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The Presence of Othering, Colour-blind Racism, and Whiteness in Public Discourse Surrounding Asylum Seekers

A Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

Asylum seekers have been part of the Dutch migration debate for decades. In 2015, newspapers spoke of a 'refugee crisis'. In 2022, in addition to non-European asylum seekers, many Ukrainian refugees came to the Netherlands. The Dutch asylum system could not cope with the influx of all these refugees, and the newspapers soon spoke of an 'asylum crisis'. The migration debate in the Netherlands is mostly criticised in the literature in terms of intolerance, human rights violations and national self-interest. An underexposed theme in the migration debate is racism. This is because the Netherlands is a colour-blind nation, where *whiteness* predominates. This makes racism a non-existent phenomenon in the eyes of white Dutch people, while the 'other', who does not conform to the Dutch self-image, is disadvantaged based on racial characteristics. This study examines whether *othering*, *colour-blind racism* and *whiteness* are present in the public discourse surrounding asylum seekers. In doing so, this research builds on Gloria Wekker's previously published work *'White Innocence'*. Through critical discourse analysis, 22 newspaper articles are analysed, and an attempt is made to make the invisible systems of *othering, colour-blind racism* and *whiteness* visible.

Keywords: Asylum seekers, othering, colour-blind racism, whiteness, Critical discourse analysis

1. Introduction

After giving 449 medical and 203 psychological consultations in the second half of 2022, Médecins Sans Frontières has stopped providing aid to asylum seekers in Ter Apel. It was the first time the organisation had to provide assistance on Dutch soil in its 50 years of existence. Asylum seekers from Syria, Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Somalia, Eritrea and West Africa were treated (Médecins Sans Frontières, 2022). The most common complaints were skin infections due to lack of hygiene and neglected wounds. In addition, many asylum seekers had mental complaints such as depression, psychosis, anxiety and panic attacks (Médecins Sans Frontières, 2022). Many of these asylum seekers had to sleep outside because there were no shelters available (NOS, 2022). In contrast, there were emergency shelters directly available for Ukrainian refugees who had fled to the Netherlands as a result of the Russian invasion that started on January 24th, 2022. The State Secretary for Justice and Security even intended to permit municipalities to house Ukrainian refugees, who are automatically granted refugee status, but not non-European asylum seekers. The Human Rights Board (*College voor de Rechten van de Mens*) reminded the government that all refugees are entitled to reception and that discrimination based on origin is unacceptable (Ubbens, 2022).

Dutch newspapers spoke of an *"asylum crisis"* (König, 2022, p.6), just as they spoke of a *"refugee crisis"* (Chouliarak et al., 2017, p.2) in 2015, when a record number of asylum seekers came to the Netherlands. Asylum seekers have been a major topic in the public debate on migration since the 1990s. In addition to media coverage, there has been a lot of academic research on the migration debate. In general, there is a consensus in the academic literature about a hardening of the migration debate in recent decades. Lucassen and Lucassen (2015) argue that the deaths of Pim Fortuyn and van Gogh and 9/11 put an end to Dutch tolerance and the political correctness that existed due to guilt over the deportation of Jews and the war crimes that the Netherlands had committed during the decolonization of Indonesia. The events at the turn of the century fuelled an anti-immigration sentiment among both right-wing and left-wing political parties, which strongly influenced the migration debate and Dutch asylum policy.

Jansen et al. (2018) argue that national interests have caused a hardening of the migration debate. Large refugee flows are said to compromise state sovereignty and national interests (Geuijen, 2004; Böcker & Havinga, 2011). Oomen (2013) describes the paradox that has emerged in the migration debate in terms of human rights. On the one hand, the Netherlands has arrogated to itself the status of a human rights protector, and human rights are actively promoted abroad by the government. On the other hand, the human rights situation of asylum

seekers in the Netherlands is criticized by the media and international institutions, and the government ignores this criticism (Oomen, 2013).

The hardening of the public debate surrounding asylum seekers is thus criticised mainly in terms of intolerance, self-interest and human rights. An underexposed topic in the public debate surrounding asylum seekers in the Netherlands is racism. This is because racism is a barely discussed topic in Dutch society. 'Race' and 'racism' are terms that do not exist in the Netherlands. Policymakers and scholars prefer the term 'ethnicity,' which mainly refers to the cultural characteristics of population groups. This ignores the hierarchical connotation that race carries within Dutch society (Weiner, 2014). In addition, white Dutch people see themselves as *"a tolerant, small, and just ethical nation, colour-blind and free of racism and that foregrounds being a victim rather than a perpetrator of (inter)national violence"* (Wekker, 2018, p.39). Colour-blind here refers to not acknowledging colour. This would mean that white Dutch people claim to not make choices based on racial differences. In reality, such distinctions do occur (Weiner, 2014). Discrimination in the housing market and the labour market still takes place to this day. Bonilla-Silva (2018) introduced the concept of *colour-blind racism* to describe new forms of racism that occurred in the US. This is an ideology that defines how white people explain racial inequality without sounding racist.

The dominant self-image in the Netherlands is one of *whiteness* and being Christian (Wekker, 2018, p.7). Population groups that do not conform to this image must integrate and assimilate as quickly as possible (Wekker, 2018). *Whiteness* creates a monoculture in which the culture, ideas, and values of white Dutch people are seen as superior (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Christianity is an important part of this monoculture. People who adhere to another religion are expected to assimilate as soon as possible. White Dutch people do not see *whiteness* as a racial position within society. This makes it an invisible norm to which ethnic/racial minorities are subjected. (Wekker, 2018).

Colour-blind racism and *whiteness* reinforce the invisibility of racism in the Netherlands, but at the same time, they are ubiquitous. Both concepts are related to processes of *othering*. Minorities in Dutch society are continuously contrasted with the dominant Dutch self-image (Wekker, 2018). This thesis examines how the invisible systems of *othering, colour-blind racism* and *whiteness* are present in the public debate surrounding asylum seekers. The research question is therefore formulated as follows: *How are invisible systems of othering, colour-blind racism, and whiteness present in public discourse surrounding asylum seekers between 2022-2023?* This is a relevant study because little research has been done on *colour-blind racism*, *whiteness,* and racism in general in a Dutch context. The research complements

the work of Gloria Wekker (2018). In her book *'White Innocence',* she argues that the dominant discourse in the Netherlands is strongly influenced by *colour-blind racism* and *whiteness*. However, she stated that little research has been done on the role of these concepts in Western societies. More research is needed to make intra-European comparisons. By investigating *colour-blind racism* and *whiteness* in a different context, this study fits well within the existing literature. In addition, this research fits well within the academic migration debate. As argued earlier, the role of racism is underexposed in this debate.

This study is done through critical discourse analysis (CDA*). "One of the main tenets of CDA is to make the invisible visible"* (Amalsaleh, 2010). CDA seeks to comprehend and address social issues by critically analysing what is included or excluded in texts and what is 'perspectivised' through linguistic processes (Cooper et al., 2010, p.3). Through this method, this research seeks to make the invisible systems of *othering, colour-blind racism* and *whiteness* visible in the public discourse surrounding asylum seekers. The data consists of newspaper articles published between 2022-2023. In the second chapter, the concepts of *othering, colour-blind racism* and *whiteness* are defined. The third chapter further explains the methodology. In the fourth chapter, the results will be presented, followed by a conclusion in the fifth chapter.

