newcomers are not considered to be ‘integrated’(Ibid)

‘Article 13: integration and social cohesion’ in the year report of the governmental finances states that the government aims to increase societal cohesion; social stability and the integration of everyone with a migration background, and the acceptance of the cultural diversity of the society (Ministerie van

Financiën, 2020). This article and its explanation contain a few assumptions. It assumes that if you have a migration background you need to be stimulated to fit in, even if you are a second or even third-generation migrant. This contains the assumption that people with migrant parents would also still need to integrate, even though they have lived in the Netherlands for their entire lives. In return, it assumes that citizens without a migration background do not explicitly need to be integrated into society, and as Schinkel (2017) calls it, thus get a 'dispensation of integration'.

According to this report, the integration policy puts the emphasis on creating social stability within an increasingly diverse society. According to the report a socially stable society means the following: people are self-reliant and can participate without further ado; they can live together with their differences and everyone feels at home regardless. This report may say that it focuses on social stability in an increasingly diverse society, but offers no suggestions or practical tools to accomplish this. While talking about creating a socially stable society it mainly focusses on the "people of different cultures", implying the socially unstable society we apparently find ourselves in is their responsibility (Ministerie van Financiën, 2020). If we would use integration as a sociological concept, Waldinger (2015) argues that it should be used as a measurement of the 'de-differentiation' of the nation or the national by the foreign or the foreigner. However, the opposite is achieved with the current immigration policy (Waldinger, 2015). It is more about how to keep ourselves apart from the world as a nation-state. It is a way of measuring how successfully the national society is differentiated from its wider surroundings (Favell, 2019).

As discussed in the previous two sections, according to the Dutch government, integration in general means participation, and taking responsibility, this concerns both the written and the unwritten rules in society. While talking about integration, socio-cultural integration often concerns the unwritten rules in society (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2022). In the following section, the imaginaries of the participants of this research on the meaning of socio-cultural integration will be examined based on statements the participants have made during the interviews.

#### 4.3 Definition according to participants

In this section we will discuss the imaginaries on socio-cultural integration of the participants in this research. This section will analyze the core elements as imagined to be of importance in socio-cultural integration, according to the participants. As explained in the methodology, four groups of people have been interviewed for this research. During the interviews they have been asked what they thought integration, and socio-cultural integration in particular, mean. The textbox below highlights the responses of four participants, one of each sub-group of people that have been interviewed.

*To be familiar with culture, cultural issues. Not the heavy, heavy things, know the traditions and know the laws, know the Dutch laws and to fix ourselves to the society. To know, to learn, to understand, to adapt and to reflect, that is integration (Interview, Ahmid, Afghan new, 22-6-2022).*

*Integration is reciprocity, you have to learn the language, you have to find your place, you have to know the social and cultural codes, people have to teach you those (Interview, Rafiq, Afghan old & practitioner, 13-5-2022).*

*Mutual respect, regardless of what someone's background is. To communicate with one another in a normal manner (Interview, Henk, practitioner, 7-6-2022).*

*Learning the language and respecting each other (Interview, Gijs, neighbor AZC, 21-6-2022).*

Many of the important aspects of socio-cultural integration named by the participants correspond to what is important according to the Dutch government, such as language, respect, participation, and adaptation. Interestingly, when it comes down to responsibility, Gijs and Henk seem to imagine it as something more general, not solely focused on the responsibility of newcomers. While Ahmid talks about “fixing himself in society”, which seems to imply a more passive role of the receiving society. Rafiq also focusses on the fact that people have to teach you the social and cultural codes, which implies a more active role of the receiving society. There seems to be some sort shift in imagining their own integration as to be something they have to do themselves, or something the society has to help them with, depending on the length of their stay in the Netherlands. This difference explicitly came forward in some of the Afghan newcomer and Afghan old interviews as well. Sina (interview, Sina, Afghan old, 24-5-2022) and Roqia (Interview, Roqia, Afghan old, 3-6-2022) also express the importance, and in some way even the obligation, of the help of the receiving society in integration of newcomers. Contrastingly, Nilofar (Interview, Nilofar, Afghan new, 23-6-2022) and the Afghan group that has been interviewed for this research (Interview, Afghan group, Afghan new, 8-6-2022) believe that the receiving society have no responsibility in their integration. Or as Nilofar put it: “The Dutch people are so nice and help with everything, we are so lucky they did not have to do that”. The role of the receiving society in integration will be discussed more in depth in section: “4.5. Responsibility”

As shown in the textbox above this chapter, language is a frequently mentioned element considered of importance for integration. Not only the four participants presented in the textbox, but every single participant of this research mentioned the importance of language in socio-cultural integration. This very much reflects the importance put on language proficiency by the Dutch government in integration policies. Being able to communicate is a key aspect of socio-cultural integration, communication is necessary to start participating in society. To try and accomplish this, language proficiency is emphasized in integration policy (Richards & Schmidt, 2014). Gizam, an integration policy advisor of the municipality Nijmegen also wonders what the effect of English-speaking newcomers on their integration in the Netherlands is. She thinks the importance of the Dutch language lies within the cultural aspects of being

able to speak the language, of showing you are putting effort in to adapt, of giving something back to the host society by learning the language (Interview Gizam & Louay, practitioners, 1-6-2022). While working at Heumensoord, there was a young lady who explained it to me in a similar way. She was studying Dutch by herself and frequently came to me or one of my colleagues for help. She explained to me that the main reason why she was studying so hard, was to show her respect for the country and the culture by learning the language. This way she showed her willingness to adapt, and to work hard to earn her position in the Dutch society. During this conversation with her, two other men join us in our conversation, and try to convince her of the fact that there is no need to be fluent in Dutch. They argue that her English is really good, and since everyone in the Netherlands speaks English as well, what really is the point in being fluent in Dutch? (Personal communication, Heumensoord, 27-9-2022). Interestingly, the Dutch integration policy does not take this dominance of the English language into account, and the effect this has on Dutch society and the Dutch identity (Richards & Schmidt, 2014). The majority of Dutch citizens are at least bilingual in Dutch and English, which can lead to newcomers who speak English learning Dutch slower, as they can speak English and easily depend upon that to support their livelihoods (Edwards, 2016).

Integration also often seems to have something to do with some sort of obligation to put enough effort in. You have to participate, contribute and stick to the rules of the country you have migrated to (Ridder et al. 2019, 44-46). The importance of “effort” is also represented in how the government imagines integration. As stated on the Dutch government website for integration policies: “The government consistently monitors the effort migrants make to integrate. If you do not make enough effort, you may lose your residence permit. This will not happen if you have a right to asylum but even then you must still make an effort to integrate.” (Government of the Netherlands 2018). The other side of this coin is that integration means that you do not cause any nuisance or problems, and to not occupy a disadvantageous position within society (Dekker & Ridder, 2019, p. 44-46). This is mentioned by several participants of this research as well, especially by Afghan newcomers (Interview, Afghan group, Afghan new, 8-6-2022; Interview Ahmid, Afghan new, 22-6-2022; Interview, Afghan new, Nilofar, 23-6-2022). Roqia, a woman of Afghan heritage who arrived in the Netherlands in 2016, and now teaches the participation classes for the municipality of Nijmegen criticizes the way that socio-cultural integration is often seen as “not to bother” as the flipside of effort. To illustrate this she uses the example of the Chinese community.

*I think that when you are asking what socio-cultural integration means it is also important to look at the “they” who need to integrate. I think that as long as people do not bother others, some automatically assume that it is going well with their integration. If you look at the Chinese community for example, that is quite a big community that often feels no need to integrate at all. But you don’t hear people complaining about them! I recently had a Chinese man in my class, who lived in the Netherlands for 20 years but didn’t speak a word Dutch. The translator explained that this was the case because he worked in a Chinese restaurant in a Chinese community and never thought it was necessary to do so. But you don’t hear anyone complaining about him in the newspapers (Interview, Roqia. Afghan old & practitioner, 3-6-2022).*

She argues that “not to bother” is not the same as “putting effort in”, specifically because some migrant groups seem to receive different treatment when it comes to the attention on them concerning their integration. This is also mentioned by both her and Pieter (Interview, Pieter, Neighbor AZC, 9-6-2022), regarding Ukrainian newcomers who seem to get the “dispensation of integration’ (Schinkel, 2017), and are allowed to work directly after their arrival to the Netherlands. Based on these examples Roqia wonders who the “they” is that need to integrate, and what determines the difference between people who have to make sure not to bother and people who have to “give something back”. This will be further analyzed in Chapter 6: society.

This “giving something back” as a motivator to put the effort in, as Roqia, Gizam & Louay talk about, implies a certain form of reciprocity. Reciprocity is “the practice of exchanging things with others for mutual benefit” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2016). Rafiq also named reciprocity as an important aspect of socio-cultural integration. Rafiq, who came to the Netherlands in 1994 and is now the director of a local project- and advisory bureau on diversity and environmentalist issues in Nijmegen explicitly described integration as reciprocity, as something which has to come from “both sides” and not just from migrant people. He emphasizes the social and cultural codes and the reciprocity in this.

Some sort of belonging also seems to play a part in socio-cultural integration, or as Rafiq describes it “to find your place”. This is also represented in the emotional element of socio-cultural integration as explained in the sub-text above (Huijink et al., 2015). Belonging or a sense of belonging is the feeling that you are (socially) connected to other people within a specific social or cultural context (Baumeister & Leary 1995). The importance of the occurrence of feelings of belonging in socio-cultural integration will be further examined in Chapter 6: Society

The way social-integration is described by some participants closely resembles the way it is theoretically described by the government. Not everyone thinks the same things are important in socio-cultural integration, although the theoretical concept of socio-cultural integration is used as if it has a clear-cut meaning. Even though the quotes drawn upon to show what participants thought socio-cultural integration meant, might not seem too contradictory, we have to dig deeper to expose the underlying imaginaries of these explanations to be able to properly talk about it. In the following sections, we will go into several aspects mentioned as of importance for socio-cultural integration, and their underlying imaginaries. Since participation, adaptation, responsibility, and effort came forward in both the analysis of the imaginaries of the Dutch government and the imaginaries of the participants, they will be used as a guideline through the analysis of imaginaries.

#### 4.4 Participation & adaptation

Participation can be described as someone’s involvement in activities that lead to interaction with others in society (Fudge Schormans, 2014). It is through participation that helps identity and practices develop, this involves action and connection. Participation refers ‘not just to local events of engagement in certain activities with certain people, but to a more encompassing process of being active participants in the practices of social communities and constructing identities in relation to these communities’ (Wenger &

Snyder, 2004, p. 4). The participants of this research referred to the role of participation in socio-cultural integration as follows:

*If you participate in activities it is both fun and good to show you are trying, it helps everyone (Interview, Nilofar, Afghan new, 23-6-2022).*

*I think the important thing about integration, and social integration specifically, is participating in the society you are a part of. Still being yourself, with your own quirks and your own background, of course. Integration is being able to join without having to do much more effort than Dutch people have to (Interview, Roqia, Afghan old & practitioner, 3-6-2022).*

*Integration is to participate, to be provided with the proper tools to operate like a full-fledged member of society (Interview, Gizam & Louay, practitioners, 1-6-2022).*

*Adapting is important, like I did when I went to India in 1980, I wore a bhindi right from the start and was trying to be as much as possible like the Indians (Interview, Ans, Neighbour AZC, 27-6-2022).*

As you can see in the quotes above, participation can be approached in different ways. Nilofar, who came to Nijmegen after the recent rise of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in 2021 thinks participation is important, to show you are putting in the effort, and how that will help everyone. This shows certain underlying imaginaries about integration not just being “a migrant problem” but an issue of the wider society. As explained in the societal relevance of this research: very often problems that are labeled as immigrant problems, are problems of society as a whole and affect everyone who lives in that society (Korteweg, 2017). There seem to be different imaginaries of who has to participate, and who is helped by the participation of migrants. Nilofar thinks it helps everyone. Ans, a neighbor from the AZC, thinks participation is something to be done solely by migrant people.

Ans talks about participation as adaptation and compares it to when she herself went on vacation in India and adapted to the Indian culture. She is not the only participant who spoke about participation and adaptation as if they were two sides of the same coin (Interview, Fred, neighbor AZC, 2-6-2022; Interview Ahmid, Afghan new, 22-6-2022; Interview, Afghan old, Manan & Vendula, 30-5-2022). Adaptation can be described as the process of adjusting one's behavior to conform to the prevailing system of values and norms of society (Huff et al, 2021). Cultural adaptation means how well individuals adapt to a certain cultural context they find themselves in. One could say that adaptation goes further than participation because it entails adjusting one's behavior, not just participating in the society you find yourself in (Ibid.). The way Ans talked about integration showed that she actually meant assimilation instead of integration. She stressed the importance of newcomers “letting go” of their “own” culture. In the case of assimilation, it is expected of a newcomer in society to fully adapt to the cultural patterns of the host

society, while letting go of their own culture. In the case of integration, the non-dominant group is indeed the group that is adapting mostly, but they also keep (a part of) their own culture (Entzinger, 2006).

Participation and adaptation can thus both be imagined as something which only migrant people have to do or something which has to be done by everyone in society. Roqia, says that ideally socio-cultural integration would mean that you are aware of each other's cultural codes, respect them and participate in them/at times adapt yourself to them. This comes very close to the definition of integration used by García-Ramírez et al (2011): to adapt to the receiving society while also holding on to one's own culture. According to their definition integration means mutual respect and acceptance of all cultures. There was a difference within the sub-groups of this research as to whether or not they also looked at it from the perspective of the newcomer when it came down to participation.

