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The Continuously Changing Self: The Story of Surinamese Creole Migration to the Netherlands

Jenise Ogle
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The Continuously Changing Self: The Story of Surinamese Creole Migration to the
Netherlands

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Abstract

This paper is the result of a month long study on how the process of migration affects the sense of Self of middle-classed Creole Surinamese migrant women who first migrated to the Netherlands in the 1960's or 1970's. All data was obtained from semi-structured oral history interviews analyzed with a historical and theoretical framework focusing on the influence of colonialism upon the three steps of the migration process: before migration, migration, and after migration. It is concluded that colonialism and its legacies have conferred, reconfigured and dismantled migrant women's sense of Self throughout the entire migration process. Recommendations for future research include similar studies on other groups of Surinamese migrants such as men, other ethnicity groups and the lower class.

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Introduction

This project is an analysis of Caribbean migration stories of Surinamese Creole women to the Netherlands. This paper will discuss the historical context in which the journey from (and sometimes between) Suriname, a former Dutch colony, and the Netherlands took place as well as the ways Surinamese Creole women look back at the migration process, following the three steps of the migration process: pre-migration, migration, and post-migration. Due to the Caribbean context of this paper, the theme of re-migration will also be significant and will be addressed within the analysis.

While many analyses of Caribbean migration tackle the question of transnationalism and the creation of bi-nationals, this will not be directly addressed within this paper; however due to the content of the life stories, transnationalism will be present in the foreground of this work. This paper will pay particular attention to how race, ethnicity and cultural heritage affect the histories of these women in the Dutch context.

Threading the themes of migration, discrimination, and cultural heritage together, I created my main research question: *How has the migration process affected the way Surinamese Creole migrants perceive and define their sense of self?*

Assumptions

In determining the criteria for my interviewees and the premise of my paper, I have made multiple assumptions. Initially, I chose the Surinamese population because I assumed that I could compare the centuries long multi-culturalism of Suriname to the comparatively long history of multi-culturalism in the Netherlands through the microcosm of my interviewees' life histories. With this I hoped to make an in-depth analysis of these women's stories, make a broader statement about the impact of Dutch colonialism on the colonized a comparative assessment of how multi-culturalism in both countries have affected these women.

The main assumption I have made in choosing Surinamese Creole people is that they have live in a community that prioritizes migration and race; therefore they will be knowledgeable in how migration has changed their perception of themselves particularly their racialized Self. I also chose to interview women who migrated between the years 1960 and 1980, because I have assumed that these women would have the knowledge to speak about how Suriname's independence and post-colonialism has affected their migration and integration experiences.

My desire to interview Creole Surinamese women is because I have assumed that the cultural heritage of slavery will be make these women more aware of the injustices they have faced in the Netherlands from the Dutch and the significance of colonialism to their family histories, their migration journey, as well as their former and current social position.

Methodology

For this project, I have completed four oral history interviews with five Surinamese Creole women. Two women requested to be interviewed simultaneously

and I followed their wishes. The objective of these interviews was to learn more about the experiences of these women within the three steps of the migration process. All of the women interviewed lived in Suriname at least until the age of 17 and first migrated to the Netherlands within a span of two decades, between 1960 and 1980.

The reason I have chosen the oral history method is because this is the most effective means to gather life histories of individuals. As Alessandro Portelli writes, oral history focuses on the oral narration and content of an interview, allowing for an analysis of not only what is said but also how it is said.¹ Since my research focus is on perceptions and definitions of the Self, I needed a methodology that would facilitate discussions about these very personal details. Portelli believes that the use of oral sources in oral history is the only historical research tool where the speaker's subjectivity is focused.² As my paper ties into themes of subjectivity, it makes the most logical sense to use the oral history method, as it will be the most efficient and practical way to acquire the information I desire. While I realize the benefits of the method for my research topic, I also notice it has its challenges. Its focus on language was a challenge as English was not the native language of my interviewees and I know that this restricted many of the answers I was provided with. During my interviews I tried to aid my interviewees as much as possible to find the right words in order for their meaning not to be misconstrued and in my analysis I looked at body language and method of narration to compliment what was said in order to better understand the intended meaning. Also, the small sample size that I had to focus on restricts me from making broader claims of the Surinamese Creole migrant

1
Alessandro Portelli, "What makes Oral History Different," The Oral History Reader (1979) 34.

2
Portelli 36.

population; however as I desire to analyze very personal characteristics, other research tools like surveys that allow for a large sample size were too impersonal for my topic.

I wished to hold one-on-one interviews, however two women requested a single interview, a request I respected. While I understand that this may have affected my research, I also understand that interviewees must feel comfortable and safe. Yvette Kopijn wrote that oral historians must be sensitive to cultural differences and must be ready to accommodate these differences.³ My interviewees wished to be together because they felt the experience would be the more fruitful with multiple people and I decided that I would accommodate to their wishes.

All interviews were conducted in homes except one that was performed in an eatery. This location may also have affected the answers she provided me with, as it was a very public space. I felt this affected the open and safe atmosphere that I hoped to create for all of my interviews so that they could feel comfortable sharing anything with me. My interviewees lived in or around Amsterdam except one who lived in another area of the Randstad, a region of the Netherlands that encompasses the four largest cities and their surrounding areas. Four of my five interviewees have given me permission to give their name publicly. The interviewee that has decided to stay anonymous has been given a pseudonym within this paper and all identifying information has either been kept private or changed.

There are some biases that I must acknowledge about my interviews and my interviewees. For finding my interviewees, I first located members of the Surinamese civil society in the Netherlands. These individuals then put me in contact with my

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Yvette, Kopijn, "The Oral History Interview in a Cross-cultural Setting. An Analysis of Its Linguistic, Social and Ideological Structure." Ed. Mary Chamberlain. Memory and Narrative (1998)

future interviewees; however I have come to realize that when soliciting individuals to participate, these community members portrayed a more concentrated research focus to these women than I intended. For this reason, one of my interviewees was misinformed about the breadth of my topic, thinking it was mostly about discrimination, and I believe this affected the answers she gave. Our interview focused mostly on her past experiences with discrimination in the Netherlands and while this may not have been the focus of my research it has found a place within this paper. I believe that it is also revealing that through the chain of information, discrimination became the key focus, indicating a desire amongst the population to speak about this topic.

Secondly, all of the women I have interviewed were or currently are employed as teachers and nurses. On one level this is significant because it exemplifies the employment sectors open to Surinamese Creole women during the time period of migration as well as what were culturally acceptable and respectable professions for these women in the Netherlands. Their professions are exemplary of the female migration to the Netherlands in the time period between the 1960's and early 1970's. The first groups of female migrants to the Netherlands were the nurses and teachers of Creole descent from the middle classes.⁴ This aside, this does create an important bias because all of my interviewees are middle classed, educated women who have connections to the civil society. As a group these women have a very specific experience with migration as they lived middle class lifestyles and associated with people of this same class. These characteristics have had a profound impact upon the

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H. van Amersfoort and M. van Niekerk, "Immigration as a Colonial Inheritance: Post-Colonial Immigrants in the Netherlands, 1945–2002," Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies (2006) 334.

experience of these women and therefore it affects my conclusion, as it cannot be extended beyond this very specific category of women.

Thirdly, my research comes from a very gendered viewpoint, as all of my interviewees are women. This in combination with the fact that all of my participants are also employed in traditionally female occupations means that this research is also limited on the basis of gender. My findings cannot be extended beyond female migrants. This is significant because I am inclined to believe the stories of males would be drastically different considering the divergent employment options between men and women as well as the differing gender roles for men in both the Surinamese culture and in the Netherlands.

Lastly, I must address my personal biases. As a multi-racial American woman of Caribbean descent this identity creates inherent biases in my research that I have done my best to recognize and rectify. For example, I have quite a few strong feelings towards Dutch and Surinamese multiculturalism but I have realized the necessity of being impartial throughout conducting my research and I have tried my best to accomplish this. I must also recognize that while this identity may pose as a weakness it also served as an asset for setting a comfortable mood in which to speak with my interviewees as I could be seen as a person who my interviewees could identify with and eventually open up to.⁵ Also, as someone who shares both the gender and cultural background as my interviewees I was in a better position to analyze my research as I already had an understanding of cultural norms.

Literature Review

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Kopijn (1998).

Research on the intersection of migration, race and discrimination in the Netherlands has centered on the history of colonialism despite the diverging contexts in which these themes have been discussed. Unfortunately, the academic research on this intersection has been miniscule in comparison to the outpouring of academic research done in other countries. In his overview of academic work, Eric Mielants, recently discovered that the Netherlands has a unique lack of literature about racism especially considering its current state as a multi-cultural society⁶. The issue of racism is rarely ever the focus of academic work and usually reduced to a very small portion of a study.

This lack of research seems to come from a tradition of a purposeful ignorance of race in the Netherlands. For this reason, Philomena Essed became known as the founder of the discussion on racism in the Netherlands when she published her groundbreaking book *Everyday Racism: Reports from Women of Two Cultures* (1990). In this study, Essed interviewed women from both the Netherlands and the United States of America to discuss the troubles they experience with racism in their respective societies. In the Dutch context, she interviewed 14 Surinamese migrant women living in the Netherlands about their views on racism and their experiences with it.⁷

Essed found that the Netherlands as a country ignores the issue of racism and its affect on the integration of migrants within the Dutch community. This is a reflection of a greater problem: Black people in the Netherlands have always known

6

Eric Mielants, "From the Periphery to the Core: A Case Study on the Migration and Incorporation of Recent Caribbean Immigrants in the Netherlands," Caribbean Migration to Western Europe and the U.S. (2009) 64.

7

Philomena Essed, Everyday Racism: Reports from Women of Two Cultures (1990): 43.

that racism exists but they have been hesitant to speak up about it and the white Dutch do not understand its meaning making it difficult to produce fruitful conversation about race here.⁸ In Essed's study, she discovered that her interviewees also shared the Dutch racism taboo and openly feared using the term, but despite this they experience racism that affects their freedoms and possibilities in what she coins as "everyday racism."

These stories and analyses of everyday racism offer us a first impression of its meaning. Everyday racism refers not only to the prejudice and discriminatory treatment actually experienced, also to the stress caused by the threat of racism. It is the fear of being hurt suddenly and unexpectedly. It is the precautions you must take in order to evade possible discrimination and the strategies you must develop in order to react adequately and be alert to whatever happens around you. It is the sense that your social environment is not safe.⁹

Essed believes that "everyday racism" is a colonial vestige that is a result of a white mindset of superiority that has been embedded in all social constructions of contemporary Dutch society.¹⁰ Recently, Gloria Wekker referred to this white mindset as the "cultural archive," indicating that in the psyche of the white Dutch as stores feelings and perceptions of superiority that are rooted in colonialism.¹¹

8

Essed 41-42.

9

Essed 142.

10

Essed 42.

11

Gloria Wekker, Innocence Unltd. Intersections of Gender, Race and Sexuality in the Dutch Cultural Archive (2013). Forthcoming

This conclusion about colonialism is significant, as it has become a focal point for the few researchers that engage the question of how race and migration affect the lives of immigrants here after the dawn of post-colonialism. As it has been discovered that colonial heritages explain the behavior towards minority groups from the white Dutch, it also illuminates the problem of colonial vestiges in societal structures. Consistently, the structural systems of employment, education, housing and many more perpetuate the colonial ideals of superiority to the white Dutch and the continued marginalization of the former colonized and their descendants. Eric Mielants examines this trend in his analysis of racism in these structural systems. From his analysis of the educational and employment systems, racism has been a prominent factor in keeping colonial Caribbean migrants and their descendants in the lowest positions of the systematic hierarchies despite what he found to be opposing opinions by Modernists theorists. As a result, many of these minorities are only accepted for the lowest employment positions and are usually forced into some of the worst performing schools. All of this contributes to the privilege that white Dutch natives are given in the society.¹² It also must be noted that Eric Mielants is a Belgium social scientist who is not fully acquainted with Dutch society or history as the other authors listed in this literature review that focus on the Dutch Caribbean. It is possible that his work contains some flaws due to this nature.

The effect of the colonial period in societal structures and in everyday actions begs for more study about how colonialism affects individuals and their own self-identity. Sabrina Marchetti takes up this thread as she examines the role of colonialism in the identity formation of female paid domestic laborers in the

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Mielants 74-77.

