

# Languages and Loyalties: Shaping Identity in Tunisia and the Netherlands

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Group memberships can, of course, be important (no serious theory of persons or individuals can ignore those social relationships), but the diminution of human beings involved in taking note only of one membership category for each person (neglecting all others) expunges at one stroke the far-reaching relevance of our manifold affinities and involvements.

Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence*

## I. Introduction

The 16th-century Spanish grammarian Antonio de Nebrija once said that “language has always been the companion of empire.”<sup>i</sup> Colonial empires of past centuries indeed produced language practices that influence speaking habits today. However, as the world becomes increasingly entrenched in the processes of globalization, global interactions are amplified. When discussing the place of language in globalization, it is therefore valuable to acknowledge colonial legacies while looking at the implications of a more recently significant phenomenon: international migration. Given the power of national governments to shape national identities, the contexts of colonization and immigration raise interesting questions about how government policies influence the connotations of languages. While the policies imposed by colonial regimes and those enacted today in response to immigration are not identical, both offer opportunities to investigate how language policies may affect individual identities.

The “Globalization in Comparative Perspective” year abroad, sponsored by the Macalester College Institute for Global Citizenship, was a prime opportunity to study the role of language in the globalizing world. Peter Singer writes of globalization: “Over the past few centuries the isolation has dwindled. Slowly at first, then with increasing rapidity. Now people living on opposite sides of the world are linked in ways previously unimaginable.”<sup>ii</sup> I use two case studies to exemplify how increasing global interaction compels governments and citizens to re-examine identities that were, perhaps, previously less challenged. My fall semester in Tunisia offers insight into the lasting effects of mixing a history of French colonization with the cultural legacies of an Arab state. My spring semester in the Netherlands, alternatively, facilitated a study of the ways immigration may generate an urge to protect an identity that was once taken as a given. Both locations have experienced encounters between different cultures, with different languages. The more I observed language dynamics in these locations, the more the rationales behind the choices fascinated me. Amartya Sen’s arguments influence my conviction that language as a medium of identity requires a multi-faceted analysis. Sen acknowledges the society-wide effects that designations of identity generate, but he also emphasizes the role of personal choice in their expression. Inspired by Sen’s claim that a person faced with plural identities prioritizes them based on political and social circumstances, this study asks: In what ways do government language policies influence how an individual evaluates the significance of his or her concurrent identities?

To address this question, section two outlines the theoretical connections between language and identity established in the existing academic literature. I connect the literature to Sen's work articulated in his volume, *Identity and Violence*. While existing literature covers these topics, discussion is lacking about the potential for government policies to shape the relationships between language and identity. Section two also addresses language planning. Section three seeks to illustrate the relationships between language, identity, and political planning through two case studies. The Tunisia study focuses on French and Arabic code-switching (the habitual switching between languages) as a potential consequence of colonial and post-colonial language policies. I incorporate personal interviews conducted with Tunisian women. Next, the study of the Netherlands addresses the essay's central question focusing on the Dutch Civic Integration Examination, a requirement for Dutch citizenship since 2006. The views of a Dutch official in the field of immigration issues add to the research. Section four offers conclusions and suggests avenues for future research.

## II. Theoretical Framework

In this section, I reflect upon language as a medium of identity, envisaging identity as an expression of loyalty to a certain set of norms and values, cultural and political. The ideology underlying language includes, according to Woolard and Schieffelin, "the cultural system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests."<sup>iii</sup> The assumption of connections between language and identity underlies the following considerations: first of Sen and identity, and second of government language policies.

### A. Language and Identity

Multilingual situations engender a hyperconsciousness about speaking habits, Madeleine Dobie argues in an analysis of linguistic diversity.<sup>iv</sup> In the quote presented at the beginning of this essay, Sen states that strict cultural categorization neglects the existence of complex individual identities.<sup>v</sup> He argues against "the illusion of singularity," or the presumption that people can be easily classified, which creates tension in a non-homogenous society.<sup>vi</sup> Based on Dobie and Sen's assertions, the cultural encounters resulting from colonialism and immigration should have the potential to cause reassessments of language habits. An encounter between cultures that speak different languages is a potential impetus to delineate a language for a community, Woolard and Schieffelin argue accordingly.<sup>vii</sup>

The more emotional aspects of these encounters are avoided in the arguments of Dobie, Woolard and Schieffelin, but Sen addresses them through his book's focus on the anxiety caused by navigating numerous identities. Sen constructs his arguments in opposition to those of Samuel Huntington's 1993 "Clash of Civilizations" hypothesis. Everyone belongs to distinct, incompatible civilizations defined by factors such as history, language, culture, and religion, according to Huntington.<sup>viii</sup> Unlike Sen's emphasis on the multitudes that exist within any individual, Huntington believes that those belonging to one society share a homogenous identity.<sup>ix</sup> Speaking a language would therefore be a declaration of belonging to a specific group. For this essay I subscribe to Sen over Huntington and regard the connections between language and identity as flexible. However, Sen does make a pertinent qualification: individual choices occur within sociopolitical constraints that limit their feasibility.<sup>x</sup>

The adoption of languages (or semi-adoption in the case of language mixing) could indicate openness to their ideological implications, Urciuoli argues in her work “Language and Borders,” in which she underscores the fluidity of identity and its susceptibility to being influenced.<sup>xi</sup> Nevertheless, Urciuoli recognizes the constraints described by Sen and claims that switching fully between languages is more likely to occur when identity is politicized and compromise is less acceptable.<sup>xii</sup> Colonization and immigration are ripe for politicization. Constraints on choice and the politicization of language are central to the analyses of Tunisia and the Netherlands. Unlike Huntington’s perspective, this article takes the connections between language and identity as social and political constructs. Politics hinge on perceptions of a society’s identities and subsequent priorities. Constraints could therefore include perceptions of identity that discount individual divergences and encourage prioritization based on what society at large values most. One language may not be abandoned in favor of another, but their uses could become differentiated, Sen claims.<sup>xiii</sup> My studies of Tunisia and the Netherlands explore the pressure individuals face from competing expressions and perceptions of loyalties.

