

THE MAKING OF SURILAND. THE BINATIONAL DEVELOPMENT  
OF A BLACK COMMUNITY BETWEEN THE TROPICS AND THE  
NORTH SEA.

Livio Sansone<sup>1</sup>

Summary:

The mass migration from Suriname – a small country – to the Netherlands – also a small country- has created new opportunities for transnational (actually, binational) lifestyles for a large part of the population of Surinamese origin in the Netherlands. This article analyzes the function of Surinamese parties and of the Surinamese Creole music circuit in both keep up the spirit of the community in the Netherlands and constructing a new ethnic landscape – Suriland: a magic country stretching over the Atlantic Ocean and embracing both Suriname and the Netherlands. In the second part of the article I argue that this Surinamese Creole cultural creativity around partying and producing as well as enjoying music does not fit within the limits of contemporary Dutch official policies and practices centred on a combination of (stiff) multiculturalism and renewed emphasis on assimilation to the Dutch mainstream. The specific, colonial status of these Caribbean migrants to the Metropole and their second generation defines a peculiar position in Dutch society – neither entirely and properly Dutch nor entirely foreign and authentically ethnic.

Amsterdam is an important city of the region we now know, after Paul Gilroy (1993), as the Black Atlantic. It has become so relatively recently, after the mass immigration of people of (mixed) African descent from Suriname in the late Sixties and early Seventies, the more recent pendulum migration from the Dutch Antilles and the even more recent immigration from a variety of African countries (especially Ghana). These migrations have made of Amsterdam the European capital with the largest percentage of “black” people<sup>2</sup> - approximately 7% of the eight hundred thousand

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<sup>1</sup> Dep. of Anthropology, Federal University of Bahia, Brazil, [sansone@ufba.br](mailto:sansone@ufba.br)

<sup>2</sup> By “black” I understand people who consider themselves and are seen by others of being of African or part-

inhabitants in 2000. In the Black Atlantic, Amsterdam takes a special position, on the fringe of the English-speaking ecumena, in many ways reflecting the position of the Netherlands as to continental Europe and Britain. Most importantly, Amsterdam is a site of a process of ethnogenesis which leads to the transformation of a Creole-Caribbean culture into a new “black culture”, which sees as main actors the second-generation sons and daughters of immigrants from Suriname. This way, in the Netherlands over the last thirty years a somewhat traditional, Caribbean oriented Creole culture has given way to a more youthful, cosmopolitan, pan-Black and relatively “modern” black youth culture with a head in Amsterdam, but a heart in Paramaribo.

Similar transformations have occurred also in Britain and to an extent in France (Grosfoguel 1997), where the cultural life of Caribbean immigrants partially gave way to a pan-black culture and identity amidst the younger generation who had grown up in Europe. These groups moved, as it were, from an ethnic condition into a racial condition (even though, admittedly, in these cases the analytical difference between ethnicity and “race” is even fuzzier than usual). However, in Amsterdam such transformation has taken specific contours, because it related to two factors which here took a more central role than in Britain or France: the eve of multiculturalism, which gained the support of the Dutch State throughout the Seventies and Eighties (it receded in the Nineties), and the fact of Amsterdam being a so-called capital of the counterculture (with networks, movements, facilities and public opinion relatively in favour of a number of “alternative” lifestyles, such as that of the squatters movement, neo-hippies, new-age movements, rastafarians etc.).

Some dimensions of this making of a Dutch black culture have been already highlighted by research, in particular as regards the involvements of a growing section of Creole youth with black youth styles and streetwise lifestyles (Sansone 1990, 1992 and 1994; Van Niekerk 2003; Wermuth 1999).

This article deals with an aspect that has been hitherto little explored by social research. It emphasizes how in this process the place and relevance of homeland Suriname itself as well as how the role and sorts of popular music associated with the

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African descent. Negroid phenotype is essential to the definition of both in- and outsiders. The Dutch equivalent of black, *zwart*, has recently also been used in a series of circles in a different way, for defining those who “look” different from mainstream, native, white Dutch people.

making of a Dutch black culture have changed over time. It describes the modernization of one of the main “traditional “ aspects of Surinamese-Creole community life in the Netherlands, the organization and participation in parties and feasts. Also this dimension of leisure is being affected by a degree of “modernization”. In its second section, the article expands on the process that is making it possible to envisage a peculiar magic bi-nation, Suriland - the country that overcomes the dilemmas of remigration and homesickness by displacing the very notion of homeland. The very transnational Surinamese population is developing new ways of coping with (cultural) colonialism and its aftermath. Let me first provide some basic socio-economic contextualization.

Caribbean migration to the Netherlands can best be described as a movement from small countries into another small country. The number of these Caribbean migrants totaled over 360,000 in 1996 (2.4% of the total population) of which approximately 90,000 were from the Dutch Antilles (Curaçao, Aruba, Bonaire, St. Eustatius, Saba and St. Marten) and the rest from Suriname<sup>3</sup>. Caribbean immigrants and their offspring also constitute a very large share of the total number of the *allochtonen* (the ethnic minorities which are the result of immigration). They are more “urban” than most other immigrants, both in terms of their being mostly urban dwellers in the Caribbean (more so the Creoles) and in terms of their settlement in the Netherlands - where they, in particular the Surinamese Creoles, are more heavily concentrated in the main cities than other groups of *allochtonen*. For the Creoles it has been an emigration from city to city (from Paramaribo to one of the main Dutch cities) (van Niekerk 1994:47-49). The Creoles are people of African-European and African-Asian descent. This paper focuses on the Creoles, about whom I have conducted a longitudinal research lasting ten years from 1981 to 1992 (Sansone 1992, 1992a and 1994).

