"When Is My Dutch Good Enough?" Experiences of Refugee Women with Dutch Labour Organizations

Halleh Ghorashi
Department of Culture, Organization and Management,
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Maria van Tilburg
RAZAR Community and Development

The basic assumption in the Dutch dominant discourse on integration is that knowledge of the Dutch language when combined with education is the key factor for integration into society. The aim of this article is to show how female refugees who have completed higher education in the Netherlands experience the process of integration into the Dutch labour market through contacts with and in Dutch organizations. We situate the narratives of these women in the broader discursive context of the Netherlands and show what these experiences can tell us about the policies and debates on integration in the Netherlands.

Le discours hollandais qui prédomine en matière d'intégration repose sur l'hypothèse de base selon laquelle une connaissance du néerlandais conjuguée à l'éducation constitue le facteur clé menant à l'intégration à la société. L'objectif de cet article est de démontrer comment les réfugiées qui ont complété des études supérieures aux Pays-Bas s'intègrent au marché du travail néerlandais par le biais de contacts avec et au sein d'organismes néerlandais. Nous plaçons le vécu de ces femmes dans le contexte discursif élargi des Pays-Bas et expliquons dans quelle mesure leurs expériences peuvent nous éclairer sur les politiques et les débats relatifs à l'intégration aux Pays-Bas.

Key words/Mots-clés: Refugees/Réfugiées; Integration/Intégration; Dutch organizations/Organismes néerlandais; Dutch discourses on immigration/Discours néerlandais en matière d'immigration, Dutch language/Langue néerlandaise.

© 2006 by Transaction Publishers. All rights reserved./Tous droits réservés.
ISSN: 1488-3473

JIMI/RIMI Volume 7 Number/numéro 1 (Winter/hiver 2006): 51–70

One of the major effects of globalization has been the emergence of new forms of identity in nation states. Hall (1992) writes, "modern nations are all cultural hybrids" (p. 297). Young (1995) believes that "heterogeneity, cultural interchange and diversity have now become the self-conscious identity of modern society" (p. 4). In addition, the UN Development Report (UNDP) Report (2004) states that the most important challenges facing "the new multicultural states" will be related to issues of cultural diversity. This is also true for the Netherlands, a country that for decades has been considered tolerant and liberal, but now is seen by the world as a country in crisis. This new image is partly due to two shocking murders, those of Pim Fortuyn in 2002 and Theo van Gogh in 2004.

Despite diverse approaches and opinions, many in the Netherlands agree that integration of immigrants into Dutch society is a crucial step toward responding to these new challenges. The basic assumption is that participation in the regular labour process, and when possible in the educational process, is the critical bridge to Dutch society (Glastra, 1999). However, reality shows that for migrants, entering the labour market is far from easy. Many studies point to lack of qualifications among migrants as the reason for their exclusion from the workforce. These scholars of the so-called deficit approach believe that when migrants improve their skills, they will able to participate in the labour market on an equal basis (for an overview, see Glastra).

Another body of literature, the so-called discrimination approach, opposes this view and argues that discriminatory processes in organizations prevent migrants from participating fully in the labour market (Glastra). In this article we take another view on the problem. We believe that it is neither lack of qualifications nor visible discrimination that causes the exclusion of migrants. It is rather the (in)visible discursive processes of exclusion that need to be studied in order to understand the position of migrants in Dutch society and their access to the labour market. We show how the above approaches are based on varying definitions of power and how a discursive approach to power enables us to introduce a new angle on the problem.

Other Approaches to Power

Organization studies have long viewed the issue of power as part of the hierarchical order and authority in organizations (Hardy & Clegg, 1999). As a result, the idea of power is seen as part of the normal structure of an

organization. For this reason, research on power and the possible abuse of power in organizations has been noticeably absent. Bies and Tripp (1998) relate this absence to "the organizational imperative" (p. 216), which is based on an assumed synergy between the rational subject and the modern organization. This imperative is based on two propositions: first, "whatever is good for the individual can only come from the modern organization," and second, "therefore, all behaviour [*since rational*, our emphasis] must enhance the health of such organizations" (Scott & Hart, 1979, cited in Bies & Tripp, p. 216). The modernist-rationalistic thought underlying this imperative has resulted in a kind of blindness to the processes of exclusion in organizations. Any existing research on power was mostly about power outside formal organizational structures (Hardy & Clegg). It is from this framework that the above-mentioned deficit approach could be understood. This approach does not place power in the organization's formal processes, which could result in the exclusion of certain groups, but places the problem outside the organizations and on potential employees.

Another strong body of literature on power that has influenced organizational studies comes from critical literature inspired by Marx and later by Gramsci. In these studies power is seen and approached as domination. Whereas Marx approached domination as a class-based visible suppression related to the means of production, Gramsci's focus was on processes of domination or hegemonies that were invisible and taken for granted. Lukes' (Brouns, 1993) work on power and decision-making processes takes this line of approach and has become especially popular in feminist studies and organization studies (Wilson & Thompson, 2001). The fundamental aspect of this critical approach is that power is seen as the cause of injustice and suppression, whether manifest or latent. This line of approach has become the essential basis for the discrimination approach mentioned above. In this approach, power is often equated with (in)visible forms of oppression and injustice.