The navigation of loyalties involves deeply-rooted cultural and personal attitudes that affect speaking habits, according to Dobie.<sup>xiv</sup> Because of these considerations, switching between languages is psychologically taxing, according to Ennaji in her discussion of multilingualism.<sup>xv</sup> Speakers may experience frustrated attempts to match certain images. Multilingual situations generate tension when the multiple identities cannot be expressed simultaneously. The pressure to prioritize is less in the case of non-contrasting identities, Sen argues in a qualification of Moha Ennaji’s claims.<sup>xvi</sup> He writes that “a person has to make choices—explicitly or by implication—about what importance to attach, in a particular context, to the divergent loyalties and priorities that may compete for precedence.”<sup>xvii</sup> Similarly, Urciuoli argues that publicly using more than one language, like the code-switching I study in Tunisia, is more likely when no clear language minorities and majorities exist.<sup>xviii</sup>

## **B. Language Planning**

An understanding of the construction of language connotations is key as I examine the reasoning behind, and effects of, government language planning. Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu contends that language is a form of symbolic manipulation, “which aims at determining the (mental) representation that other people may form of these properties and their bearers.”<sup>xix</sup> His statement further establishes that language is a means to shape identity. Bourdieu would agree that language planning is a method used by those in power to shape the representations people hold of themselves and others. Bourdieu’s ideas complement those of Sen and provide solid roots from which to approach language planning. Both case studies suit an assessment of the political strength of language and my study of Tunisia pays particular attention to the influence of educational systems. Government officials are often the people powerful enough to assign roles and meanings to languages.<sup>xx</sup> It is important to keep in mind, though, that my focus on the political aspects of language does not contradict Sen’s emphasis on the role of individual choice; Sen recognizes that these choices are made within the limits of what has been framed as acceptable.

Language planning conveys the acceptable uses of languages by constructing a linguistic hierarchy. Post-colonial states in particular tend to promote certain languages as they organize their societies around projects that relate cultural identity to economic and political development, according to Ronald Judy in his analysis of language in Tunisia.<sup>xxi</sup> Judy limits his analysis to the

post-colonial context, but states like the Netherlands, facing large amounts of immigration, may be tempted to construct similar connections. Many states have identified national languages, distinguishing one or more languages as the most acceptable expression of belonging. Some countries, like the Netherlands, have gone further and made knowledge of the national language obligatory for citizenship and residence; this trend is expanding, with countries like Canada also considering language proficiency requirements.<sup>xxii</sup> McNamara and Shohamy argue that “Governments and other central authorities use tests to impose educational policies knowing that those who are affected by the tests will change their behavior.”<sup>xxiii</sup> Even countries that have historically encouraged immigration, like the United States and Australia, have tightened language requirements, motivated by discussions of national identity that have been spurred by intensified globalization.<sup>xxiv</sup> The assumption that language equals culture lies in the political contexts of colonialism, post-colonialism, and immigration. Whether this assumption is correct is less important than the fact that the perpetuation of such connections through language planning may make it the reality. As top-down language planning changes over time, so could perceptions of self. Despite the established research on the connections between language and identity discussed here, it is useful to use Sen—whose ideas underpin the other authors’ arguments—to structure a more thorough examination of the effects of globalization and identity. Applying the theories to Tunisia and the Netherlands illustrates how language policies signify efforts to define a national identity and place constraints on individual choice.

### III. Case Studies

I use two cases to examine the constraining influence of government language policies on the prioritization of identities. First, I examine how language policies have shaped speaking habits and identity in Tunisia at the level of the individual. Second, for the Netherlands, I illustrate the government’s methods and motivations to construct and maintain a national identity through language. Colonization in the mid-20th century and migration at the beginning of the 21st century are not synonymous. Nevertheless, both situations imply that cultural and lingual confrontations spur an evaluation of identity. I believe the comparison demonstrates the potential effects on identity that accompany increasing global interaction.

#### A. Tunisia: Colonization and Code-Switching

French is not in competition with Arabic. Their functions are different: Arabic is the official language; French, language of the window to the world, is not an attack but one of our cards.

