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Meaning-making in conjunctures: the affective-discursive framing of the 2024 Amsterdam violence as “failed integration” of migrants

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ABSTRACT

In November 2024, violence following a football match in Amsterdam was framed as evidence of migrant men’s failed integration into Dutch society. The frame achieved discursive dominance, anchoring public debate, and was adopted by the government before empirical substantiation. We examine the affective-discursive processes behind the frame’s salience amid conjunctural conditions and heightened collective anxieties. We conceptualize anxiety-fear arrangements as configurations of affective relations between socio-material elements. Frames, as meaning-making devices, organize meanings and orient emotions, shaping relations within arrangements. Through a multimodal discourse analysis of political statements, parliamentary transcripts and media items, we trace how the failed integration frame organized meanings, channeling collective anxieties onto tangible objects of fear: migrantized bodies, objects and places. The frame became salient through precedence, emotional intensity, cultural resonance and moral certainty. Empirically, we illustrate how bodies are ‘migrantized’ through framing. Conceptually, the anxiety-fear arrangement provides an operative template to understand meaning-making in conjunctures.

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Introduction

In November 2024 in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, violence broke out following a match between two football clubs, the Amsterdam-based AFC Ajax and the Israeli club Maccabi Tel Aviv. Politicians in the governing coalition swiftly framed the events as antisemitic violence against Maccabi Club’s fans, committed by young men with a migration background. The politicians posited that this is evidence of migrant men’s failed integration into Dutch society. This discursive connection situated the events within a longstanding discourse on migrant integration in the Netherlands, (re)activating pre-existing anxieties around social cohesion. The frame emerged prior to the conclusion of the official investigation, which identified the cause as a “toxic mix” of hooliganism, antisemitism and

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the conflict in the Middle East. The integration frame became the dominant interpretation, centering public discussion and media coverage. It anchored the debate around national identity and migration, while diminishing other relevant interpretations. The nature and timing of the events make it a rich case for conjunctural analysis, considering its connection to geopolitical conflict and the fixation of migration as a site of competing politics of belonging (Yuval-Davis 2006). This paper investigates the affective-discursive processes that made the failed integration frame dominate public discourse. Approaching frames as interpretative meaning-making devices, we explore the discursive construction of the frame, the affective conditions that led to its salience and the meanings assigned to migrant men, objects and spaces.

Conjunctures are periods of destabilizing change in which society's self-understanding is called into question (Grossberg 2015), resulting in the negotiation of meanings surrounding identity. Migration politics is the epicenter of a meaning crisis, with a struggle between competing interpretations of belonging, citizenship and national identity. Who is a "migrant" is increasingly being defined through racialized boundary work that is articulated through nativist body politics (Wodak 2015). Additionally, migration discourse is entangled with the globalized implications of geopolitical conflicts, rising economic pressures and increased polarization. The affective atmosphere of conjunctures is marked by heightened anxiety, creating the conditions for these discourses' increased salience. The rapid changes in discourse have unsettled "migrant" as a stable signifier, making established lenses, such as citizenship or securitization, increasingly inadequate in accounting for ongoing shifts. The implications of these unsettled meanings are also becoming more materially potent, moving from discourse to reality. We respond by approaching meaning-making as an affective-discursive process (see Wetherell 2013), combining approaches from discourse studies (Entman 2003; Laclau and Mouffe 2001), affect studies (Ahmed 2014; Slaby, Mühlhoff, and Wüschner 2019a), and conjunctural analysis (Grossberg 2015; Hall et al. 2013), applied to the Dutch context.

Through a multimodal discourse analysis of political statements, parliamentary transcripts and news items, the paper examines how the failed integration frame centers national identity as a domain of contestation. This illustrates migrantization (see Dahinden 2025) through discourse, where migrants are constructed and defined as oppositional to "Dutchness". We argue that the integration frame's discursive dominance is attributed to affective-discursive practices that enabled its salience under conjunctural conditions. The frame collapsed complexity, was emotionally intense and resonated with existing cultural tropes. We conceptualize the anxiety-fear arrangement to trace how political actors channeled vague collective anxieties into tangible fears assigned to migrants, demonstrating how discursive meanings organize affective relations, shape the politics of everyday life and mediate lived realities.

We proceed with our theoretical framework in four steps: (1) we examine how belonging is contested within current conjunctural conditions, namely destabilized identity structures and intense affective atmospheres, (2) we conceptualize the anxiety-fear arrangement, a configuration through which meaning is organized, (3) we demonstrate how frames operate as meaning-making devices, and (4) we discuss how discursive meanings shape our lived realities.

Contested belonging in conjunctures

Anti-migration discourses must be situated within the current conjuncture to explain their salience. Drawing on Grossberg's (2015) conjunctural analysis, we understand conjunctures as specific historical moments in which political, economic, social, cultural and epistemological forces converge, creating the conditions for change. Social structures destabilize when they are unable to adapt to changes in material conditions and social expectations. Meaning-systems that make sense of realities also destabilize when they cannot accommodate the growing complexity of societal issues. This destabilization reverberates, unsettling established identities anchored in these structures, giving conjunctures an existential dimension. Society is designated a "problem space," and its self-understanding is called into question (Scott, 2004; as cited in Grossberg 2015, 25). Social relations and meanings are subjected to discursive negotiation. Grossberg's conceptualization of conjunctures resonates with the present global moment, marked by simultaneous crises, economic pressures, political polarization and globalized geopolitical conflicts. We focus on the European context to discuss how migration discourses (1) negotiate belonging to national identities, and (2) mobilize conjunctural affects, particularly collective anxiety, produced under these conditions.

Anti-migration discourses (re)assert the nation-state as the primary identity anchor. Wodak (2015) describes this as *renationalization*, a political and discursive process through which the nation-state, naturalization and citizenship are defined through nativist body politics. While the discourse is packaged in nativist language, it is fundamentally racialized boundary work. European racialization functions through "mute" categories; categories that represent race without explicitly naming it (Goldberg 2006). "Migrant" is one such constructed category, functioning as a marker of difference rather than a descriptive label (Tudor 2018). Migrantization is the ascription of a migratory status to people, othering them through constructing them as not (fully) belonging to the imagined homogenous nation-state (Dahinden 2025). Boundaries are drawn through a binary logic that continues a colonial tradition, in which society's self-definition depends on the construction of an oppositional other (Schinkel 2018). In the Netherlands, for instance, "autochtoon" (referring to people with both parents born in the Netherlands) and "allochtoon" (referring to people with at least one foreign-born parent) were former official categories (Yanow and Van Der Haar 2013).