Recently there has been criticism of these approaches of power from a Foucauldian perspective. In this new approach, power is not something to be possessed, but is present in social relations and incorporated into the practices of daily life. Power in the Foucauldian approach is not a zero-sum game where some are powerful and others are victims (Wilson & Thompson, 2001). From this point of view, it is not the power of domination as such, but the power of discourse that deserves attention. The power of discourse works through all human actions, which makes any kind of active opposition a part of the dominant discourse and not something outside it.

Inspired by this approach to power, we show that the exclusion of migrants is mainly due to the dominant discourses of which they are part and not so much to their lack of qualifications or the oppressive injustice they face from organizations.

In particular, our aim in this article is to show how highly educated female refugees experience the process of integration into the Dutch labour market and what their experiences can tell us about the dominant discourses on integration in the Netherlands. The methods used in this research are in-depth interviews, questionnaires, and participant observations. Twelve refugee women from Iran and Afghanistan were interviewed, and a questionnaire was distributed among 100 members of a Dutch-based platform of refugee women's organizations, *De Zwaluw*, which is an intercultural and multicultural platform for refugee organizations of women in the Netherlands. Nineteen organizations from countries such as Iran, Iraq, Kurdistan, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Eritrea, Somalia, and China are linked to the platform. In addition, interviews were conducted with two employees of the University Assistance Fund (UAF), an organization founded in 1993 that helps refugees obtain higher education in the Netherlands and then helps them find appropriate work. From the questionnaire 83 responses were received. The data from the questionnaire are only partly useful because many of the respondents did not complete it in full.

In the following section we provide background information about the refugee women central to this research along with a brief overview of their first years in the Netherlands. We then present their experiences in finding appropriate jobs in the Netherlands and position their stories of inclusion in or exclusion from the labour market in the broader context of the dominant discourses on migration that began to arise in the 1990s.

Surviving the First Years in the Netherlands

All the women of this study have their own specific stories, but in common they have an enormous drive to build a new life in the Netherlands. Most of them had been politically active in their homelands and were forced to flee because of this. Others joined family members or husbands who had been forced to flee. The average age of all refugees in the Netherlands with residence permits is 29 years, and 25% have completed higher education in their homelands (Warmerdam & van den Tillaart, 2002). The women participating in this study were between 24 and 46 years old at the time of the

interview, and most had completed a course of higher education in their homelands.

Most refugees from Iran and Afghanistan came to the Netherlands in the 1980s and 1990s (van den Tillaart, Olde Monnikhof, van den Berg, & Warmerdam, 2000). The participants in this study arrived in between 1984 and 1997. The first phase faced by most of these women on arrival was a long asylum procedure. Most considered this phase the worst period, referring to it as lost time. During this time the women were not allowed to attend school or work. They lived in asylum centres that were and are often located in secluded areas. This meant that they had few opportunities to establish contact with native-born Dutch people during the early years of their residence in the Netherlands. In addition, in the interviews they mentioned that they felt uncertain and useless during this period. One woman said, "During the asylum procedure you are nobody, there is no individual attention and you are not allowed to have dreams."

The feelings mentioned in the interviews are not limited to these particular women. Other studies show similar results. In Geuijen's (2000) work, asylum-seekers in asylum centres expressed the same feelings. "All we do is eat and sleep; we live like animals". . . "Each day is the same, every day I know what will happen, it's killing me" (p. 108). "The psychological effects or traumatic experiences from the homeland are less serious than the ones here. We are stuck here for three or four years without any prospects" (p. 108). "My life is slipping by. For years I have done nothing but wait. I used to work very hard. Now the time just passes. I could do a lot for this country. Why won't they let me work?" (p. 326). Shahbazy Feshtaly (2003) and Warmerdam and van den Tillaart (2002) also describe how this long asylum procedure has a negative effect on the lives of asylum-seekers that continues years after they leave the centres.

In 1998 the law *Wet Inburgering Nieuwkomers* was enacted, which rules that all immigrants with residence permits are required to take and pass a course that includes education in Dutch, knowledge of Dutch society, and career orientation. Most of the women participating in this study, however, had obtained their residence permits before this law was passed. Because of this, their language education was arranged through decentralized policies of local municipalities, refugee aid organizations such as *Vluchtelingenwerk*, University Assistance Fund (UAF), or through informal networks and friends. Before 1998, taking Dutch language courses depended on immigrants' own initiative. For women with children, taking a course was more difficult because childcare was often not provided and they had to arrange this themselves.

> The municipality arranged a language course for my husband. Because I had a child and childcare was difficult to arrange, I could get a volunteer once a week at home for language education. I was not satisfied with this solution and kept resisting. I arranged a language course and childcare myself with the help from a teacher (Respondent 10).

This respondent came to the Netherlands in 1996. She had almost completed her studies in medicine in Afghanistan before she had to leave. In the Netherlands she had to repeat the same studies and is now looking for work.

Despite the difficulties in gaining admission to language courses, opinions as to the quality of these courses was also diverse. For example, language courses offered by UAF were evaluated as positive, whereas those offered by municipalities were less positively evaluated. A necessary step toward starting education in the Netherlands is to pass the NT2 (Dutch as a second language) state exam. It is remarkable that some of the women in this study passed this exam after only three months of studying the language. Most had come to the Netherlands with credentials from institutes of higher education and years of work experience, but this did not automatically mean that their credentials would be recognized. In most cases credentials were recognized but certified lower than expected.