*There was so much we had to get used to after arriving to the Netherlands, it was hard because everything was in Dutch. Sometimes COA forgot to tell us important stuff, the first time the air raid siren [lucht alarm] went off we thought Taliban came to the Netherlands to get us, it was very scary. We didn't know it was a regular thing (Interview, Afghan group, Afghan new, 8-6-3033).*

*The people in the AZC seem so depraved [ontaard] at times, like they are not feeling well, maybe they are haunted by trauma's or something. Anyways I also would go crazy if I would have to live in such a small room with nothing to do all day and no possibility to work (Interview, Pieter, neighbor AZC, 9-6-2022).*

*I am 74 years old and came to the Netherlands 10 years ago. I was sick when I got here, started to go blind and was dealing with a very severe case of diabetics. I started the naturalization process to get a passport 5 years after I got to the Netherlands, with a possibility to get excused from certain rules due to my sickness. This process is so difficult for me, and I get so little help to navigate through it, the bureaucratic system confuses me and is not build for people with poor eye sight. I would have to accomplish the impossible to actually become Dutch (Interview, Manan & Vendula, Afghan old, 30-5-2022).*

*Upon their arrival in the Netherlands refugees often have a lot of traumas to deal with, and get used to their surroundings. We have to make sure the expectations we put on refugees are realistic, if the government policy creates unrealistic expectations towards them then society will notice they are not meeting these expectations and start stigmatizing them (Interview, Gizam & Louay, practitioners, 1-6-2022).*

What these quotes have in common is the fact that the participants also emphasized the fact that newcomers need to be enabled in their participation as well. Someone has to explain certain things to them, how the bureaucratic system works, or warn them about the air raid siren and explain that it is just a routine test. We need to take into account that newcomers frequently carry trauma's with them as a result of the situation they fled from. Something with which the residents of Heumensoord also frequently came to me was the fact that all the official papers with the information they receive are in Dutch, which makes

it impossible for them to read. Finding someone willing to do that the often took some time, and caused delays on multiple occasions (Personal communication, Heumensoord, 20-9-2022).

Adaptation is frequently meant in Dutch media when talking about participation in terms of integration. The focus lies on migrant people “changing” “their” ways/culture in order to conform themselves to the prevailing standard (Yilmaz, 2016). Participation provides people with both the ability to negotiate and the possibility of mutual recognition, it does not necessarily come with respect, equality, or collaboration (Wenger, 2002). According to this definition, there is the possibility of mutual recognition. Opinions on what the role of the dominant group in society is in this seems to vary depending on whom you ask. Loauy, policy advisor for the municipality of Nijmegen, also emphasizes newcomers receiving “the proper tools” to participate in society. This shows that she views the participation of newcomers as something they have to be helped with, not as something they have to do themselves. (Interview, Gizam & Louay, practitioners, 1-6-2022). Which brings us to the question: whose responsibility is it to provide newcomers with these “tools”? Who is responsible for the integration of people with a migration background in the Netherlands?

#### 4.5 Responsibility

The integration approach in the Netherlands has been identified as a very restrictive program within the EU. It requires newcomers to earn their citizenship status through a marked-oriented complex program. The neoliberalist ideas, on which the governmental strategy is based view freedom as a basis for socio-political order. This neoliberalist view has led to a situation where newcomers are held responsible for organizing their integration, but are not being handed enough tools to properly do so (Suvariero & Kirk 2015). This is also represented in Rafiq’s quote in the quote box below. According to him, the receiving society has to let people with a migration background in, and explain certain things to them, in order for them to know how everything works within the society. In his example, the responsibility of integration of people with a migration background lies both with the person knocking on the door, and the person opening the door.

*Of course it is the government who is responsible for integration!! They help tell us what to do and then we have to do our best (Interview, Nilofar, Afghan new, 23-6-2022).*

*For a newcomer it is a must to understand how to present oneself in society. Being able to do so, someone has to ask you a question, someone has to let you tell your story. If you knock on someone's door and the person who opens does not say "come in" how are you ever going to know how it works inside the house (Interview, Rafiq, Afghan old & practitioner, 13-5-2022).*

*Everyone is responsible for integration, not just the government. if you make one authority responsible for integration like we do now, you will not get there. It has to come from the inside out, otherwise it won't work. People have to be intrinsically motivated to put an effort into integration (Interview, Hugo, practitioner, 7-6-2022).*

*I think we all have to integrate towards each other, if you have a circle with on the one side "the normal" Dutch person, and on the other side refugees [creates a circle with his hands], not only refugees have to adapt. We have to meet each other somewhere in the middle, of course refugees have to do a bit more, we will not be meeting each other exactly in the middle And it is up to the government to determine where and to provide its citizens with what is wrong or right (Interview, Gijs, neighbor AZC, 21-6-2022).*

Opinions on who is responsible for integration among participants vary but generally have a very big emphasis on the role of the government in this. Interestingly this contradicts the government's own stance, where people with a migration background are responsible for "their own" integration into Dutch society. It obtains the assumption that migrant people are not part of the imagined society yet, and that society is something "untouched and unchanged" by the migrant people living in it (Schinkel, 2017). The representation of society as something rigid and the consequences of this will be discussed in Chapter 6: Society.

Where the government emphasizes the responsibility of migrant people and only briefly touches upon the responsibility of the non-migrant citizens within the society (Ministerie van Financiën, 2020). Gijs, Rafiq & Hugo seem to imagine integration as a shared responsibility in which active participation of everyone within the society is required, with the main responsibility of it on the migrant themselves. This also came forward as the opinion of most newcomers in a report called "citizens perspectives" which was published by the SCP (Dekker & den Ridder, 2019) According to the majority of newcomers, it is up to the newcomers to adapt to their new surroundings. Nonetheless, they do also state that Dutch people often say that 'foreigners' need to integrate, without realizing that they themselves also have to put some effort in to accept, respect, and help the newcomers and that they have to get to know them to understand them better (Ridder et al. 2019). According to the SCP research people think "foreigners" need to integrate. Article 13 of the Dutch financial year report, as discussed in the first section of this chapter, shows that the wish of

people with a migration background to integrate does not stop after an individual has passed their integration test, it continues to require effort after that (Ministerie van Financiën, 2020).

#### 4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has analyzed different aspects of what the participants of this research imagined to be the meaning of socio-cultural integration. It started out by examining the meaning of socio-cultural integration as defined and acted upon by the Dutch government, showing a big emphasis on participation, adaptation and responsibility. Within the different sections of this chapter, it seems that there is a big variety of how participants imagine certain elements of socio-cultural integration. Nonetheless, there also seems to be some sort of consensus on the importance of certain elements of integration. The importance of elements such as language, participation, respect and culture, is emphasized by several members from the four research groups. The discrepancy in this appears when asking the questions: How? And to what extent? While analyzing the imagined importance of language it already showed that it is influenced by English language proficiency. Participation is indeed imagined to be of importance in socio-cultural integration, but to what extent, and whether or not it actually is participation, or more adaptation, seems to be no consensus on. Who is responsible for the socio-cultural integration of newcomers also turned out to be a topic of controversy, some participants thought the main responsibility of this lies with the government, who in return puts this main responsibility with the newcomers.

This chapter has attempted to portray the ambiguity of the concept of socio-cultural integration, by showing the variety of imaginaries regarding socio-cultural integration, by both the participants of this research as well as the government. The assumed culture in which the newcomer would presumably have to integrate into, to participate and/or adapt to. The next chapter will dive into the underlying imaginaries about the role of culture and cultural participation/adaptation in socio-cultural integration to answer the question: What is the role of Dutch cultural identity in the imaginaries on socio-cultural integration? To continue to answer the fundamental question as posed by Favell (2019): What does this mean, integration? of whom? into what?

## Chapter 5: What is the Dutch cultural identity?

*If you choose to live in a different country, why not adapt!? (Elsevier, 2019).*

*“Dutch” - its traditions, habits, and language is assumed to be under pressure, and sometimes even betrayed according to right-wing politics and media (de Groene Amsterdammer, 2019).*

*What is the Dutch identity, is it even possible to become a réal Dutchman? (Volkskrant, 2019).*

Many news outlets and politicians have emphasized the fact that the Dutch cultural identity is apparently under pressure, or either criticize the fact that we are portraying it as if it is something rigid, something unable to become. Dutch people often emphasize that if you live in the Netherlands, you need to adapt to “our” Dutch ways. It is frequently mentioned as an important and the most pressing issue of integration that newcomers do not follow the Dutch norms and values closely enough. However, the specific embodiment of “our” ways remains frequently unelucidated, and how rigid certain things are imagined seem to very much depend on the person you ask, and the context you find yourself in (Dekker & Ridder, 2019).

The key concept of the problems that come with integration seem to be “the Dutch cultural identity”: a set of features that are the main characteristics of the Netherlands. It is these characteristics to which migrant people -more or less- need to confine themselves to integrate in the Netherlands: our country's written and unwritten rules and habits. Often these are the characteristics that the “original inhabitants” as Tiemeijer (2021) calls them, grew up with, and which they value (Tiemeijer, 2021). But who is this Dutch person people with a migration background supposedly need to mirror themselves to?

This chapter attempts to answer the third part of Favell's (2019) fundamental question on integration, as presented at the beginning of Chapter 4: into what are we integrating? This will be done by analyzing the underlying imaginaries of the Dutch cultural identity, and what is considered important for newcomers. In this chapter the bridge will be made from Dutch cultural identity to the effects this has on citizenship. Furthermore, the groundwork for the final empirical chapter on society as an uncontested whole will be laid out.

### 5.1 What is “Typically Dutch”

The exact cultural elements, norms, and values migrant people would have to adapt to or participate in often remain unelucidated, this came forward in an SCP research in 2019 (Dekker & Ridder, 2019). This research shows that certain things such as freedom, equal rights between men and women, equality, social etiquette, and language were thought to be of importance for the Dutch cultural identity. Some qualities which are considered to be “bad” Dutch qualities are: Dutch stubbornness, greediness, religion, and the extreme form of individualism. These qualities were mentioned as things migrant people should definitely not have to adapt to (Ibid). The following section will discuss what is considered to be typically Dutch

according to the participants and link this to the broader societal context. During the interviews, the participants have been asked several questions on what they thought to be important aspects of the Dutch cultural identity, and what were things to be pointed out as to be “typically” Dutch.

*Dutch people are always very much in time, they value time, they are independent and participate actively in society, they ride bikes, holidays are important and show Dutch culture (Interview, Ahmid, Afghan new, 22-6-2022).*

*Some habits such as having respect for each other, especially the elderly. If you are standing in line in the grocery store with only one thing to buy and the person in front of you has a whole cart they often let you go first (Interview, Manan & Vendula, Afghan old, 30-5-2022).*

*Certain traditions are important in Dutch culture: kings day, eating Dutch doughnuts [oliebollen], birthday parties all sitting in circle, eating at 6 o'clock sharp, and just joining everything [“Gewoon” meedoen] (Interview, Anne-Marie, practitioner, 10-6-2022).*

*I think it is typical for the Dutch to care about their own wellbeing and build a meaningful life, make enough money to provide for themselves, to participate in this weird society we live in. Freedom is also very obviously Dutch....(..)” (Interview, Pieter, Neighbor AZC, 6-9-2022).*

Remarkably, things referred to as “typically Dutch” in the textbox above are merely positive. The focus seems to lie primarily on the “good” qualities a Dutch person identifies themselves with. Commonly while being asked what “typically Dutch” was, participants came up with very specific elements. Pieter is one of the few who paint a bigger picture while discussing “typically Dutch”, with his focus on “building a meaningful life and making enough money.” Elements such as “eating at 6 o'clock sharp” and “being on time” or “planning” frequently came up while discussing the Dutch culture and identity. People without a migration background often mentioned it very casually, whereas people with a migration background often said it with a cast of spot in their voices (Interview, Sina, Afghan new, 24-5-2022). During the time I was working at Heumensoord, a colleague and I once wanted to go on a lunch date to a place where one of the residents told us he got hired as a cook. We took out our phones to look at our agenda and pick a date and time somewhere next week. The resident started laughing about “how typically Dutch” we were because of this, with our fully booked agendas pre-assuming there would be no time to do it this week (Personal communication, Heumensoord, 24-10-2022).

According to Manan & Vendula, Dutch people are respectful, this is also what they have learned during their integration in the Netherlands since integration is often framed as “to participate and respect” by the government (Duyvendak & Scholten, 2012). Anne-Marie, someone who works for COA as a program coordinator, also focuses on the participation element, and the importance of “joining” in social and cultural activities, just like Pieter who refers to it as “to participate in this weird society we live in”. The way Pieter

imagines “typically Dutch” is very individualistic and slightly neo-liberalistic with an emphasis on making enough money for oneself to provide a livelihood, he does not say anything about providing for society. This neo-liberalistic and individualistic idea of what “typically Dutch” is, is also strongly represented in the Dutch integrational policies. With a big emphasis on the individual and very little on the collective effort in integration (de Waal, 2018). Pieters individualistic imaginary of “Typically Dutch” plays into the aforementioned “extreme form of individualism” mentioned by Dekker & Ridder (2019), as something which is considered to be a “bad” quality of Dutch people. On the contrary, Gijs, another neighbor of the AZC, imagines respect and participation as more collective issues in “typically Dutch”. He emphasizes taking care of each other and just “letting you be” (Interview, Gijs, neighbor AZC, 21-6-2022).

The elements marked as important by the participants of this research very much played into the stereotypical ways of how Dutch people are described within both Europe and the Netherlands itself. Western European countries often describe Dutch people as ambitious, emotional, independent, and efficient. People in the Netherlands often identify themselves as very open, hardworking, a tad direct, and above all living in a tolerant and free nation-state (Verheul & Besamusca, 2014). These are also the elements that come forward in the way integration policies and practices are approached (de Waal, 2018). These stereotypical elements of the Dutch cultural identity are of importance because nations are defined through the characteristics which the people within those nations feel like they share. Nevertheless, it is vital to understand that these characteristics, and more importantly the imaginations of these characteristics, are always fixed on a certain territory (Branch, 2014).

