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'VOODOO' ON THE DOORSTEP YOUNG NIGERIAN PROSTITUTES AND MAGIC POLICING IN THE NETHERLANDS

Rijk van Dijk

In their Max Gluckman Memorial Lecture Jean and John Comaroff (1999) alert anthropology to the dramatic rise in what they call occult economies in many post-colonial societies. Occult economies include a wide variety of phenomena, ranging from 'ritual murder', the sale of body parts, and the occurrence of zombies to the implosion of pyramid schemes, which all lead to moral panics about liberal capitalism run wild. Everywhere around the globe the Comaroffs note many comparable examples of such moral panics caused by what are locally considered illicit or occult means of accumulation. Whether it is about the rise of witchcraft and zombie scares in South Africa, or the scares about traffic in body parts in Latin America, or the satanic abuse of children for commercial gain in Europe, everywhere the fear and horror of the surreptitious commodification of life itself appear to be at stake (see also Scheper Hughes, 1996, 2000). Following on closely from Evans-Pritchard's adage that 'new situations demand new magic' (1937: 15), the Comaroffs attribute much of the incidence of these scares to the mystique and magic of late capitalism itself: the mysterious mechanisms of the market, the promise of unimaginable wealth it produces, the 'magical allure of making money from nothing', as Andrews (1997) has called it, the enticement of effortless riches that liberalised flows of money, goods, services and people may yield, and so forth (see also Soros, 1998). Throughout they recognise the attempts of ordinary people to cling to arcane forces in their pursuit of otherwise unattainable wealth. Paradoxically these run parallel to all the efforts of people to control such illegitimate means of accumulation, of acquiring wealth and luxury items. Often immoral consumption is denounced and anyone found guilty of such behaviour is eradicated from society.

Furthermore, the Comaroffs argue incisively that the chilling forms of such accumulation and the scares they produce involve and affect the whole of the younger generation, both children and young people. The Comaroffs focus on the young in South Africa and their shattered hopes and aspirations in the post-apartheid era. Instead of opening up new vistas of progress and prosperity, it disenfranchised the young from ever reaching a similar position to their elders. The Comaroffs highlight

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youth's fear of being turned into zombies by that very same older generation. The witchcraft scares that arose in the northern districts they studied revolved particularly around that notion: young people falling prey to threats of being reduced to a will-less labour force by those in power. It can be recognised in many other parts of Africa as well, and it ties in with my own work on the fears of urban youth in Malawi at the time of the dictatorial regime of President Banda (Van Dijk, 1992). Their salient anxiety was of being turned, overnight, into *ndondocho*: brainless creatures with tongues, hands and feet chopped off through magical means by those who controlled them, so that calling for help would become impossible.

The Comaroffs, however, immediately explode the notion that the targeting of youth in illicit, immoral forms of accumulation should be considered a phenomenon typical of Africa. They cite such chilling examples of mass panic concerning the theft and sale of certain organs of infants in Latin America (Scheper Hughes, 1996), the scares about the satanic abuse of children in England (La Fontaine, 1997) and the sexual slavery and torture of Czech girls in Germany (Staunton, 1997). There is indeed a vast literature, mostly sociological, which deals with the incidence of moral panics in Western societies centring around the many cases involving youth. (On the introduction of the concept of 'moral panic' see Young, 1971; S. Cohen, 1972; Hall *et al.*, 1978; on victimised youth and children, Ben Yehuda, 1990; Best, 1990; Richardson *et al.*, 1991; Jenkins, 1992). This article intends to add a transnational case to this list of the brutalisation of the young in various forms of extraction, accumulation and the panics they produce. It concerns the trafficking of young Nigerian girls for the Dutch sex industry and the alleged involvement of 'voodoo' in the girls' submission to Dutch male desires (see also WOCON, 2001). The sudden discovery of this transnational circuit gave rise to a 'voodoo' scare which resulted in an unprecedented effort in the policing of magic in Dutch society (Van Dijk *et al.*, 1999). This article explores how Dutch police services were confronted with what they believed was 'African voodoo' in their crusade against child prostitution in the Netherlands' largest cities. Although they did not know what it was they were fighting against, the police felt they were obliged to protect society from what they perceived as a spiritual threat which originated in a 'dark continent' and intended to keep Nigerian minors in a bondage of exploitation by the Dutch sex industry. Once the story was out that the police had created a special task force, with the remarkable name 'Voodoo team', the media reacted with a mixture of shock, sensation and sex obsession. Much of the resulting imagery appeared to be a post-colonial continuation of European constructions of the African body, in Butchart's analysis 'a body without volume', just a surface caught in a European estranging gaze (1998: 54).

Furthermore, the fact that young Nigerian girls appeared to be enslaved in the sex industry primarily through and by 'voodoo' rituals performed on them by their pimps and madams caused a major stir in Dutch politics and provoked a deep sense of alarm. Dutch political

discourse had increasingly been proclaiming an ideology of liberal capitalism, free entrepreneurialism, unfettered travel for its citizens and permissiveness in public morals. Now acute difficulties in exercising stable control over space, time, flows of money, goods and people and the liberties of sexuality emerged.

For one, the phenomenon ran counter to the self-perception of a state which, having invested so much in all sorts of serialising and taxonomic techniques over the last couple of years, was expected to supervise immigration and the emergence of a multicultural nation.¹ Women-trafficking by 'operators', involvement in 'voodoo' and child prostitution shook that sentiment profoundly. The state felt obliged to intensify its control and inspection of multiculturalism and to subject the girls and their 'voodoo' to criminal investigation.

Despite all these efforts the state has not been able to reach a satisfactory 'solution' to what it mainly perceives as an 'occultic back door' of the fortress that Europe, including the Netherlands, is supposed to be. The basic problem it faces is that its taxonomic rules and regulations do not 'reach' into the intercultural and interstitial domain where the entire problematic of manipulation by 'voodoo' is played out. Meanings of 'voodoo' escaped petrification and appeared to be highly ambivalent and manipulative.

What inspired me to write this article was not so much the process of 'othering' that any anthropologist will anticipate taking place in such constrained contexts of political control and police action. What fascinated me was that, in the face of 'capitalism run wild', 'emic' explosions of difference can be seen to occur. There was a sense of commonality of experience and mutuality of cultural expectations, hopes and desires which took shape between some police officers and the girls which were not based solely on the latter's victimisation. This observation leads me to debate the way in which the Comaroffs emphasise cultural difference in how and why moral panics erupt in different societies worldwide. Compared with the sociological studies mentioned earlier, their study is a major leap forward in the way it produces a comparative and cross-cultural understanding of moral panics and explodes notions of a differentiating 'other'. It thus is able to overcome a variety of shortcomings in the sociology of moral panics—a literature to which they do not refer—which are largely the result of bounded conceptions of societies and moral communities. In that sociology the concept of moral panic became a society's function of deviance and disintegration, and thus relates to the public's concern over the aberration of norms and their manipulation by interest groups (see Goode and Ben Yehuda, 1994). The Comaroffs' attempt at

¹ For extensive discussions of the modern nation state in Europe and elsewhere and how it produces a categorical order of classifying identities see Foucault (1972), Balibar and Wallerstein (1991), Anderson (1991), Dirks (1992), Gilroy (1990), (1991), Malkki (1995), or it testifies to a purposeful absence of it, as Mbembe (1992a, b) describes for certain parts of Africa

relating specific forms and manifestations of moral panic to the spread of a global and yet cultural economic form opens up that boundedness and ceases to treat moral panics as isolated and unrelated cases.

Yet the question remains of what is exploded exactly in this view if, for example, zombie scares are treated as exclusively related to an African refraction of late capitalist relations whereas scares concerning the sexual abuse of minors are perceived as ultimately belonging to the anxieties of a Western world. In other words, although they develop a profound understanding of the global comparability of the various expressions and manifestations of fears, desires and social upheaval, the cultural contexts in which these are perceived to take place or are experienced remain distinct if not parochial. It is therefore in such rare instances of transculturally shared experiences as, in this case, police officers and Nigerian girls alike that one can and should ask: why should anthropology maintain culture as a principle of difference and not as a constructive site for the experience of commonality and mutuality?