Several organizations such as Nuffic have tried to establish a central system to validate foreign diplomas and work experience, but it is not yet in place. As a result, often the type of education and/or the student counsellor determines the possibilities for exemption or adaptation of the education program. This random acknowledgement of past education or experience meant that most of the women participating in this study had to repeat their studies. Some chose a new field at the university level, whereas others opted for job-oriented education (*Hoger Beroep Onderwijs*) in order to have better chances for work.

Finances posed yet another challenge for the participants. Dutch regulations dictate that students over 30 years old are not qualified to receive student grants and must pay their own tuition fees. This seriously limits refugees like the women in this study, who often start or restart their education when they are older. One of the few alternatives is to choose part-time study in order to qualify for social security benefits. However there are several disadvantages to this option. First, few courses of study are offered part time. Second, part-time study takes much longer to complete, so this is not an attractive option for people who wish to enter the job market as

soon as possible. Third, one cannot study while receiving social security benefits for more than two years, but most higher education courses take at least four years to complete. Because of these difficulties, help offered by UAF was important. UAF is a private foundation that provides grants and loans to refugees and asylum-seekers who are accepted as clients so that they can enrol in a course of higher education.

Despite all the obstacles, the most striking outcome of this study was that none of the respondents experienced delays in their studies. The women had to combine their education with pregnancy and/or raising children, voluntary work, and long family visits. All were non-native speakers and not familiar with the Dutch education system, but despite these disadvantages all graduated in a relatively short time. These women did not waste time when they received their residence permits and worked hard to build new lives in the Netherlands. Ghorashi (1997) describes the same pattern in female Iranian refugees in the Netherlands and the United States.

After completing their studies, the participants began to search for work. They used the same conventional methods used by native Dutch people. For example, they searched through advertisements, used their networks, and registered in agencies for temporary jobs (*Uitzendbureaus*). Friends or UAF Job Support helped most of the women with writing letters and filling in applications. One would think that the women's eagerness and perseverance in obtaining a Dutch degree and their use of conventional methods of job-seeking together with their work experience would be enough to find jobs appropriate to their education and experience. In the following section we show that this was not always the case.

"Am I Ever Going to be Good Enough?"

> I am always careful in using the word *discrimination*. But an applicant has to have certain qualities and language is one of them. Language is valued immediately. This is why native Dutch speakers have more of a chance to get a job and this is influenced mainly by the language. But I think that people should get a chance to show their (other) qualities (Respondent 3).

This respondent, aged 42, came to the Netherlands in 1988, studied Eastern language and culture, and works as a freelance translator. Some of the participants after several attempts found satisfying work, yet none obtained

work compatible with her education and work experience. Other respondents were still trying to find a suitable job. Despite many application letters and job interviews, the women in this research were rejected many times even for jobs for which they were overqualified. From the questionnaire we learned that of 49 respondents, 75% said that language was an obstacle to finding work. Other obstacles mentioned were ethnicity (10%), sex (12%), and age (16%). Thirty-four percent said that employers saw cultural differences as a reason for not offering work.

One woman explained that she applied for work as a receptionist. She knew that this was below her qualifications, but she wished to start somewhere in the organization. Despite this she was not accepted and was told that her language proficiency was not good enough. She found this difficult to digest. Her language skills were good enough for her to earn a Dutch higher education certificate, but not good enough for a job for which she was overqualified? Yet it is probably true that the language skills required of a receptionist, for example, are different from those required of a student. However, the point remains: could a non-native Dutch speaker ever acquire the perfection required even for work below their qualifications? Some of the following examples address this point. There are other cases when language is given as the reason for rejection.

In the following case it contrasts with good study results and experience in practical training and volunteer work where language did not seem to be a problem.

> I did an internship at an insurance company. After I finished, I applied for a job in the same department where I had to do the same work as I did during my internship. My employer told me that my language was not good enough for the job, but during my internship my language had been sufficient (Respondent 8).

This respondent, aged 31, finished her law study in Afghanistan and worked as a prosecutor. She came to the Netherlands in 1998 and wished to study Dutch law, but she could not afford the tuition, so she took a two-year work-related program of studies and is now looking for work.

Based on data from the interviews, language seems to be the main obstacle to entering the labour market in the Netherlands. However, the issue of language is often used to define other qualities. An example of this is a woman who applied for a job as a flight attendant. The response she received was that the company stood for high quality and that people with accents did not fit the image of the organization. Applicants who speak

Dutch with an accent are often considered less qualified. Kruisbergen and Veld (2002) conclude that employers have a less positive image of employees when their language is not fluent. They are excluded from the start and not given a chance to show their abilities. Yet the participants in this study presented various ways to break through this barrier.

One way to combat exclusion is to take a temporary position. Some women found work through contacts in organizations as a result of internships, co-assistance, or a graduating period. Despite their accents, these women were evaluated based on their qualities because they had been able to demonstrate them. For these women, taking temporary work seemed to be essential to gaining a permanent position. This indicates that employers need to have first-hand working experience with these women in order to appreciate their qualities. In these cases they do not reduce all qualities simply to language.

Another way to find a good job is to obtain good advice and mediation. Of those refugees who approach UAF Job Support for advice, approximately 85% find suitable jobs within a year. The success of this support can be found in the personal advice, experience, and network of UAF in working with refugees with higher education. "When I apply for a job through UAF, then it is something. There are people who know and trust you and that certainly influences employers, and they find it easier to trust you" (Respondent 9). This respondent, aged 46, worked as a health care researcher in a university in Iran before she fled to the Netherlands. She studied social sciences in the Netherlands and is looking for work.