This idea of the Dutch cultural identity is constructed through the imaginations and narratives of certain groups, these narratives and imaginations are made and remade through political myths, i.e self-fulfilling prophecies (Bottici & Challand, 2006). These imaginations and narratives play a key role in the (re)construction of borders (Klerides & Zamylyas, p. 417). Klerides & Zamylyas (2017) describe national identity as a continuously constructed and reconstructed discursive border, under influence of a set of representations and interpretations about the perceived other and self. Identity is often conceptually organized into several categories such as ‘land’, ‘past & future’, and ‘culture’. The borders between the narratives and imaginations on this are not fixed in space and time and are constantly changing (van Houtum & van Naerssen, 2002).

## 5.2 What is important in “Dutch cultural identity”

Just as discussed in the previous chapter on the definition of socio-cultural integration, participation & adaptation are considered to be important in socio-cultural integration. All participants were asked what they thought to be important elements to adapt to or participate in concerning the “Dutch culture” or “Dutch cultural identity”.

*I think holidays are important to participate in. I think that somehow that can help me connect to society, people explain to you how these things work. Also some of the holidays are just so interesting for me. Interesting to see how things work. But mainly I do it for fun, I just want to join in the festivities. I respect the Dutch culture (Interview, Nilofar, Afghan new, 23-6-2022).*

*There is nothing specific to which you HAVE to adapt to or participate in, it is not like all Dutch people are the same and participate in the same cultural traditions. You just have to be interested in finding out which traditions would be of interest for you, and learn something about that, and have the freedom to do that. You should least know what we are celebrating during certain holidays (Interview, Rafiq, Afghan old & practitioner, 13-5-2022).*

*Finding solutions is very Dutch, the freedom to discuss certain topics. The “poldermodel” in which more people are entitled to an opinion. I think that is something importantly typical Dutch (Interview, Hugo, Practitioner, 7-6-2022).*

*Public holidays are important to participate in [for migrant people], not really because of the public holiday itself, but because it is a time to open up, everyone is more open during public festivities. It would be a good time for them to talk to people and mingle a little bit (Interview, Fred, Neighbor AZC, 2-6-2022).*

There appears to be an emphasis on Holidays in the Dutch cultural identity, or at least holidays are seen as a way to easily get in touch with Dutch culture. As explained by Bhugra & Becker (2005) Cultural events can indeed improve this feeling of belonging and understanding of the host society's cultural identity amongst newcomers and also build bridges between people who possibly would usually not get in touch with each other. The way Fred puts it, it sounds like something that has to be done by the newcomers with no active participation in the “mingling” by the other Dutch citizens. Nilofar both emphasizes the necessity of holidays to connect to society, as well as the fact that she personally enjoys it, but this also does not explicitly include the active participation of the other Dutch citizens involved.

On the contrary, in the interview conducted with Roqia, she focuses more on the multi-sided effort which has to be put into the understanding and transition of Dutch cultural identity. She explains how some of the students in her participation class were excited about Kingsday, because they have Dutch neighbors who are very happy about Kingsday happening again after two years of COVID. It brought the neighborhood together, and create bridges between people in the neighborhood because they were all excited and working towards Kingsday (Interview, Roqia, Afghan refugee & Expert, 3-6-2022). To accomplish this a certain level of openness is needed, the neighbors need to take the time to include the newcomers, which requires mutual effort from both the receiving society and the newcomer, or the supposedly “other” who has a different culture (Steward & Anderson, 2008).

Some characteristics of what is important in the Dutch cultural identity were most frequently mentioned by certain sub-groups. The importance of a social network, social contacts with Dutch people,

and especially the role of the receiving society in active social and cultural participation were stressed most frequently by participants of Afghan heritage (e.g. Interview, Afghan group, Afghan new, 8-6-2022; Interview, Nilofar, Afghan new, 23-6-2022; Interview Rafiq, Afghan old & practitioner, 13-5-2022). This made me think of something Anne-Marie, someone who worked for COA at Heumensoord said that was surprising to her at times. In her interview, she drew upon a situation in her class. After one of the lessons about the Netherlands at the AZC someone came to her with the request to maybe also offer some more practical lessons. The woman mentioned that knowing how the nation-state works are important as well, but she also did not know that you can hand in plastic bottles and get back money from it, or that there are often volunteers wanted in big local public events, and there is a site where you can register to get notifications for that. When Anne-Marie asked her how she came to know these things, she explained that she met a nice Dutch lady in the supermarket who explained this to her, whom she was very thankful for because of all of her help (Interview, Anne-Marie, practitioner, 10-6-2022). She thus knew this through a social encounter which stresses the importance of learning by doing, and the role of the receiving society in understanding Dutch culture to her. The receiving society has to be willing to explain those things. Nilofar also draws upon this, while referring to the importance of holidays in Dutch cultural identity. She stresses the importance of Dutch people taking the time to explain how things work to help her both understand Dutch cultural identity better, and feel connected to society. It shows her how some cultural traditions in the Netherlands work, and helps in gaining a bigger understanding in this (Interview, Nilofar, Afghan new, 23-6-2022).

### 5.3 Freedom

The importance of freedom in the Netherlands kept coming back during the interviews while discussing both integration and Dutch cultural identity. It appears to be some sort of fundamental value of Dutch cultural identity, according to some (Dekker & Ridder, 2019). As mentioned earlier in this chapter People in the Netherlands often identify themselves as very open, hardworking, a tad direct, and above all living in a tolerant and free nation-state (Verheul & Besamusca, 2014). In the textbox above the previous section, , Hugo (Interview, Hugo, Practitioner, 7-6-2022), and Rafiq (Interview, Rafiq, Afghan old & practitioner, 13-5-2022), also mention it while discussing important elements of Dutch cultural identity. Notably about the concept of freedom is the fact that a lot of the participants seem to interpret freedom in a similar matter, as something which is very important in Dutch cultural identity. Freedom of speech, freedom of choice and freedom of expression are considered to be at the basis of our society (Interview, Fred, Neighbor AZC, 2-6-2022; Interview, Manan & Vendula, Afghan old, 30-5-2022; Interview, Loauy & Gizam, practitioners, 1-6-2022). Hugo (Interview, Hugo, Practitioner, 7-6-2022), praises freedom because in his opinion it helps people to vocalize their opinion and creates a freedom to speak one's mind. Contrary, in the third quote of the textbox at the top of this section, Rafiq (Interview, Rafiq, Afghan old & practitioner, 13-5-2022), points out that not all Dutch people are, the same, or participate in the same cultural traditions. He emphasizes the newcomers' initiative and freedom in choosing what to participate in and adapt to, but does point out that it is necessary to know what is going on during public holidays.

People of Dutch heritage mention freedom in a very casual way, in the first quote box of this Chapter Pieter, calls freedom “very obviously Dutch” (Interview, Pieter, neighbor AZC, 9-6-2022). Ans also thinks it is very important to have freedom in the way you express yourself and does not approve of the fact that newcomers, or mainly people following Islam (two categories that she does not seem to see separately from each other) frown upon naked beaches. According to her, the freedom to express yourself in a way of your own choosing is one of the core concepts of Dutch culture. Nonetheless, she is also very clearly appalled about women wearing a Hijab or headscarf (Interview, Ans, Neighbor AZC, 27-6-2-22) Apparently that is a way of freedom of expression she does not approve of, this shows the imagined limits and selectiveness of the concept of freedom.

Rafiq & Sina (interview, Sina, Afghan new, 4-5-2022) both mentioned that they felt lied to by the government about freedom. They were told that The Netherlands was the land of freedom and equality, and that was thus something important to oblige while integrating into the Netherlands. However, after staying here for a while it became clear to them that this was not the case for everyone.

*I was very surprised early on about certain things not adding up in the Netherlands. We are the country of Article 1 [of the constitution]. Article 1 says that everyone in this country is equal and should be treated equally. That sounds great, the fact that the constitutional democracy put emphasis on the first article about freedom. But then I look around and I see ‘Het Hollands vingertje’, and think to myself, if we are all equal, where are the black majors? Where are the equal chances for everyone, where is freedom for everyone? (Interview, Rafiq, Afghan new & practitioner, 13-5-2022).*

With the ‘Hollands vingertje’ he means the condescending attitude that people with a migration background receive from people of Dutch heritage. The lack of opportunities that results from this condescending attitude, the lack of equal opportunities within our society. This is also something I frequently hear back from the people living in Heumensoord. Very early on since their arrival, they experienced the same thing. Even though they were brought here by the Dutch government itself, they felt unwelcome and lacked freedom and equality in the way they were being treated. They experienced the anti-AZC protests and saw it on the news, asking me if that was not going against the ‘non-discrimination thingy’ we have in the Netherlands. They already had to sign a document which stated that the Netherlands was a free and equal country without discrimination (The participation declaration). This confused them as to whether or not these were the actual “rules of the Netherlands” or something only they themselves were held to as newcomers (Personal communication, Heumensoord, 4-11-2022).

Very interestingly, this participation declaration and the way it is implemented actually goes against this valued freedom. Tamar de Waal (2018), promovendus on EU integration law, argues that the participation law actually clashes with some fundamental values in the Netherlands. The participation declaration is mandatory to sign if an individual wants to have the possibility of ever obtaining a residence permit for the Netherlands. Newcomers are thus forced to sign this document (which is completely in Dutch) upon arrival to the Netherlands. The fact that they are forced to sign this clashes with the

fundamental rights: freedom of thought, religion, and freedom of speech. Many of the Afghan newcomers who lived in Heumensoord did not even know what they were signing, since it was all in Dutch (Afghan group, Afghan newcomers, 6-1-2022).

Furthermore, it affects the equality of citizens. People with a migration background have to be perfect citizens as a precondition to earning their Dutch citizenship. This is not the case for the rest of the citizens without a migration background in the Netherlands, who have never had to sign the participation declaration. They are perceived as citizens who naturally have the right to their citizenship, their citizenship will not be put into question, not even when they have been convicted of a felony and do not participate or fit into society (De Waal, 2018). This 'unequal playing field' leads to situations in which newcomers are held to higher standards but receive fewer resources, and whose actions are put into question more frequently, this is exactly what Rafiq explains as the "Hollands vingertje".

#### 5.4 Reluctance to define "Typically Dutch"

Often participants were struggling with sharing their personal ideas on what the Dutch culture or identity would be, and what would be important for migrant people to participate in and adapt into. This reluctance sometimes came from the fact that they did not want to play into the existing stereotypes of what the Dutch culture is, or should be. Other times it was seemingly making them uncomfortable because they were afraid of saying the "wrong" thing. Often when we took the time the participants would come up with things they thought to be important, but especially the participants without Afghani heritage were at times struggling to express what core elements were important in Dutch culture. Afghan newcomers were not visibly struggling to define what they thought to be typically Dutch and did not express any concerns about that, which is why they are not represented in the quote box below.

*While talking about "typically Dutch" or what has to be done in socio-cultural integration people often tend to talk about "act normal". What is normal? It is not explained anywhere or something! I have always thought that to be very weird (Interview Roqia, Afghan old, 3-6-2022).*

*I wouldn't know how to say what is typical for the Dutch cultural identity because I don't know if that's just normal in my direct groups or for more people in the Netherlands. I don't want to make that division. (Interview, Anne-Marie, practitioner, 10-6-2022).*

*You know what it is, the problem is the fact we are still trying to find out what the "real" Dutchman is, there is no such thing! It is all hot air [gebakken lucht] and nonsense. We in Europe expect newcomers to adapt to "us" as if we all share the same culture. But we don't! That's why nobody has succeeded in grasping what newcomers need to adapt to, and explain it to them. That's the problem! (Interview, Gijs, neighbor AZC, 21-6-2022).*

The quotes in the textbox above show the contested nature of culture and cultural identity. Gizam & Louay state that there is no such thing as the Dutchman, and emphasize the importance of a person's imaginaries in what they think to be a "real" Dutchman. As queen Maxima, queen of the Netherlands who herself is originally from Argentina, once said: "the real Dutchman does not exist". She said this during her attendance at a WRR presentation in 2007 and caused a lot of commotion with it. However, what the real Dutch identity was, was still not answered after the nationwide discussion which followed Maxima's statement (Mantel, 2018). Gizam & Louay agree with Maxima on this by saying: "There is no such thing as the Dutchman. For one person the 'real' Dutchman may be a tokkie [a word used to refer to a specific kind of working class family], for another someone voting for VVD [i.e. a more right wing, generally a richer, more upper class person]." (Interview, Gizam & Louay, practitioner, 1-6-2022).

Nevertheless, this apparent denunciation of the Dutch cultural identity by participants such as portrayed in the statements in the textbox does not necessarily show an understanding of the contested nature of the concept of Dutch Cultural identity. In Essed's (2008) article "Who wants to feel white" on Race, Dutch culture and contested identities, Essed takes examples of the students writing papers about whiteness and cultural identity. These show that many of them distance themselves from the notion of the "national identity" being their own identity, in an attempt to show their awareness of diversity within the nation, not taking into account that many of the things they say also show implicit elements of "normality" and the divide between the "self and the other". Gijs also does this by saying "we in Europe expect newcomers to adapt to "us", which either contains the implicit assumption of newcomers solely arrive from countries outside of Europe, or the assumption that only newcomers from outside the borders of Europe have to adapt. The approach of "Typically Dutch" in the case of this research, and "national identity" in Essed (2008) often remains an abstract theoretical 'thing' in the way it is described and approached by participants, not something lived, or something individuals have the power to change, more as something invented by someone far out of reach (Ibid). While being asked what he thinks is typically Dutch, Pieter feels like he has to give some stereotypical answer, even though he has merely been asked what he experienced as to be typically Dutch. This is an example of how Essed argues that cultural identity is often approached not as something individuals would have to power to change, or in this case imagine based on their own opinions instead of stereotypes.