Netherlands¹³. In her study, Marchetti interviewed 15 Creole migrant women living in the Netherlands about their lives as domestic workers. She discovered threads of “continuities” between the colonial period and the post-colonial world that affect how domestic workers create their sense of Self and how this impacts their relationship with their white employers. As in colonial times, where white colonizer women and their black colonized counterparts had delegated roles and expectations of character, this has recreated itself in contemporary relationships of domestic labor. Marchetti found that her interviewees prided themselves on their caring and strong natures as well as their mastery of “ethnic” skills, just as they have been praised for during colonial times. In opposition to this, white women were portrayed by these migrant workers as infantilized presences in the households who did not feel any responsibility for domestic chores. Marchetti writes that these descriptions of self-identity are just archetypes of accepted colonial identities which are historically rooted and perpetuated in contemporary domestic worker-employee relationships.¹⁴

While these studies have been the most relevant in terms of research on migration, race and discrimination in the Netherlands, looking beyond it into the wider European context there is a wide breadth of research done, most centering on Great Britain. An analysis of this information is warranted because of both the lack of information present in the Netherlands on this topic and for an analysis of how the Caribbean heritage affects the intersection of migration, race and discrimination. The specific Caribbean characteristics of the Surinamese migration to the Netherlands differentiate the experience of this group from that of other colonial migrants to the

13

Sabrina Marchetti, Paid Domestic Labour and Postcoloniality: Narratives of Eritrean and Afro-Surinamese Migrant Women (2010) 5-6.

14

Marchetti 134-171.

Netherlands like the Eurasian migrants coming from the former Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia). Mary Chamberlain's work is particularly helpful in analyzing how this cultural heritage of the Caribbean has made it unique. In her study, "Identity and Kinship," she spoke with three generations of two Jamaican migrant families in London. These family narratives helped her to find that cultural identity and belonging are intrinsically linked to family bonds. She also reveals that in a typical Caribbean context, family connections are extremely important in the migration of these peoples and with their coping strategies with becoming a racial and cultural outsider in a new land. These findings also have a colonial aspect, as these family relationships are direct results of slavery in these countries.¹⁵ Her research in *Narratives of Exile and Return*, discusses similar threads. It focuses on the affect of migration and return upon individuals, the creation of family narratives and family migration patterns.¹⁶

My research is an amalgamation of the main threads of each study I have detailed above. I analyze how the Caribbean heritage of Surinamese migrants has influenced how they interpret their experiences with racism in wider Dutch social structures and how this ultimately is used to create their post-colonial self-identity. As little research has been done on the effect of the Caribbean colonial heritage on the intersection of migration, race and discrimination in the Dutch context I feel that this research will fulfill a necessary place in contemporary migration studies in the Netherlands.

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Mary Chamberlain, "Identity and Kinship: Caribbean Transnational Narratives" *Caribbean Migration to Western Europe and the US* (2009) 243-247.

16

Mary Chamberlain, *Narratives of Exile and Return* (1997)

The History of the Colonial and Post-Colonial Relationship between Suriname and the Netherlands

The relationship between Suriname and the Netherlands began in 1667 after the Treaty of Breda gave the Dutch formal control of Suriname in exchange for its former colonial possession, New Netherland, what later became New York City.¹⁷ This exchange would have profound effects on the futures of both colonial possessor and possession. After the Dutch's failed conquest in Brazil, Suriname became its only option for a plantation society, with slaves eventually encompassing 90% of its population by the early 1700's. The remaining 10% of the population were European migrants mainly composed of French and Jewish settlers as well as a few hundred runaway slaves living in the bush (maroons)¹⁸ and the remaining native populations.

200 plantations that produced sugar, coffee, and cocoa fueled the Surinamese economy of the time, worked on by West African slaves, most of whom the Dutch West Indies Company transported to the Americas.¹⁹ This slave society produced strong racial separations within what had already become a multi-ethnic society. Harsh rules determining labor responsibilities and forbidding any education to slaves helped to create a divide between slaves, European whites, and black freedmen. This in addition to strict laws forbidding the intermixing of the groups, including a prohibition on relationships between freed and enslaved blacks,²⁰ created a stratified

17

Allison Blakely, "Historical Ties Among Suriname, the Netherlands Antilles, Aruba and the Netherlands" Callaloo (1998) 473.

18

Blakely 474.

19

Marchetti 51.

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Blakely 474.

societal structure. The Europeans, who began to fear an uprising from the slaves, later used this societal stratification as a line of defense. The black freedmen and new mixed populations created a social buffer zone between the white Europeans and the large slave numbers.²¹

The deterioration of the plantation society began in the middle of the 18th century, when the plantations suffered from a severe financial crisis due in part to low profits and continued resistance from the maroons, as well as an overall loss of power as the Netherlands entered the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War.²² This financial collapse changed the relationship between the Netherlands and Suriname for the next two centuries. For the Netherlands, Suriname was no longer a profitable possession but instead a financial and administrative burden that it increasingly wished to relinquish.

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The official end of slavery in the Dutch Caribbean took place in 1863, freeing 36,484 slaves of a total Surinamese population of 50,000.²⁴ After unsuccessful attempts by Europeans and freed blacks to fulfill the labor shortages present after the end of slavery, the Dutch government and private business turned to Asian indentured labor. Between 1853 and 1939, 70,000 indentured laborers from British India, Java

21

Gert Oostindie, "Introduction: Ethnicity as ever?" Ethnicity in the Caribbean: Essays in Honor of Harry Hoetink (1996) 3.

22

Rik van Welie, "Patterns of Slave Trading and Slavery in the Dutch Colonial World" Dutch Colonialism, Migration and Cultural Heritage (2008) 183.

23

Rosemarijn Hoefte, "Thrust Together: The Netherlands Relationship with its Caribbean Partners" Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs (1996) 36.

24

Thio Termorshuizen, "Indentured Labour in the Dutch Colonial Empire, 1800-1940" Dutch Colonialism, Migration and Cultural Heritage (2008) 265.

and China (but in much smaller numbers) were recruited to work in Suriname. By 1940, these Asian migrants comprised more than 50% of the population.²⁵ As the Dutch are responsible for bringing most of the Surinamese population (the African slaves and Asian indentured laborers) to the country with forced migration, it literally built a society that is culturally and historically defined by Dutch colonialism.²⁶ Most obviously this colonialism brought the Dutch language, education reform, and Christianity (mostly to the Creole population) to Suriname²⁷

As the multitude of ethnicities lived in Suriname, the three main ethnic groups, Creole, British Indian (now called Hindustani) and the Javanese all retained some of their separate cultures while a larger creolization of the three and the Dutch cultures occurred. In other words, it was the rise of Suriname's ethnic pluralism.²⁸ This pluralism has since been characterized with cultural and ethnic divides that later transformed itself into distinct color/class differences with unequal opportunities between the ethnicities and within them. When the Asian populations were brought to Suriname, they entered into a society that had gradually been taken over by the Creole population. As the white population declined at the outset of emancipation, this left social room for the Creole population to take control of these higher classed positions in society, particularly by making use of the colonial education system.²⁹ This

25

Termoshuizen 294-295.

26

Gert Oostindie "Migration and its Legacies in the Dutch Colonial World" Dutch Colonialism, Migration and Cultural Heritage (2008) 21.

27

Oostindie (2008) 8-9.

28

Marchetti 52-53

29

Oostindie (1996) 3.

education system consisted of compulsory Dutch education, inciting many Creoles to leave their plantations for the cities where there was better access to education. The cultural hegemony of the Dutch could be seen in the outlawing of Sranan Tongo, the language spoken by the slave descendants and eventually became a social indicator of low class and a lack of education.³⁰ Initially this class difference was shadowed by a color difference. Light-skinned Creoles, who resulted from relationships between African woman and European men, gained the second highest educational and professional levels after the remaining Dutch, in contrast with the darker Creoles who usually had lower social status and education.³¹ Eventually, the darker skinned Creoles used their access to education to gain more social capital, later becoming competition for the light skinned Creoles, though a history of white and light colored superiority continued into the 20th century.³² This upward social movement in addition to new Dutch citizenship granted to Creole Surinamese people in 1863, but denied to the Asian populations 1954,³³ all helped to put the light skinned Creole population in a strong political and economic position.

In 1942, Queen Wilhelmina delivered a radio speech that spoke of changing the relationship between the Netherlands and its colonies.³⁴ This was mainly due to

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Aonghas St-Hilaire, "Ethnicity, Assimilation and Nation in Plural Surinam" Ethnic and Racial Studies (2010) 1003.

31

St-Hilaire 1004.

32

St-Hilaire 1004.

33

Marchetti 53.

34

Hoefte (1996) 35.

mounting international pressures.³⁵ As a result of these actions and a military defeat by the inhabitants of the former Dutch East Indies, in 1954 the Netherlands created the Charter of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.³⁶ This established that Suriname, the Netherlands, and the Antilles were separate yet equal partners within the Kingdom of the Netherlands.³⁷ This autonomy gave the Creole people greater opportunity to travel to the Netherlands for further educational study or other personal reasons. This is why before 1970 it was mostly Creoles who migrated to the Netherlands.³⁸ It is interesting that as the Dutch granted more emancipation to the colonies, it also emphasized its cultural influence through the classroom, by focusing more on the Dutch with the purpose of fostering a sense of belonging to the nation and culture of the Netherlands.³⁹ This created an imagined idea of the Netherlands as a “paradise” that was not entirely true.⁴⁰ These factors also encourage Creole people to migrate to the Netherlands to further their education and eventually this population gained large social and political influence. They almost single-handedly ushered in independence for the country without the support of any other races, with 80% of the Javanese and 99.9% of the Hindustani opposed.⁴¹

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Hoefte (1996) 36.

36

Hoefte (1996) 36.

37

Hoefte (1996) 36.

38

Eric Mielants, 60.

39

Marchetti 70-72.

40

Marchetti 118.

41

In 1975, Suriname gained its official independence from the Netherlands, but this had not been the end to the political, social and economic relations between the two countries. Slowly their relationship deteriorated as political turmoil emerged in Suriname after a military coup d'état in 1980. This provoked the Netherlands to end its financial assistance program between the two countries.⁴² During the period of 1975 to 1980, thousands of Surinamese fled to the Netherlands for fear of the political and economic ramifications that independence would bring. This was possible because after the Dutch granted independence, it allowed visa-free travel between the two countries.⁴³ In total, 100,000 Surinamese migrated to the Netherlands. This was a diverse population of people that mirrored the ethnic and class proportions in Suriname.⁴⁴ This number has grown to 350,000 Surinamese living in the Netherlands today, almost equal to the number of people living in Suriname currently (400,000).⁴⁵ This migration is one of the many reasons that while Suriname may have gained its independence, it is still culturally, socially, politically, and economically entangled with its former colonizer through the connections of the Surinamese populations. The historical ramifications on the migration stories of my interviewees will be quite evident as I move on to analyze the life stories of my five women.

Hoefte (1996) 38.

42

Marchetti 53.

43

Oostindie Paradise Overseas: The Dutch Caribbean: Colonialism and its Transatlantic Legacies (2005) 118.

44

Blakely 474.

45

Oostindie (2008) 18.

Chapter I

Before Migration: Life in Suriname

A Happy Childhood

One common thread in the life stories of Constance, Conchita, Lillian, Joyce and Olga was that Suriname was home to their happy childhoods. A happy childhood is unique to both the class and race of my interviewees. Not all Surinamese women particularly of the lower classes and other races look back on their childhoods with happy recollections.⁴⁶ Memories of caring family, close neighborhoods, and loving friends help these women to look back fondly on their young lives. Lillian was more than enthusiastic to describe how great her childhood was to me:

Can you tell me about your childhood?

I had a nice childhood. My father died when I was nine years so I stayed with my younger sisters and my two brothers and my mother. So my mother she was working and she did her best to raise us up. And I think she succeeded in that. We were not rich, but I never went to bed with hunger. She was always with us. She offered her life for us. In Suriname you don't need a lot of things to be happy. We don't need fancy things. Our life was normal. We don't need money even as a child. If your mother gives you five cents you are a happy girl. So I had a very good youth if I could say that. Sometimes you hear that children were abused by their uncle or their father, but I didn't know these things and just what I say. That was life. Very, very easy.