Tunisian Minister of Culture, 1991<sup>xxv</sup>

Situated on the North African coast, Tunisia has seen numerous foreign occupants. A possession that passed between Roman, Arab, Ottoman, and French hands, it is a valuable location to study the political and social effects of language. The languages involved in my study are Arabic and French. Three varieties of Arabic exist in Tunisia. First is Classical Arabic, irrevocably associated with Islam but fluently grasped by few.<sup>xxvi</sup> Second is Modern Standard Arabic, linked with the mid-20th century attempt to spread a sense of universal culture in the Arab world. Its original aim in the Maghreb was to replace French as a medium of expressing modernity.<sup>xxvii</sup> Today it is seen as easier and more useful than Classical Arabic but it is a learned, not mother,

tongue.<sup>xxviii</sup> Finally, there are Arabic dialects, which are unique to each Arab country and usually spoken as the mother tongue. This essay refers most often to the third category. A significant portion of the dialectal Arabic vocabulary in Tunisia is borrowed or adapted from French. Nonetheless, French holds its own status in Tunisia and French media still outsells Arabic media 53 years after France's formal exit.<sup>xxix</sup>

I first establish the colonial role of language in Tunisia and then outline the post-independence policies. I engage Sen's theories of identity throughout, supported by interviews I conducted with two Tunisian women who switch regularly between French and Arabic and have lived under both the French protectorate and the Tunisian republic. The women include retired professor Sonya and international translator Yasmine, both in their sixties. (Their names have been changed to protect their privacy.) The women share a high level of education, implying exposure to a variety of worldviews. The final criterion is location; both women live in suburban Tunis, an area that experienced a significant French presence. These criteria are valuable because my research question assumes that these women can make choices between languages. The more languages and worldviews to which they were exposed, the more likely it is that their code-switching indicates choices. Current forms of globalization, like large-scale international migration, have replaced colonization as a force through which speakers of different languages come into contact, but the research about the colonial period aspires to establish a historical precedent.

### *1. Colonial Tunisia*

To characterize the 75-year period of French control in Tunisia as one of political dominance would be too limited a description. During the creation of the French protectorate in 1881, language was a powerful weapon in the colonial arsenal and a method of oppression as effective as physical force, argues Jerad, a scholar at the Center for Maghreb Studies in Tunis.<sup>xxx</sup> The inundation of French into a society that had previously been 100 percent Arabic speaking put into sharp relief the connotations attached to speaking a language. Establishing power in Tunisia was a *mission civilisatrice* for the French, one in which they sought to establish their culture as superior to the pre-existing local cultures.<sup>xxxi</sup> The French goals were largely cultural, not economic, in nature.<sup>xxxii</sup> Arabic and consequently its speakers were classified as belonging to an inferior society and a backward way of life. Colonization, therefore, constrained identity because each language conveyed an opposing identity. The French reproduced the separation through power structures within which one had to work if he or she desired to prosper socially, economically, or politically.

The pressing issue is this: how did French shift from being the language of the intruder to being integrated into everyday speech and interaction? The colonial administration's language planning exemplifies the manner in which language and ideology are conflated and perpetuated. The chosen status of French had ideological motivations but also practical consequences.<sup>xxxiii</sup> The administration implemented the language as that of government, business, and secular education.<sup>xxxiv</sup> Arabic speakers were compelled to acquire a command of French for political, economic, or social mobility, and the high status that accompanied the mobility consequently elevated the perception of French. Except for those in the southern desert regions, where the colonial grasp was light, Arabic's use narrowed to the home and religion.

In my interviews with Sonya and Yasmine, they spoke of the roles Arabic and French held in their upbringings. When asked what effect French has had on her life, Sonya reflected: "I have

always spoken French, so I do not know... But I belong to the older generation and for us Arabic was not very important. I learned Arabic in secondary school. I spoke a mixture at home.”<sup>xxxv</sup> Her response demonstrates the depth of the French influence for Sonya’s generation. It is intriguing, however, to consider how others viewed the French speakers. Yasmine’s response is illuminating: “We did not speak French at home. [But] this did not create any kind of estrangement. My speaking French was alright with my parents, they did not feel like we were getting away from their culture. I went to a school that taught in both, which was more than other people in my generation who spoke mostly in French.”<sup>xxxvi</sup> Despite their different educational experiences and home environments, the French language played a significant role in each of their young lives. Although Yasmine did not speak French at home, the language was nevertheless accepted by her family as a necessity. I will next explore how these early experiences affect the current associations the women make between language and identity.

## 2. *Post-Colonial Tunisia*

After Habib Bourguiba became the first president of independent Tunisia in 1956, lingual and cultural ties to France persisted. Initially, Bourguiba favored Arabization—or the elevation of Arabic to the sole language of the government and education. Soon, however, he publicly favored French language and culture, according to Craig Sirles.<sup>xxxvii</sup> Indeed, an American diplomat reported in 1972 that he had “never met a man outside of France so French and in the Arab world so little Arab” until he met Tunisia’s first president.<sup>xxxviii</sup> Bourguiba sought to create a modernized state and stressed multiculturalism and ties to the West through language.<sup>xxxix</sup> Arabic defaulted to the language of tradition and the private sphere despite its new status as Tunisia’s official language. Through his policies, Bourguiba encouraged a greater consciousness about language and the perception that speaking French was synonymous with a modern identity and high status. Arabization was meant to produce “an Arabic modernity as well as an integral national linguistic space of cultural authenticity,” according to Judy.<sup>xl</sup> Nevertheless, French was too deeply ingrained to be replaced.

An absence of Arabic infrastructure, especially in education, stunted Arabization in Tunisia, reflecting the government’s lack of enthusiasm for the process. The government and elite were nearly all French-educated and the majority of Tunisians lived close to the most francophone areas of the country, including the northern coasts and especially the capital of Tunis. Tunisian literacy rates in Arabic and French at this time were roughly equal among the general population, suggesting that a complete eradication of French could have been problematic.<sup>xli</sup> Sonya and Yasmine both emphasized the importance of the educational system in perpetuating the popularity of French, even post-independence. According to Yasmine:

I do not really associate French with colonization. I associate it with school and education. It is a question of generation. In my generation we used French a lot because our schools were French schools... If I did associate French with colonization, I would stop speaking so much French because I do not like that idea.