One's own experience in the organization or the mediation of a trustworthy organization is essential in overcoming the possibility of prejudice. In some cases, once the women had broken through the barrier of entering an organization, the value of their qualifications became clear. None of these women had problems with work because of language. This was true even of participants who had direct contact with Dutch customers as part of their jobs. Becoming employees of Dutch organizations has advantages for both parties. The women may ask their colleagues for help in editing letters and as a result improve their language skills. In addition, they can contribute different points of view and work experience to the organization. One respondent mentioned that because of her academic education and research experience in Iran, she could help colleagues analyze specific problems from a new perspective. "Sometimes my language can be a problem. My present employer gave me the chance to show my other qualities, because I have other qualities. My employer wanted to invest in me" (Respondent 4). This respondent, age 32, had

been a surgical nurse in Iran. In the Netherlands she was over age to take an internship, so she decided to complete job-oriented education and is now a social worker.

Thus far this article focuses on the possibilities and difficulties of entering Dutch organizations from the perspective of the participants. Equally important is how these women experience their work and positions in the organizations. In this regard, it is not only having work that is essential, but also keeping the work. Odé and Dagevos (1999) point out that employees from ethic minorities are isolated in organizations and that this can result in early resignations. In the following section we explore the participants' experiences in working situations.

"A Black Horse among White Horses"

When women finally find a job, it does not necessarily mean that they are accepted by their colleagues or feel motivated and comfortable in their organizations.

> I was different from everyone. I felt like a black horse among all white horses. Everybody always seemed to be together, and I was alone. I felt excluded, not because the people were mean: it was just that there were only white people and I was the only foreigner. After one year I did not want to work there anymore, nothing special happened. It was just that I did not feel comfortable there. I had the feeling that my colleagues did not see me; maybe this has to do with cultural differences. When I said Hi, I did not get a response. In their own group they were nicer to each other and more understanding (Respondent 2).

This respondent had seven years of working experience as a physician in Afghanistan. She had to repeat parts of her studies in medicine and the co-assistance in the Netherlands, which took about three years. She has since worked in three hospitals, changing jobs because she felt unaccepted in these environments.

In the above case, being different resulted in total exclusion, even being completely ignored, by other employees in the organization. However, being a minority could also result in being a token employee. To address this issue, Kanter (1977) showed that when the number of minorities in an

organization is relatively small, they may be accorded token status. Tokens become highly visible and are often seen as representative of their group rather than as individuals. Following this path, Benschop (1998) and Benschop and Doorewaard (1998) argue that tokens often carry a heavy burden. Because of their visibility, they are not permitted to make mistakes. When they represent a group accorded negative connotations by the majority society, they must work hard to reverse this image. This means that they often have to work harder than other employees and are vulnerable.

This was the case with all the women in this study. Being highly educated refugees made them tokens in the organizations they entered. All the respondents told us that at first they had to prove themselves more so than other new employees and that everybody was watching them. "As a foreigner you always have to be better and that is tiresome. You have to prove yourself over and over again and fight for your rights" (Respondent 5). This woman had studied sociology in Iran and worked in a research institute. After coming to the Netherlands in 1994, she decided to complete job-related education and now works as a social worker.

> Every refugee tries to get back to her old level [of work]. A healthy person does not give up easily. You know who you are and what you are capable of. In the Netherlands they do not know what I can do, so I have to prove it (Respondent 2).

This respondent, from Afghanistan, came to the Netherlands in 1996 and now works as a physician.

In addition to becoming a token, it seems that moving up in the organization is difficult for migrants, and especially for migrant women. Almost no women from ethnic minorities hold high positions (Portegijs, Boelens, & Keuzenkamp, 2002). In this research we were not able to investigate the experiences of the women on this issue because most of them were still beginning their careers in the Netherlands. But the interviews told us something about their views of their future possibilities. Most are ambitious and have plans to move up in their organizations. But they also know how difficult this is and are afraid that they will be limited in their efforts. "I will stay in this job, for the time being. I am satisfied with this job. I think that when I start to look for another job or higher position, it is going to be difficult" (Respondent 5). This woman studied sociology in Iran and now works as a social worker in the Netherlands. "Because of this [prejudice] I am not keen to look for a new job. I do not want to have to prove myself over and

over again" (Respondent 1). This Iranian woman came to the Netherlands in 1997, completed job-oriented education, and now works as a project assistant in a welfare organization.

From the results of this research it appears that highly educated female refugees show a great deal of initiative and are ambitious to get work for which they are qualified. However, they find difficulties both on entering the organization and in keeping their jobs. At first, they face difficulties based on their backgrounds. These difficulties are often translated into poor language skills. For this reason, it seems that previous work contacts and good mediation are essential for them to enter an organization. Once inside the organization the women face another set of difficulties based on tokenism and the social environment. Based on these findings, we could conclude for now that neither knowledge of the Dutch language, nor obtaining a higher degree in the Netherlands, is enough for integration in the Dutch labour force.

It seems that other processes are at work here. In these processes, the images that employers and other employees have of the migrants are important. In turn these images are influenced by the dominant discourses in society. In the following section we introduce a short background on the dominant discourses on migration since the 1980s. We then explore how dominant discourses on migration have influenced the normative images in organizations and thus the selection procedures and work situations in organizations.