From her story, we can find that her mother had a strong presence in her life. As matrifocal societies, it is not unusual to hear Caribbean stories that give praise to the mother figures in their lives as well as their older relatives.⁴⁷ While it is a common cultural narrative, it also has a dual purpose to perpetuate the cultural heritage to its communities no matter where they may be located. By keeping the praise of the

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Yvette J. Kopjin "By being on the move, we become more:" Race, Class, Gender and Sexualities in the (Post)colonial Memories of Three Generations of Javanese-Surinamese Women in the Netherlands (2013) Forthcoming

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Chamberlain (2009) 236.

mother in portraying life stories it tells those who hear it, the younger generation, how the mother figure should be treated in Caribbean culture.⁴⁸

The emphasis on needing little is also an attempt by Lillian to give a counter-narrative to colonialism as well as both a generational and class statement. By stating that in Suriname she didn't need money, she is contrasting the wealth of the colonial power of the Netherlands and stating that this was not necessary for both a successful and happy childhood. This satisfaction with little material goods may also be a heritage of slavery, where slaves were given little to nothing during the time of slavery in the country. As a result, other things like the necessity of family became more important than material goods and this can be clearly seen portrayed in Lillian's statement. This statement can also be seen as support for both Lillian's class and generation. During her time in Suriname, wealth was not a necessity and happiness of the lower class was easy to attain at least for her race.

Something particularly interesting with Lillian's quote is her emphasis on the fact that she had never been abused as a child. This may be spurred on by common stereotypes of abusive black male figures of stories that she has heard of abuse in families. By stating that she was not subjected to abuse, she is referencing the absence of her father and how this has been a positive experience because it saved her from potential sexual abuse.

- Conchita's description of a happy childhood also referenced the importance of family and the influence of class within her small village:

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- *Can you tell me about your childhood in Suriname?*
- My childhood was very nice. We lived in a small town where the American Alcoa Company looked for aluminum. Later on I discovered it was divided. There were all kinds of people, who earned their wage by hour, by day, per week, per month

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Chamberlain (2009) 235.

and so on. So we had several neighborhoods if you were a daily or weekly or monthly [worker]. The houses were upgraded the moment you upgraded your salary. I had a wonderful youth, it was best when I didn't know about the divided rule. It was wonderful and up until now all of my neighborhood friends from that particular village, if we meet each other there is a bonding because of the village.

Within this memory, Conchita details the strong class/color differences present within the Surinamese bauxite community at this time period and the American influence in creating this. She depicts a village where inhabitants are separated based on the wealth of the family, a situation that could have easily been very contentious and it seems that her childhood naiveté helped her to enjoy this situation more. As she says it was “best” when she did not know of these separations, it can only mean that once these class/color differences became apparent, the situation changed. And yet, despite these strong class and racial divides, she has been able to look back fondly on the experience. This may be a result of the strong communal bonds between this neighborhood's former inhabitants. As she states, this neighborhood created such strong bonds that it is still present till that moment. Mary Chamberlain's “Identity and Kinship,” she describes the importance of neighborhood bonds finding that in many communities in the Caribbean, the community becomes akin to family to the individuals. This eventually leads to strong ties that are often recreated in other countries or kept strong through transnational ties.⁴⁹

Olga's happy childhood took place in two countries. Descended from a family of migrators, she also had a mixed Caribbean childhood that was influenced by her Surinamese, French Guianese, and English Guyanese roots:

Can you tell me about your childhood in Suriname?

I was born in French Guiana by a French Guianese mother and English Guyanese father. After that I was raised up in Suriname. I went to primary school in Suriname on the border of French Guiana. When my dad and my mother divorced, my mother

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Chamberlain (2009) 236.

went again to French Guiana and I grew up in French Guiana and Suriname. After my primary school, I went to high school in Moengo. Moengo is another district close to Albina, a village in [the Eastern part of] Suriname. All of my sisters and brothers were in French Guiana. I was the only one who grew up in Suriname. Cause my father was working in Suriname. I was raised by my grandmother.

Caribbean society is known for its familial migratory patterns (Chamberlain 2004), as Olga's history proves that she also belongs to a family that has a tradition of frequent migrations. As her English Guyanese grandmother and father moved to French Guiana and later to Suriname, Olga continued this pattern when she migrated to the Netherlands. As referenced earlier, this family's migration pattern is emblematic of a greater historical Caribbean tradition of migrating within and out of the Caribbean for better opportunities.⁵⁰ This pattern included separating yourself from family members and at times utilizing other members of the family for support in these decisions. The fact that Olga's grandmother raised her is exemplary of "child sifting," the pattern of extended relatives co-parenting or fostering children.⁵¹ Olga's grandmother helped to support her father's decision to migrate to Suriname by raising her and as a result it must have made migrating easier for him.

Olga's story also touches upon the sensitive topic of divorce and separation, but instead of hampering on how this may have affected her childhood, she instead focuses on her journey from French Guiana to Suriname and how this was possible. Again, this may be her attempt at continuing a Caribbean cultural template, which refers to "patterns of response" that can be stereotyped in the ways values are being explained.⁵² This particular template stresses the importance of the migration process

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Gert Oostindie (2005) 94.

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Chamberlain (2009) 236.

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Chamberlain (2009) 233

and the possibilities it brings opposed to the negative effects it may have on the family.⁵³ And even with the separation from her mother and siblings she agrees that she was spoiled during her upbringing by her grandmother and father.

From Village Life to City Life

While three of the women spent their childhoods and young adult lives in Paramaribo, Olga and Conchita chose to travel from their smaller villages to the capital city for study and more opportunities. Inevitably when moving from a rural or semi-rural area to the urban capital, changes are bound to be observed. One of the changes Conchita observed was a very obvious separation of ethnicities that was not observable in village life:

What was the relationship between the other ethnicities in Suriname?

For myself, in the village that I was born, there was no difference. Because we did everything together and those who were Muslims, I only knew they were Muslims when they had their feasts. Then they invite us for the Sugar feasts. Then we go there and we eat a lot and then we go back home.

Do you think there is more of a separation between the ethnicities in the cities than in the villages?

Yes, because in the village I didn't see it, I didn't recognize it, I didn't know about it. But in the city, you hear on the radio they have their special radio programs, start building huge, huge temples and mosques. They celebrate their feasts very (openly).

Something particularly telling about this statement is the discussion of “it” by Conchita. One on hand she uses this statement to provide a reassurance of how close the individuals of her class in her home village were and to depict the stronger separations present within the cities; however her use of the word “it” displays that she also understands that an ethnic separation was present within her village. As we have discovered that Conchita's village was ethnically segregated it may have been a result of the lower social maneuverability individuals possess to openly express their beliefs in villages opposed to cities. This may be due to prejudices and fear or from

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Chamberlain (2009) 233-234.

class challenges. Gert Oostindie writes that in the Dutch Caribbean, class is extremely important for social integration and for that reason culture and class are intrinsically linked.⁵⁴

· Conchita's claim that she has not seen differences within the people of the town and even with her students as school may also be an attempt to give a counter-narrative to the belief that Suriname is strongly separated by ethnic and religious lines as it is a plural society.⁵⁵ By stating that these differences, mainly religious, were barely observable, she is creating a peaceful picture of Suriname where religious divides are nonexistent. This counter-narrative is one that I have heard from other individuals and will be addressed during the greater discussion on ethnic relations in Suriname.

· *Ethnic Relations in a Plural Society*

It would be worrisome to hold any discussion on the sense of Self of Surinamese people and to disregard the relationship between the ethnicities in the country as ethnic relationships are very important points of identification within its plural society. As demonstrated by Conchita's story, ethnic relationships play a large role in Surinamese life. Growing up in a multi-ethnic society almost equally inhabited by individuals of Asian and African descent, all of the women interviewed had strong opinions on the relationship between the ethnic groups in the country. Ranging from peaceful to troublesome, the opinions on this topic are vast and in between. I will first examine the discussion of how troublesome the relationship is presented by Lillian:

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Gert Oostindie Postcolonial Netherlands (2010) 117.

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Oostindie (1996) 7.

And then what they do is also to talk bad thing about each other. The black man and the Hindustani. I'm going to tell you a nice story. My brother who died was the chief of the police. He was the most important one besides the head of the police. And then they hired one of them (white Dutch) to give some studies in Suriname. And then he, that white guy, he went to my brother and said, "You know, I notice you black ones, you are the most in this court but you get the lowest jobs." And then he goes to the head and said, "You know, you Hindustani, you are not so much in this court." And then he said to talk bad about each other. And here it is also. They come and they say, "You know black people, they always have a big mouth. But you guys, you are so quiet." This is what the white people are saying in Suriname and here. Even in your country they try to bring the fighting.

· *Do the Hindustani and Creole say mean things about each other? Or is it the white Dutch that say it first?*

· Nowadays, if the white man told us, we would tell him just like it is. But you see the Hindustani, he was (saying passively), "Yes, yes." And this, that. The white man say to the Hindustani, "I like you people, you are so quiet. But the black one always has big mouth! And they so lazy!" And they say it to bring division. And, it is still there.

As evidenced by Lillian's story, she finds that race relations in Suriname are troublesome, filled with stereotyped images of Creoles and a constant Dutch instigator. For decades academics studying the region of Suriname have emphasized its plural nature or the fact that it is populated by multiple ethnicities and religions that live together in one place under a single political unit yet do not mingle.⁵⁶ This separation finds itself rooted in colonialism.⁵⁷ Many have believed that the pluralism of Suriname lends itself to increased ethnic strife.⁵⁸ This story given by Lillian on the relationship between the main ethnic groups, the Hindustanis and the Creoles, is a description of the greater ethnic tension academic believe have been occurring in the country since its early beginnings as a slave state. What is interesting about her story is that it also depicts the former colonizer, the Dutch, as the perpetrator of this separation. This is an echo of past colonial practice where the Dutch gave preferential

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Gert Oostindie Study of Ethnicity in the Dutch Caribbean 217.

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Kopijn (2013) Forthcoming.

58

Oostindie (1996) 7.

treatment to certain ethnic groups in order to keep the populations separate and prevent solidarity.⁵⁹ This is an attempt by Lillian to show the dangers of colonialism and its continued negative effect on the country.

This “nice story” that Lillian gave to me is also not an experience of her own but one of her brother’s. Mary Chamberlain has found in her studies of the Caribbean population, that many people present “family narratives,” or stories and memories past down to members of families that depict a greater family history.⁶⁰ While our interview may have been targeted toward her experiences, she could not help but give me a story about her brother that illustrated her point. This is yet another characteristic of the strong cultural and narrative binds between family members of the Caribbean.

While this racial separation may have been seen as troublesome to Lillian, Constance could not help but see a different outcome to the relationship:

How do the ethnicities relate to each other in Suriname?

In Suriname there was not a tension, but a belittling of the groups towards each other. “You cooli you,” the black man is saying to the Hindustani. But in a way, they were separate and still there was no tension. And they also had times where they were together and I think Suriname now has more togetherness than when I lived there.

Constance has found a different way to interpret the relationship of the Surinamese ethnic separation. For her, it may have had a belittling characteristic but it was never a tension filled relationship with vast consequences for the potential stabilization of the country as some academics fear. It may be surprising that someone who admits that belittling occurs but this does not create tension, but this may be characteristic of the

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Rosemarijn Hoefte, Control and Resistance: Indentured Labor in Suriname (1987) 4.

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Mary Chamberlain Narratives of Exile and Return (1997) 65.

of “unity in diversity.” A belief that even with the strong separations of culture, race, religion and ethnic background, the country can still unite as one. This has been lauded by many as one of the main reasons that “serious ethnic tension” did not occur in the country when it had all the potential to do so.⁶¹ For this reason, it may be that Constance is giving a description of race relations that has been present within the Surinamese cultural template for generations.⁶²

Similar to this positive view on the situation, three of the women, Olga, Joyce and Conchita gave a peaceful view of the ethnic relationships in Suriname. In their joint interview, Olga and Joyce strongly gave a similar opinion. Stating that there were no troubles until the year 1980 and giving this enthusiastic saying:

Olga: The Mosque...
Joyce: is next to the synagogue

This is a continuation of the “unity in diversity” belief present in the Surinamese cultural archive, that despite its difference everyone lived peacefully within the country. I must also note my phrasing of this question: *How did everyone in the country get along? Did they fight at all?* This may have elicited biased answers as I used the word “fight” which can construe a very powerful image that I did not intend. It is also important to recognize the reference to 1980, which is meant to allude to the military coup d’état when the economic and social structures of the country began deteriorating.

The “mosque is next to the synagogue” statement can clearly be seen as a common reference for describing race relations in the country as demonstrated by the

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Oostindie (2010) 117.