The population of Caribbean descent in the Netherlands is heterogeneous in both ethnic and social terms, with relatively poor ethnic cohesion and little of a recognized ethnic leadership, when compared to other ethnic minorities of immigrant origin such as the Turks and the Moroccans. In terms of social position, over the last three decades large

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<sup>3</sup> The multiethnic origin of the Surinamese population is reflected in the migration. According to my estimates, a third of the population registered as of Surinamese origin in the Netherlands (that is, those who have at least one parent born in Suriname) is Hindustani, fifty percent is Creole (see below for a definition), 10 to 15 % is of Javanese origin and the rest either of mixed origin or of Chinese, Portuguese and Lebanese

groups of Surinamese and Antilleans have been marginal to the Dutch labour market - unemployment rates peaked, reaching over 50 percent in the late eighties, and have receded ever since. A relatively large minority of lower-class Creoles has never managed to gear in the labour market and live of welfare checks. This is due to a combination of exclusion, untimely immigration and the self-exclusion that results from the attempt to anticipating racism or other obstacles. This process is imbued with colonial images, which affect both their self-image, and the image the white majority has of them (Sansone 1999).

However, this relatively marginal position on the Dutch labour market - associated with a marginal position in Dutch party-political life - need not be echoed by marginality in other aspects of public life, where Surinamese and Antilleans are more prominent than most other ethnic minorities, such as in the leisure arena and in the rituals of conspicuous consumption. These colonial immigrants and their offspring are a very conspicuous example of selective integration/assimilation (Waldinger and ...): they show that speaking fluently the language of the country of immigration, having in most cases the Dutch citizenship and considering themselves as better off than other immigrant groups - and being seen as such by outsiders - do not automatically result in a better than average socio-economic status. Apparently the kind of social and cultural capital one needs to climb the social ladder of Dutch society is not just the mastering of Dutch ways as nowadays the prophets of cultural integration at all costs seem to suggest. All this said, over the last few years the position of the Surinamese in Dutch society seems to have improved in a number of aspects. Educational standards have improved, particularly among those who have either been born in the Netherlands or have followed their education entirely in the Netherlands. Even more pronounced is the social advancement for the majority of second generation young people of mixed Surinamese-white Dutch marriages ( .....). Labour participation has increased, as part of a general trend of reduction of unemployment and increase of the number of flexible jobs available for the poorly skilled - even though these are jobs that offer little scope for career. In addition, more generally, in the Netherlands black people have become more assertive and aware of their rights as *burger* (citizen) and as consumers.

Whether on account of the relative marginality to the labour market or because of their own “tropical” traditions (“it’s in our blood to be street-wise and keen on fashion”),

the latter combined the expectation of non-black Amsterdammers in regards to young blacks (“they love so much dancing...”), a certain picture of young blacks has become hegemonic in the local leisure time arena. In Amsterdam, Creole young people, it is commonly said, like to hang around in groups and are keen on youth culture, dancing, music and fashion. They are also more active than their white contemporaries in the creation of youth styles of their own, such as the *wakaman* (the street-wise womanizer-hustler) and more “mixed” black youth styles, for which they used English names, such as disco-freaks, rastas, electric boogie dancers and, lately, hip hoppers. The latter were expressions created by the so-called one and half generation - those who were born in Suriname, but had been socialized in Dutch schools and youth clubs. Young Creoles also developed their own version of “street gangs”, the names of which were inspired by US-movies, such as the Warriors, Cobras, Mafia West and Black Brothers. A certain emphasis on the centrality of public leisure in the life and personality is very much part of the self-image of these young black people. Indeed, starting from the years of mass migration to the Netherlands, young Creoles, especially young males of the lower classes, have created a series of youth styles that have been conspicuous in the leisure time arena. In fact, I have the impression that some of the most recent styles, such as hip hop, have concerned, one way or another, more than fifty percent of Creole youth. A minority participates directly and intensely while a larger group participates in a more detached fashion and part time – as fans, music and fashion consumers, TV audience; often through a small peer group that reminds us of the “bedroom subculture” of working-class British Girls in the Seventies (MacRobby 1978).

These conspicuous youth styles have not only predictably attracted the attention of Dutch popular mass media, but also of the main chunk of academic publications on race relations and black cultural creativity. In fact, when researching on these spectacular aspects one has to bear in mind a number of problems relating to stereotyping as well as self-image. Because of the selective media coverage of black youth cultural production, media portraits have been heavily based on these spectacular youth - and this has had a certain influence on racial stereotyping of young blacks from non-blacks. Selective media coverage and racial stereotyping has concerned, beside street corner men (the *hosselaars*), street-wise youth style. This representation, in turn, has deeply influenced the self-image

also of the silent majority of Creole youth. The centrality of conspicuous youth style as well as the public dimension of the leisure arena in the life of Creole youth bears two further issues. First, whether the investment in public leisure is an effort to relax and reduce strain, a protest or even a means to gain better acceptance in the mainstream of Dutch society. Second, the extent to which such investment also results from what can be seen as an obsession with spectacular and/or estheticized forms of black cultural creativity from the side of social research - a bias that has been associated with a relative lack of concern for other, subtler and less straight-forward, combinations of blackness with “tradition” and “modernity”.

### **Surinamese parting and the Creole “pleasure circuit”**

Black clubs and even venues, such as the *negercafes*, existed in Amsterdam already before WWII (Kagie 1989). They grew in importance and popularity also in a section of the white population in the Fifties and became a real circuit (“with things to do on each and every day of the week, even on Monday, when there is the *moendaidansi*”) soon after the beginning of the mass immigration from Surinam in the early Seventies when the Creole inhabitants of Amsterdam start to see their presences as representing a sizeable (ethnic) community. The Seventies and Eighties saw the growth of Surinamese welfare organizations, which in their heydays, when the Dutch State was still in a state of shock as to the decolonization of Suriname and as colonial immigrants in general, were generously funded. Those two decades also saw the activities of a plethora of Surinamese part time and fulltime leisure impresarios (record producers, music agents, choreographers, rally organizers and, to a certain extent, religious leaders). In Amsterdam the latter’s frantic and often competing activities produced an “atmosphere” (*surinnaamse sfeer*) in which the large Surinamese population could revive memories of their tropical homeland - be it indoor – relax, feel at ease and forget their were in fact in a foreign country – in spite of the fact that the overwhelming majority of the Surinamese has always had the Dutch citizenship. A number of these facilities soon got the name of *zwarte uitganggelegenheden* (black leisure facilities) among native white social and youth workers.

