

# International Institute of Social Studies

The logo for the International Institute of Social Studies, featuring the word "Erasmus" in a stylized, cursive script.

## **Clashing Identities? Mexicanity and Dutch Integration Policy**

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## List of Acronyms

<b>CBS</b>	Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek
<b>EC</b>	European Commission
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>GTN</b>	Government of the Netherlands
<b>IND</b>	The Immigration and Naturalization Service
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration
<b>KNS</b>	Kennis Nederlandse Samenleving, Knowledge of Dutch Society exam
<b>MIPEX</b>	Migrant Integration Policy Index
<b>NT2</b>	Dutch as a second language exam
<b>USA</b>	United States of America

## **Abstract**

This research explores the relationship between Dutch integration policy and Mexican immigrants' Mexicanity. Current immigration flows have resulted in stricter attitudes and policies towards newcomers. In this context, citizenship as the relation between the legal and the social has become the leading principle in Dutch integration policy. Accordingly, to become citizens, immigrants must prove their level of integration by being self-sufficient and actively engaged in Dutch society. Thus, this paper argues that the equalization of citizenship and integration by the Dutch government, oversees the interwoven and complex mechanism that immigrants face during their integration process.

By focusing on Mexicans immigrants' integration experience, this paper portrays how "real" integration is grounded. As Mexican immigrants move simultaneously amongst different political communities, being subject to specific circles of privilege or oppression. Their social locations, identifications, and emotional attachments greatly determine their integration process. This research makes use of citizenship in a wider context as an inclusionary or exclusionary tool of the state where individuals use their agency influenced by the politics of belonging to make the Netherlands their home.

## **Relevance to Development Studies**

This research contributes the field of development by addressing integrations as an uneven and multidimensional process involving a variety of actors. The majority of the literature tackles integrations as a unilateral process; dismissing the complex dynamics and roles performed by the actors involved.

## **Keywords**

Integration Policy, the Netherlands, Mexican immigrants, Citizenship, National Identity, Mexicanity, Belonging, Biopower.

## Defining the research topic

I grew up in Chihuahua, a medium-size city in northern Mexico, four hours away from the USA border. Dual citizenships, irregular migration, racism and discrimination are part of our everyday life. By living in other countries, I became aware of how normal those events had been to me. Now that I'm living in a country that is not my own, I am interested in finding other ways of interaction. Beyond labels and fear of "the other". My interest in the link between immigrants' identities, everyday struggles, and public policy has to do with my personal experiences as well as my academic formation. By engaging with the literature, I noticed a correlation between national identity and immigration policies, which impact immigrants' means to perform their identity and overall the way they feel about living in a foreign country.

I set up to carry out two exploratory interviews that helped me identify several common elements, facilitating the definition of my current research topic. Both interviewees made a special emphasis on the fact that their Mexicanity had been reduced by choice, not by the pressure of the Dutch state. The latter surprised me as external forces greatly shape both identity and nationality. Thus, the fact that they were not aware of the power relations influencing their identity was decisive for my research criteria. Furthermore, I had the opportunity to be part of the study by Montero-Sieburth and Cabrera Pérez (2013), which looks into the role of the Spanish language and Mexican culture in Dutch multicultural households. During the research, I started to engage in small talks with the participants—all of them female and the majority had been living in the Netherlands for at least five years. When I asked them what it was like to live here for so long, they all stated that it took some time to integrate into society, as the culture was so different from their own. I remember a participant stating: "Dutch culture has a lot to give, but it provides it in a different way, not as Mexicans do" while another one said "There is no exclusion but no acceptance either." The plurality of arguments that justified their stay in the Netherlands intrigued me; there was something worth researching in this interaction.



# Chapter 1 .

## Introduction.

“If you settle in the Netherlands, you have a *duty to integrate* and must take a civic integration exam. [...] The government consistently monitors the effort migrants make to integrate. If you do not make enough effort, you may lose your residence permit”.

*-Government of the Netherlands' webpage, 2015*

### 1.1 Background

Recent events and migratory trends have created a sense of threat amongst the native Dutch community, which feels that, their heritage, norms and values are at risk because of non-Western migration flows. The local society's discontent increases over a feeling of being “displaced in one's own country”(Kremer, 2013: 2). Assimilationist and nationalist discourses are currently being institutionalized through policymaking, “with migrants being blamed for not meeting their responsibility to integrate and for practicing backward religions” (Vasta, 2007: 713.). “Citizenship [has become] the leading principle of the current integration policy [where] the government [...] needs active citizens and good citizenship” (van Houdt et al., 2011: 414, 416). The Dutch regime seems to dictate a one-way responsibility: the duty of immigrants to integrate, leaving behind its historical place as a leader on integration policy (MIPEX, 2015).

Both attitudes and policies have moved away from a tolerant approach to that of a stricter nature (Vasta, 2007: 714). “Since 1998, the Netherlands has introduced a number of compulsory programs for immigrant newcomers in an attempt to ensure [immigrants] integrate into Dutch society and culture to a much greater degree than in the past”(Vasta, 2007: 714). In the Migrant Integration Policy Index<sup>1</sup> (MIPEX), the Netherlands ranks 11th out of 38 industrialized countries, having dropped -8 points on MIPEX, more than any other country has from 2007-2014 (MIPEX, 2015). This is primarily due to austerity measures and more stringent requirements. Therefore, human rights and social justice concerns were raised in the international arena: “Human Rights Watch stated that this clearly applies only to family migrants from certain nationalities, mainly from non-Western countries” (Bandelow et al., 2014: 15). This approach has not had a profound impact on the number of immigrants coming

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<sup>1</sup> The Migrant Integration Policy Index is a tool which evaluates and compares what governments are doing to promote the integration of migrants in all EU Member States, Australia, Canada, Iceland, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, Norway, Switzerland, Turkey and the USA. (MIPEX, 2015)

to the Netherlands, but has rather reshaped perceptions and customs amongst non-Western migrants and natives.

## 1.2 Research problem and relevance

I question if there is coherence between policy and practice. The changes from the Dutch multicultural state to that of integration as a duty (Vasta, 2007; Bjornson, 2007; Goodman, 2011 and Scholten, 2011) are “based on the idea that [...] the previous policies failed and that the reasons for this are, first, a misplaced tolerance for cultural difference on the Dutch part, and, second, some immigrants deliberate refusal to embrace Dutch culture, languages and values” (Vasta, 2007: 715) Nonetheless, assuming that integration resistance is present in all immigrants, leaves a gap between policymaking and reality. Is it fair to say that all immigrants refuse to integrate and become a “true” Dutch citizen? Who defines this integration? And is integration requested in the same degree and form to immigrants? The fact is that the state is just one of the many actors involved in immigrants’ everyday struggles, meaning that its power is limited and shared. By homogenizing integration, Dutch immigration policy dismisses immigrants’ diversities and the complexity of mechanisms involved in their integration process. Therefore, this research explores the reasons why Dutch citizenship attainment ensures residence but not real integration.

Dutch *inburgering* (integration) policy serves as an interesting example because it has undergone great transformations. Entzinger (2014) stresses that Dutch government’s history of dealing with immigrant’ integration demonstrates the perils of “thinking in terms of fixed ‘national’ integration models” (Entzinger, 2014: 693) Historically a multicultural policy, Dutch integration policy has shifted towards an assimilationist position. As a result, the Netherlands currently holds one of Europe’s strictest immigration policies (Entzinger, 2014: 693-694). However, in the midst of globalization and growing social anxiety from an incipient sense of threat towards their way of life, this tendency to encumber immigration is not exclusive of the Dutch. (Entzinger, 2014: 702) Western European states such as France and the United Kingdom are currently adjusting their citizenship criteria towards a position in which citizenship is no longer a right but has become a “prized possession that is to be earned and can be lost if not properly cultivated” (van Houdt et al., 2011: 408). Consequently, I am interested in Mexican immigrants’ perceptions and subjectivities towards Dutch integration policy. To do so, I focused on what it is like to be Mexican in a Dutch citizenship context; their understandings of integration, what they had to “learn” and how this has shaped their understandings and performance of their Mexicanity. Is the Dutch government’s definition of integration and citizenship in par with that of Mexican immigrants?

Several times during the course of my fieldwork I was asked about the nature of my research. After giving an explanation, most would state their interest but there was little discussion about the impact. I was so sure about the link between my study and development that I forgot how this field rarely focuses on middle class immigrants with little or no tangible hardship. Then, in the

midst of my research, the “European migration crisis”<sup>2</sup> erupted. An estimate of more than 680,000 individuals arrived in Europe and by October 2015, 3,090 were reported missing or dead (IOM, 2015). Images and stories quickly spread, sparking debates all through Europe. I began engaging in casual dialogues and every time, I would think “They ‘accept’ the refugees, they come but then what?” The problem is not so much whether to grant them asylum, the real challenge would come afterwards.

In the midst of rising migration trends, immigrant and integration policies become a relevant element in migrants’ welfare as well as host countries’ economic and social stability. “In 2013, the number of international migrants was 232 million and is projected to double to over 400 million by 2050” (Martin, 2013: 2) Furthermore, according to the Indicators of Immigrants Integration 2015, immigrants tend to have lower outcomes<sup>3</sup> than the native-born (OECD and the European Union, 2015: 11) Specifically in the Netherlands, non-western immigrants unemployment rate is “more than three times as high as that of the native Dutch population” (Regioplan, 2014: 129). Moreover, regarding incomes, “the average annual household income of non-western migrants is 18,300 euros, compared with 25,500 euros for natives’ households” (Regioplan, 2014: 129). No wonder that non-western immigrants are six times more likely to be dependent on social welfare than natives (Regioplan, 2014: 130). As much as the previous numbers raise an economic concern, the sole fact that nationality, ethnic perceptions, and social fears prevent immigrants from enjoying better life conditions is in itself sufficient reason to raise concerns.

I have chosen the Mexican community as my object of analysis, because in contrast with the “traditional” Turkish, Surinamese and Moroccan migrants, they are not considered an imminent threat to Dutch culture. Furthermore according to Barajas the overall Latin community has the ability to quickly adapt and integrate into Dutch society (2007: 113). As much as this argument can be discussed, the reality is that Mexican immigrants are somewhat invisible in the Netherlands. This might have to do with the fact that they are, according to Montero-Sieburth and Cabrera Pérez (2013), a small population characterized by young highly educated individuals with a favourable access to the labour market. The Mexican community is constituted by 3,535<sup>4</sup> persons (CBS, 2014), out of whom, almost 60% are women and 40 % men. Their everyday struggles are different than the “common” immigrant as the great majority

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<sup>2</sup> The European migration crisis is the name used by politicians, the media and recently some academics to explain the great influx of people fleeing their country, as a result of conflict, climate change etc. Most individuals come from war torn nations as Syria, Afghanistan, Eritrea, Nigeria and Kosovo. “This phenomenon has been identified as the “biggest crisis of irregular migration in Europe since 1945” (Financial Times, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> The 2015 Indicator of immigrants Integration report assesses immigrants and their children’s integration by social and economic outcomes, established by the EU “Zaragoza indicators” of integration. (OECD and the European Union, 2015: 3)

<sup>4</sup> This number represents the total population of first generation Mexican immigrants. If second-generation immigrants are included, the number rises to 5 254 (Statistics Netherlands, 2014).

does not have the economic necessity to take hard labour job positions nor their livelihoods depend on the Dutch welfare system. Thus, the Mexican immigrant is not considered problematic. However, is not seen as an asset either, making this group interesting to research.

However, the fact that these immigrants are considered “better off” due to their class does not mean that they are not in a vulnerable position. Around “forty-two percent of highly-educated, foreign-educated immigrants working in the [European Union], have jobs that would only require lower levels of education. This is twice the number of their foreign-born peers who hold qualifications from the host country”(OECD and European Commission, 2015: 11). Still, [...] third-country<sup>5</sup> nationals with higher education degrees have greater trouble finding a job than their EU peers” (EC, 2015: 11). The latter was explained by Nicole, a customer’s service employee with a Bachelor’s degree in Agronomy who has been living in the Netherlands for around four years. At one point in the interview she stated, “Whatever you do, you will always be an immigrant.”