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Chamberlain (2009) 233.

fact that Joyce could finish the statement for Olga and its repeated use from Conchita when I interviewed her. The use of this phrase clearly demonstrates that these women would like me to know that even despite the vast differences of the people, they can still be united.

Relationship with the Netherlands and its Colonial Influence

As a colonial possession, Suriname has been subject to strong cultural influences from the Netherlands. Sabrina Marchetti refers to this relationship as “netherlandisation” a process of “colonial acculturation,” where the Netherlands imposed their ideas and culture onto the Surinamese in order to create a sense of belonging.⁶³ The impact of this relationship had been a prominent theme within my interviews for this research. All of my interviewees were more than willing to describe where they first learned about the Netherlands and some go as far as to speak on how this relationship has shaped their Dutch national identity. All of my interviewees stated that they learned about the Netherlands at school. Joyce and Olga spoke quite vividly about this and the influence of the colonial heritage in their interview:

- *Where did you first learn about the Netherlands in Suriname?*
- Olga: As you know, Suriname was a colony of the Netherlands. We learned everything about it.
- Joyce: Everything was in Dutch. The books, everything.
- Olga: The books, just the same.
- Joyce: What they use here in the schools in Holland we were using it in Suriname. I can remember in the Dutch language reading books, all stories, drawings were as if we were in Holland. With snow and everything. With trees that were growing on the water. We saw also the ditches. The ditches were covered with ice and the children were skating (laugh).
- Olga: Everything was like Holland.
- Joyce: It was so strange. In Suriname, a tropical country, you are learning about snow and ice, all these trees and the ditches.
- Olga: And also the geography, we learned all the provinces of the Netherlands. We learned everything of the Netherlands. So when we came here it was not a big surprise because we learned everything already.

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Marchetti 70.

· Joyce: And everything was in Dutch.
· Olga: Everything was in Dutch because we were a colony of the Netherlands.
Joyce: And at home, in general we were not allowed to speak the Suriname language.

· We were not allowed. If we were speaking Suriname they told you, “Don’t do like a nigger.” (laugh). Yes, “Don’t talk like a nigger.” Because, they called the Suriname language Negro English.

· Here we see the large impression colonialism had on the lives of Olga and Joyce. School taught them everything about the Netherlands; enough so that they felt when they finally migrated to the Netherlands they knew everything that was necessary. In a way, this show colonial pride, as one is so knowledgeable about their mother country they can easily conform to the life there. This comment also refers to their feelings of national belonging to the Netherlands, as school taught them that they belonged to the Dutch kingdom and as a result thought they would be received as Dutch citizens within the Netherlands.⁶⁴

· The narrative that Joyce and Olga gave also focuses heavily on the influence of language. Historically, the Netherlands used its influence to push culturally Surinamese practices, especially the Surinamese language Sranan Tongo, out of common usage to be replaced with what the colonizers found to be acceptable behavior or in this case the acceptable language.⁶⁵ And the emphasis on “nigger” and not wanting to talk or in essence become one, provides a basis for a cultural hierarchy that colonialism brought. As the acceptable Dutch behavior, use of the Dutch language, became what was

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Kopijn (2013) Forthcoming

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Oostindie (2008) 8-9.

proper, and what was in the past a common Surinamese tradition had at that period been degraded.

- Conchita gave a similar account of this story and even added that the history of her homeland, Suriname was not given much attention:

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- *Where did you learn about the Netherlands?*
- It was in school. All the teaching was in Dutch and the history of Holland and the geography, we learned most of that. We learned something very small about Suriname.
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- This experience detailed by Conchita demonstrates that in colonial Suriname, the Netherlands always took priority in education.

Suriname was paid little attention to. This seems to be in agreement with the experiences given by Joyce and Olga, that what was Surinamese was either pushed to the background in favor of what the Dutch desired.

- These experiences exemplify the profound influence of the colonial relationship on both culture and education, but it also had a lasting impact on national identity and belonging. As Joyce and Olga spoke about their relationship with the Netherlands, they mentioned how they saw themselves as Dutch people:

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- Joyce: And the more foreign people were here, well in fact we are not foreign people. We were Dutch.
- Olga: Yes, we were Dutch people.
- Joyce: We had the Netherlands nationality. But the problem was that most Dutch people didn't have a clue about what country Suriname was.
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- Their reaction to their reception will be discussed later within the paper, but the idea that they were "Dutch people" with the "Netherlands nationality," shows that for both Olga and Joyce the influence of Dutch colonialism affected the creation of their national identity. Constance had similar feelings as she stated she felt no different from the Dutch in Suriname. For these women they were not Surinamese, they were Dutch and some might

say rightfully so as Suriname had yet to gain its independence from the Netherlands at this time. In this way, Dutch colonialism had a strong impact upon the identity formation of its colonized people and their national loyalties. Gert Oostindie found that more people in Suriname than the other Caribbean colonies align their national identity with the Netherlands, especially the Creole population.⁶⁶ This will be very important later in the paper, as we will come to find that many of the women had trouble understanding why the native Dutch did not recognize them as fellow Dutch citizens.

· Similar to the experience of Olga and Joyce, Lillian learned all about the Netherlands in school but her loyalties did not necessarily lie with her colonizers. Instead, she used her story to state that she was better off than her contemporaries living in the Netherlands. Without even being prompted, Lillian gave me this story:

· When I was in school in Suriname, we had white teachers. I didn't have dark [teachers]. [Only] a few, but most of them were white men. Because they (get) good money for the teaching. So all of them were white men. When I was at the school, they gave me the scholarship for one year. I notice that the white girls, they didn't know! And then they [are] watching me and they say, because I was the oldest, they were 19, 20, "Hey Lillian. Where did you learn all these things?" I say, "In my country." They don't know anything about history. We have to learn everything about history. Netherlands history! Everyday we had to. So we knew everything. What they had to learn, I knew already. So they [are] watching me and say, "Oh, we didn't know. How come I don't know and you know?" And I said, "I don't know."

· Here Lillian describes how important Dutch history was to her education in Suriname similar to the story given by Joyce and Olga. The difference here is that Lillian displays how vital it was in Suriname by comparing her knowledge with that of native Dutch students. Her knowledge of her fellow's students' home country was by far better in her opinion than theirs. Not only does this exemplify the idea that the colonial relationship

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Oostindie (2005) 168.

dominated the educational lives of the Surinamese, it also shows that this was far more important for them than it was for the native Dutch.

· Lillian is also making use of this example to subvert the idea that the white Dutch colonizers were more knowledgeable and superior to the “dark” Surinamese colonized people. As historically shown, during slavery the Dutch tried to keep knowledge out of the hands from its slaves and as a result stereotypes of unknowledgeable blacks became common.⁶⁷ Lillian is using her experiences to prove that not only is this not true, but that the colonized “dark” people have even surpassed their colonizer oppressors in terms of knowledge.

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· *Conclusion*

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· It is difficult to make conclusions about five very different women, but there are major themes that these life stories make apparent about life in colonized Suriname. All of these women enjoyed their time there despite the class and ethnic divides present in the country. The influence of family and neighborhoods was vital in creating a peaceful and enjoyable life for these women in Suriname; however the colonial influence is not difficult to see in the creation of these strong families as well as the ethnic, racial and class divides. Colonialism had an immeasurable impact upon these women’s lives in Suriname. From their school time lessons, to the formation of their national identity, feeling of belonging and the rejection of traditionally Surinamese culture, tenets of Dutch colonialism can be found throughout all these actions and many of their beliefs. In the next two chapters, I will explore

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Essed 43.

how these beliefs were tested during migration and integration and how perceptions and identities may have been changed in the process.

Chapter Two

Migration: Journey to the Motherland

Motivations

The decision to migrate is one that has profound effects on individuals, families, communities and, if in large enough numbers, entire societies. Every migration story is unique as well as the motivations behind that initial journey yet they all have similar commonalities as they are linked with a shared culture and history. All of my women had their own motivations for first moving to the Netherlands and I will describe those here.

Joyce was the first woman to migrate to the Netherlands in 1964, but it seemed that her motivations were similar to Olga's who arrived in 1969. Both women's decisions to migrate were focused on attaining higher educational levels:

Was an easy decision to make personally, to come to Holland in the first place since everyone else was coming for school?

Olga: No, it was not so difficult because you came here to graduate. And to study and to be.

It was expected of most people?

Olga: Yeah.

Joyce: But we had friends and family already here. So we didn't come here on our own, because we didn't know anybody, no. There were friends and other family members already here. So we stayed close to each other. Like you have friends here that you know and you come here to do your thing... The way we came to Holland it was very common that when we did college in Suriname that you went to the Motherland for further study. It was normal.

As can be seen from their experiences, during this time period, migration for school was a very common motivation for leaving Suriname and moving to the Netherlands, either permanently or temporarily for the Creole middle class that had access to schooling in the Motherland.⁶⁸ Joyce and Olga's motivations are quite in line

for their time period as many Creole people of the middle classes went to the Netherlands to study during the 1950's and 1960's.⁶⁹

The experience of Joyce was also coupled with the positive influence of family and their help with migration. Historically, family has been at the center of Caribbean chain migration, as they help support each other to leave and receive them when they do arrive.⁷⁰ Conchita family is also important for her migration story. With most of her siblings already in the Netherlands it seemed like a natural choice for her:

Can you tell me about the day you decided to move here?

That was very easy because I had three brothers and one sister here. They said, just come over it is nice here. So I just came here.

Just as Joyce's decision to move was easier as her friends and family had precipitated the journey, it was the same case for Conchita, making it much easier to choose migration. As Constance was only 17 when she moved to the Netherlands, her parents ultimately decided to move to the Netherlands:

Do you remember the day that your parents told you that you were moving to Holland? Do you remember what their motivation was to come here?

That it would be better to study for the children. I think my mom always wanted to come to Holland, perhaps since I was four or five years. I remember my mom bringing it up. But I was happy there in Suriname, so I didn't have the motivation or the feeling to go. I wasn't happy when they told us 'cause [by then] my husband was already my boyfriend. I had to leave him behind and it was not nice.

For Constance, whose parents travelled to the Netherlands in 1970, it seems that they were of the population of individuals who saw that the Netherlands would grant them more opportunities and as a result wanted to travel to what Oostindie calls their "paradise overseas."⁷¹ An imagine Netherland that was purposefully created by the

van Amersfoort and van Niekerk 334.

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Oostindie (2005) 140-142.

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Chamberlain (2009) 244.

71

Oostindie (2005) 94.

Dutch in colonial Suriname.⁷² In contrast, this decision was difficult for Constance, as she had to make sacrifices and leave people behind that she cared about. This is a unique story in my group of interviewees as she was the only one who felt she made sacrifices in order to migrate to the Netherlands; she was also the only person unwilling to initially move.

Lillian's story was a unique case among my women; she came to the Netherlands without the intent to stay for longer than a vacation. Instead, she travelled to stay with her close friends in Holland for no longer than a month, but her stay in turn lasted for decades:

I went to Breda and I had a nice time. And then, when it was time to leave they said, "Why do you leave so quick? You have no children. Stay awhile!" I said, "Oh yes, I can stay." "We have a big house here. Stay awhile." "I said, yes I'll stay." And from that time I am now for 36 years.

As she later mentioned, it was the 1970's and in that time everyone wanted to come to Holland.⁷³ The surprising thing about her account is the ease in which she describes the decision to stay. It may be interesting to note that when she came in 1977, it was three years before the Netherlands would cut off visa-free travel from Suriname as well as the beginning of political and economic strife.⁷⁴ She did not mention how these factors may have influenced her decision-making process, but we can be sure that she was at least aware of these issues.

The Journey to a New Country

72
Kopijn (2013) Forthcoming.

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Oostindie (2008) 18.

74
Oostindie (2005)118.

As I mentioned earlier, all migration stories are unique yet have commonalities. From my experience interviewing these women, I have learned that these stories can be filled with an incalculable number of feelings including sadness, happiness, and excitement joined with tears, laughter and smiles. From flights that last a few hours to 24, and perhaps even a three weeklong journey by boat, all of these women had different stories about their experience reaching Holland for the first time. All are memorable experiences and significant for each woman's life.

Joyce's 24-hour cheap flight by propeller plane allowed her to reunite with her boyfriend and two friends that were like family. Similarly, Conchita arrived only to be met by her brother and sister. Interestingly enough, both Conchita and Joyce were met with laughter from their family when they arrived wearing gloves. Again, this story reveals the important role family serves in the migration process.