The development of liberal capitalism itself gives way to such considerations. While there are difficulties in distinguishing the 'late' from 'earlier' forms of capitalism in analytical terms, two striking aspects need to be mentioned in the light of the Nigerian prostitution case. One is that whereas earlier capitalism to a large extent maintained a fairly secluded domain of reproduction and metabolism which provided a continuous flow of labour for its 'mode' of production, in liberal capitalism that domain is increasingly commoditised. This concern is deeply transcultural. It leads to a second consideration, which is the increasing individualising exposure of the person as individual *per se* to the market with rapidly diminishing opportunities for the state, the family or any other social form to mitigate or cushion the experience. Particularly in Europe, including the Netherlands, the state has largely 'moved' from the market to the domain of identity. This is the new domain of increasing non-negotiability, of policing and supervision of liberalism, a niche for the creation of high-pressure identity politics in the service of difference and 'othering' *par excellence*. And yet, although the police service as a whole is the 'strong arm' of that anti-liberal dimension of the state, some (but certainly not all) police officers concerned with the Nigerian prostitution cases became deeply involved in the girls' lives and predicament. This is, I feel, a domain which anthropology may successfully explore: how demotic discourses and practices arise, in this case between some police officers and the girls, that begin to go against the grain of formal, rigid, state-orchestrated identity politics and the forms of 'othering' that are endemic in Western culture.

In the next section the Dutch context of the relationship between 'voodoo', child prostitution and police surveillance will be sketched. At the time of writing concerted police action aimed at intervention in 'voodoo' was in full swing. It still is. In the section after that the mystifying use of the notion of 'voodoo' is elucidated in the context of Dutch public, political and aid/awareness discourses. In the fourth section the entire public brouhaha about Nigerian girls being smuggled

into the Netherlands under a coercive system of 'voodoo' is elaborated against the background of the development of the Dutch taxonomic state. This section pays particular attention to the Dutch state moving from the market to the domain of identity and the rigid politics it developed to contain liberalism and to focus police supervision. In the final section some further ideas are developed on the relationship between anthropological and Africanist research and such predicaments of globalisation that draw text and context, home and field closely together. The question is, precisely what notions are exploded in anthropology if the local ramifications of late capitalism are read with an eye to cultural difference only, thereby excluding experiences of commonality and mutuality?

'VOODOO' SCARES AND MAGIC POLICING OF UNDER-AGE ASYLUM SEEKING
THE DECONSTRUCTION OF A MORAL PANIC

In 1999 the Netherlands received more than 5,500 under-age and unaccompanied persons applying for asylum. A large proportion of them originated from Asia, China in particular, but the majority were young, unaccompanied people from various countries and areas of conflict in Africa. The asylum procedure is such that minors, that is, people under 18 years of age, are examined and interrogated only marginally as to the truth and validity of their stories. Often no rigorous treatment with regard to verification of their stories of circumstances at 'home', of travel and arrival is applied by border police or asylum authorities, contrary to the situation with adult asylum seekers. The most important reason for this is the fact that in Dutch law the testimony of minors is considered of only 'circumstantial' importance (and is not regarded as 'evidence' in the strict sense of the word) while in the countries of origin virtually no means of validating any aspect of it exist. Under-age asylum seekers therefore often enter the asylum status without much ado. They are only very rarely sent back to their country of origin and are usually placed upon arrival under the tutelage of a Dutch guardian (in the absence of parents or other carers).²

Since the early 1990s there has been a substantial growth in the number of minors from Africa applying for asylum status. They come from countries such as Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan and in more recent years also from Liberia, Sierra Leone, Mozambique and Angola. Latterly there has been a substantial rise in the number of girls from Nigeria, ranging in age roughly from 10 to 20. Following 'normal' procedures of 'intake investigations' upon arrival, and in view of their request for asylum, these girls were placed by the Foreign police service into juvenile homes in various parts of the Netherlands. Soon, however,

² Once discovered by the police, unaccompanied minors who happen to reside in the Netherlands without a permit to stay, are included in a rather similar procedure of tutelage and placement in certain homes

it became clear to those in charge of the asylum camps and homes that Nigerian girls in particular, as distinct from other under-age asylum seekers, were prone to disappear from their (foster) homes, leaving no trace whatsoever of their destination. In some cases within the first few days of arrival in the Netherlands, and after being accommodated in an asylum home, the girls disappeared, often leaving no more than a bundle of old clothes behind. Neither their appointed guardians (appointed by the government) nor the caretakers at the camps and homes usually had a clue as to their whereabouts. Eventually the number of such seemingly inexplicable disappearances began to run into the hundreds.

Disappearances of any young girl in the Netherlands commonly provokes a great deal of concern, police investigation and political calls for greater security. But, initially there was no outcry. A sense of alarm started spreading only when in the years 1995–97 the problem was connected with another growing cause of public concern: child prostitution. A number of social interest groups and women's organisations began noticing the appearance of young African prostitutes in the red light districts of the large cities (Amsterdam, Rotterdam and the Hague mainly). Initially, groups of African prostitutes consisted mainly of adult women from Ghana (see Adomako, 1993; de Thouars and van Osch, 1995) and from French-speaking West African countries. In the early 1990s under-age Nigerian girls appeared on the scene. The fuss that arose in prostitution circles because of their influx did not just concern their age but above all the fact that they appeared to be prepared to 'work' for rates that largely undercut those of the adult prostitutes.

Occasional violent clashes between these groups of prostitutes drew the attention of the above-mentioned social interest organisations. The reports by the social concern groups, such as the most important one by Terre des hommes (1997), expressed above all their anger with regard to the fact that Dutch politics and police seemed to take very little action against the sexual exploitation of African minors, the harsh conditions under which they lived and the frequent violence with which they were confronted because of the economic interests involved. Only then did a public outcry follow. It led to debates in Parliament and eventually compelled the police to take action.

However, the concerted police action against traders, traffickers, 'madams', pimps and their brothels involved in the exploitation of child prostitutes brought many unexpected and previously unknown aspects to light regarding the Nigerian girls' predicament. First of all, most of the girls, when interviewed, admitted that on departure from Nigeria they had been thoroughly instructed by their 'boyfriends' (I will come back later to the implications of this term) on how to behave, what to say and where to go upon arrival in Europe. If the border police, for example at Schiphol international airport, near Amsterdam, became suspicious about their travel documents, the girls were allegedly instructed by these 'friends' to appeal for asylum immediately. Telephone numbers given to them by their 'boyfriends', which they

were supposed to hide on their bodies, would enable them, once they had been transported to an asylum camp, to establish contact with the sex bosses who were expecting their arrival. The intricate knowledge of Dutch asylum procedures was profound. These traders and traffickers often seemed to have been able to explain in detail how easy it was to run away, to be collected from the asylum camp and so to disappear into Dutch society. Indeed, in many cases the girls discovered that although they were put in an asylum camp there was no restriction on their freedom and they could easily be collected by whomever they contacted.

Another unexpected feature, however, was that the police often found the girls suffering from what appeared to be deep fears and anxieties about powers of unknown nature and origins. Initially the police were less interested in the fate of these girls as such than in the criminal networks that lurked behind this form of exploitation. However, when the girls were discovered in the brothels where they were working and taken in for questioning, many of them began trembling with fear, some of them ending up in uncontrollable fits and seizures, often turning completely unresponsive to what police officers were trying to ask. The police also discovered that such forms of anxious behaviour were also reported from the (asylum) homes and places where some of these girls had been living previously (that is, before having been collected for the sex industry), or where they were placed after they had been removed from the red light districts.

The police and the guardians were increasingly alerted to the fact that some of the girls began referring to certain religious rituals that had taken place before they left Nigeria and which they were forced to go through after arrival in the Netherlands. In addition, an often heard complaint from girls taken out of brothels and the like was 'Where's my packet? Did you retrieve my packet from my operator?' Such packets apparently meant a lot to them in view of the rituals they had been through in Nigeria and after arrival in the Netherlands.

All this left the various authorities confused and perplexed about the backgrounds of the girls and the occult threats that seemed to be involved. Almost immediately the term 'voodoo' was coined as a way of referring to the anxieties of supernatural origin the police recorded, the rituals that had supposedly taken place in relation to the girls' travel and the packets that one way or another seemed to keep them in bondage to their work as prostitutes. As a small number of girls, sometimes reluctantly, began co-operating with the police in the investigation of trafficking networks, apartments would be indicated where 'packets' had been assembled or were being kept. The police discovered a number of these small parcels, made up of unknown objects often wrapped in cloth, and opened them. In a number of cases they appeared to contain human-related material: finger- and toenail cuttings, hair cuttings, underwear, sometimes stained with what appeared to be menstrual blood. Other types of material had often been included as well: kola nuts, pieces of twisted metal, powder and soap.