### 1.3 Research question

I started the research with the understanding that the Netherlands’ national identity and integration policy have undergone a process of adjustment to cope with the challenges brought by globalization and immigration. As a result, concepts such as citizenship, integration and community have been elevated towards a moral level (van Houdt et al., 2011: 409). Correspondingly, the state expects that immigrants assume an individual responsibility to embrace Dutch culture and language. This has created the necessity for Mexicans to redefine themselves based on state-led values, delimiting the way they interact. However, at the end of my fieldwork I could not find a direct link between integration policy and Mexican immigrants performance of identity. I noticed that in reality, the attainment of Dutch citizenship was not the main obstacle in their integration process, but rather their encounters with other actors. These greatly influenced their understandings of what citizenship and integration entitled. As such, my research question is:

**How do Mexican immigrants in the Netherlands understand and experience integration in the context of Dutch citizenship?**

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<sup>5</sup> Third-country national (a notion to be understood in the context of the European Union) refers to a non-EU national who resides legally in the European Union ”(OECD and The European Commission, 2015: 344)

### *Sub-questions*

- How is Mexicanity defined and understood?
- What are the terms and conditions to obtain Dutch's citizenship?
- In the midst of civic integration, what are the relevant elements, norms, and values that determine Mexican immigrants' identity?
- How do Mexican immigrants perform their identity?

## **1.4 Methodology**

To understand how Mexican immigrants perceive and experience Dutch citizenship and integration I used an intersectionality analysis. This enabled me to understand how Mexican immigrants' social, gender, race, and class categories are located influencing their experiences and subjectivities. By so doing, I de-homogenize the Mexican community in the Netherlands. Nonetheless it is important to mention that I will not fully unpack Mexican identity but rather attempt to understand the relation between Dutch citizenship and integration definitions, and immigrants' perception and performance of their national identity. As according to Andreouli and Howarth (2012) "the context of identity should be understood as simultaneously psychological and political" (Andreouli and Howarth, 2012: 361).

My research took place in several Dutch cities such as Amsterdam, The Hague and Rotterdam. Additionally, I gathered and analysed bottom-up data, prioritizing Mexican immigrants experiences and perceptions over the setting in which they develop. To do so, I understood their knowledge and perspectives as situated and partial (Rose, 1997: 305). That is, because knowledge is "produced in specific circumstances and that those circumstances shape it in some way" (Rose, 1997: 305). Similarly my epistemic background, race, class and gender influenced my way of receiving and understanding this knowledge. Henceforth, my conclusions are neither neutral nor universal. Both the interviewees and me negotiated our knowledge during the process of the fieldwork (Rose, 1997: 315). It was a journey in which identities, subjectivities and understandings were shaped and reshaped to construct imaginaries and epistemologies. Additionally this research is also the product of power structures as "the researched must be placed in a different [power] position from the researcher, since they are separate and different" (Rose, 1997: 313). Thus, the reflexivity used to understand the data is "less a process of self-discovery than of self-construction" (Rose, 1997: 313). I changed through this research: I became aware of my circles of privilege due to my race, class and gender as I was after all, a white middle class Mexican woman doing research in the Netherlands. Thus, my study provides a particular perspective on Mexican immigrants' understandings and experiences of Dutch citizenship and integration.

I carried out 15 semi-structured interviews and conversations with Mexican immigrants. That is, foreign individuals who have settled in The Netherlands “with the intention of staying in the country for a certain period of time” (Regioplan, 2014: 141) I immersed myself in the Mexican Community by attending events and venues in which I made acquaintances. For my sample I decided to make use of a purposive/judgment and snowball method. My chosen criteria included Mexican immigrants who had been living in the Netherlands for more than 3 years and either hold Dutch citizenship or were in the process of obtaining it. It is worth mentioning that I interviewed three persons who did not meet the latter criteria, given that they were either students or considered highly skilled migrants, which exempts them from the civic integration policy. I did this in order to assess the differences between immigrants’ categories and their integration experiences. Greatly due to the snowball sampling, I focused on middle class immigrants as most hold at least a Bachelors degree and have a favourable economic situation. However, I aimed to reveal the nuances within the group by placing “individuals, their lives, their experiences and the contexts in which they are situated, to the forefront”(Harrison, 2008: XXI). Moreover, life stories serve as a way to constitute individuals. Thus, identities are formed through time, but not always in a chronological matter. Rather they are a result of interpretation and re-interpretation. Identities are enacted through enunciation, as experiences and contexts greatly influence people’s choice of story and narrative. This approach helped me obtain a deeper understanding of Mexican immigrants’ subjectivities.

### *Advantages and limitations*

Sometimes in casual gatherings and the office, the topic of Dutch national identity and immigration would be brought to the table. As I was doing an internship in the migration and refugee protection team at Oxfam Novib, a non-governmental organization focusing on poverty reduction and development, talking about such matters was inevitable. Being immersed in a team composed by Dutch citizens advocating for immigrants and refugees, gave me the opportunity to see another side of the story: “the self” recognizing and humanizing “the other.” Moreover, I was an international graduate student in a relationship with a Dutch man who lacked fluency in Dutch. Hence, I became an individual that had to be taught what Dutch society was. Thus, even though I did not attempt to immerse myself in the native culture, Dutch national identity found me; through my social and professional circles, which until a certain extent influenced my research.

To comprehend Dutch citizenship and integration, I limited my research to the state, as it is the actor who has the last call in policy making. I obtained my data through secondary sources such as governmental webpage, non-governmental agencies, policy papers, reports and literature on Dutch integration policy. This facilitated the identification of the elements, values, and norms behind Dutch immigration policy. I realize that by attempting to comprehend Dutch societal values and norms through policy and the state, I am constructing a unit that may be seen as homogenous. Nonetheless, it is im-

portant to recognize that identity, citizenship and nationality are part of the state's nation building project. Thus, the Dutch nation as a political construction is an imagined community. That has to be modelled, adapted and transformed (Anderson, 1991: 141). Hence, policy is (in theory) the gathering of all the elements and nuances that constitute Dutch society. By focusing on the Dutch government and policy, I am penetrating the Dutch imaginary.

Yet, I was missing the ways in which Dutch society resisted this imaginary. Given that most of my data came from the interviewees, my main focus was the Mexican immigrant perspective. However, as I gradually became exposed to Dutch society, I met individuals that would challenge Dutch integration policy. For instance, Mark a colleague at Oxfam Novib, would always switch to English if I joined a conversation. Stating that it was rude to speak Dutch if I did not understand. These experiences helped me understand how integration is a multidimensional process with several actors involved. Nonetheless, my preference to interview Mexicans limited my analysis.

## Chapter 2. Theorizing Citizenship & Identity

“I will never be Dutch, because If I became Dutch, I would be a second-class Dutch and for that...no.” It was a sunny day in Ede and Martha, a cultural anthropologist, who has been living in the Netherlands for over 12 years, was discussing what it meant to have a Dutch passport. She had made clear during the interview that even though she fulfilled every requirement that the state had set for the Dutch nationality, she would never renounce her Mexican citizenship. I started thinking that she switched from identity to citizenship as if they were synonyms. During fieldwork often participants would state that if they were forced to renounce their Mexican citizenship to obtain Dutch nationality, they would have stopped the process, as they did not want to stop being Mexican. Nonetheless, as the Mexican nationality cannot be renounced, said moral struggle is not present in Mexicans’ decision to attain Dutch citizenship.

In this section I build on Isin and Wood’s theory of citizenship as the relation between the sociological and the legal. This perspective sets the basis to understand how social group’s identities struggle for redistribution, recognition and representation. I then make use of Yuval-Davis’s multi-layered citizenship theory by which she situates “citizenship in a wider context of contemporary politics of belonging which includes citizenships, identities and the emotions attached to them” (2007: 561). The latter, displays the need to redefine the concept of citizenship to include those identities and realities that portray current heterogeneous societies, such as Mexican immigrants in the Netherlands.

### 2.1 Citizenship in modern times

Citizenship studies have three perspectives that dominate this discipline: (Neo)Liberalism, Communitarianism and Civic Republicanism (Isin and Wood, 1999: 6) Liberalism assumes that the individual comes before the community or the state: “the bearer of rights is individual and the granter is the nation-state” (Isin and Wood, 1999: 7). Therefore citizens are responsible for their own behaviour and that of their family and peers (van Houdt et al., 2011: 411). Accordingly, for liberals like Joppke citizenship is a complex and evolving institution that for normative purposes is commonly defined as the official membership of a given political community (2010: 6). Citizenship becomes an element of the modern state by which the government delimits its membership to identify who will be entitled to its protection (Joppke, 2010: vii). On the other hand, Communitarianism critiques (neo)liberalism’s self-aware and sovereign individual who advocates for its own rights as its sole barer. Moreover, Communitarianism portrays the individual as embedded in a social structure and thus, (s)he is the construction of its context. “The key issues are [...] the community, common values and the commitment of individuals to endorse and defend these values” (van Houdt et al. 2011: 411) As such, individuals have



several loyalties which impact their understanding of citizenship: They might have conflicting or juxtaposed obligations and fluid rights, depending upon the community's degree of influence. Finally, civic republicanism, which is more in line with the Dutch system, states that liberalism's self-regarding individual and communitarianism's egalitarian person may coexist. This school stresses citizenship as the link by which citizens come together as a stable and coherent political community, maintaining a prolonged sense of loyalty. In so doing it "criticizes both universalistic claims of liberalism, which argues for the virtues of the individual, and communitarianism's [...] claims of group identity and pluralism" (Isin and Wood, 1999: 9)

Isin and Wood challenge the former schools by stating that the citizen is neither a submissive rights bearer nor an obedient entity under the rule of the state (1999: 12). Hence, citizenship is "an articulating principle that affects the different subject positions of the social agent [...] while allowing for a plurality of specific allegiances and for the respect of individual liberty" (Mouffe cited by Isin and Wood, 1999: 12). Furthermore, the authors "recognize that certain identities are built as durable dispositions via practices which should be used as resources rather than differences to be effaced" (Isin and Wood, 1999: 13). In this sense, citizenship is both a set of practices and rights and duties defining an individual's membership to a political community. However it is not entirely a sociological or a legal concept, but rather is the product of a dialogue between both dimensions (Isin and Wood, 1999: 4).

Yuval-Davis (2007), as Isin and Wood, understands individuals as being positioned in diverse communities and loyalties, but goes further by describing citizenship as multi-layered. She argues that there is a need to de-homogenize citizenship, given that within a state there is an amalgamation of "concrete people who are differentially situated in terms of gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality, ability, state in the life cycle etc." (Yuval-Davis, 2007: 562), thus "the citizen" must be understood accordingly. She stresses that citizenship is not necessarily attached or separated from the nation-state but rather, citizens live different realities and loyalties by moving in a diversity of political communities (Yuval-Davis, 2007: 562). In this sense, both Yuval-Davis and Isin and Wood agree on peoples having diverse loyalties and that citizenship as result of social interactions, is more than a legal conceptualization. However, Yuval-Davis grounds citizenship and deepens the analysis by stating that individuals' understanding of rights and responsibilities is affected by "their location within each polity, as they are constructed (often in unstable and contested ways) by other intersecting social divisions, such as gender" (Yuval-Davis, 2007: 562). In other words, while Isin and Wood position citizenship at a meso level where there is space for plurality, Yuval-Davis considers it as a personal categorical condition where its holder's social locations might converge and form a common understanding amongst communities and identities.

## 2.2 The dimensions of identity

Identity is a complex terrain involving different elements, actors and degrees. I make use of Parekh's definition of identity as "those constitutive features that define [a person/nation/community] as this thing or this kind of thing, rather than some other, and distinguishes [it] from others" (2008: 8). Hence, understanding identity becomes a process of differentiation and constitution, given that this concept interrelates with both chosen and unconscious elements. However, the author stresses that identification by its own is not enough. For a given identity to be born, there must be a certain meaning and valorisation of the interrelated features of a person, community or nation (Parekh, 2008: 9). This means that I define myself in terms of how different I am from the other and the meanings I, or some other actors, attribute to those differences following an ethical and political value system.