Lillian remembers her experience as "nice" while Olga can't forget how cold it was when she first arrived in September with 12 other nurses to attend school. The longest trip by far, was Constance's three-week boat trip to the Netherlands:

And then we came here on the boat on the 17th of August, after three weeks. Before that we went to Curacao and Jamaica and all the Caribbean places. Then we came here and it was a little cold for us. We came here in Amsterdam at the back of Centraal Station. It was like "Wow, everything." My father and mother went to Holland before and I think they liked it but I was like, "Oh my God. What is going to happen here?" I know, [in] the evening when the boat took off from Suriname, I stayed there and I had tears in my eyes. The only thing I knew was the light through the tears and I thought; "Now I have to go."

Unlike the other women interviewed, Constance had mixed emotions about arriving in the Netherlands, much to do with the unhappiness she felt over leaving her home in Suriname. She also felt the uncertainty of living in an entirely new place that none of the other women echoed. Other than these two unique characteristics about her story what is particularly interesting is that her boat travelled to "Curacao and Jamaica and all the Caribbean places." This is exemplary of both the historical

migration within the Caribbean as well as the new orientation of Caribbean migration toward Europe; especially the countries that still kept their borders open to Caribbean people.⁷⁵ This boat went to other Caribbean countries possibly dropping people off and most definitely gaining more along the way until it ultimately reached its destination of Europe.

(Un)Realized Expectations

Most of the women I interviewed had many expectations of the Netherlands before moving to Holland. Lillian is the exception, as she had not thought much about what her life would be like before her planned “vacation” to Holland. Overall, most of the women were highly influenced by what they were taught in school. Here we see the influence of “the paradise overseas” myth again and how this creates an imagine view of the Netherlands.⁷⁶ As Constance stated:

Did you have any expectations for what Holland would be like?

When I saw the pictures when I was little. I was in a Catholic school so we had all of the books from Holland. You know when you are out of the city, and you see where the farmers live. You see the farmer’s yard and a lot of trees, then another farmer’s house. That was my imagined Holland. I never thought about a big city. With everything busy.

For Constance, her imagined Holland turned out to be entirely different from the Holland she found herself living in. As Mary Chamberlain experienced in her work with migrants from Barbados this is not an uncommon experience. Many migrants find themselves surprised when they arrive in their Mother Country to learn that their expectations for the country cannot be fulfilled, as Mary Chamberlain

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Chamberlain (1997) 5-6.

76

Kopijn (2013) Forthcoming.

showed in her research with migrants to Britain from Barbados.⁷⁷ Many of the other women felt similar when they arrived, surprised that the image of the Netherlands they saw in school did not match what they had encountered. Joyce and Olga complained that the Netherlands was entirely different than what they learned in school. For example, the buildings were different and they never saw pictures of this. On the other hand, Conchita felt her expectations were fulfilled. She learned of snow, hail, skaters and even winter jackets. When she migrated to Holland she finally had the opportunity to see this.

Lillian was entirely opposed to following what she believed was the common stereotype of Holland as a nice place that was better, even superior. In her view, she did not have to think anything of it because she always planned to live her life in Suriname:

After learning all of this stuff about the Netherlands, what did you think about it? I didn't think about nothing. Because I wasn't planning to come. When my friends say, "You come over? You'll have a nice time." And then they say, "In the Netherlands, you eat big meat." Because in Suriname we were not rich so we ate small, small meat. [...] So I was not somebody that thought, "Oh Holland! Oh the Netherlands!" No! They told me and I was alone, I had no children I went to school. When they told me, I had my money, I saved my money. We didn't need a lot of things. [...] I say, "Ok, I come. I come with you to Holland." So I was not thinking about nothing. And when I came I saw everything was nice. It was nice. I came on the 1st of September. Everything was nice but it is not that I was surprised and said, oh this country is nice. It is everything. It is good. No, I was not that kind. Because it was not my dream. I came because my friends said.

From Lillian's response, it can be seen that she refused to be seen as the stereotypical migrant who moved to the Netherlands to go to her "paradise overseas."⁷⁸ In this sense, she refused to see the myth of the "paradise" and is stressing the agency she had in deciding her fate. Instead, she wanted to make sure that I knew the Netherlands

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Chamberlain (1997) 71-72.

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Oostindie (2005) 94.

was never her “everything.” Instead, she wanted me to believe that the decision to move to the Netherlands was not a choice she made for herself. Lillian’s statement can also be seen as one that subverts the supremacy of the colonizer mentality. For her just because you can get “big meat” in the Netherlands didn’t mean it was better. She was satisfied for the little that Suriname provided because it was enough, everything else was just extravagance. She was compelled to make sure that I understood that Suriname always had enough for her and that the stereotypical idea that the Netherlands, her colonizer, is better was not to be believed in her case.

First Impressions

Along with expectations, a discussion of these women’s first impressions can be valuable to understand how truly different the Netherlands may or may not have been compared to Suriname. Joyce, Olga and Conchita were quite surprised with how similar everything looked and Constance was not prepared for how busy everything was or how much travelling was done in the Netherlands. Alternatively, Lillian thought everything was nice and did not find herself surprised by much. The most interesting account came from Joyce and Olga who both were shocked by the behavior and lack of knowledge of the white population. Without even being prompted Joyce launched into a description of how surprised they were by the lack of knowledge about Suriname:

We had the Netherlands nationality. But the problem was that most Dutch people didn’t have a clue about what country Suriname was or it was. Our culture, they never heard of it. Nobody taught them in school. [...] So it was an eye opener for us.

This quote exemplifies how shocked Joyce and Olga were to discover that the Dutch knew nothing of their country. Considering that their schooling focused so heavily on the Netherlands and they recognized themselves Dutch nationals, it is easy to

understand how they could have been shocked to realize that their fellow Dutch people did not recognize their country, heritage or identity as Dutch people. I believe that this realization is another example of how in Dutch colonialism the Netherlands was always prioritized over its colonies. Not surprising considering the relationship; however for the Dutch people to not even be aware of its colonies speaks to how far removed Suriname was in the Dutch collective consciousness and memory.

Another first impression, Joyce felt compelled to tell me was her surprise at seeing uneducated white men. From her experience in Suriname, she never fathomed that white men could be uneducated. As mentioned earlier by Lillian, many of the teachers in Suriname were white Dutch men and this was the only experience Lillian had with them, so she was ultimately shocked to see white men as garbage men. She learned that, "White does not mean educated." The shock that Joyce felt was from the realization that the colonial image of the educated and superior white colonizer that she saw portrayed to her in school and I trust elsewhere was not true. In the Netherlands, color and class did not overlap, unlike what these women previously were taught and experienced.

Similarly, Olga felt her colonial image of the Dutch dashed as she moved to the Netherlands. She was shocked to see the bathing habits of the Dutch and how unclean they were:

What surprised me when I came here; in Suriname you think all the white people are so proper and so clean. But when you come here they are so nasty. They are not brushing their teeth. They are not showering, cleaning their clothes, wearing the same jeans throughout the whole week.

This statement not only describes the shock of seeing the colonial image ruined, it also serves to subvert old colonial stereotypes of the whites as superior. In this example, Olga is trying to describe how the Dutch may have thought they were

superior but in reality they were not because they could not even take care of themselves. In this way, she is trying to dispel old colonial images of the Dutch just as her own image was dispelled in the past.

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· *Remigration*

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· One common characteristic found in most of the life stories I gathered was remigration. Three of my interviewees, Olga, Conchita and Constance, had already returned to Suriname, after their first move to the Netherlands. Eventually all re-migrated to Holland but many plan to return in the future and Lillian looks forward to moving back as soon as possible. The reasons vary for migrating back but underlying all of them is a love for Suriname. Olga who returned to Suriname in 1973, traveled back to Suriname when her schooling was over to be with her boyfriend who she eventually married and had two children with. Conchita political desires compelled her to return in 1980, during the political instability of Suriname, hoping to make a change. Constance first traveled to Curacao before returning to Suriname. Her motivation to return was because of the longing she felt for Suriname, a country she never wanted to leave, as well as her boyfriend and friends, in combination with a desire to move away from her parents.

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· Their motivations for returning to the Netherlands are just as diverse as their initial reasons to leave that may represent common reasons among the Surinamese migrants for return. For Conchita, the failure of her political movement convinced her to return in 1986. Historically, at that moment Suriname was politically unstable making it very dangerous for many to stay in the country. In Constance's case, family pressure convinced her to return in 1975, as her parents asked her to return to Holland and her boyfriend,

who later became her husband, wished to move to Holland to attend school.

Family influenced Olga's decision to return as well; however it was the dissolution of her marriage that spurred her to return in 1979.

· The overall consensus regarding the return trip was that it was relatively easy to return to the Netherlands as they all had previous experience living in the country. For Constance and Conchita, they relied on their families for support in returning and this must have made the situation easier. While this return may have been made with ease, it was not without its sacrifices. Constance again had to leave her beloved Suriname, where she still hopes to return until this day. In Olga's case, she was forced to leave her two children behind in Suriname. Obviously, a difficult decision, but she was confident that her children would be well taken care of by their relatives. Here Olga describes how hard she worked to establish herself in the Netherlands:

· I left them (her children) with their father's mother, their grandmother. I came to the Netherlands and I worked *night* and *day* and I bought a house and they came here on the 1st of July in 1980. I came in September again and in October I looked for work and I started in 1 December. Exactly a year.

· Pounding her fists the entire time she gave this account, it was easy to see the determination she had to get her children back. It makes one question how she could have left them behind at all. The reason she felt she could leave her children behind was because she knew they would be in the hands of a capable family member, their grandmother. Again, this is an example of "child shifting," passing on care for a child onto other members of the family.⁷⁹ As her grandmother also raised Olga so that her father could migrate and work in Suriname, she also allowed her children to be raised in a similar way for a

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Chamberlain (2009) 243-244.

similar purpose. This can be seen as what Mary Chamberlain calls the “family ethos,” which can include a preferred family method for migration.⁸⁰ It is obvious that child shifting and migrating as a result of divorce and to better oneself is of Olga’s family ethos, as her father had a similar life story. This may also contribute to the ease in making the decision to return that Olga conveyed. The stories of these women, regardless of their reasons to return to Suriname and re-migrate to the Netherlands, are some of the thousands of Caribbean people that practice migration and re-migration patterns.⁸¹

· *Conclusion*

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· The process of migration has had affected all of these women in different ways. As I have discussed, it forced some of them question their colonial loyalties and rethink their national identity while for others it called others to use anti-colonial counter-narratives to demonstrate their self-assertiveness. The journey from one place to another, with differing societies is not an easy one, and collectively these stories depict the multitude of emotions surrounding this change from the suffering to the joy. Emotions coupled with motivations that compel some to go back but ultimately to return, changing perceptions and identities along the way. In the next chapter, I will analyze how this has affected their process of integration and self-belonging.

Chapter Three

After Migration: Life in the Netherlands

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Chamberlain (1996) 51.

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Chamberlain (2009) 233-234.

School Time Troubles

Adjusting to life in the Netherlands meant entering a normal daily routine for my interviewees and for many of them that meant entering the Dutch school system. At one point or another, Constance, Lillian, Joyce and Olga were all attending school in the Netherlands. No matter the decade, these women all faced their own unique troubles with school. I already spoke of Olga's trouble with her classmates' bathing habits in the late 1960's and early 1970's. Lillian who attended school in the 1980's struggled with reconciling the fact that she had to attend school at all. For Lillian, the decision to attend school was not of her own making. She had already completed school in Suriname and worked as a teacher for years, but she discovered that the Dutch did not recognize her qualifications. If she wanted to teach again in the Netherlands she would have to attend an extra year of school and she did. In our interview, she explained how frustrated she was that everything Surinamese was not as recognized by the Dutch.

As I described earlier, she amazed her classmates when she displayed that she already knew all of the information taught during class. This in addition to her frustration with having to attend school again is very informative. It shows that Lillian not only believes that the Surinamese are more knowledgeable than their Dutch contemporaries, but that the Dutch are also misguided to think that just because they are Surinamese people that they have an inferior education. Again, Lillian is subverting the colonial discourse of Dutch superiority and Surinamese inferiority.

Joyce continued to subvert this discourse with the description of her own troubles with school in the mid 1960's. While Joyce assured me that she spoke ABN Dutch, which she considers similar to "Oxford English" or proper English, she realized that her school friends and her teachers were not speaking ABN Dutch. In

class, she felt as though she was hearing another language and was forced to study by herself, yet she still graduated. Again, in this example the colonial discourse is subverted as the colonized Surinamese are portrayed as not inferior but instead superior as they have mastered the language of their colonizer, something her Dutch contemporaries and even her teacher could not do.

