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Postcolonial Migrants in the Netherlands: Identity Politics versus the Fragmentation of Community

Oostindie, G.J.; Bosma, U.; Lucassen, J.; Oostindie, G.

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POSTCOLONIAL MIGRANTS IN THE NETHERLANDS

Identity Politics versus the Fragmentation of Community

Gert Oostindie

Introduction

Over one million of the 16.4 million citizens of the Netherlands are first- or second-generation migrants from the former colonies. This paper discusses the post-war history of these postcolonial migrants. At some points comparisons are made with other groups of so-called 'non-Western' migrants. It is appropriate to emphasize beforehand that this analytical division between postcolonial and other non-Western migrant communities is important for the Netherlands, as it is also for Portugal and perhaps Spain, but it seems largely irrelevant to the United Kingdom and France. The arrival of non-Western migrants in most other Western European states had little to do with their own colonial history.¹

In the Netherlands, the largest community of postcolonial migrants stems from the turbulent decolonization of Indonesia immediately after the Second World War. The formation of the Surinamese community in the Netherlands is directly linked to the highly contested transfer of sovereignty in 1975. The last, still ongoing, chapter in this postcolonial history is written by migrants from the (former) Netherlands Antilles, in particular Curaçao (Figure 3.1, Table 3.1). The first two streams of migration were directly linked to the transfer of sovereignty, albeit in dissimilar ways. The later Antillean migration continues to this day precisely because there has been no such change in constitutional status.

This contribution provides an analysis of the backgrounds, processes and consequences of these post-war migrations. The first sections discuss

Notes for this chapter begin on page 124.

the colonial backgrounds of the migrant groups, the nexus between decolonization and migration, and the actual processes of migration. Thereafter the focus shifts to patterns of integration of these highly divergent postcolonial communities in the metropolis and, as a corollary, the ways the host society reacted to these migrations and was transformed in the process. Particular attention is given to the contests over group and national identities, and the applicability of the concept of identity politics.

This type of analysis begs for analytical clarity and broader contextualization. As for the first, in much of what follows there is little theoretical reflection on the key concepts of 'community' and 'identity'.² It has become a truism that such concepts refer to processes rather than givens, a reality obscured by the everyday labelling and self-presentations of individuals and groups. This point is taken but slightly glossed over in what follows. 'Community' is simply used as a common denominator for a group of people sharing elements of a prehistory in a former Dutch colony. There is some discussion of common characteristics arising from this background. There is no firm assumption that these various communities jointly or separately share one identity, or are in the process of forging (or forsaking) one such postcolonial identity. Neither is it taken for granted that the majority of second and following generations of 'postcolonial migrants' think of themselves in such terms at all.

Mapping Postcolonial Migrations

Colonial Origins

On the eve of the Second World War, the Dutch colonial empire consisted of one huge colony, the Indonesian archipelago, and two tiny ones in the Caribbean. An enormous demographic disparity characterized this empire. While the Netherlands had fewer than nine million inhabitants, the population of the Dutch East Indies numbered seventy million. Suriname, in spite of its large surface, had no more than 140,000 and the six Caribbean islands together a mere 108,000.

An immense territory and great ethnic heterogeneity defined the Dutch East Indies. The Dutch ruled the colony, but made up an insignificant proportion of its total population. Colonial rule had institutionalized a rigid 'ethnic' classification into three classes. 'Europeans' were either metropolitan or locally born. In contrast to British India, a majority in the latter category were of Eurasian origin. The Chinese made up the majority of 'Foreign Orientals'. The overwhelming majority of the population was labelled 'Indigenous', a category including local aristocracies as well

as the destitute masses throughout the archipelago. Members of the last two categories were defined as 'colonial subjects' rather than full citizens of the Dutch empire.³

Throughout the colonial period, a migration circuit had linked the colony to the metropolis. For present purposes, what interests us most is not the constant coming and going of metropolitan Europeans, but rather the extent to which people actually living in the colony visited the metropolis and perhaps settled there. There was a small but steady stream of such migrants, mainly middle- and upper-class, locally born, legal 'Europeans', often accompanied by their own servants. The objectives of these metropolitan sojourns included the pursuit of higher education, furlough, or simply the desire to 'repatriate' to a European country only known through family stories. By the turn of the century, The Hague had acquired the epithet of 'the widow of the [East] Indies'. Some twenty thousand '*Indische Nederlanders*' lived there.⁴

With the economic growth of the colony and the intensification of the colonial nexus, the numbers of migrants increased and widened. In the late colonial period, students from the 'Indigenous' and 'Foreign Oriental' elites started to enrol at Dutch universities. Small numbers of lower-class Indonesians followed, but throughout the entire period, the character of the colonial migrant community was anything but a representative sample of the archipelagic population. *Totoks* – first-generation Dutch settled in the colony – and *Indische Nederlanders* (born in the colony) taken together added up to less than 1 per cent of the population in the colony, but dominated the expatriate community in the metropolis. There was thus a class as well as an ethnic and cultural bias, as the majority of migrants were white or Eurasian, Christian, had a fair command of the Dutch language, and had participated in Dutch education or would do so – in short, an extremely unrepresentative sample.

Migration from the Caribbean colonies presents a slightly different picture. This contrast starts with the actual settlement in the Americas. With the exception of small numbers of Amerindians in Suriname and on the island of Aruba, immigrants made up the entire population of these Dutch colonies. Europeans formed a minority amongst an overwhelming majority of enslaved Africans and their descendants. After the abolition of slavery in 1863, large numbers of indentured labourers from British India and Java were transported to Suriname. In contrast to the Dutch East Indies, all inhabitants of these colonies would eventually be considered full Dutch citizens, and hence have the right of abode in the metropolis.

Throughout the colonial period, there was a small but steady stream of Dutch 'repatriates' to a metropolis some of the migrants had never seen before. The motives were much the same: education, furlough, or a com-

fortable retirement. During the period of slavery, members of the white elites would visit the Netherlands and perhaps settle there, often taking their slaves with them. Post-slavery, the composition of the modest Caribbean migrant community came to reflect changes in the social fabric of these societies. 'Creoles' of mixed descent joined the students enrolled in Dutch universities. The first lower-class black migrants followed. But all of this was a mere footnote to the exodus that was to follow.⁵

West Indian migrants had much in common with the 'Europeans' from the East Indies. They spoke Dutch and had gone through Dutch education. Most belonged to the colonial upper and middle classes. They enjoyed full citizenship rights in the metropolis. Many of them were of mixed origins. And all were creolized to the point that the metropolitan population often considered them far less 'Dutch' than they themselves thought they were.

Like their counterparts from the East Indies, the Caribbean migrants started various types of associations. Some of these were educational, cultural, or social. Others had explicit political goals, and indeed in the 1930s the Netherlands witnessed serious pro-independence agitation by a handful of left-wing radicals, notably the Indonesians Semaoen, Mohammed Hatta and Rostam Effendi, and the Surinamese Anton de Kom. Dutch authorities reacted strongly against this flag-waving. Only the Communist Party supported the cause of independence, while all major parties, including the Social-Democrats, considered a transfer of sovereignty a possibility for the remote future.

Decolonization and Migration

This self-serving *naïveté* was shattered during and immediately after the Second World War.⁶

The Netherlands was occupied by the Germans in 1940, while Japan took over the Dutch East Indies in 1942. Only the Caribbean territories remained 'free', that is, colonial possessions ruled by the government in exile. During the war, the London-based Dutch cabinet finally came up with proposals for colonial reform, including autonomous rule in the various territories. All of this was too little, too late for the major colony. On 17 August 1945, two days after the Japanese capitulation, Indonesian nationalists Sukarno and Mohammad Hatta proclaimed independence. It would take a full four years of bitter warfare and thorny negotiations before the transfer of sovereignty was accomplished at the end of 1949. New Guinea (Papua) was left out of this deal, but to great Dutch resentment it would be added to the Republic of Indonesia in 1962.

In the lee of this violent and, for all parties, traumatic episode, the first phase in the decolonization of the Caribbean was quietly negotiated. By the 1954 'Statuut' or Charter of the Kingdom, both Suriname and the Netherlands Antilles attained autonomy within the Kingdom of the Netherlands. This constitutional status would prevail for Suriname until the full transfer of sovereignty in 1975. The Statuut still binds the six islands to the Netherlands in an ambivalent postcolonial imbroglio – not that the Dutch wanted to retain their former colonies in the Caribbean, but rather they found no valid arguments or effective means to impose independence on populations who consistently refused the 'gift' of sovereignty.

These three highly divergent patterns of decolonization in turn marked very dissimilar migration histories. During the Japanese occupation of the Dutch East Indies, most of the European population had been concentrated under horrible circumstances in detention camps, while many males had been deployed as forced labourers under even worse conditions. Many 'Europeans' of Eurasian background had not been sent to the detention camps, but would find themselves increasingly isolated, and were threatened and harassed by both the Japanese and the Indonesian population. Thousands of Europeans perished during the war.