As represented in the responses of the participants it is indeed highly unlikely that the members of any national group will fully agree on the content used to characterize their identity. This difficulty to define "national identity" has become more frequent since globalization increased, since this provides additional matter that can be used to (re)negotiate national identity (Kunovich, 2009). To be able to make sense of increasing outside influences, people tend to return to the concept of the norm, and normality (Davis, 2013). As can be seen in the text box above, both Anne-Marie and Roqia talked about normality in some way, the following section will discuss the way the idea of "normal" plays a role in Dutch cultural identity and socio-cultural integration.

#### 5.4.1 "Normal"

The reluctance to define "typically Dutch" seems to have something to do with the notion of normality. The following section will discuss the notion of normality as brought forward by the participants of this

research. Anne-Marie seems very aware of the fluidity of the concept of “normal” and refrains from defining “typically Dutch” because in her opinion she can only speak about “typically Dutch” based on her circle of contacts. She feels uncomfortable speaking about typical Dutch because it creates a vision of “normality”, which is something she likes to say away from. In her opinion, this sense of “normality” often leads to unnecessary divisions between people and a sense of inequality (Interview, Anne-Marie, practitioner 10-6-2022). Indeed, in an article written by Lewin-Epstein & Levanon (2005), they show that recent studies have indicated that national identity is empirically related to negative sentiments of individuals towards people with a migration background. In their article called “National identity and xenophobia in an Ethnically Divided Society,” they show that national identity is frequently used as a way to have some sort of “claim of wrong or right” and is held above people with a migration background head in case they do something that the dominant group of society does not approve of. This is exactly what Rafiq means with the aforementioned “Hollands vingertje”.

In Western European national societies highlighting what they perceive to not properly belong to them is a way to (re)articulate their identities. While imagining what they are not, a certain image of what they are becomes visible and available for meaning-making and governing (Schinkel, 2017). One could also say that is what is currently happening in the Netherlands, certain imaginaries of what does not belong in our society lead to othering, a certain perception of having a claim to a certain “Normality”. Roqia questions this normality, and her general wonder about the use of “act normal” as an explanation for intercultural issues within Dutch society. In her own experience, this normality is not properly explained within the society, nonetheless, it is frequently used. Our own prime minister even used it in an official letter on what he thinks the problem of our society is by saying “act normal or go away”. Rutte claims that everyone who “rejects the fundamental norms and values of the Dutch society should better leave” (NOS, 2017). This narrative is also represented in society. While working at the camp Heumensoord, I had a conversation with two of the guards about integration. They were hopeful for the successful integration of the people living there, after all, they had gotten to know them a little bit and they seemed like “normal and good” people. They were wondering why integration, in general, was going so poorly, since all the migrant newcomers they meet are so nice and want to learn (Personal communication, Heumensoord, n.d).

In his interview, Hugo pointed out that he feels like if we would focus less on differences and what is “normal” or “not normal” as such vague concepts we would not feel so left out all the time (Interview, Hugo, practitioner, 7-6-2022). This opinion is shared with several of the Afghan newcomers interviewed for this research. The two Afghan couples I had a group interview with said that at times they felt like they had to adapt and become different people to properly belong, but do not know how to do this at times, which can make them feel lost (Interview, Afghan group, Afghan new, 8-6-2022). Nilofar, another Afghan refugee I met through my work at Heumensoord, says that she “feels like she has to be reborn in the Netherlands to fit in and belong” (Interview, Nilofar, Afghan new, 23-6-2022) Interestingly a bit later in the interview Hugo himself uses a similarly vague concept by saying that everyone should be able to express themselves the way they like, as long as it is respectfully and does not go “too far”. By this, he means as long as it does not hurt others (Interview, Hugo, practitioner, 7-6-2022). This of course is a very vague explanation because different people can have different imaginaries of what going “too far” in being yourself is, it is a very normative concept.

### 5.5 Fluidity & selectivity of “Dutch cultural identity”

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Dutch people often emphasize that if you live in the Netherlands, you need to adapt to “our” Dutch ways. Or as Fred put it: “maybe they just need to try a little harder to fit in” (Interview, Fred, Neighbor AZC, 2-6-2022). It is frequently mentioned as an important and the most pressing issue of integration that newcomers do not follow the Dutch norms and values closely enough (Dekker & Ridder, 2019). However, culture is a constantly changing dynamic process, changing over time. It endorses power and power-developed culture. Culture involves the production, circulation, and legitimation of meanings via performances, representations, and practices (Gregory, 2004). During his interview Rafiq also directly drew upon the interchangeability of culture by saying: “Well what is culture? Something you always carry with you, which changes along with you, which changes along with the environment you find yourself in” (Interview, Rafiq, Afghan old, 13-5-2022). The fact that culture is not set in stone, and is a very normative concept is discussed in 5.3: Reluctance to define what it is “Typically Dutch”. The following section will dive deeper into the fluidity & selectivity of the imaginaries on “Dutch cultural identity”.

*Having too many cultures and differences is no good. You can do that at home. I think some values other cultures take with them have a negative effect on Dutch culture. The bad elements have to go, the good elements can stay if it does not bother. The rest I think will have to go and they should go with Dutch culture. The characteristic of development is to go with the best, and I think that the culture from the Dutch has the best elements so other elements from other countries should be let go (Interview. Ahmid, Afghan newcomer, 22-6-2022).*

*You cannot just let your culture “go” as if it is a sack of potatoes you can just leave behind. Culture is your background, the situation from which you derive. It constantly changes in relation to the things and people you are surrounded with (Interview, Sina, Afghan old, 24-5-2022).*

*You see, a lot of things are to be labeled as typically Dutch, like tulips and stuff. But I don’t think any of those things are really important for cultural integration you see. What I think to be important for integration is for example an intercultural marriage or intercultural friendships. The social process of people mingling is what determines culture, and stop focusing on differences so much (Interview, Hugo, practitioner, 7-6-2022).*

*They don’t even celebrate Christmas or Sinterklaas! [...] They don’t agree with Zwarte Piet I think. Their parents keep them home when Sinterklaas comes to school. Not the Africans or the Chinese, but the Islamic people. And then they give us a big mouth about Suikerfeest because it is not even about sugar and blablabla (Interview, Ans, neighbor AZC, 27-6-2022).*

Ans shares the opinion more people in the Netherlands have: newcomers do not adapt to “our” norms and values closely enough (Dekker & Ridder, 2019). Losing the “vaguely described written and unwritten rules and habits” often leads to the complaint that “the Netherlands is not the Netherlands anymore (Tiemeijer, 2021, 8-10). This is the same case with the Zwarte Piet discussion. Zwarte piet often symbolizes the resistance of some of the Dutch citizens against the change we are going through because of other cultural influences in the Netherlands. For some people it symbolizes the fact that Dutch traditions are being “taken away” by people from “different cultures and ideologies”. It frightens them to lose traditions that are important to them, traditions which according to them, should be important to everyone living in the Netherlands (Ridder et al., 2019. 50). A few of the Afghan newcomers who lived in Heumensoord last year shared this opinion with Ans. They also had an opinion about what had to be done with their “own” culture while adapting to what they presumed to be the cultural norm in the Netherlands. According to them, they would only be “good Dutch citizens” if they abandoned their own culture. The way they imagined culture was seen as something rigid, something that would almost follow a certain checklist as if you could call yourself a proper practitioner of a culture if you fit all of those boxes (Interview, Afghan group, Afghan new, 8-6-2022).

The statement made by Hugo in the quote box above shows that Hugo indeed perceives integration and culture as a multi-actor adaptation process, as something in which people from different cultures have to come closer together and show true diversity to others by influencing the public street image. By using the example of the Tulip, Hugo touches upon an example of intercultural exchange, it endorses the changeability of culture and the fact that National identity is constantly (re) negotiated (Kunovich, 2009). Despite the fact that we often perceive the tulip as the representative of ultimate Dutchness, the Tulip was imported from Turkey in the 15th century (Entzinger, 2014). The Tulip is the perfect example to show that culture indeed is an adaptation from multiple ‘sides’, culture is a constantly changing process..

*I don't know about integration, in some way integration, culture, etc. it is all just so random what we want from them [talking about the people living in the AZC]. We want them to integrate but I don't see anybody with a protest sign saying “Newcomers should become more greedy & stubborn”, even though those are very Dutch qualities (...). I am eating Chinese every Monday, what does that say about me then? That's not Dutch as well!! (Interview, Fred, neighbor AZC, 2-6-2022).*

Notably, as Fred points out, there is also some hypocrisy in the wish to let newcomers integrate. As Fred points out during his interview It is not asked for newcomers to also adapt to our bad habits, stubbornness, greedy and passive are also frequently mentioned as to be typical characteristics of the Dutch culture and identity. We do not expect newcomers to become as greedy, stubborn, and passive as we are, rather not actually. It thus often comes down to the fact that people expect newcomers to adapt to some ideal image of what the Netherlands is. The idea of integration is based on an ideal image of who or what The Dutchman is. Some sort of Tinder profile with the best lighting and the most perfect selfies, accompanied by the most socially desirable sentences, by which in the end we hold newcomers to a much higher standard than we can accomplish ourselves: the Dutchman that does not exist (Ugur, 2022).

## 5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to elucidate the ambiguity of the wish for newcomers to integrate into “the Dutch ways”. It has shown that there is an imagined difference on the importance of cultural habits by the participants of this research. Apart from the imagined importance of freedom, there seems to be no consensus on what Dutch cultural identity is, which however does not withhold people from imagining there is. Nevertheless, there is also some awareness of the fluidity and changeability of culture and sometimes lack of equality in this, which is shown in the reluctance shown by some participants to define “typically Dutch”. Newcomers are not being asked to participate or adapt to the “bad” elements of the Dutch culture. In some ways, it even seems as if newcomers are held to higher or at least different standards when it comes down to cultural participation or adaptation. This will be elaborated on in the next chapter. While discussing socio-cultural integration, culture is frequently mentioned as the thing to “integrate into”, society is often referred to as the broader context in which socio-cultural integration takes place. What society means, will be discussed in the following chapter.

## Chapter 6: In-or outside Society?

The time we currently live in can be identified as a time of: 'flows and closures'. A stream of changes (flows) has exclusion as consequence (closures) (Andersons, 2006). The streams of changes have created a high sense of insecurity. Rising individualization in the 60's, Europeanisation, globalization, and the arrival of newcomers with a different culture and religion, often perceived as "strange" heightens the feeling that the Netherlands is not the Netherlands anymore, mostly for Dutch citizens without a migration background. The directness of the discussions about this, and the little consequences / the impersonal element of social media and the internet make that this sense of insecurity and distress only increases, for all citizens within the Dutch society (Mantel, 2018). According to a recent SCP publication titled "established, but not at home", more than half of the Dutch citizens with a migration background who have been living in the Netherlands for a longer period of time, and even second or third-generation migrant people, do not experience the Netherlands as a very welcoming country. They are gloomy with regard to politics and often experience discrimination because of their heritage (Dagevos et al. 2022). In this publication the SCP argues that there is an integration paradox occurring: even Dutch citizens with a migration background who occupy a good socio-economical position often feel socio-culturally left out of society (Ibid.)

This chapter will discuss the imaginaries concerning society and how this is acted upon within the context of integration in the Netherlands, to shed light on the results of these "closures" on society regarding socio-cultural integration. It brings together the imaginaries as discussed in the previous two chapters and places them within the context of imaginaries about society. This will be done in 5 sections starting with society, in which will be discussed whether or not newcomers are imagined to be in or outside the imagined society. From this we will be moving on to belonging, to discuss the importance of a sense of belonging within the society to partake as a part of that society, followed by the flipside of belonging: othering, and how othering and processes of others lead to less feeling of belonging. Moving on, we will follow with a section about inequality which goes into the frame of "the deserving migrant". After this we will end with a section about loyalty, and the perceived loyalty towards the society and the Dutch state.

### 6.1 Society

What is society, and what does it mean? Who is a part of the society? Who belongs and who does not? There is a big difference in whether or not migrant people are imagined to be "outside" or "inside" the society (Citrin & Sides, 2008). This idea is also represented by the first quote in the textbox below:

*We can't wait to really be a part of the Dutch society, to contribute, to know everything about the Dutch ways. Receiving our Dutch passport will be the best diploma ever haha! (Interview, Afghan group, Afghan new, 8-6-2022).*

*Everyone in the Netherlands continuously has to adapt to a new situation within the society, the society is constantly changing, due to everyone in the society (Interview, Sina, Afghan old, 24-5-2022).*

*You have to make sure to not shut people out, you have to actively let them participate in the society, in all societal activities, let them play by the same rules of everyone else in the society That is integration. It doesn't stop at just participating, people have to feel included (Interview, Hugo, Practitioner, 7-6-2022).*

*Well the people in the AZC have not really started their integration yet, they are just waiting to get permission to starts, they are excluded of society in every way possible (Interview, Pieter, neighbor AZC, 9-6-2022).*

These quotes show a certain imaginary of newcomers being outside the host society, or not allowing them to participate on an equal level. This plays into the 'society as an uncontested whole' concept, in which society is presented as something rigid, something not influenced by the change happening within this society (Schinkel, 2017). According to Schinkel (2017), The concept of 'society' selects its members and delimits its boundaries, while reproducing an imagination of having insiders and outsiders as two categories at the same time. It thus creates the existence of the imagination of shared values and characters which set the insiders apart from those who do not really belong to the society: the outsiders. Schinkel also notes that regardless of the continuously changing policies and integration practices, it is always the people with a migration background who are held accountable for not fitting into the society that they live in. The way the Afghan group talks about still having to "really become a part of society" shows a certain portrayal of them not being "in" society yet. People with a migration background are put outside 'society' and society is imagined as a domain without problems since the existing problems are relegated to the individual level. The rhetoric of 'bringing migrant people into society' illustrates the idea that migrant people are still in the process of arriving, even though some of them have been born here (Boersma & Schinkel, 2018).