2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter defines the concepts of *othering, colour-blind racism* and *whiteness.* Analysing these concepts creates a framework that provides an overview and consistency in this research.

2.1. Othering

In order to explore how invisible and internalized systems and conceptions such as *colour-blind racism* and *whiteness* take shape in Dutch society in relation to asylum policies, it is important to define the concept of *othering. Othering* can be defined as "*a phenomenon in which some individuals or groups are defined and labelled as not fitting in within the norms of a social group. It is an effect that influences how people perceive and treat those who are viewed as being part of the in-group versus those who are seen as being part of the out-group*" (Cherry, 2023, Race and Identity). In this process, a dominant group and several minority groups emerge. When a dominant group within society feels threatened by minority groups, this can affect its treatment of these groups. Minority groups can be seen as a threat to the maintenance of existing cultural values and norms and access to social services (Scheepers, Gijsberts, & Coenders, 2002; Van Londen, Coenders, & Scheepers, 2010). *Othering* is a tool that a dominant political group within society can use to disadvantage or exclude marginalized and subordinated groups that pose a threat (Kagedan, 2020). Oppositions between the dominant group and minority groups are particularly emphasized at times of crisis and influence policies and institutions (Laffan, 2016).

Exclusion takes place on the basis of identity. As a dominant group in society develops a shared identity, minority groups are created in society that differ from the dominant group and do not fit this identity (Paré, 2022). The identity of the dominant group creates a social norm (Wekker, 2018) consisting of different characteristics. Processes of *othering* can result in the exclusion of minority groups that differ from the dominant group based on differences in culture, gender, ethnicity, race, nationality, language, religion, skin colour, sexual orientation, political beliefs, or socioeconomic background (Moritz, 2020). The identity characteristics of the dominant group are intertwined with mainstream discourse, policies, and institutions. This reinforces the hostility that arises towards minorities in society, which can result in discriminatory practices (Todres, 2009). This is often accompanied by the dehumanization and negative stereotyping of minority groups. The deviant identity characteristics of subordinate minority groups are rationalized by the dominant group in order to legitimize and justify the

inhumane treatment of these groups (Moritz, 2020). This creates a hierarchical division that places minority groups outside society and subordinates them to assimilation and integration. At the same time, these groups are blamed for lacking the qualities to integrate and assimilate (Guillem, 2018).

2.2.　Colour-blind racism

During the transatlantic slave trade and the colonial past, new ideas about racial hierarchy emerged in the Western world (McKay et al., 2017). To justify the slave trade, enslaved Africans were portrayed as primitive beasts who had to be converted to Christianity in order to teach them the customs of the civilized world. Muslims and other non-Christian populations were also considered inferior and were dehumanised by the European powers. Over time, non-European populations were seen as inferior and white Europeans perceived themselves as the superior population. After 1700, science was used to find explanations for the differences between the supposed 'biological racial differences'. This also allowed Europe to scientifically substantiate institutionalised racial inequality (McKay et al., 2017).

Europe's (and the Netherlands') colonial past still plays a role in contemporary thinking about racial inequality (Wekker, 2018), but takes new forms (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). White Dutch people do not see racism as causing social inequality. Whites who do not see colour believe that everyone has equal opportunities. This 'colour blindness' makes it impossible to overlook historical causes of racial inequality, and its presence in contemporary society (Cummins, 2017). The ideology that describes how white people defend current racial inequalities is defined by Bonilla-Silva (2018) as *colour-blind racism*. This racial ideology consists of four frames used by white people to explain certain phenomena related to racial inequality without attaching racial aspects to them. These frames do not mention race as an explanation for social inequality. The impact that Western countries have made in spreading racial theories is disregarded in this way and is and shows how white people view themselves (El-Tayeb, 2011). The four frames will be briefly explained below. The frames were formed in an American context, but are useful in this study because the Netherlands is described in the literature as a colour-blind country (Weiner, 2014; Wekker, 2018; Rose, 2022). The four frames allow for a better understanding and exploration of how *colour-blind racism* manifests itself within the context of this research.

Abstract Liberalism

"The frame of abstract liberalism involves using ideas associated with political liberalism (equal opportunity, the idea that force should not be used to achieve social policy) and economic liberalism (choice, individualism) in an abstract manner" (Bonilla-Silva, 2018, p.76). Viewing race-related phenomena from a liberalist perspective allows white people to come across as moral and reasonable. Framing racial problems from the liberal perspective undermines practical approaches to racial inequality (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). An example of this way of thinking: if everyone has equal opportunities, why is positive discrimination needed in the labour market?

Naturalization

"Naturalisation is a frame that allows whites to explain away racial phenomena by suggesting they are natural occurrences" (Bonilla-Silva, 2018, p.76). Racial inequalities are framed by white people as a natural process. Naturalization is used to reinforce the idea of nonracialism. The preferences of racial populations would stem from a biological need (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). Segregation, for example, is framed as a natural process. Black people simply prefer to live together in the same neighbourhood, separated from white people.

Cultural racism

"Cultural racism is a frame that relies on culturally based arguments to explain the standing of minorities in society" (Bonilla-Silva, 2018, p.76). In the colonial past, the biological superiority of white Europeans and Americans was the cause behind the exclusion of minorities. These biological aspects have been replaced by cultural aspects, which maintain racial hierarchies. For example, during slavery, racial minorities were seen as inferior due to their racial and cultural background (Bonilla-Silva, 2018).

Minimisation of racism

"Minimisation of racism is a frame that suggests discrimination is no longer a factor affecting minorities' life chances" (Bonilla-Silva, 2018, p.77). This allows white people to view racist phenomena as non-racist. White people can distort their racist intentions, or accuse minorities of being oversensitive or playing the 'race card' (Bonilla-Silva, 2018).

2.3. Whiteness

The identity of the dominant group within society influences the way minority groups are viewed. In the Netherlands, the dominant group consists of white people. The Dutch self-image, or rather the Dutch identity, is strongly influenced by *whiteness* (Wekker, 2018). Hall (1992, p. 6) defines *whiteness* as *"a set of locations that are historically, socially, politically, and culturally produced, and, furthermore, are intrinsically linked to unfolding relations of domination." Whiteness* privileges white people by shaping institutional structures, policies, and political processes. *Whiteness* and white superiority underpin political institutions that guarantee the sovereignty of Western states (Searle & Murle, 2018). *Whiteness* creates a monoculture in which the culture, ideas, and values of white people are seen as superior (Bonilla-Silva, 2006).

In Europe, *whiteness* creates a practical norm that encourages racial discrimination against minorities who are not racialized as white. This results in exclusionary processes, dehumanization, human rights violations, violence, and limited access to obtaining citizenship. *European whiteness* maintains a racial hierarchy where 'being white' is the desired norm (Essed et al., 2019). As a result, Western societies internalize negative conceptions of non-Western populations as a sign of their dominance and superiority (Said, 1978, p.3-4). European states created a common identity that was based on Christian traditions and the idea that European states should set a good example for the world. This gave Europe a sense of (moral) superiority. Other countries could take an example from the European identity (Paré, 2022, p.44-45).