Reflecting a broader trend of emotionalization in political discourse, nativist discourses are characterized by their emotional intensity. This necessitates attention to not only their emotive nature, but also the affective context they function in. The contemporary collective atmosphere is characterized by a particular intensity, with heightened anxiety becoming a defining condition of many societies (Zamorano Llena, Stier, and Gray 2024, 10). Collective uncertainty arises when the present is increasingly illegible, which intensifies into anxiety when imaginations of the future are pessimistic. In the European context, migration discourses function in a context of anxious politics, which describes the political terrain in which existential anxieties about European states' survival become central reference points that shape political imaginaries and narratives (Modest and de Koning 2016). Politicians tap into existing anxieties to mobilize people into action, and compete over the public's "emotional agenda" (Albertson and Gadarian 2015, 28). Anti-migration discourses position the "nation" as facing an existential threat

from migration. The “nation” is imagined through historical narratives that are characterized by feelings of “mourning for lost greatness, hegemony and homogeneity, with a strong sense of who belongs” (Modest and de Koning 2016, 101). Migrants are constructed as the threat, projecting collective anxieties onto bodies and objects that are positioned as embodiments of these anxieties (Modest and de Koning 2016). Ahmed (2014) makes a distinction between anxiety, which lacks an object, and fear, which is fixed onto one. Anti-migration discourses thus position migrants as fearful objects, condensing collective anxieties into a scapegoat that is constructed as the cause of social dislocations, and symbolically rejected (Hall et al. 2013).

The anxiety-fear affective arrangement

Conjunctures are affectively intense, inviting understanding migration discourses’ dominance within the affective atmospheres they are embedded in. Affective atmospheres are the “shared ground from which subjective states and their attendant feelings and emotions emerge” (Anderson 2009, 78). Affect is the “energetic glue” that mediates the interactive relations between social actors, discourses and material realities (Grossberg 2015, 107). To make these affective relations traceable, we use the concept of affective arrangements: a configuration of affective relations between elements, such as “persons, things, artifacts, spaces, discourses, behaviors, and expressions” (Slaby, Mühlhoff, and Wüschner 2019a, 5). We understand configuration as an “operative template” (Slaby, Mühlhoff, and Wüschner 2019b, 31), which provides a layout for examining how relations between elements are organized through meaning. Following Wetherell’s (2013) call for approaching affect and discourse as mutually constitutive, we understand meaning-making as an affective-discursive process.

Meaning-making is a discursive practice, as meaning is made through communicating how we think, interpret and feel about people, objects and events (Baxter, Scharp, and Thomas 2021). Meaning shapes how we define, interpret and respond to relations between the elements of affective configurations. The discursive production of meaning is done through articulation, the discursive practice through which relations between these elements are established (Laclau and Mouffe 2001). The identities of those elements are defined by their positions in relation to nodal points, which are centers of discourse that anchor meaning (Laclau and Mouffe 2001). Meaning is produced by evaluating a semantic object (e.g. people, objects, events, or phenomena), categorizing it as “good/bad” or “moral/immoral” (Baxter, Scharp, and Thomas 2021). Through equivalence logic, different elements are grouped and constructed as being equivalent based on their opposition to something else (Laclau and Mouffe 2001).

Based on this understanding, we conceptualize the anxiety-fear arrangement as a specific affective arrangement in a conjunctural context with heightened collective anxieties. Through this configuration, anxieties are channeled into tangible objects of fear. First, the nation-state is articulated as the nodal point and belonging is defined in relation to it. Migrants are constructed as being “strange outsiders” to society, and thus, not belonging. They are positioned in opposition to the “national self,” which is implicitly defined through binary contradiction. Second, elements associated with migrants (bodies, objects and spaces) are constructed as existential threats to the national self, thus associating them with social anxieties. Through emotionally charged discourse,

they are positioned as observable objects of fear. Fear is elicited through framing migrantized groups as being violent, out of control and threatening to the public. These affective and discursive processes invoke a state of moral panic in response to a perceived existential threat.

Frames as discursive meaning-making devices

Anti-migration discourses are political in nature, meaning that they operate through framing. Accordingly, we center frames as discursive meaning-making tools. Frames are strategic devices through which reality is interpreted, with events as the primary semantic object. Meaning is made through interpreting the events (*what happened*) and explaining their relevance (*what does this mean*). Frames thus operate as narrative structures, in which events are selected, ordered into a story, and the roles of perpetrators, victims, and causes are assigned accordingly (Entman 2003; Van Hulst and Yanow 2016). Because events are complex and ambiguous as they unfold, frames function to provide clarity and reduce uncertainty (Van Hulst and Yanow 2016). Frames are therefore interpretative frameworks and not objective representations of reality. The selection of events is political in essence, as actors selectively emphasize details to make them more “noticeable, meaningful and memorable” (Entman 1993, 53), swaying audiences towards a specific interpretation.

The selection and interpretation of events is organized around a central frame, which functions as a nodal point. Naming an issue as a problem transforms it into a policy issue (Van Hulst and Yanow 2016), which is constructed as a deviation from the norm, constituting a grievance (Zittoun 2014). Frames’ normative nature means that power relations determine which bodies are framed as problematic subjects and how they are categorized (Butler 2016). In affective arrangements, frames organize the relations between elements through normative categorization. Elements are sorted by categorizing them as “good” or “bad,” invoking a moral framing.