For the police as well as for the entire domain of social care and tutelage, homes, camps and fostering, a doom-laden and threatening picture began to emerge of 'voodoo', evidenced by the existence of such packets and by the tormenting fears from which the girls appeared to suffer. In close collaboration with this civic domain, the police began developing the theory that sheer occultic threats were coercing the girls to stay in the highly exploitative sex industry. Owing to this 'voodoo' and the rituals they were forced to take part in, the girls saw no alternative but to return to their pimps and madams as soon as they could, regardless of the care and the warm social environment they were provided with under the tutelage system. After all, what else could explain their great fears and anxieties and their almost frantic efforts to get back into the prostitution business as soon as possible? It provided all the institutions of care and tutelage with some vague cultural notions concerning firstly 'Africa', secondly why the girls seemed to prefer the harsh conditions of prostitution to their good intentions and caring environment, and lastly why so few of the girls seemed to respond positively to the kind of intercultural psychiatric help that was on offer in such times of great psychological stress and fears. The girls were apparently profoundly policed by 'voodoo' in every movement and every thought.

The police decided to intensify their enquiries into 'voodoo'. Girls were interviewed extensively about the content and meaning of the 'voodoo' threats. Some of them began explaining that if they did not comply with the 'voodoo oaths' they had 'taken', either in Nigeria or in the Netherlands, the 'voodoo' spirit would come and kill them, or would destroy their life and that of their families back home. Part of the 'voodoo' threat consisted of enormous debts the girls became involved in with regard to their 'operators', 'sponsors' or 'madams' who had organised their travel from Nigeria to Europe and subsequent incorporation into the sex industry. The girls explained that back in Nigeria rituals had been performed with the object of 'tying' the girl to the debt, which would initially amount to around US\$10,000-\$20,000 (see also WOCON, 2001). The 'voodoo oath' would also imply a vow on the obligation to repay the debt to the operator as soon as the girl got into Europe. Often upon arrival in Europe subsequent 'voodoo rituals' would be performed with the purpose of religiously sanctifying the debt that the girl would be in *vis-à-vis* the 'operators and madams' for establishing her in the sex industry and accommodating her in a brothel. Such debt would accrue to around US\$25,000 or more.

The picture that emerged in police recording and reporting by social care institutions was of an occult and sinister involvement of African religion, its priests, rituals and other practices, in the enslavement of young girls. 'Voodoo' was defined as an essential element in how the system was operated by women traders and traffickers. All sorts of images began circulating on the actual content and threats that this sinister form of African religion was supposed to entail. In a sense it came to form a 'rational' explanation for a great deal of the girls' 'irrational' behaviour. This sinister form of intimidation could be

turned into one of the grounds for which traders, traffickers, operators, madams and pimps could be prosecuted. Dutch law recognises 'magic' as a form of intimidation that may be used to obstruct the expression of a person's free will.

The police and other authorities became keenly interested in the details of the girls' 'voodoo' experiences. In some cases they obtained lengthy reports of what they perceived as gruesome acts such as swallowing objects, drinking sacrificial blood, pins and puppets, fire and water—in short, many aspects that fit in with much of a popular culture image of what 'voodoo' actually looks like. These images were confirmed not only by the discoveries of the above-mentioned 'voodoo packets' at the brothels or the homes of the traders where the girls were kept, but also by practices of 'devoodooisation'. Some of the asylum and tutelage homes began experimenting with forms of invented exorcist rituals for some of the tormented girls. In addition the police were able to arrest a number of the traders and madams on the evidence and indications the girls provided. From these suspects further details of the scope and success of the 'voodoo' practices could be obtained.

On the basis of the apparent efficacy of intimidation by 'voodoo', the steadily growing number of Nigerian girls entering the Netherlands to work in the sex industry and the scale of the whole relationship between 'voodoo' and keeping under-age girls trapped in such a form of exploitation, a gigantic police operation soon took shape. Co-ordinated by the national 'Voodoo team', a concerted action of hundreds of police officers was organised during 1999–2001. It aimed at tracing the disappearing girls (both in the Netherlands and abroad, as the prostitution networks appear to move quickly from city to city and to neighbouring countries) and at arresting the traders and traffickers so as to put an end to this aspect of the sex industry. The magnitude of the police action reflected the deep and widely shared sense of alarm that 'voodoo' had given rise to in the public domain.³ In itself it contributed to the emergence of what can be called a moral panic. More than child prostitution as such, a phenomenon known to Dutch society one might say almost from time immemorial, the combination with an African occult form of religion in particular made it feel as if the entire civil society of the Netherlands was in jeopardy. Much might be said about the extent to which this upheaval, this sense of boomeranging threat, was aggravated by the media, the sensationalism of their reports, the television documentaries full of suggestive screen shots of 'dark' rituals, drums, fire, African girls filmed with hidden cameras as they went about their business in brothels and red light districts, and so forth. However interesting, illuminating and indispensable such an analysis may be to understanding the profound feelings of shock that perturbed

³ The number of newspaper articles, magazine reports, social care reports, radio and television broadcasts about it is simply too large to give details of sources here. A substantial number are indicated, though, in Van Dijk *et al.* (1999).

Dutch society, it is beyond the scope of the present article. My focus is rather that of a further exploration of the politics of hybridity that seem to be involved in the way the police and other officials dealt and still deal with the situation.

The images of 'voodoo' which so forcefully induced the police to give the matter top priority, to mount an unprecedented operation to police magic and to disentangle the sexual exploitation of girls from the threats of African religion, immediately strike us as highly hybrid. They are very much the result of a cultural interface, a culture contact situation giving rise to meanings and understandings between members of groups with very different statuses, cultural backgrounds, competence, expertise and engagement with transnational and transcultural situations. The orientalising images of the one (say the police) continuously stumbled into the occidentalising images of the other (say the girls) and vice versa, making for a politics of mystique consisting of many layers. This will be explored in the following section.

THE PRODUCTION OF LAYERS OF MYSTIQUE IN 'VOODOO'

One day I was approached by members of a police team who asked me for an explanation of the thing they had discovered in a 'voodoo packet', as they called it. I was a member of a research group that investigated the background of some of the Nigerian girls and their 'voodoo' (see Van Dijk *et al.*, 1999). The occasion became an example of how the police themselves were part of the problem of the threatening images of 'voodoo' they sought to purge from Dutch society. Whilst this police team were successfully taking a young Nigerian woman (not under-age, but around 20 years) out of a prostitution network they had also discovered what they claimed was a 'voodoo' packet. They had opened it for inspection and had been taking pictures of the contents. Out came a kola nut wrapped in paper, some soap, in a small bowl, some herbs and—interestingly, so they thought—two small plastic bags containing tablets of some sort. During interviews with the girl she had revealed firstly that the packet had been 'assembled' at a 'voodoo' shrine in Nigeria before she left for Europe, secondly that the priest of that shrine had given her a small note with instructions on how to use the various items (there was a picture of the handwritten note) and lastly that the packet had been kept at her place of 'work'. Thus, so the police officers reasoned, the packet was indisputably a crucial element in the 'voodoo' threat that controlled the life of this girl. Their attention was drawn not so much to the kola nut ('just a nut'), the soap or the powder as to the pills in the plastic bags. The question was 'Do voodoo priests drug their clients?' In other words, was that the meaning and the expected effect of these tablets? Do 'voodoo rituals' indeed mean to take away the expression of one's free will so that the girl becomes enslaved and drugged, unable to escape?

The disregard of the other items of the packet was striking in itself, but it was even more remarkable that a 'close reading' of the small

plastic bags containing the tablets revealed the written abbreviation 'chloroq.' on both of them. Obviously, although I am not attesting to the exact chemical composition of the pills, an anti-malaria drug appeared to have been included.⁴

This small event is very telling of the general atmosphere that had emerged. 'Ordinary' police officers simply hadn't a clue but were determined to investigate while 'voodoo threats' seemed to lurk everywhere. As the matter was considered so deeply serious, the girls, though perceived as 'victims' in the first instance, eventually came to be regarded as living embodiments of the occult threat. They were subjected to all sorts of 'on the body' investigations. The police looked for and photographed distinct body markings that could be related to 'voodoo' (and in this sense produced what Burchart, 1998: 54, considers the kind of 'Foucauldian' techniques of supervision that see the African body as a 'body without volume'). In the eyes of the police, incisions, skin colouring and specific haircuts were clear markers of 'voodoo' intimidation which were interpreted as turning the girl into little more than a zombie. To the girls such police scrutiny was a fearful experience which turned them from 'victims' into 'perpetrators'. On the police side there was initially little empathy with such feelings of terror and intimidation. Rather, the frantic search for 'voodoo' became part of the problem they were trying to deal with. The police action itself, paradoxically, turned out to be a factor in the intercultural 'room for manoeuvre' that the term 'voodoo' began to indicate. It was as if the police and the other officials in the entire tutelage system began producing the answers to the questions they were asking.