Things were not getting any better for the European citizenry in the immediate post-war years, as the armed fight over the country's political status became wedded to social and civil struggle, and plain criminality. This so-called *bersiap* period caused the death of thousands of white and coloured Europeans. With the transfer of independence, order was more or less restored, but the remaining resident European and Eurasian population segments felt increasingly marginalized in the new republic which, in turn, saw these groups as remnants of a despised racial colonial order.

The end of the war and the following successive turbulent phases of the decolonization process triggered a series of migrations to the metropolis.⁷ The first round consisted mainly of repatriating first-generation Dutch families. In the successive rounds, the proportion of Eurasian *Indische Nederlanders*, who had never been in the Netherlands before, increased, while in the 1950s Moluccans joined this migration. In addition, several thousand ethnic Chinese settled in the metropolis. The exodus from Indonesia was more or less completed by the mid-1960s. By then some 300,000 had migrated to the Netherlands. The volume of the postcolonial community rooted in Indonesia stands at 519,000 today, with the first-generation migrants now forming a minority of some 40 per cent (Table 3.1). These are considerable numbers – but of course of little demographic importance to the country they were leaving, which had a population of seventy-five million in 1950 and has three times that number today.

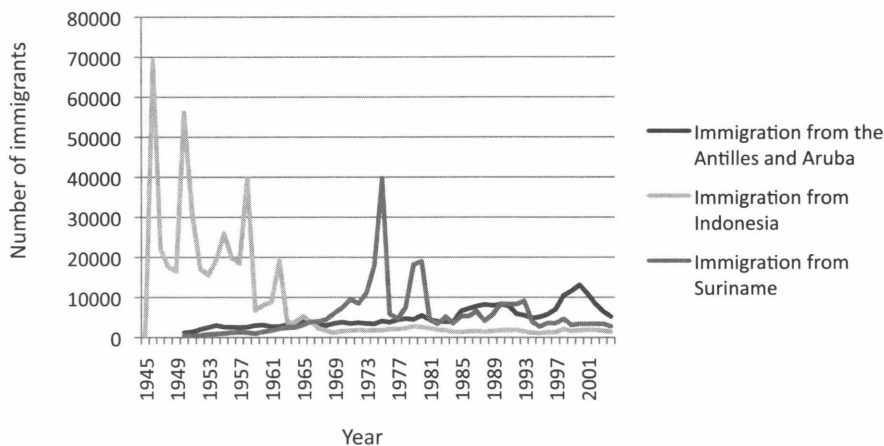


Figure 3.1. Net immigration from the former Dutch colonies, 1937–2005

Source: CBS, and Bosma, *Terug uit de koloniën*, 27.

Migration from the Dutch Caribbean was not linked to the war, but did relate to the decolonization process.⁸ At the time of the proclamation of the Statuut, not many more than 5,000 Surinamese and Antilleans were living in the Netherlands. This figure had grown to 40,000 by 1970. Thereafter, the numbers exploded. The Surinamese community has increased to over 330,000 today – as against 475,000 in contemporary Suriname itself. The share of second-generation ‘Surinamese’ is well over 50 per cent, but declining (Table 3.1). The growth of the Antillean population came later. Today, the Antillean community in the metropolis is some 130,000. Of these, 40 per cent belong to the second-generation (Table 3.1). The total population of the six islands is about 300,000.

A turbulent decolonization triggered the migration from Indonesia, and the same applies to Suriname. Yet beyond this congruence there are more meaningful disparities. The mass departure from Indonesia was a matter of minority groups directly connected to the waning colonial order. The Surinamese exodus, in contrast, consisted of a fairly representative sample of the total population and was sparked by the Surinamese government’s highly contested decision to attain independence by the end of 1975. While the Dutch government was delighted to comply – partly in the hopes of curtailing migration – a large number of the Surinamese voted with their feet.

In the next decades, the spectre of the Surinamese exodus would haunt not only the young republic, but equally the former metropolis. The vain hope of the Dutch government of enticing the Antillean population and

Table 3.1. Postcolonial and other major non-Western migrant communities in the Netherlands, 1960–2008

	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2006/8 (d)
Total population†	11.4 million	13.0 million	14.1 million	14.9 million	15.9 million	16.4 million
'Indische Nederlanders', total						519,000*
1st generation						204,000
2nd generation						315,000
Moluccans, total		25,900 (a)	35,200 (a)			58,349
1st generation						26,000
2nd generation						32,349
Surinamese, total	8,000 (b)	28,985 (b)	157,091	232,776	302,514	331,900
1st generation			126,107	158,772	183,249	187,483
2nd generation			30,974	74,004	119,265	144,417
Antilleans**, total	ca. 2,500 (b)	13,630 (b)	40,726	76,552	107,197	129,683
1st generation			29,515	54,881	69,266	80,102
2nd generation			11,211	21,671	37,931	49,581
Moroccans, total	ca. 100 (c)	17,400 (c)	69,464	163,458	262,221	335,127
1st generation			57,502	112,562	152,540	167,063
2nd generation			11,962	50,896	109,681	168,064
Turks, total	ca. 100 (c)	23,600 (c)	112,774	203,647	308,890	372,714
1st generation			92,568	138,089	177,754	194,556
2nd generation			20,206	65,558	131,136	178,158

† Sex ratios for the total population were balanced throughout this period. The same applies to the *Indische Nederlanders*, Moluccans, Surinamese (since 1970) and Antilleans (since 1970). Strong male preponderance characterized the Moroccan and Turkish population up to 1990 and 1980 respectively; hereafter, this imbalance was offset.

* For alternatives figures, see Beets et al., *De demografische geschiedenis*.

** From all six islands of the (former) Netherlands Antilles; the great majority from Curaçao.

CBS figures for 2006.

Source: All figures taken from Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (CBS), unless indicated otherwise:

a. Penninx, Schoorl and Van Praag, *The Impact*.

b. Oostindie and Klinkers, *Knellende koninkrijksbanden II*, 225.

c. Commissie-Blok, *Bruggen bouwen*.

d. Bosma, *Terug uit de koloniën*, 30 (postcolonial migrants, 2006), CBS (total, 2008; Moroccans and Turks, 2008).

its leadership to accept independence became increasingly linked to the equally futile wish to curtail Antillean migration to the Netherlands. The opposite transpired. The choice against independence made by the Antilleans has not simply confirmed their citizenship in the Kingdom of the Netherlands and their right of abode in the metropolis. These privileges are now key arguments for Antilleans to reject a transfer of sovereignty.

In sum, decolonization was pivotal for the formation of postcolonial migrant communities in the Netherlands, but the contrasts are enormous. Migration from the Dutch East Indies mainly involved minority groups linked to the colonial system that irrevocably lost their way of living because of a resented transfer of sovereignty. The choice for independence in Suriname triggered an exodus of a fairly representative sample of the total population and heavily affected the feasibility of the young republic. The Antillean refusal to accept independence not only precludes Dutch yearning to stop Antillean migration, it also reflects the islanders' determination to retain all rights attached to citizenship in the Kingdom, particularly the right of abode.

Profiles: Migrants from the Dutch East Indies/Indonesia

The notion of a 'postcolonial migrant community' is an adequate pointer to differentiate the various groups subsumed under this heading from other migrant communities. There is a shared history of Dutch colonialism, a measure of pre-migration experience and perhaps affinity with the Dutch language and culture, and prior to independence, in most cases, undisputed Dutch citizenship and the unrestricted right of abode. One question then is how these commonalities affected self-understanding, outside perceptions, and paths of integration within this broadly defined 'community'.

But first we need to address the obvious fact that this common denominator conceals a great deal of diversity within this presumed community, and even within the three colonial communities. We simply cannot understand postcolonial migration history without taking these contrasts seriously. But we also need to ponder other factors, particularly the consequences of the distinct timing of the three migrations.

In keeping with chronology, we first return to the migrants from Indonesia. This migration was demographically insignificant to the sending country, and represented anything but a cross-section of its population. The great majority of the migrants were *totoks* or Eurasian *Indische Nederlanders*. Numerically smaller groups included some twelve thousand former colonial Moluccan soldiers with their families, and about seven thousand ethnic Chinese rooted in Indonesia.

Pre-migration socioeconomic and cultural characteristics had evident ethnic correlations. Generally speaking, the *totoks* had occupied the higher strata of colonial society and had been relatively successful in securing some sort of continuity with Dutch ways in the tropics. A majority in this group were strongly affected by the shock of the Japanese camps and the *bersiap* period, and deeply resented the transfer of sovereignty, the loss of private property and perhaps kin. Back in the Netherlands, they also have suffered status decline. Yet leaving aside personal trauma, these repatriates with their high levels of education, social and cultural capital, and white skins were certainly the best positioned of all postcolonial migrants to start a new life in the metropolis.