From the heydays of mass immigration to day, the vast majority of young Creoles have spent (part) of their leisure time in this kind of facilities, “atmosphere” and “circuit”. In particular those who grew up in Surinam and migrated to the Netherlands only in their teens, especially those in the lower- and lower middle class<sup>4</sup>, have often been preferring Creole parties and “black” facilities over mixed leisure facilities of either the commercial or youth work sort. It goes without saying that the degree of involvement has been varying to a great extent. In certain moments, when the matter was to get to know the own ethnic community, involvement was more intense; when instead one gave priority to the exploration of the metropolis, the “atmosphere” and the “circuit” were drawn upon more episodically.

The circuit consisted of large dance parties where Creole pop dance music (better known as *kaseko* or *bigi poku*<sup>5</sup>) was played, contribution parties (*bijlegfeesten*), Surinamese “happenings” such as bus or boat excursions (often a floating party), many family parties (often held because of a *winti* ritual and/or on a birthday) and *pese-pese* parties (home bingo). In many ways to that circuit one can also add what were seen by in- and outsiders as the street corners in which the authentic Paramaribo lower-class street life was recreated in this Northern country: a couple of street markets, some patches of the Chinese quarter and the squares of the high-rise neighbourhood of Zuidoost<sup>6</sup>, and even a few MacDonal establishments close to the above-mentioned street markets. Most Surinamese agreed that this was the closest one could get to a certain tropical atmosphere in the Netherlands. They also added that it was something particularly Creole, and even more so *volksreool* (lower-class Creole). One informant once told me that he preferred Amsterdam to other Dutch cities because it was “the most American city in the Netherlands” - by “American” he meant open-minded and easy-going<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Roughly one can say that a fifth to a third - in more recent years - of the Surinamese are in the middle class.

<sup>5</sup> In this text I use these two terms as equivalent, as my informants have been doing. For a very good account of music in Suriname and its dance version, see Weltak 1990 and 1999.

<sup>6</sup> This large and high-rise neighbourhood, well served by the subway and with a lot of green areas and parks, had been built for the upper middle class, but for a series of circumstances, starting from the early 80s and until the moment of writing, has become the largest, and most “problematic”, concentration of lower-class Creole immigrants and their offspring in the country.

<sup>7</sup> It commonly understood that Amsterdam was a “Creool” city whereas Den Haag a “Hindoestani” city. The former was a politically more progressive city, the latter the more conservative formerly imperial capital, in

For most people in the first generation of young Creoles who had just arrived in the Netherlands the “Creole atmosphere” was the only place where they felt at home. For them going out basically meant visiting places where *bigi poku* was played; those who considered themselves more enlightened combined *bigi poku* with a visit to a salsa and soul club - anyway places where black people, and mostly black men, were, so to say, on control of the dance floor: “That’s real having fun Surinamese style, because at Dutch parties people seat down all the time”. In 1982 an older young man described this way a “typically Creole” weekend: “(...) Dancing, a quick stop at home for freshing up, new clothes on, going somewhere dancing, back home again and the whole thing all over again”. Older young men visited discos where a lot of Surinamese came, places with names, mostly in English, such as Ebony and Caribbean. Some of them simply did not feel comfortable in places where only white people could be seen: “Among black people I feel I am somebody (*een mens*)”.

The backbone of the pleasure circuit is a network of parties and party organizers. There are parties for children, teenagers, adults and senior citizens. Family parties are possibly the most important meeting places for the Surinamese - they are the backbone of the ethnic community. They offer the opportunity to go out to people with little disposable income. Single mothers and young couple can bring children to these parties - kids are welcome even at dance parties whereas the Surinamese complain that native Dutch people are friendlier to dogs than to young kids at parties. Especially for young single mother children birthday parties represent a proper network where tips on possible odd jobs, informal economic activities and baby products are exchanged - baby products and women fashion are often also for sale, usually for a soft price or in installments. Young mothers can chat while kids play with one another. Moreover also men visit these children’s parties, they tend to stay by the entrance door or the kitchen - where booze is served or sold. They also check out the scene and which women are around. At some point the music change. No more children’s songs, but dance music. Lighter first and tougher later on. Women start dancing. Fist with each other, then with men - when available. For certain children’s parties the organizer invites a band, but,

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which were concentrated the large Eurasian population that had arrived from Indonesia in the Forties and Fifties.

according to most informants, this habit is becoming less common because of the rising costs of hiring a band.

Throwing a party can be expensive. In 1988 a children's party cost between 250 and 500 guilders (supplementary benefit for a single mother with one child was about 1450 guilders – approximately USD 1000). A party for a teenager costs easily 1000 guilders. A lot of money for someone on the dole - as the majority of lower-class Creoles in the Eighties and early Nineties. Sometimes one borrows moneys from friends and relatives. Otherwise one draws on the rotating credit system, *kasmoni*. One has to pay for food (usually a member of the family cooks, but sometimes a professional cook is hired), booze and music. When records are plaid, then the DJ is usually someone from the family. In larger parties music is mostly live - especially in Zuidoost where the flats are larger and neighbours do not tend to complain about loud music. A band cost between 200 and 250 guiders and plays for one hour at the end of the party. In most cases such bands consists of a reduced formation of three to six musicians, who often also play in larger bands. At certain parties, in particular birthdays of senior citizens also a choir is hired. Most of all it plays churchly songs - popular especially amidst the members of the traditional Moravian Church, but also amidst people of other Christian confessions. In other birthday parties are carried out certain *winti* rituals. In fact throwing a (large and loud) party can be one of the obligations, often suggested in a session with a healer (*bonoeman*) (Venema 1992). In fact the borderline between a party and a *wintipré* can be rather thin. The religious ritual flows into a party or the party is interrupted for practicing a *winti*-ritual - to go on as a party soon after. Apparently, this borderline has become even thinner in the Netherlands, where the practice of *winti* has become more open and accepted than it was in Suriname - largely thank to the incorporation of *winti* in the universe of "other religious practices" that formed part of the mosaic-wise construction of ethnic minority's culture through multiculturalism and its institutions (schools, NGO's, TV programs etc.). Meanwhile, the Creoles in the Netherlands and, be it to a lesser extent in Suriname, have been experiencing a good degree of secularization - religion is less than before a structuring factor of their social life. In 1990 a *bigi-poku* musician turned such change into words as follows:

Fifteen years ago you had people who asked you to play a whole string of churchly songs. Nowadays they expect you to play just about two coral tunes right in the beginning: to make happy grandma. Then they want you to play *kaseko*, for dancing and the rest. Towards the end they expect a cultural number (a piece of *kawina* music) so that they feel they are concluding the party in peace with their culture (LS, *winti*).