A Brief History of and the Discourses on Immigration

Despite a longer history of immigration exacerbated by the consequences of colonialism, the discourse in the Netherlands is dominated by the arrival of the so-called guest workers in the late 1950s. Post-war economic growth and the need for unskilled labour caused the Dutch government to look beyond its borders, forming labour contracts first with Italy and Spain and later with Turkey and Morocco (Wilterdink, 1998). In the 1980s the Dutch government began to focus on integration of this group of immigrants when it realized that migration, once viewed as temporary, had gained a more permanent character (Entzinger, 1998; 't Hoen & Jansen, 1996). Approaching integration at that time did not exclude immigrants maintaining their identities (*integratie met behoud van eigen identiteit*). The focus then was on the integration of immigrants as groups. Later, starting in the 1990s, this group-based integration with its emphasis on the groups' own

culture was criticized as one of the major reasons for the isolation of immigrants in society. At this time the focus was on integration on an individual basis (Entzinger, 1998).

In the light of these changes the cultural background of migrants from Islamic countries was seen as problematic for integration into Dutch society. The low economic position and social isolation of these Islamic migrants made them the underclass of Dutch society. In this environment, the right-wing political movement gained political popularity because of its anti-immigration ideas. At the beginning of the 1990s, Bolkestein, the leader of the Liberal party (VVD), gained attention as a result of his remarks about migrants (*de Volkskrant*, September 12, 1991, "*Integratie van minderheden moet met lef worden aangepakt*" [the integration of minorities should be dealt with toughness]). Through his presentations Bolkestein focused on the negative social, cultural, and economic effects of migrants on Dutch society. In so doing he touched on issues that were long thought to be the views of the extreme Right or the Centre Democratic Party (CD).

Unlike the platform of the unpopular CD party, the words of Bolkestein reached many because of his sophisticated presentation. He emphasized the incompatibility of Islamic and Western values, suggesting that Islamic immigrants (if not integrated) were the chief problems of Dutch society and could endanger Western achievements. He thus blamed the government for not being strict enough about either integration policy or regulations related to asylum-seekers, which he argued led to a growing crime rate and increasing numbers of asylum-seekers entering the Netherlands. In his view the only successful immigration policy was to limit the entry of new immigrants and focus on integrating existing immigrants. The only way to do this was to create distance from politically correct attitudes by placing pressure on immigrants to integrate completely into Dutch society.

Although some who saw in him a person direct enough to express their own discomfort with immigrants in the Netherlands celebrated Bolkestein's assimilative-restrictive approach to immigration, others—most political parties and intellectuals—distanced themselves from his approach. Despite the importance of Bolkestein's ideas for the discourse on migration in the Netherlands at the beginning of the 1990s, his ideas were not yet considered dominant discourse on migration. Yet his contribution was to break certain taboos about migrants in the Dutch public space. For the first time, a major political party presented a strong standpoint against the discourse of *toleration of difference* that had dominated Dutch political and public discourse on migration for some time.

After Bolkestein, Paul Scheffer, a leftist publicist, became the core figure in the media after publishing his views in "*het multiculturele drama*" (*NRC Handelsblad*, January 29, 2000). In this article he argued that the integration of immigrants into Dutch society had failed and that multiculturalism was merely an illusion because it ignored the formation of an underclass of migrants. He emphasized, as had Bolkestein, the importance of unconditional integration of immigrants through their learning the language and Dutch history. In short, in Scheffer's view the government had been indifferent to the fate of immigrants, and immigrants had been indifferent in their own efforts at integration. This piece caused many reactions in the media and drew a response from Scheffer (*NRC Handelsblad*, March 25, 2000). The similarity of Scheffer's views to those of Bolkestein was such that Bolkestein referred to it as "a feeling of déjà vu" (interview with Bolkestein in *NRC Handelsblad*, May 20, 2000).

Despite differences in background and points of argument, both Bolkestein and Scheffer could be considered what Prins (2002) calls *new realists*. In this interesting work, Prins explores how the somewhat optimistic belief in diversity of cultures in the Netherlands that characterized earlier decades has been replaced by a new genre of public discourse, termed *new realism*. An important feature of this new genre is that having the guts to solve problems of integration leaves no room for compromise or taboos.

In this new framework, cultural differences are increasingly considered the main obstacles to integration and/or that there is no other option for migrants than to adopt Dutch culture and society. In our view, it was in 2000 that this assimilative discourse on migration began to gain dominance in the Netherlands. This discourse entered a new phase with the rise of Pim Fortuyn. In Prins' (2002) words, "Fortuyn thus managed to turn new realism into its opposite, into a kind of hyperrealism. Frankness was no longer practised for the sake of truth, but for its own sake" (p. 376). Once a scholar and publicist, the effect of Fortuyn became remarkable when he was chosen as the leader of the newly established party *Leefbaar Nederland* (Liveable Netherlands). In a short time the polls showed great popularity of the party among Dutch people. Together with the prominence he gained in the media, this shocked old-school politicians. His success with the Dutch public was due mainly to the events of September 11, 2001. In the minds of many, the potential enemy—read Islamic migrants—which Bolkestein had described in the 1990s changed from speculation to fact. This made it easier for Fortuyn to make comments that had been implied earlier but had not been made explicit. In an interview Fortuyn used phrases such as "Islam is a backward culture" and " the real refugees do not reach Holland." (*de*

Volkskrant, February 9, 2002, *"De islam is een achterlijke cultuur"* [Islam is a backward culture]). These comments shocked the foundations of politics in the Netherlands.