On the eve of their exodus to the Netherlands, the Eurasian *Indische Nederlanders* formed a more differentiated and ambivalent community. From the early days of Dutch colonization up to the mid-nineteenth century, this Eurasian group had developed its own creolized culture. Its socioeconomic profile was highly differentiated, with only a minority undisputedly prosperous and well educated. After the First World War, the *Indische Nederlanders* did compete with the metropolitan Dutch, actually with success, but on the other hand they faced increasing competition themselves from the emerging educated Indonesian middle class. A measure of anxiety, status insecurity and resentment therefore characterized the community long before 1942. Nevertheless, and in spite of the havoc created by war and *bersiap*, many of this group would have opted to remain in their homeland had it not been for the new republic's growing impatience with this group, which was perceived as colonial.

Ultimately, over 90 per cent of those with Dutch citizenship left Indonesia, most settling in the Netherlands, but some fifty thousand moving on to the United States and other predominantly 'white' non-European destinations. The pre-migration profile of the *Indische* community settling in the metropolis was mixed. While they had shared an in-between colonial status, mixed racial descent and Christianity, there were wide disparities in socioeconomic position and educational careers, affinity with Dutch culture, and command of the Dutch language. The unsought-for parting with Indonesia was traumatic and initially caused a decline in status for all. The prospects for them in the white metropolis were therefore not particularly good at the start.

Of the two minorities mentioned above, the Chinese from Indonesia underline that socioeconomic performance rather than racial characteristics determine the qualification of 'invisible migrants'.⁹ Throughout the colonial period, and of course before that, Indonesia had had a Chinese population of several millions. Categorized among the 'Foreign Orientals', these *peranakan* (domestic) Chinese were disproportionately represented

in the middle and upper socioeconomic layers of the colonial state. Most ethnic Chinese would stay in Indonesia after 1945. The minority migrating to the Netherlands were overwhelmingly middle class, well educated, Christian, and Dutch speaking – in short, well equipped. Apparently their pre-war status as ‘Foreign Orientals’ did not preclude their early attainment of full Dutch citizenship.

In contrast, the majority of the twelve thousand ‘Ambonese’ or Moluccans arriving in the Netherlands in the early 1950s had a pre-war history of modest socioeconomic status and education.¹⁰ Male service in the colonial army and their Christian faith had set them apart from the overwhelming majority of the ‘Indigenous’ population. Their previous commitment to colonial rule and particularly their ongoing support for Moluccan separatism made them unacceptable to the new Indonesian regime. The men came to the Netherlands with their families under military orders but subsequently lost their military status. What was left was an ethnic minority group with a shared tradition of commitment to colonial rule and strong affinity with the Christian monarchy, but overall low pre-migration educational levels, little command of the Dutch language, an undefined legal status, and a strong affinity with the programme of political separatism in the Moluccas. These were poor qualifications for successful integration.

Profiles: Migrants from Suriname

In the 1970s, migration from Suriname attained the proportions of an exodus. Most of the natural demographic growth of the Surinamese ‘nation’ was in the Netherlands, with at present something of a 60/40 division of the total Surinamese population. Pre-independence Suriname was a quintessential plural society, with a population divided along ethnic lines. In the 1970s, Surinamese of African descent still slightly outnumbered their compatriots of Asian descent. By that time, the majority of Afro-Surinamese were urban carriers of the creolized culture which had been pioneered by enslaved Africans.¹¹ Middle- and upper-class educational, cultural and religious orientations were explicitly Dutch, while lower-class orientations were of a more mixed character.

The population with Asian backgrounds is more heterogeneous. Between the 1870s and the Second World War, indentured labourers were recruited from British India and Java. Their subsequent history testified to the desire of these groups to retain distinct identities. The degree of exogamy has been limited and Asian Surinamese still classify themselves primarily as either Hindustani or Javanese. Within the former population, the majority are Hindu, and perhaps 15 per cent Muslim. Islam remains

the dominant religion among the Javanese. Christianity is a minority religion among the Surinamese of Asian origins.¹²

Colonial rule did not attempt to do away with the ethnic segmentation it had produced. Religious and cultural difference was respected, as was the private usage of various ethnic languages. But in contrast to the strategy in Indonesia, government policies in Suriname made Dutch education the norm for all, and Dutch the language for administration. Upper- and middle-class Surinamese of all ethnicities came to share a strong orientation towards the metropolis and were well versed in Dutch. The picture was more ambiguous among the lower-class majorities of all ethnicities, but by the 1970s the majority of Surinamese had a reasonable command of this language.

The exodus of the 1970s involved, more or less, a cross-section of the sending community, with a slight Asian overrepresentation. 'Racially', all Surinamese differed from the Dutch. In culture and religion, the Afro-Surinamese were closer to Dutch culture than the Hindustani- or Javanese-Surinamese. But divisions of class and hence educational and linguistic skills cut across such 'ethnic' lines and would ultimately prove to be of more importance in the integration process.

Profiles: Migrants from the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba

The 1954 Statuut endowed autonomy to a six-island country, the Netherlands Antilles, with its seat of government on the largest island, Curaçao. The major constitutional change in the following half century has not been the step towards full independence, but rather the disintegration of the six-island country. The second-largest island, Aruba, attained separate status in 1986, while the dismantlement of the Antilles-of-Five was completed in October 2010.¹³

Migration to the Netherlands has been a predominantly Curaçaoan affair, with Aruba following at quite a distance. About 132,000 Antilleans and Arubans live in the Netherlands as against less than 300,000 on the six islands, hence roughly 30/70. The distribution of the Curaçaoan transnational population is even in the order of 45/55. The Antillean exodus is the most recent of the postcolonial migrations under review here. It is analytically also the most straightforward. All Antilleans can enjoy full citizenship and the right of abode in the Netherlands. One consequence of this constitutional arrangement has been a high incidence of circular migration. The Antillean migrant community in the Netherlands came to represent a cross-section of the Curaçaoan population and included more limited sections of the other islands.¹⁴

Throughout the post-war period, the overwhelming majority of the Antillean community in the Netherlands has been of African descent, Christian, and Papiamentu-speaking. Initially, the migrants were mainly middle class, seeking higher education and so on. Their educational levels were above average and their command of Dutch was good. From the 1980s, the growing Antillean community came to represent a cross-section of the sending islands, and in particular of Curaçao. This meant a dramatic change in the socioeconomic profile of new arrivals from the Antilles. Middle-class migrants continued arriving, but they were now far outnumbered by lower-class islanders with meagre educational skills, a poor command of Dutch, and little affinity with Dutch culture in general. This last episode in the history of postcolonial migration to the Netherlands therefore presents a glaring contrast with the opening chapter written by *Indische Nederlanders*.

Social Mobility and Integration

Faced with the prospect of relatively massive movements of people from the former colonies to the metropolis, Dutch policy makers agonized over the chances of the new arrivals and their willingness and ability to adjust to Dutch society. They moreover worried about possible hostile reactions in the host society, and pondered over ways to curtail free immigration from the former colonies. Was there really that much reason to worry? There is no unequivocal answer to this question. A first analysis of major indicators of socioeconomic status and mobility however does suggest that initial appraisals were too pessimistic for immigrants from both Indonesia and Suriname – perhaps more time needs to pass before we can seriously evaluate the current pessimism about the Antillean lower classes.

In chronological order, the first large groups to arrive were repatriating *totoks* followed by *Indische Nederlanders*. While the repatriation of the first group had not evoked much concern, there had been widespread anxiety that the second group, being firmly rooted in Indonesia, would not be capable of integrating in Dutch society. This in turn provoked debate about the possibilities of curtailing migration, but to no avail. A concerted effort was made to help the adjustment process. Government at all levels, churches, and private institutions built a paternalist but rather effective machinery to provide temporary housing and to help the integration in the educational system and the labour market.

Studying this integration process in the late 1960s, British sociologist Christopher Bagley spoke of a success story in race relations.¹⁵ Perhaps this achievement owed more to the pre-migration social and cultural capi-

tal and post-migration stamina of the *Indische Nederlanders* than to Dutch policy. Either way, this first round of assimilation of 'alien' Dutch citizens was remarkable by any standard. Perhaps the most telling evidence of this is that we cannot present any serious longitudinal data on integration. By the late 1970s, at the time the Dutch government and academia started to monitor its minorities, not only the *totoks* but equally the *Indische Nederlanders* were considered successfully integrated and therefore no longer of interest for policy purposes. Not surprisingly, the same applies to the Chinese with Indonesian roots.¹⁶

The Moluccan community in contrast did figure as a major concern when policies for Dutch minorities were being formulated in the late 1970s. By then, the Surinamese exodus was taking shape and the signals that the Mediterranean 'guest labourers' would not repatriate but rather bring their kin over became clear. In the following decades, the emergence of a multicultural society would induce the government to develop a sophisticated system for monitoring minorities. By the 1980s, the Surinamese, Turks and Moroccans were the three largest migrant communities and, from the 1990s on, they were increasingly the subject of comparative studies. The Antilleans were soon added to the list (Table 3.1).