Parekh's politics of identity theory depicts "individual's identity [as] three-dimensional" (2008: 9). These dimensions or components are interrelated and hence inseparable. The first dimension called "Personal Identity", consist of "the values in terms of which they define or identify themselves as certain kinds of person"(Parekh, 2008: 10). However, this identity is the result of a choice by which the individual selects the elements that will become part of his or her personality and individuality. Parekh states that "we are not defined by our background"(2008: 11) as we are able to break free from it. As such, this degree is essential to guide our individual choices and actions. This is the "I" level, our essence, providing the moral energy to self-definition and evaluation (Parekh, 2008: 10-13). On a second level, alike Yuval-Davis, the author acknowledges that individuals are embedded in social, political, cultural, religious, gender, and ethnic structures that influence their identity either formally or informally (Parekh, 2008: 15-16). This degree named "Social identity" involves the traits appropriated by individuals that are socially significant and used to classify and stratify people, subjecting them to certain meanings and norms, and expectations. "Social identities represent a blend of normativity and power, being legitimized in terms of the prevailing body of beliefs to ensure that its members not only conform to, but internalize the norms of these identities"(Parekh, 2008: 16). The author then links social roles with social identities, which are at the same time defined and ranked differently by different individuals. A crucial element of this dimension is its fluidity and complexity, as a social identity in a given locus might not have the same meaning and importance as in another context (Parekh 2008: 17-26).

Finally, he categorizes the "Human Identity" as the third dimension, characterized by being the "most general and [...] basic form of self-identification" (Parekh 2008: 26) This is the result of a process of differentiation based on biological and moral features in which people set themselves apart from the natural world and classify themselves as humans. The latter includes a series of norms and values that must be performed to continue their moral and ontological separation (Parekh 2008: 26-28). Ironically, in the policy world, especially that of immigration, identity is seen as somewhat homogeneous. Conversely,

identity involves several elements that are not constant or equally influential, which directly impact policy objectives.

## 2.3 Citizenship and identity

According to Isin and Wood, both citizenship and identity are considered group markers. They delimit social and political communities by joining them through common, status, norms, understandings and beliefs. “Citizenship allows or disallows civil, political and social rights and obligations” (Isin and Wood, 1999: 19) in a community, providing an institutionalized membership to a certain polity. Hence, identity marks social and cultural aspects of a given group, while citizenship differentiates them through the law. As a result, the link between citizenship and identity is often times seen as contradictory. Given that “[t]he belief in the basic conflict between citizenship and identity arises from a specific conception of each: citizenship is universal and identity is particular” (Isin and Wood, 1999: 3). The understanding of the concepts greatly influences the nature of the relationship. For instance, Joppke goes beyond the classic T.H Marshall’s definition of citizenship as a mere membership involving rights and obligations, to explain that citizen is greatly influenced by its context (2010: 6). Leaving behind Marshall’s one-dimensional definition, to consider the concept as a tool of the liberal state by which neutrality and equality is facilitated. As such, assigning identity a place within citizenship would represent an imposition of universal beliefs that would result in inequality as identity unites difference and likeness (Simmel, [1908] 1971).

Nonetheless, Isin and Wood problematize this antagonism by stating that the classical notion of citizenship has to evolve. For them this concept is “not only a legal and political membership in a nation-state but [is] also an articulating principle for the recognition of group rights” (1999: 4). In this sense citizenship is both formal and moral. Formal as it provides a juridical status as a member of a political community and moral due to the extra legal requirements asked for its attainment (Schinkel, 2010: 268). Hence, citizenship has to stop being universal and give space to different identities and realities.

Accordingly, Andreouli and Howarth (2012) focus on the recognition of identities through institutions and policies. The authors state, “within the context of national identity, recognition is not only shaped by social representation in [everyday interactions] [but also] by the reified representations of political institutions” (Andreouli and Howarth 2012: 362). If we take into account the understanding of citizenship as an institutional indicator of the nation and nationhood, then to detach identity and citizenship would mean to “[overlook] the impact of policy making and practice [running] the risk of depoliticizing identity construction process” (Andreouli and Howarth 2012: 362). In other words, citizenship and identity are interlinked by a system of political and social institutions that provide an “official” recognition of a given identity, legitimizing the existence of individuals and communities. This recognition enables

the construction of a distinct and cohesive community, justifying the exclusion of those who do not meet the nation's traits (Andreouli and Howarth, 2012: 364). In this process, a binary is created: insiders and outsiders. However, these social categories delimit the participation and recognition attributed to a given group in so far as both the participation and recognition meets the insiders' traits (Andreouli and Howarth, 2012: 364).

Moreover, Yuval-Davis recognizes that citizenship as inclusionary or exclusionary influences individuals' sense of belonging. For her, belonging "is about emotional attachment, about feeling 'at home'" (Yuval-Davis, 2006: 197). She mentions that belonging is conformed by three interrelated analytical levels: social locations (specific combination of gender, class, race etc.), individuals' identifications and emotional attachments to political communities, and lastly the ethical and political value systems by which members differentiate their own belonging as well as others (Yuval-Davis, 2006: 199). In this sense belonging is a fluid process "which is only a naturalized construction of a particular hegemonic form of power relations" (Yuval-Davis, 2006: 197). However, it tends to become politicized in times of threat, bringing a fore the politics of belonging. That is, the political projects to construct belonging through a variety of methods directed to a given group which is at the same time being composed by the same project (Yuval-Davis, 2006: 197). Concomitantly, the politics of belonging maintain and reproduce the communities' boundaries as well as that of the political actors who challenge them. These actors struggle to realize their projects within said boundaries and the community. However, is with these projects that they seek to position themselves in a power position both inside and outside the collectivity (Yuval-Davis, 2006: 205). As such citizenship becomes an arena to claim and realize identities and realities, delivering a sense of belonging to its heterogeneous citizens by imposing a hegemonic understanding of collectivity.

The following image illustrates how citizens simultaneously exist amongst different realities and loyalties. Under the formal and/or moral citizenship umbrella, individuals must negotiate, resist and/or comply with other actors to claim and realize their identities. These fluid mechanisms occur concomitantly amongst different political communities. Hence, citizens' specific combination of personal identity, social locations, identifications and emotional attachments enhance or decrease their agency in specific contexts. Said leverage allows individuals to abide or resist integration by challenging or meeting the community's social identity and ethical and political value systems, which hierarchize their identities and belonging. Accordingly, individuals might hold formal citizenship while still being excluded from moral citizenship. Therefore, the power of the state relies on the ability to use the politics of belonging, that is "[to abdicate] responsibilities for others, and [redefine] who its members are" (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004: 1019). Therefore, the state's membership greatly influence whether certain groups' identities feel represented or not. Hence, Mexican immigrants' integration process is a dynamic, on-going negotiation to both define and understand their Mexicanity, while at the same time, comply with Dutch citizenship's.

## Citizen Map

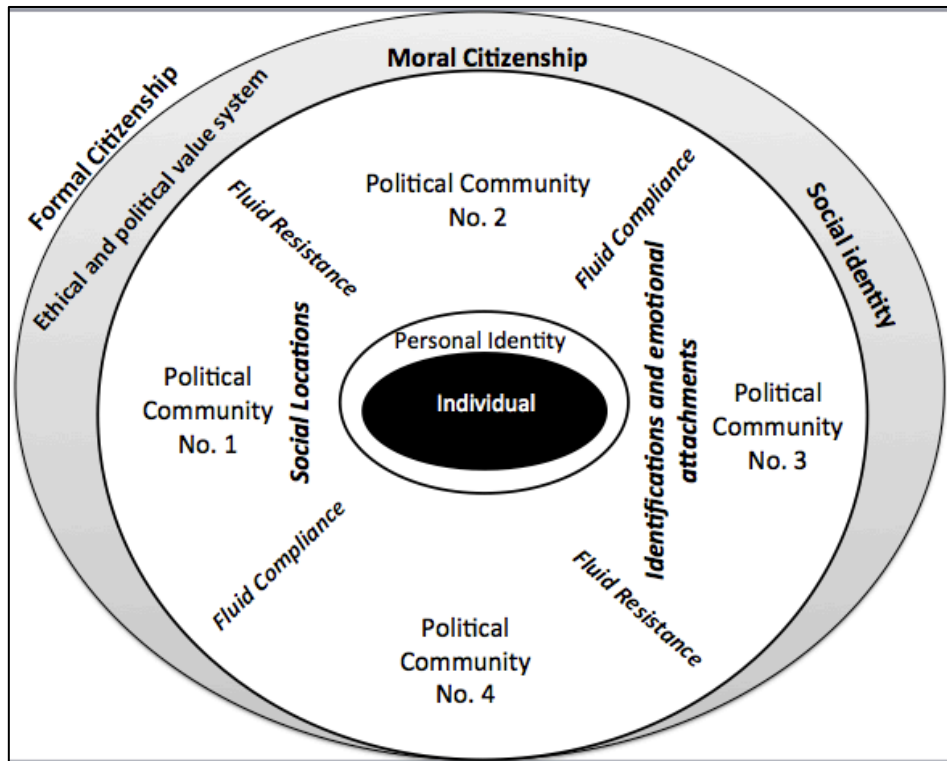


Figure 1 *Drafted by the author*

## Chapter 3. Mexicanity, national identity and Dutch integration policy

“Imagined communities have selective memories.

Getting history wrong is part of existence as a nation”

(Lechner, 2008: 47).

I was having dinner with friends from different nationalities, when randomly we started talking about curious traits from our countries. Somehow we wound up talking about nationalism, which is when I recounted that every Monday morning at 8:00 the whole school would go to the backyard to sing the national anthem and salute the Mexican flag. They were amazed, what to them seemed to be a chauvinistic tradition was a fond memory for me. I recognize that the national symbols are, a big part of my Mexicanity. Would I have built such a strong national identity had I not stood and sang the national anthem those mornings? May be not; what I am sure is this tradition was the result of a carefully planned strategy, aiming to provide a meaning to a given land, government and society. It was a strategy to imagine a nation.

Anderson (1991) argues that nationality and nationalism are culturally constructed by the nation, which is an imagined political community. “It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each, lives the image of their communion” (Anderson, 1991: 6). Additionally, he stresses that the nation is limited since even the biggest community is finite, given that no nation includes the entire human race. Furthermore, it is sovereign as the idea of a nation was born during the Enlightenment and the Revolution, periods in which freedom from the divinely ordained, dynastic system was envisioned. Moreover, Anderson’s links the concept of nation to that of a community because regardless of its social inequality, the nation “is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (1991: 7). In this sense, the community has to be distinguished and evaluated not based on its genuineness, but in the manner in which it was imagined.

I do not attempt to meticulously describe Dutch nor Mexican national identities. As “the hegemonic political culture is bound by the set of imaginary power-networks that define socially accepted forms of subjectivity and that are customarily considered as the fullest expression of national culture” (Bartra, 1992: 2). To talk about the traits that construct what is “Dutch” or what is “Mexican” would perpetuate the silencing of other subjectivities that also compose the Mexican or Dutch character. Henceforth, my objective in this chapter is to show the architecture of each national identity, understanding how they are defined and appropriated by its subjects. Subsequently, as immigrants are position in both Mexican and Dutch nations, I display the terms and

conditions of Dutch integration policy to understand what are the challenges and requirements Mexican immigrants must meet as newcomers.

### 3.1 Mexicanity

*There are several Mexicos in Mexico*, is a popular phrase. However, all of them fall under the hegemonic cultural discourse of the State. Roger Bartra remarks, “The idea that a unique subject, ‘The Mexican’ exists in national history is a powerful cohesive illusion; [...]. The definition of ‘The Mexican’ is rather a description of how he or she is dominated and, above all, how exploitation is legitimized” (1992: 6). In other words, specific stereotypes and archetypes attributed to Mexicaness, as Bartra names it, enable the constitution of a “sort of discourse: an intricate network of points of reference to which some Mexicans (and some non-Mexicans) turn to explain the national identity” (Bartra, 1992:3). By this, the nation-state subjugates other identities to meet one of its modern imperatives: homogeneity (Gutiérrez and Núñez, 1998: 85) As such, Mexicanity is not something we are born with, but rather something we learn from various institutions that provide the elements and discourses for us to “know” who we are, or should I say who we are supposed to be.