To the popularity of these family parties contributes the popular opinion that they represent a sort of a liminal space. There, people from different social background can come. To which even white people like to come – the growing group who is said to enjoy the frolic Creole atmosphere. It is in the first place he or she who throws the parties who does a special effort to invite a number of better off Creoles or even white people, for example, those relatives with a good jobs or the managers of Surinamese welfare organizations. All the others positively evaluate the presence of these “better” people. It provides status, it can mean interesting contacts and it is said to be a good antidote against violent brawls, because even the heaviest *wakaman* (street hustler) would not show that much agro in the presence of these better placed people. On their part these better placed people also like to attend parties with different groups of Surinamese, either because they feel emotionally involved with the culture and tradition of Creole folk habits or because they firmly believe that *winti*-practices are much more effective when exercised in the lower-class milieu. Traditions and magic powers are said to be stronger among the poor. When it comes to a *winti*-ritual or to a night heavy *bigi-poku* dancing, middle class Creole admit they prefer to move “downwards” socially speaking. In those moments *Volkscreolen* and even *Bosnegers* are said to be the real “pleasure people” (*pleziersvolk*)<sup>8</sup>.

As a matter of fact, better off Creoles maintain a kind of borrowing relationship with the lower-class Creoles. *De Volkscreolen* and the *Bosnegers*<sup>9</sup> are held as the

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<sup>8</sup> Such attitude is much more explicit in the Surinamese community in the Netherlands than in Suriname itself which tends to be a much more conscious society in terms of social hierarchy and ethnic differences. In fact, the relative lack of hierarchy among the Surinamese in the Netherlands it is said to be one important push factor for the continuing popularity of emigrating towards this country.

<sup>9</sup> This is the native, emic term for the bushnegroes. In Suriname, Creoles from the coast and the city, Paramaribo, with their political parties on an ethnic base, have been insisting on another term,

“conservators” of the roots; they are visited and consulted on certain occasions, but participation in their social network is kept to a minimum - intensive involvement with such network and their close system of reciprocity would not rime easily with the demands of Dutch modernity and social mobility on daily life. Better off Creoles (their number is usually estimated as approximately a third of the Creole population in the Netherlands) have created their own network, more discrete and less exposed to the stereotyping gaze of Dutch popular culture and media. They like to hold “cooler” parties, with less *ondroberedansi*<sup>10</sup>, no drumming music (*kawina*), some light, older *kaseko*, and especially soka, merengue and salsa. Nonetheless, the relatively high degree of social mixture at parties held by lower-class Creoles witnesses to the important meeting function of such parties and the strength of flexible family network that are important in assisting (new) immigrants. This commitment in moments of relative social mixture among individuals from both the middle and the lower class explains the absence of “class” discourses among the Creole in the Netherlands, as opposed to Suriname, as well as the fragility and uncertainty of the middle-class status of the better off third of the Creole population in the Netherlands<sup>11</sup>.

During the period of time of my research, from 1981 to 1991, this party circuit experienced dramatic changes. Over the last years the popularity of Creole parties, especially the commercial ones, has decreased, in spite of the constant in-flow of newcomers from Suriname, who in most cases come in on a tourist visa and then try to get a residence permit with the help of their family. Newcomers, of course, especially those of the lower classes, tend to be consumers of the Creole leisure circuit, but are also willing to explore “new things”. In many ways they come to the Netherlands

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*boslandcreolen*. I argue that this was an attempt to count bushnegroes as Creoles, as the rural section of them, in the census and the several unofficial counting of ethnic groups that the ethnically segmented Surinam is experiencing. The Creoles feel outnumbered by the Hindoestani, who have higher fertility rates, and are said to be, and represent themselves, as more successful as entrepreneurs whereas Creoles have made of public jobs and the Army their main labour niche.

<sup>10</sup> In colloquial Sranan Tongo, *ondroberere*, literally, that which is below the navel, means something like intense, gutsy, deep, rootsy and typically Creole. It is what you feel when you are excited and, in the meantime, participate in your culture.

<sup>11</sup> Because of the mass character of migration from Suriname and the Dutch Antilles, in which all layers of the Surinamese and Dutch Antillean society participated enthusiastically, with an overrepresentation of the better educated in the first waves and of the poorer strata in the more recent waves, people of Caribbean origin have been much more represented in the middle class than other immigrant groups. In fact among the people of Caribbean origin there is a stronger class divide, even more so among the Antilleans, than for the other main