Still it would be an awareness of the continual crisis of the Moluccan minority that stimulated the first formulation of a Dutch minorities' policy. The immediate trigger would be political violence committed by second-generation Moluccan youth. It soon transpired that a tragic mix of geographical segregation, deficient educational and linguistic skills, political resentment, and inadequate policies had produced serious integration problems. Concerted effort resulted in gradual improvement, but over half a century after arrival and well into the third generation, contemporary statistics for the Moluccan minority continue to disclose serious problems.

Overall statistics for the Surinamese testify to significant progress since the 1970s, to the point that many politicians, spokespeople for the community, and expert scholars claim, somewhat prematurely, that this community's integration is nearly successfully completed. The aggregate figures indeed inspire cautious optimism, but with qualifications. There is little hard data to differentiate between the situations of the various ethnic groups, so we cannot know whether progress is evenly spread. Moreover, there are indications that increasing socioeconomic differentiation has meant the transmutation of a particular Afro-Surinamese culture of poverty into new metropolitan patterns of deprivation and deviance.

Up to the 1970s, migration from the Antilles had a middle-class bias and tended to be for educational purposes and, therefore, temporary. While this strand of migration continues up to the present and causes no problems, the situation of a disproportionate number of the contempo-

rary Antilleans, predominantly the Curaçaoan community, is considered worrisome, whether one looks at education, income and the labour market, family stability, or criminality. Three explanatory factors should be singled out. First, there is a direct continuity here: the exodus has involved a cross-section of an insular population characterized by the same grave problems. Next, the widespread deficiency with regard to command of the Dutch language has hampered upward social mobility on the island and has become an impediment to subsequent integration in the metropolis. Finally, unlike the migrations above, Antillean migration remains an ongoing and circular process. This means that room for an effective intervention has been limited.

Of course, integration is not only about hard issues such as income, labour market participation, educational achievement, health, deviance and the like, but also about participation in society outside of one's own community – to the point that it may become less self-evident to define these 'communities' by 'ethnic' criteria at all. In this respect, the postcolonial migrant communities have come to differ from the other major migrant groups. The most telling indication of this is the high frequency of interracial relations and offspring for *Indische Nederlanders*, Moluccans and Indonesian Chinese, as well as for Afro-Surinamese and Antilleans. The figures are much lower for Hindustani and Javanese from Suriname.

At this point it is useful to provide some comparative figures. Unemployment is a good place to good start (Table 3.2). After a dramatic peak in the early 1980s, national unemployment figures decreased well into the twenty-first century. Unemployment for the major non-Western migrant communities likewise decreased spectacularly, but remained clearly above the overall national figure. In 2006, with the exception of the Antillean community, first-generation unemployment was lower than second-generation figures for these communities. The initial considerable edge the Surinamese and Antilleans had over Moroccans and Turks, however, seems to be slowly fading. Net labour participation since the late 1980s discloses a similar trend for all migrant communities. Their rates may improve but are still behind the equally improved overall Dutch figures. For participation rates we do see a consistent advantage for Surinamese and to a lesser extent Antilleans over Moroccans and Turks.¹⁷

According to Dutch national statistics for 2006, average household incomes in the four major migrant communities still lagged behind the national averages, with the Surinamese at the high end (82 per cent of the national average), followed by the Turks (71), Moroccans (68) and Antilleans (63). The low figure for Antillean households may partly be explained by the high incidence of single-parent, female-headed households; the same probably applies to the Afro-Surinamese community.¹⁸

Table 3.2. Unemployment figures (per cent), postcolonial and other major non-Western migrant communities in the Netherlands, 1981–2006

	1981	1983	1988	1991	1998	2002	2006
Total	8	14	7.7	5.9	4.1	2.2	3.3
Moluccans		41					
Surinamese		35–40	33	26	13	10	12
Antilleans		43	35	31	15	12	17
Moroccans	21	37	38	36	23	14	17
Turks	21	34	38	31	21	14	15

Sources: CBS for totals. Dagevos, *Perspectief op integratie*, for 1981, 1983. Veenman, *De arbeidsmarktpositie*, for 1988. Veenman, 'De maatschappelijke positie', for 1998. Dagevos, Gijsberts and Van Praag, *Rapportage minderheden 2003*, for 2002. Dagevos and Gijsberts, *Jaarrapport integratie 2007*, for 2006. CBS for totals 1991, 2002, 2006.

Long-term figures for educational achievement are hard to come by, but the data we have do allow for some conclusions.¹⁹ There is a gradual improvement for all migrant communities. This is particularly evident for Moroccans and Turks, whose second generations, not surprisingly, do much better than the poorly educated first generation. Ever since this type of monitoring started in the 1980s, the Surinamese and Antillean communities have had a clear edge over the Mediterranean migrants. Today their overall educational profiles are still superior, even if still below the Dutch average.

While there is some ground to assume that the Dutch system worked reasonably well in helping the second generation to higher educational levels than the first one, there is still a considerable gap compared with the local white population. With the steady increase in the proportion of non-Western populations in all major cities and the ensuing emergence of 'black schools' over the past decade, there is much concern about whether the educational system can continue to help to bridge the gap. There is some historical evidence against too much optimism and laissez-faire here. In the 1980s, research on the relatively small Moluccan community pointed to the failure of regular education to significantly raise the educational achievement of second- and third-generation Moluccans. It took considerable extra investments in the 1990s to, at least partly, redress this situation.

To the extent that the Dutch educational system does facilitate better educational performance and thus, we may assume, stimulate successful integration, the second and later generations of the postcolonial communities face the prospects of declining competitive advantages over the Mediterranean migrant communities. By the second and certainly the third generation, citizenship issues are no longer relevant, the educational system works more or less the same for all, and the advantage of the

first postcolonial generations' prior knowledge of Dutch society and command of the Dutch language diminishes. From this perspective, we may well understand why spokespeople from the Moluccan and, particularly, Caribbean communities voice concern over the narrowing of the debate on minorities to the integration of Moroccans and Turks, as if postcolonial migrants' integration had been successfully completed by now.

Figures on delinquency provide a sad indication that successful integration has not been achieved. The arrival of migrants in the Netherlands as elsewhere has always been accompanied by unsubstantiated stories of crime and other deviant behaviour. While we should be extremely cautious about such often xenophobic reports, recent figures for all migrant communities confirm higher crime rates. Moreover, the postcolonial bonus does not seem relevant here, as Antilleans champion some of the wrong statistics, followed in this precise order by Moroccans, Surinamese and Turks.²⁰

On the scale of interethnic relations, postcolonial migrants are definitely more integrated. Why the incidence of interracial relations would be higher for postcolonial migrants is not hard to surmise. No matter what 'racial' and political differences there may be, there were pre-migration affinities in education, culture, and, for most groups, religion. The latter also most likely explains why Hindustani and Javanese integration stopped at that point. Nevertheless the contrasts with all other major migrant communities are significant. The majority of the latter are Muslim and – unlike in France – adhere to an interpretation of the Koran that interracial marriage may be good, but interreligious marriage is unacceptable. Moreover, choice of marriage partners tends to be along national lines. Both Moroccans and Turks have strong national orientations and are reinforced in this by 'home' authorities. Average command of the Dutch language is less accomplished than among postcolonial migrants and its usage in private is more limited. These factors combined are not conducive to interethnic mixing.

This brief glance at some relevant statistics therefore confirms that in spite of overall improvement, Moroccan and Turkish integration so far lags behind the averages for the majority of postcolonial migrants – not even counting the *Indische Nederlanders* who no longer figure in any of these listings. Coupled to post-9/11 apprehensions about a Muslim 'fifth column' unwilling and unable to integrate, this had a slightly perverse effect on the status of postcolonial migrants in the Netherlands, making them a more preferable – or perhaps less resented – type of immigrant, and was 'proof' that the problem lies not with the host society.²¹

Political Opportunity Structures

Did the post-war Netherlands really provide such good opportunities? Answering this may lead on to the question of how racist or xenophobic Dutch society has or has not been, between 1945 and today. It is not the objective of this contribution even to begin to answer this exceedingly complex and perhaps embarrassing question. Suffice it to say that Bagley's praise for Dutch success in dealing with migration and race relations was open to criticism in 1970, a fortiori so once the mass migrations from the Caribbean and the Mediterranean gained momentum, and certainly with the rise of anti-migrant populism in the new millennium. While open racism was and remains unacceptable in most spheres of Dutch society, toleration of immigrants has oscillated strongly over time – but it seems not to have significantly affected the integration trajectories of postcolonial migrant communities.