In Dutch practice, *whiteness* ensures that white Dutch people (while the population composition of the Netherlands is very diverse) occupy a dominant position within society. They perceive the Netherlands as a racism-free, tolerant, ethical, and hospitable country. This self-image gives white Dutch people a sense of superiority that justifies the position they hold within society (Wekker, 2018). *Whiteness* is not seen as a racialized position within Dutch society because it has been the norm and taken for granted for so long. It has been integrated into society in such a way that it has become an invisible phenomenon. At the same time, it is a ubiquitous system that perpetuates social inequality by privileging white Dutch people and putting other racial groups at a disadvantage (Cole, 2019). Thus, although white Dutch people do not talk about 'race', they do make distinctions based on the racial characteristics of other population groups. The population of the Netherlands consists of a composition of multiple racial/ethnic groups, but the dominant representation of 'Dutchness' is one of white, Christian, or secular (Wekker, 2018, p.7). Population groups that do not meet this standard must assimilate or be excluded (Essed, 1994).

This invisibility of the concept of race stems from the Netherlands' memory of the Holocaust. Race is mainly associated with the persecution of Jews during World War II, and not with what happened in the colonies at the time (Van der Horst, 2004). It is noteworthy that racial differences are not cited as a cause of social inequality in contemporary society. The impact that Western countries made in the past with the spread of racial theories is thus disregarded and says something about Europe's self-image (El-Tayeb, 2011). Wekker (2018) rightly argues that the Netherlands' colonial past plays an important role in creating contemporary racial relations. The invisibility of race in Dutch society has meant that little research has been done on the role of *whiteness* in Western societies. This would allow for intra-European comparisons. It is possible that *whiteness* plays a similar role in other Western countries with a colonial past (Wekker, 2018; Weiner, 2014).

3. Methodology

The aim of this research is to reveal 'invisibilities' in public discourse surrounding asylum seekers. Critical discourse analysis could be an appropriate method to achieve this goal. CDA aims to make visible the invisible connections between things. It examines structural power relations, forms of domination, and discrimination through the use of language. This makes forms of social inequality visible. Language is a means of domination and language is a tool of power (Wodak & Meyer, 2001). Fairclough (1992) argues that *"the relationships between discoursive, social and cultural change are typically not transparent for all the people involved"* (Fairclough, 1992, p.9). According to him, this means that discourses remain largely hidden. To reveal a discourse, a researcher must be critical. *"We cannot, from within the discourse's self-contained universeof representation, describe it"* (Fairclough, 1992, p.9). Fairclough and Wodak (1997) argue that the use of CDA is necessary to expose power relations that involve racism in news articles.

Data

To investigate whether *othering, colour-blind racism* and *whiteness* are present in public discourse surrounding asylum seekers, I use newspaper articles published between 2022-2023. Dutch newspapers write a lot about asylum seekers and related topics. In addition, Dutch newspapers act as a discussion platform where opinions and views on asylum seekers are shared. Therefore, newspapers form the public discourse surrounding asylum seekers. 2022-2023 is an interesting and relevant research period because many Ukrainian refugees came to the Netherlands in addition to non-European asylum seekers. This triggered the 'asylum crisis' (Rijksoverheid, s.d.). Moreover, this study should take place in a relatively short period of time. A longer research period would require more data that cannot be analysed in the time frame of this study. A total of 22 newspaper articles are analysed. Nexus Uni is a database that has the most recent newspaper reports and has extensive search functions to perform targeted searches. Therefore, Nexis Uni has been used for data collection. The newspaper articles were selected using the search terms 'asylum policy Netherlands', 'asylum seekers', and 'reception.' To structure and delineate my data collection, I used the five most-read and largest newspapers in the Netherlands (*De Telegraaf, Algemeen Dagblad, De Volkskrant, NRC Handelsblad*, and *Trouw*). This search yielded not only news items but also opinion pieces. A total of 12 opinion pieces and 10 news articles were selected.

Limitations

Researchers using CDA are quick to see themselves as omniscient and moral judges. It is important to reflect on one's own cultural identity, interests, and ideologies (Gavriely-Nuri, 2018). Researchers using CDA should be aware that multiple sources are highlighting the same topic. These alternative sources may have been produced in a different context from the previously consulted source (Bartlett, 2018). Another limitation is the reliability of Nexis Uni. The database is constantly updated. As a result, new articles are added and other articles disappear. As a result, researchers will not get the same search results at all times while the search terms have remained the same (Snider & Janda, 1998). Storing digitally acquired news articles externally is therefore important.

Positionality

It is important to reflect on the position you take in your own research. It is important to realize that I base my analyses on certain values and norms. My bias is not necessarily based on truth (Wodak & Meyer, 2001). I am writing this study because I feel it is important to bring attention to racism and related issues. This does not prevent me from conducting my research as objectively as possible. I am a white man who benefits from his racial position in Dutch society. I am researching a system of which I am a part. I have never experienced racism, nor will I ever know what it feels like. Because of this, I may not fully grasp the full extent of the invisible systems and beliefs I am researching. In the first instance, I am conducting research from a white perspective and not from the group potentially affected by racism (in this case, asylum seekers). Nor do I want to speak for them, nor will I in this research.

4. Results

For this study, 22 newspaper articles (12 opinion pieces and 10 news items) related to the *"asylum crisis"* (De Telegraaf, 2022a, p.2; De Telegraaf, 2022b, p.2; NRC, 2022, p.17) were analysed. This analysis shows that there is relatively little objective news published on the asylum crisis. Both the news articles and the opinion pieces focus primarily on the opinions of experts, politicians, concerned organisations, and the Dutch population. These public actors have a predominantly critical view of the government's asylum policy. Key themes include: government discrimination, crisis caused by government (intervention), pursuing a failing asylum policy, possible solutions to the asylum crisis, and political self-interest. There is also a lot of focus on municipalities in the newspaper articles. Although it is mentioned in the articles that many municipalities are critical of the Dutch asylum policy, they are still seen as part of the Dutch government by experts and authors of the newspaper reports. However, many municipalities feel bypassed by the government because it would not fulfil its agreements with regard to the reception of asylum seekers.

The discussion surrounding asylum reaches further than the asylum policy in the Netherlands. The discussions in newspapers related to asylum seekers is broad as it also has a European component. The *"hardening"* (Baneke, 2022, p.6-7; Walters, 2023, p1-4) of the migration debate is much discussed on a European level and the asylum policies of countries outside the European Union (EU) are highlighted because they may contain aspects that could become part of Dutch asylum policy. Throughout the newspaper articles, there is a lot of focus on the *"high influx"* (Van Mersbergen, 2022, p.4-5; De Telegraaf, 2022a, p.2; Du Pre, 2022, p.8) of asylum seekers into Europe and the Netherlands. Racism is a relatively small topic in the discussion on asylum seekers and is mainly mentioned when discussing the differential treatment of Ukrainian refugees compared to non-European asylum seekers. The analysis will show how invisible concepts such as *othering, colour-blind racism,* and *whiteness* are present in the public discourse around asylum seekers.