precisely to experience the modernity and fashion they associate with life in the Netherlands. For them, in most cases, images of wealth and modernity are associated with just two countries: the Netherlands, to which they have more easily access, and the US, which they know mostly from a distance. As a result of this process fewer parties are given and commercial ones have lost much of their audience. Most first generation Surinamese are not young any longer and go out less. Other factors are at play. For the generation that has grown up in the Netherlands there are more options. According to most of the latter, especially those who are considered Dutchified by the older generation, giving a feast “for yourself” (that is, to oblige your *winti*), has become too dear. In the last years of my research just a couple of informants had given a party. Most of them said to have no money for those things or, rather, that they have other priorities. A great threat to the Creole pleasure circuit comes for the “white” leisure industry, which offers better attractions, frequently for lower prices and in more central locations. Such opinions go hand in glove with a general idea among young Creoles that the Creole pleasure circuit is mostly old-fashioned and provincial: “You bump in the same people all the time. It’s a matter of staring at each other in the doorway because in those shebeens there is no real room for dancing”. Moreover they find social control too strict: for flirting it’s no good place. In fact, to an increasing extent for young Creoles has become more important to gain access to the so-called white leisure facilities, where they are convinced they can make good use of their blackness and tropicalness (intended as attributes that can make you look cuter to certain sections of the white youth, especially of the other sex), than to negotiate a space in the fairly small and saturated Creole leisure industry. They like the more professional attitude of Dutch music venue - show start on time, there are no fights and the facilities are generally newer and cleaner. On top of that, against all odds, “white” facilities have managed much better to relate to developments in music taste among young Creoles. The best-known hip hop groups and soul bands, as well as the most popular bigi poku bands, tend to do these “white” venues, which on these occasion gain an overwhelmingly black audience <sup>12</sup>.

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immigrant groups in the Netherlands.

<sup>12</sup> Music venues and other leisure facilities are defined “white” (*blank*) when they are owned and managed by white people. Large number of robust Creoles and Moroccans young men and attractive Creole girls,

Commercial parties still have an important social function in the Creole community, especially in Zuidoost, for a smaller and older public. For a group of lower-class young adults they represent a pivotal opportunity for courting. For another group organizing parties has become an extra source of income. For most young Creoles these parties, however, it is OK to visit them from time to time for good typical food and to get news from Suriname. But if one is out for contemporary trends and fashion, then one is much better off in the larger, more anonymous and less ethnically tinged leisure facilities downtown.

Also the music taste of young Creole has changed. In one way it has grown closer to the mainstream of today's music culture. In the years of this research *bigi poku* lost some of its popularity among young Creoles in favour of other sorts of "black" music that, opposite to *bigi poku*, attract, and are consumed by, a large section of the urban white youth. The older young men, who had grown up in Suriname and migrated to the Netherlands in their early twenties, saw it as sell out to the Dutch. Indeed my survey on music taste held in 1982 among one hundred young Creoles visitors of the youth club United World, where I used to do volunteer youth and social work, showed that they preferred to buy disco and reggae records rather than *bigi poku* records. Most of them argued that *bigi poku* was for parties in the family or in the community and that somebody in their family already had those records. Disco and reggae music, they added, was more modern and trendy. The decrease in interest in the traditional Creole pop music and *pleziercircuit* did not mean, however, that they opposed Creole parties and *bigi poku*. Neither it meant that these "traditional" forms of lower-class Creole cultural production were anything static. In fact the last round of interviews, held in 1991-92, demonstrated that even those young Creoles that the older generation considers as being more Dutch-oriented visit Creole parties, especially those held within the family, and that "in due time" they would also dance properly *bigi poku*.

The orientation on other music sorts than *bigi poku* can be seen as an attempt to differentiate themselves from the older young men who are more oriented on Suriname -in fact, according to their own voice, work hard to have fun "just as it was back in

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however, have started to be hired by these white managers over the last years - possibly also to add a certain ethnic tinge to these facilities.

Paramaribo”. The younger generation shows a more varied pattern of consumption on the leisure arena. They insist on having an individual(ized) opinion on music taste and consumption, often resisting attempts by outsiders (media people, teachers, youth workers) as well as by older members of the Creole community to format music taste and fashion habits of their younger generation. Young Creoles tend to be well informed about white and black musicians, bands, live shows and venues in Amsterdam and other large Dutch cities. Music magazines are well read and music programs on radio and TV well followed.

Music also plays an important role as ethnic marker, whatever the borders of the “own” ethnic group might be, shifting as they are - in certain situations “blackness” can even include a couple of non-black peers with whom they share neighbourhood life. In Oud West, the other region of Amsterdam in which I conducted fieldwork and lived, youth and community centers experienced a true “music war”:

We were (white and black) ska’s and DJed in the Witte Brug (a youth club within a community center). Everything was going fine until those heavy (white) young men from the Wachttorens (a nearby youth center catering for young men with drinking and/or hard drugs problems) came along. They could not stand any black music. One of them put his revolver on the forehead of Freddy, the DJ, and ordered him to play André Hazes (LS, the epitome of Amsterdam-schmaltz, folksy pop singer). When he refused they smashed the head in of one of us. [1983].

Even though young Creoles want to be and feel “modern”, musically speaking, in other ways they have set forth a process of rediscovery of certain musical tradition. It concerns the section of this tradition that, in general, as well as outsiders they associate with “roots” - something identified as a combination of authenticity with down-to-earth, vibrant and percussive. Accounting for this phenomenon requires some details on dynamics within Creole pop music. As it is the case with music in general and Caribbean music in particular (Bilby 1985), Creole pop music is constantly experiencing change in the Netherlands as well as in Suriname (Weltak e.a. 1990: 67-

84). On the one hand, developments in the Netherlands reverberate onto Suriname, where *bigi poku* and *kawina* groups pay increasingly attention to Western pop music and modern music technology. Music traditions and modern technology are mixed with one another with wit for the sake of creating new “tonalities” - the aim of which is making it possible to be invited to tour the Netherlands. On the other hand, the Surinamese community in the Netherlands looks up with a lot of respect to music groups based in Suriname. The most exclusive and expensive music shows revolve around a main act of a Suriname-based band. There is, therefore, a reciprocal influence. Surinamese bands are inspired by the “modern things” they can capture from the way Netherlands-based band play; Dutch-Surinamese musicians are inspired by the “original and deep” forms of playing music and singing back in Suriname. There is a sort of a role division. New arrangements and instruments are developed mostly in the Netherlands: where one is supposed to have access to better and more advanced technological equipment. Developments and new trends as to lyrics and singing techniques come mostly from Suriname: where one is supposed to be bestowed with more creativity and can draw upon “purer” voices, especially Bushnegro voices.