We now move to discuss how frames become salient in conjunctural conditions. First, they provide clarity and moral certainty, making them particularly appealing in an anxious context. Migration frames collapse complexities into simplified normative explanations, presented as “common-sense” (Wodak 2015), and thus agreeable. Moral judgement is assigned based on a simplistic moral binary. Fixating vague anxieties onto a single frightening threat provides clarity and makes finding solutions appear simpler and attainable (Wodak 2015). However, appearing straightforward does ideological work by condensing multiple threats into a singular threat (Hall et al. 2013). Second, frames that evoke strong emotional responses become more salient (Entman 2003). Frames’ emotional intensity makes them salient in conjunctural affective atmospheres with heightened anxiety. Migration frames center the nation as a threatened object, invoking existential urgency with pessimistic imaginations of the future. Lastly, migration frames provide interpretations that are resonant with dominant cultural frames, such as familiar metaphors and racialized stereotypes. Frames that employ cultural tropes are more recognizable, creating the conditions for their reproducibility (Butler 2016). This cultural resonance makes frames highly salient due to their familiarity (Entman 2003). Salience has discursive implications. Salient frames that become dominant in media effectively render competing frames politically irrelevant (Entman 2003).

Migration frames circulate primarily through digital media, where meaning is constructed through multiple modes, namely language and images (Wang 2014). Language anchors images by informing how they are interpreted. Images anchor language by representing material reality, positioned as evidence of the truth of a discursive claim (Butler 2016). The selection of images and their positioning in relation to language is therefore a discursive process. The “seeing is believing” cognitive bias is also leveraged by politicians, presenting images as evidence that validates their interpretations. In anxiety-fear arrangements, positioning images depicting migrantized bodies, attributes, objects or clothing items alongside the frame constructs them as representations of fear. Together, they form a visual register of markers that signal a threat. These meanings “stick” to their subjects through repeated circulation, which reifies their representation of fear (Ahmed 2014).

Discursive meanings to lived realities: A recursive loop

We discussed how meaning is made through affective-discursive processes in a conjunctural affective atmosphere, showing how meaning is organized through discourse. We now move to how these discursive meanings sediment into the politics of everyday lived realities. Affect mediates between the social and material. In our conceptualization of affective arrangements, meaning shapes relations between its elements, which include bodies, objects and material settings. Discursive meanings become embedded in individuals’ interpretation of their lived realities, demonstrating affect’s “unavoidable materiality” as it is “viscerally lived” as experience (Grossberg 2015, 106). Althoff (2020, 261) discusses how public narratives act as narrative frameworks through which people make sense and assign meanings to their everyday experiences. Because frames are narrative structures, we argue that salient frames shape meaning-making on an individual level. Language allows meaning to circulate between the individual and public scales. Individuals assign meaning to everyday encounters based on their framing of situations (Goffman 1986), where stacks of frames constitute a meaning-making structure that organizes subjectivities and contextual relations (Scheff 2005). On the urban scale, these frames feed into urban imaginaries, which are interpretative grids through which materialities, experiences, and practices are understood (Lindner and Meissner 2018).

Berger and Luckmann (1966, 44–45) further discuss how we perceive others in everyday life based on categories (e.g. “man”, “European”) and interpret their behavior as resulting from this category. In anxiety-fear arrangements, the “migrant” is constructed as a threat. The association with fear thus pre-constitutes the affective frame for interpreting encounters, since these meanings are generalized to all those in this category through categorical equivalences. It thus becomes a social position through which they are perceived, orienting their “bodies in specific directions, affecting how they take up space” (Ahmed 2007, 150). Additionally, the leveraging of racialized bodily attributes as migration markers leads to visual deviation being perceived as foreign (Guðjónsdóttir 2014), making some bodies hypervisible (Amer and Leung 2023). Discursive meanings are embodied through enactment. Meaning foregrounds action as “people act according to the meaning they impute in situations” (Beuving and De Vries 2015, 32). This materializes exclusion, for instance, through institutional practices, such as racialized policing by state bureaucrats (Çankaya 2020).

Research context

This study examines the discursive processes through which the November 2024 violence was framed. The violence was linked to a football match between Amsterdam-based AFC Ajax and Israeli club Maccabi Tel Aviv on 7 November 2024 in Amsterdam. Tensions began the day before the match with reports of skirmishes and verbal altercations between Maccabi's fans and some city residents around the city center. City officials initially considered canceling the match but ultimately decided to continue it (NOS-05). The violence occurred after the match on the evening of 7 November. The violence was framed by the governing coalition as antisemitic violence against Maccabi's supporters, accusing "youth with a migration background." This framing preceded the release of the investigative report of Amsterdam's *Politieke Driehoek*,¹ which came out on 11 November, 4 days after the event. The report attributed the violence to a "toxic cocktail" combining hooliganism, antisemitism and the conflict in the Middle East (HP-08). Politicians from the coalition parties, namely PVV, VVD, BBB and NSC,² positioned the violence as evidence of migrants' failed integration in the Netherlands. Migrants' "failed integration" is a pre-existing discourse in the Netherlands, often discursively linked to Dutch-Moroccan men. The events' occurrence at a conjuncture of rising anti-migrant sentiments in the Netherlands and globally, and the ramifications of the ongoing Israeli genocide in Gaza, make it an analytically unique case to examine how contemporary migration discourses function.

Methodology

The paper employs a discourse analysis with four dimensions: framing, affect, visibility and contextual embeddedness. This methodological approach accommodates the overlapping conditions in which the failed integration frame functions. Our analysis is based on a corpus composed of news items, social media posts by politicians, press releases and the parliamentary transcript of the Dutch House of Representatives' (Tweede Kamer) 23rd meeting, focused on the events. The primary focus is on the coalition's framing and politicians' statements in the media, rather than the media's coverage in its own right. The analytical framework is informed by affect theory (Ahmed 2014; Grossberg 2015; Slaby, Mühlhoff, and Wüschner 2019a) and discourse theory (Baxter, Scharp, and Thomas 2021; Laclau and Mouffe 2001). Our multimodal analysis spans language and images, following an understanding of intertextuality that approaches meaning as produced across both images and language. We examine the juxtaposition of images and text, discursive associations and the meanings assigned to visual markers.

Scope and data collection

Data was collected from different sources, each corresponding to a discursive function, shaping the frame's emergence, circulation, salience and dominance. The frame's origin is traced to X (Twitter) social media posts, where politicians framed the events as they unfolded, prior to the conclusion of any official investigation. In media, which mediates between politicians and the public, the frame was circulated, (re)produced and given a visual form. The press conference marks the adoption of the frame as a governmental

position. In parliament, the frame's structure is fully revealed (actors, causes, evaluation and treatment) and institutionally consolidated, represented in the parliamentary transcript of the Tweede Kamer's 23rd session. These sources combined reflect the circulation and consolidation of meanings across multiple discursive sites (Entman 2003).