“I found my identity here, not so much there (Mexico)” Monica, who works at home and takes care of her two children, had just explained how regardless of her integration process she would always be Mexican. Often, the participants would state that living in the Netherlands made them learn and understand what Mexico and their own Mexicanity was really about. José Del Val states that there is an obsessive search for the meaning of “being Mexican” which would depict the “soul” of our identity as a nation as well as the basic characteristics and conflicts constituting it. However, he concludes that all attempts have always ended up depicting a sort of caricature, full of stereotypes that will never portray all the nuances involved with being Mexican (Del Val, 2004: 18). He mentions that within our national identity, there is always a battle between the Mexican we are supposed to be, and that which we really are, and accordingly we deny. As it contradicts the Mexican we so proudly describe and wish to be (Del Val, 2004: 20, 21). An example of this is our historic battle to articulate the two traditions that are customarily considered the main roots of our identity: the native “indígena” and the settler, the Spanish “española” (Del Val, 2004: 21). In one hand, we confront and deny our indigenous past and on the other we aspire to be “European.” We live in a constant search, but at the same time we have an imposed example of what being Mexican entails.

*We are neither Spanish nor Indigenous, we are Mestizos*

My country’s identity, as that of any former colony, was built on blood and subjugation, which greatly impacts social relations today. Spanish rule created a caste system, each with different privileges and duties. This distinction amongst ethnic groups was based on real or imagined characteristics, positioning each in

a hierarchical system, which delimited an individual's future (Klor de Alva, 1999: 171). The latter, generated a series of marginalization and social discrimination toward the darker skinned groups, which is still an important source of racism and inequality in Mexico. According to Klor de Alva the cast system emerged as a social need more than a natural method of classification. Said "need has historically appeared when changing material conditions or governmental demands cannot be met by the prevailing social arrangements" (Klor de Alva, 1999: 171). Consequently, the terms "mestizo" and "mulatto", used to address the casts' hybrid offspring, evolved into an indicator of ancestry rather than a mere method of recognition (Klor de Alva, 1999: 171-173). Hence, the terms became a source of identity, a manner of social organization and cohesion used for strategic purposes. "The end of the colonization period (1821) and the indigenist-oriented Revolution of 1910, enabled "the creation of the Mexican identity by officially fusing all casts into one mestizo society" (Klor de Alva, 1999: 175). Accordingly, Mestizaje then became "a register through which new people can be brought into existence, or as an elucidating metaphor that helps to make sense of the masking that goes on when fusion fails to take place as different peoples meet under asymmetrical conditions" (Klor de Alva, 1999: 175). Is precisely its natural ambiguity that provides space for communities to become. As Mestizo "can be made to stand for anything anyone wants them to be" (Klor de Alva, 1999: 177).

Being Mestizo enables Mexican immigrants to cope with the uncertainties brought by the integration process. "I feel that I'm not from here or there," stated Nicole. Similarly Arlette, a Master's student and former lecturer, told me she felt uncertain of her identity; she neither felt Mexican or Dutch. However, these women recognized the ambiguity in which they were situated and still carried out their everyday activities. Both had a job, Nicole in customer service and Arlette as an employee in a café. They were married to Dutch men and acknowledged both the challenges and prerogatives of living in the Netherlands. I felt that even though their lives were far from easy, the fact that they did not completely belong was not their main concern. Mexican immigrants travel with their Mestizo identity, alongside other social locations and attachments, providing them with a sense of belonging. Nonetheless, is precisely the ambiguity of the Mestizo that might also give space to a personalized Mexicanity. Immigrants' need of belonging is sometimes fulfilled by their attempts to maintain their national identity, "discovering" what it means to be Mexican. This way the Mestizo is also a space to reaffirm identities and forge agency.

### **3.2 Dutch national identity**

Dutch nation, built on the moral basis of "the golden age" during the 17th century has seen a great transformation. From being a sociopolitical apparatus where power resided fairly evenly, amongst Protestants and Catholics (Uitermark, 2012: 61) to that of a heterogeneous society, where "the idea of being Dutch means [individually] adhering to certain set of cultural and social norms and practices" (Kremer, 2013: 1). The modern Dutch identity began to (re)shape and the need to identify the not-Dutch emerged. Hence, the Centraal



Bureau voor de Statistiek (CBS) in an attempt to “humanize” immigrants classification methods, enforced the terms *Autochtoon* (descendants of the original inhabitants of the Netherlands) and *Allochtoon*<sup>6</sup> (either born abroad or descendant of at least one parent born abroad) (Doppen, 2010: 132). However, on a poll carried out by the same institution, 61% of Dutch citizens said the majority of societal tensions were amongst *allochtoon* and *autochtoon*. Far less than those reported between rich and poor (25%) (Kremer, 2013: 3). Similarly, a survey carried out by Kaleidos Research in August 2014 found that immigrants are seen more of a threat than an asset. 1 in 5 believe that immigrants enrich society and 1 in 5 believe that escaping poverty is a good reason to give someone a residence permit (Boonstoppel, 2015: 1). It is clear that the Netherlands, historically recognized for its multicultural nature, has shifted to a stricter approach (Entzinger, 2014).

### *The need for national identity*

“The Netherlands is too complex to sum up in one cliché’ said Queen Máxima. ‘A typical Dutch person doesn't exist” (Zorreguieta quoted by Corder, 2007). Queen Maxima’s famous phrase attempted to give space for other ways of being and belonging. However, with the increase of immigration flows, erosion of borders and space, the need to clearly define who “we” are is a heightened (Gutiérrez and Núñez, 1998). Máxima was right; there is not a clear Dutch identity, as it is an ever-changing process. But she did, however, fail to understand that National identity is not so much appraised by whether or not it exist, but rather on the emotions it evokes in its subjects.

Triggered by local events related from globalization and increasing immigration flows, concepts such as identity, citizenship and nation were morally elevated. At the beginning of the 21th century, journalist Paul Scheffer wrote the “Multicultural Drama” which portrayed an incipient sense of discomfort in Dutch society. Scheffer stressed that the Netherlands “had been too generous by not requesting immigrants to learn the Dutch language nor culture (Vesta, 2007: 714). Dutch society, in his argument, had to “develop a greater sense of national consciousness and become less indifferent to its own society” (Kremer, 2013: 9). This would help immigrants to clearly identify the elements needed to adapt and integrate (Kremer, 2013: 9). Scheffer’s piece ignited a dialogue in which “immigrants’ struggle to ‘succeed’ was related to Dutch [...] culture of relativism, complacency, and consensus” (Uitermark, 2012: 87). With the assassinations of the radical anti-immigrant politician, Pim Fortuyn by an animal rights activist and the subsequent killing of controversial filmmaker Theo van Gogh by an Islamist extremist; the cracks in the system were uncovered. The Netherlands sense of smugness was challenged, which created panic

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<sup>6</sup> The use and definition of both terms *Allochtoon* and *Autochtoon* as a manner to categorize Dutch society are widely debated and challenge. Given that they cover a series of racial-ethnic interpretations and implications that have moved away from the original aim and have now seen as a tool for segregation and dehumanization of immigrants and their descendants. (See Yanowa and van der Haarb, 2014).

amongst society (Buruma, 2007: 15). Consequently, the immigration debate got to a point in which the “discourse [framed] the nation as being in ‘crisis’” (Lechner, 2007: 356, 361), where the functioning of the Country’s institutions depended on a clear National identity and an efficient integration policy..

### **3.3 Defining and enforcing integration**

The concept of integration is frequently used but hardly defined. Loch states that integration has a double meaning: sociological and individual/local (Loch, 2014: 623). Similarly, Entzinger builds on Loch’s understanding of integration to define it as a process where individuals or groups with a foreign origin or ancestry are incorporated into a receiving society (individual level) that is by itself integrated according to certain elements that provide social unity (sociological level) (Entzinger, 2014: 693). On the other hand, the Common Basic Principles on Integration created by the European Commission (EC) to serve as a basis for member states’ immigrant integration policies (EC, 2015), define integration as “a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of Member States” (Council of The European Union, 2004: 17). These definitions might seem contradictory given that the first portrays integration as a one-way street while the second assumes a mutual responsibility between the immigrant and the receiving state and society. However, Loch and Entzinger see integration as a tool rather than an epistemic basis for policymaking. Accordingly, national models of integration are shaped on ideal-type constructions based on a nation’s previous and current socio-political developments. Thus, integration policies serve not only as a description of immigrants incorporation process into a nation-state but also reflect the nation’s ideal self-image, emphasizing on how it wishes to maintain solidarity among its members (Entzinger, 2014; Loch, 2014 and Bertossi and Duyvendak, 2012). Consequently, each nation-state appropriates a specific definition of integration as well as a strategy in their policies to achieve a certain degree of social loyalty and homogeneity.

The Netherlands current definition of integration has two dimensions. The Immigration and Naturalization Service (IND) states: “If you wish to acquire Dutch citizenship, you must demonstrate that you have integrated sufficiently. This means that you should speak, read, write, and understand Dutch reasonably well. You must be able to manage in Dutch society” (IND, 2015). Additionally, the 2013 Annual Report on Integration, by the Dutch Statistics Office remarks, “Integration of immigrants into society refers to a process where immigrant groups and the native population draw closer together and participate fully in society” (CBS, 2014: 20). Hence, integration seems to have economical and cultural dimensions. Migrants must prove their integration by being economically self-sufficient and able to engage in Dutch society. Integration then seems more to do with minimizing material and social dependency than reducing economic and social inequality.

Since the establishment of the Inburgering policy in 1994, there has been a “virtualization of citizenship”. Previously citizenship was seen as an important precondition to guarantee immigrants’ integration (Regioplan, 2014, 30). However, by 1997 the renunciation requirement was introduced, which constrains immigrants to hold only one nationality. In 2003, the Naturalization Exam was enforced, requesting immigrants to demonstrate certain knowledge of the Dutch language as well as Dutch society (Regioplan, 2014, 30). Subsequently by 2006 and 2009, citizenship ceremonies and the Vow of Allegiance became mandatory as the last steps in attaining citizenship (Regioplan, 2014, 30). These shifts are examples of what Schinkel (2010) calls “The Virtualization of Citizenship.” He indicates that as a result of the equalization of integration and citizenship, citizenship has turned “into a possibility instead of an actuality, and which turns into a virtue” (Schinkel, 2010: 266). In other words, citizenship becomes a tool to define one “society” over an “outside society”. This “foreign” society “consisting of non-active [...] citizens and non-citizens lacking proper ‘integration’ ” (Schinkel, 2010: 266) is valorised under the culturalist approach of current Dutch integration. Which prioritizes cultural integration over a socio-economic integration (Schinkel, 2010: 266-269). Hence “immigrants are not primarily seen as a threat because they take our jobs, but rather because they challenge our way of life”(Entzinger, 2014: 697). As a result, there is in the Netherlands “a significant number of people who are formal citizens but who are at the same time object of problematizations of integration” (Schinkel, 2010: 271) and thus, “fall from actuality to virtuality” (Schinkel, 2010: 271). Therefore, immigrants have to undergo a double process to become citizens, first in the moral dimension to then seek the formal membership to the state. Dutch citizenship has “shifted from controlling the borders of the state, to controlling the borders of society” (Schinkel, 2010: 278).

Regardless, as an immigrant, there are two main ways to acquire Dutch citizenship: “Naturalization” or “Option”(IND, 2015). “The majority of foreign nationals who want to obtain Dutch citizenship must do so through naturalization” (Regioplan, 2014: 31), given that the “option” procedure is only available for a few number of individuals who have a clear connection to the Netherlands either by residence or lineage. Then, immigrants’ often turn to “naturalization,” meeting several conditions: have at least 18 years of age, hold a valid residence permit, be sufficiently integrated, proven by passing the civic integration exam, have lived in the Netherlands for at least five years, and renounce to current nationality (Regioplan, 2014: 31 and GTN, 2015). “If [...] married to a Dutch national, [the immigrant] can apply for naturalization after three years of marriage. The same applies to registered partnership after three years of uninterrupted cohabitation”(GTN, 2015). Once the immigrant has submitted the application to their corresponding municipality, the file is forwarded to the “Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND) with a favourable or unfavourable recommendation” (GTN, 2015). Subsequently, the IND decides whether or not to grant Dutch citizenship. Nonetheless, to be considered as a Dutch citizen, the immigrant must attend the naturalization ceremony, at which (s)he proclaims the citizenship pledge and is given a document proving that (s)he is now a Dutch national (GTN, 2015).