A strange process of intercultural communication and production of intercultural mystique began taking place. Police reports of interviews with the girls were corroborated by interviews I and my colleagues held with some of them. These revealed that the girls had indeed been referring to the entire pluriform religious complex of shrines and security cults at their place of origin. (It is beyond the scope of this article to review the extensive literature of those forms of West African religious culture.) It came to light that visits to shrines in the girls' region of origin, mostly located in Edo, as most of the girls originated from Edo state and had been living in Benin city before leaving for Europe, were a common feature of their stories. (On this relationship see, for instance, Bradbury, 1957; Babatunde, 1992; Girshick Ben Amos, 1994.) Once a girl had been approached by a 'boyfriend'-cum-operator, a visit by both of them to a nearby shrine often followed, for the 'agreement' to be consecrated and sealed. (For the judicial aspects of Vodun see the excellent work by Rosenthal, 1998.) Usually the

⁴ Thera Rasing, in addition, has alerted me to the fact that in various parts of Africa the combination of large quantities of chloroquine tablets and small quantities of soap is used by women as a cheap, but not always effective, method of aborting an unwanted pregnancy.

'operator' had taken on the obligation to 'make' the necessary travel documents for the girl, to find the money for her ticket and to make sure that she would be able to establish contact with those who were expecting her overseas. The visit to at least one but commonly a series of shrines in the company of this 'operator' served a range of purposes. One was the assemblage of a 'packet' containing a range of symbolic artefacts embodying a whole range of meanings, functions and signifiers. As a tangible sign of the 'agreement' the 'packet' was and is usually made to contain human *materia sacra* of both the 'boyfriend' and the girl, so giving the whole arrangement an objective and indisputable quality. (See Rosenthal, 1998, for similar observations.) The so-called 'boyfriends' who lure young girls into the business with glowing promises have been reported to operate in cartel-like structures throughout Edo state. (See *Newswatch*, 1999.) Girls have reported extensively on how contact with the 'boyfriend' was established, the range of rituals the boyfriend made them go through in Nigeria and even their experiences together while travelling to Europe, as the following case shows.

The case of Monday

Monday (not her real name) was 25 years old when I met her for the first time, early in 2000. The previous year she had been one of the very first of the young Nigerian girls in Amsterdam to lodge a complaint against her traffickers, her 'boyfriend' in particular, with the police. Although technically not under age, her years of experience in the 'system' (dating back to 1992) made her a valuable source of information in subsequent police investigations concerning a network of 'operators' in Amsterdam. Her story yielded all sorts of detail about her predicament and about her relationship with her 'boy friend'. In brief her story ran as follows.

She came into contact with a 'boyfriend' in late 1992 while she was living with her stepmother in one of the suburbs of Benin city. As her stepmother did not have a regular job, but was dependent on the erratic income of being a seasonal trader in the market, her situation had been fairly destitute throughout. Monday was able to complete primary schooling but became a drop-out after the first years of secondary schooling, as money for her school fees was simply lacking. Intent on joining her friends in the many societies, social clubs and credit unions (*toltiens*) that exist in Benin city, she became a 'working girl' just before the untimely death of her stepmother in 1993. It was in the context of her membership of a social club that she met a certain John, who flattered her with small presents and one day proposed to fly her to Italy 'to look after his business', as she explained. She agreed, only to discover that in the month before departure John would take her to a 'voodoo shrine' and that she would have 'to take an oath not to betray him'.

At the shrine the priest (*ohen*) took hair, fingernails, toenails and pubic hair from them and fabricated them into one packet. Added to the packet in the days that she had to spend at the shrine were a few

drops of her menstrual blood and some sperm from the intercourse she had with John. In the presence of the god objects (or fetishes) John pledged to take her to Europe, while Monday in turn had to swear to repay John whatever she owed him for his services. Both ate from the same kola nut and pronounced these oaths before the deities of the shrine while some offerings were made (in money and a goat was slaughtered) to invoke the gods' presence. The priest, she recounted, made it clear to both of them that breaking this arrangement would anger the gods and could jeopardise their lives, a statement which put fear into her heart, as she explained. Monday received in addition a number of incisions (on her chest and her forehead) into which potent medicines were rubbed. The priest explained that these would enhance her beauty and afford travel protection. When they finally left the shrine John paid the priest and some days later managed to arrange a flight for Monday to Bulgaria. He accompanied her and, after some ill fated attempts to enter Italy, finally delivered her to a brothel in Verona. At that point he received the sum of US\$20,000 from the 'madam' and disappeared.

For some time, like many other young Nigerian girls, Monday worked the streets of Verona, but by the middle of 1994 she had become seriously ill, collapsed and was hospitalised. After some time the authorities discovered that she was without proper identity papers and decided to deport her back to Lagos. Much to her surprise and alarm she found John awaiting her. He took her back to Benin city, mistreated her violently, sent her back on the street to work and began arranging a return to the prostitution circles of Europe. Part of the preparation was another visit to a shrine where the religiously sanctified contract was renewed, including a new packet, which again was kept by the priests. She was also made to visit a shrine far away from Benin city, where she received much more intimidating and sinister treatment, as she was kept in bondage, threatened physically and made to swallow things she did not recognise. Here for the first time in her story the term 'voodoo' surfaces, as a puppet was made of clay containing the above-mentioned body-related substances which thereby clearly signified her being and her identity.

In the end it was five years before John was able to send her back to Europe. Early in 1999 she arrived at the airport in Amsterdam but decided that she was not going to follow all John's instructions. She did not apply for asylum upon arrival, and therefore was not placed in an asylum centre from where she would be collected by a sex operator, but instead decided to report to the police. In her explanation she indicated that the combination of physical threats, the ever increasing debts to John and her madams, now amounting to perhaps US\$80,000 (and the debt to her madam in Verona still stood), as well as the 'voodoo', were becoming too much for her. With a certain amount of confidence in the police she was placed in a closed centre, waiting for her plea for admission to the Netherlands to be heard. Although she had not lived up to the 'oaths' she took she remained pretty confident that John could not do much, as the

'voodoo' had not hurt her thus far. When in the course of 2000 the Dutch authorities decided that she could no longer stay in the secluded type of accommodation offered at first she finally disappeared in the Netherlands, her destination unknown.

As this case demonstrates, declaring vows in the presence of the shrine's god objects provide mutual commitment, not only with a visible and tangible representation but on the level of the audible. This guarantees close inspection of each other's fulfilment of commitments in the 'invisible' world. In a number of cases the girls declared to the police that such arrangements with operators often also involved their families, relatives and possessions as a kind of guarantee of the repayment of the debts that girls were incurring. This again meant that sureties for the costs of the girls' travel were given supernatural sanctification so that misfortune and so forth could be kept at bay. Visits to various shrines for this whole complex of arrangements and agreements also involved those shrines which are perceived to exist 'under the eyes' of the Oba, (the king of Benin), and in those cases particularly augmented the 'judicial' characteristics in the girls' perception of things.

In addition to the body-related material, the made-up packets often appear to include many more signifiers embodying personal and spiritual power, beauty and sex appeal, protection and success. Pieces of twisted metal refer to the power of Ogun, soap and powder enhance beauty and sexual 'power', the kola nut is an exchange of faithfulness between lovers, and so forth.

In addition, as the case of Monday shows, the girls also spoke of travel protection obtained at various shrines. Animals (goats, white chickens) were slaughtered for the purpose and the girls were sprinkled with their blood. There was in short a superabundance of meanings and signifiers both in the ritual practices that many of the girls underwent before leaving Nigeria and in the contents of the packets they or their operators carried with them. Further empowerment was acquired by the girls 'taking prayers' at the rapidly emerging charismatic Pentecostal churches in Benin city, such as those of Benson Idahosa and its offshoots.