It is apparent that the language policies of the French administration influenced language habits, but Yasmine’s statement that she does not associate French with colonization is intriguing. Sonya also told me that, while French is a mark of colonization, she does not associate it with

subjugation. If French no longer carries these connotations what, then, can one deduce about choosing to speak French versus choosing to speak Arabic in post-colonial Tunisia? It is instructive to look further at the breakdown of Arabization in Tunisia.

Arabization in Tunisia never became the politically charged issue that it was in neighboring Algeria, which the French controlled from 1830 until a bloody independence was secured in 1962. Several factors may be responsible for the relative lack of polarization in Tunisia. Algeria had to contend with a large Berber community fighting for their own language rights and thus had numerous contested identities to manage and appease.<sup>xlii</sup> Tunisia, alternatively, had a relatively homogeneous population and had to negotiate only the path between Arabic and French, languages that had already been established as belonging to separate areas of life. The Tunisian leadership saw little conflict between a path of modernization shaped by French and the traditional societal values ingrained in Arabic.<sup>xliii</sup> The earlier quote by the Tunisian Minister of Culture epitomizes this view. Under the second and current president, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, French continues to be the language of mobility and the number of students learning the language has increased since 1956.<sup>xliv</sup> Humanities studies have gradually been Arabized at the secondary school level, but French remains the language of instruction for scientific and technical subjects, especially in higher education.<sup>xlv</sup>

The interview responses indicate that although French may not be explicitly associated with the actions of France, it still has ideational connections. On this issue, Sonya mused to me: “Is French associated with modernity? I do not think so. But there is something true in what you said... There was this idea that if you did not speak French you were illiterate. This is no longer the case today. I do not think that anybody considers anybody who speaks Arabic only to be illiterate.” Sonya and Yasmine’s answers strongly suggest that their generation, at least, has internalized the motives of the colonial administration and view speaking French as an expression of a modern, sophisticated identity. Sonya insinuates that younger generations view Arabic relatively positively but the fact that the generation of the post-colonial political elite makes such associations is a possible explanation for why language planning policy has not durably sought to replace French with Arabic.

Of course, the women I spoke with are not only francophone, they also regularly speak Arabic. Code-switching indicates Arabic is still a part of everyday life, even for French speakers. To fully address the question about the prioritization of identity in the face of constraints, it is vital to look closer at code-switching and the perceptions of Arabic. Both Sonya and Yasmine expressed that they find it difficult to sustain conversations in Arabic, and often notice they switch to French. Yasmine articulated the frustrations that accompany navigating the two languages:

It bothers me. It is not attractive to change between the languages, although I do it. I find it difficult to speak Arabic all the time. I have to think about how to say some words in Arabic. This is for sophisticated things, if I am reasoning about problems or politics. But if I am making plans with my sisters, I can say everything in Arabic.

Furthermore, both women emphasized that they are more comfortable speaking with other French speakers and find themselves more conscious about language when they speak with non-francophone Arabs.

Together, the sentiments of Sonya and Yasmine illustrate the constraints Sen describes and their origins in political planning. Pierre Bourdieu writes about the manipulation of symbols by those in power, and it is evident that during their period of control the French manipulated perceptions of both French and Arabic to represent certain cultural associations. Educational practices ensured that these women used Arabic most in the private sphere. Furthermore, as Dobie discusses and Sonya and Yasmine demonstrate, multilingual situations create a hyperconsciousness about language choices. Notable is Sonya's comment that even people who know Arabic tend to discuss politics in French. If this is true, it would imply that the superiority the French claimed through the equation of language with culture has to some extent been internalized. The historical dominance given to French by both the colonial and post-independence administrations constrains choice on two levels. First, the Arabic vocabulary available to the women is limited. Second, because French is still associated with modernity and sophistication, the expectation may exist to be able to discuss certain matters in French. Sonya indicated that the superiority of French is less defined in younger generations but its continued status among her generation indicates the lasting strength of language planning in constraining language choices. Both women suggested to me that, as the French intended, the use of Arabic is still largely associated with more traditional aspects of life like the home and family.

Finally, it is intriguing that while the women expressed frustration about using the two languages, they did not indicate much tension or political polarization in the choices. As Bonnie Urciuoli suggests, the lack of tension may explain the habit of code-switching. Their frustrations, however, signal that there are still forces of identity at play. This is particularly palpable in the women's acknowledgment of the colonial origins of French, its continued association with modernity, and their denial of its continued association with French ideology. Furthermore, the admission that they have trouble speaking completely in Arabic suggests that they prefer communicating with Tunisians who share similar educational and geographic upbringings, markers of specific social identities. The women may not feel the need to choose one language over another, but the feasibility of using each language has been limited. The women told me that they nevertheless view the coexistence of French and Arabic as a positive defining feature of Tunisian identity. Sonya said: "We are aware in this country of the importance of learning languages... Even though French is the language of our colonizers, it is still a beautiful language and it is a language we appreciate." The women suggested that their generation perceives the coexistence and simultaneous use of French and Arabic as definitive of the Tunisian identity. They presented themselves much like the state itself has, as facing a struggle between two ideational extremes and settling upon a middle ground, where languages and identities do not compete but work concurrently. Like the state, perhaps, the desire exists to be—and be perceived as—at once francophone and Arab.