4.1.   The Presence of Othering

The analysis depicts that several processes of *othering* are part of the public discourse on asylum seekers. An example is the coverage of Ukrainian refugees. Both the opinion pieces and news articles consistently talk about *"Ukrainian refugees"* (Reijmer & Venneman, 2023, p.6-7; Meijer, 2023, p.9; Candel & Ceelen, 2023, p.1-2; Ezzeroili & Damen, 2022, p.2-3) when referring to people who fled to the Netherlands as a result of the war in Ukraine. Non-European refugees are described a lot more often as *"asylum seekers"* (De Telegraaf, 2022a, p.2; De Telegraaf, 2022b, p.2; Meijer, 2022, p.6-7; Keukenkamp, 2022, p.8; Baneke, 2022, p.6-7). A refugee is a person who forcibly flees his or her country because of war, violence, or persecution without prior warning. They cannot return home until the conditions in the country of origin are safe. An asylum seeker is someone on the run seeking international protection but whose claim to refugee status has not yet been determined (Amnesty International, 2023). This suggests that non-European asylum seekers have not necessarily fled their country for legitimate reasons.

Newspaper articles do note that there is a difference in the perception of Ukrainian and non-European refugees and that Ukrainian refugees are treated differently (Candel & Ceelen, 2023, p.1-2; Meijer, 2022, p.6-7; Zuidervaart, 2022, p.22-23; Bilic, 2022, p.18; Ezzeroili & Damen, 2022, p.2-3). The Dutch government makes an extra effort for Ukrainian refugees to find proper housing and creates the necessary reception location for them, while asylum seekers in Ter Apel have to sleep outside due to a shortage of places in reception centres. This is not considered major issue. Ukrainian refugees simply have a different legal status (Meijer, 2022, p.6-7; Ezzeroili & Damen, 2022, p.2-3). In one of the opinion pieces analysed, entitled *'Taking in Ukrainian refugees is not racist',* the opinions of experts and politicians who do find the unequal treatment of non-European asylum seekers compared to Ukrainian refugees problematic are explained and criticised by the author.

"What the question is deeply about: is it wrong and reprehensible to care more about people who are close to you – geographically, linguistically, culturally, religiously – than about people with whom you feel less kinship? Yes, people like Leo Lucassen apparently think so. They employ a morality that is abstract and theoretical, but by no means human" (Bilic, 2022, p.18).

The author of this column unwittingly exposes the essence of *othering*. People who are more like the Dutch by geographical proximity, language spoken and religious- and cultural background are treated differently from people who seem less like the Dutch. Ukrainians are perceived as people who resemble the Dutch, while non-European refugees are perceived as

distant and less similar to the Dutch. According to Paré (2022), the exclusion of minority groups is based on the difference in characteristics. According to the author of this article, the Ukrainian identity fits with the Dutch identity. As a result, they are included in Dutch society, while refugees who fled countries that lie outside of Europe are not helped in the same way. Non-European refugees do not possess the same identity characteristics as the dominant 'in-group' in Dutch society and are seen as different, and not fitting into society, and thus become part of the excluded 'out-group' (Cherry, 2023). In this way, the writer of this article justifies the different treatment of Ukrainian refugees. He continues with labelling the mindset of people who perceive unequal treatment as objectionable, morally abstract and inhumane. This means that people who stand up for Ukrainians are seen as humane in the eyes of the author.

Oppositions between the dominant group and minority groups are particularly emphasized at times of crisis and influence policies and institutions (Laffan, 2016). News articles consistently refer to a *"crisis"* (Reijmer & Venneman, 2023, p.6-7; Zuidervaart, 2022, p.22-23; NRC, 2022, p.17; Stronks, 2022, p.18) exclusively concerning non-European asylum seekers. Ukrainian refugees are not mentioned as a cause of the crisis. This type of reporting fuels the perception that the Netherlands is in a crisis which it cannot get out of due to the high influx of asylum seekers (De Telegraaf, 2022a, p.2; Du Pre, 2022, p.8; De Telegraaf, 2022b, p.2; Kuiper & Van Der Poel, 2023, p.1-2; Meijer, 2023, p.9). Reporters write of an *"untenable situation"* (De Telegraaf, 2022a, p.2; NRC, 2022, p.17; Baneke, 2022, p.6-7) causing much *"chaos"* (Meijer & Venneman, 2023, p.6-7; NRC, 2022, p.17). The government is unable to arrange accommodation for everyone due to the arrival of asylum seekers. As a result, asylum seekers who applied at Ter Apel had to sleep outside. It is repeatedly stressed that there is a shortage of reception locations (Reijmer & Venneman, 2023, p.6-7; Meijer, 2022, p.6-7; De Bruijn & Hoogerheijde, 2023, p.24).

How problematic the shortage is, is regularly mentioned in news reports with figures. The article mentioned that the Netherlands should have 70,000 beds by the end of 2022. This meant a shortage of 14,000 beds (Meijer & Venneman, 2023, p.6-7). An image is created which depicts the Netherlands as a country that cannot cope with the high influx of asylum seekers. On top of this, there is a lot of coverage in the news about the high admission rate of asylum seekers in the Netherlands. According to one news article, 85% of asylum seekers who apply are admitted to the Netherlands. This was only 49% five years ago. 99% of the requests from Turkey, Afghanistan and Yemen are granted, and the percentage for Syrians is 96%. The newspaper articles also cite figures from surrounding countries (Meijer, 2023, p.9). This gives readers the idea that the Netherlands has an exceptionally high admission rate, while it has no

control over the influx of asylum seekers at all which creates a lot of negative coverage of asylum seekers as the quote below shows.

"And then there is the pull factor. Asylum seekers may be more likely to choose the Netherlands as their final destination if they hear that in addition to regular reception, pocket money, the promised house, benefits and a bonus await if the asylum application is not processed in time" (De Telegraaf, 2022b, p.2).

This quote comes from a news article called *"headaches"*. It is claimed here that the Netherlands has a pull factor in that its asylum policy benefits asylum seekers even if their applications are not processed on time. This creates the idea that the Netherlands attracts extra large numbers of unwanted asylum seekers who cost the Netherlands a lot of material provisions. Consequently, newspapers write that the attractive asylum policy attracts *"fortune seekers"* (De Telegraaf, 2022a, p.2; De Telegraaf, 2022b, p.2; Baneke, 2022, p.6-7) who come to take advantage of the Netherlands. Another term that recurs more often in news articles is *"veiligelanders"* (Meijer, 2022, p.6-7; Kuiper & Van Der Poel, 2023, p.1-2). *Veiligelanders* are asylum seekers who have come to the Netherlands to seek asylum from a country defined by the Netherlands as safe. However, newspapers portray this group negatively. They are primarily men from Tunisia and Morocco and are said to have no chance of a residence permit and only cause nuisance (Meijer, 2022, p.6-7; Kuiper & Van Der Poel, 2023, p.1-2).