Source	Type	Corpus ID	Number
X (Twitter) posts	Social media	X	12
Tweede Kamer 23rd Session	Parliamentary transcript	TK	1 (189 pages)
Prime Minister press conference	Press conference transcript	RO	1 (27 pages)
NOS	Media; public broadcaster	NOS	6
RTL Nieuws	Media; commercial news	RTL	12
Het Parool	Media; Amsterdam-based online newspaper	HP	11
de Volkskrant	Media; online national newspaper	VK	19

The selection period is 7 November 2024, when rioting was first reported, until 13 November 2024, the date of the parliamentary session, when the frame was consolidated. This timeframe also corresponds with a full news cycle. Using X's advanced search, we identified 12 posts from coalition politicians/party accounts that framed the events. We focus on the governing coalition, which had a parliamentary majority and centered migration in its political agenda. We identified several keywords based on the X posts to guide further selection of news stories. 48 news items were collected from NOS, RTL, de Volkskrant and Het Parool, representing a range of popular news sources.

The keywords were two-layered. The first concerned relation to the events directly through the keywords "Maccabi," "Amsterdam rellen" (riots), "Amsterdam geweld" (violence). The second concerned framing of the events through the keywords "antisemitisme," "integratie," and "integratieprobleem." Stories from Het Parool and de Volkskrant were retrieved through Lexis-Nexis using these criteria. NOS and RTL stories were only available on Google and were retrieved using the same criteria. The discrepancy in the number of news items is caused by some sources having blogs, with a thread of stories, rather than individual stories. The corpus was compiled into an indexed overview.

Analysis

Data was analyzed through three rounds of coding. First, we used Zittoun's (2014) framework as a sensitizing concept, examining the frame's construction in parliament. It was applied as an entry point to identify the five stages that built the integration frame. Second, we applied theory-guided inductive coding to identify the discursive tools employed to establish the frame, including nodal points and anchors, association, representation, visual bias, historical imaginaries, affective charge and visual juxtapositions (Butler 2016; Laclau and Mouffe 2001; Wang 2014). We identified the following code groups: (un)Dutchness, racialization, migrantization, threat, public order, (hyper)masculinity and fear/anxiety. This insight revealed that existing frameworks did not account for conjunctural conditions, particularly the discursive anchoring of national identity and affective intensity. Accordingly, we abductively developed the anxiety-fear arrangement as an analytical concept that traces how migration discourses operate, particularly the racialized demarcation of belonging around national identity, deployed through an emotive and nativist framework. We do so by articulating Wodak's (2015)

renationalization, affective-discursive entanglement (Wetherell 2013), anxious politics (Modest and de Koning 2016) and affective arrangements (Grossberg 2015; Slaby, Mühlhoff, and Wüschner 2019a). The analysis was situated in the Dutch context and contextualized within literature on migranticization and masculinities in Europe. Our analysis is structured around bodies, objects and spaces as socio-material elements of affective arrangements.

The construction of the “failed integration” frame: what happened?

We start by mapping the failed integration frame. The frame rapidly emerged, instantaneously relating the events to migrants’ non-integration. As the events unfolded on 8 November, Yeşilgöz (VVD) labeled the events as “pure antisemitism” in Amsterdam’s streets (VK-01). Wilders (PVV) also posted on X, saying: “Looks like a Jew hunt in the streets of Amsterdam” (X-GW-02). The failed integration frame emerged through (1) labeling, the first step of framing, where an issue is named and problematized (Zittoun 2014). The violence was labeled as antisemitic “pogroms,” making it contradictory to Dutch norms. This framing preceded the official investigation, which attributed the violence to a “toxic mix” of hooliganism, antisemitism and conflict in the Middle East (HP-08). It also ignored the initial reports of violence before the match on 7 November 2024. RTL reported that Maccabi supporters assaulted a taxi driver in Amsterdam, prompting a reaction from taxi drivers (RTL-01). Nonetheless, the failed integration frame achieved discursive dominance, becoming the main lens of interpretation across discursive sites.

Labeling is followed by (2) identifying victims and (3) the designation of perpetrators. Maccabi fans are identified as the victims of antisemitic violence. The perpetrators were explicitly identified as Muslim/migrant youth, described in gendered and racialized terms. Prime Minister (PM) Schoof identified the perpetrators as “a specific group of young people with a migration background [that] is overrepresented in those hit-and-run actions” (RO-01). Yeşilgöz called them “scum” (X-DY-01) and Wilders (PVV) used the label “multicultural scum”, calling for their arrest and deportation (X-GW-02). Coalition politicians then pivoted to designating a “major integration problem” as the cause (NOS-01), since “a large part of Islamic youth do not subscribe to Dutch norms and values” (NOS-02). The frame’s dominance is demonstrated in anchoring the discussion in the parliamentary session on the events, held on 13 November. The following stage is (4) imagining an apocalyptic future. Politicians constructed a frightening future that resembles historical analogies, positing that without decisive action, the Netherlands’ future would be “reminiscent of the thirties and forties” (Van der Plas, BBB, TK-01), closer to “the darkest pages in our history” (Van Vroonhoven, NSC, TK-01) and that “it will get much worse” (Wilders, PVV, TK-01). Dramatized imaginations of future disorder consolidate the issue as urgent and unacceptable (Zittoun 2014). Future imaginaries set the stage for the fifth step: (5) establishing conditions for action, determining their scale and severity. Van der Plas (BBB) stated she rejected “cups of tea in the community center” with the Muslim community (TK-01). Solutions discussed included allowing police to monitor Telegram groups, denying or revoking Dutch citizenship, outlawing foreign funding for mosques, higher sentences in juvenile criminal law, expanding the legal definition of terror, revoking residence permits, and banning “hate imams” and “unfree messages in mosques.” The frame’s dominance is consolidated institutionally.