However, there is no clear-cut difference between Dutch immigration and integration policy as “the rights of immigrants have become increasingly conditional on successful integration” (Ersanilli, 2014: 10). To “be eligible for a residence permit or for naturalization, you first have to pass a civic integration exam” (IND, 2015). The Civic integration exam consists of five exams and one orientation course: a written, listening, speaking exams, and Kennis Nederlandse Samenleving (KNS), Knowledge of Dutch Society exam as well as the Orientation on the Dutch Labor Market. Moreover, there are three main civic integration examinations procedures depending on the Immigrant’s condition and motives behind the application. (1) Civic integration examination abroad: where the knowledge is assessed by taking an exam at the Dutch Embassy or Consulate in the country of origin or residence and consists of three tests with a total cost of €350 (IND, 2015). This examination has to be performed when the immigrant is attempting to join a family member, husband/wife or partner in the Netherlands. (2) Civic integration examination: a requirement to continue residence and permanent residence, performed once the immigrant wants to change the purpose of stay into continued residence or permanent residence. Finally (3) Civic integration examination: requirement for naturalization. The immigrant then must pass the civic integration examination and the NT2, (Dutch as a second language evaluation) proving basic knowledge of Dutch language and society.

Nonetheless, Highly skilled immigrants have another migratory treatment, as the Dutch government has been trying to attract knowledge workers for a few years now. Since 2004, some special regulations were put into force. Employees from registered companies are entitled to fast-track admission. Similarly, knowledge workers are exempted from the civic integration exam, and income requirements for those who had obtained a degree from a Dutch university are lowered than those not considered highly skilled (Ersanilli, 2014: 3).

### *A gendered policy*

Participants, who had come to the Netherlands to join their partner or family, had undergone a stricter process to acquire Dutch citizenship. "Ever since March 2006, spouses and fiancés from non-EU countries must undergo the Civic integration from abroad before they are permitted to join their Dutch partners [...]" (Bjornson, 2007: 65). This means that a certain degree of integration must be achieved while the applicant is physically and conceptually outside [...] the state” (Goodman, 2011: 237). Additionally, the Netherlands does not provide any training or preparation before the Dutch language and society test (Goodman, 2011: 238). However, there are several exemptions, amongst which includes holding a “western” nationality<sup>7</sup> and soliciting the residence permit as an employed or highly skilled migrant (IND, 2015). Therefore, this

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<sup>7</sup> Among these nationality-based exemptions are individuals from “The United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and South Korea” (Goodman, 2011: 246)

scheme has a specific target: the control of family-forming migration. During 2014, 32 Mexicans took the civic integration from abroad exams, which resulted in a success rate of 94% (Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, 2015: 33). With an overall 97% of all the applicants passing the KNS test from abroad (Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, 2015: 3), without having a direct contact with Dutch society, is clear that this policy aims to obfuscate entry not ease integration.

Additionally, even though Dutch government makes an effort to set forth gender equality in their integration information, mostly migrant women use this scheme. During 2014, 74% of the applicants were female (Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, 2015: 20). When interviewed, Martha stated, “I felt like a child who had to be taken care of” as she explained how her now husband had to sign a document becoming her “sponsor”. Immigrants who migrate under this scheme are subject to the sponsoring of their partner who starts the residence application on their behalf, ensuring to have sufficient funds to support their family member or partner (IND, 2015). Migration is greatly gender and often time’s women are to face more challenging conditions, as they are subject to deeper structural oppressions.

As immigration policies reflect the socioeconomic objectives of the state, “immigration law performs the dirty work of inequity and exclusion” (Dauvergne, 2009: 333). As such, said policies become pragmatic solutions as well as symbolic proclamations of whom should be welcome and who should not (Anderson, 2012). With this membership, citizens lean loyalties, socialize, and assimilate certain beliefs as well as the moral criteria for his or her actions. In a few words, national identity is what sustains a nation, what provides its citizens with a sense of self-recognition and differentiate them from others (Gutiérrez and Núñez, 1998: 82). By doing so, “nations-states achieve three fundamental objectives: unify practices, built homogeneity and delimit cultural originality (Gutiérrez and Núñez, 1998: 83). As such, nations establish formal and informal terms and conditions for its membership, which Mexican immigrants meet in a diversity of ways influencing the elements, norms, and values constructing their Mexicanity.

## Chapter 4. Between boundaries

“I do not know what is worst, dealing with other Mexican or the Dutch”

- *Nicole, four years in The Netherlands*

During fieldwork, I understood that Mexican immigrants would construct their belonging amongst different communities and by diverse means. Given that identity and belonging are fluid, clusters that might seem homogeneous, once unpacked, are in reality very complex. My research is focused on middle-class immigrant as I argue that the homogenization of integration, belonging, and identities clouds nuances that are the real challenges for integration policies. I have categorized these immigrants as middle class as the majority hold at least a Bachelors degree and have a fairly favourable economic situation. However, within the cluster I noticed contesting ideas and characteristics, demonstrating that even though all the participants could be assigned to one class, their perceptions and understanding of identity, integration and citizenship vary according to their lived experiences, position and background. Accordingly, this chapter aims to demonstrate the interwoven social locations, values, and norms that influence Mexican immigrants perceptions and identities in the midst of their integration process. That greatly delimit the way their Mexicanity is performed.

I make use of the map from chapter two to unpack Mexican immigrants' integration trajectories and dynamics within Dutch citizenship. Immigrants are in constant struggle to belong. As such Mexicans move simultaneously amongst different political communities where their agency is subject to specific social locations, identifications, and emotional attachments, which are evaluated upon a specific value systems. Accordingly Mexican immigrants are constantly engaged in dialogues and negotiation within a diversity of dimensions, actors, and times, which might result in conflicting or juxtapose understandings of integration, Mexicanity and Dutch citizenship.

## Mexican Citizen Map

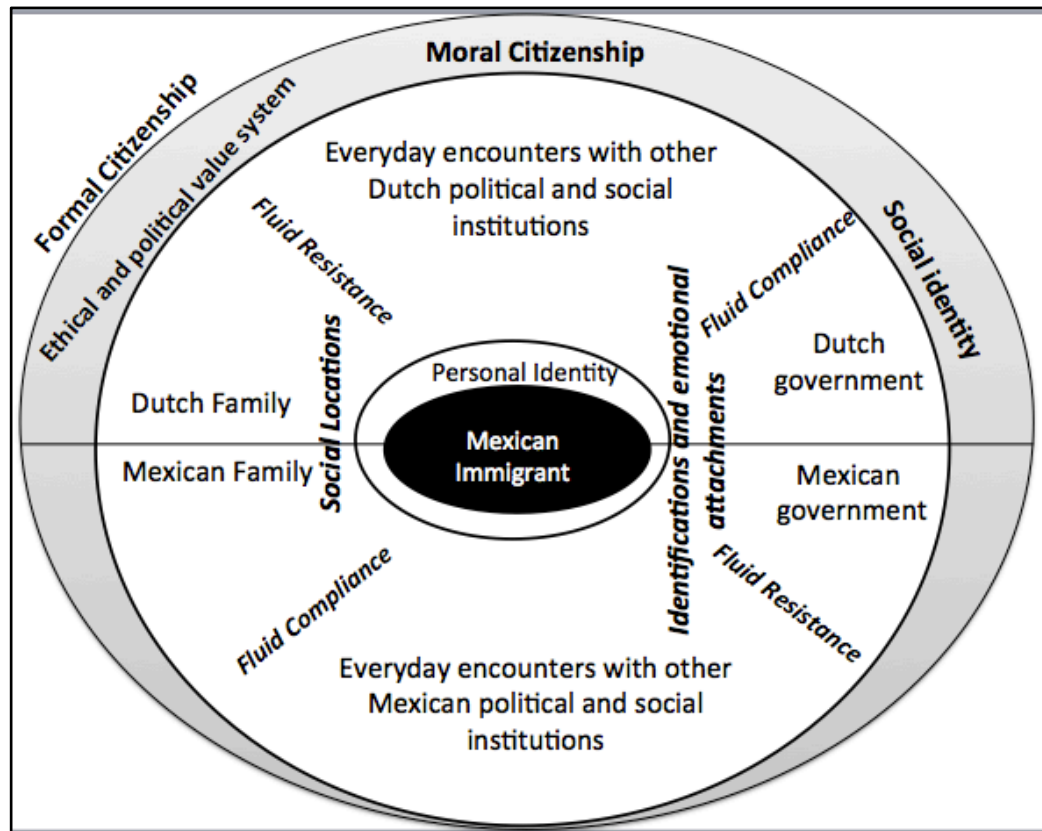


Figure 2 Drafted by the author

### 4.1 Dutch government

*Made for another type of immigrant.*

When I asked about the KNS, Mexicans would regard it as easy. Miroslava, a waitress in a Mexican restaurant with a Bachelor in Communications, told me “The questions are very very silly.” Similarly, Martha said, “The integration exams are made for another type of immigrant.”

The KNS exam is focused towards an orientalized immigrant who is envisioned through western ethno-racial structures. That is specific cultural and biological traits attributed to a community, based on a hierarchy of superiority and inferiority linked to their biology (Grosfoguel, 2004: 315). Said immigrant knows nothing about modern life, and settles in the Netherlands to engage in precarious labour, making him and economic and cultural liability. For instance, as part of the preparation for the KNS, “applicants can buy a video entitled ‘Coming to the Netherlands’. This video, [...] includes images of gay men kissing and topless women lying on the beach, [...] it seemed designed to pro-

voke Muslim migrants and not everybody considers homosexuality and topless sunbathing to be core Dutch values” (Ersanilli, 2014: 3). However, when asked about the questions of the exam, Rolando, a scholar who has lived in the Netherlands for over eight years, answered, “Some [questions] are oriented to discriminate certain cultures that are orientalized, Islamic cultures. Things like if you’re going to kick the neighbor’s dog or if you get nervous at watching topless women at the beach, things that for us, who understand the occidental culture, are not problematic”. Mexico’s culture is in constant interaction with western cultures, especially that of the United States. Thus, part of our social identity is influenced and compliant to western values, which provides an advantage once our “westernness” is put to test.

The term *inburgering* is translated as civilizing. Daniel, the owner of a restaurant in The Hague, who has lived in the Netherlands for about 10 years, and had studied a Masters in Spain. Expressed his opinion: “I don’t like it at all, I got angry. I engaged in discussions with my husband and my friends. I told them they are not going to teach me how to be civilized! On the contrary I’ll teach them” Differently, the rest of the participants had a variety of feelings towards it, a fraction saw it as part of their responsibility to integrate or as an act of respect towards the Netherlands: “I need to respect right? Because I live in their country, I am the one who needs to adapt, not the other way around,” stated Miroslava. Contrarily, there were some who saw the exam as a mere requisite that had to be met, something superficial that had nothing to do with the real process of integration, which happened in everyday life: “For me the source [of my identity] are the relationships, history...anything else is bureaucracy” Rolando calmly mentioned as we were wrapping up the interview. Backgrounds and emotional attachments influence and construct perception over the meaning of the exam. For Daniel as a former expat, the exam undervalued his skills; while for Miroslava it represented an obvious requirement. But for Rolando the exam was a tool of the state to construct a homogeneous society. Each complied or resisted in different dimensions, Daniel by postponing his naturalization, Miroslava by assuming responsibility and Rolando by appropriating his integration to redefine it. They were simultaneously moving between the boundaries of moral citizenship while complying with its formal dimension.

## 4.2 Everyday encounters with other Mexican/Dutch political and social institutions

*“Te quiero, pero de lejos”, I love you but from afar*

I noticed that Mexican immigrants in the Netherlands distanced themselves from other Mexicans. “The Mexican that comes here is less humble, (s)he believes (s)he has the right to, but the truth is that (s)he doesn’t have the right to nothing”. Daniel, was telling me about his perceptions of the Mexican com-



munity when he made the distinction between two types of Mexican immigrant. The one who is constantly comparing and is never entirely happy, and the second type, who can integrate and understand that the Netherlands is not Mexico, appreciating it as a separate culture and nation. This was not the first time I had heard about the lack of solidarity between fellow Mexicans. Arlette, stressed that there was pressure amongst the community to maintain a certain status attributed to the high middle class, which involved a lack of solidarity towards others who did not yet “attained” said status. Similarly, Rolando, when asked about his opinion he stated: “It could be the logic of the Mexican middle class. [...] In comparison to the Mexican community in the USA, who do have a strong sense of comradeship [...], the Mexican immigrants in the Netherlands are highly individualistic, as they don’t come here to confront problems that require solidarity”.