Any discussion of the vicissitudes of Dutch toleration should take the broader context seriously. In 1945, the Netherlands was a white country with a long but not very recent history of mainly northern European immigration. In the 1950s, the idea that the small country could no longer provide opportunities for all of its inhabitants resulted in state-sponsored emigration to countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Canada and South Africa. Some three hundred thousand Dutch left. In these circumstances, it is no surprise that the arrival of many more immigrants, a majority of non-Western origin, has gone down in history as a rupture.

Today, amongst a population of 16.4 million, there are over 1 million with roots in the colonies, nearly 1 million from Muslim countries, mainly from North Africa and Turkey, and another 750,000 'Western' migrants. The total proportion of first- and second-generation immigrants is just below 20 per cent. Of the total immigration population, 45 per cent is classified as Western and 55 per cent as non-Western. Within the larger cities, all proportions for immigrants are above the national average. In Amsterdam and Rotterdam, first- and second-generation immigrants form a majority of the population, and many lower-class neighbourhoods are now predominantly non-white.

These demographic changes have caused serious tensions, but arguably strong political articulation dates only from the late 1990s. Before that, mainstream politics maintained a low profile on migration issues. Most politicians advocated an inclusionary policy, certainly for the postcolonial migrants. This applied first to issues of citizenship. There is a paradox here. Recent studies demonstrate that, like their rank and file, many politicians were questioning whether previous colonial citizenship should translate into the right of abode in the metropolis.²² Thus there were seri-

ous debates about withholding such rights from the *Indische Nederlanders* and Moluccans, who were supposedly 'rooted' in Indonesia and therefore not able to re-root in the Netherlands. Next, in the debate over a transfer of sovereignty to the former Caribbean colonies, the need to stop migration by withdrawing citizenship was a serious argument for Dutch politicians. After Antillean independence had proved to be a Dutch illusion, mainstream politicians advocated the curtailment of the right of abode.

A series of confidential commissions explored ways to restrict migration from the overseas territories. The paradox in all of this was that most politicians, and all successive governments, no matter their reluctance, and even though fully aware that a good part of the electorate advocated the closing of the borders to migrants from the former colonies, ended up publicly defending the citizenship rights of overseas citizens. Hence no legal restraints were imposed on the 'repatriates' from Indonesia, nor on the Surinamese, until five years *after* independence, and, up to the present, there are none on the Antilleans. Moreover, the defence of this unpopular stance implied solemn and dramatic admonitions not to forget that the Dutch shared a long history with these new immigrants. Prime Minister Willem Drees declared publicly in 1953, in spite of his personal scepticism about the prospects of *Indische Nederlanders*, that there was a 'special responsibility', and even a 'duty', to welcome this group with a 'right' to a place in 'our society'.²³

Such public statements discredited critics of unrestricted access as unreasonable. The same public rhetoric would be deployed to counter protests against the growing migration from Suriname, even if members of cabinet actually shared the misgivings expressed in the media. It is ironic that only in the past few years have members of the government and parliament alike been less reticent vis-à-vis Antillean migration, hence from the Antillean perspective eroding the fundamentals of the 1954 Statuut with its solemn words about shared and equivalent citizenship.

As it is, the citizenship of the postcolonial migrants implied full access to all state provisions, from education and housing through health services to unemployment and seniority allowances. There were few political debates about limiting access to such provisions. At the time of the mass migration from Indonesia, the overall level of such provisions was very modest anyway. The Dutch economy was in a shambles after the war and it took another twenty years before the 'Dutch miracle' permitted the establishment of a generous system of public provisions, later regarded as a symptom of the 'Dutch disease'.

So what type of policy did the Dutch government enact? The main support was help with finding temporary housing, followed by guidance about coping with Dutch ways, to facilitate integration. This is often re-

garded as paternalistic if not condescending. Direct financial assistance was meagre. There was clearly much bitterness expressed in *Indische* remembrances when collected years later. But as a recent study suggests, the level of material support was not negligible by the standards of the time. Perhaps the lack of empathy left more of an enduring resentment.²⁴ As it was, the spectacular post-war economic growth soon provided room for substantial progress.

By the time of the exodus from Suriname, the Dutch welfare state was at its zenith. Inevitably the sudden arrival of so many migrants with full Dutch citizenship placed a heavy burden on housing and welfare provisions. The good thing about this was that the settling of the Surinamese population occurred without major crises. The bad thing was that there was a disproportionate dependence of Surinamese migrants on state provisions. This was not getting better as the Dutch economy entered into a crisis with staggering rates of unemployment in the early 1980s. Only the new round of economic growth in the 1990s enabled the Surinamese community to attain significant socioeconomic progress.

Again, the case of the Antillean community is paradoxical. The Curaçaoan exodus dates from the 1990s, precisely a period of impressive economic growth. Yet while the Surinamese community did manage to benefit from this bonanza, the Antilleans did not and hence remain far more dependent on welfare. This may be explained by the socioeconomic profile of the community which was mainly lower class and generally lacked the appropriate linguistic and educational skills. Related to this, female-headed households with young children came to dominate Curaçaoan migration in the 1990s. What followed was a 'welfare trap' and levels of deviance among youngsters unparalleled in the history of postcolonial migration to the Netherlands.

In reviewing the socioeconomic development of the various communities one cannot escape the conclusion that government was crucial in restraining overt racism and in securing the right of abode and unrestricted access to citizenship rights such as education, the labour market, and welfare provisions. Only the latter proved a mixed blessing. Government policies aiming at – or forsaking – cultural assimilation will be discussed below. One may debate whether these had any consequence whatsoever in the socioeconomic arena.

Historians of migration tend to have a rosier picture of migration than sociologists and political scientists.²⁵ While scholars from the social sciences tend to focus on 'new' contemporary problems, historians, following their interest in long-term trends, often feel that successful integration is simply a matter of time. Three generations, migration historians often affirm, is the more reliable time-span to evaluate whether integration is

successful or at least well underway. Departing from that principle, we can only evaluate the migration from Indonesia – concluding, of course, that the *totok*, *Indische* and Chinese stories are all successful, the Moluccan record mixed. The first three communities made good use of their postcolonial social and cultural capital as well as the post-war Dutch economic miracle. The question is why the last group failed to do so.

What of the Caribbean migration, with its shorter time lapse? Well over thirty years after the initial exodus, the Surinamese community seems on the right track, but there are two caveats here. We do not have good longitudinal surveys to differentiate between the various ethnic groups. Secondly, the fact that the Surinamese are doing better than most other migrant communities does not mean they are on a par with the rest of society – and there is no reason not to deploy that yardstick. Still the conclusion is warranted that the Surinamese community did benefit from the postcolonial bonus, that is, undisputed citizenship and a fairly good knowledge of, and some degree of affinity with, the Dutch language and culture. The Hindustani case shows that a religious match with the Christian traditions of the metropolis per se is not a significant factor.

The crisis in the Antillean community – again, not including its middle class – seems deeper than any previous one among the postcolonial migrants, except for the Moluccans. Of course, the time elapsed is shorter here. Yet as with the Moluccan community, the postcolonial bonus apparently was less active. This may seem surprising. Both groups are Christian and their middle-class segments have a long history of strong and cordial relations with metropolitan policy makers, spiritual leaders and the like. There is a strong tradition of interracial relations. But in both cases, prior command of the Dutch language and educational skills were poor. Both groups moreover have nurtured political resentment over colonialism and its legacies. Finally both communities have tended towards self-isolation, in the Moluccan case initially supported by Dutch policy, in the Antillean case in spite of vain governmental efforts to accomplish the opposite.

A political opportunity structure is partly determined by the way politicians, opinion leaders and the like debate issues in public. Arguably the historical nexus worked well here, certainly favouring postcolonial migrants over other immigrant communities. As with the debate over the right of abode, opinion leaders have tended to emphasize long-standing relations, historical responsibilities, and the like. The one exception to this rule is of recent date. With the general hardening of the public debate over migration issues, the cases of the *Indische Nederlanders*, and at times also the Surinamese, are still quoted as proof that flexible, hard-working migrants will be allowed to find their place in society, but the Antillean youth are increasingly excluded from this benign discourse.

In politics, and other sectors of public life such as the mass media, postcolonial migrants were the first among the post-war immigrants to make it to positions of responsibility and visibility – again the cultural and social capital of the postcolonial nexus paid off. The first generation of immigrant members of parliament and municipal councils was dominated by members of the postcolonial communities, as were the first non-white faces on television. The same applied to sports, although it was precisely in the most popular of all sports, soccer, where the rise of black protagonists caused some of the most virulent debates about the complexities of racial relations in Dutch society.