Whilst referring to the initial phases of intercontinental travel to Europe, which include the quest for spiritual empowerment for success, for protection and for accommodating the effects of strangerhood, in their narratives the girls only rarely used the word 'voodoo'. 'Voodoo' did not readily surface as a term to describe their experience of 'swearing oaths' at the shrines, of obtaining the medicines to enhance beauty, of establishing the relationship with a 'boyfriend' and containing it in a packet. Although they seemed awe-inspiring (the slaughtering of goats and chicken by priests, the sprinkling of animal blood on one's head, etc.), the girls I interviewed did not experience these kinds of ritual as intimidating and coercive *per se*. Necessary steps to be taken, yes; engaging in spiritual worlds of power and counter-power, control and inspection, certainly; but not to be equated with complete loss of

the expression of personal desires and choices. Rather the engagement with the spiritual domain resonated with their desire to travel abroad, to seek 'greener pastures' in Europe. These were desires often felt to be blocked by certain spiritual forces. Migration is a spiritual problem, blockage, passports, visa and air tickets belong to the realm of spiritual empowerment, whereas unfettered travel such as that of Europeans throughout Africa, if not the world, for that matter, is a sign of immense heavenly benevolence. (See Van Dijk, 1997, for examples of Ghanaian Pentecostal forms of such discourses.)

Commonly the girls only began experiencing much more coercive and intimidating forms of rituals as well as physical violence further down the line of their extended contact with their operators, pimps and madams. Particularly when things were beginning to go wrong, for instance if upon arrival in Europe a girl decided to get out of the prostitution networks, she would meet with a violent mix of physical abuse and occult intimidation. In referring to such frightening events as rituals performed on them in apartments in the low-cost south-eastern housing area of Amsterdam known as the Bijlmer, the term 'voodoo' surfaced. The implication is that 'voodoo' denotes a kind of 'inauthentic' ritual, not performed on the girls' behalf, not with their own but solely with the operators' commercial interests in mind, and not performed by ritual specialists who would want to safeguard their public status and prestige. 'Voodoo' became synonymous with spiritual entrapment and with being policed through occult means by their madams and pimps in every move they made.

Some girls, like Monday, did run away and approached the police so as to lodge a complaint against their operators, pimps and madams. However, they not only found themselves confronted with the usual problem of translating what cannot be translated with its full significance, nuances and implicit meanings in another language, but also encountered the imaginations of the police concerning occult threats.

'Voodoo' quickly became the site of negotiable meanings and part of an arena of vested interests. For the police, the evidence of exotic cults and occult threats formed a basis for the prosecution of traders, traffickers and operators. For lawyers, it became a helpful way to demonstrate on the girls' behalf their incapacity, their inability to escape from those who controlled them and therefore understandable grounds for their otherwise illegal stay in the Netherlands. For the entire care sector it provided ample grounds on which to defend the sector's stake holding, its ideology of offering trajectories for 'integration' as against right-wing political interests aimed at repatriating asylum seekers as much and as soon as possible. Increasingly, and with mounting pertinence, as the number of Nigerian girls grew, the crucial question became: can 'voodoo' be recognised as grounds for granting asylum? Some of the older girls, who were not entirely certain of their status in this respect, began talking much more poignantly about their 'voodoo' experiences and exotic rituals. These fuelled feelings similar to those that La Fontaine (1997) describes on the perceived satanic abuse

of children in England. Horrific images of Caribbean 'voodoo' filled the imagination particularly of the social interest groups who declared themselves in defence of innocent childhood and of the Western prerogative of protecting it in all circumstances. In fact this public moral outrage concerning African religious practices ideologically celebrated very Eurocentric notions of the young as defenceless victims of their own cultural religious forms and Europe as the idealised place where childhood blossoms in safety.

Hence 'voodoo' became both an explanation for the inexplicable as well as a site for denying the agency of any Nigerian girl: a suffocating hug (*doodknuffelen*), as the Dutch saying has it. Following the public outcry over the supposedly satanic feature of these girls' involvement in the sex industry, the question of repatriation to Nigeria became completely taboo. The image of occult, satanic practices originating in Nigeria, but being decisively 'standard' there so as to enslave young girls, loomed extremely large. This resulted in very emotional protests, by social interest groups, lawyers and other concerned parties against such possible treatment of victims of African religion who turned up on the Dutch doorstep. Irrespective of whether or not the girls themselves at any stage in their travel to Europe, in the rituals they underwent and in their contacts with 'boyfriends' had co-operated 'voluntarily', the idea of rescuing them from African religion inspired much concerted action. The very idea of the possibility of voluntary action in this field, of another cultural experience of meaning, of 'being under age', of 'being a prostitute', and so forth, became deeply resented in a pervasive ideology of political correctness (Terre des hommes, 1999).

Perhaps paradoxically, it was leading members of the 'Voodoo Team' itself who in the end began shifting their ground in understanding the girls' position as well as their cultural and religious background and experience. Though highly contested by others in this arena of interests, these members of the police force, owing to their extensive contacts, expressed a kind of 'anthropologisation' of their knowledge and understanding. They began moving away from the perplexity that had struck so many of their colleagues. 'Yes,' some began to say, 'voodoo requires further exploration, likewise the girls' understanding of what it means to be a prostitute in the West and being under-age in this society.' Interestingly, those regarded as defenders of civil society *par excellence*, prominent members of a national police team, now began voicing interest in alternative views and insights into this complex of African religion, brutalisation of minors and occult intimidation. It was a shift little understood and regarded as highly suspect by many in the field of social care. In addition, some members of the Voodoo Team themselves surreptitiously became deeply involved in the girls' lives. They tried to find safe places for them which would offer security against the threats of the traffickers as well as against the attempts at extradition by other branches of the police service. Hence an intriguing question arises. Do anthropology and the police in such circumstances become strange bedfellows? The point, after all, is that policing is not only a site where visceral knowledge is gathered on the effects of the

unbridled corporeal free enterprise and omnivorous sexuality in which late capitalism seems to abound. It is also a site where negotiations over empirical 'facts' go on even in domains which by and large the state regards as absolutely non-negotiable. Perhaps this is a shocking thought for an anthropology seeking abstinence from any form of internal colonialism or any form of incrimination or corruption by power, but it is well worth pondering. The question obviously is, why were their expressions of empathetic interest, and surreptitious creation of safe havens, considered to be against the grain of the social and political development of the Dutch nation state? The answer the next section will venture to give is that it upset the political endeavour to ensure the formation of a perfectly controllable nation state: a project of identity politics which in all its rigour had been taking shape since the early 1990s.

THE GRAND NARRATIVE OF A CONTROLLABLE STATE

Many aspects of the moral panic that surrounded the 'discovery' of 'voodoo' and young Nigerian prostitutes can be explored by pointing at important historical developments relating to the rise of liberal capitalism, such as Boas's *Cult of Childhood* (1966) or of formal religion and the decline of magic (Thomas, 1973). I want to focus, however, on another modern myth: the scrutiny of society, the supervision of the nation by the state in Europe. This is in line with Appadurai's thinking (1998) that the modern nation state requires and constructs specific forms of violence in order to produce 'full attachment'—rather than the reverse—in the creation of a myth of the unity of the nation in the face of various globalising processes. This myth signals a counter imagery to what Habermas (1998) has called the dissolution of the European state in two directions: one 'upward'—that is, the dissolution of state power into supranational organisations and 'openness' to all sorts of global movements of goods, services and people—and another one 'downward', into the aggregation of a multicultural society expounded by a plethora of migrant groups, diaspora cultures and very different nationalistic sentiments (Modood and Werbner, 1997). The myth concerns the integrity of the state in both meanings of the word.

The rise of late capitalist relations, the profound liberalisation of the market and exposure to the effects of globalisation in terms of 'flows' of people, goods and information were met by the Dutch state with what can be called the construction of 'sites of non-negotiation'. One of the most important of these sites was and still is that of identity politics. The cornerstone of its identity politics became a praxis of serialisation, that is, a well functioning system of recording those living in the Netherlands, which Rouse defines as part of what he calls the development of a taxonomic state: 'the increasing use of censusing and mapping, the growing emphasis on the registration of births, marriages and deaths, the history of the passport, the identity card and fingerprinting' (1995: 362).