Pieter agrees with this in some way, he feels like the people living in the AZC are not really "in" society yet, not due to their own effort or lack thereof, but because of the way they are excluded from society. He refers to the fact that a lot of the people living in the AZC are not even a "status holder" yet, they are still under investigation by the IND and have not gotten a residence permit yet. An asylum seeker is supposed to hear from the IND within 6 months if they will be getting a residence permit. The IND can prolong this term to a maximum of 15 months if they feel the need for more investigation (Ministerie van Justitie en Veiligheid, 2022a). However, it frequently takes the IND much longer to grant someone a residence permit (NOS, 2022), which leaves them unable to fully participate in the society they find themselves in for much longer. In some way, they are being kept outside the society by the Dutch

government for much longer than after the moment they arrive in the Netherlands. The other neighbors of the AZC that have been interviewed shared Pieters's opinion in the sense that the people living in the AZC were not really "in" society yet. Ans & Fred for example also imagines the residents of the AZC to still be "on the outs of the society". According to Ans this however has more to do with their own lack of effort, and "different" habits, something we will dive deeper into later in this chapter in the section '6.3: othering' (Interview, neighbor AZC, Ans, 27-6-2022; Interview, Fred, neighbor AZC, 2-6-2022).

This idea of people living in an AZC not really being "in" society yet, or not really "belonging" in the society, is represented on government websites as well. The Rijksoverheid website on the page discussing housing states the following: "Asylum seekers become status holders when they receive their residence permit. They will from then on start to be a part of the Dutch society, and will receive housing" (Ministerie van justitie en Veiligheid, 2022b). This implies that they have not been a part of the society before receiving their permit and finding a house. The way it is phrased "They will from then on start to be a part of (...)" suggests that they will only start the process at that point, and in some way can imply they still have a long way to go from then. Having status does not mean that you are treated exactly the same as other people living in the Netherlands, you have to complete your integration course within 5 years to get an extension for the residence permit. On top of that, you can also be evicted if you commit a crime, something which is not the case for others living in the Netherlands (Ministerie van Justitie en Veiligheid, 2022a).

Hugo focuses on actively letting people participate in society, and having the same rules for everyone, creating equal ground. Integration also means that everyone has to feel included, according to Hugo. Some sort of sense of common belonging, inclusivity, and commitment is -according to supporters of multiculturalism- indeed important for a society to function properly (Modood, 2007). This also raises the question of what society is, as apparently you can live in a society without being a part of it according to government's definitions. According to Schinkel (2018), it all starts with the lack of a theoretical imagination of 'society'. The occurrence of an imagination of 'society' which is lacking is that of 'society' as something with a border, and a unified identity, and by doing this actually puts social science into the role of border control. In line with this, Schinkel (2017) also does not accept 'society' as the context of the imagination. He argues that if the concept of society only exists because of a work of imagining, it is 'theoretically unsatisfactory' as he calls it to also assume that this work of imagining takes place within this society

This lacking theoretical imagination of what society is, is also leading to a lacking definition of society in a political context. For his research Haile (2020) conducted a policy analysis of Dutch parliamentary documents in search of the (re)production of the society as an uncontested whole frame. While conducting this research he notices that it is very rare to find a proper definition of Dutch society itself in these parliamentary documents. However, this non-defined, implicit description of Dutch society is very often used as a norm and benchmark to define the 'other' and determine its position. At times the arrival of migrant people, and specifically non-Western migrant people, is used to focus on what "we" as the Dutch society are in danger of losing (Haile, 2020)

The way Sina approaches integration in society, everyone would be included in the "we" of Dutch society. As discussed in previous chapters her imaginaries on integration and culture are that they are affected and constantly changing, and also being influenced by newcomers, and imagined "others". She

portrays the contested nature of integration (Interview, Sina, Afghan old, 24-5-2022). Unsurprisingly this is also the way she imagines society, with a big emphasis on the mutual adaptation of everyone within the context of a constantly changing society. She criticizes the way integration into society is often portrayed as something only to be done by newcomers, with newcomers have no effect on the unchanging society. One could say that this 'society' into which migrant people need to integrate is everywhere and nowhere at the same time. It is everywhere in the way that it is used as the benchmark to which we measure migrant peoples alleged integration, but it is nowhere because it is undifferentiated and static, and an imagined whole at the same time. Because of this, while measuring integration, what it is exactly that people need to integrate into is not questioned, and assumed to remain unaltered by the people who need to be integrated into it (Schinkel, 2018). This provides those who integrate with very little agency and presents the concept of society as something they do not belong in, something in which they are the "other" being put outside the society they find themselves. This will be discussed in the following two sections "Belonging" and "Othering".

## 6.2 Belonging

Belonging or a sense of belonging is the feeling that you are (socially) connected to other people within a specific social or cultural context (Le Penne, 2017). Research conducted by Gere & MacDonald (2010) has shown that belonging may even be a fundamental need for someone to function within a certain context, and thus be of great importance to both the individual and the context they find themselves in. This stresses the severity of the fact that according to some participants of this research, there is very little room to feel like they belong as newcomers or even people with a migration background who have been in the Netherlands for a longer period.

*No, no, no, I do not feel like I belong here. We were treated very poorly in Heumensoord and told to be happy with what we got. The Dutch government took us here under the promise that they would take care of us, that they would shelter us. I would never in my wildest dreams imagine that caring for us and sheltering us would mean having almost no access to anything else but a bed as your own personal space, and food that for sure would not be eaten on a daily basis by Dutch people themselves. (Interview, Nilofar, Afghan newcomer, 23-6-2022).*

*We feel like we belong here, we are in the right space. As long as we avoid politics and don't turn on the TV we feel like that at least ha-ha (Interview, Manan & Vendula, Afghan old, 30-5-2022).*

*I am sometimes wondering, I have a lot of friends who have a migration background like myself, but they often still feel like they don't belong. They sometimes feel like the society doesn't accept them as part of the Dutch society. As long that's still the case, or as long as they feel like that's still the case they will never fully feel at home. You can be properly integrated but still not feel at home, as long as (a part of) the receiving society doesn't accept you. It can sometimes feel as if you have to keep on proving yourself to be able to belong (Interview, Gyzam & Louay, Policy advisors, 1-6-2022).*

*I think they [the people living in the AZ] feel safe but not at home. They are often being ignored, or people look away. I think they must feel it, that a lot of people feel very distanced from them [...] But it's not like they are trying to change this situation (Interview, Ans, neighbor AZC, 27-6-2022).*

Nilofar's response to being asked if she feels like she belongs in the Netherlands shows a great amount of discontent with the way she has been treated since she arrived in the Netherlands. The Afghan evacuees who came to the Netherlands after the rise of the Taliban were brought here by the Dutch government. Most of them had worked for the Dutch government in some way back in Afghanistan, or were judges, journalists, or people of political power, and would be in danger of the Taliban because of that. The difference between them and other newcomers is that they already have been allocated a residence permit upon arrival (Visser, 2022). This puts them in a different position compared to other newcomers. While working at Heumensoord, many of the evacuee's living there shared this feeling of discontent with Nilofar. Quite often they confided in me and asked me how it was possible that their living arrangements and food options were so bad, almost inhumane at times. They were living there in the fall, and the heavy wind and rain could make the corrugated roof lift up, and made so much noise that sleeping became almost impossible. At some point, they even had to evacuate two of the tents in the middle of the night, because of safety issues from the storm (Personal communication, Heumensoord, 19-11-2022; Omroep Gelderland, 2021). On a national level, there was concern about their living conditions as well, and eventually, Heumensoord had to close down (Bormans, 2021).

Afghan evacuees' living conditions and the way they were treated really seemed to lower their expectations, and in some way also their respect or even loyalty towards the Dutch government (Personal communication, Heumensoord, 20-11-2022). As Nilofar points out in the quote in the textbox above, it also

affects her personal sense of belonging. Later in the interview, she explains she just started to be her own person again when they got their own apartment. Especially because they did not get this apartment through COA but through Dutch friends of theirs. Their friends worked very hard to find her husband a suitable job that would include living space. The fact that their own social connections helped them with this made her feel a bit more like she belonged, like there were people who valued them and wanted them to be here. This sense of belonging can come from social relationships with others in this social or cultural context. This is especially important for members of the so-called “minority groups within a society”, the more they feel like they belong, the more likely they are to seize work opportunities or do better in school. However, even when one does well in school and seizes all the work experiences to meet its path, it is still possible to feel like one does not belong (Walton & Cohen, 2007). Gizam took some of her friends who have a migration background as an example to illustrate this, she explains that as long as the society does not accept you, or perceives you as not to belong, it can continue to feel like you have to keep on proving yourself. As long as that’s the case you will never completely feel like you belong. The Netherlands is indeed perceived as less hospitable by people with a migration background compared to people without a migration background. Even second or third-generation citizens often perceive the Netherlands to be the least hospitable towards people with a migration background (Dagevos et al., 2022).

According to Ans, the people in the AZC probably do not feel like they belong here. She contributes this to the fact that they are often being given the cold shoulder by others. In a way, it almost seems as if she blames themselves for that by saying “it is not like they are trying to change that situation themselves” (Interview, Ans, Neighbour AZC, 27-6-2022). This is very contradictory, as the host society acts as if you do not belong, treats you in a different way than others, and then later blames you for the fact that you feel like you do not belong. However, there also are many people with a migration background who do feel a commitment to the host society and develop a sense of belonging. This raises questions about the conditions in which people with a migration background are stimulated or hampered with regard to national identification and what elements would indeed improve these feelings of belonging (De Vroome et al, 2014). Moreover, there also is some hypocrisy over who needs to adapt to the Dutch culture in order to properly belong. According to Ans, the “Islamic people” will probably never really belong because they are “too different” from “us” (Interview, Ans, neighbor AZC, 27-6-2022). There have been, and will be again in the future, heated debates about whether or not 'Islam' should have a status of 'belonging' in the Dutch and European culture. These questions have not been asked about Christianity or Judaism (Essed, 2008). Both these heated societal debates, and the way in which Ans approaches certain newcomers as “the Islamic people” are very strong examples of othering.

The (re)production of a certain image of newcomers as “others” by the government and presented in the media has effects on the sense of belonging of newcomers, explained by the quote above of Manan & Vendula. Migrant policies can be viewed as “politics of belonging” in which the migrant itself often has very little agency and is perceived as the “object of integration” within “society” (Brubaker, 2010). The conceptualization of ‘society’ does not exist independently of its imagination. For a society to exist, to make a difference, to have effects, and to be a concept both states and citizens can act upon, or in the name of, it needs to be imagined. States exercise their symbolic power in shaping this imaginary through migration policies by classifying people as belonging either to “us” or “them” or in the empty void in between, in the

process of becoming “something’ within a society (Paul, 2015). This is a reproduction of a certain representation of who belongs to the “we” in relation to who belongs to the “other” (Anderson, 2014).

### 6.3 Othering

In the Netherlands, culture is often seen as something static, something prominent, especially by those who are fearing the increase in Islamic influence and power in the Netherlands, such as Ans (Interview 10, Ans, neighbor AZC, 27-6-2022). These concerns lead to a culturalization and emotionalization of citizenship. This means that citizenship is increasingly less about political and social rights and more about the norms and values of a culturally defined society (Slootman & Duyvendak, 2015). The from-then-till-now continuity, the belief that some people historically belong in the Netherlands, brings the past to the present and creates an unwelcoming environment to cultures that, according to some, do not resemble enough ours (Foner, 2006). This prevailing discourse of nativism is rooted in the idea that those whose heritage has been in the Netherlands for centuries are allowed to have a more important say in what ‘our’ culture and identity is, belong ‘more’, and have more rights (Duyvendak, 2021). Opposition to other cultures is indispensable in creating the national cultural identity of a country. This frequently led to the Dutch “other” being used to legitimize political statements or ambitions and facilitate debates about the relationship between citizens and the government and integration and diversity (Ibid).

*I just want to show the people of the Netherlands that not everything you thought about the Afghan woman is true. I wish people would talk to us before they became afraid by the idea of us. Of course it is strange if you have never seen an Afghani woman before, It is new, new things can be scary. But then we will talk to each other and you can see we have things in common, that I am not that different, that we are not as the media and politics portrays us to be (Interview, Nilofar, Afghan newcomer, 23-6-2022).*

*Some people are imagined to be “further away” from how the Netherlands “really is”, in need of more training before they can pass the integration test, or really be a “good” citizen (Interview, Sina, Afghan old, 24-5-2022).*

*You need to de-culturalize integration, not just assume certain things based on where someone is from or how they look. Not just assume that someone from Afghanistan is Muslim. Don’t label people in a certain cultural way without even talking to them and jumping to consequences based on that (Interview, Rafiq, practitioner, 13-5-2022).*

*I think that the Dutch people will never think that non-Dutch people can become Dutch people, or will ever properly integrate in all cultural things. I think this is the case everywhere around the world. You will never really be the same, act the same, be one of them. I think you will continue to see and feel that (Interview, Ans, neighbor AZC, 27-6-2022).*

The way Ans approaches being Dutch shows a certain culturalization of citizenship. Being “really” Dutch is something she refers to as maintaining through the process of “integration in cultural things”, and not to obtaining formal Dutch citizenship. Citizenship, according to parliament, becomes a leading principle in the presence of people from ‘other cultures’ in the Netherlands. It becomes framed as a ‘choice’ for participation in the society. The focus on citizenship in integration shows a culture-centered way of thinking, in which the level of being a ‘good’ citizen is coherently connected to the culture people perceive someone to be a part of. It amplifies the practices normalized according to the ‘dominant culture and creates the perception of the ‘good’ citizen as someone who shows ‘loyalty’ towards ‘society’ (Schinkel, 2008). Furthermore, it focuses solely on the ‘choice’ for participation for newcomers, not the choice of participation from the receiving society. How Ans put is, it sounds as if newcomers have no influence on the content of this “Dutchness”, this refers back to the “society as an uncontested whole” concept explained at the beginning of this chapter.