## **B. The Netherlands: Immigration and Social Cohesion**

Being yourself and at the same time being part of the society is a blessing for the Netherlands. We are a multicultural society. Bonding is the first step towards social cohesion. Facilitate both.

Surrendra Santokhi, The Hague's Program Office of Citizenship and Civic Participation

The government of the Netherlands began to officially grapple with language and identity relatively recently. Consequently, a retrospective analysis is less appropriate here than in

Tunisia. The Civic Integration Examination took effect in 2006 and certain foreign nationals must complete it abroad before gaining entrance to the Netherlands. I contend that this event established speaking Dutch as a prerequisite for allegiance to Dutch society. The Netherlands study builds upon Tunisia's experiences to illustrate how the current era of globalization intensifies identity questions. However, unlike in Tunisia where I addressed the research question through the eyes of those affected by the language policies, in the Netherlands I engage it through a governmental perspective. Together my two case studies explore both how language policies influence identity and how they are purposefully designed to produce such influence.

I first give an overview of immigration trends in the Netherlands, specifically the progression from "Pillarization" policies to the current trends of multiculturalism and integration. Second is an assessment of the Civic Integration Examination. Finally, I hypothesize about the prospects for identity and language in the Netherlands. To accomplish this task, I use surveys conducted by Dutch researchers and an interview I conducted with Surrendra Santokhi, the senior manager of The Hague's Program Office of Citizenship and Civic Participation.

### *1. Dutch Immigration Trends*

First- and second-generation immigrants compose approximately ten percent of the Dutch population and in major cities this percentage climbs higher, reaching fifty percent in Amsterdam.<sup>xlvi</sup> In contrast to current trends, the decade following the Second World War began with extensive Dutch emigration to other Western countries. Consequently, the Netherlands faced a labor shortage from the 1960s onward, and recruited workers from Morocco, Turkey, and the former Dutch colony of Suriname.<sup>xlvii</sup> The Dutch government, thinking the shortage was temporary, focused on the development of parallel social institutions for each community in an effort to discourage permanent settlements.<sup>xlviii</sup> This system was known as pillarization. Neither the Dutch nor the immigrants welcomed changes to their cultural identities, Phillip Muus argues in his study of Dutch immigration policies, and there were few calls for immigrants to adapt to Dutch cultural or linguistic norms.<sup>xlix</sup> However, in the mid-1990s, immigrant populations appeared to be increasingly permanent and policies shifted focus to multiculturalism and integration, including a stronger emphasis on the Dutch language. Historically, the relations between the mainstream Dutch population and immigrant groups have been shaped by the degrees of similarity between them.<sup>1</sup> Language became increasingly symbolic of similarity.

As the immigration flow increased, government policy became concerned with social cohesion. The demands for immigrants to adapt to Dutch norms and values grew concurrently with an effort to define what constitutes Dutch identity.<sup>li</sup> Language has become a sign of loyalty to Dutch society. Dutch politics and media increasingly characterize an immigrant's use of his or her non-Dutch mother tongue as a hindrance to the cohesion of Dutch society.<sup>lii</sup> A lack of Dutch language proficiency is therefore perceived as a lack of loyalty to the host society. Woolard and Schieffelin's theory that a cross-cultural encounter increases the importance of language for a community applies here. The popularity of the late Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn, whose resolute anti-immigration views earned him one-third of the votes in the 2002 Rotterdam council elections, exemplifies the rising anti-immigration sentiment that accompanies calls to protect Dutch culture and language.<sup>liii</sup> Much like French skills were necessary for successful social participation in colonial Tunisia, in the Netherlands language proficiency has similarly contributed to the economic success of the Surinamese relative to less fluent groups like the Turks and Moroccans.<sup>liv</sup> However, the purpose of this essay is not to argue the practical

necessities of language proficiency, but rather the ways in which the Dutch government has used proficiency requirements to fuse and preserve language and identity.

## 2. *The Citizenship Test and Identity Preservation*

According to Floris Vermeulen, of the Institute for Migration and Ethnic Studies at the University of Amsterdam, extensive integration of immigrants has failed partly because of the cultural distance that immigrants and native Dutch keep from each other, exemplified by separate, relatively homogenous neighborhoods and social spaces.<sup>lv</sup> The changes to the citizenship test seek to better select immigrants receptive to and capable of integrating into the mainstream Dutch society by adding an exam about Dutch culture and another about Dutch language.<sup>lvi</sup> The Dutch Department of Citizenship and Immigration states in its informational material: “If you wish to acquire Dutch citizenship by means of naturalization, you must demonstrate that you have integrated sufficiently... You must be able to manage in Dutch society.”<sup>lvii</sup> Defining integration into Dutch society as an active loyalty to the values and norms associated with Dutch identity as well as speaking Dutch expresses that loyalty. According to a 2003 study by Hagendoorn, Veenman, and Vollebergh, the Dutch prefer immigrants with a high fluency and cultural match, a criteria including lifestyle choices like religion. Those with low fluency and little cultural match are least preferred, while close cultural match lessens the importance of fluency.<sup>lviii</sup> A 2007 study by Hagendoorn and Sniderman similarly reports that one-tenth of Dutch respondents considered immigrant groups as inferior; Turkish and Moroccan immigrants were rated most inferior while the Surinamese were rated least inferior.<sup>lix</sup> The relative acceptance of the Dutch-speaking Surinamese shows a correspondence between acceptance and language skills. Notably, the Civic Integration Examination does not apply to applicants from Western countries who arguably share values and norms similar to those of the Netherlands; applicants from the European Union, Norway, Iceland, Switzerland, Australia, Japan, Canada, New Zealand, South Korea and the United States are exempt.<sup>lx</sup> Meanwhile, most current immigrants originate from non-Western countries. I interpret these exceptions as support for the idea that the Dutch government uses the citizenship exam, and the willingness to learn Dutch, to evaluate applicants’ openness to Dutch norms.