Even the other asylum seekers label them as *"thieves"* (Meijer, 2022, p.6-7). However, a brief interview with the Refugee Council reveals that a total of only 1,000 asylum seekers fall under this category (Meijer, 2022, p.6-7). Only one news article has nuanced the status of this group of asylum seekers by quoting Peter Rodrigues, a professor of migration law at Leiden University. He argued that asylum seekers coming from a safe country are not necessarily safe (Kuiper & Van Der Poel, 2023, p.1-2). Nevertheless, the perception that there is a large group of asylum seekers causing nuisance prevails. In the newspapers, the attention centres much on the role of municipalities in the asylum crisis. Many municipalities only selectively take in refugees because they fear that they will cause a nuisance.

"Municipalities, in return for their willingness to temporarily accommodate asylum seekers, impose requirements on the nationality, age and sex of asylum seekers. No men, but women and children; not from one country but from another, and preferably Christian but not Muslim" (Grütters, 2023, p.18).

This quote is from an opinion piece, called *'À la carte asiel is pure discriminatie'*, that criticises the discriminatory attitude of municipalities towards asylum seekers. The fear of nuisance trumps the willingness to receive asylum seekers. In addition, municipalities deliberately choose to receive asylum seekers whom seem a better fit for them (Grütters, 2023, p.18; Keukenkamp, 2022, p.8; Trouw, 2022, p.16; Kuiper & Van Der Poel, 2023, p.1-2). The focus on the asylum crisis and the nuisance caused by *veiligelanders* creates negative stereotyping of asylum seekers, resulting in discrim,inatory practices by municipalities (Todres, 2009). By portraying asylum seekers as a nuisance, municipalities rationalise selective reception despite being prohibited from doing so. In addition, the arrival of asylum seekers from safe countries causes a lot of controversy among the population.

There has been a particular focus in the newspapers on the municipality of Albergen, because, during the summer of 2022, it refused to accept asylum seekers who did not meet the selective requirements set by the municipality. Albergen only wanted to shelter a small number of asylum seekers who were not from safe countries because it was already accommodating Ukrainian refugees. Two opinion pieces described how the population started to protest against the arrival of the asylum seekers. Eggs and fireworks were thrown at the asylum seekers (Keukenkamp, 2022, p.8; Baneke, 2022, p.6-7). This was not condemned, but further rationalised by calling the residents' resistance *"humane"* and the situation *"complex"* (Van Mersbergen, 2022, p.4-5; Keukenkamp, 2022, p.8). Municipalities were also portrayed as victims of a failing asylum policy because they were often bypassed by the national government, which allegedly failed to honour its agreements (Keukenkamp, 2022, p.8; Reijmer & Venneman, 2022, p.6-7; Ezzeroili & Damen, 2022, p.2-3). This created discontent among the municipalities as it makes them come across as powerless.

Asylum seekers are oftentimes dehumanised in Dutch newspapers. Generally, the idea that non-European asylum seekers are the cause of the asylum crisis prevails. Furthermore, the high influx described in newspapers ensures that the Netherlands is in a constant crisis. Ukrainian refugees are not seen as part of this crisis. The treatment non-European asylum seekers received in the Netherlands is rationalised by the newspapers by portraying the asylum seekers as profiteers of a soft asylum policy, a nuisance, and by showing sympathy for the unwillingness of municipalities to accommodate asylum seekers. These are no longer people fleeing an unsafe situation in their home country, but a burden that the Netherlands has failed to address.

4.2.   The Presence of Colour-blind Racism

This research uses the four frames of *colour-blind racism* described by Bonilla-Silva (2018). The analysis of newspaper articles shows that there are indeed signs of *colour-blind racism* in the discourse surrounding asylum seekers in the Netherlands. The four frames will be explained in more detail below.

Abstract Liberalism

Newspaper articles often highlight that municipalities provide selective reception to asylum seekers. Asylum seekers are selected on the basis of gender, nationality and religion, as discussed earlier in this chapter. There are municipalities that refuse to accept asylum seekers by using these criteria in their argumentation. In the newspaper articles, spokespeople from a number of municipalities speak out and try to justify the selective reception or refusal of asylum seekers. As mentioned earlier, municipalities selectively receive asylum seekers due to the fear of them becoming a nuisance (Grütters, 2023, p.18; Keukenkamp, 2022, p.8; Trouw, 2022, p.16; Kuiper & Van Der Poel, 2023, p.1-2). There are also municipalities that claim they have no place to accommodate asylum seekers and refuse to create reception locations (Grütters, 2023, p.18; Keukenkamp, 2022, p.8; Reijmer & Venneman, 2023, p.6-7; Van Heerde, 2023, p.9).

Some municipalities do not want to provide shelter because the national government does not provide structural shelter and does not honour its agreements with municipalities. As a result, municipalities have to accommodate asylum seekers for a longer period of time than they agreed to. This causes a lot of discontent among municipalities (Keukenkamp, 2022, p.8; Reijmer & Venneman, 2022, p.6-7; Ezzeroili & Damen, 2022, p.2-3). However, municipalities in the Netherlands cannot be forced to accommodate asylum seekers (Grütters, 2023, p.18). The government prefers municipalities to take care of asylum seekers on a voluntary basis. The State Secretary for Justice and Security said the following about this: *"Reception coercion is a defeat and a last resort"* (Ezzeroili & Damen, 2022, p.2-3). The news article argues that the secretary of state's *"liberal worldview"* (Ezzeroili & Damen, 2022, p. 2-3) stands in the way of the reception of asylum seekers. One of the opinion pieces makes a statement about a *"neoliberal trend"* (Baneke, 2022, p.6-7) arguing that it is creating an anti-refugee sentiment. Thus, in the newspaper articles, municipalities give several reasons why they feel they do not need to accommodate asylum seekers. Simultaneously, the government assumes that the municipalities will take care of the reception of asylum seekers without further government interference, and does not want to intervene. Bonilla-Silva (2018) argues that the frame of *abstract liberalism* consists of the use of liberal conceptions (little government interference, individualism,

freedom of choice) when implementing policies. It is precisely these conceptions that municipalities and the government pursue that prevent non-European asylum seekers from being sheltered, and these ideas are disseminated in newspapers.

Naturalization

There is little evidence for the frame of *naturalisation* in the discourse presented by the papers. "*Naturalisation is a frame that allows whites to explain away racial phenomena by suggesting they are natural occurrences*" (Bonilla-Silva, 2018, p. 76). Situations in which racial inequality occurs are framed as a natural process. It can be argued that helping Ukrainian refugees and neglecting non-European asylum seekers because they are less like us is described as a 'natural reaction' in the article *'Taking in Ukrainian refugees is not racist'*. In this article, the author claims that it is logical for the Netherlands to receive Ukrainian refugees but not asylum seekers from *"faraway countries"* (Bilic, 2022, p.18). According to the author, this natural reaction does not stem from racism. At the same time, there is also *minimisation of racism* here. This will be explained more in depth below, where this frame is further analysed.