One perceives a polarity: in this representation of Suriname is closer to nature, purer and more creative; the Netherlands is closer to technology, the place where things can be mixed and where technological skills are available. In fact, this reciprocal, Transatlantic, influence is going on for longer than two decades and is in many ways constitutive of the cultural creativity and the sociology of Surinamese pop music. *Bigi poku* groups from Suriname are very often in the Netherlands - touring in this country makes you important, and more expensive, in Suriname. To a lesser extent - mostly because there is less money to pay for bands from abroad - Dutch-Surinamese bands also tour Suriname. Playing in Suriname also gives you credit amidst your “home” audience in the Netherlands. In the period from 1986 to 1992, largely due to an economic contingency dictated by a very convenient exchange rate, which enabled even poor Surinamese who were depending on Dutch welfare checks to travel once a year to Suriname and “enjoy life” or buying some properties, traveling back and forth to Suriname increased a lot. This time Suriname was not any longer dealt with as a poor homeland to which emigrants had the obligation to return, but, rather, as a second

tropical-holiday homeland in which one could spend periods of time and invest in with a certain regularity. Relevant to our music story was that it was becoming increasingly difficult to detect who and which of the two countries was influencing what.

It is clear that over the years of this research within *bigi poku* in the Netherlands developments are going in two directions. A number of groups, such as the renowned Trafassi, play increasingly “classic” because they aim at an older and nostalgic audience. They have purged the lyrics of “raw” words, play less syncopate and have brought percussion down to a minimum - percussion being associated with mostly disreputable lower-class *Volkscreolen* and sometimes with *winti*. On the contrary other groups, for example Ganzensound and Jongoe Bala, play *plat*, “raw” music. The latter groups follow a development that has been going on for a number of years in Suriname. There, a number of bands under the leadership of the famous band Soekroe Sani (Sweet Thing) has rediscovered the “deep” forms of *kawina* music, especially those played by Bushnegroes. On the one hand, they use uncensored lyrics, sing with so-called Bushnegro-voices and draw heavily on the percussion beat of *kawina* music. On the other hand, these groups introduce newer instruments, especially of the electronic sort, in *kawina* music. So, starting from the early Nineties a specific sort of music from Suriname, which we can call electro-*kawina*, acquired a large popularity which has maintained ever since especially among the upcoming second generation in the Netherlands as well as among young people in Paramaribo: it is a very danceable, electronic and pop version of the traditional *kawina* music, especially of its “deeper” version, mostly sung in Saramakaan rather than in Sranan Tongo<sup>13</sup>. In the Netherlands the groups that play “raw” music aim at a younger and more Western-oriented audience who is also keen on hip hop – indeed the same young people who had considered traditional *kawina* as too old-fashioned and slow until a few years ago. I heard some of them saying that Jongoe Bala is playing punk-*bigi poku*. This rediscovery of Bushnegro

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<sup>13</sup> Saramakaan is a Creole language that has incorporated a sizeable Portuguese lexicon, spoken by a large section of the Bosnegers. It is very different from the Creole language of Suriname, Sranan Tongo, which, though often associated with lower-class urban *Volkscreolen*, is the vehicular language of markets, neighbourhood- and street-life. Urban Creoles hold an ambivalent attitude towards Bosnegers: they respect them for their bellicose and brave past of resistance to slavery, but scorn on them for their present condition, which is deemed backwards and inherently non-modern. As part of this ambivalence, Saramakaan singers and religious healers are deemed more powerful because they live closer to nature, to one of the roots of Surinamese-Creole culture (Bilby 1999; Reijerman 1999).

roots and kawina was contaminating. In 1990 the band Ganzensound, in the Eighties probably the best-known bigi poku band of Amsterdam, sensed the change. They sought to attract the young generation by moving in two directions. First, the lyrics and the music became increasing “raw” and the three singers (the groups consisted of ten people only one of whom could read music) did their best to sing as much as possible “as Bushnegros”. Second, the act became a complete show. At large parties, for example, they started off with a playback show - playback singing is a popular activities also among Surinamese kids and adolescents – then came a hip hop group followed by the first bigi poku tunes. During the break a dance group demonstrated a combination of jazz ballet with “typically “ Latin American and African dances. Hip hop saw all kids and teenagers dancing; bigi poku managed to get literally everybody in the hall to *schuren* (dancing very close and sensually in couples) and electro-kawina is good for bubbling (the thrilling buttocks dance which came from Jamaica, as I was told in a Paramaribo nightclub meaningfully the Spanish name El Tiburon – The Shark,).

### **One homeland?**

Attitudes to Suriname and to cultural production originating from Suriname have been varying, largely, on account of the number of years of residence in the Netherlands together with the part of one’s life that has been spent in this country. In many ways, thus, it varies according to generation. In trying to give a general picture, one can say that the experience of Surinamese - and Antilleans - and their offspring in the Netherlands can be seen as part of different processes: transnationalism, diasporization, the forming of an ethnic minority (the Surinamese/Antilleans) and of a racialized group (the blacks). All these three processes are present, depending on the point of view and on the degree of generalization.

The position of Surinamese and Antilleans in the Netherlands cannot be understood outside their status as special colonial migrants. The political status of these immigrants and their offspring is essential to the understanding of their situation, and sets them apart from other immigrant groups. Suriname and the Dutch Antilles were Dutch colonies. In 1954 they were given a special Statute, called *Autonomy Within Your Own Country* (*Autonomie in eigen land*). Today the Dutch Antilles is part of the Netherlands (*Rijksdeel*), but not a province. The Dutch Antilleans have a parliament of their own and can vote for

the Dutch parliament only when they are residing in the Netherlands. They are Dutch citizens, with Dutch passport (Schuster 1999). The situation of the Surinamese is different. Surinam obtained independence in 1975. On the verge of independence the Surinamese could choose nationality. Approximately forty percent chose for the Dutch nationality either because they had already migrated to the Netherlands or because they had planned to do so. At present 90 to 95 percent of the people of Surinamese origin in the Netherlands are Dutch citizens.