Rafiq’s imaginaries on why integration does not work, are quite opposed to those of Ans. Rafiq advocates for as he calls it a “deculturalization of integration”. He emphasizes the fact that there frequently are many pre-assumptions based on someone’s heritage, not just as prejudice within the society but also institutionally and scientifically in the way newcomers from certain heritage are framed and analyzed. Borders and othering between people, should not be seen as permanent and fixed lines, but as ‘discursive powers struggle’ with room for interpretation and negotiation. They should be seen as processes instead of ends. Because of the othering happening within a society, and the lack of power of those being framed as “others”. There is very little ability of these ‘others’ or ‘outsiders’ of society to gain the power to negotiate their position (van Houtum & van Naerssen, 2002). As Sina explains it in the textbox above this section, some people are imagined to be “further” away from society, which provides them with less possibility to really be a part of the society.

Borders are no fixed thing in time or space, but the symbolism of a social practice of spatial differentiation. The current selective openness in both the borders of our country and the borders of our minds who determine the “us” and the “them”, creates a tension between human rights and the possibilities in protecting sovereignty (van Houtum & van Naerssen, 2002). During the interview with Roqia she draws upon this selective openness as well, by calling Ukrainian refugees “VIP refugees”. She thinks it is painfully obvious who is considered to be a more valuable refugee (Interview, Roqia, Afghan old & practitioner, 3-6-2022). This will be discussed more in depth in the section 6.5: the (un)deserving migrant. Our liberal economy is in favor of this flexibility and access to money and resources which also increases the mobility of people. However, the flexibility of these borders is a ‘selective gatekeeper’, and borders are still often politically used as indeed to be something rigid when it comes down to the mobility of certain people and unwanted cultural influences (van Houtum & van Naerssen, 2002). Which is exactly the way Ans (Interview, Ans, neighbor AZC, 27-6-2022) wants the government to use these borders to only let people in who actually add something to the Dutch society. To not let the “Islamic people” “unwilling to adapt” take over in the Netherlands.

The quote from the interview with Nilofar ends with “we are not as the media and politics portray us”. By saying this she expresses her opinion on the fact that, in her opinion, the government and the media portray Afghan women as “different” or even “scary, as she puts it. States exercise their symbolic power in

shaping the imaginary of “others” through migration policies by classifying people as belonging either to “us” or “them”, or in the empty void in between, in the process of becoming “something’ within a society (Paul, 2015, p.20). This shows the imagination of the opposition of being either outside or inside the society. Concepts such as ‘immigrants’ and ‘sovereign nations’ are perceived to be mutually exclusive to coincide (Feldman, 2005). However “immigrants and Immigrant integration’s articulation of the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ as preexisting, hides their mutually constitutive nature through integration practices, measurements, and performatives” (Haile, 2020. P.54). Because of the pre-existing assumption of the “other” being “outside” the society, not able to enter on the “proper” terms, the portrait of a nation-state as an entity in crisis prevails (Feldman, 2005. p. 213). Gijs mentioned something similar in his interview: “a crisis here, a crisis there, I feel like there are crises everywhere these days” (Interview, Gijs, neighbour AZC, 21-6-2022).

Processes of domination and discrimination go hand in hand with othering and bordering processes and are continuously (re) constructing the divergence in power ratio between different groups within the society (Loyal, 2011. p188). Only the most powerful and influential groups within a society are able to (re)construct this understanding of the self which puts them above the “other”. As Louay put it: “the receiving society has to give you the opportunity to participate, otherwise, the integration won’t succeed (Interview, Louay & Gizam, practitioners, 1-6-2022). These borders are constructed through everyday processes and are maintained in the smallest things, and create the (cultural) boundaries of belonging (van Campenhout & van Houtum, 2021).

#### 6.4 Inequality

Equality is something frequently mentioned by participants in the previous sections of this chapter, often with regard to gaining equal opportunities and equal treatment for newcomers and migrant people. There is a huge difference in how migrant people have to prove themselves within the society compared to people without a migration background, even for second or third-generation people with a migration background. People with a migration background are being put in the category of the irretrievably unassimilable other, having to prove their deservingness (Bonjour & Duyvendak, 2017).

*That's why that they provide lots of opportunities like DUO that they help us they the special budget for the education one factor is this, but that is only for the language. If you finish fast like I do you can also use some of the money for other educational purposes, that is allowed, that is what I'm going to do (Interview, Ahmid, Afghan new, 22-6-2022).*

*If you have less, less cultural knowledge, less cultural tools to move up on the social ladder, you are often perceived as less in the society, regardless to whether or not this is actually due to your own doing or merely other circumstances like education The most important thing is to just stop comparing, or blame people for things that are just not their fault, we all have to adapt to each other (Interview, Sina, Afghan old, 24-5-2022).*

*Okay, for example, the overseas integration law. The requirements of that are so unequal! Not only European countries get a pardon from that, also other countries like Japan! It is so selective (Personal communication, practitioner, Heumensoord, 23-9-2022).*

*I definitely think that, sadly enough, if you are a newcomer or even a second or third-generation migrant people will always doubt you, because of the color of your skin (Interview, Gijs, Neighbor AZC, 21-6-2022)*

What these quotes have in common is that they all draw upon inequalities that arise in the course of integration, some of them explicitly included in integration policies such as the overseas integration law, others focusing on the unequal access to reaching the same goal, due to factors such as the color of your skin, your educational level or class. According to Favell (2019), migrant people may be subjected to too much integration to fit into a certain “national identity” frame. The end goal of integration is generally for migrant people to be invisible in society, but in fact, that has little to do with being a national. Often when an immigrant is applauded for “successful” integration, this is a celebration of class, not integration. It is frequently about how exceptional it is that newcomers have attained the success of the white “national” working class (Favell, 2019).

As mentioned in the societal relevance of this research, people with a migration background are perceived to be at the bottom of the society upon their arrival, if they are perceived to be making part of the society at all. If Afghan newcomers, for example, are perceived to be at the bottom of society, and someone like Ahmed, who belongs to a higher class back in Afghanistan, passes his language exams very quickly. We are happy because he has proven to be “better” and possibly belong “higher” on our class ladder. This in no way should be a surprise, because Ahmed was a PhD student back in Afghanistan and comes from a family background in which they have very similar “western” values to ours (Interview, Ahmed, Afghan old, 22-6-2022). We applaud him for being able to use the money for his language course for other forms of education as well. This also has a lot to do with the “Netherlands vingertje” as Rafiq calls it, we should have assumed Ahmed would do well on the language courses since he is highly educated and proven to be an intelligent man. Instead of doing so, we now hold him as an exceptional case, an example of his fellow Afghan newcomers, and sometimes even as an example of the fact that newcomers indeed do

not try hard enough. If Ahmid can do it, why can't everyone do it? Are they not trying hard enough? These questions devote a great deal of merit to the effort someone puts into integration, not taking other elements into account, as Sina points out in the quote above.

A policy analysis discussed in an article by Bonjour & Chauvin (2018) showed that work ethics are often framed as important aspects of cultural misfit or cultural fit within the Dutch society, this indicates a broader "civic deservingness" (Bonjour & Duyvendak, 2017). Van Houdt et al (2011) argue something similar. According to them the idealized image of a good citizen is indeed a working citizen, someone who is participating and contributes to society economically. However, the failure of people with a migration background to economically properly participate is often explained, or blamed on, culturally. In the article of Extra & Yagmur (2010) they argue that this is also happening in the schooling system. They discuss how low skills in Dutch language proficiency and other socio-cultural differences between the schooling system and the home culture are perceived to be an "integration issue" in the Netherlands. This does indeed act as barrier to the involvement of parents in their children's school and the help they can receive from their parents when it comes down to school work. Nevertheless, this is no different from other working-class families with similar factors. They argue that the level of education of the parents is an influential factor in the parents' involvement in their children's schooling, not their migration background. This appears to be a class issue overgeneralized to a migrant or "different culture" issue (Extra & Yagmur, 2010). Having "less cultural knowledge to move up on the social ladder" as Sina puts it, may as well be because of other factors than someone's heritage.

Most interestingly about this remark made by Gijs is the fact that it shows a possible underlying imaginary of newcomers, migrant people, and second or third-generation migrant people automatically having a different skin color. Or, in the context in which we were discussing this during the interview, implying that people with a "different" skin color automatically belong to a "different" culture. As opposed to people with the "same" skin color who thus supposedly belong to the "same" culture. Nevertheless, he is not alone in this. Gijsberts & Dagevos (2007) defined socio-cultural integration as something concerned with whether the so-called "ethnic minority groups" remain distinct, or are becoming part of the receiving society. In this analysis white migrant people or people from certain "western" countries are not to be considered as an "ethnic minority group" but as to already be a part of our society. Schinkel (2018) calls this the 'dispensation of integration', meaning that white citizens are not the research subject in terms of their integration. integration does much more than just make a distinction between "well" integrated individuals and individuals who are "not well" integrated. The concept of immigrant integration makes a distinction between individuals for whom integration is not an issue, and those who need the concept of integration to be a part of and be accepted into a society (Schinkel, 2018).

This dispensation of integration is also represented in the selectiveness of the overseas integration law, a law someone working for COA brought to my attention during the time I was working at Heumensoord. We were discussing the participation declaration, and he expressed his concern about its inequality of it, and the selectiveness of the fact that for example, expats did not have to sign it if they came to the Netherlands (Personal communication Heumensoord, 23-9-2022). The overseas integration law is another example of the selectiveness in the Dutch political system, one that actually raises human rights concerns according to human rights watch (Human Rights Watch, 2016).

The overseas integration test has to be passed while still in the country of origin in order to be able to join family members or spouses in the Netherlands. Citizens from the EU, European Economic Area, Australia, Switzerland, Canada, New Zealand, South Korea, Japan, and the USA do not have to take this test. The fact that citizens of some nationality do not have to take this test makes the test discriminatory, since there is no equal possibility to gain Dutch citizenship through family reunion. This test also indirectly discriminates against Turkish and Moroccan people with a migration background in specific, as they more often want to marry someone from their country of origin (Human Rights Watch, 2016) The reason why this test is brought to life is also to target these groups specifically, to decrease the amount of Turkish and Moroccan people with a migration background gaining asylum in the Netherlands. Nonetheless, it has never been framed that way it is framed to “keep migrants with poor prospects from entering the Netherlands” (Bonjour & Duyvendak, 2017). The test and the financial costs and restrictions which come with it clash with the right to family life and the rights of Dutch citizens or residents to have family members live with them (Human Rights Watch, 2016).

Notably, the Dutch government has a legitimate interest in the integration of its migrant population and is at the right to try and improve this. However, the overseas integration test does not contribute to this. It does quite the contrary, by delaying entry and family reunion in the Netherlands, it actively delays the process of integration of family members of existing people with a migration background, and the integration of the people with a migration background possibly waiting for their spouse to arrive and to start their life in the Netherlands together. On top of that, it also a high risk of alienation of migrant communities, since it creates the impression that they and their family members are not welcome (The Netherlands: Discrimination in the Name of Integration, 2016). This creates a certain “deservingness” frame, in which you need to deserve a family reunion, or need to live up to certain standards which are harder for some migrant people to reach compared to others. This family migration policy’s goal is to reduce the entry of “migrants with poor prospects” (Bonjour & Duyvendak)

#### 6.5 The (un)deserving migrant

Putting someone’s belonging in question and institutional, scientifically and societal othering can create the idea of an “Underserving migrant”, meaning someone who should be barred to come to the Netherlands, because of the (pre) assumption that they are likely to properly “integrate” in the Dutch society (Bonjour & Duyvendak, 2017). The “undeserving migrant” represents the fact that migrant people should “earn” their place in society and “prove” themselves to the receiving society. This is very strongly represented in the statement done by a member of the Afghan group that has been interviewed for this research, as portrayed in the text box below:

*If you don't do your very best to show your worth, and to show you earn your place here, you shouldn't have come to the Netherlands (Interview, Afghan group, Afghan new, 8-6-2022).*

*I felt helped and supported when I arrived in the Netherlands in 1997, the procedure to get a passport and find a house wasn't as bad as it is now, Dutch people were very welcoming to us. However, it has changed a lot the past few years. This makes me feel bad for the Afghani people who come to the Netherlands now and don't get good help, almost as if they don't deserve it...and somehow I did in 1997? (Interview, Manan & Vendula, Afghan old, 30-5-2022).*

*That's the painful thing, there is a huge difference in the past few years to where you come from as a refugee. If your Afghani, Eritrean, etc, you are treated differently than the Ukrainians are now, there is a difference in how much you have to prove yourself (Interview, Roqia, practitioner & Afghan old, 3-6-2022).*

*If you look at the difference between how the refugee's from Ukraine are being welcomed, how everyone is so much more open to them compared to the refugees from Islamic countries. That's horrible but in some way I understand it. For me it is also easier to relate to an East-European than a Syrian, which has to do with a lot of judgements and prejudices (interview, Pieter, neighbor AZC, 9-6-2022).*

All the quotes in the textbook above show the “deservingness frame” of migrant people, in their own way. The group of Afghan newcomers that have been interviewed said you have to earn your place here, you need to show to the world that you deserve to be here. Manan & Vendula are actually confused by the fact that Afghan newcomers nowadays have to do so much to prove themselves, while it was much easier for them at the time of their own arrival. Roqia also talks about this difference in having to prove yourself and the difference between refugees from different countries in this. Later on, she even calls the Ukrainians “VIP refugees”. Pieter doesn't say that he thinks some refugees would deserve it more but does acknowledge the difference in how they are being treated, and even states he understands why people would relate more to a Ukrainian refugee.