This lack of solidarity was an element I could clearly link to Dutch integration policy. Immigrants would keep their integration process private, assuming an individual responsibility for their adaptation. Empathy and comradeship became a commodity something extra once integration had been achieved. “At first I did not feel the need to seek other Mexicans, it was only after some time that the need emerged. But then again it was also because of my transition, I was adapting to a new country, new customs, family, etc. It was only after that I felt the responsibility to help the newcomers,” Martha, stated when asked to depict the Mexican community. Similarly Marisela, a scholar living in the Netherlands for more than seven years, stressed that she no longer interacts with many Mexicans as in the past, given that she is now more integrated into Dutch society and living in Rotterdam far away from her Mexican acquaintances. However, I mostly perceived this isolation amongst those immigrants who were more pressured by the state to integrate. That is, those who had come here to settle down with their partner, husband or wife and, therefore, had to go through the civic integration exam. Their process entailed a more tangible loss. They needed to detach from their Mexicanity to achieve the requested level of integration. In contrast highly skilled or employed immigrants—some are outside of the formal citizenship but are still subject to its moral dimension—have more leverage over their decision to integrate or not. However, compliance to the Dutch governments’ plea for immigrants to assume an individual duty to integrate, would directly impact loyalties and emotional attachments resulting in a lack of comradeship and solidarity amongst Mexicans.

### *I was a little Dutch before*

Sometimes when explaining how they had achieved integration, some participants stated: “I was a little Dutch before.” Integration is seen as a dichotomy that greatly depends on immigrants’ personalities. Individuals would classify themselves either as integrated or not. When successful, a great part of their explanation would include how they had some Dutch values before living in the Netherlands, such as order, punctuality, fondness for structure and efficiency. However, their justification as to why they were “like this” before, would fall as part of their personal identity, as said traits did not match the

hegemonic understanding of The Mexican. Again, this was greatly due to Dutch integration policy's influence. Integration and citizenship were seen as a moral outcome that required effort. Accordingly, there were two types of immigrants. Those who had not integrated and longed for Mexico located outside of the Moral citizenship; and those inside who "understood" that they had to start anew and integrate. Accordingly participants commonly used the phrase "can't adapt/integrate". When I asked a participant "why do you think they can't do it?" The interviewee responded: "It's the personal insecurities of people. It has to do with the personality of the individual and how the brain works. Insecure people are the ones who struggle the most to adapt, or also those that are here for the wrong reasons or that had a golden idea of something. No one can tell you how life is going to be in another country. That is impossible" If the immigrant was not successfully integrated then this was due to a weak personality that impeded them to stop comparing Mexico and the Netherlands. Hence, integration was resisted and met on an everyday basis, encouraged or challenged by Mexicans, depending on the community they were located in that time.

"Even if you are qualified, even if you are integrated, you will always be an immigrant. Consciously or unconsciously there will be a difference in that" stated Francisco, who holds a Masters degree and works as a promoter of a Dutch University. Successful integration did not remove the label of "immigrant". Integration for the majority of the participants, regardless of whether they had Dutch citizenship or not, meant that they were better equipped to engage in everyday activities not that they belonged. High levels of integration meant a minimized Mexicanity—and vice versa—but not its eradication. Immigrants would state that they had appropriated Dutch values, but they would never be Dutch, even with formal citizenship. Therefore, Mexicans are political agents, which belongings and identities sometimes challenge the hegemonic culture by their sole existence, as they perpetuate their project within the boundaries of Dutch citizenship. And at the same time making use of Dutch ideologies and projects to situate themselves in an optimal power position both inside and outside Dutch society (Yuval-Davis, 2006: 205). Accordingly, immigrants do not entirely detach from their Mexicanity as it is an embodied dimension of their belonging. They struggle to make sense of the rights, duties, and allegiances that come from moving between two communities boundaries

### *"Je moet", Language*

Arlette asked me to meet her in Amsterdam; she expressed her frustration over the fact that a week before, she couldn't remember the word for fingernails in *Zapoteco*, an indigenous language in Mexico. "For me is very important to speak Zapoteco, and I'm forgetting it...I'm losing myself". Two days later, I find my-

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<sup>8</sup> Je moet: you should or you must in Dutch. This phrase emerged in an interview when talking about the pressure to integrate. Nicole stated that the phrase was a constant in her interaction with her family –in –law and other people in her social circles. "Je moet, that's all you hear".

self in Monica's dining room in Amersfoort, and she is frustratingly telling me how she used to criticize "pochos"<sup>9</sup> and now she finds herself struggling to speak Spanish without resorting to English or Dutch. Language is a curious tool, greatly linked with privilege and understandings of duty. Francisco told me about his experience with the NT2 exam; he stated that after passing the exam, he did not continue his studies with the language. Everything he did was either in Spanish or English; hence he had no concrete need to become proficient in Dutch. In a country where 94% of the population can speak at least one language in addition to their mother tongue, and where 90% is particularly likely to speak English (EC, 2012: 5, 21), Learning Dutch is not so much related to survival or need but rather to will and social pressure.

However, language is not only an instrument for communication but is an essential part of our identity as an individual. Benveniste states, "language is the nature of man" (2008: 40). Given that the human we know is a speaking man, who speak to other human beings, providing him or her their essence. Thus, Language is not limited to an instrumental function but rather "it is in and through [it] that man constitute himself as a subject"(Benveniste, 2008: 40). This means that with each word immigrants' speak, they define themselves by the enunciation of who they are before others. Hence, Arlette and Monica's sense of loss, according to Benveniste's theory, goes beyond their incipient difficulty to communicate with the Mexican or Dutch community. It has to do with their inability to become a subject in the language that was the only mean for them to be Zapoteca and Mexican. Hence, the institutional requirement to learn Dutch is not only a communication imposition but also one of identity. As language carries values, norms, gender, race and class, the manner in which you speak greatly influences others perceptions of who and where you are. As such, language is used by Dutch citizenship as a tool of inclusion or exclusion but is also a channel by which immigrants resist their subjugation, by rejecting to learn and speak Dutch

### 4.3 Dutch/Mexican family

"Family is like mueganos<sup>10</sup>, always together." My mother uses this popular saying every time she wants to explain the dynamics of the Mexican family. The phrase makes reference to a traditional Mexican candy, which is very sticky. Family is an essential part of identity building as it sets the basis for the construction and preservation of emotional attachments and ethical and political value systems. Is one of the institutions where individuals learn how to become Mexicans. Therefore, a great part of what they call "roots" are embedded in the Family.

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<sup>9</sup> Traditionally used to negatively depict the Mexican-American or "Chicanos" way of speaking which is usually a mixture of Spanish and English.

<sup>10</sup> Mueganos are usually made by frying little dough balls and coating them with piloncillo (raw sugar syrup).

“I could tell you that my heart is split in half. Between the home that I have, because my husband is there, my activities, my life, and on the other hand, the part to which I belong, or where I used to belong, where I’m from.



*Several Mueganos candy, imaged obtained from <http://www.aliatuniversidades.com.mx>*

[...] My family is what I miss not the land” Marisela had just answered how she felt living in the Netherlands. Most of the participants’ attachment and loyalties to Mexico would reside in the family left behind. And hence, continue to have strong ties with the country even though they were in different degrees, positioned within Dutch society. Hence great part of immigrant’s identity would come from the family, detaching from it also meant detaching from who they are.

However, family as a political community is polluted with hierarchized social and economic locations, which have direct implications for immigrants’ integration. During interviews often family was seen as a terrain of conflict or negotiation. Monica recounted an experience with her sister-in-law. She was in need of a babysitter and couldn’t get one in time. She asked her husband to call her sister-in-law and ask if she could take care of the kids. Her answer wasn’t at all what she expected. “In Mexico if someone is in need of help then all the family members mobilize to make it work, but here you have to ask knowing that you might get a no as an answer.” Mexican family norms and values greatly differ from the Dutch as social locations (gender, class and race) have different weight. While being the sister-in-law might bring particular rights and duties in Mexico it might not be the case in the Netherlands. As such, Family becomes as space where each hegemonic political culture designates the norms and values delimiting dynamics and roles. Hence, regardless of having the same reproductive objective, Mexicans understanding of family might contest with Dutch society imaginary, hindering his or her integration.

“I sometimes tell my wife to invite my mother-in-law for dinner. Otherwise, she won't do it as often” stated Francisco. Similarly, Marisela described her family dynamics: “I call my sister-in-law to make an appointment to see her, because even family is structured, and sometimes she might say no, not because she doesn’t want to, but because she has other engagements.” Ironically, scheduling might be seen as a lack of trust or care in the Mexican family. Dropping by for lunch or dinner is always permitted and even encourage. Therefore, Mexican immigrants’ immersion into Dutch family life encompasses a learning process in which the immigrant learns what he or she identifies as Dutch values. However, they might incorporate said values or make use of them to promote dialogues amongst identities, finding ways in which they might reshape and/or perform their Mexicanity. Monica recounted how she kept in touch with her Mexicanity: “I had to learn how to cook. Is like a safety cushion for me, because it brings me memories of my family. I don’t

know why food was so important. It was a ritual, the Chiles en nogada<sup>11</sup>...I didn't like to cook. But for us, food was sacred" As a result, Mexican negotiate and maneuver to introduce Dutch family members into their traditions, enforcing Mexican values into the institution while at the same time learning what it means to be Dutch.

Under Dutch citizenship Mexican immigrants appropriate their integration process through different dimensions and means. By doing so, they shape and reshape epistemologies, subjectivities and identities according to their realities. They move between communities' boundaries attempting to belong. Accordingly, when two or more national identities interact, there will be a dialogue, involving other influences such as values, society, gender, class, race and emotions. Thus, immigrants' understanding of what integration means as well as the way to achieve it, greatly depends on the latter struggles.

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<sup>11</sup> Chiles en nogada: is an elaborate dish, traditional to the state of Puebla. Considered a patriotic dish, is usually prepared during the month of September when Mexicans celebrate their independence from Spain.

## **Chapter 5. Mexican immigrants' integration experience in the context of Dutch citizenship**

Most of the motives behind immigrants' decision to settle in the Netherlands were not related to improving their life conditions. Even though Mexican immigrants are exempt from certain structures of discrimination and oppression, they are still objects of social inequality. Thus, I will complete the analysis started in the previous chapter to explain how do Mexican immigrants in the Netherlands understand and experience integration in the context of Dutch citizenship. To do so, I will unpack citizenship through immigrants' intersections displaying the multidimensional nature of integration. Secondly, I will argue that "real" integration happens on the ground. Therefore I will be applying the concept of biopower to describe how civil society and other institutions, not only the state, shape and control the members and boundaries of society. Finally I will explain how in order to belong, Mexicans appropriate their integration process to transcend the original hegemonic understanding of Mexicanity and Dutch national identity, allowing the immigrant to redefine his or her own integration and identity.

### **5.1 Outside the policy reach: de-homogenizing citizenship and integration**

National integration policies' goal of homogenizing society is cosmetic. Policymaking aims to tackle social problems, which are envisioned and defined by a handful of actors. As a result, the problem is represented in terms of subjective understandings of the world. Hence, there is a negotiation over which aspects from social reality are to be included in the policy (Hajer, 1995; Roggeband and Verloo, 2007). Thus, the problem is partly real and partly constructed. Given the ever-changing nature of the political, social and economic elements influencing policymaking, understandings and definitions of what constitutes national identity. This leaves citizens and newcomers with no chance to actually cope and integrate under the established terms and conditions. Accordingly, integration policy does not influence all actors in the same manner and degree as it was envisioned.

Individual's identity and citizenship are embodied, involving social locations and loyalties. Each social location's category, being gender, class or race, is differently measured against other categories on the basis of specific value systems within specific historical contexts and communities. This means that a specific combination of categories might provide privilege in a given location while it can facilitate oppression in another. In other words, intersectionality plays an important role in immigrants' understanding and experiences regarding integration because behaviour, social roles, and privilege are highly dependent on said categories. However to address them separately also represents a challenge, as in real life these categories are in constant intersection, mutually constituting oppressions. (Yuval-Davis, 2007: 565). For instance Cynthia is a

white middle class immigrant who holds a privileged migratory status. As an employee of an international organization, she is exempt from undergoing the civic integration exam. However, given that she is married to a Dutch man, within the family and the Mexican community, she is socially located in a different position where integration is expected, regardless of her migratory status as a highly skilled immigrant. Her gender, race and class are position within specific ways in specific moments. As such, to talk solely about migrants women or middle class immigrants does not say much about the inequalities or social challenges these individuals face” (Yuval-Davis, 2007: 565).