For colonial migrants push and pull factors relate to a high degree of political, economic and cultural interaction between the Metropole and the (neo)colony. Hence, often these push and pull factors are more culturally laden than for other groups of migrants.

“Cultural” motives have always been present as both push and pull factors. This concerns the fear for social and racial unrest as well as the attractiveness of the “bright lights of the city” (which knows a high-brow as well as a low-brow version). The special relationship between Suriname and the (former) Metropole has made it possible that from the early 1990s onwards immigration from the Dutch Antilles and, to a lesser extent, Surinam has become a sort of collective international adoption by Dutch society of certain social groups that experience hardship in the homeland (mostly because of lack of public health provisions, psychological stress, educational problems, escaping from the police or criminals, and harassment on ethnic grounds).

Remigration or, rather, what I call “commuting”, has always been strong among the Dutch Antilleans, probably, being stimulated by the absence of restrictions to travel to Europe and by better unemployment benefits and medical care in the Netherlands. In 1993 departures were more numerous than arrivals in the Netherlands. In 1996 arrivals were slightly more.

A circular movement of some sort, linking Netherlands with the homeland through flows of people, goods, opinions, sounds and tastes, also exists for the Surinamese. Cash flows seem to be more intense than for the Antilleans, possibly because of the much stronger disparity in living standards between Netherlands and Surinam than between Netherlands and the Dutch Antilles. Surinamese support relatives in Suriname almost as often as the other main immigrant groups<sup>14</sup>. Surinamese also buy land and property in

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<sup>14</sup> Among the Surinamese, Hindustanis are more likely to support a parent still living in Surinam than Creoles

Surinam - this being made easier by the favourable exchange rate.

Remigration, with the exception of the older generation, is largely a dream, part and parcel of the ethnic ideology. Nevertheless, in opinion polls Surinamese and, even more so, Antilleans state more often than Moroccans, Turks and Southern Europeans that they want to go back to the homeland (Martens en Verweij 1997:102).

In fact, the whole notion of homeland has become rather relative for a large number of these Caribbean emigrants, mostly for the Antilleans, who have developed a transnational lifestyle - which exists in both a lower-class and a middle-class version. Holland and the homeland have become two extremes of a continuum.

In terms of belonging to a country or a particular place we can speak of multiple allegiances. The ingredients of this complex system of allegiances can be Suriname, (a part of) the Antilles, the Netherlands, the urban Western world, the Black Atlantic and, for the Hindustani, the Indian Diaspora. Both communities are strongly bi-national: the Surinamese community spans across two nation states; the Antilleans community spans across two parts of the same nation state. However, in both cases the two ends of the bi-national whole have different power, status and cultural or emotional importance for the people involved - depending, first of all, on the time of stay in the Netherlands and on which point of life they have migrated.

Among the Surinamese there is a variety of sub-groups with different geographic horizons: from the small-scale "own place" back in the Caribbean to the Black Atlantic or simply the "dead ordinary" Western world as it is perceived through life in a Dutch city. For sure, explicit diaspora ideas and practices concern a minority. Yet, for everybody settling in the Netherlands has offered more scope for the cultivation of the diaspora ideals and for the maintenance of international links with the Black Atlantic (the US, the UK, the Caribbean writ large and, to a lesser extent, Africa), India or China. The perception of this process, and of the modern "transnation", and of its benefits for life in the Netherlands, depends largely on gender, age, ethnic origin (Hindoestani, Creoles or Chinese) and also life orientation. In the following paragraph I limit myself to the Surinamese Creoles.

In Suriname some Creoles started relating to English-speaking black culture, for

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(Martens en Verweij 1997). This has to do with the more close-knit Hindustani family system and with their average shorter stay in the Netherlands.

example, in terms of music taste, soon after World War Two, when US troops were stationed in Suriname. The influence of the English-speaking black culture has increased ever since. Emigration to the Netherlands has multiplied the opportunities of "direct" contacts with different black subcultures from all over the world and the US in particular. The Netherlands is better connected than Surinam with the international media and leisure and music industry. In the Netherlands the orientation on the mythical "super blacks", in particular, in the United States becomes a way to be "modern" and in the meantime to differentiate oneself from white Dutch people. One of the results of this is that, in particular for the Creoles who have grown up in the Netherlands, English-speaking Afro-America is becoming one of the cultural points of reference. Besides these cultural contacts with English speaking Afro-America, a large group of first generation Creoles have maintained close social and cultural ties with Surinam. A part of this group has actually developed a transnational lifestyle by "commuting" between Suriname and the Netherlands (Sansone 1992a). In effect the international orientation on Afro-America and Surinam tend to complement rather than to combat each other. This adds to the complexity of Creole-black culture in Holland - where locals and cosmopolitans coexist, together with different degrees of Surinam-ness, ethnic allegiances and cultural influences.

In fact, for an increasing section of the population of Caribbean origin the Netherlands is, if not a new fatherland, home. For this group silent or visible display of affection towards the place of origin, the symbols of the "diasporas" and ethnic identity are ways to cope with life in the Netherlands and even to frolic up certain aspects of this European experience.

Life in the Netherlands is leading to a transformation of ethnic identity, to a process of deprovincialization and deterritorialization of both social networks and symbolic horizons. Among the Creoles a new black identity is in the making. A section of the Hindoestani is starting to identify strongly with India, without necessarily scorning their Surinamese origin. These are largely generational trends: they are more pronounced among those who have grown up in the Netherlands.