Cultural Racism

The discussion surrounding asylum seekers, as previously established, is exclusively about refugees outside Europe. Therefore, these asylum-seekers have a different cultural background than Dutch citizens. The newspapers quote several politicians using derogatory and dehumanising terms to describe asylum seekers. For example, a PVV Member of Parliament states that the party is in favour of a total asylum stop for *"so-called asylum seekers from faraway African places or the Middle East sandbox"* (De Telegraaf, 2022a, p.2). Non-European asylum seekers are additionally seen as profiteers who come to benefit from *"pocket money, the promised house and benefits in addition to regular reception if their asylum application is not processed in time"* (De Telegraaf, 2022b, p.2). There is also a perception that *veiligelanders* cause a lot of nuisance (Grütters, 2023, p.18; Keukenkamp, 2022, p.8; Trouw, 2022, p.16; Kuiper & Van Der Poel, 2023, p.1-2). Non-European asylum seekers are attributed a number of negative characteristics, such as threatening, and a burden for the Dutch society, that cause dehumanisation and exclusion of these asylum seekers. By attributing these characteristics to non-European asylum seekers, newspapers portray them as an inferior group in Dutch society. The position in which non-European asylum seekers find themselves is thus justified by the newspapers (Bonilla-Silva, 2018).

*"Minimisation of racism is a frame that suggests discrimination is no longer a factor affecting minorities' life chances" (*Bonilla-Silva, 2018, p. 77). This allows white people to view racist phenomena as non-racist. As noted earlier, the Dutch asylum policy, and the broader discussion surrounding asylum seekers, is hardly considered racist in Dutch newspaper articles. One of the opinion pieces that has been mentioned multiple times in this chapter (*'Accommodating Ukrainian refugees is not racist'*) discusses and refutes the opinions of *GroenLinks* city councillor Thijme Hoffmann and social historian Leo Lucassen. Hoffmann states, *"It is quite simple to explain: racism."* (Bilic, 2022, p.18). He is referring to the politicians who want to take in Ukrainian refugees but not asylum seekers with a dark skin colour or an Islamic background. Lucassen argues that *"the Netherlands cannot separate this solidarity* (for Ukrainian refugees) *from the xenophobic and Islamophobic climate of recent decades"* (Bilic, 2022, p.18). The author of this article refutes these opinions by minimising racism. According to him, it is logical for the Netherlands to come to the aid of refugees with more common characteristics, and not do so to asylum seekers from faraway countries (Bilic, 2022, p.18). He concludes his column by arguing that *"someone who is not superciliously concerned about events in Yemen or Eritrea, but who does immediately open his own home to a Ukrainian family on the run, is not a racist or xenophobe, but a benefactor"* (Bilic, 2022, p.18). Firstly, the author minimises racism by stating that selectively helping refugees is a matter of commonality. And secondly, racism is discussed only in the comparison between Ukrainian refugees and non-European asylum seekers. There is no discussion about the treatment of non-European asylum seekers before Ukrainian refugees arrived to the Netherlands. Discussing and refuting the role of racism only in this context further minimises racism.

A second form of minimisation occurs as the treatment of non-European asylum seekers is placed beyond the responsibility of the Dutch government. The newspapers constantly talk about a high influx of asylum seekers. This high influx means that the Netherlands can no longer cope with the reception of all these asylum seekers. The Dutch prime minister, Mark Rutte, (is even quoted in one of the news articles. He states that he *"cannot rule out that people will have to sleep outside again"* (Kuiper & Van Der Poel, 2023, p.1-2). According to some newspapers, this would then also include many fortune seekers, overloading the asylum system even further (De Telegraaf, 2022a, p.2; De Telegraaf, 2022b, p.2; Baneke, 2022, p.6-7). An image emerges of large numbers of asylum seekers coming to the Netherlands, which means that not all asylum seekers can be accommodated, and therefore some have to sleep outside. Asylum seekers are

thus made responsible for their own position. Racism, the lack of tolerance and solidarity, and the unwillingness to help non-European asylum seekers are discounted.

4.3. The Presence of Whiteness

The public discourse that surrounds asylum seekers is heavily influenced by *whiteness*. Underlying mechanisms of racism and racial discrimination are hardly recognised and acknowledged, while the public actors who make themselves heard in the newspapers are critical of the government. The newspaper articles pay much attention to the fact that many municipalities impose requirements on the asylum seekers being sheltered. For example, the newspapers describe how municipalities choose on the basis of origin, religion and gender. It is made even more concrete by noting that many municipalities want to receive Ukrainian refugees but not asylum seekers who have fled from Arab or African countries (Grütters, 2023, p.18; Keukenkamp, 2022, p.8; Trouw, 2022, p.16; Kuiper & Van Der Poel, 2023, p.1-2).

Furthermore, one opinion piece criticised the Royal Military Police's working method for ethnic profiling. The author found it remarkable that the Royal Military Police could read an asylum seeker's right of residence by skin colour or origin. Both situations are labelled in the papers as a form of "*discrimination"* (Grütters, 2023, p.18). However, the situations are not recognised as a form of racism influenced by *whiteness*. *Whiteness* is an invisible system that favours white Dutch people and puts other racial groups at a disadvantage (Cole, 2019). Dutch municipalities can choose who to include or exclude and do so based on racial characteristics. This expresses the negative perception the Dutch municipalities have towards non-European asylum seekers. On top of this, municipalities do accept Ukrainian refugees who are predominantly white and Christian because they possess characteristics that match the dominant representation of 'Dutchness' (Wekker, 2018). Racial inequality is thus perpetuated and the Netherlands enables privileges for itself and Ukrainian refugees (Searle & Murle, 2018). The quote below shows how discriminatory practices surrounding Ukrainian refugees and non-European refugees are thought of.

"I find the discussion painful. There is a horrific war going on. Thousands are dying, millions are adrift. Ukrainians who want to flee Eastern Europe can actually go one way: the West. How wonderful that the latter do not face closed borders, but are warmly welcomed by neighbouring countries. How different it was when many Jews fled Hitler Germany in the late 1930s" (Bilic, 2022, p.18).

The opinion piece in which this is stated (*'Taking in Ukrainian refugees is not racist'*) discusses whether selective hosting of refugees can be considered racist. The author finds the discussion painful because Ukrainians face a horrific war and can only flee to the west. He also thinks it is a good thing that these refugees are warmly welcomed by neighbouring countries that open their borders to Ukrainian refugees. He then makes the comparison with Jewish refugees during World War II. In the Netherlands, racism is mostly associated with the persecution of Jews, rather than the racial inequality during the Dutch colonial times (Van Der Horst, 2004). The author of this article makes the same association by contrasting Europe's hospitality today with the persecutions of Jews during World War II. By reasoning in this way, the Netherlands comes across as an ethical, hospitable, racism-free and tolerant country (Wekker, 2018). Reasoning in this way completely disregards the exclusion of non-Western refugees. Refugees from African and Arab countries do not, in practice, have to count on a warm welcome.