In current debates on state formation in Europe and elsewhere the essential importance of these techniques of classification in the modern state's pursuit of establishing a national order have been widely noted. (See Foucault, 1972; Anderson, 1991; Balibar and Wallerstein, 1991; Dirks, 1992; Malkki, 1995.) Haunting the mirage of a fully controllable nation as far as identities are concerned, and in an attempt at containing the porosity of its borders in a globalising world, rigorous measures were implemented by the Dutch state with the aim of knowing its citizenry in every possible detail. Gradually, particularly in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Africa came to figure as a 'force' largely responsible for undermining the taxonomic efforts of the state. It also jeopardised the imagery of a controllable and knowable citizenry and thereby increased the porosity of its borders. (For an overview of African migration to the Netherlands see Van Kessel and Tellegen, 2000.) The appearance of 'Africa' as a threat to taxonomy and the state's specific efforts to control immigration from various African countries became an important element in the development of 'non-negotiability' in its identity politics.

The history of stern identity politics began with the post-World War II reconstruction period, which saw an ever increasing demand for labour. (In this the Netherlands were no exception during the overall reconstruction of Western European society in the 1950s and 1960s: see R. Cohen, 1987: 111–37.) From the early 1960s recruitment began to take place in those regions, immediately bordering on Western Europe, where labour was still reasonably cheap and readily available. In fact a new-style multicultural society was born. The old-style multicultural society which the Netherlands once was, thanks to the occasional and 'random' inflow and mingling of different groups in its pre-war history (Huguenots, Jews, Moluccans, Indians, Creoles, etc.), contrasted with this highly systematic effort at incorporating in its total work force specific individuals from other cultural domains. Recruitment teams were sent out to Morocco, Greece and Turkey, among other countries, to register young men for work in Dutch companies or specific sectors such as greenhouse horticultural production.

The so-called 'free recruitment' of such labour was officially halted in 1973–74 as a consequence of the tightening of the economic situation in the Netherlands (and in Europe generally for that matter) which followed the oil crisis. In previous years the acquisition of legal residence status for these recruited employees was not a difficult matter. Suddenly, however, the legal residence requirements were drastically tightened by the government, leading to the post-colonial invention of 'illegality' as a social problem requiring supervision. Since the early 1980s, for example, the so-called SoFi number was introduced, given by the nation state to every Dutch citizen at the moment of birth. This makes it possible to keep a kind of track record of somebody's income, tax pay status and use of social security benefit schemes throughout their life.

The introduction of this system was one of the techniques the nation state developed to control access to the common goods of the welfare

state and to exclude those regarded as 'illegals', by definition anybody who has no documents. All the actions and measures taken, particularly from the early 1980s onward (and still today), to curb illegal immigration seem to be premised on the notion that the nation state knows its subjects, is entitled to the total registration of its citizens, is empowered to serialise identity and therefore has an intricate knowledge of all those who reside in its territory. This *volonté de savoir*, to invoke Foucault, became intricately interwoven with the development of a 'minority policy' (*Minderhedenbeleid*, first formulated by the Dutch government in 1983). This was concerned exclusively with monitoring the welfare state's fringes and marginal groups. It has led over the years to a wide range of measures taken to enhance the social position of minorities in terms of labour, education and housing, and it has clearly identified groups and areas of concern in terms of 'maladaptation', discrimination and involvement in criminal activities.

Returning to the issue of the serialisation of identity, one of the problems that surfaced was that the records showed many gaps, particularly in the larger cities. Identities were not fully known, could not fully be tracked or escaped supervision. The gaps came to be known as 'statistical dirt' (in Dutch, *vervuiling*)⁵ in the registration of the nation state's citizens. During the 1980s it became evident that the records and statistics of the nation state's subjects were not 'clean', 'consistent' and 'compatible'.

From then on a widespread public concern about 'illegality' (*het illegalen vraagstuk*) was born. It was fed particularly by anxieties over two 'streams' of people attempting to gain access to the welfare society. One was the 'flow' of asylum seekers, the other the 'flow' of uncontrolled labour migration from Third World countries. The discourse of streams and flows in the *illegalen debat* is interesting not only for its dehumanising and estranging capacities, as if there were unfettered access, but also for the notion that these people may carry 'pollution'. It is, however, an issue which I will leave undiscussed here.

As happened in other European countries as well, the authorities felt the need to draw sharp distinctions between those who can be considered and proclaimed refugees and asylum seekers on the one hand to the exclusion of those with a status of being 'only' a migrant for economic reasons on the other. To seek economic asylum (in contrast to other categories such as political asylum or ecological asylum) was defined as inadmissible, particularly when in the early 1980s the legal forms of labour immigration were brought to an end. With regard to Africa, this policy meant that for a number of nationalities refugee or

⁵ While I also ran into this notion of dirt frequently in conversations with government civil servants, Staring *et al* (1998: 40) also record such anxiety in various other public services. They quote, for instance, a manager in educational services as saying, 'De administratie in Amsterdam is vervuild, wel zo'n 15 procent. Ja, en hoeveel illegalen daar tussen zit weet ik niet, maar je ziet dat er groepen illegalen zijn.'

asylum status was acknowledged as circumstances of war and persecution would make a safe return (whether compulsory or not) impossible at short notice. Other nationalities, however, were excluded from such provision because the political situation in their countries was not considered to justify such a status and their motives for coming to Europe were disqualified as purely economic. (On these terms, for instance, it became impossible for Nigerian nationals to seek asylum.)

On the basis of 'statistical dirt' wild guesses began circulating with regard to the overall size of the illegal labour migrant population and the extent of the 'damage' done to the economy, labour market and social services. As I indicate below, Ghanaian and Nigerian immigration formed an important element in the growth of the authorities' anxiety about the scale and scope of illegality in Dutch society.

From the late 1980s and early 1990s onward a sense of public alarm was growing about the 'volume' of the illegal population, the limited means the government seemed to have of curbing these 'flows' and how little the police services were allegedly able to do in checking the apparently 'porous' borders of the nation state. Extremist right-wing political parties benefited from the public alarm and gained much popularity, particularly in the major cities, where the influx of migrants had been greatest. On that basis they began winning seats in the national parliament. As a result the tightening of taxonomic measures was called for.

As Rouse (1995) shows, one of the effects of taxonomic state policies is that although serialisation marks people as distinct individuals, with their own 'number' in the state records, it simultaneously constitutes them as members of distinct, recognisable communities within the nation. Communities, above all, considerable numbers of whose members seemed to escape the state's taxonomic measures and remain 'undocumented'. Particularly in the Ghanaian and Nigerian cases, a cultural conflict of governmentality surfaced. Premised on the idea that a single identity is inseparably tied to a single name and a single number, civil servants in the large cities began complaining bitterly about the strange identities, often considered 'fraudulent', under which Ghanaians and Nigerians turned up in their records and statistics. In the late 1980s and early 1990s increasing cases of suspect West African identity documents were recorded by the Foreign Police service in conjunction with local authorities (such as the *Burgerlijke Stand*). When I interviewed civil servants in the Hague they revealed that in the years between 1992 and 1996 those dealing with Ghanaian and Nigerian identity documents would *a priori* consider almost 100 per cent of them to be fraudulent, forged or otherwise incorrect. Chief inspectors of police thereupon began stirring up a huge public debate about the enormous size of the illegal West African populations which were supposed to be living in the low-cost housing areas of Dutch cities, such as the Bijlmer in Amsterdam.

This led the government, first of all, to commission detailed studies of the 'illegal problem' both in terms of insights into the illegal population itself (numbers, nationalities, livelihood, coping strategies)

and in terms of the effects on the economy.⁶ Although independent studies were able to disprove a number of officials' statements concerning the number of illegal migrants (see Van der Leun *et al.*, 1998, in conjunction with Staring *et al.*, 1998), the result of the public and political alarm was that in the early 1990s the government not only decided to introduce what it hoped would be a fraud-free passport and other identity documents but also passed a law that made it obligatory to show proof of identity upon demand (*Wet Identificatieplicht*, 1 June 1994). Moreover, it decided to bring in a new law of a very different nature. The *Koppelingswet* would permit the connection of quite separate databases each containing highly private, personal information on Dutch citizens.⁷ Through their interconnection it would almost automatically become clear whether a person registered for housing, for example, was also registered for lawful residence in the Netherlands. In other words, it would increase the visibility of those who through the loopholes and inconsistencies in the various data systems were able to reside and work in the country illegally.