### *A matter of gender*

“I am tired, let them think whatever they want”, Monica was explaining to me the social stigma she experienced for working at home. Monica stressed how her Dutch female friends and acquaintances would judge her decision to engage in unpaid labour. Not only was this seen as oppressive but the fact that she was a housewife in the Netherlands, and by her own will, was considered ludicrous. Migration is greatly gendered and migrant women are especially vulnerable as they are often seen as victims of backward and misogynous culture, but also as the “key to solving problems of integration and emancipation” (Roggeband and Verloo, 2007: 272). Hence, migrant women are defined as a policy problem (Roggeband and Verloo, 2007: 280). Given that one of the most exalted Dutch values is gender equality, the acceptance of any culture that challenges the modern understanding and practice of said value is seen as problematic.

However, it is precisely this framing that stagnates migrant women in a stigmatized social position. They are left with the burden of acknowledging their “inferiority” and “backwardness” related to their gender and religion (in case of the Islam) to attain Dutch citizenship. Accordingly, a great part of Dutch integration policy aims to “emancipate” and “advance” migrant (Muslim) women to a level in which they can be considered similar to the autochthonous female population (Roggeband and Verloo, 2007: 272). Yet in reality, policy sets the visual basis for their exclusion. The courses and exams that these women have to take for their naturalization encourage the appropriation of an imaginary in which non-western women are portrayed as oppressed. This leaves them in a problematic position where they need to reject their cultural origins while at the same time attempt to adapt to a culture that will never entirely accept them as a member.

On the other hand, gender inequality is not limited to policy and formal citizenship. Mexican immigrants fulfil and perpetuate heteronormative gender roles in specific ways and communities. For instance, Mexican women would often be the ones who shared their culture through food, while men would mention using spirits like tequila as an important part of sharing their Mexicanity with non-Mexican friends. Similarly, the responsibility of teaching Spanish to the children would frequently fall to Mexican women who were considered in charge of the upbringing of children. As a result, the integration process

portrays a series of negotiations both on a material and subjective level, which is very much related to both immigrants' and natives' understanding of which roles and task are performed by which gender.

### *A matter of class*

“If I had stayed in Mexico, my situation would probably be the same... it wouldn't be exactly same, but it wouldn't be worse. Because in Mexico I belonged to a certain class, I went to school, to university, where I was doing a graduate degree and where my parents supported me. My situation wasn't worse than the one I have here.” Marisela and I were comparing Mexican immigrants' situation in the Netherlands with those who had crossed the US border in search for a better life. Choice is a privilege, which usually comes from a favourable socio-economic position. Being able to decide to go back to Mexico without the risk of falling into a precarious situation is a big game changer for immigrants.

Class enables Mexicans to have certain leverage over their integration. Education and economic solvency allow immigrants in the Netherlands to manage their “real” integration process. That is, their everyday life experiences. Their social-economic situation exempts them from engaging in precarious labor, in contrast with the irregular immigrants in the US. Hence, Mexicans appropriate their integration process and “personalize” it in the manner in which they see fit. Integration, in this sense, is not so much a matter of need, but more of a life project. Additionally, Dutch individualization of integration validates immigrants' decision to customize their integration. In other words, they undergo the *inburgering* but then decide to further integrate selecting those dimensions in which their social locations allow them to modify the terms and conditions of their integration. Accordingly, some might decide to become fluent in Dutch while still enjoying Mexican music, customs, celebrations etc. Similarly, others might see language as an imposition and given that there is no need to speak Dutch on a regular basis, they adopt certain practices that are considered Dutch, such as structure, punctuality bluntness etc. Overall, class provides some leverage to personalize integration's terms and conditions. However, this is highly determined by needs, social locations and overall will.

### *A matter of race*

Immigrant's race was an important factor in their integration. My sample included people with different skin, eye and hair colour. Nonetheless they did not meet all the racial traits that are linked to the Netherlands: tall, blue or green eyed and blond hair. As much as I disagree on generalizing and allocating physical features to a specific ethnicity, the reality was that Eurocentric racial guidelines were used by both Dutch and Mexicans to understand social norms, labels and categories. For example, when asked about their feelings towards Dutch citizenship, both Marisela and Francisco would state that they do not presume to be Dutch, even though they were integrated. Firstly because of



their non-western appearance and second because their roots were deep in Mexico. Racial traits greatly impact citizenships and identities, as not only do we learn how to behave but also how others should look. Accordingly, Mexican immigrants felt that their racial features were not in line with those linked to Dutch people, and thus, no one would believe they were “real” Dutch citizens. Thus, Immigration is not only a legal status but is also an embodied category.

Consequently, immigrants’ ethno-racial position impedes their complete integration of Dutch values and culture. As much as Dutch citizenship attempts to bring immigrants into western modernity reducing cultural inequalities, immigrants arrive to polluted spaces. Filled with racialized power relations shaped by a historical, epistemic and ethnic hierarchy (R. Grosfoguel et al., 2014: 7). The latter provides an explanation as to why Francisco and Marisela told me that their appearance influenced Dutch natives in “believing” they were not Dutch, even if they hold a Dutch passport, spoke the language and closely interacted with Dutch people. Individuals are simultaneously manoeuvring between different ethno-racial structures under which they are labelled in different ways each with specific implications. As such, immigrants and natives engaged in radicalized actions holding different degrees of power. Thus, labels and categories such as “immigrant”, “Dutch” and “Mexican” are embodied and used in different dimensions and communities, to either facilitate or obstruct integration.

However, to change ethno-racial structures both the self and the other have to be implicated. I was surprised by the fact that Francisco and Marisela verbalized their racial differentiation. Meaning that immigrants have the power to perpetuate both their own as well as their host ethno-racial structure. While the immigrant undergoes their integration process, he or she is also subjugated to power structures that influence their ideas, behaviour and loyalties. As such, they might impose these structures over other actors that challenge the boundaries of society to “compensate” their racial positioning. Accordingly they move to another dimension where their social location situates them in a more privilege location. For instance, while talking about the KNS exam, a participant told me: “I was very upset. If I were a Tarahumara indio<sup>12</sup> from the mountains of Chihuahua that [...] doesn’t know anything then yes, I understand there are some steps to take as they are not accustomed to a western life”. Immigrants are both subject and agent. Their position and degree of subjectification greatly influences their understanding of who should be integrated and under which terms, making them agents used by the hegemonic culture to control and monitor the imagined nation.

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<sup>12</sup> Tarahumara or Rarámuri, as they call themselves, is the name of an indigenous group that reside in the mountainous area in the crossing through the States of Chihuahua, Durango and Sonora in the north of Mexico.

Social location's categories and their corresponding intersections delimit the rules of engagement for immigrants. Gender, class and race are crucial in immigrants' understandings of citizenship and integration as they greatly influence expectations, treatment and opportunities. A female Mexican immigrant that has obtained her citizenship through unmarried partnership will have a different experience than an immigrant who settled in the Netherlands as a result of employment. Both are exposed to structures of oppression even if an individual holds a favourable position within a historical context as privilege and inequality might be taken away or enhanced in another. Hence, immigrants experience uneven integrations: while they might be considered adapted to a given political community such as family, they might be considering mavericks in another.

## 5.2 Grounded integration: compliance and resistance

My friend Maria had come to visit and we were planning to go to Enschede, a city in the east of the Netherlands, to see a common friend. Maria, my boyfriend Daan and I rushed to the bus in the town's central station. Maria and I had just checked in with our transport cards when Daan screamed that we were on the wrong bus. Maria and I quickly tried to check out, but a red light kept flashing every time. "It's too soon, you just checked in a few seconds ago," said the bus driver. I asked for a solution, as not checking out would get us a fine. He rudely replied: "I don't know and I won't wait for you." Maria remarked on his rudeness and the bus driver snapped. "You are the rude ones, you didn't greet me when you came in, as is customary. You know, there is a word for people like you in Dutch..." Regardless of the fact that I did not understand said word, I could not stop thinking how this was Dutch integration 101.

As a student, I am legally exempted from civic integration—the moral citizenship—as I am a temporal resident. However, I wonder if the bus driver would have stopped yelling if I had told him this. Real integration is grounded; immigrants learn how to move within Dutch society through everyday interactions. Dutch integration policy's limited reach, forces the government to share its power for the monitoring and controlling of populations. Hence, it recurs to other actors such as benefactors and institutions (Lilja and Vinthagen, 2014: 110). "The disciplines of the body and the regulations of the population" (Foucault, 1998: 139-140) for the management of life is what Foucault calls Biopower. A "technology of power, which organizes human subjects as a population" (Lilja and Vinthagen, 2014: 110). This control over life "needs continuous regulatory and corrective mechanisms" (Foucault, 1998: 139-140). Hence social agents—in this case those who meet the cultural and normative requirements of the Dutch nation—"qualify, measure, appraise, [and] hierarchize society" (Foucault, 1998: 145). As a result, immigrants are regulated both legally and biologically by the state and its agents, assuring that there is an optimal functioning of populations under certain guidelines.

However, Mexican immigrants' also resist this power through different means. They might be the subjects of stronger biopower impositions in some communities while in others they challenge it. In case of resistance, for instance, immigrants are obliged to learn Dutch, they teach Spanish to their children or impose said language as the only means of communication in the household. Agency in this sense relies in self-reflection and will to be different. Immigrants challenge institutions and policies for the management of populations by modifying the behaviour within subcultures and creating the basis of alternative institutions, values and customs (Lilja and Vinthagen, 2014: 121). Resistance in Mexican immigrants occurs when they appropriate their integration process and manage it in different degrees and ways using different guidelines from those imposed by Dutch society.

The latter does not mean that all immigrants resist integration. Victor lives in Nijmegen and works closely with Dutch engineers. As a highly skilled migrant he did not have to go through the KNS even when he requested Dutch citizenship. However, he was, under the Dutch definition, one of the most integrated Mexicans I met: he speaks the language, he understands the customs and norms and overall he has appropriated them. "I feel like a fish in the water here," he stated when asked about his life in the Netherlands. He decided to integrate following the guidelines of Dutch policy and hegemonic political culture. Seemingly while talking to him, he was very glad to have the opportunity to live in the Netherlands and be deeply engaged with Dutch society. Like him, other participants would enjoy some of the benefits of integration and belonging. Accordingly, integration is not always seen as an imposition, even though the nation's institution and actors guide it; integration also implies the subjects' will to change.

### 5.3 Custom-made Mexicanity

"I have created my own space where I feel comfortable, that is where I live. I have it decorated with collages that I made or images from Mexican street artists. They have several things, like skulls with mask<sup>13</sup>, which comfort me. My symbols, what I relate to, I take them with me and I live them." I had asked Paulina, a PhD student who had arrived in the Netherlands three years ago, to describe how she lives her Mexicanity.

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<sup>13</sup> Calaveras, or what is globally known as Mexican Skulls, are a symbol of Mexican culture that relates to the celebration of the Day of the Dead, where family and friends gather to remember their dead. Setting altars with food, as the dead are believed to come on that day to the world of the living.



La Catrina, a drawing by José Guadalupe Posada is a symbolic emblem of the Mexican culture. Image obtained from: <http://www.learner.org/courses/globalart/work/124/index.html>

Participants would often reclaim and reconstruct Mexicanity, in line with their reality. As a consequence, through the fieldwork and my own journey I could not find a consistent understanding of Mexicanity. Participants would express their perceptions and feelings towards what being Mexican meant to them. However, even though there were some common elements amongst them (as those included in chapter 4), I cannot provide a solid description of the Mexican. The latter because national identity as a provider of a sense of belonging is greatly influenced by individuals' social locations, identifications and emotional attachments as well as

ethical and political value systems where they are embedded (Yuval-Davis, 2006: 199). Furthermore, the Netherlands as a space out of the reach of the Mexican hegemonic political culture, provides immigrants with the liberty to reconstruct their own Mexicanity. Hence, Dutch government and society in their effort to impose Dutch values and culture, incentivize Mexican immigrants to self-reflect on their own social locations, personal identifications and emotional attachments, bringing new elements from their current realities to appropriate and reshape their Mexicanity.