Van Campenhout & van Houtum (2021) explain this continuously having to prove yourself if you find yourself in a marginalized position within society, by using the case of the German soccer player Özul. He resigned from the German national team because he felt marginalized and disappointed by the country he felt he had given everything for. Whenever they won a soccer match people were excited and talked about how “we” won, whenever they lost a soccer match everyone was talking about how “the Turks on the team” may not have been playing at their best during the match, and started question whether or not it was a good idea to have so many “foreigners” on their national team. The question of deservingness also seems to be some sort of moral issue. Football players with a migration background or dual citizenship, have the extra burden of having to prove to belong to the nation. They also have the risk to be seen as undeserving or untrustworthy if they do not explicitly show their loyalty with both words and actions. At any point when they perform less, their entire being is being put into question (van Campenhout & van

Houtum, 2021). Nonetheless, following this line of argumentation Ukrainians might as well be imagined as to be “foreigners” and “having dual loyalty”. The perceived difference in this seems to lie in the fact that Ukrainians are imagined to be less “different” in comparison to for example Afghans. Pieter agrees to this in some way, and attributes this to the existence of certain “prejudices”. His perceived distance from Ukrainian refugees is closer compared to that of Afghan refugees.

Manan & Vendula directly put this deservingness into question, why they apparently deserved to be welcomed, get a house & a passport and their fellow Afghani citizens get a different treatment now. It makes Manan question why she did deserve it back in 1997 and others do not seem to deserve it now. It makes them question their own deservingness. There was no question whether or not the Afghani people who got here through Heumensoord would get a residence permit, this was already promised to them by the Dutch state before arrival. The fact that they would formally become Dutch citizens was pre-determined. This however did not mean they would also be accepted into the imagined community, into the moral dimension of citizenship (van Campenhout & van Houtum, 2021). The imagined community of the nation-state is a community of value in which some members can be considered to be of higher value, and more deserving of their citizenship than others (Anderson, 1983). The result of this in Dutch society is continuously shifting hierarchies of national belonging (van Campenhout & van Houtum, 2021), which is portrayed in Manan & Vendula’s wonder about their deservingness back in 1997 and how the current Afghan newcomers are being treated. This can lead to the competition of national acceptance, and having to show your loyalty in some way, in which not everyone has the same means to compete (Ibid).

## 6.6 Loyalty

Loyalty is an element that came up while conducting the interviews. There have been no direct questions about loyalty in the research guide. Nevertheless, loyalty has shown to be something frequently touched upon during the interviews, solely by participants of Afghan heritage. Two people in the Afghan group of people from Heumensoord said that to be Dutch is not to stand out, to make sure you do not bother anyone, and stay in the background as much as possible (interview, Afghan group, Afghan newcomers, 8-6-2022). These opinions were not vocalized in the other research groups. Because I was curious I mentioned this to someone working in the integration department of the municipality of Nijmegen and asked her if she thought about this in the same way, or how she thought this came to be. According to her, this is a very common vision of people who have non-western European heritage and live in the Netherlands. They often appear to be surprised about how individualistic and invisible Dutch people try to be, and the lack of loyalty to family and friends. This individualistic image of Dutch citizens seems to increase the amount of loyalty they feel they have to show towards the state, according to her (Personal communication, Bureau Wijland, 8-5-2022).

This explanation has a big emphasis on the way migrant people interpret loyalty, however, their perceived necessary loyalty towards the Dutch state does not just appear out of thin air. In the Netherlands, like many other Western European countries, there is an upcoming societal emphasis on having traditional national values and identities, and people with a migration background being accused of their lack of assimilation to these “core values” which according to some comes from a lack of loyalty to the host nation

and host culture or identity (Vasta, 2007). This originates from the fear of diversity leading to a lack of feelings of belonging, those feelings of belonging are considered a prerequisite for national solidarity, effective democracy, and a unified society (Putnam, 2008). Both the media and some politicians frequently claim that because of the increase in migrant people there is an occurrence of dividing loyalties and an increasing lack of attachment to the host society, which undermines the national identity. This leads to a big focus on the loyalty and solidarity of migrant people towards both the host society and the state (De Vroome et al, 2014).

*I am different, my name is different, I am raised and shaped somewhere else, I have known different countries and speak different languages. My family lives somewhere else so it makes me feel different, sometimes others make me feel different because of it. This can also raise questions for you or others about my loyalty to the Netherlands (Interview, Rafiq, Practitioner & Afghan old, 13-5-2022).*

*We feel ashamed for “taking houses” Dutch people need to live in themselves. The Netherlands is full and those houses should go to the people who do belong here. We have to make sure to work extra hard to show to the government we are good, and give something back for the help they have given us”(Interview, Afghan group, Afghan new, 8-6-2022).*

Proving yourself, or continuously having to prove yourself or your loyalty, as represented in the two quotes above, seems to be an important aspect of socio-cultural integration in the Netherlands. Discourses about integration and assimilation are closely tied to a specific ideal of citizenship and the nation, that of a national community with undivided identification with and loyalty to a single common nation-state. Within these ideals, the migrant transnationalism and increasing options of having dual or multiple citizenships are considered as a possible threat and undermining of the nation and citizenship. These possible multiple allegiances with multiple citizenships are supposed to cause conflicts concerning loyalty, which is, by some, believed to complicate the proper identification with the host polity (Miller 2000; Renshon 2001).

Having to show loyalty is often perceived as a precondition to belonging, but this contradiction leads to less feeling of belonging because not everyone has to show loyalty. This is also explained in the concept of “Dual loyalty”, a perceived occurrence among people of two nationalities. Dual loyalty arises when a citizen holds some form of political allegiance to another state, which could challenge their loyalty to the Netherlands. This often leads to newcomers having to do more to prove their loyalty to the state, in comparison to citizens who are not perceived to have dual loyalty (Baron, 2009), just like the in example of Ozül (van Campenhout & van Houtum, 2021)

The fact that people with a migration background have to prove themselves in some way is also represented in the scholarly world. There are multiple pieces of research about the “current state of affairs” on migrant identification with the national identification, but not that many focused on how non-migrant groups relate themselves to the national identification. Both economic and socio-cultural integration affect the national identification of people with a migration background and loyalty towards the state. However, this is not something only happening to people with a migration background. ‘Natives’ as Heath & Roberts

(2008) call the non-migrant population of a country, who are socio-economically marginalized also have a lower, or relatively low sense of national belonging compared to the native population with a better socio-economical position.

### 6.7 Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to show how society is imagined by the participants of this research, and how different approaches to society affect the way newcomers and migrant people are imagined in relation to society. There is a big difference in whether or not newcomers or even migrant people are imagined to be “inside” or “outside” the imagined society. When imagined as being “outside” the society, this can affect the sense of belonging, and increase certain imaginaries of an unassimilated “other” and “undeserving migrant”. Culturalization of citizenship puts a bigger emphasis on cultural elements in obtaining citizenship and seemingly increases the distance between “us” and “them”. Because of this pre-existent assumption of the “other” being “outside” the society, not being able to enter on the proper terms, the portrayal of a nation-state as an entity in crisis prevails. The imagined community of the nation-state is a community of value in which some members can be considered of higher value, these imaginaries affect the way these individuals are being approached within society. This creates the idea of the “(un)deserving migrant”, and can lead to certain migrants having to show a great amount of loyalty in order to show that they belong.

## Chapter 7: Discussion & Conclusion

### 7.1 Conclusion

This thesis has shed light on the contested nature of integration by taking the imaginaries of practitioners of integration policy, neighbors of the AZC, and Afghan migrant people, analyzing and mirroring these imaginaries in an attempt to answer the following question: *In what way do the contrasting imaginaries of socio-cultural integration of Afghan migrant people, neighbors of an AZC and practitioners of integration relate and contrast to each other, and how does this relate to how they imagine society?* This has been done by looking at the imaginaries of socio-cultural integration, Dutch national identity & society through the eyes of the participants that have been interviewed for this research and the data collected during the exploratory phase of this research. While diving into these three concepts the contested nature of integration has become more clear, because of the way these imaginaries sometimes coincided but at other times have shown to be the complete opposite of each other, with both in-group differences and in-between group differences. This conclusion will start with an overview of the most important research findings of the three empirical chapters, to then combine these findings and show what the mirroring of different imaginaries has been.

Chapter 4 discussed and analyzed the different imaginaries regarding the meaning of socio-cultural integration, of both the government and the participants of this research. This chapter has shown that participation & adaptation are imagined to be at the core of socio-cultural integration. Nevertheless, the extent to which newcomers need to participate, or if they need to adapt, differs depending on who you ask. The question of responsibility faces a similar issue, the government puts the responsibility of integration mostly on the shoulders of the newcomers. Some of the participants actually thought this to be more of a governmental issue. There appeared to be a field of tension whether integration was imagined more as an assimilation matter or more as everyone within the society moving towards each other. Neighbors of the AZC and Afghan newcomers seemed to define integration more as adaptation and participation by newcomers, whereas practitioners and Afghan old put more emphasis on the fact that everyone within the society had to participate and adapt. The discrepancy concerning the imaginaries of the meaning of socio-cultural integration portrays the contested nature of integration and leaves us a big question at the end of the first empirical chapter: integration into what?

Moving on, in chapter 5 the concept of “Dutch national identity” is analyzed based on the imaginaries of the participants. The “Dutch cultural identity” would be the thing newcomers would have to presumably participate in/adapt to. There seems to be no full consensus on what Dutch cultural identity is, apart from the importance of freedom and the role of freedom in the imagined Dutch cultural identity. Nevertheless, multiple participants of Afghan heritage also put the selectivity of the Dutch freedom into question. While some of the other participants seemed to imagine it as something very common, and later on during their own interview said something which portrayed some selective imaginations regarding freedom. The absence of a clear definition of what Dutch cultural identity is, leads to the culturalization of citizenship, and expectations of newcomers which go way beyond citizenship. The concept of “normality” is used to show how some participants of this research are aware of the subjective experience of what is

important in culture, while others use the concept in a way that implies their imaginaries of some sort of universal concept of normality. Citizens who are perceived to be part of an “other” culture are at times held to higher standards when it comes down to loyalty, but also get provided with fewer tools to become to feel like they belong in the Netherlands.

Chapter 6 has attempted to show how society is imagined by the participants of this research, and how different approaches to society affect the way newcomers and migrant people are imagined in relation to society. There is a big difference in whether or not newcomers or even migrant people are imagined to be “inside” or “outside” the imagined society. When imagined as being “outside” the society, this can affect the sense of belonging, and increase certain imaginaries of an unassimilated “other”, and “undeserving migrant”. Culturalization of citizenship puts a bigger emphasis of cultural elements in obtaining citizenship and seemingly increases the distance between “us” and “them”. As a result of this pre-existent assumption of the “other” being “outside” the society, not being able to enter on the proper terms, the portrayal of a nation-state as an entity in crisis prevails. Some of the participants of Afghan heritage brought the concept of loyalty forward during the interviews, with an imagined loyalty towards both the nation-state and loyalty to the rest of the people living in the Netherlands, the imagined need to show their loyalty and worth to the host-society. The imagined community of the nation-state is a community of value in which some members can be considered of higher value, these imaginaries affect the way these individuals are being approached within society.

Combined these three chapters have portrayed a wide range of imaginaries and their possible effect on the way integration and integration processes are imagined. By imagining “integration” as something which only has to be done by (certain) groups within society, there seems to be an increase in “othering” and created a certain frame of “deservingness”. This is based on the claim that newcomers would have to “participate & adapt”, but some of the participants did not even dare to imagine into what they would have to “participate & adapt” exactly. Even among participant who imagine integration as an effort of everyone in society, these “othering” and “deservingness” frames seemed to appear from time to time. While portraying the complexity, interconnectedly and contested landscape within which integration is a societal issue, this theses has emphasized the importance of accepting the contested nature of integration. The need to accept, and communicate about the fact that different actors have different imaginaries when it comes down to the concept of integration. It stresses need to approach the “integration issue” together with everyone living in our society.

#### 7.1.1 Mirroring of different imaginaries

To reach this conclusion, this thesis has analyzed semi-structured interviews to mirror the imaginaries of socio-cultural integration from a multi-actor perspective. The interviews provided me with a broad variety of different imaginaries from different actors. Because of the research method and size of this research, there is nothing to generalize or conclude based on the findings of this research. This has also never been the purpose of this research, it had the purpose to mirror the subjective imaginaries of the participants to collect an as much diverse collection of imaginaries on socio-cultural integration as possible. And it has. The strength of this research lies in the opportunity to collect and mirror different imaginaries the written and unwritten rules of society regarding migrant peoples integration.

Most interesting and unique was the opportunity I had to also mirror an individual's own imaginaries with their own statements and beliefs, both implicit and explicit. The number of times someone completely spoke against something they had said just five minutes ago was astonishing. This, more than anything shows how imaginaries are constantly changing based on many aspects involved, or how something said slightly different shows a whole other aspects of an individual's imaginary. To properly understand how certain societal processes come to be, being able to understand the imaginaries of different people living in the society has shown to be of vital importance. The mirroring of different imaginaries has also shown the importance of responsibility and effort in integration. Some of the participants of this research have shown to be slowly attempting to move away from the concept of a newcomer integrating into society and instead more towards society integrating as a whole. While others seemed to imagine the rigidity of Dutch national identity as being of vital importance in the time we currently live in.

Science, politics, society, and the media are all different forces that influence how integration is imagined. Since they are constantly undergoing change, so are the imaginaries regarding integration. Nevertheless, while politics and the media seem to create a more 'black-and-white' picture of the current situation on integration. The participants of this research have shown that they actually leave some room for nuance, and are very aware of how their imaginaries can vary from those of others. If anything, this thesis has shown that if we want to deal with the current "integration issue" in society, we need to do this with the help of everyone in this society. Or as Schinkel (2018, p.15) put it: "the question is ultimate whether we want to make resources available to improve the prospects of migrants and their children, or do we want to continue to go down this road we are currently on".