These laws were also intended to facilitate a further analysis of the supposed relationship between illegality and criminality.⁸ In 1994 a special parliamentary commission of inquiry was established with the aim of reviewing police methods of investigating criminal organisations (the Van Traa commission). A whole chapter of its report was devoted to Nigerian and Ghanaian involvement in criminal organisations. The focus of their attention for the Ghanaian and Nigerian community was exactly this: although their criminal activity appear to be limited to a few areas (drug trafficking, car theft and trafficking in women for the prostitution business) it involved the production of 'papers' for which they became particularly known. Because of the taxonomic emphasis of the Dutch nation state this was perceived to jeopardise and rock its very basis. In other words, attitudes to the seriousness of the crime of fraudulence in documentation have dramatically increased over the last decade. Unlike other ethnic minorities this provoked disproportionate attention on the West African community on the part of Dutch officials

⁶ In terms of the number and background of illegals, the commissioned study by Van den Broek (1992), conducted in the Hague and focusing on the size and nature of its illegal population, in fact admitted that nobody in the state's civil service or that of the city itself really had a clue. No civil service unit, not even the Foreign Police service, had a firm idea of the size and composition of the illegal population of the city. Estimates ranged from 6,500 to 50,000 individuals (of a total population of 300,000), which Van den Broek compared with estimates for Amsterdam, which ranged between 30,000 and 60,000 individuals.

⁷ This law took effect in the teeth of fierce protests from a range of legal aid practitioner organisations, social support groups and interest groups in January 1997.

⁸ Staring *et al.* (1998) and Van der Leun (1998) examined this alleged relationship between illegality and criminality. Other than the fact itself of not possessing identity documents or possessing fraudulent documents (which is, after all, the essence of the bureaucratic definition of 'illegality') illegals did not score substantially higher on a range of distinguishable criminal acts, and in fact scored lower on a number of them in comparison with the legally resident members of minority groups. Most perpetrators of any offence were arrested by the police on the basis of not possessing the requisite documents (in the Hague, for instance, 72 per cent out of a total of 120 African illegals arrested by the police in 1995).

from the early 1990s onward. It was soon estimated that although official records would suggest a figure of about 13,000 Ghanaians and 3,000 Nigerians residing in the Netherlands (among a total of 84,000 African nationals, 1 January 1998), 'undocumented' immigration is double if not triple that figure. West African identities therefore came to dominate public concern about the Netherlands' 'open borders'.

This general atmosphere of 'alarm' was conducive to the announcement of yet another government ruling intended to curb the illegal inflow. This edict came to be known as the *Probleemlanden circulaire* (the 'Problem countries' circular, 1996). It stipulated that from April of that year onward five overseas countries were considered as 'blacklisted'. This was essentially due to the extent of their involvement in the production of fraudulent identity documents. For the first time the government admitted that in these five cases no confidence whatsoever could be placed in their governments' ability to control the flow of identity documents. Nor could there be any guarantee of the genuineness of the documents its citizens would present to the respective Dutch embassies. Top of the list was Ghana, followed by Nigeria, India, Pakistan and the Dominican Republic.

This circular indicated that, on top of the normal procedures for dealing with illegals and fraudulent documents with the ultimate sanction of deportation, from now on another instrument would be used in controlling and checking identities. This instrument is called 'verification' (*verificatie*). It implies that for any identity document required by Ghanaians and Nigerians in the Netherlands (passport, marriage certificate, birth certificate, etc.) the Dutch government is entitled to investigate the person's identity in the country of origin in whatever direction the Dutch authorities feel necessary. In practice it meant that as of 1996 the Dutch embassies in both countries stepped up their investigation of the antecedents of any person applying for emigration to the Netherlands. Such investigations by Dutch officials in Ghana and Nigeria, usually with the help of local informants and detectives, involve the interrogation of relatives, friends and colleagues, the researching of school, church and hospital records and the contacting of local police offices for any further information on the person. Only when the full verification of the person's identity is complete can documents be assessed, processed and stamped as having been 'verified'. In other words any Ghanaian or Nigerian hoping to settle or marry in the Netherlands knows in advance that permission to do so will involve a fully fledged and costly investigation of his or her private life in the country of origin.⁹

⁹ Enormous difficulties have arisen with this verification procedure. Ghanaian birth records are often missing or simply non-existent, names are spelled differently or have been changed during the course of a lifetime, dates and places of birth, of residence, of marriage, etc., are often ill recorded or simply not recorded, schools, churches, hospitals have often lost their records for lack of funds to store them properly, families are often divided among themselves owing to conflicts and rivalries, therefore unwilling to give information or deliberately distorting information, local detectives are bribed to give details or to mislead the investigation, and so on.

When the effects of the verification procedure became felt in the communities in the Netherlands, slowly but surely protest mounted. While in the Netherlands interest groups began organising joint protests against the measures,¹⁰ in Accra and Lagos the prices of forged documents rocketed (see, for Accra, de Thouars, 1999). So-called 'paper boys' and 'connection men' were increasing their prices for forged passports, visas or any other type of requisite document to unprecedented levels.

From a somewhat detached point of view this remarkable, but continuing, episode in Dutch identity politics reveals a new feature of late post-colonial state relations: the interrogation of individuality in an age of porosity of territory and of porosity of identity. The Netherlands authorities' investigation of citizens' identities on the territory of another state is a feature of the inequality of control of that porosity. Ghana's and Nigeria's weaker systems of civil administration, both in the present and in the past, act in that sense against their own territorial integrity. They have been forced to allow investigations by another, better organised nation state of the identities of their citizens. In the process the trajectory followed by the Dutch nation state is to impose its own ordering and disciplining of identities upon another nation state. It assumes the legitimate right to do so in the face of another nation state's defective civil administration.

From the Dutch official's perspective the whole exercise is a reaction to the porosity which is experienced in tightening access to Dutch society. Its object is to supervise the state's perimeters and to curb migration from Africa, considered to be inspired by 'economic motives only' and as such parasitic on its wealth and resources. The shock wave West African immigration in particular sent through the Dutch system was that it was not watertight to any great extent. It offered many ways to take up illegal residence and illegal access to social benefits and the like. Above all, it made many realise that a system based on the creation of objective memory in terms of paper-based bureaucratic control of identity is the result of a specific and certainly not a universal cultural rationale. What I often noticed when interviewing Dutch civil servants was the extent of their surprise that the creation of such objective memory is not a universal principle of state formation. It was particularly in the West African case (though not exclusively so) that the confrontation between cultural rationales in establishing identities became so pertinent. It is also subjected to the unequal, subjugating post-colonial encounter that I outlined above.

¹⁰ In 1998 these groups presented a petition to the Dutch parliament on this issue, including reports on a number of cases in which for reasons that were not clear verification had failed and where lawyers were disenfranchised from any further information which might help their clients fight the decisions that were taken against them. Ultimately the report, although supported by legal rights groups and lawyers, altered the situation little. In 1999 it was followed by an official complaint lodged with the Ghana government against the Dutch government and its treatment of such and similar cases.

CONCLUSION AND INTERPRETATION: DEMOTIC PRAXIS

Whereas in the public mind the Dutch state effectively dealt with its late capitalist, liberal and globalising dimensions by implementing rigorous measures, a tightening of controls and profound enlargement of its supervision, it did not include nor had it anticipated the policing of 'voodoo' and magic. The integrity of the state was at stake in both meanings of the word. This problem flew in the face of its attempts to control and inspect the identities of those vying to join its citizenry and in terms of the social morale of upholding an ethic of childhood and an ethic of protecting childhood and an ethic of separating the state from religion. Whereas on an ideological level all these domains indicate sites of 'non-negotiability', West Africans appeared to unsettle the construction of these domains: identities for sale, childhood open to sexual exploitation, 'voodoo' as a form of religion intended to circumvent state strictures. The Nigerian girls appeared to embody full and combined negation of these areas where the state had developed specific strategies to accommodate the effects of globalisation and liberal capitalism.

Further 'strange' phenomena occurred. Nigerian girls sought the help of the Dutch state to accuse and prosecute their traders, traffickers, 'boyfriends' and madams for their unbridled capitalism. Police officers became compassionate and vicariously involved in the girls' plight, thereby establishing relations of genuine trust and confidence, even leading some police officers to become active on the girls' behalf. (Some sought to prevent repatriation, helped in 'parenting' the girls and became profoundly informed of their religious fears, experiences and manipulative imagery as far as 'voodoo' is concerned.) And for the Netherlands even such an unusual experience as its ambassador in Lagos facing questions about his embassy's involvement in the trade in illegal documents is illustrative of the kind of demotic discourses I would highlight. (See also Baumann, 1997, for a discussion of demotic discourses in transcultural and multi-ethnic relations.)