Whiteness is also reflected in the negative images and broader discussion surrounding asylum seekers. Newspapers highlight the debate on asylum seekers from two perspectives. The first perspective dehumanises and describes asylum seekers as a problem for Dutch society. According to these newspapers, the government's asylum policy has a *"pull factor"* (De Telegraaf, 2022a, p.2; De Telegraaf, 2022b, p.2; Van Mersbergen, 2022, p.4-5) and too many asylum seekers are admitted to the Netherlands. The asylum seekers coming to the Netherlands are said to consist mainly of fortune seekers and pose a threat to Dutch society. As mentioned earlier, Ukrainian refugees are not part of this discussion, and therefore pose no threat. The coverage of the asylum crisis only reinforces this picture. In the articles analysed, considerable attention is paid to possible solutions to curb the asylum flow. One news article suggested that some solutions would be applicable to the Netherlands or to Europe as a whole. Many of these solutions are sought in other countries policies. The United-Kingdom has the asylum procedure of asylum seekers handled in Rwanda and Greece has started building a border wall. Denmark has a strict asylum policy where asylum seekers have to pay for their asylum procedure, which the asylum seekers have to go through in non-European countries, just like in the United Kingdom. It is suggested that the Refugee Convention of 1951 should be reviewed, and the Netherlands should examine whether they could withdraw from the convention. According to the public opinion reflected in this newspaper, the Netherlands should move to a total asylum stop or follow the example of other countries with restrictive asylum policies. This line of thought is reflected in *De Telegraaf's* news article.

"The VVD reveals its support for migration deals with countries outside the EU. "This is necessary to get a better grip on migration flows, discourage illegal migration, and prevent life-threatening trips across the Mediterranean," says MP Ruben Brekelmans. "The UK shows that this is still possible. The EU should also do more work on this, as it succeeded earlier with Turkey. Whether these precise agreements with Rwanda contain enough guarantees for humane reception will have to be seen in practice" (De Telegraaf, 2022a, p.2).

The VVD is the largest liberal party in the Netherlands. In this newspaper article, the idea of making migration deals with countries outside the European Union is brought to the reader's attention with the idea that making migration deals must be a good solution if even the VVD supports it. The necessity of the Netherlands regaining control of migration flows, which is proposed in the article, suggests that too many asylum seekers are coming to the Netherlands and that this influx of asylum seekers cannot be controlled. To come across as ethical, it also mentions that asylum seekers would then not have to make the dangerous journey across the Mediterranean. Here, Europe should work together as one to curb the influx of non-European asylum seekers. Reference is made to the asylum deal the United Kingdom made with Rwanda. While the priority is clearly to curb the influx of asylum seekers, it is pretended that the humanitarianism of reception is indeed a prerequisite for concluding a migration deal. "It still has to be proven in practice" means: first conclude a migration deal to control the uncontrollable migration flow, then look at the humanity of reception. The Dutch self-image of being ethical and humane is recognisable in this quote (Wekker, 2018).

The manner in which asylum seekers are discussed and the possible measures that should be taken against them are a product of *whiteness*. The discourse described here is aimed at keeping out the non-white *other*. The underlying ideas and values that support the dehumanisation of non-European asylum seekers are dominant in society. The quote shows that politicians want to work on curbing the flow of asylum seekers by exploring the possibility of migration deals with non-European countries. This shows how *whiteness* shapes institutional structures, policies and political processes. Containing the flow of asylum also safeguards the sovereignty of the Netherlands,and of other Western states (Searle & Murle, 2018). According to Essed et al. (2019), *whiteness* in Europe creates a practical norm that encourages racial discrimination against minorities who are not racialised as white. This results in exclusionary processes and dehumanisation. These aspects of *whiteness* are also present in the public discourse surrounding asylum seekers.

The second perspective which emerges in the newspaper articles criticises the government's asylum policy and experiences a *"hardening"* (Baneke, 2022, p.6-7; Walters, 2023, p.1-4) of the migration debate. The hardening of this debate is said to be due to high housing shortages and unemployment. Politicians use these existing problems to frame asylum seekers negatively. It is not only far-right populist parties that spread anti-refugee sentiment. The newspapers note that now also the *"neater right"* (Baneke, 2022, p.7) is negatively framing asylum seekers (Baneke, 2022, p.6-7; Walters, 2023, p.1-4). In addition, the government is held responsible for letting a crisis emerge. Cutbacks, short-term thinking, stopgap measures, misjudgements and political unwillingness have put the Netherlands in this situation (NRC, 2022, p17; Candel & Ceelen, 2023, p.1-2; Kuiper & Van Der Poel, 2023, p.1-2; De Bruijn & Hoogerheijde, 2023, p.24; Ezzeroili & Damen, 2022, p.2-3).

One of the measures taken by the government is to delay family reunification in order to reduce the inflow of asylum seekers. The newspapers criticise this measure because the government is deliberately coming up with a measure that is not legally feasible. This is because it does not offer structural solutions to the asylum crisis. The government continues to appeal to the highest court, and a lot of time passes there before the policy is declared invalid. Then the policy is adjusted slightly and the *"legal battle"* (Jaeger, 2022, p.6) starts all over again. Much of the criticism therefore focuses on human rights violations, the loss of humanity, and the lack of solidarity in addressing the asylum crisis. For example, there are repeated references to the legal obligations the Netherlands has when it comes to providing reception locations for asylum seekers (Jaeger, 2022, p.6; Van Mersbergen, 2022, p.4-5; Grütters, 2023, p.18; Trouw, 2022, p.16; Stronks, 2022, p.18). The racial components of asylum policy are not highlighted as the quote below shows.

"It is a question of humanity. Of course there is also poverty in the Netherlands. But many people here face death threats, they are not safe in their own country. They are people like everyone else. They are not necessarily dangerous, something some people sometimes seem to think" (Van Mersbergen, 2022, p.4).

The quote comes from the opinion piece *'Unacceptable that we allow this'*. In it, philosopher Marli Huijer is interviewed, who is critical of asylum policy. She calls it *"a question of humanity",* which is lacking in the current asylum policy. Refugees flee to the Netherlands because it is unsafe in their own country, and they are *"people like any other"*. She also agrees that some of the Dutch frame refugees negatively because they are said to be

dangerous. However, the underlying racial distinction that Dutch asylum policy embodies is not recognised. As mentioned earlier, the discussion is only about non-European asylum seekers. Therefore, it is mainly non-white asylum seekers who are negatively framed and disadvantaged by the asylum policy. *Whiteness* is something that is taken for granted which has made it become an invisible system in Dutch society (Cole, 2019). The quote shows that the criticism made is limited to criticising the humanity of asylum policy. However, the racial position of asylum seekers is not included in this criticism. The Dutch do not talk about 'race' after all, but they do differentiate between asylum seekers based on racial characteristics without mentioning or noticing it. This is a recurring phenomenon in the criticism of Dutch asylum policy in newspapers. Racism is thus not part of the newspapers' criticism of the asylum policy in the Netherlands.

5. Conclusion

This study asked the following research question: *How are invisible systems of othering, colour-blind racism and whiteness present in public discourse around asylum seekers between 2022-2023?* By analysing 22 Dutch newspaper articles, an attempt was made to make these invisible systems visible through critical discourse analysis. A number of conclusions can be drawn from this analysis. *Othering, colour-blind racism* and *whiteness* are part of the public discourse surrounding asylum seekers. Processes of *othering* became visible in newspapers as non-European asylum seekers are perceived in newspapers as causing the asylum crisis. Ukrainian refugees, who share more common characteristics with the Dutch population, are not part of this criticism. The idea that the Netherlands is in an asylum crisis creates dehumanising coverage of non-European asylum seekers. For example, asylum seekers are said to come to the Netherlands mainly to benefit from the soft asylum policy. There is also the perception that asylum seekers cause a nuisance, therefore, no one wants to take them in.