Constance had a similar language experience in school, which contributed to her feelings as an outsider. Without even being prompted, Constance describes how being the only black student in school was very difficult for her:

Within a week we were going to school in Arnhem...I went to school and the *coldness!* Not the temperature, the atmosphere. When I was in Suriname I had a lot of friends and I did everything for class. And then I came here and I was the only black person in the school. That was very heavy for me.

· *How was your relationship with your classmates in Holland?*

You know we talked together but there was no click. They want to know everything then they asked me if you could go by car from Suriname to the Antilles. They didn't know anything.

Here, Constance is reiterating the surprise that many of the other women felt at the lack of knowledge about Suriname; however she also includes an account of how difficult life as the only black student was for her. As she arrived in 1970, Surinamese people had already been living in the Netherlands for years, but not in the mass numbers of the late 1970's.⁸² As the only black student in the school she felt like an outsider among people who did not know of her country or her culture and unsurprisingly, this was difficult for her. Later, she mentioned that she felt some of her teachers treated her differently because of her Surinamese background and this must have contributed to her feelings as an outsider as well.

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· *Difficulties in the Workplace*
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van Amersfoort and van Niekerk 334.

· While attending school was one component of adjusting to life in the Netherlands, finding a job and starting work was another. Most of the women found it easy to find a job, many using connections through family and friends to locate their professional opportunities in the Netherlands. Some of these women had some struggles with their native Dutch colleagues while others felt no such thing. Olga and Joyce found themselves in the former position. Both agreed that obtaining a job in their time period (the late 1970's and late 1960's respectively) was relatively easy and neither made any mention of difficulty at the workplace. The other women, Lillian, Conchita and Constance, were not as lucky.

· Lillian's first job in the Netherlands was a cleaning job in a courthouse that she did while raising her family and attending school. Without even being prompted she gave me details of the discrimination she faced while working with Dutch women for the first time:

· Oh my goodness. The ladies there were non-educated. Only cleaning [and] no education. But they knew how to discriminate. Oh my goodness. Every dirty job, they didn't want to do. They gave it to me. Yes, because I was cleaning also. They were uneducated white women. I was the only dark one. And every dirty work they didn't want. Because they hire me to sweep the office and to empty the dust pan, and to clean the ash tray. And then suddenly one day, I was there and one gave me a broom and said I have to go outside and clean the steps. The steps were not my job. And so, every time they gave me other jobs to do that I was not hired for [...] And, yeah that was a couple of months [then] I left the job.

· From this excerpt, we find that Lillian felt upset that uneducated white Dutch women were forcing her to do dirty work. It can be clearly seen that she was not happy to be forced to perform work that she felt was inferior to what she was hired to do by people who were not even in her class, because they were uneducated. This is a reversal of the colonial stereotype about the inferior colonized people and superior colonizer that I mentioned earlier.

· While Lillian felt shocked that these women could treat her so, it actually sounds like a very familiar story that Sabrina Marchetti writes about. In her work, she sets out to prove that colonial roles are often reimagined in post-colonial domestic relationships. In this way, narratives given about these relationships usually portray the white mistresses as helpless, infantile, and abusive. Comparatively, the black domestic worker then takes on the role of the strong worker who is a victim of the abuse inflicted upon her by her white mistress.⁸³ In this way, we see that Lillian is using a similar narrative form to describe her experiences with her white colleagues. She is the unsuspecting victim who is being taken advantage of by her white former colonizers. Lillian's use of this narrative form shows that she is placing a colonial image onto this relationship, despite the discontinuity of characteristics described by Marchetti and those of Lillian's experiences. For example, these women were her colleagues and not her mistresses, yet she still felt compelled to complete the work they told her to do and use this anti-colonialism narrative form to describe the experience to me.

· The colonial vestige that perpetuates the idea of inferior blacks and superior whites is also present within the stories of difficulty that both Constance and Conchita gave. Both women had to suffer through uncomfortable and racist behavior from their colleagues at work. This was a very drastic change for Conchita who had previously good work experiences in the late 1960's and 1970's. During this time period, even though she was the only Surinamese person at her school, she made strong friendships with her white colleagues and even went on holidays with them. She stated that in those decades, "The atmosphere was entirely different." Here, she is referencing the change she experienced when returning to Holland and the work force

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Marchetti 144-145.

in the 1980's. Historically, this was after the time period in which mass migration from Suriname occurred. Obviously this had profound effects on various relationships and I will discuss this more in-depth later, but for now I will focus on how this changed Conchita. For instance, at one of her teaching jobs in Holland, her colleagues complained over the amount of minority employees in the school:

- *Were your colleagues also mixed?*

- Yes, my colleagues were also mixed and the white ones were complaining that every year there is another black coming onto our team. [...] And when I started working there, they said, "Yes, I think the next colleague will also be a Surinamese." They don't use the word black but we use it. "The next one will also be a Surinamese or an Antillean; we should take good care of them. The next one should be a white one otherwise, you Surinamese will overrule us. Haha." Yes, they said it laughing to all of us. Six blacks and two Arabs.

- Conchita later spoke about how this type of behavior caused a separation between the two groups, whites and blacks (she defined this as anyone not white). The blacks began holding separate coffee and lunch breaks and this was only stopped after the manager intervened and demanded they work more together. In this way, it can be seen that Conchita feels the Dutch have made her work environment more uncomfortable. In order to save themselves from this uncomfortable environment, Conchita and the rest of her black colleagues felt it necessary to separate themselves. It is quite obvious that this was a drastically different environment for her; as she had previously felt comfortable enough to not only befriend her Dutch colleagues in the past but also to spend vacations with them. In the 1960's and 70's, she had previously went out of her way to spend more time with her colleagues but in the 1980's and beyond she had the opposite reaction. Since this turn she was compelled to spend as little time as possible with Dutch colleagues. This statement is also very telling about how she interprets and sees the Dutch. The Dutch are portrayed as the people are the sources of the division, who fear

being overtaken by the blacks, yet who are unwilling to even say the word “black,” revealing obvious cultural differences.

Constance was met with similar statements at her workplace. She said that her colleagues would often say belittling things about black people and went so far to make rude jokes about them. This made her furious and at times she would twist the joke to make the black person better off, to the anger of her Dutch colleagues. Eventually, she informed them of how uncomfortable these actions made her feel and that she would appreciate it if they would refrain themselves from stating such things in her presence. These series of events, is exemplary of what Philomena Essed discusses of the superiority-inferiority relationship of the Dutch and their black counterparts, a colonial inheritance.⁸⁴ It is obvious that these jokes were used by the Dutch to impose their superiority over their black colleagues, whether done consciously or not is a question I cannot answer. It is this type of behavior that Constance was opposed to and felt necessary to fix. For this reason she provided an inverted account of these stories that portrayed her people in a superior light. The reaction of her colleagues shows that they too felt unhappiness over being placed in an inferior light. In this way, Constance is giving the Dutch a taste of the ill treatment that she has been subject to her entire life, but she is also comparing herself to her Dutch colleagues, saying that while they feel it entirely appropriate to say rude things to her, they feel angered when it is done back to them. They are portrayed as ignorant people who display hypocritical behavior, yet Constance and her white colleagues similarly felt unease at being seen as inferior in the eyes of the other.

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Essed 43.

· These instances can also tell us more about the way each woman reacts to these types of behaviors in the workplace and some of the possible ways a person can handle racism in the Netherlands. While Conchita and her colleagues felt that separation was the best answer, Constance took the assertive approach and wanted her Dutch colleagues to experience what they had put her through. And in opposition to both, Lillian just lived with the ill treatment until she could leave the job.

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· *Living Spaces*

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· One experience all of these women lived through was searching for a suitable living space for themselves and their families. Again the experiences vary, as was the case for every theme discussed in this paper. After first arriving to the Netherlands, Conchita, Joyce and Lillian had friends and family that could be relied on for housing support. Many of these women lived with family members and friends for years before setting out to find a home of their own. On the other hand, Olga first stayed in a school dorm when she moved to the Netherlands and later had to rely on herself to purchase her first home. Finally, Constance's family had to move into temporary housing for two to three months before they could move into their first home. The only consistent thread within the life stories in regard to this topic was that it was relatively easy. Finding and living in their first permanent homes was an entirely different experience for these women. Choosing a location, navigating the housing market and living with new neighbors were all unfamiliar things that needed to be surmounted.

· Joyce and Olga spoke very candidly about their difficulties in finding the right location for their homes in 1971 and 1980 respectively. While there was housing available in Amsterdam Bijlmer, both women chose not to

move there. The reason that Joyce chose to forgo housing in Bijlmer and as a result Amsterdam entirely, was because she found the houses in that area were way too big for her. In the interview she was very adamant about her decision to stay out of the Bijlmer and finally settled into a suburb of the city. Olga was even more resolute in her decision to stay out of the Bijlmer. For her, she thought that the Bijlmer was not a safe place for her to raise her kids and she felt that living with so many people of color could bring unwanted trouble. When discussing her relationship with the Surinamese population in the Netherlands she said:

- And sometimes it's better not to have so close contact with [Surinamese] people. Sometimes it's better.
- *Why is this?*
- When there are many colored people living together in a square, they get the most discriminated by the white people. If you are alone here and a black woman than everybody will [not discriminate against you]. But if there are more, then it will be another way.
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- I believe that Olga chose not to move to the Bijlmer for fear of the racism she and her children may have been subjected to in that area. She repeated several times that the Bijlmer was not a square "to raise your children." She believed that it was too dangerous to bring her family there and as a result made the decision to live in a neighborhood with white people. I believe that it is interesting that someone who described strong fears of discrimination would choose to stay in an entirely white neighborhood and forgo the chance to live with people of her own color. It might be that instead of moving to a white neighborhood to flee discrimination of white people, she instead wanted to remove herself from the Bijlmer, to move further away from the danger that her own people represented to her.

· If this is the case, then it may be that her beliefs are a continuation of the colonial stereotype that black people are inferior or dangerous. While this is possible, I think the more plausible answer is that she is attempting to reject the Surinamese culture of her fellow nationals living in the Netherlands. One of the most obvious developments of this culture is the migrant community of the Bijlmer, created in the 1970's to accommodate the growing population of the Netherlands, that eventually became the home to thousands of migrants.⁸⁵ It may be that she would like to distinguish herself from this community for various reasons. One way to do this was by rejecting to live in the Bijlmer where many Surinamese people wanted to live and were living. In this way she may have be subverting colonialism in her own way by refusing to be put where the Dutch wanted her to be placed, instead listening to her own desires.

· My three other women took no issue to living in the Bijlmer or Amsterdam Zuid-Oost and have all lived there at some point in their lives. Conchita spoke very candidly about how difficult navigating the housing market was in the early 1970's. Before moving to Amsterdam, she and her husband were forced to move to a suburban village, but as soon as they heard of the Bijlmer they rented an apartment:

- *Was that because of opportunity?*
- It was just the opportunity. We were the first people who rented the houses. [...] The moment we heard about Bijlmer Mer, we just applied for an apartment.
- *You mentioned that you had difficulty finding a house in Amsterdam, was this because of a shortage?*
- Yes, first there was a shortage because later on near the independence of Suriname, you had to wait very long. You had to go and have an interview with the

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Peer Smets and Marion den Uyl, "The Complex Role of Ethnicity in Urban Mixing: A Study of Two Deprived Neighborhoods in the Netherlands" Urban Studies (2008) 1446.

board. And then you had to get a form and wait two years. Oh no! So a lot of people moved out of Amsterdam at that period.

· Here, Conchita describes the difficulty of finding a house in the 1970's. She references the independence of Suriname. Historically, before the independence of Suriname thousands of people fled the country in fear of an unstable yet independent Suriname. This put much stress on an already stressed housing market. During this time period, it was very difficult to find a house and some even say that there was a lot of discrimination in the housing market.⁸⁶ For this reason, many of the Surinamese people went to the new housing projects of Bijlmer to live. Conchita, Constance and Lillian are examples of the many who settled there.