The frame draws a connection between the violence and migration-related anxieties in the Netherlands. Politicians framed migrant men as perpetrators of antisemitic violence, positioned as evidence of their failed integration. The discursive connection to “integration” situates this issue within existing discourse on migrant integration in the Netherlands, evoking existing collective anxieties about social cohesion. In a press conference, PM Schoof stated: “I think we can say without too much effort that we have an integration problem,” framing the violence as caused by “an underlying problem” that has “developed over the last fifty years” (RO-01). By connecting the emergent problem to an existing, more familiar one, politicians can utilize the correlated language register to explain the emergent problem (Zittoun 2014). The frame thus positions migrant men as unintegrated, and hence, threats to social cohesion. This allows the politicians to access a familiar repertoire, which includes predominant racialized tropes about migrant men. As frames that conform with existing cultural schemas become more salient (Entman 2003), we connect the frame’s salience with its resonance with racialized constructions of migrant men.

Anchoring Dutchness as a nodal point

National identity was centered through multiple affective-discursive processes. Politicians repeatedly invoked tragic national traumas, particularly the Netherlands’ role in the Holocaust, in relation to the violence. The evocation of these national memories is significant due to their relation to Dutchness. Goldberg (2006) argues that the Holocaust is central to Europe’s self-conception, because of its proximity to the “self”. This applies to the Netherlands by extension, but particularly because of the proximity of Jewish suffering to the nation’s history, and in Goldberg’s terms, its “self-narration” (Goldberg 2006, 356). Because of this moral significance, evoking the Holocaust calls the “self” into question. This existential nature centers “Dutchness” as a moral subject, anchoring it as a nodal point. In doing so, politicians position themselves as “the saviors of the Jews”, claiming ownership over their past, while obscuring facts such as that the first official apology from the Dutch Government for the Holocaust came in 2020 (Barr and Contreras 2026, 101).

These national memories are recognizable and have a strong normative character. Politicians’ statements articulated their emotional responses. PM Schoof said he was “full of disgust and shame” and called the actions “morally degenerate” (RO-01). Wilders said that he is “ashamed that this can happen in the Netherlands” (X-GW-02). Yeşilgöz also stated that the images of the attacks were “incredibly sick,” causing her “stomach to turn” (X-DY-01). Here, emotional intensity shapes meaning by communicating significance and invoking morality. Articulating the emotion also directs the public towards a specific emotional response to the assigned meaning. Politicians also used Holocaust references to foreshadow the future if the problem is not addressed, invoking anxiety and fear. This increases circulation and maintains an emergency framing, in which “normal” politics and processes are rendered inadequate.

Dutchness is centered as the frame’s nodal point, and other elements, namely “antisemitism,” “Islamic” and “integration”, derive their meanings based on their perceived relationship to it. Antisemitic violence is positioned as being opposed to Dutchness. Migrant men are framed as perpetrators, thus positioning the violence as evidence of

their failed integration. Their belonging to Dutchness is therefore questioned. This reflects how integration discourses produce racialized othering, as only non-white migrants' integration is questioned (Schinkel 2018). Barr and Contreras (2026) also discuss how conceptions of Jewish victimhood are increasingly deployed in racialized discourses on Dutch Muslims. This maintains Dutchness as a homogenous national identity threatened by Muslim outsiders, whose committing of antisemitic violence becomes evidence of their unintegration. Their unintegration thus poses a threat to "Dutch freedoms," which Yeşilgöz (VVD) said are "under pressure" (NOS-01). This makes a link to a longstanding discourse on the integration of the Dutch-Moroccan population in the Netherlands. It illustrates the functioning of the anxiety-fear arrangement, where existing anxieties about social cohesion are articulated and fixed onto tangible objects of fear. It also centers their citizenship and belonging as sites of contestation.

Constructing frightening bodies, objects and spaces

We now turn to analyzing the affective-discursive practices that sustained the frame. By focusing on the discursive tools employed by the politicians and the frame's affective charge, we demonstrate how the discursive frame functions in the anxiety-fear arrangement. We situate discursive meanings in relation to Dutchness, identified as a discursive anchor. The analysis is (1) multi-scalar as *bodies* carry *objects* through *spaces* and (2) affective, demonstrating how anxieties are made tangible by attaching fear.

Frightening bodies: migrantized and visualized

Migrant men were defined through categorical equivalences, collapsing different identities into one category. Politicians used "Arab," "Moroccan," "North African" and "Muslim" interchangeably to refer to the problematized group. Additionally, politicians inferred these equivalences based on racialized interpretations of images, collapsing multiple identities into "with a migration background." Migration background not only becomes a homogenized identifier, but also a marker of difference, as it is discursively positioned as distant from Dutchness.

Migrant men are framed as unintegrated into Dutch society due to their personal failure to assimilate. However, the responsibility is collectively assigned to all members of the homogenized group, regardless of personal identifiers such as nationality, religion or ethnicity. Their failure to integrate is problematized and positioned as contradicting an imagined, problem-less homogeneous society. This interpretation of integration is non-relational and assumes society is fixed and static (Schinkel 2018). This is illustrated in the construction of migrantized men as not subscribing to normative Dutch values. Another illustration of the construction of this contradiction is Wilders (PVV) stating: "People have absolutely nothing to do with Western norms and values, but with Islamic values, and they are diametrically opposed to ours." (NOS-04). The use of the pronoun "our" enacts a boundary between "us" and "them," in this case, migrantized men. Also illustrating this, PM Schoof said that this group had "turned its back on society" (TK-01). Difference is constructed through contradiction in anxiety-fear arrangements, dichotomously demarcating belonging. Migrant men's Dutchness was consistently hyphenated, followed by "with a migration background." By ignoring their

citizenship, the frame migrantizes citizens by constructing them as not (fully) belonging, contesting their connection to the Netherlands. Their Dutchness was acknowledged only when discussing denaturalization as a punitive measure, contesting their citizenship and legal belonging. Their realities are interpreted as personal failure to integrate, without considering structural inequalities and relational conditions. It creates a paradoxical situation where migrant men's failed integration is problematized, but also rendered impossible, since their differences are essentialized and positioned as incompatible with Dutchness.