The Comaroffs appear to treat the rise of liberal capitalism as a new form of hegemony: the inescapable positioning of the individual in mystiques of the market, of production and of consumption. They emphasise the magic allure of making effortless fortunes causing moral panics about illicit means of accumulation, but the question really is whether that 'mystique of the market' is to be considered in all cases the deep-seated cause of social anxieties and scares. The point I wish to make by emphasising the rigidity of Dutch identity politics *vis-à-vis* West Africans is that the moral panic concerning Nigerian child prostitution may or should also be attributed to the overriding forms of individualism liberal capitalism appears to enforce: Sartre hegemonised. Avoiding the trap of the West as the individualised self as against the non-West as the communal self, at stake are the very specific if not coercive forms of individuality that late capitalism fosters and that override or dissolve other communal expressions of individuality, in the West or in the non-West. While in the rigidity of its identity politics the Dutch state ventures to limit the possibility of 'choice' in the

construction of individual identities, the shock wave Nigerian child prostitutes sent through the system was the dark possibility of 'choice', the looming and almost unthinkable malign image of self-realisation through occult practice and sexual exploitation. (See also Pickering and Wilkins, 1993.) Again the state was taken completely by surprise by the fact that increasing numbers of these young girls sought to establish contact with the many African, particularly Ghanaian pentecostal, Churches in the country (of which there are over forty; see Van Dijk, 1997, 1999). This was a kind of choice running against the state-provided means of care, tutelage, parenting, etc., that would in its view guarantee the kind of 'exfoliation of personal identity' it envisages for its own young people.

The second question I feel we need to ask is, what exactly is exploded by the Comaroffs? They call for an anthropology that studies the local and cultural fabrication of both late capitalist relations and the panics they cause so as:

not to overreact, not to treat anything 'global' either as feckless fashion or as a threat to the existence of a discipline traditionally concerned with the parochial—this last by dissolving all things culturally contingent and close to the ground into the great Eurocentric solvent of late capitalism. [1999: 294]

Their warning, well taken, leads us to consider the sameness in the production of late capitalist relations as an element of culture while at the same time enabling anthropology to study the distinctive features of how such relations and the cultural responses they evoke come about. Obvious as it may seem to stress human agency in the fabrication of social cultural realities that are or become distinct, it does not draw attention to mutuality, to agency in the 'bridging' of cultural divides. Culture, in other words, still maintains in this perspective a differentiating function, as Durham (1999) has called it, and is not a terrain for the exploration of commonality of experience. However, some Dutch police officers and some Nigerian girls did just that. They created a shared sense and experience of the magic of 'Europe', of omnivorous sexual exploitation, of occult threats and rigid identity politics. This was and is a demotic discourse, emerging as the two parties involved, girls and police officers, were each prepared to peel off the manipulative aspects of 'voodoo' and 'investigation' respectively. A specific setting therefore, as otherwise police action against illegals, particularly in cases of forced repatriation, remained coercive and even violent. Nevertheless, as this article has sought to argue, unexpected explosions of difference may occur in the nooks and crannies of what may otherwise appear as monolithic, hostile and exclusionary systems; domains that may escape the anthropologist's attention in a search for experiences of commonality and mutuality.

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ABSTRACT

This article deals with the moral panic that emerged in the Netherlands when it became publicly known that under-age Nigerian girls were being smuggled into the country to be put to 'work' in the sex industry. A massive police investigation not only found hundreds of cases but also uncovered the fact that certain unknown and occult rituals played a part in how traffickers, 'madams' and other sex bosses appeared to keep the girls locked in this exploitative system. Soon an unspecified notion of 'voodoo' came to dominate the entire police operation, the public image of what was happening to these girls, and the way in which the girls were treated within the Dutch judicial system and its care. The article deconstructs the moral panic and all the images of Africa and the occult which became so crucial to the way the Dutch state tried to deal with the situation. It sets this analysis in the context of an anthropology of globalisation and a cultural exploration of how issues of morality and identity are affected by what the Comaroffs have called the occult economies of late capitalist relations. It concludes that to a great extent the scale of the moral panic can be understood by pointing at the rigidity of the identity politics of the Dutch nation state in previous years. Its policies were meant to curb some of the effects of globalisation (such as illegal immigration from Africa) in order to preserve its integrity, but it now found them seriously undermined by something the policies were not designed to cope with.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article traite de la panique morale qui s'est emparée de la population néerlandaise en apprenant qu'on faisait entrer clandestinement des jeunes filles nigériennes mineures aux Pays-Bas pour les faire « travailler » dans l'industrie du sexe. Une enquête de police de grande ampleur a permis de recenser des centaines de cas, mais a également révélé que certains rituels inconnus et occultes jouaient un rôle dans la manière dont les trafiquants, les « mères maquereelles » et autres magnats du sexe semblaient maintenir ces jeunes filles enfermées dans ce système d'exploitation. Une notion non spécifiée de « vaudou » est rapidement venue dominer l'opération de police, l'image publique de ce qui arrivait à ces jeunes filles, ainsi que la manière dont ces jeunes filles étaient traitées au sein du système judiciaire néerlandais et de son système de protection sociale. L'article procède à une analyse critique de la panique morale et des images de l'Afrique et de l'occulte qui sont apparues essentielles dans la façon dont l'Etat néerlandais a tenté de faire face à la situation. Il place cette analyse dans le contexte d'une anthropologie de la mondialisation et d'un examen culturel de la manière dont les thèmes de la moralité et de l'identité sont affectés par ce que les Comaroffs ont appelé l'économie occulte des rapports capitalistes avancés. Il conclut qu'il est possible, dans une large mesure, de comprendre l'étendue de la panique morale en évoquant la rigidité de la politique identitaire de l'Etat-nation néerlandais au cours des années précédentes. Cette politique, qui visait à endiguer certains effets de la mondialisation (comme l'immigration clandestine venue d'Afrique) dans le souci de préserver l'intégrité du pays, se trouve désormais sérieusement remise en cause par des situations qu'elle n'avait pas prévues.

'THE ARROW OF GOD'
 PENTECOSTALISM, INEQUALITY, AND THE
 SUPERNATURAL IN SOUTH-EASTERN NIGERIA

Daniel Jordan Smith

In September 1996 the city of Owerri in south-eastern Nigeria erupted in riots over popular suspicions that the town's *nouveaux riches* were responsible for a spate of child kidnappings and alleged ritual murders. The weekend prior to the riots, a local television station broadcast pictures of a man holding the freshly severed head of a child. The video was accompanied by an announcement that the man with the head had been arrested the previous day. The police wanted to know the identity of the child and were asking for the public's assistance. The next day, the alleged murderer died in police custody. Rumours of his death spread quickly and the public suspected that he was deliberately silenced to prevent him from revealing elite involvement in the crime.

Two days later, the police dug up the headless body of the murdered child in the compound of Otokoto Hotel, where his alleged killer had worked. A crowd gathered as the police unearthed the child's headless corpse. After the police left the scene, the onlookers burned the hotel. The mob then moved to a nearby department store that catered to the rich and set it on fire. From there, the crowd grew still larger and moved across the city, burning many of Owerri's most select stores and hotels, focusing on businesses reputedly owned by the *nouveaux riches*.

The rioting and burning continued into the next day, sparked by the alleged discovery the next morning of a roasted human corpse at the residence of 'Damaco', one of Owerri's young 'millionaires'. In addition, word spread of the purported finding of human skulls and 'human meat pepper soup' at the Overcomers Christian Mission, the pentecostal church where Damaco worshipped. Before the riots subsided and Nigeria's military government imposed a strict curfew, more than twenty-five buildings and dozens of vehicles had been torched. In addition to the high-class stores and hotels, and the houses of many of Owerri's young elite, the mob razed the Overcomers Christian Mission church, its pastor's residence, and a number of other pentecostal churches and religious houses in the town.

In retrospective popular accounts and in the explosion of press coverage that followed, the Owerri riots were portrayed as a religious cleansing. The destruction of property was widely viewed as a popular uprising against the connected evils of child kidnapping, ritual murder,

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