Either way, we may safely conclude that in the public arena, white is no longer the norm. Perhaps more telling is another observation. Over the past decades *Indische Nederlanders* have been less conspicuous in politics and the media than people of Caribbean origin – apparently the need to ‘present’ the former is no longer seen as urgent. Successful integration thus has contradictory effects. And indeed recently there have been complaints from the Caribbean community that their representatives and concerns are increasingly neglected, as the focus has now shifted to the symbolic inclusion of the Muslim communities.

Degrees of and Varieties in Multiculturalism

In the mid-1970s, radical Moluccan youths organized a series of violent actions to protest about what they, following their parents, thought of as the ‘colonial occupation’ of the Moluccas by Indonesia. They blamed the Dutch government for its lack of support for an independent Moluccan republic, and for its betrayal of their fathers who had been demobilized against their will in the metropolis. Linked to this political anger was deep frustration over the lack of progress the community had made in the Netherlands.

Political violence was unheard of in the tranquil post-war Netherlands. Train hijackings, and occupations of the Indonesian embassy and a primary school were met by military counteractions and left several casualties. From this bloody episode, coinciding with the exodus from Suriname and the permanent settlement and family reunion of many of the labour migrants from the Mediterranean, emerged the conviction that the time had come to formulate a minority policy. In 1979, the Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR) published the first report explicitly stating that most immigrants from the former colonies and the Mediterranean had come to stay, and that their settlement required specific policies. The government accepted the argument – but it would take ten years, the influx of several hundred thousand new immigrants, and a second WRR

report before it was officially recognized that the Netherlands had indeed become an immigrant country.²⁶

Much has been made in the past decade of the supposed failure of Dutch minority policies. In 2002, the Dutch parliament installed a commission to investigate 'what went wrong'. The report published two years later by parliamentarians of diverse political leanings and ethnic backgrounds offered nuanced conclusions. Yes, migration had changed the Netherlands fundamentally and permanently. Yes, there were serious problems with several ethnic communities, but there was also progress in all groups. And no, there was no reason to state that overall, minority policies had failed or that there had been a clear alternative.²⁷

By the early twenty-first century, the hardening debate over ethnic minorities had become part and parcel of a larger debate about Dutch identity. Multiculturalism was attacked as a silly idea of leftist politicians forsaking the justified desire of the silent white majorities to preserve a national *Leitkultur*. Much more may be said about this, but for present purposes the question is whether Dutch politics had indeed moved to reckless multiculturalism since the 1970s, allowing for mass immigration, neglecting the labour market and educational issues, pampering migrants with welfare provisions, encouraging them to cling to their own cultures, and neglecting to ensure that they would adhere to the fundamentals of an open society.

There are no consensual answers to these questions. Up to the late twentieth century, there was more anti-immigration rhetoric in parliament than effective policy to this end. Now this seems to have changed, with a remarkably broad consensus in parliament. There has indeed been an explosion of government spending on minorities, from some 9 million euros in 1980 to over 1.2 billion in 2003.²⁸ But this spending was mainly on 'hard' sectors and certainly not on cultural and religious immigrant organizations. The 1970s idea of helping minorities to retain their own culture and language never became a central feature of minority policies, and had been abandoned altogether by the late 1980s.

Much of the debate of the past decades has been obscured by the semantic question of what is meant by a multicultural society. From the start, there was a descriptive use, very appropriate in times when politicians were unwilling to openly acknowledge the fact that the ethnic and cultural make-up of the country was changing. There is also a more normative reading, championing a broadening of the concept of national identity and hence rejecting the idea of assimilation or integration as basically one-sided processes. The more radical interpretations of the latter stance have been severely criticized in the past decade. But looking back over the entire post-war period, we may as well conclude that there never

was any serious political commitment to a radical version of multiculturalism. Integration has never ceased to be the norm. The only real issue has been the degree of toleration for 'non-Western' additions to a hegemonic Dutch *Leitkultur*.

In reviewing recent debates on multiculturalism in the Netherlands, one is struck by the fact that postcolonial migrant communities hardly figure anymore – and when they do, it is mainly as evidence that massive immigration need not pose enduring problems.²⁹ This is partly explained by their better performance in the major statistics, but there are other considerations. The present Dutch debates have a strong cultural dimension; 'culture' often being but a thin disguise for 'Islam', and Islam perceived as a somehow unassimilable culture. This radical rejection is not mainstream, but has certainly achieved wide popularity and respectability.

In this context postcolonial migrant communities seem to have become something of a shining example. One has a point here. In spite of ethnic 'otherness' and initial socioeconomic backlogs, the majority of postcolonial migrants were able to achieve successful integration – and their pre-migration 'colonial' cultural capital did help. Throughout the post-war period, postcolonial communities have articulated political and ideological resentment, as will be discussed below. But there was nothing like a rejection of Dutch society. The postcolonial migrant experience then becomes a showcase of migrants adjusting well in a presumably tolerant, non-racist host society.

There are some problems with this approach. Partly these are of a cultural nature, such as the glossing over of the fact that the 'Asian' half of the Surinamese is neither from a Christian background, nor exogamous – parameters often quoted as crucial for successful integration. There is also a neglect of the uneasy class-cum-culture dimension to Afro-Caribbean integration problems, as in female-headed households, a hustlers' street culture, and the like. Nonetheless it seems that representatives of the postcolonial migrants do not fundamentally question the assertion that their communities are more capable and willing to fully integrate – and that their right to retain a distinct ethnic identity does not imperil this integration.

Minority Associations, Cultural Heritage, History and Identity

After the Second World War, over 2,500 associations of postcolonial migrants were established in the Netherlands. They served pretty much the same objectives as the few dozen pre-war colonial ones: articulation of

ethnic cultures, religious services, providing a home away from home, and defence of group interests. The database recently inaugurated at the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam enables us to follow the life and times of postcolonial migrant organizations in unusual detail.³⁰

In *Ternug uit de koloniën*, Ulbe Bosma provides the first systematic analysis of these associations.³¹ He underlines that most associations were organized by the immigrants themselves: government policies and finance were crucial for a minority only. He does suggest that the striking under-representation of *Indische* associations reflects a remarkable political opportunity structure. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s the Dutch government discouraged the establishment of separate ethnic organizations, while at the same time the repatriates had easy access to the conservative political establishment anyway. The fact that Moluccans did create an astonishing number of associations may indeed be taken as evidence of this group's long isolation from wider society, as well as its long engagement with the political issue of an independent Moluccas.

The number of Surinamese organizations likewise is considerable. While initially most, and even at a later stage many, of these were founded as national, including all Surinamese, the ethnic plurality of the sending society was increasingly reflected in its postcolonial migrants. Something similar may be said about the less numerous assortment of Antillean organizations. While the majority of these would claim to be simply Antillean, most are predominantly Curaçaoan in character.

As Bosma observes, over 2,500 may seem a lot, but the figure pales in comparison with the estimated 60,000 or so organizations extant in the Netherlands today. Also, the ratio of ethnic organizations to the scale of their community does not suggest a specific postcolonial propensity to found associations. The Antillean, Moroccan, Surinamese and Turkish ratios (in that order) are more or less in the same category. And all organizations suffer from the same problems of limited active membership, funding, and so on.

Whether such ethnic associations are conducive to integration is a moot point, and experts offer contradictory interpretations. Suffice it here to observe that postcolonial organizations have been decisive in many instances in the articulation of political demands. All communities campaigned for more generous state support for the new arrivals but there were also more specific demands. Thus, *totoks* and *Indische Nederlanders* jointly lobbied for back pay of salaries and pensions forgone because of the Japanese occupation, *bersiap* and the transfer of sovereignty, as well as a more generous entrance policy for repatriates. Moluccan associations sought to pressure the Dutch government to support the case for an independent republic of the Moluccas. Surinamese societies urged the Dutch

government to isolate or even dethrone the military dictatorship of the 1980s. And today, Antillean associations aim to ensure continuing, unrestricted entrance to the Netherlands.

There were many more such lobbies. Some succeeded, others failed. But the point is that these political endeavours invariably included explicit reminders of the colonial past and the ensuing obligations of the Dutch government. Postcolonial migrant organizations had an evident asset here over other migrant associations. ('We are here because you were there.'). Moreover, their leadership benefited from easier access to the authorities and media, not only because of such postcolonial reminders but equally because the colonial legacy had given them a distinct advantage in cultural capital. They had historical and political arguments, and the language and style to express these effectively.