The language policy is a rallying point for nationalist campaigns. One of the most visible is Proud of the Netherlands (*Trots op Nederland*), founded by former immigration minister Rita Verdonk, the driving force behind the new requirements.<sup>lxi</sup> When she launched her party in 2008, Verdonk made a strong statement in favor of a homogenous identity: “When we Dutch people find ourselves constantly having to move over and adapt to new cultures in our own country I say: enough is enough!”<sup>lxii</sup> Her support has been strong. In 2008, her party was projected to win 22 of the 150 Dutch parliament seats in the next election, although the projection has since shrunk.<sup>lxiii</sup> Based on anti-immigration trends, the Netherlands’ policies seem to enforce the understanding that speaking Dutch is a fundamental expression of loyalty to Dutch norms and values for immigrants.

## 3. *Choice, Language and Identity in the Netherlands*

Amartya Sen’s support for the freedom to prioritize identity is more difficult in the Dutch case than in the Tunisian case because immigrants effectively consent to the status of being Dutch by their applications for residency and citizenship. Considering the Dutch language majority and the

number of different languages immigrant groups bring, it would be pragmatically difficult for the Netherlands to function as a multilingual state. Furthermore, the state appears unwilling to see other languages as compatible with national identity. While Surrendra Santokhi expressed to me his admiration for the multiculturalism of the Netherlands, he also placed value on social cohesion and the role of language in providing it. Integration means immigrants assume the values and attitudes of the host population or the host population absorbs the attributes of the immigrant groups, according to Hagendoorn, Veenman, and Vollebergh.<sup>lxiv</sup> The latter, they write, is less likely, although it was the case in Tunisia. Instead, the Netherlands uses language to protect traditional Dutch society—or the imagination of it—from significant infiltration by immigrant norms. The Civic Integration Examination is consistent with McNamara and Shohamy's assertion that governments use such requirements to identify those willing to adapt.

Immigrants tend to be marginalized by mainstream society,<sup>lxv</sup> but it should be further noted that immigrant communities do not form in isolation. This essay has shown that state policies hold the power to determine how immigrants identify themselves and how others view them. Santokhi underscored the salience of language as a condition for integration by recounting efforts by The Hague's municipal government to reach immigrants who arrived before the new requirements were put into effect. The city encourages this group to attend non-compulsory language courses offered by foundations and religious institutions. The existence of this group indicates that despite recent measures there will still exist a portion of the population who may not linguistically integrate as much as new arrivals. Tonken, Hurenkamp, and Duyvendak caution that integration levels vary in other aspects too, as language integration can occur on a functional or emotive level.<sup>lxvi</sup> The integration promoted by the government requirements is most easily classified as functional, or knowledge of Dutch that facilitates "doing shopping, visiting the doctor [and] helping your kids with their homework," in the words of Santokhi. Alternatively, emotive integration is more applicable to the Tunisian phenomenon of code-switching, in which language ties effect a sense of belonging. Perhaps the Dutch requirements, then, are meant foremost to protect the mainstream Dutch identity rather than actively instill a sense of belonging in immigrants. Indeed, Vermeulen argues that there remains a strong sentiment among the first-generation Moroccan population that eventually they will leave the Netherlands.<sup>lxvii</sup>

What meaning do these sentiments hold for the application of Sen's theory to the Netherlands? The Civic Integration Examination evokes the "illusion of singularity." Of course, the sentiments of Santokhi reflect efforts towards multiculturalism, but the inquiry relevant to this research is the extent to which the language policies allow for the choice implicit in multiculturalism. Policies like the exam and the sentiments behind the popularity of movements like Proud of the Netherlands indicate that language has become symbolic of Dutch identity. Therefore, while multiculturalism may be encouraged from one direction, immigrants also face pressure to declare allegiance to Dutch society by speaking Dutch. The confrontation caused by immigration has created in the Dutch the hyperconsciousness Dobie references, much like colonialism did in Tunisia. Moreover, Vermeulen suggests immigrants feel disconnected from mainstream society. They may respond by staying within their own cultural groups. Is reciprocal alienation a caveat of Sen's theory of choice and identity? The Dutch fear changes to national identity that could make them feel like foreigners within their native country, while immigrants face social exclusion without adequate Dutch language skills. They are at a crossroads similar to that which Tunisia faced when the instigation of French threatened to make Tunisians feel out of place in their own country. As discussed earlier, over time Tunisian society has found a way to integrate

both languages into a cohesive identity. Such a middle ground seems less likely for the Netherlands. Politically, the Dutch are using language as a symbol of Dutch identity. This phenomenon is becoming more important than the multicultural identity once attributed to the Netherlands. Therefore, immigrants face complicated choices and constraints in navigating identities in their new country. By seeking to live in the Netherlands and taking the required exam, they implicitly agree to make the Dutch identity a significant force in their lives. Consequently, the citizenship test constrains identity. However, perhaps these voluntary constraints are only temporary. My research suggests that some immigrants prioritize their home identity over the identity associated with their recipient country. The Civic Integration Examination, then, is meant to influence identity choices in favor of Dutch identity, but it may also compel an adverse reaction.