Politicians extend the equivalence logic from identities to violence. Migrant men are constructed as common perpetrators of antisemitic, misogynistic and homophobic violence. In parliament, Wilders (PVV) labeled migrant men as a "group that causes misery everywhere in the Netherlands" and the reason "daughters don't dare to go to the fair" and "women don't dare to go out on the street (...) I have been warning about this for more than ten years" (TK-01). Yeşilgöz (VVD) said that Muslim women are "locked up indoors" and stated, "it is often young Dutch people of Moroccan origin who attack LGBT people in Amsterdam" (TK-01). In response to criticism of her approach as polarizing, Yeşilgöz stated that failure to act endangers "women, LGBTQ people, to the Dutch Jews, to those who no longer want to believe" (TK-01). Migrant men are constructed as hyper-masculine and aggressive, driven by religious fundamentalism. They are framed as common perpetrators of multiple forms of social violence. This framing also positions individual freedoms as markers of Western modernity, contrasting Muslim backwardness. Politicians present these connections as evidence of migrant men's incompatibility with Dutchness. Migrant masculinities are racialized and opposed to normative Dutchness based on these culturally embedded assumptions. Through implied contradiction, Dutchness is imagined as white, tolerant and civilized, making Dutchness a civilizing marker. The integration frame also diminishes relevant complexities. Politicians leverage "common sense" (Wodak 2015), exemplified by Yeşilgöz stating that it is "not rocket science" (TK-01).

Visual markers were positioned as representations of these categorical equivalences. Politicians leveraged the "seeing is believing" bias, which makes equivalences appear evident rather than constructed. Wilders (PVV) stated in parliament: "They were, as is evident from all the images, all the witness reports, all the movies and everyone who experienced it, all Muslims. They were largely Moroccans" (TK-01). Similarly, van der Plas (BBB) states: "Do we see the images on social media of Moroccan and other North African young men in which outright hatred of Jews is spread?" (TK-01). To make the distinction clearer, she elaborates: "It was definitely not Jeroen Pepijn from Winterswijk that I saw on the images, you know. It was other young people. That is what we saw" (TK-01). Politicians present an interpretation of images, inferring the identities and roles of those depicted. Bodies are migrantized based on racialized physical attributes, assigning meanings to visual cues such as skin color. Since politicians had identified the perpetrators prior to any arrests, PM Schoof was asked on what basis Nobel (VVD) made this accusation. He stated: "He based that on, if I remember correctly, his statement went on to say that there were quite a few young people who spoke Arabic, so you could also conclude that they were apparently young people with a different background, i.e. with a migration background, and that on that basis he also spoke about integration problems" (RO-01). This reveals how racialized inferences about identities are used to establish their roles in the violence. Constructed as violent perpetrators, bodies' physical attributes are

positioned as visual representation of fear. Politicians also posit their interpretations as observable, and therefore, truthful. Relevant to this, Het Parool reported that a video widely circulating online as an illustration of violence by “Middle Eastern migrants’ against Jews was misattributed, as it proved to be of Maccabi supporters attempting to assault a pro-Palestinian demonstrator (HP-05).

These meanings were consolidated through repeated juxtaposition in media, where images featuring these visual markers were positioned alongside violence reports. Over time, these become reified into dominant interpretative frameworks, thereby “sticking”, forming a visual register of threat markers. Young, male and darker-skinned bodies were frequently depicted in media coverage and particularly prominent in scenes of disorder. For instance, an image on NOS shows migrant men stand opposite police forces in full riot gear (NOS-03). The positioning signals a confrontation or stand-off. This resonates with the prevalent tropes that perceive groups of migrantized men as “gangs’ who engage in masculinized defiance. The “hyper-masculine migrant young men” construct is central to Dutch safety and security discourses and embodied in the form of spatial practices (Çankaya 2020). The association with criminality is illustrated by another image on RTL, which depicts five men with racialized features, blurred faces, and four are wearing black hoodies or puffer jackets (RTL-11). The text anchors the image: “Amsterdam’s most violent perpetrators in Amsterdam on *Opsporing Verzocht*³ are currently still unrecognizable.” The image’s constructive purpose is unclear, as their blurred faces make their identification not possible. It does, however, signal to the public that these are criminals at large and vigilance is required. This discursive framing makes migrantized men subjects of public focus. This renders them hypervisible in everyday life as these meanings shape how their behavior is interpreted, increasing public monitoring and moral policing.

Objects as tools of disorder

Objects gain relational, contextual meanings through connections to people, other objects or ideas (Lieto 2017). We examine how the integration frame assigns meanings to objects, among the material elements within the anxiety-fear arrangement. The frame centered several visual objects based on their association with migrantized bodies, namely, black hoodies, puffer jackets, helmets, scooters, taxis, knives, balaclavas and facemasks. Scooters and taxis were constructed as tools of organized violence, utilized for “hit and run” tactics, illustrated by Yeşilgöz (VVD), stating: “Young people on scooters and taxi drivers joined forces to hunt down Jews” (TK-01). Migrantized men are framed as “tearing through the city” with their “hoods on” enacting violence enabled by these objects. Online groups on platforms such as Telegram were positioned as tools through which disorder was organized. For instance, an RTL news item featured screenshots of Snapchat and Telegram conversations that featured plans for violence, anchored in the text: “Be there fighters!: This is how the attacks on Israeli supporters were organized” (RTL-07). In media images, scooters often appear facing the police in riot gear.

The frame positioned scooters as tools of violence, making them a symbolic signifier of the events. Through association with migrantized bodies, scooters were made into identifiers of migration. “Boys on scooters” emerged as a recurring term in the frame, used to connote a specific group. Wilders (PVV) states: “All of Amsterdam knows who they are ...

they usually weave through traffic unhindered. They don't give a damn about anything (...) sitting together on a scooter or a fat-bike⁴" (TK-01). Fat-bikes specifically have become a subject of moral debate, associated with (racialized) youth delinquency. This continues existing imaginaries that associate scooters with problematic youth in Dutch cities. The problematization of these objects makes them visual cues for control. In fact, "young boys in black hoodies on scooters" is a common racialized identifier used by police in Amsterdam (de Koning 2017).