The shock was so severe that his own party, *Leefbaar Nederland*, distanced itself from him immediately after this interview. Fortuyn did not stop his activities, but founded his own party, *Lijst Pim Fortuyn* (LPF). Despite this backlash, the polls showed an enormous surge in popularity for his party. Its first achievement was in the city election of Rotterdam where it won the most seats. The party also ran for parliament. However, Fortuyn did not take part in these elections because he was shot dead on May 6, 2002 before the election. Nevertheless, his political views, which were an extension of the new realist discourse begun in the 1990s, changed the Netherlands. It is now a country where the dichotomies between the Dutch and migrants have become greater than ever. These dichotomies have been strengthened by the strong culturalist conviction interwoven with the new realist discourse. This culturalist approach to migration discourse in the Netherlands has led to increasingly negative images of migrants, especially Muslims, in the last two years. Both the murder of Theo van Gogh in 2004 and racist attacks like the burning of mosques that followed the murder are examples of the widening of the existing gap between "native Dutch" and migrants.

Discursive Power in Organizations

Although organizations have their own dynamics, they are also influenced by the broader context in which they operate. It is almost impossible to believe that the dominant discourses on migration in Dutch society would not affect job opportunities for its migrants. In fact Statistics in the Netherlands (CBS, http://statline.cbs.nl) show the 2003 unemployment rate of non-Western migrants at 14.4%, of Western migrants at 6.9%, and of native Dutch at 4.1%. Thus the unemployment rate of non-Western migrants is 3.5 times higher than that of native Dutch people. Many reasons are suggested in the literature for these disappointing figures. These vary from language and education levels, to (in)direct discrimination, to age, to behaviour and motivation (Abell, 1993; Brink, Pasariboe, & Hollands, 1996; Dagevos, van der Laan, & Veenman, 1997; Essed, 1991; Odé & Dagevos, 1999; Commissie Avem, 2002; Veenman, 1997; Warmerdam & van den Tillaart, 2002).

Yet we show that in case of the women who participated in this study, neither lack of qualifications, nor visible discrimination are the reasons for

their exclusion. It is, rather, the negative images of migrants related to the dominant discursive processes in society that have resulted in their exclusion. In order to explore these processes, we start with the concept of *disembodied worker*. With this term, Acker (1992) refers to an abstract idea of an ideal employee who has no body, but is best qualified for the job, is available full time, and is flexible. However, Acker shows that this so-called disembodied worker certainly has a sex because full-time availability ignores the combination of work with care, and this combination is more often the case for women than for men (Benschop & Doorewaard, 1999). We argue that the disembodied worker not only has a sex, but also an ethnicity. We follow Wekker's (1998) path by considering white Dutch identity as "a powerful, normative and ethnic category" (p. 59). In this way the image of *the best person for the job* often goes with an ethnic preference, which in the case of the Netherlands means a preference for *a real Dutch person*.

It is well known that selection procedures in organizations cannot be as neutral as often claimed. Studies have shown that selection goes beyond the paper qualifications required for a position. It is also subject to certain (in)visible norms and expectations of the selection committee. Thus selection often results in processes of inclusion and exclusion in organizations. Gowricharn's (1999) use of the concept *cultural selection* is important for our article. Cultural selection refers to factors related to appearance (sex or ethnicity) or to the cultural expectations that play a role in selection in the labour market. In her study, Meerman (1999) shows both components of this cultural selection. She states that the image of a good employee is that of a white male (both sex and ethnic marker) who is direct in communication (cultural marker for the Dutch way of communication). Although cultural selections are always present in one way or another, in the case of the women of this study this selection has an added dimension, namely, the link of perfection in Dutch to cultural difference.

Although in this study the issue of language was the chief expressed cause of exclusion, we believe that this reason conceals the real basis for exclusion. For example, an Englishman who speaks Dutch with an accent, but is white, male, and behaves "more Western" will have less trouble finding a job in the Netherlands than a refugee woman from an Islamic country with the same qualifications. This may account for the higher unemployment rates at all education levels of non-Western migrants compared with those of Western migrants (*RWI arbeidsmarktanalyze*, 2003). In an interview, an employee of UAF also said that was easier to find jobs for refugees from the former Yugoslavia than for refugees from Islamic countries. In her opinion, this is because of the (supposedly) lesser cultural differences

between refugees from the former Yugoslavia and the native Dutch. Based on these findings, we argue that this so-called imperfection in language proficiency is a manifestation of something broader: the fear of cultural difference. This fear, as we show, is grounded in the broader culturalist discourse in society. To place this act of exclusion in the broader discourse makes it possible to see it as more than an explicit and conscious act of discrimination, as a "natural" reaction to the "unwanted other." The excuse of language proficiency is often considered the most legitimate reason for exclusion by both employers and employees. In this way, language covers up other reasons for exclusion and keeps them from surfacing. It covers fear and distrust of new migrants influenced by the dominant culturalist discourse of the country. Migrants who may already have Dutch nationality may never be able to fit the image of the *real Dutch* or the *ideal employee*.

Returning to the beginning of this article, the most intriguing question here is: What does this language-based exclusion tell us about the basic assumptions in Dutch debates on integration? As mentioned above, knowledge of Dutch has been introduced as an undeniable basis for inclusion or integration into society. However, we see that the same criterion, the Dutch language, is used as the chief basis of exclusion from participation in the labour market. As we show in this article, this is because the language skills of new migrants can never meet the expectations of Dutch organizations. Furthermore, it is not the language itself that blocks integration into Dutch society, but how it symbolizes negative images of new migrants. This brings us to the chief paradox of the basic Dutch assumption about integration. Knowledge of the Dutch language may be important for integration, but it does not serve as a natural link to participation in the Dutch labour market.