#### **IV. Lessons**

The tightening connections created by globalization present opportunities, but they also create tensions as individuals are confronted with norms and values that compel them to define their own identities. The cases presented here focus on different eras of globalization—colonialism by the West and immigration to the West—but both demonstrate how globalization urges an evaluation of identity and the role that language can play. Language, after all, facilitates sharing ideas and building a sense of community. I sought to discover how government language policies constrain the perceptions and expressions of identities, and Tunisia and the Netherlands present two responses encouraged by globalization. I find the Netherlands' policies more constraining than those of Tunisia. The Tunisians I interviewed intimated that Arabic and French peacefully coexist in Tunisian society, although the languages are used for different purposes. The women saw both as characteristic of post-colonial Tunisian identity. The necessity of French for social mobility imposes some constraints, but these may have more to do with social class than identifying as Tunisian. Despite the apparent flexibility between French and Arabic, however, my research suggests that language still plays a crucial role. It seems too simplistic to dismiss the discrepancy between official policy and practice as an indication of linguistic ambivalence. Rather, this discrepancy may indicate, as do the class elements intimated by the interviews, that language policy in Tunisia may hold greater power in the social, rather than formal political, realm.

The Netherlands, alternatively, seems unlikely to approach a similar point of linguistic hybridization because language is more politicized at the moment in both the social and political realms. Dutch is the only majority language and thus speaking another language as one's mother tongue or in daily interactions identifies one as an outsider. The Civic Integration Examination exemplifies these constraints and enforces them. The exam strives for social cohesion in theory, but it also perpetuates the perception that immigrant languages are a declaration of disloyalty to Dutch norms. The "illusion of singularity" denounced by Sen is enforced.

While my research satisfies the initial inquiry, there are aspects of both cases that limit my analysis and warrant further investigation. Regarding the Tunisia research, the demographic status of the women I interviewed limits the applicability of my conclusions for the greater Tunisian population. Tunisians of different ages, socioeconomic backgrounds, and geographic origins may make different associations. Would French seem more foreign, for example, to someone outside the colonial centers or someone with less experience in the francophone higher education system? Considering the legacies of Arabization and the frustrations the women

expressed about exclusively speaking Arabic, it would also be valuable to explore how the factors that have shaped Tunisian identity (like the strong presence of French) influence the regional identity of Tunisians.

Concerning my research in the Netherlands, it is useful to look at the government's perspective, but I can only speculate about the actual reactions to them. Interviews with immigrants would deepen my findings. Furthermore, I focus on immigrants arriving after 2007. What about second- and third-generation immigrants, who might identify as Dutch and speak Dutch fluently, along with their parent's mother tongue? It would be interesting to see the extent of code-switching in the Netherlands.

Regardless of the newly surfaced questions, the research reveals an unanticipated and noteworthy occurrence. Although immigrating could be considered a more voluntary symptom of globalization than being colonized, in the context of my case studies, the former has created more tension. Undoubtedly the freedom to negotiate between French and Arabic in Tunisia partially results from the country's particular history; as mentioned earlier, language is a more contentious subject in Algeria, which had a more aggrieved break from the French. However, the relative harmony between varied affiliations and languages also results from the government's moderate language stance, exemplified by the Minister of Culture's statement about the value of both languages. As the world faces ever-increasing interconnectedness, I find a thought from Sen's *Identity and Violence* worthwhile: "The hope of harmony in the contemporary world lies to a great extent in a clearer understanding of the pluralities of human identity, and in the appreciation that they cut across each other and work against a sharp separation along one single hardened line of impenetrable division."<sup>lxviii</sup> The Netherlands faces practical constraints against becoming a multilingual society like Tunisia because of the large Dutch-speaking majority. Nevertheless, as immigration and language debates gain momentum, it is constructive to keep in mind that the confinement of identities to simplified, singular expressions of allegiance may break down the very society it seeks to unify.

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<sup>i</sup> Quoted in Kathryn A. Woolard and Bambi B. Schieffelin, "Language Ideology," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 23 (1994): 67.

<sup>ii</sup> Peter Singer, *One World*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 9–10.

<sup>iii</sup> Woolard and Schieffelin 1994, p. 57.

<sup>iv</sup> Madeleine Dobie, "Francophone Studies and the Linguistic Diversity of the Maghreb," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 23 (2003): 35.

<sup>v</sup> Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence* (New York: Penguin Books Ltd., 2007), p. 176.

<sup>vi</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>vii</sup> Woolard and Schieffelin 1994, p. 62.

<sup>viii</sup> Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?," *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (1993): 25.

<sup>ix</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>x</sup> Sen 2007, p. 5.

<sup>xi</sup> Bonnie Urciuoli, "Language and Borders," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995): 527.

<sup>xii</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>xiii</sup> Sen 2007, p. 37.

<sup>xiv</sup> Dobie 2003, p. 34.