Similarly, Dutch society's understanding of the Mexican and our perception of the Dutch is socially constructed. Dutch national identity then becomes an interpretation resulting from the experienced and discursive visualizations Mexican immigrants are exposed to. Just as one of the participants, who wished to remain anonymous as the information provided might raise some concerns in his or her work, stated: "I don't position myself as Mexican, I am positioned there." The interviewees, as well as I, constructed the Dutch identity based on our epistemic and empirical position. As such, Mexican immigrants' integration process will never go completely in line with what the Dutch government understands as Dutch. Simply because immigrants have previous knowledge, lived experiences, citizenships and identities that shape their own definition of Dutch national identity, which might or might not follow that of the government. Consequently, national integration policies' visualization of Dutch culture fails to cope with immigrants' fluid understandings of their own national identities, as well as that of their host countries. Setting a gap between what is asked of the immigrant and what he or she understands. At the same time, Dutch society is constantly shaping and reshaping its own definition of Dutch identity. Resultantly, the integration that this policy preaches is cosmetic, portraying the elements and values the state seeks to find and develop without actually understanding what Dutch society entails.

In the following image I build from the Citizen map in chapter 2 and 3 to magnify one of the political communities. The map displays integration as an uneven process that mainly occurs outside the reach of the state. Immigrants understand and experience Mexicanity and Dutch national identity in a diversity of ways as a result of their daily interactions with other actors. Building a sense of belonging is not only the result of individuals' intersectionality, identities, and attachments, but is also the way their backgrounds and current reali-

ties value these elements (Yuval-Davis, 2006: 203). Accordingly, there is no consistent definition of Mexicanity. As it is the result of a selective process, where immigrants discriminate and discern the elements of the hegemonic understanding of the Mexican and the Dutch, selecting and performing only those elements that make immigrants feel at home. Hence, within Dutch citizenship, Mexicans appropriate their integration process to realize their identities in a variety of degrees and ways.

### Inside a political community

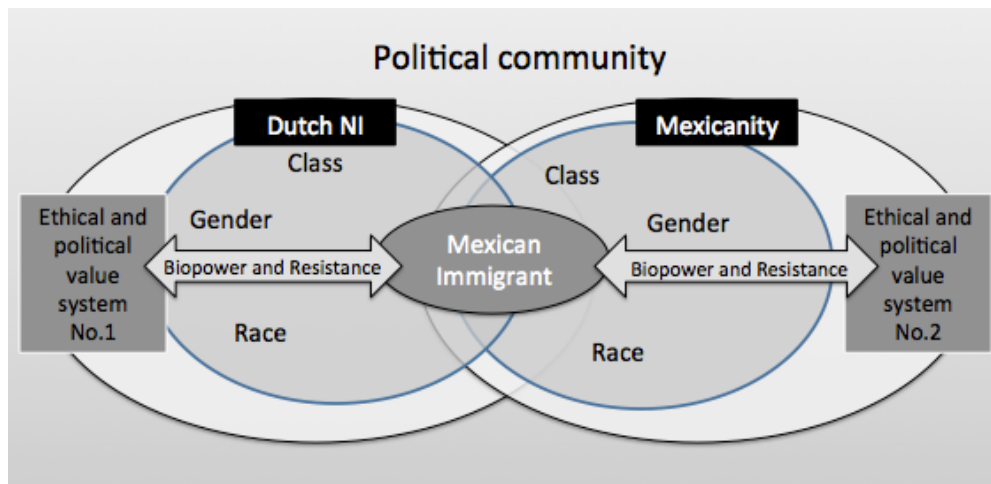


Figure 3 *Drafted by the author*

This approach serves as a tool to situate immigrants and natives in a specific time and place. Helping to understand the interwoven dynamics and mechanism that immigrants face. In so doing, immigrants are recognized as active agents, manoeuvring across the borders of Dutch society attempting to belong. However, this approach does not solve the homogeneity dilemma. Integration policy as a group marker is a tool to homogenize, control and manage society. Accordingly is hardly unlikely to draft a policy that accommodates multiple identities and citizenship. However policymakers must take responsibility for the methods by which they aim to achieve this homogeneity. Given that imposing ideas, values and norms will always entitle a hierarchy of identities and cultures that might lead to social exclusion, inequality, and ethno-racial hatred.

## Chapter 6. Conclusions

“I am not from here but I am here”

*-Anonymous interviewee*

I started this research with the belief that there would be a direct and visible link between Dutch integration policy and Mexican immigrants’ performance of identities. As much as I found significant correlations, the link was not as visible as I predicted. Attainment of Dutch citizenship was not the real obstacle in immigrants’ integration process as our culture is greatly influenced by western values and customs. The real challenge resided in their everyday life struggles that emerged from encounters with other actors such as Dutch society and family-in-law. However, the problem was still present, Dutch integration policy, assures residence but does not ease integration. Hence, I questioned the goal of Dutch government’s integration as the individual responsibility to learn Dutch language and assimilate values and customs “labelled as Dutch, such as tolerance, gender equality and freedom of expression” (Roggeband and Verloo, 2007: 282). In reality, integration is an uneven and multidimensional process, which happens mainly on the ground, upon everyday life experiences. Hence, Dutch citizenship’s term and conditions dismiss immigrants’ identities as well as previous and current citizenships. Given that “people are simultaneously placed in more than one political community” (Yuval-Davis, 2006: 562). Hence, any attempt to homogenize society will be cosmetic, as integration policy will never be able to address all dimensions, loyalties, and actors involved in an immigrant’s integration process.

Accordingly, Mexican immigrants move between boundaries of society appropriating integration to fit their realities. They shape and reshape integration through acts of resistance or compliance, which are subject to their social locations. Hence depending on the political community, Mexicans exercise different degrees and means of power to modify the terms and conditions of their integration, while simultaneously engaging in different citizenships and identities. I question if said shaping and reshaping ever stops. I think of Victor that is completely integrated, of Nicole who refuses to speak Dutch and of Marisela who tries to understand Dutch society. I conclude that this is an ever-changing process as Mexicans are in constant search for their identity just as the Dutch. Thus, integration is an on-going negotiation by which immigrants attempt to build a home in different communities. Hence, citizens who have always been part of the formal spectrum of citizenship might at times exit the moral citizenship deciding upon how when and where they will integrate.

However, immigrants, regardless of their class, understand integration from their epistemic and subjective position. That is, each person in specific contexts, social locations, identifications and emotional attachments, differentiates his or her own culture, interpreting it according to his or her reality. Therefore, both Mexicanity and Dutch national identity are the result of a selective process by which the immigrant discriminates and discerns the elements

of his or her national identity. This, to bring and perform only those that make him or her feel at home while leaving behind those features that he or she dislikes. Hence, even though Dutch integration policy attempts to homogenize society through the virtualization of citizenship in which citizenship becomes a moral goal, the reality is that immigrants regardless of their nationality have a specific gaze constructed by their lived experiences, subjectivities, social locations etc. that delimits the way they perceive and understand values, culture and society. Describing how an immigrant is integrated would only portray one reality that is by no means universal.

Accordingly, my research portrays one particular perspective of the struggles immigrants face to integrate. As such, the knowledge that emerged from the 15 participants does not display all the nuances and challenges that Mexican immigrants face. However, their stories open the floor for further discussions over the social implications of national integration policies. Hence, policymakers and societies need to take responsibility for their methods by which they aim to integrate migrants. As regardless of their class, migrants all over the world, just as the Mexican community in the Netherlands, struggle to fit.

## **Final Reflections**

We were discussing the obstacles of belonging when I asked my last interviewee, “What did you have to leave behind or learn to interact with Dutch society and live in the Netherlands?” The response summarized my own struggle: “I had to leave behind my own prejudices.” Recognition of the other is an important part to overcome the immigrant-native binary. As both imagined communities in one moment or another dehumanized each other. Of course Mexicans’ othering does not have the same implications as the Dutch’s, given the discrepancy of power positions. Nonetheless, these exclusionary practices perpetuate fears, violence and overall ignorance. There will always be a process of subjectification and resistance, which integration policies should not take for granted. Policymakers must acknowledge the limits of their subjectivities and understandings of reality by providing a space within citizenship, where both natives and immigrants might conflate in different dimensions without recurring to ethnic hierarchies. To do so, integration must be understood as a multi-dimensional and complex process, which involves several actors subject to specific social location, emotional attachments and, ethical and political value systems. If taken for granted policy will continue the perpetuation of social exclusion, inequality and racism. Policy not only has to give a legitimate face to the migrant but also to the native, if not, the host culture also falls victim to its own homogenization.

Overall, natives and immigrants have to acknowledge their role and responsibilities in the matter. It took me some time to understand this—partly because of interviewing only Mexicans. There were occasions during the research where I felt disempowered. I closely identified with the participants real-

ities as I was also undergoing my own integration process, which was heightened by my dialogues with these immigrants. I felt antipathy towards the Netherlands, its government and society; how they imposed identities, norms and values over others. I saw the nation with a gaze constructed by the struggles of the participants. And as such, I executed the same exclusionary practices I was attempting to challenge. However, I also met other immigrants and Dutch who would promote spaces to understand what both Dutch and Mexican society entitled. If integration is grounded, so is change, and both parties must promote spaces for identities to converge not clash.

This research aimed to display the complex interwoven mechanisms involved in immigrants' integration process. I wanted to demystify the migrant as an entity that must be educated and control for the sake of the host country. Immigrants have agency in their everyday integration process. As such, integration is not only the result of negotiations between the migrant and the state. Other actors and material or subjective elements influence their integration experiences. As such, further research is needed to find other ways of interaction. Especially in regards to initiatives where host societies are brought into the stage assuming their role as agents. Governments must engage their societies in the integration process. Citizens should also be held accountable for the creation of more human and equal environments for immigrants to develop.



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## Appendix. List of participants

Name	Years in The Netherlands	Occupation	Reason to immigrate	Stage in Dutch citizenship attainment	Location	Date
<b>Marisela</b>	7 years	Scholar	Romantic reasons <sup>14</sup>	Recently granted	Rotterdam	12/May/2015
<b>Martha</b>	12 years	Intercultural consultant	Romantic reasons	Granted	Ede	13/Jun/2015
<b>Miroslava</b>	5 years	Waitress	Romantic reasons	Few exams pending	The Hague	04/Jul/2015
<b>Arlette</b>	3 years	Masters candidate/Barista	Romantic reasons	Granted	Amsterdam	5/Jul/2015
<b>Monica</b>	12 years	Home labour	Romantic Reasons	Granted	Amesfoort	06/Jul/2015
<b>Francisco</b>	8 years	Academic liaisons between the Netherlands and Latin America	Family reunion	Granted	Nijmegen (Skype)	07/Jul/2015
<b>Paulina</b>	3 years	PhD candidate	Studies	PhD student	Middelburg	10/Jul/2015
<b>José</b>	9 years	Chef in a restaurant	Romantic Reasons	One exam pending	Amsterdam	13/Jul/2015
<b>Daniel</b>	10 years	Owner of a Mexican restaurant	Mixture of business and romantic reasons	Granted	The Hague	23/Jul/2015
<b>Victor</b>	10 years	Mechatronic engineer in a MNC <sup>15</sup>	Business	Granted	Nijmegen (Skype)	24/Jul/2015
<b>Nicole (changed name)</b>	4 years	Customers service	Romantic reasons	Granted	Rotterdam (Skype)	15/Aug/2015
<b>Adriana</b>	More	PhD	Career	Highly	The Hague	25/Aug/2015

<sup>14</sup> Individuals who settled in the Netherlands to join a their husband/wife or a partner.

<sup>15</sup> MNC: Multinational corporation

	than 1 year	Candidate and employee at the International Criminal Court		Skilled migrant		
<b>Cynthia</b>	More than 7 years	Layer at the International Criminal Court	Career	Highly Skilled migrant	The Hague	28/Aug/2015
<b>Rolando</b>	8 years	Scholar	Career and family	Granted	The Hague	9/Sep/2015
<b>Anonymous</b>	The interviewee considered that the information provided might raise some concerns in his or her work environment.					
<b>Guadalupe</b>	More than 30 years	Librarian	Romantic reasons	Granted	The Hague	28/Sep/2015