Spaces as moral objects and sites of disorder

As the site of violence, public spaces were made into moral objects. The violence constituted an encroachment on Dutch spatial norms, in relation to Dutchness. Dutch public spaces are characterized by safety, order and urban harmony, understood through *leefbaarheid*, or livability, a central concept in Dutch spatial imaginaries. Speaking on public space, Wilders (PVV) referred to "anarchy," where "the scum" took charge and turned "beautiful old Mokum" into "ISIS territory" (TK-01). This suggests that "uncivilized outsiders" threaten Dutch public spaces from within. Referring to the city as "Mokum," the city's nickname, evokes historical connotations. Mokum means "the place" or "safe haven" in Yiddish, which is a name Amsterdam gained as it became home to more Jews fleeing persecution. The framing of violence as "pogroms" and "Jew hunts" is therefore significant in relation to the history of the city. Circulating images depicted dim night lighting, empty streets, traces of destruction and heavy police presence. The centrally located Dam Square is frequently featured, carrying symbolic weight. The scenes depict an apocalyptic scene and a disruption of normalcy. The contradiction logic extends to the "orderly city," juxtaposed with scenes of urban unrest, and the "tolerant nation," juxtaposed with "disorderly" migrants.

Certain urban spaces are associated with migrants and framed as problematic. Mosques and Islamic weekend schools are positioned as sites of radicalization. For instance, Yeşilgöz (VVD) positions the schools as sites for "importing antisemitism and anti-Dutch values" (TK-01). VVD's plans included "supervision of weekend and Quranic schools" as one of the presented solutions (X-VVD-05). An RTL report on the violence includes an unrelated image of a girl at a school, writing the Arabic alphabet on a whiteboard (RTL-12). Migrants' spaces are framed as problematic through associative juxtaposition. This extends to inferences about migrant neighborhoods, illustrated by van der Plas (BBB): "There are people in Amsterdam who don't dare to walk around in certain neighborhoods" (TK-01). Wilders (PVV) employs equivalence, connecting the violence to general disturbances. He states: "Just ask people on shopping evenings, in swimming pools, on the beach, in cinemas. That group that causes misery everywhere in the Netherlands" (TK-01).

Sidelined frames

Here, we discuss competing frames that were sidelined. Considering the violence followed a football match and hooliganism being a recurring issue in Amsterdam, the hooliganism frame is a particularly relevant interpretation. Reports of hooliganism by Maccabi fans prior to the match (RTL-01) initially led the mayor to consider banning the Ajax-

Maccabi match (HP-08). Hooliganism intersects with hypermasculine practices and territorial identification, while football matches are complex events with a particular historical specificity, affected by multiple overlapping causes (Spaaij 2008). A hooliganism framing would allow interpreting Maccabi fans' actions as hypermasculine rioting, while also considering nationalist and racist dimensions. In parliament, coalition politicians leveraged affective intensity of the antisemitism framing to diminish the hooliganism framing's relevance. The geopolitical frame, which centers Maccabi's links to the Israeli state and its ongoing genocide in Gaza, was sidelined. The conflict was framed as the primary cause of violence in only one news item, appearing in the headline of a story by de Volkskrant (VK-03). Otherwise, direct references to the conflict were limited to providing context. The frame's sidelining is exemplified by Yeşilgöz (VVD) stating that the events are "not only connected to tensions around Gaza, but are symptoms of a deeper integration problem" (VK-06). While not denying Gaza's relevance, Yeşilgöz's phrasing demotes its importance compared to integration, demonstrating Entman's (1993) point on politicians' selectively making specific details more noticeable.

Discussion

Firstly, situating the analysis of the failed integration frame in conjuncture highlights the conditions that contributed to its salience. The globalized implications of geopolitical conflict are amplifying the already heightened anxieties in European politics. Issues such as antisemitism, islamophobia and the genocide in Gaza have themselves become polarizing, becoming more entangled with existing societal tensions on migration. The frame also reflects the entanglement of globalized and national issues. The integration frame's affective intensity contributed to its salience in this conjunctural affective atmosphere, which constitutes the terrain the frame functioned in, thus creating the affective conditions for its wider circulation. Anderson (2009, 77), borrowing Marx's terminology, describes affective atmospheres as "*pressing and enveloping* society from all sides." The failed integration frame evoked conjunctural anxieties through its emotional intensity, evident in the strong emotive language and the evoking of the Holocaust and tragic national memories to imagine the future. The positioning of the nation-state as endangered also stokes anxieties, in which framing the events as antisemitic violence, because of the Netherlands' past, enables the positioning of the nation as a moral object. In centering the nation state, the frame also connects with existing discourses on integration. The frame's racialized representation of migrant men is visualized and reaffirms familiar tropes associated with the Dutch-Moroccan population (Çankaya 2020). Culturally congruent frames become more salient (Entman 2003), as the familiarity creates the conditions for their reproducibility (Butler 2016). Additionally, the failed integration frame provides clarity and moral certainty by collapsing complexity. Multiple causes are reduced into one singular threat, constructed through categorical equivalences. This missed complexity is revealed in comparison to the official investigation, which attributed the events to hooliganism, antisemitism and the conflict in the Middle East. Given the proximity of the events to Gaza and Israel, the sidelining of the geopolitical frame also invites consideration to not only what salient frames highlight, but also what they exclude or obscure, and what political motive that exclusion serves.

Second, we demonstrated the centering of Dutchness as a nodal point in the integration frame. Anchoring Dutchness exemplifies renationalization, (re)asserting nation-states as primary identity anchors (Wodak 2015). A conjunctural lens reveals how renationalization is responsive to conjunctural conditions, namely the unsettling of social structures and meaning-systems that foreground identities. We understand the centering of Dutchness as a protectionist political objective that seeks to define the “self” in response to contemporary dislocations, societal changes and economic decline. Such dislocations are positioned as consequences of migration and racial difference, thus invoking nostalgia for an imagined homogenous past (Duyvendak, Geschiere, and Tonkens 2016) untroubled with conflict. This deployment of nativism functions through racialized boundary work, illustrated by the use of “Arab,” “Moroccan,” “North African” and “Muslim” to construct the problematized group. This is reflective of Goldberg’s (2006) understanding of how European racialization functions through “mute” categories, where foreign descent acts as a marker of not “fully” belonging (Yanow and Van Der Haar 2013). In addition to the racialized aspect of this discourse, it is also illustrative of Duyvendak et al.’s (2016) concept of “culturalization of citizenship”, which, in the Netherlands, entails the expected adoption of liberal and progressive values to be recognized as full citizens. A discursive emphasis on culture enables the continuous narration of Dutchness as “exceptionally open and liberal” in contrast with the unintegrated others (Duyvendak, Geschiere, and Tonkens 2016, 40). This aligns with contemporary perspectives on migrant integration, particularly: the definition of integration through cultural assimilation (Schinkel 2018) and the grounding of integration discourse in nationalistic imaginaries of the nation (Ghorashi 2025).