· Once moved into these new places, the women had to live with their new neighbors. Conchita and Constance both commented that their neighbors in the Bijlmer were very nice to them. In 1971, Conchita was the only black inhabitant in her building, in an increasingly blacker neighborhood, until more Surinamese began filtering into her building. In 1975, Constance entered into an already diverse neighborhood that she also saw become blacker with time. She too had good relationships with her neighbors. Lillian had a very different experience when she moved on her own to Utrecht in what she called a “non-social neighborhood.” In her new home she lived above two older Dutch women. She recalled that she faced much discrimination. The women often called the police on her when her children were running in the house. When the police came they would not let her explain herself. Instead the police said to her, “Go to the bush. Your children

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van Amersfoort and van Niekerk 334.

are running in the house. Here, we don't do those things." Lillian was very forthcoming in detailing the ways she felt she was discriminated in this white neighborhood, but she eventually moved and began living in the Bijlmer.

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· *Impact of Decolonization: Changes of the 70's*

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· Throughout my entire paper I have been eluding to the impact that decolonization has had on these women's lives and the greater Netherlands community. In this section, I will discuss how the women observed and interpreted these changes and its impact on their lives. The relevancy of this change is integral in understanding how this migration to the Netherlands and the experiences related to this have also changed with time. One of the most significant events, that had long lasting affects upon the Dutch community, was the mass migration that occurred during the 1970's, before and after the independence of Suriname. In this section I will focus mostly on the stories of Conchita, Olga and Joyce who arrived in the Netherlands prior to the social upheaval that occurred in the 1970's.

· Joyce, Olga and Conchita all noticed gradual changes occurring within the Netherlands during the 1970's. As Joan mentioned repeatedly during our interview, she saw new migration as one of the main causes. She stated that early in the 1960's there were not that many Surinamese people in the Netherlands but the population slowly grew. As I mentioned earlier, 100,000 Surinamese people migrated between 1975 and 1980 to the Netherlands, adding to the few thousand that were already present.⁸⁷ Olga agreed that many more people came but she was much more open in her

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Oostindie (2008) 18.

opinion regarding this migration. She felt that too many people came over.

There are many variables that may have caused Olga to believe this.

Remembering her stance that it's best to live away from your own people may be the cause of this. Perhaps the masses of migration to the Netherlands made it more difficult to remove herself from other Surinamese people and individualize herself as I thought might be the reason for her self-imposed separation. The other potential reason is the major impact this wave of migration had on the relationship between the Dutch and the minorities in the country. I will discuss more about this later in this section.

- Conchita and Joyce described how they observed neighborhoods change. Conchita stated that at one point she was the only black resident in her former neighborhood and over time it became entirely black. Similarly, Joyce described how she saw her friend's neighborhood's change in the 1970's. In speaking about her neighborhood and its changes she mentioned:

- It was a very nice and still is a very nice neighborhood. But there were areas of (my city), houses companies were renting. There, I saw because friends of mine were living there, how gradually the whole neighborhood changed. And only foreigners lived there. [...] But most of them were in the center of the city. But the other ones you find outside the center of the city. So those were the changes. And if you walked past the big buildings, the apartments, you don't have to know it. But there is one very important sign that [you see] and you know who is living there. Do you know what it is? The antennas. The saucers. For TV. The front or the back of the building, most of the apartments have these antennas. Gradually, you saw more and more of these saucers. Then you knew what was happening in that neighborhood.

- I think it is particularly interesting that Joyce mentions that she still lives in a nice neighborhood but there were other areas of her city that were becoming blacker and were not as nice. It seems as though she was equating niceness with whiteness, which sounds oddly similar to the white as superior and black as inferior colonial belief that I mentioned earlier. Here, Joyce also

mentioned the mass numbers of other ethnic groups that entered the Netherlands during this time period, mostly the migrants from the Mediterranean.⁸⁸

· This mass migration had profound effects upon the job market.

Joyce recalled how this migration impacted the job availability of the time.

With more people in the Netherlands, more competition arose for jobs and the effortlessness in which a person could find a job no longer existed.

· It was possible [to find a job] because in education jobs and nursing jobs, there was a need. It was not so difficult to get a job. In fact it was very easy. We knew the language and we had the education. And we spoke flawlessly. [...] I think till 1975, 1976, I frequently had friends calling me about jobs.

· *Why do you think it changed around that time?*

· Joyce: Gradually, things were changing. The migration and politics were changing. [...] The young people wanted to go to school. They wanted to educate themselves. And look for a better job and everyone was going to school. The economy needed people to do the common jobs. In the 70's, the different European countries started to bring in the guest workers from Turkey, Morocco, Spain, but mostly from the countries that had cheap workers. And they were on contract for 10 years or so. And they thought after that they would leave. But they didn't leave. They stayed here. And we had a shift of not only economics but [also in] the way things were developing. Well everything changed, starting in that period. [...] So in the 70's, the great competition started. Yeah, between the Dutch people, the Surinamese people that were already here, the guest employees, and well after that the people from Africa came here, North African people, from the Ivory Coast and also Nigeria. Yeah and Europe started to become a melting pot.

· The sentiments that Joyce provided in this excerpt are very similar to

what Philomena Essed said about the historical situation of the Netherlands in that time period. Many Dutch thought that the immigrants that travelled to the Netherlands during the 1960's and 1970's were only staying temporarily.⁸⁹

Once it was realized that these migrants were not leaving than competition

began in the job market. Eric Mielants confirms that this migration had made

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Essed 38.

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Essed 40.

the job market more difficult to navigate.⁹⁰ The knowledge that Joyce has on this subject shows how well educated she is on the topic, but it is interesting that she spoke of the competition of the era but not of the difficulty that minorities faced within that competition of the 1970's. For Joyce to be so knowledgeable of this topic it is hard to believe that she had no knowledge of this situation. Her silence about this is intriguing considering that she was very outspoken about her Dutch nationality and her stance as not a foreign person living in the Netherlands. Her identification as a Dutch national may be the reason that she wished for the competition of the Netherlands to be seen as a friendly competition that was not entangled with prejudices and difficulties similar to her peaceful assessment of Suriname.

· One of the reasons that navigating the job market became so difficult after the mass migration wave of the 1970's was because an increased racial tension that found its roots in that decade. Earlier I mentioned that Conchita had vastly different relationships with her colleagues after she returned to the Netherlands in the 1980's. This is largely due to the change that happened in the 1970's. As stated earlier, when the Dutch realized that the migrants were not going to leave and in fact scores more were coming, due to the independence of Suriname among other reasons, they began to feel threatened. As a result, the Dutch started to exert their hegemony upon these migrants through racism and other behaviors.⁹¹

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Mielants 66.

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Essed 42-43.

· One of the ways in which Dutch hegemony was imposed upon these women and the migrant races was the use of the word “allochtone.” According to Eric Mielants, the current definition of allochtone represents recently migrated “colored” people, while the term autochtone refers to the white Dutch.⁹² While most of the women did not hear the prominent use of the word until the 1980’s, after the dividing moments of the 70’s, Joyce knew that it had been used before and that it was not as polarizing. According to Joan, when she was in a political group at school in 1974, they were labeled as allochtone. Joyce was very clear in stating that the use of the word in that time period was much more neutral and that it simply meant immigrant, used much more infrequently than now. It was not until the 1980’s that the word was used in a negative way. The change of this word symbolizes the change in the race relations spurred on by the 1970’s. When discussing the use of the word allochtone, Conchita described the impact of the 1970’s on race relations:

· *Did the meaning of the word allochtone change?*

· When I came in the 60’s, people would look at you. Look at my hair and my skin and ask some questions. They were interested but later on they didn’t look at you that way anymore. The first years in the 60’s, they were nice, not saying rude things, but in the 80’s it was different. My friends and relatives often said something [like], “They treat me like that because I am black.” When I came in the 60’s I didn’t talk like that. I knew I was black and I am Surinamese and most of the Dutch people didn’t even know where Suriname was. They thought we were from Curacao. Everyone. “Oh, you’re from Curacao?” “Nope, I’m from Suriname.” But later on, yes. I had some moments where I thought they did that just because I am black. And it wasn’t because I am a Surinamese, but because I’m black.

· I believe that this quote from Conchita is exemplary of what Philomena Essed wrote about the changes of the 1970’s. At first people were curious of the migrants and their presence but they were never discriminatory. The only

surprising thing was the lack of knowledge of Suriname, which many of the women also brought up. Eventually a change occurred in the 1970's and things became different. Racism and discrimination became problems for not just Surinamese people but for all migrants.⁹³ Conchita's distinction that this discrimination happened to her because she is black and not because she is Surinamese is very telling. No longer was she differentiated from the other minority groups in the Netherlands, her status as a Dutch national and an inhabitant of a former colony, did not matter. In the 1980's, she was treated badly because she was black and no other qualities about her mattered.

· It is also important to consider the context in which this answer came up. My question clearly stated that I wanted an answer about the word *allochtone*, yet she responded in an entirely different manner. This speaks to what the very word *allochtone* means to her and her identification with it. To demonstrate how the word has changed, she brings her own situation to the forefront and describes how things have personally changed for her, an *allochtone*. This answer also delves into the negativity that the word inspires as upon questioning she immediately brought up the idea that things have become more challenging for her and that her race has inspired discriminatory behavior. In fact, when I referred to the word *allochtone*, all of my interviewees recognized it as themselves in some capacity as the Dutch applies it to them. One even said to herself, "When did we become *allochtone*?" Again, this demonstrates the recognition that my women felt with the word.

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· *Social Relationships with the Dutch and Others*

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· An analysis of how these Surinamese women see their relationship with their own community, the Dutch and other migrant groups is crucial to understanding how their sense of Self has changed since migration and is further developed by how this relates to their perception of other groups. In my earlier analysis, I wrote about the separation yet unity of the various ethnic and religious groups of Suriname as observed by my interviewees. While all of the women did not agree about the relationship of the groups within Suriname, the resounding sentiment was that there is still much separation. All of the women had various reasons for why this was happening. Olga believed that the longer someone lived in the Netherlands the more separated they become from their Surinamese people. She also agreed with Joyce that sometimes the distance between people is so great in the Netherlands that it is more difficult to see people because of the necessity to travel. Conchita echoed this belief but mentioned that the separation happens along ethnic lines. The two largest groups, Hindustanis and Creoles populate separate neighborhoods. For example, she has found that the Hindustanis concentrate in Den Haag while the Creoles live elsewhere. She also believed that while their relationship has not gotten worse since migrating, there has been a slight increase in competition of the two groups as the Hindustanis have more opportunities to enter into other labor markets.

· Lillian and Constance have a more negative opinion of the relationship between the Surinamese. Lillian believes that the Dutch were responsible for the fighting between the Hindustanis and the Creoles and the continued separation of these groups in the Netherlands. Lastly, Constance agreed that the separation of the ethnic groups has intensified in the

Netherlands with the Hindustanis desiring to be incorporated into the white population. While this confirmed the sentiments raised by the other women, she also added that there is discrimination present within the smaller Creole ethnic community, an idea not touched upon by the other women. Constance describes feeling hurt when people would discriminate against her because of her light skin and how this made her feel differently about belonging to the community:

· *Has most of the discrimination you have felt towards you and your family been from the White Dutch people or has there been discrimination from other groups?*

· I also think from the Surinamese group, that thing (about) light skinned, dark skinned. Because when I feel with some of my friends or people I know, I think we are Surinamese and all of a sudden I hear, “We are looking at what you are going to do because you are light-skinned.”

· *When someone says something like that to you, who is Surinamese, do you feel differently? Does it hurt as much? Or since you are from that culture do you understand it better?*

· At one place, I can understand it better because I know it, but it really hurts because when I think we are Surinamese together than you get the feeling (of hurt). One lady perhaps two years ago, did a meditation writing group [with me], so we shared a lot. I had the feeling that we had something developed. She said, “You know what, always when I am looking at you, we were black in Suriname and when we were on the school bus, we had to sit behind. And then the light skinned girls like you they sit in front and every time I see you I get that feeling back.” I was so flabbergasted. I was so disappointed. In the Dutch community you are not welcome but sometimes in the Surinamese community you are not welcome also.