- <sup>xv</sup> Moha Ennaji, "Aspects of Multilingualism in the Maghreb," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 87 (1991): 22.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Sen 2007, p. 28.
- <sup>xvii</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.
- <sup>xviii</sup> Urciuoli 1995, p. 530.
- <sup>xix</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 220.
- <sup>xx</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 224.
- <sup>xxi</sup> Ronald A. T. Judy, "Some Notes on the Status of Global English in Tunisia," *Boundary 2*, Issue 26.2 (1999): 6.
- <sup>xxii</sup> Nicholas Keung, "Language Test Angers Immigration Lawyers," *The Star* (3 May 2008), accessed online at [thestar.com/article/421032](http://thestar.com/article/421032).
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Tim McNamara and Elana Shohamy, "Language Tests and Human Rights," *International Journal of Applied Linguistics* 18, no. 1 (2008): 89.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.
- <sup>xxv</sup> Quoted in John D Battenburg, "English in the Maghreb," *English Today* 12, no. 4 (1996): 5.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Ennaji 1991, p. 8.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.
- <sup>xxviii</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.
- <sup>xxix</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.
- <sup>xxx</sup> Nabiha Jerad, Lecture on "Culture, Language and Identity in the Post-Colonial Maghreb," Center for Maghreb Studies, Tunis, 6 October 2008.
- <sup>xxxi</sup> Craig A. Sirles, "Politics and Arabization: The Evolution of Postindependence North Africa," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 137 (1999): 118.
- <sup>xxxii</sup> Mark I. Choate, "Identity Politics and Political Perception in the European Settlement of Tunisia: The French Colony versus the Italian Colony," *French Colonial History* 8 (2007): 98.
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> Woolard and Schieffelin 1994, p. 67.

- xxxiv Dobie 2003, p. 33.
- xxxv Sonya, interview by author, 30 November 2008.
- xxxvi Yasmine, interview by author, 2 December 2008.
- xxxvii Sirles 1999, p. 122.
- xxxviii Quoted in Battenburg 1996, p. 7.
- xxxix Sirles 1999, p. 122.
- xl Judy 1999, p. 6.
- xli Sirles 1999, p. 120.
- xlii Ennaji 1991, p. 14.
- xliii Ibid., p. 122.
- xliv Ibid., p. 17.
- lv Ibid., p. 19.
- xlvi Floris Vermeulen, Lecture on “The Integration Process in Amsterdam,” Institute for Migration and Ethnic Studies, University of Amsterdam, 20 January 2009.
- xlvii Philip Muus, “Dutch Immigration Policy: A Pragmatic Adjustment,” in *Controlling Immigration: A Global Perspective*, 2nd ed., edited by Cornelius et al. (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 264.
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- xlix Muus 2004, p. 283.
- <sup>1</sup> Louk Hagendoorn, Justus Veenman, and Wilma Vollebergh, *Immigrants in the Netherlands: Cultural versus Economic Integration* (London: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2003), p. 2.
- li Tonkens, Hurenkamp, and Duyyendak 2008, p. 4.

<sup>lii</sup> Kutlay Yagmur, “Language Policy in the Netherlands,” Working paper, AMARAUNA World Languages Network (February 2009), accessed online at [amarauna-languages.com/orokorra/artikuluak/eu/Bilbao\\_Yagmur.pdf](http://amarauna-languages.com/orokorra/artikuluak/eu/Bilbao_Yagmur.pdf): 7.

<sup>liii</sup> Muus 2004, p. 264.

<sup>liv</sup> Hagendoorn et al. 2003, pp. 221–222.

<sup>lv</sup> Vermeulen lecture, 2009.

<sup>lvi</sup> The Netherlands. Ministry of Justice, *Naar Nederland* (2005), accessed online on 25 March 2009 at [thiememeulenhoff.nl/documentenservice/pagina.asp?pagkey=53768](http://thiememeulenhoff.nl/documentenservice/pagina.asp?pagkey=53768).

<sup>lvii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>lviii</sup> Hagendoorn et al. 2003, p. 56.

<sup>lix</sup> Paul M. Sniderman and Louk Hagendoorn, *When Ways of Life Collide* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 48.

<sup>lx</sup> Sebastiaan Gottlieb and Laurens Nijzink, “Dutch Citizenship Tests Discriminate.” *Radio Nederland* (15 May 2008), accessed online on 8 June 2009 at [static.rnw.nl/migratie/www.rnw.nl/internationaljustice/specials/HumanRights/080515-dutch-immigration-mc-redirected](http://static.rnw.nl/migratie/www.rnw.nl/internationaljustice/specials/HumanRights/080515-dutch-immigration-mc-redirected).

<sup>lxi</sup> Paul Belien, “Dutch Introduce Exams for Immigrants, Consider Army Drill for Youths,” *The Brussels Journal* (21 January 2006), accessed online on 10 April 2009 at [brusselsjournal.com/node/695](http://brusselsjournal.com/node/695).

<sup>lxii</sup> “Dutch Labour Party Gaining Momentum,” *Angus Reid Global Monitor* (14 January 2009), accessed online on 1 May 2009 at [angusreid.com/polls/view/32612/dutch\\_labour\\_party\\_gaining\\_momentum/](http://angusreid.com/polls/view/32612/dutch_labour_party_gaining_momentum/).

<sup>lxiii</sup> “CDA Leads, Verdonk Gains in Netherlands,” *Angus Reid Global Monitor* (16 April 2008), accessed online on 1 May 2009 at [angusreid.com/polls/view/30451/cda\\_leads\\_verdonk\\_gains\\_in\\_netherlands](http://angusreid.com/polls/view/30451/cda_leads_verdonk_gains_in_netherlands).

<sup>lxiv</sup> Hagendoorn et al. 2003, p. 3.

<sup>lxv</sup> Yagmur 2009, p. 2.

<sup>lxvi</sup> Tonkens et al. 2008, p. 7.

<sup>lxvii</sup> Vermeulen lecture, 2009.

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