Third, our analysis showed the affective-discursive processes through which the failed integration frame was constructed. Applying the anxiety-fear arrangement, we trace how meanings organize affective relations between the configuration’s elements, namely bodies, objects, spaces, discourses and interpretations. We trace how the frame organizes meaning by tracing these elements’ meanings in relation to Dutchness as a nodal point. Migrant men, as perpetrators of antisemitism, were positioned in opposition to Dutchness, which is defined through negation. The frame defines migrant men based on their migration and religious backgrounds. This discursive work corroborates Dutch anti-migrant discourses’ perception of Islam as a primary threat (Wodak 2015) and existing tropes about racialized men (Çankaya 2020). The frame leverages existing anxieties about social cohesion, associated with integration discourses, and connects the events to other social issues, particularly homophobia and violence against women. This illustrates Hall et al.’s (2013) scapegoat analogy, where collective anxieties condense into a singular actor, who is also framed as causing other social problems. The frame thus positions migrant men as the perpetrators of the November violence and a threat to society and Dutch public space. Our analysis also showed how racialized visual markers were used to define this group. These discursive associations are articulated through affective intensity. This demonstrates how collective anxieties are channeled into tangible objects of fear through discursive meanings. The frame built a visual register of attributes that represent this fear. These included racialized bodily features, clothing items and objects, such as scooters. Politicians, referencing circulating visuals, articulated those assumptions based on visual attributes and language. This was accompanied by juxtaposition in

media, where visual markers depicted in images derive meaning through association with the frame. These attributes will be perceived as threatening when encountered.

Our objective is to demonstrate the discursive construction of meanings that shape everyday realities. People narrate their experiences and assign meaning to their lived realities based on public narratives (Althoff 2020), and interpret other individuals' behavior based on the category they place them in (Berger and Luckmann 1966). The frame's salience and resonance with familiar cultural tropes will consolidate these meanings further, illustrating Ahmed's (2014) "stickiness" analogy. This reifies "migrant man" as a social location through which they are perceived, approached and reacted to in urban environments. It illustrates how a social position is discursively constructed, with meanings generalized to an entire group, shaping their realities. The frame constructed "migrant men" as a unifying category, which it identified by a register of visual markers. Racialization makes migrantized bodies hypervisible (Amer and Leung 2023), making their bodies more "noticeable" and orienting how they "take up" space (Ahmed 2007, 150). Assigning negative meaning to bodies' differences thus shapes their realities before their arrival, stripping them of their individuality. Migrantized bodies and associated objects were made into frightening subjects. By constructing them as fearful, discourse pre-constitutes the affective conditions of encounters, centering fear as a lens of interpretation. Migrant men notice people afraid of them and are aware of being reduced to "Middle Eastern men" by appearance (Huizinga 2023). Affective arrangements mediate the "patterning" and "channeling" of affect (Slaby, Mühlhoff, and Wüschner 2019a). Future ethnographic research should thus trace how these discursively constructed meanings become lived experiences on the level of urban encounter.

The paper's theoretical contribution is the anxiety-fear arrangement as an "operative template" for understanding affective and discursive meaning-making in migration discourse, relevant to contemporary collective anxiety and emotionalization of politics. The analysis demonstrates the process of migrantization, showing boundary work and meaning-making through discourse. The integration frame shows the discursive process through which politicians define who is a "migrant." We show how this is increasingly entangled with racialized and culturalized registers. Additionally, this demonstrates how migration discourses employ a nativist discursive register, while belonging is demarcated through racialized boundary work. We show how migrantization is taking on a more "materially potent" character. This is demonstrated by politicians' discussion of denaturalization as a punitive measure and the negotiation of their citizenship status. This is relevant for migration scholarship as it points towards "migrant" no longer being a stable signifier and reveals boundary work within states.

Conclusion

In summary, the failed integration frame functioned as a narrative framework to interpret the November 2024 violence in Amsterdam. Migrant men were positioned as perpetrators of antisemitic violence, framed as evidence of their failed integration. Through affective-discursive practices, the frame organized meanings in relation to Dutchness as a nodal point. Collective anxieties were channeled onto migrant men, made into objects of fear, and identified through visual markers. The frame's salience can be explained by employing culturally resonant notions about migrant men, providing a clear moral

judgement, and its affective intensity in an anxious context. What this case has shown is the complexity of politics in conjunctures, with social issues being entangled in complex histories and globalized polarization. Monocausal explanations that rely on equivalence logic to frame a fixed group as a cause of social problems assign a negative meaning to difference, stoking social tension, cultivating a culture of fear, while obscuring the conditions that shape these problems. The promise of hope for some becomes dependent on its denial for others. Affective arrangements define the “boundaries of possibility in which people live their lives” (Grossberg 2015, 117). When these discursive meanings become the dominant interpretation, they shape how society perceives migrantized men, materializing as exclusions. Ahmed (2014, 211) highlights that fear is especially tenacious and difficult to disassociate from, stating that “there can be nothing more dangerous to a body than the social agreement that the body is dangerous”.

Notes

1. “Political Triangle” composed of the mayor, chief of police and public prosecutor.
2. PVV: Partij voor de Vrijheid; VVD: Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie; BBB: BoerBurgerBeweging; NSC: Nieuw Sociaal Contract.
3. Dutch TV program that helps identify suspects involved in crimes.
4. An electric bike that resembles a motorcycle, characterized by its thick tires, hence the name. It is increasingly common among young urban groups, with its look and price range contributing to its appeal.

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