These bonuses allowed them to imply 'we have always been Dutch, certainly more so than other migrants'. But there was a concurrent and certainly not less pronounced affirmation of unique ethnic identity. Often one and the same organization would engage in both discursive strategies, as indeed individuals did and do. Apart from the countless smaller ceremonies, parties, tournaments, and the like, over time a few massive cultural manifestations of postcolonial identity emerged. Thus we have the annual *Indische* Pasar Malam Besar in The Hague. It has celebrated its fiftieth anniversary and is the largest cultural festival in the city. The annual Hindustani Milan festival also takes place there. Amsterdam hosts the annual Afro-Surinamese Kwakoe festival, and Rotterdam has the annual summer carnival which started as an Antillean fiesta.

All of these share postcolonial origins and continue to be bonding celebrations of ethnic affirmation, pride and perhaps nostalgia. Over the decades, they have striven to widen their audience amongst the locals. Not all have been equally successful, but clearly there are no similarly inclusive festivals among the other migrant communities. Postcolonial migrant cultures seem to have more of a propensity for building social bridges. But the very success of such festivals has prompted debates about authenticity. The issue is generally not whether bridging is acceptable or even desirable, but rather on what terms the 'authentic' culture is presented – not only in festivals, but equally in the media, in museum exhibitions, in artistic expressions, and the like.

In her book *Ons Indisch erfgoed*, Lizzy van Leeuwen comments on these debates in the *Indische* community.³² Her analysis of the endless post-war contests over *Indische* authenticity graphically illustrates the pointlessness of essentialism, yet at the same time evokes the strong feelings within the community – if there is one at all – about identity, authenticity, and the right to define its contents. None of this becomes easier once the issues of

social bridging and the prospects of widening the audience crop up. From here it is only one more step to debates about the commoditization of identity and the cultural heritage industry.

Such dilemmas are not unique to the *Indische* community and indeed are discussed in Caribbean circles as well. But again, something sets the combined postcolonial community apart here from other migrant groups, to wit, the predicament of defining a cultural identity of one's own while at the same time stressing the long-standing colonial and postcolonial linkages. One way of reconciling these seemingly contradictory approaches is the return to history.

Indeed, over the past two decades we have witnessed several postcolonial 'memory wars' – though 'wars' is too strong a word for very emotional but strictly verbal contests. Over the past decades Dutch authorities facilitated the establishment of a series of monuments commemorating the war years in Indonesia. After much hesitation, in 1999 the government marked 15 August, the day of the Japanese capitulation, as a national day of remembrance. Repatriates from Indonesia had led the way here, and urged for more.³³ Disenchanted with the way Loe de Jong, author of the monumental, state-commissioned history of the Kingdom during the Second World War, had depicted pre-war colonial society and particularly with regard to their role in it, a good number of *totoks* and *Indische Nederlanders* rose in protest in the late 1980s, paving the way for the initiation of a series of research projects on the history of *Indische Nederlanders*; the Japanese occupation and its aftermath; the supposedly cold-hearted post-war reception of the repatriates; and the handling of financial claims by the Dutch government.³⁴

After protracted negotiations, this packet of historical studies led to a wider 'Gesture' (*Gebaar*) in the 1990s, which consisted mainly of individual compensation, but also financial support for a wide range of institutions and initiatives having to do with *Indische* history and culture. Serious funding was also provided for the cultural institution 'Het Indisch Huis' (Indisch Home) which, as Lizzy van Leeuwen details, unfortunately ended up as an embarrassing failure.³⁵ With this broad *fin de siècle* programme, the Dutch government responded to the resentment in the *Indische* community and hoped to close the debate on the late colonial period and its aftermath. Predictably, this has turned out to be a premature hope.

In the 1980s, as part of another package of reconciliatory policies, the Dutch government funded the establishment of a Moluccan historical museum in Utrecht. This was the first, and up to the present only, museum exclusively dedicated to a specific post-war immigrant community. Two decades later the government financed yet another historical research project, this time on sixty years of Moluccan history in the Netherlands.³⁶

Again, government had responded to the postcolonial urge to tell the story and hence broaden the national narrative.

No such specific 'gestures' have been made for the entire Caribbean community. There is no museum or official history of migration from Suriname or the Antilles. But again in the late 1990s, the Dutch government responded to the urge to address the most delicate element in this area of colonial history. In 2002 a national monument in commemoration of slavery was unveiled, with an educational and research institute added. In addition, a series of museum exhibitions and educational television programmes were sponsored. Reconciliation is an explicit objective, and once more there are hopes of closing this chapter. Meanwhile, of course, this leaves the Surinamese of Asian descent unattended on this carousel. At present it seems representatives of these groups take pride in not urging for such state-sponsored gestures. But this may change.

In 2006, at the initiative of the Dutch parliament, an official commission presented a new canonical version of Dutch history.³⁷ Much has been said about the initiative itself and its results. But clearly the new canon reflects thorough changes in Dutch society and self-understanding, hence its critical attention to colonial history, including slavery, as well as post-war migrations. There is also an explicit awareness of multivocality and a questioning of assumptions about the relation between history and national identity. Certainly this is no longer the canon of a homogeneous white nation, and certainly the new profiles reflect debates in which postcolonial migrants have successfully staked their claims.

At the same time, such initiatives beg for critical reflection. Thus one may well wonder about the correspondence between official canons and popular feeling, between historiography and memory. Moreover historians cannot ignore the perils of rewriting history to fit social objectives, even one as laudable as promoting integration.

Identity Politics

The concept of identity politics is widely used and perhaps misused in the study of minority groups. According to the Stanford *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 'The laden phrase "identity politics" has come to signify a wide range of political activity and theorizing founded in the shared experiences of injustice of members of certain social groups. Rather than organizing solely around belief systems, programmatic manifestoes, or party affiliation, identity political formations typically aim to secure the political freedom of a specific constituency marginalized within its larger context. Members of that constituency assert or reclaim ways of understanding

their distinctiveness that challenge dominant oppressive characterizations, with the goal of greater self-determination.³⁸

There are some problems with this definition, the first being that the locus of identity politics is placed squarely with distinct, presumably minority, groups. One may well argue that any hegemonic discourse in any given state implies identity politics as well. There is no such thing as an undisputed national identity. Moreover, in democratic societies minorities may claim the right of distinction without having to worry about the political freedom to do so. Finally, a discourse of 'distinctiveness' easily results in essentialism. With these caveats in mind we may nonetheless ask ourselves whether it is useful to speak of identity politics of the postcolonial migrant communities in the Netherlands, and if so, to what end and with what results were these played out.

In the early post-war decades, first *totoks* and then *Indische Nederlanders* did organize themselves to attain political goals. In some cases this was moderately successful, as in the prolongation of entrance rights for repatriates long after 1949 and perhaps also in urging for government-supported housing. Other elements proved futile, as in the 1945–1949 protest campaigns against the transfer of sovereignty. Joint claims for financial compensation had only limited success. It seems, though, that in these first post-war decades, there was no appreciable political articulation of a separate identity within the Dutch imagined community. That had to wait until the later 1980s, and continues even to this day.

From the start, cultural distinctiveness has been an issue in the Moluccan community, but again up to the 1980s, the objective of organizing and lobbying was mainly political: in particular the attempt to find support for their ideal of an independent republic of the Moluccas. It was a futile effort. Implicitly, the clinging to housing arrangements in separate locations singled out for Moluccans reflected a desire to sustain distinctiveness. This striving was however undermined from within, as members of the community were marrying and moving out anyway, and from without, as Dutch government policies actively and effectively discouraged separate housing arrangements. This policy did not change when, in recent times, there was more official recognition of the uniqueness of the Moluccan community and its migration history.

One may debate whether there is a Surinamese identity in the first place, or rather a series of contrasting but remarkably easily coexisting ethnic identities. Perhaps one should add that whatever the results of nation-building in Suriname itself, the 'community' in the Netherlands has demonstrated decreasing internal cohesion. Of course there has been joint lobbying throughout the past decades, mainly for political objectives. These include prolonging the right of abode and improving conditions

in the Netherlands, restoring democracy after the military coup, securing continuation of development aid and municipal cooperation, and so on. But precisely when it comes to identity issues, each ethnic group has gone its own way, with the Afro-Surinamese clearly being the most vocal in bringing cultural distinctiveness into the public debate.

There is some irony in the fact that the latest arrivals, the Antilleans, stem from the only former colony still part of the Kingdom and yet have a leadership continually emphasizing cultural distinctiveness alongside historical bonds. Again, the objectives have been mainly political: against the imposition of independence, against the Dutch wish to keep the six islands together, against Dutch projects to curtail free entrance to the Netherlands, in favour of more active policies to improve the socioeconomic situation of the community. The way cultural distinctiveness is used as an argumentative tool is ambiguous. There is much talk of pride in identity, of insular cultures that should be allowed to prosper, of the beauty of creolization and particularly Papiamentu. Yet in advocating vigorous and well-endowed integration policies, Antillean spokespeople invoke precisely elements of this cultural specificity – Papiamentu, matrilocality, sometimes ‘slavery trauma’ – as explanatory factors for the present crises in their community.