Another paradox in the basic assumption of integration relates to the importance of education for integration. It is said that education in the Dutch system is an essential factor for integration. All respondents in this research mentioned that having a Dutch education helped them improve their language skills and learn more about Dutch society. The paradox here is that the women in this research said that it was difficult to enter education at a higher level because of Dutch policies and regulations. Refugees are often in their late 20s when they come to the Netherlands, and this prevents them from applying for student loans as these are unavailable for those aged 30 and over. Thus even if these refugees are legally entitled to study or work, they are "too old" to study and do not have the right papers to work. This results in their depending on social security in order to survive. People on social security benefits may not study for more than two

years. Most of the respondents managed to finish their education with the help of the UAF. Ironically, it is not the government that eases or solves the paradox here, but non-governmental organizations such as UAF.

Based on the above, we argue that the basic assumption or doxa of integration with its concentration on knowledge of the Dutch language and education is paradoxical. This is mostly because it does not consider the effect of discursive processes on integration. The new culturalist discourse on integration and recent events has made the integration of immigrants an urgent issue in Dutch society. This sense of urgency has created an atmosphere that provides no time for reflection on the underlying assumptions of the integration debate. Instrumental decisions are made one after another in an attempt to solve the problems in the short term without consideration of the paradoxical nature of the assumptions themselves. Based on the material in this article, we show that the paradoxical basis of the assumptions about integration should at least provide a foundation for reflecting on these assumptions, if not going one step farther and reconsidering this generally accepted doxa of integration.

Rethinking the Integration Approach

In this article we show that the women participating in this study have invested their time in the Netherlands as effectively as possible. They have learned the language and have studied in institutions of higher education. In trying to find or keep work, however, they faced difficulties. They fulfilled their share of the bargain to integrate into Dutch society; however, as we show, this integration process has been far from easy. The main difficulty is that the context of the Netherlands with its negative images of new migrants combined with the high expectations of organizations, which are caused by a fear of cultural differences, leave little room for women of Islamic background to be part of society. The women in this study have tried hard, taken initiatives, and shown a great deal of perseverance to achieve their goals. It is, therefore, more painful to note that despite their efforts it has been difficult to find work for which they are qualified. We show the effect of normative images in defining who does or does not get a job and why. At this point, the paradox of the integration doxa shows itself. It is assumed that language proficiency and education are essential ingredients in finding a job and that these will lead to integration. Based on this assumption, politicians are focusing attention on obliging migrants to learn Dutch. But we show that language and even education seem not to be

enough. Based on the findings in this research and supported by other literature on the subject, we argue that any instrumental attempts to solve integration problems based on this simplistic assumption will fail.

The only realistic way to address this issue is to embrace its complexity. Knowledge of the Dutch language will not help migrants to integrate when Dutch context, society, organizations, and discourses are so exclusive toward migrants. Integration policy in the Netherlands will not succeed until it considers the power of dominant discourses on migration and its negative effect on the participation of migrants in society. While Dutch policies and discourses fuel negative images of migrants, organizations will "naturally" choose the safe way out, which translates to searching for "our kind of people." In this environment, no space can be created for the integration of migrants: our research findings exemplify this. The migrants have done their best to meet what are considered to be basic requirements for integration, yet these attempts do not seem to be sufficient to bring about integration. In our view, the basis for their exclusion is to be understood by considering the dominant culturalist and assimilative discourses on integration, even when these are translated in terms of the migrants' language skills or educational achievements.

References

Abell, J.P. (1993). *Belemmeringen voor minderheden bij toetreding tot de arbeidsmarkt: Een inventariserend onderzoek.* Amsterdam: Universiteit van Amsterdam, Vakgroep Arbeids- en Organisatiepsychologie, Sector Etnische Groepen en Arbeidsmarkt.

Acker, J. (1992). Gendering organizational theory. In A.J. Mills & P. Tancred (Eds.), *Gendering organizational analysis* (pp. 248–260). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Benschop, Y. (1998). Diversiteit aan het werk. In H. Doorewaard & W. de Nijs (Eds.), *Organisatieontwikkeling en human resource management* (pp. 253–271). Utrecht: Lemma.

Benschop, Y., & Doorewaard, H. (1998). Covered by equality. The gender subtext of organizations. *Organization Studies, 19*(5), 787–807.

Benschop, Y., & Doorewaard, H. (1999). Verhulde genderongelijkheid in organisaties. In F. Glastra (Ed.), *Organisaties en diversiteit: naar een contextuele benadering van intercultureel management* (pp. 181–199). Utrecht: Lemma.

Bies, R.J., & Tripp, T.M. (1998). Two faces of the powerless: Coping with tyranny in organizations. In R.M. Kramer & M.A. Neale (Eds.), *Power and influence in organizations* (pp. 203–219). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Brink, M., Pasariboe, M., & Hollands, M. (1996). *Integratie van vluchtelingen op de arbeidsmarkt: Resultaten van een vervolgonderzoek onder statushouders afkomstig uit Iran, Somalië en voormalig Joegoslavië.* Utrecht: Instituut voor Sociale Geografie UvA.