On the other hand, all this fluidity notwithstanding, the Dutch system of race relations, and the attitude of the State towards Surinamese and Antilleans, foster the continuation of ethnic difference and of its spectacular liturgy. The system of pillarization (*verzuiling*), through which the Dutch establishment has managed national social and

confessional tensions, has had a profound influence on the creation of a specifically Dutch system of ethnic and race relations that is specifically Dutch. The attitude of the Dutch State towards ethnic difference and the politics of ethnic identity among ethnic minorities has changed over time: from antagonistic towards minority ethnicity to stating that ethnic identity is the pre-condition for participation on an equal basis in the majority society, to more relativist - minority ethnicity is fine, but ought not affect the duties all citizens have towards society by and large -, all the way to, with a big change over the last few years, a strong emphasis on assimilation to the 'social mores' of mainstream Dutch society (whatever they might be)<sup>15</sup>. Special social services for Caribbean migrants were created at first, mostly on the eve of mass immigration, for being dismantled in recent years. Social services, therefore, had to adjust their approach, from "category-oriented" to "general" (*algemeen*). Also the official terminology for defining different categories of (black) foreigners have changed over time, but it is always there, corroborating the continuous existence of ethnic difference. Presently, the most used term is *allochtoon* (something like "of foreign origin"), which applies both to people who are born abroad and in the Netherlands, to the first and the second generation<sup>16</sup>, to "full blood" as well as "half blood" citizens, to people with Dutch citizenship and foreigners. For being an *allochtoon* one needs to look different or practice a culture that is supposedly originated abroad. It goes without saying that this term, which is often used from a relativist perspective, expressing respect for "different" or "minority" cultures, carries the danger of eternity - in principle, it has something of the "one drop rule", because, symbolically, it halts biologic and culture mixture; one can be an *allochtoon* even if he or she is only in part of foreign origin and up to the third generation or even further. Next to the official terminology and classification, of course, there is a popular use of racial or ethnic terms, which rather than on descent is based on visible differences based on perceived culture and/or phenotype - along the polarity *donker*/dark-skinned versus *blank*/white.

Interestingly, Creoles claim civil rights, in times of collective and individual conflicts, as *autochtonen* or as *allochtonen*, depending on the group they compete with and

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<sup>15</sup> This assimilationist policies titled *inburgering* (literally, becoming a citizen) have been gaining political and popular support especially after the assassination of the populist and racist politician Pim Fortuin.

<sup>16</sup> It is a matter of speculation how the third and successive generation will chose to identify themselves and will be seen by others - as Black Dutch?

on the circumstances - their “Creole” political status offers more options for the manipulation of ethnicity than the more univocal status that the other main immigrant groups have at their disposal.

### **Conclusions:**

The cultural production around the making of a new black culture in the Netherlands relates to a set of multiple ethno-cultural allegiances - Suriname (Paramaribo and the “bush”), Afro-America, lower-class urban Dutch “white” urban culture and youth culture. In many ways, such multiplicity explains both the attractiveness of “black culture” for certain groups of non-blacks - who see “black culture” as something that has managed to combine nicely modernity, being “natural” and oppositional behaviour to the hum drum of Western culture.

Most of the cultural interaction and production described in this article does not occur in the shadow of the Dutch State and of official – and pretty stiff – multiculturalism. More than formal education and State-sponsored activities - the privileged site for official multiculturalism – it has been the combination of new technology, media and leisure industry that have been playing a pivotal role in this process. This combined factors have had had a double function. On the one hand it has forced dramatic changes even on the more “traditional” forms of Surinamese music and dance. On the other hand, together with the new channels offered by the transnationalization (a de facto bi-nationalisation), it has created new opportunities for the rediscovery of the “authentic”, “deep” and “ancient” in Surinamese cultural production as well as for making relative the general impression in Dutch public opinion that Surinamese Creole culture and black cultural forms more generally lack authenticity.

The attractiveness and ‘coolness’ of black cultural forms to non-black youth, often of immigrant origin, however, does seem to weaken the claim of many black spokespeople that also their (back) culture is an ‘authentic ethnic culture’ within Dutch society. Apparently the *conditio sine qua non* for official recognition by the Dutch State and by the rituals of multicultural education is the intrinsic degree of originality, distinct

visible traits and authenticity of the cultural expression of a recognized ethnic minority – and in the opinion of Dutch policy makes in this respect the Surinamese Creole (sometimes described as *onze negers*, our own back people) score low.

Most likely, it is this feeling of estrangement from official multiculturalism, a set of practices and narratives that offers little scope for black cultural production – that is, for the making of a Dutch black culture largely to be understood as a metropolitan reinterpretation of a lower-class Surinamese Creole subculture - that spurs the pursuit of different transatlantic avenues for black cultural creation – a spurious universe that, thronged with commodification and commerce, seems to bestow with a certain status combining blackness with modernity exactly those traits that are otherwise seen as hybrid and mixed.

The bi-nationalisation of the Surinamese community and “black globalisation” have had a great influence on both black cultural production and black leisure in Amsterdam. In turn, such developments have been influencing public leisure and youth culture in Paramaribo. The significance of the categories “youth” as well as “black” is redefined in this transnational context and process.

In analyzing the experience of lower-class Surinamese Creoles in the Netherlands one can certainly read it as an example of segmented assimilation (Zhou 1997) – in Dutch society they are much more central in the arena of leisure than in that of work. I would suggest we apply this reading to the binational context in which a good number of Dutch citizens of Surinamese origin live: in terms of self-image and self-esteem their relative economic marginality in Dutch society is largely counterbalanced by the relatively high status of the Dutch passport holder in Suriname.

The relationship between today’s Suriname and the large Surinamese community in the Netherlands cannot be understood outside the colonial past. The Surinamese are colonial migrants and in the narrative of the Surinamese nation one of today’s Suriname’s *raisons d’être* is coming to terms with the former colonizer, the Netherlands – in a peculiar combination of polemical stands and a hyper-dependent position as regards the former “mother country”<sup>17</sup>. However, this neo-colonial

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<sup>17</sup> After all, as often noticed, Dutch newspapers traditionally place news about Suriname in the home news page (*binnenland*) rather than in the page dealing with international news.

relationship has offered scope for important transatlantic fluxes of commodities and cultural artifacts that have, by now, become part and parcel of certain aspects of urban life in both Suriname and the Netherlands. From Suriname comes the “exotic”, while from the Netherlands “technique” and “modernity”. This is obvious in the process that has led to the creation of a “black” youth culture in the Dutch cities - largely developing from within the Surinamese-Creole cultural creativity - as well as in the dynamics of production and public consumption of different varieties of popular Surinamese music.

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