## 7.2 Discussion

Apart from the contribution to understanding the contested nature of integration better by providing multi-actor empirical evidence to both the societal and the scientific discussion, this research also has some limitations that have to be considered.

The sampling should be critically assessed, it would be most interesting to be able to sample on additional criteria. For this thesis, I ended up sampling people based on a few requirements pre-determined to starting this research, as explained in the introduction of this research. The focus was on whether or not someone fit into the four research groups. Besides that only gender has been taking into account in a way that I tried to have an equal amount of men and women who have been interviewed. Preferably I would have also wanted to filter on other influences such as political preference, level of education, or people that migrated to the Netherlands from other countries as well. However, due to the size of this research, those influences were only taken into account in the sense that I have tried to create a range of participants as diverse as possible, by for example taking the diversity of the neighborhood into account in selecting participants.

Furthermore, it must be taken into account that the Afghan newcomers interviewed for this research found themselves in a very unique position. Upon their arrival to the Netherlands, they already knew they were going to receive a residence permit. The fact that they were brought here by the Dutch

government puts them in a position not many other refugees find themselves in. This could possibly have an effect on the imaginaries they have when it comes down to all the elements discussed in this research, compared to newcomers who come from different countries.

A lot of other elements came up during my research, some expected, some unexpected. While working on this research I discovered my own personal frustration with the lack of solutions being offered by scholars criticizing the concept of (socio-cultural) integration. A lack of research that actually provides answers to these problems. Of course, this is also the responsibility of policy makers, but I feel like the gap between scholarly research and policy is sometimes made unnecessarily big by scholars. This research has aimed to make this gap smaller by determining its focus from a “bottom-up” perspective. In which I let myself be guided in the focus of this research based on the conversations and experiences I had during the exploratory phase of this research as elaborately discussed in Chapter 3: Methods. What would be most valuable is to combine not only different disciplines while researching integration, but also combine scientific research with policy research.

Another recommendation for future research would be to research to what extent people imagine integration to be desirable, or to what extent people who usually get a dispensation of integration are willing to make themselves accountable to integrate as well. Especially because integration is not always desirable. Complete integration implies fixed differentiations, rigidity, conformity, and close. All of these things are not frequently affiliated with the modern time we live in. A fully integrated national society will look like East Germany under Honecker or North Korea, both not very often used as societal examples in the Netherlands (Favell 2019). A policy recommendation based on this research would be to focus more on socio-cultural integration, it is often overlooked but if anything this research has shown that the neo-liberalistic hyper focus that seems to occur as both a political and societal frame does not do justice to the contested nature of integration. Or as Favell (2019) points out, does not lead to a desirable societal outcome. The neo-liberalist hyper focus leads to a big emphasis on merit and accomplishment and adaptation not taking into account that not everyone is provided with the same tools to reach the end goal.

This thesis has portrayed imaginaries discussed by participants that are in line with from this neo-liberalist hyper focus, but it has also shown examples of imaginaries that differ from this neo-liberalist view. Participants turned out to be critical on the imaginaries presented in the media and politics, and actively put concepts such as “normality” and “freedom” into question. They portray an increasing awareness of diversity and the existence of different imaginaries regarding the current “integration issue” in the Netherlands, which according to Dagevos et al (2018) is currently happening because the matter of integration is becoming a more and more pressing matter within society. Regardless they also claim that this increasing awareness of diversity and different visions on what to do with “the integration issue”, mainly seems to lead to an increase in polarization and a reinforcement of the neo-liberal focus within society. The participants of this research also have shown some awareness of inequality in the current integration situation. Nevertheless, noticing certain inequalities and the contested nature of certain concepts frequently used in the integration debate, does not necessarily have to lead to citizens actively doing something about it.

Most importantly, based on this research I would recommend that the contested nature of integration should have a central place in integrational policies, political discussion, and societal

conversation. The current divisions in today's society on integration and integrational policy seem to appear based on the assumption that there is some sort of homogeneous "Dutch national identity" to which newcomers have to adapt and integrate themselves into. Not taking into account the diversity of the society, and the impact not only on newcomers but all sorts of cultural influences have on today's society. To possibly avoid this and increase the integration of everyone within the Dutch society, the answer seems to lie in whether or not integration is imagined to be something only to be done by migrant people, or by everyone in the Dutch society. We will have to imagine integration as an integral problem within the society we find ourselves in, to feel this collective responsibility, and diminish the imaginary of a newcomer as the "unassimilated other". Putting certain people outside the imagined society does not mean you will have nothing to do with them, they will still be in the same geographical space. Or as Schinkel put it: "you may encounter 'them' on the streets, but they are not really in' society" (Schinkel, 2017, p. 3).

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# Appendix A

## Interview guide (Nederlands)

Hallo, welkom! Bedankt dat je mij dit interview af wil laten nemen. Mijn naam is Jorieke Beernink en ik ben een masterstudent aan de Radboud Universiteit. Ik volg momenteel de Human Geography master: Conflict, Borders & Identities. Dit interview zal ongeveer 30 minuten tot een uur duren. Het interview gaat over jouw persoonlijke ideeën van wat integratie in Nederland betekent, specifiek over socio-culturele integratie. Het doel van mijn onderzoek is om verschillende interpretaties van wat integratie, en voornamelijk socio-culturele integratie is te belichten vanuit verschillende perspectieven en achtergronden.

Voel je vrij om zo breed te antwoorden als je wil of me te onderbreken als iets niet duidelijk is. Als er vragen of gespreksonderwerpen zijn waar je je niet comfortabel bij voelt om te beantwoorden kan je dat ook aangeven, dan gaan we door naar de volgende vraag. Het belangrijkste is dat er geen goede of foute antwoorden zijn, het gaat over jouw persoonlijke ervaringen en visie. Tot slot zou ik dit interview graag opnemen op mijn telefoon. Dit is alleen voor mezelf zodat ik de interviews kan transcriberen en analyseren achteraf. Naast mij en mijn thesis advisor zal niemand de opnames te horen krijgen. Als je wil kan ik de opnames achteraf ook naar je toe sturen. Je naam zal nergens in het onderzoek weergegeven worden, alles is volledig anoniem. Ga je hiermee akkoord \*antwoord\*. Als je verder geen vragen hebt start ik de opname en beginnen we aan het interview.

Hoofdvraag	Vervolg vraag
<b>Vragen over integratie</b>	
Ik ga beginnen met een paar vragen over jezelf	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Waar ben je geboren?</li> <li>• Hoe oud ben je?</li> </ul>
Kun je iets vertellen over jou persoonlijke ervaring met integratie en nieuwkomers in Nederland/Nijmegen?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Actief of passief?</li> <li>• Bewoners buurt AZC: Ervaringen AZC?</li> </ul>
Hoe zou je integratie in Nederland definiëren?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Waarom definieer je het zo?</li> <li>• Gebaseerd op wat?</li> </ul>
Wie bepaald wat integratie betekent (in de praktijk)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Door welke factoren of personen wordt dat beïnvloed?</li> <li>• Wie moet er integreren?</li> </ul>
Denk je dat er een verschil is in hoe mensen met een migratieachtergrond en mensen zonder migratie achtergrond integratie definiëren?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Waarom denk je dat?</li> <li>• Is er een verschil tussen deze twee?</li> </ul>
Hoe gaat het met integratie in Nederland?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gebaseerd op wat denk je dit?</li> </ul>
<p>Hoe zou je socio-culturele integratie in Nederland definiëren?</p> <p><i>sociaal-culturele integratie : de sociale contacten die leden en organisaties van minderheden met de bredere samenleving onderhouden (sociale integratie), als ook de culturele aanpassing aan die samenleving (culturele integratie)</i></p> <p><i>Dit is een redelijk moeilijke vraag wat best wat kennis vergt. Als de participant moeite lijkt te hebben met deze vraag, leg dan de nadruk op het feit dat het een moeilijke vraag is. In dat geval</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wat kan er van iemand verwacht worden als diegene sociaal-cultureel geïntegreerd is?</li> <li>• Is dat hetzelfde voor iedereen die naar Nederland migreert?</li> </ul>

<i>kan ik ze uitleggen wat het begrip officieel betekend en dan kijken wat ze denken dat het in de praktijk betekent. Als de vraag dan nog steeds de ingewikkeld blijkt ga ik door naar de volgende</i>	
Wat is het eindpunt van socio-culturele integratie?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wanneer is het eindpunt van socio-culturele integratie ?</li> <li>• Waarom denk je dat dit het eindpunt is ?</li> <li>• Heeft socio-culturele integratie een eindpunt?</li> </ul>
Wanneer is iemand niet goed socio-cultureel geïntegreerd?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Waar herken je dat aan?</li> <li>• Waarom denk je dat zo iemand dan niet goed socio-cultureel geïntegreerd is?</li> </ul>
Wie is volgens jou verantwoordelijk voor goede integratie van nieuwkomers in Nederland?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Waarom denk je dat?</li> <li>• Is dit een gedeelde verantwoordelijkheid?</li> </ul>
Wat zijn de barrières van socio-cultureel integreren? Wat is er moeilijk aan proberen om socio-cultureel te integreren in Nederland?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hoe kunnen deze barrières overkomen worden?</li> <li>• Aan wie is het om deze barrières te overkomen?</li> <li>• Zijn deze barrières hetzelfde voor iedereen?</li> </ul>
Voelen mensen die bezig zijn met integreren in Nederland zich er ook echt thuis denk je?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hoe komt dat?</li> <li>• Wie of wat draagt daaraan bij?</li> </ul>
Hoe wordt er naar nieuwkomers gekeken in Nederland? Welke houding hebben Nederlanders over het algemeen tegenover nieuwkomers?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hoe komt dat?</li> <li>• Wie of wat draagt daaraan bij?</li> </ul>
Welke actoren spelen hier een rol in? Wat voor rol speelt de media in hoe naar nieuwkomers gekeken wordt in Nederland? Welke rol speelt de sociale media in hoe naar nieuwkomers gekeken wordt in Nederland?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hoe komt dat?</li> <li>• Wie of wat draagt daaraan bij?</li> </ul>
<b>Vragen over Nederlandse Nationale identiteit / richtlijnen voor socio-culturele integratie in de praktijk</b>	
Wat zijn Nederlandse tradities? Kan je hier wat voorbeelden van noemen?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moeten nieuwkomers integreren in deze tradities?</li> <li>• Zijn deze tradities belangrijk om na te leven?</li> <li>• Waarom? Waarom niet?</li> </ul>
Wat zijn Nederlandse normen en waarden? Kan je hier wat voorbeelden van noemen?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hou je jezelf aan deze normen en waarden?</li> <li>• Moeten nieuwkomers zich aan deze normen en waarden houden?</li> <li>• Waarom? Waarom niet?</li> </ul>

Wat is volgens jou de Nederlandse (nationale) identiteit?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bestaat de Nederlandse nationale identiteit?</li> <li>• Wat is het? Wat houdt het precies in?</li> <li>• Wie bepaald dit? Wie draagt er bij aan dit beeld?</li> <li>• Heb jij deze Nederlandse nationale identiteit? Waarom wel/niet?</li> </ul>
<p>Kan je een paar dingen/elementen opnoemen waarvan jij denkt dat ze belangrijk zijn voor Nederlandse socio-culturele integratie?</p> <p><i>Laat ze eerst zelf nadenken, als ze moeilijk met voorbeelden komt geef ze dan de voorbeelden die hiernaast staan en laat ze die beoordelen.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Waarom zijn specifiek deze dingen belangrijk?</li> </ul>
Concluderende vraag: Wat denk je dat er concreet verwacht wordt van nieuwkomers die naar Nederland komen als het om socio-culturele integratie gaat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Waarom denk je dit?</li> <li>• Wat denken anderen?</li> </ul>
<p><b><i>Onderstaande stellingen zijn optioneel, hangt af van de tijd en onderwerpen die al besproken zijn tijdens de rest van het interview. Ze zijn bedoeld voor mensen die moeite lijken te hebben om hun mening te geven tijdens het interview, of voor als sommige onderwerpen nog niet al automatisch besproken zijn in hun antwoorden.</i></b></p> <p><i>Nu zal ik je een paar stellingen voorleggen, waar ik je van vraag om aan te geven of je het daarmee eens of oneens bent. Na elke stelling zal ik je ook vragen waarom je het er eventueel mee eens bent of niet. Deze stellingen komen direct uit een SCP onderzoek uit 2018, en zijn dus niet zelf door mij bedacht.</i></p>	
Nieuwkomers passen zich goed aan aan Nederlandse normen en waarden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Waarom?</li> <li>• Voorbeeld?</li> <li>• Anderen?</li> </ul>
Nieuwkomers moeten zich Nederlandse normen en waarden toe-eigenen.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Waarom?</li> <li>• Voorbeeld?</li> <li>• Anderen?</li> </ul>
Nieuwkomers moeten participeren in Nederlandse culturele tradities zoals Sinterklaas & Pasen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Waarom?</li> <li>• Voorbeeld?</li> <li>• Anderen?</li> </ul>
Nieuwkomers moeten hun eigen cultuur los laten als ze in Nederland willen integreren	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Waarom?</li> <li>• Voorbeeld?</li> <li>• Anderen?</li> </ul>
Nieuwkomers moeten de Nederlandse cultuur en tradities respecteren	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Waarom?</li> <li>• Voorbeeld?</li> <li>• Anderen?</li> </ul>
Nederlanders moeten de cultuur en tradities van de nieuwkomers respecteren	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Waarom?</li> <li>• Voorbeeld?</li> <li>• Anderen?</li> </ul>
Nederlanders moeten nieuwkomers actief helpen om goed te integreren	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Waarom?</li> <li>• Voorbeeld?</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Anderen?</li></ul>
Laatste vraag: heb je misschien nog andere mensen die ik zou kunnen interviewen? *leg de onderzoeksgroep uit*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Heb je hun contactgegevens voor mij?</li></ul>