Brouns, M. (1993). *De homo economicus als winkeldochter theorieën over arbeid, macht en sekse.* Amsterdam: SUA.

Commissie AVEM (Arbeidsdeelname Vrouwen uit Etnische Minderheden). (2002). *Aanbevelingen op maat.* Amsterdam: ACI.

Dagevos, J., van der Laan, L., & Veenman, J. (1997). *Verdringing op de arbeidsmarkt.* Assen: van Gorcum.

Entzinger, H. (1998). Het voorportaal van Nederland; inburgeringsbeleid in een multi-culturele samenleving. In C.H.M. Geuijen (Ed.), *Multiculturalisme* (pp. 67–81). Utrecht: Lemma.

Essed, P. (1991). *Understanding everyday racism: An interdisciplinary theory.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Geuijen, K. (2000). Living and working in an asylum seeker's residence centre. In M. Gastelaars (Ed.), *On location: The relevance of the "here" and "now" in organizations* (pp. 105–123). Maastricht: Shaker.

Ghorashi, H. (1997). Shifting and conflicting identities: Iranian women political activists in exile. *European Journal of Women's Studies, 4*(3), 283–303.
Glastra, F. (1999). *Organisaties en Diversiteit: Naar een contextuele benadering van intercultureel management*. Utrecht: Lemma.
Gowricharn, R. (1999). De arbeidsmarkt, over driedeling en sociale cohesie. In F. Glastra (Ed.), *Organisaties en diversiteit: Naar een contextuele benadering van intercultureel management* (pp. 103–123). Utrecht: Lemma.
Hall, S. (1992). The question of cultural identity. In S. Hall, D. Held, & T. McGrew (Eds.), *Modernity and its futures* (pp. 273–316). Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
Hardy, C., & Clegg, S.R. (1999). Some dare call it power. In S.R. Clegg & C. Hardy (Eds), *Studying organization: Theory and method* (pp. 368–387). London: Sage.
Kanter, R.M. (1977). *Men and women of the corporation*. NewYork: Basic Books.
Kruisbergen, E.W., & Veld, T. (2002). *Een gekleurd beeld: over beelden, beoordeling en selectie van jonge allochtone werknemers*. Assen: Van Gorcum.
Meerman, M. (1999). *Gebroken wit, over acceptatie van allochtonen in arbeidsorganisaties*. Amsterdam: Thela Thesis.
Odé, A.W.M., & Dagevos, J.M. (1999). *Vreemd kapitaal: hoger opgeleide minderheden op de arbeidsmarkt*. Rotterdam: Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid door Instituut voor Sociologisch-Economisch Onderzoek (ISEO).
Portegijs, W., Boelens, M., & Keuzenkamp S. (2002). *Emancipatiemonitor 2002*. Den Haag: Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau.
Prins, B. (2002). The nerve to break taboos. New realism in the Dutch discourse on multiculturalism. *Journal of International Migration and Integration, 3*(3 & 4), 363–379.
RWI Arbeidsmark. (2003). Retrieved July 7, 2004, from: http://www.rparg.nl/Html/RwiArbeids marktanalyze2003_24.htm.
Shahbazy Feshtaly, P. (2003). *Mag ik uw bagage eens zien? Een onderzoek naar de positie van Afghaanse en Iraanse hoogopgeleide vrouwelijke vluchtelingen op de Nederlandse arbeidsmarkt*. Utrecht: Doctoraalscriptie Universiteit Utrecht.
't Hoen, E., & Jansen, S. (1996). *In de hoek waar de klappen vallen: De rechtspositie van mishandelde migrantenvrouwen met een afhankelijke verblijfsvergunning*. Doctoraalscriptie Nederlands recht. Amsterdam: Emancipatiecommissie van de Universiteit van Amsterdam.
UNDP Report. (2004). Retrieved November 16, 2005, from: http://www.undp.org.in/hdr2004/ Report_hdr2004/hdr04_overview.pdf.
Veenman, J. (1997). *Arbeidsmarkt en maatschappelijke ongelijkheid: Over oorzaken en gevolgen*. Assen: Van Gorcum & Comp B.V.
van den Tillaart, H., Olde Monnikhof, M., van den Berg, S., & Warmerdam, J. (2000). *Nieuwe etnische groepen in Nederland: een onderzoek naar vluchtelingen en statushouders uit Afghanistan, Ethiopië, Eritrea, Iran, Somalië en Vietnam*. Ubbergen: Tandem Felix.
Warmerdam, J., & van den Tillaart, H. (2002). *Arbeidspotentieel en arbeidsmarktloopbanen van vluchtelingen en asielgerechtigden: Een verkennend onderzoek naar ervaringen van nieuwkomers op de Nederlandse arbeidsmarkt*. Nijmegen: OSA-publicatie.
Wekker, G. (1998). Gender, identiteitsvorming en multiculturalisme: Notities over de Nederlandse multiculturele samenleving. In K. Geuijen (Ed.), *Multiculturalisme* (pp. 39–55). Utrecht: Lemma.
Wilson, F., & Thompson, P. (2001). Sexual harassment as an exercise of power. *Gender, Work and Organization, 8*(1): 61–83.
Wilterdink, N. (1998). Mondialisering, migratie en multiculturaliteit. In K. Geuijen (Ed.), *Multiculturalisme* (pp. 55–67). Utrecht: Lemma.
Young, R.J.C. (1995). Colonial desire. Hybridity in theory, culture and race. London: Routledge.