Colour-blind racism is also part of the public discourse surrounding asylum seekers. Municipalities do not want to accommodate asylum seekers, and they argue that they are within their rights not to do so. The national government assumes that municipalities do accommodate asylum seekers, and does not intervene when this is not the case. The views held by municipalities and the national government are strongly influenced by liberal thinking. As a result, asylum seekers are not being accommodated. The reporting on this issue fits within the frame of *abstract liberalism. Naturalisation* takes place because selective helping of asylum seekers is seen as something natural in one of the newspaper articles. As with *othering*, it is argued that the common characteristics of Ukrainian refugees ensure the provision of help. *Cultural racism* is part of the public discourse surrounding asylum seekers in that non-European asylum seekers are negatively framed by some of the newspapers. Non-European asylum seekers are regularly described as fortune seekers, nuisance seekers and *veiligelanders*. An important part of the public discourse around asylum seekers is the *minimisation* of racism. Dutch people who help Ukrainian refugees but abandon non-European asylum seekers are seen as benefactors. In addition, non-European asylum seekers are held responsible for their own fate. Due to the high influx, the Dutch asylum system becomes overloaded and people have to sleep outside. Newspapers critical of the government also reinforce the *minimisation* of racism by labelling the Netherlands' failing asylum policy as intolerant, not in line with international human rights conventions and a product of political self-interest. Although these newspapers

are critical of the treatment of non-European asylum seekers, they argue that racism plays no role their position by not naming it.

The absence of racism as a topic in public discourse around asylum seekers is also caused by the fact that the debate is heavily influenced by *whiteness.* As a result, underlying mechanisms of racism are not recognised. From newspaper articles, there is much criticism of asylum policy. Some of the newspapers believe that the arrival of asylum seekers in the Netherlands should be restricted. In these articles, an attempt is made to keep the Dutch self-image intact, while measures to keep the non-white other out of Europe are discussed. The other part of the newspapers name the inhumane and intolerant side of asylum policy, but leave racism out of it.

This research builds on Gloria Wekker's work by examining *colour-blind racism* and *whiteness* in a new context. In addition, this research has found a new angle in the migration debate. Previous studies have highlighted themes of intolerance, human rights and self-interest. This research has named the role of racism in this debate. However, more research is needed on *colour-blind racism* and *whiteness.* This small-scale research has shown that these concepts are part of the public discourse around asylum seekers. In particular, the analysis shows how non-European asylum seekers are approached differently compared to Ukrainian refugees. In part, it is also logical that the Netherlands feels more connected to Ukrainian refugees than to non-European asylum seekers because Ukrainian refugees share more common characteristics with Dutch people.

Additional research could therefore be conducted on the role of *colour-blind racism* and *whiteness* in a longer research period analysing newspaper articles written before the arrival of Ukrainian refugees. Such a study could reveal the presence of *colour-blind racism* and *whiteness* in the public discourse surrounding asylum seekers in its purest form. It could also compare the public discourse of several European countries. It's also worth mentioning that opinion pieces and news articles were used in this study. The analysis showed that there was hardly any 'objective coverage' of asylum seekers in both types of newspaper articles. Nevertheless, the use of two types of newspaper articles may limit the generalisability of the study. Therefore, consideration could be given to using one type of newspaper article in the future. Nevertheless, this research has convincingly demonstrated that *colour-blind racism* and *whiteness* are part of the public discourse surrounding asylum seekers in the Netherlands and hopefully, this study will contribute to raising awareness of racism in Dutch society.

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Appendix 1. Checklist Ethical and Privacy Aspects of Research

CHECKLIST ETHICAL AND PRIVACY ASPECTS OF RESEARCH

INSTRUCTION

This checklist should be completed for every research study that is conducted at the Department of Public Administration and Sociology (DPAS). This checklist should be completed *before* commencing with data collection or approaching participants. Students can complete this checklist with help of their supervisor.

This checklist is a mandatory part of the empirical master's thesis and has to be uploaded along with the research proposal.

The guideline for ethical aspects of research of the Dutch Sociological Association (NSV) can be found on their website (http://www.nsv-sociologie.nl/?page_id=17). If you have doubts about ethical or privacy aspects of your research study, discuss and resolve the matter with your EUR supervisor. If needed and if advised to do so by your supervisor, you can also consult Dr. Bonnie French, coordinator of the Sociology Master's Thesis program.

PART I: GENERAL INFORMATION

Project title: The invisible aspects of racism in the Dutch asylum policies

Name, email of student: Milan Vanhouwe, 669502mv@eur.nl

Name, email of supervisor: Bonnie French, french@essb.eur.nl

Start date and duration: January 18th – June 25th, five months

Is the research study conducted within DPAS   YES

If 'NO': at or for what institute or organization will the study be conducted?
(e.g. internship organization)

PART II: HUMAN SUBJECTS

1.   Does your research involve human participants.   NO

        If 'NO': skip to part V.

Part V: Data storage and backup

Where and when will you store your data in the short term, after acquisition?

All my data is digitally available. The data consists of newspaper articles available in the Nexis Uni database. I will store this data on my laptop and an external USB drive.

Note: indicate for separate data sources, for instance for paper-and pencil test data, and for digital data files.

Who is responsible for the immediate day-to-day management, storage and backup of the data arising from your research?

I am responsible for ordering and managing the data that arise from my research.

How (frequently) will you back-up your research data for short-term data security?

I will back up my data every time I find new data sources. After I collected all of my data, I will make a back up every week on my external USB drive.

In case of collecting personal data how will you anonymize the data?

I only use newspaper articles that have been made public for everyone. I do not use social media as a research source. As a result, I do not come into contact with sensitive, personal information that needs to be anonymized. If I do come across personal data, I will never mention the person's real name in my research. I will store personal data in a separate folder, named with a code.

Note: It is advisable to keep directly identifying personal details separated from the rest of the data. Personal details are then replaced by a key/ code. Only the code is part of the database with data and the list of respondents/research subjects is kept separate.

PART VI: SIGNATURE

Please note that it is your responsibility to follow the ethical guidelines in the conduct of your study. This includes providing information to participants about the study and ensuring confidentiality in storage and use of personal data. Treat participants respectfully, be on time at appointments, call participants when they have signed up for your study and fulfil promises made to participants.

Furthermore, it is your responsibility that data are authentic, of high quality and properly stored. The principle is always that the supervisor (or strictly speaking the Erasmus University Rotterdam) remains owner of the data, and that the student should therefore hand over all data to the supervisor.

Hereby I declare that the study will be conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the Department of Public Administration and Sociology at Erasmus University Rotterdam. I have answered the questions truthfully.

Name student: Milan Vanhouwe   Name (EUR) supervisor: Bonnie French

Date: 26-03-2023   Date:26-03-2023