If we narrow the concept of identity politics to cultural issues, we can easily see how postcolonial migrants have been instrumental in changing the parameters of the debate on multiculturalism. Even before coming to the Netherlands, the majority were culturally akin or at least well-acquainted with Dutch culture, whether metropolitans acknowledged this or not. The right to undisputed citizenship was claimed with reference to a shared history and cultural affinity. Over the past decades, it is not so much a change in cultural orientation among the postcolonial migrants that catches the eye, but rather the gradual acknowledgement that Dutch culture today is more pluralistic than before. Leaders of the postcolonial migrant communities have been crucial to these reappraisals. There is no doubt their pre-migration cultural capital helped them to accomplish this.

Conclusion

The successive waves of postcolonial migrants were an unanticipated consequence of the decolonization of the Dutch empire, with deep consequences for the migrants and their children and for Dutch society at large. This contribution has painted a broad canvas of the colonial backgrounds of the various migrant communities, the context of their arrival in the Netherlands, the changing political opportunity structures, the processes

of socioeconomic integration and questions of identity. Clearly there is no such thing as one homogeneous, postcolonial migrant community in the Netherlands, and one wonders whether 'postcolonial' is much more than just a descriptive adjective.

Certainly the separate, and increasingly less cohesive ethnic 'communities' discussed here have not always thought of themselves as homogeneous and like-minded. Much less have they promoted the concept of a 'postcolonial migrant community' as an encompassing denominator. There has been little practice of postcolonial identification and no tradition of postcolonial theory. There are noteworthy contrasts here with the French and particularly the British experiences. There are more dissimilarities, which need further reflection, particularly the little overlap between the Muslim and postcolonial migrant communities in the Netherlands – and in Portugal – as compared with France and the United Kingdom.

As for the Dutch debates on the place of colonialism and its excesses in the larger narrative of the nation, there seems to be more of a convergence here between the British, French and Dutch cases, whereas the two Iberian countries seem to lag behind – possibly because there is no immediate postcolonial migrant community in Spain, while for this community in Portugal colonialism is not a critical issue. The wider question here has to do with national sensibilities and responsiveness to identity politics. For comparative purposes, one may also look at the cases of lesser colonial powers such as Germany and Italy. Indeed we may also begin to include other postcolonial migration experiences in the equation, such as Turkey, Russia or Japan – but it will take far more comparative research before we can sort out whether this widening of focus really helps us understand the phenomenon of postcolonial migrations any better.

Notes

This paper was first presented at a workshop on 'Postcolonial migrants and identity politics', Amsterdam, IISG, 7–8 November 2008. I thank the participants of the workshop as well as Ruben Gowricharn for their comments and suggestions, as well as those from anonymous readers. The paper was rewritten during a research leave at the Netherlands Institute of Advanced Study (NIAS) in Wassenaar in the spring of 2009. The present article summarizes several of the arguments made in my recent book *Postcolonial Netherlands*.

1. I am fully aware that the very concept of 'non-Western' is contested on solid grounds. Though I share many of these objections, I follow the statistical and conceptual usage in the world of Dutch statistics and policy makers here.
2. For a discussion of these concepts, see the introduction to this book by Bosma, Lucassen and Oostindie.

3. See Bosma and Raben, *De oude Indische wereld*, and *Being 'Dutch' in the Indies*; and Meijer, *In Indië geworteld*, for the pre-War history of the 'European' population of the Dutch East Indies, including migration to the Netherlands. On the history of 'Indigenous' Indonesians in the Netherlands, see Poeze, *In het land van de overheerser I*.
4. Bosma, 'Sailing through Suez from the South'.
5. See Oostindie and Maduro, *In het land van de overheerser II* on pre-war migration from the Dutch West Indies to the Netherlands.
6. For Dutch decolonization policies for Indonesia, see van den Doel, *Afscheid van Indië*. For the Dutch decolonization of the West Indies, see Oostindie and Klinkers, *Decolonising the Caribbean*.
7. The most recent scholarly overviews of migration from Indonesia are Willems, *Uittocht uit Indië*; Smeets and Steijlen, *In Nederland gebleven*; and Bosma, *Terug uit de koloniën*.
8. Recent overviews of post-War Caribbean migration to the Netherlands are Oostindie, *Paradise Overseas*, 136–57; Oostindie and Klinkers, *Decolonising the Caribbean*, 177–200; and again Bosma, *Terug uit de koloniën*. A general discussion of ethnicity in Suriname and inter-insular difference in the Netherlands Antilles is provided in Oostindie, *Paradise Overseas*, 52–79 and 111–35.
9. Smith, *Europe's Invisible Migrants*.
10. Ambon is one of the Moluccan islands in the eastern part of the archipelago. Initially, the term 'Ambonese' was used as a *pars pro toto*, even including (equally Christian) inhabitants of the Minahasa in Northern Sulawesi. Contemporary usage prefers 'Moluccans' as the common denominator.
11. The urbanization of the Maroons, descendants of runaway slaves who established free and culturally distinct communities in the interiors of the country, dates from the 1980s. They are underrepresented in the Netherlands.
12. The Chinese minority from the colonial period integrated in the Afro-Surinamese segment.
13. That the internal cohesion of this colonial construct was never strong is not surprising. The three English-speaking Windward Antilles lay some 900 kilometres north of the three Papiamentu-speaking Leeward Islands just off the Venezuelan coast. Only Dutch rule and internal migration kept the islands together.
14. Over the past decade, all islands sent students to the Netherlands, many not returning to their native islands afterwards. During a short economic crisis in the mid-1980s, migration from Aruba was relatively high and possibly included a disproportionate share of the island's Afro-Caribbean segment.
15. Bagley, *Dutch Plural Society*, *passim*.
16. The volume of the latter community is estimated at ca. 15,000. Vogels, Geense and Martens, *Maatschappelijke positie van Chinezen in Nederland*, 3.
17. Table 3.2, and Dagevos and Gijsberts, *Jaarrapport integratie 2007*, Figure 8.1.
18. Data provided by CBS, www.cbs.nl
19. Data from CBS; Dagevos and Gijsberts, *Jaarrapport integratie 2007*; Dagevos, Gijsberts and Van Praag, *Rapportage minderheden 2003*; Roelandt and Veenman, *Minderheden in Nederland*; Veenman, *Arbeidsmarktpositie van allochtonen* and Veenman, 'Maatschappelijke positie van allochtonen'.
20. In 2000, according to CBS, 1.1 per cent of all Dutch people were suspected of one or more crimes. This percentage was 3.8 for Surinamese, 6.0 for Antilleans, 4.7 for Moroccans and 2.6 for Turks. In 2005, these figures were all up: 1.6 per cent for Dutch, 4.9 for Surinamese, 7.2 for Antilleans, 5.8 for Moroccans and 3.7 for Turks.
21. The ongoing migration from Curaçao is usually excluded from this narrative.
22. Jones, *Tussen onderdanen, rijksgenoten en Nederlanders*; Schuster, *Poortwachters over immigranten*.
23. Quoted in Oostindie and Klinkers, *Knellende koninkrijksbanden*, II, 226–27.
24. Bossenbroek, *Meelstreek*.

25. Lucassen, *Immigrant Threat*, 1–24. Lucassen, Feldman & Oltmer, *Paths of Integration*, 7–23.
26. WRR, *Etnische minderheden*; WRR, *Allochtonenbeleid*.
27. Commissie-Blok, *Bruggen bouwen*.
28. The total budget in this period amounted to some 16.5 billion. Commissie-Blok, *Bruggen bouwen*, 583–84.
29. E.g. Scheffèr, *Land van aankomst*.
30. The database was built as part of the research project ‘Bringing History Home’ by Marga Alferink and Ulbe Bosma. See <http://www.iisg.nl/research/migrantenorganisaties.php>
31. Bosma, *Terug uit de koloniën*.
32. Van Leeuwen, *Indisch erfgoed*. This book is another result of the research project ‘Bringing History Home’.
33. Several decades after their return from the vain mission to regain colonial control over Indonesia in 1945–1949, former Dutch military personnel would add another perspective to the debate. This debate is not discussed here; see Scagliola, *Last van de oorlog*.
34. Boekholt, *De staat, Dr. L de Jong en Indië*. The studies by Bosma and Raben, Bossenbroek, Meijer and Willems cited above all form part of this state-sponsored project. See also Bosma, *Terug uit de koloniën*, Chapter 5, and Van Leeuwen, *Indisch erfgoed*, Chapters 4 and 5.
35. Van Leeuwen, *Indisch erfgoed*, Chapter 5.
36. Smeets and Steijlen, *In Nederland gebleven*.
37. Van Oostrom, *A Key to Dutch History*. See also <http://entoen.nu/>
38. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/identity-politics/>