· This excerpt from Constance explains the type of discrimination she

still experiences within her own community. As I mentioned before,

historically this discrimination has its roots in colonialism as a color hierarchy developed during and after slavery with lighter skinned Creoles holding more power than their darker skinned counterparts. After emancipation, many of the remaining European inhabitants left to go back to Europe, leaving room for the light-skinned population to take their place. A similar colonized/colonizer relationship of superiority and inferiority developed.⁹⁴ The discrimination that

Constance faced was a result of her Surinamese friends rebelling against the traditional inferiority/superiority complex that this created; however Constance was entirely unprepared for this treatment towards her as we can see she was “flabbergasted.” It is obvious from what is said that Constance feels this behavior has affected her sense of belonging within what she had previously thought was her community. The negative effect that she felt from this behavior is because she felt comfortable in this community, as she said she thought they were all “Surinamese” until her friends told her differently. I believe that her ending sentiments are very serious for the implications that this discrimination has on her idea of Self as she realizes that while you are not welcome in the Dutch community, sometimes you are not even welcome in your own community. Ultimately, her sense of belonging has changed from the behavior she has been subjected to in the Netherlands from both her people and the Dutch.

· In order to understand why Constance believes she does not belong within the Dutch community, a discussion about the relationship between the Surinamese and the other migrant groups will be helpful. Almost all of my women stated that there is a tension or an animosity amongst the migrant groups. Lillian had the impression that the groups did not like each other, but said nothing more on the subject. Joyce and Olga believe that this animosity is derived from the fact that some of the other groups refuse to integrate yet they are jealous of the success the Surinamese have had in the Netherlands. The animosity that Joyce spoke about was a very important point to her, as she found herself scared of the potential consequences of these

Essed 42-43.

feelings. She mentioned that at times she even feels guilty for contributing to this, but she understands that her Surinamese heritage taught her differently.

Olga agreed that it has made it easier for them to deal with multiculturalism and their background as colonial subjects made it easier for them to integrate:

· *Do you think that the other groups may be jealous by seeing the Surinamese do so well?*

· Joyce: Yes, I think they are.

· Olga: Yes, there is a bit [of] jealousy. And, they cannot do anything about it.

· Joyce: Yes, because their background is different. Their consciousness about things is also different. You cannot make the leap between here to there (pointing).

· Olga: We are better civilized.

· Joan: It seems a dirty word to use, but it has something to do with it.

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· In this excerpt it is easy to see the colonial pride present in the statements made by Joyce and Olga. They are proud of how “civilized” they are in comparison to those whose cultures are not as compatible with the Dutch culture. From this statement, it can be seen that they are proud of this distinction or the “netherlandisation” that Marchetti speaks of. The cultural hegemony that was instilled within these migrants just continues the idea that the Dutch and their heritage are superior.⁹⁵ This is something that has been passed down to the Surinamese through the Dutch cultural hegemony and is seen resurfacing itself here, when the Surinamese are faced with a potential new threat for jobs and opportunities. Conchita also believed that the tension between the groups may lie in the fact that the Surinamese are emancipated and have had much progress yet she also acknowledges that the other groups have made progress as well such as the Moroccan girls. While Conchita may have affirmed that there is a tension present, she also realized that her work in the political field calls for different relationships and on that level there is no

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Marchetti 70-71.

problem with the groups. Only Constance believed there was no tension between the migrant groups.

· While Constance's opinion was the only point of contention among the women on this topic, there was a resounding dislike from all the women of being placed into the category of "black" with the other migrants by the Dutch. Lillian's experience taught her that the Dutch categorize everyone with dark skin as bad and the bad behavior of the Moroccan boys are making it worse for all colored people; however she believed that every culture has its problems. Joyce gave me a similar assessment and was adamant about her unwillingness to be a part of a community that the Dutch judge based off the actions of the criminals. Olga agreed with these sentiments and Constance believed something similar. She thinks that the Dutch do not understand the class dynamics of these groups and are judging the entire black population on the actions of the lower class, therefore "homogenizing the whole group as lower class." There are multiple reasons for this issue spoken detailed in this description. One on hand, the Dutch are to blame for not distinguishing between the groups, especially considering that it no longer distinguishes its former colonial subjects from the other migrants groups, but also the small population of people that create a bad image (blackness=badness) for minorities are also to blame.

· It is this association of blackness with badness that is responsible for the discrimination many of these women have faced within their lives in the Netherlands.⁹⁶ I refrain from stating "all of these women" because Joyce and Olga did not admit to experiencing any racist treatment

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Essed 42.

towards them. When I asked both women about racism in their lives, Joyce and Olga both responded, “I have to think deep about that.” Neither could remember or were willing to discuss with me a moment of racism in their lives but both agreed that racism and discrimination is present in the Netherlands. It is possible that neither had experiences of this nature, but it is also possible that they willingly made the choice not to discuss this with me. If this is the case, it would not be uncharacteristic of female Creole narratives about racism. When Philomena Essed completed her study in 1990, she found that many women refused to speak up about their experiences with racism because they shared the normative Dutch cultural sentiment that racism was not a topic to be discussed because it was seen as a very “loaded” concept.⁹⁷ It is possible that Joyce and Olga are more in line with this approach considering that both recognized how “deep” they would need to think in order to remember if they have ever been subject to racism. This is particularly interesting considering that the other three women I interviewed did share stories of racism with me. It may be exemplary of a new trend where women are much more willing to discuss these issues.

· Looking more broadly, all of the women either gave me moments in which they have been subjected to racism by the Dutch or have acknowledged its existence in the Netherlands. I have detailed some of these moments already in my analysis, but I have scores more of examples that these women provided for me. I will briefly describe one more. Previously, I detailed how Conchita came to the realization that she had been treated differently because she was black, in this example she explains an instance in which this occurs:

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Essed 141.

· *Now you mentioned that something happened two weeks ago?*
· Yes, because as I am 65 now I have some discounts on culture activities and things like that. Then, you have to show a card and I show her my card and she said, “Ok, it’s alright. But let me see if the number is right.” I said, “Why?” She said, “Yes, some people take cards from other people.” And I was with a friend, and I said, “I wonder if she did it to the white ones, just because the two of us are black.”

· As Conchita had said before, she realized that after the 1970’s she began to feel that people treated her differently because she was black. In this example, we find that the cashier implied that she might have stolen the card and as a result Conchita believed that this was because of her skin color and its association with “badness.”⁹⁸ From this example, we see that while Conchita may have resented that the Dutch had put her into the black category she still recognizes that she is black and will even defend that identity when necessary.

· While speaking with these women, I discovered that each possessed their own methods to cope with this type of behavior towards them. Constance described how in the past, she was inspired to fight and tried to join an activist teacher’s group, but she eventually found herself tired of fighting. Now, she chooses to stick up for her beliefs when she is subject to racism but has left the activist work behind. Lillian agreed that she must stick up for herself, but mentioned that her Christianity helps her to deal with these issues. Conchita said that she is “black and proud,” but most importantly she finds solace in her political group where they are militants against “white supremacy.”

· To discover more about their relationship with the Dutch, I inquired whether these women felt their culture was appreciated. Constance believed that the Dutch never appreciated her culture while the rest of the

women agree that the Dutch have been more open to Surinamese culture.

Conchita described how the Surinamese now have television shows that make them more visible and Lillian explained that their food, dress and hairstyles have been incorporated into the greater Dutch culture even though they still exhibit nasty behavior. Joyce and Olga agree that the Surinamese have left their impact upon the culture as they brought cleanliness and good hygiene to the Netherlands.

- Despite this openness to the Surinamese culture, all of the women agreed that their relationship with the Dutch has been getting worse.

Conchita describes this in terms of her political struggles:

- *Do you think the relationship between the native Dutch and the Surinamese population has changed since living here?*

- Yeah, it has changed. As Surinamese people, we are here. We demand our part of education, work and everything. The white [people] say we are a problem. [...] We have to fight for our rights now, more than in the 60's.

- This quote speaks to both the changes that occurred in the 1970's that made living in the Netherlands more difficult for all black people, but it also details the increased struggles that they face in receiving their fair share of the social capital of the Netherlands. As the Surinamese have become a problem, they now need to work harder to get what they deserve. Conchita wanted to make sure I understood that she believed the Surinamese population can achieve a lot if they unite. Despite the racism, economic crisis and downward spiral of social relations, she feels that as a united front they can achieve what they want.

- The feeling that the situation is getting worse was also confirmed when three of the women agreed that the Dutch are much less tolerant than before. Essed writes that the idea of Dutch cultural tolerance was

a present in the 1960's and 1970's but this has become a "national myth" that serves to deceive people about the rights of minorities.⁹⁹ The other two women, Constance and Lillian, made no comparison of the past, but believed that the Dutch are not tolerant people. Lillian distinguished that they are tolerant from afar but not when someone is in their country and Constance believed that it make look to outsiders that they are tolerant but in reality they are not. Conchita was the only person optimistic about Dutch tolerance. She agreed that it has gotten worse but also believes that they are still tolerant people. Considering the political activist work that she does, it must be necessary to stay optimistic about this.

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· *Conclusion*

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· This chapter serves to demonstrate the changes these women underwent during their process of integration. The challenges to finding a place or community of belonging is resonant throughout this entire chapter as well as the forced acquirement, destruction and configuration of identities that these migrant women were subjected to. Together these speak of the continuous battle these women face in the Netherlands to discover where they belong and what identity they should ascribe to. While the answer to this is still eluding many of them, it is this process of discovering and defining the Self that connects all of these women.

Conclusion

It would be remiss of me to make any general distinctions on how these women have collectively changed their sense of Selves as I have demonstrated that all

of these women are unique people with individualized migration stories and individualized self. I can say that all of these women have gone through a process in which colonialism and its legacies have conferred, reconfigured and dismantled their sense of Self in regards to their self-belonging, identity, and culture, throughout the entire process of migration. We can see this process occurring in all of the life stories gathered. For example, Joan, Olga and Constance all acknowledged that as children they believed themselves to possess the Dutch national identity and as a result a sense of national belonging to the Netherlands. This notion of national identity and belonging were conferred unto these women by the colonial system of netherlandisation¹⁰⁰, in which these women were taught about the Netherlands and its culture in order to feel a sense of belonging to their Mother Country. This process in turn conferred the Dutch national identity and belonging to these women, but colonialism would again change this notion of Self that these women possessed. The process of migration and integration revealed that the native Dutch did not recognize Joan, Olga or Constance as Dutch nationals who belong in the Netherlands or their claims to the Dutch cultural traditions like language. These actions were also influenced by colonialism as most of the native Dutch population stood ignorant of the Surinamese and their claims on the Dutch identity and culture. Collectively, their status as the colonizers gave them ability to ignore these claims because of the white superiority complex that colonialism created. As a result of this realization, these three women needed to internally reconcile their sense of Self as the Dutch society refused to accept them as fellow Dutch citizens resultantly creating a lack of belonging and lack of national identity. A similar analysis can be applied to how racial identity had been conferred unto these women. Conchita as well as all of the other women have

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struggled with being forced into the black identity by the Dutch and their incompetency to tell the minorities apart. As this categorization of identity was not initially well received by Conchita, it was her experiences with racism by the Dutch that have allowed her to reconfigure this identity for herself in a way that shows pride and belonging.

I feel that it also must be noted that these women are not passive actors who just wait for colonialism to change their sense of Self. They are all also active participants in this process as they have changed the Dutch culture with their influence, redefined what it means to be a Dutch national and created their own communities of belonging. While colonialism may be responsible for their changes, they are responsible for changes in the Netherlands.

Since my research and analysis is only exemplary of a very small migrant population, I recommend that future research be completed on other groups of the Surinamese population. For instance a sister study on the experience of men, other ethnicities, and other classes would be fruitful in moving forward the discussion about the Self and Surinamese migration.

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Appendix

Background Information of Interviewees

Constance Murray

Constance is a 58-year-old teacher living in the Amsterdam area. She grew up in Paramaribo, Suriname until the age of 17 when she first migrated to the Netherlands in the year 1970 with her entire family. After finishing her study in the Netherlands, she returned to the Caribbean to work for a few years. Eventually in 1975, she re-migrated permanently to the Netherlands with her future husband.

Lillian Pieru

Lillian is a 60-year-old teacher living in the suburbs of Amsterdam. She grew up in Paramaribo with her mother and siblings after the death of her father. After graduating from teacher's college, she moved to Nickerie, Suriname to work as a teacher. She eventually travelled to the Netherlands in 1977 with her friends with the original intent on staying for just vacation, but eventually settled here.

Olga Duff

Olga is a 60-year-old nurse living in a municipality between Amsterdam and Utrecht in the Randstad. She spent the first years of her childhood in French Guiana with her parents before moving to Suriname with her father close to the border to French Guiana. She finishing secondary school, she moved to Paramaribo to begin nursing. Eventually she travelled to the Netherlands in 1969, to further her education. She returned to Suriname in 1973, only to re-migrate to the Netherlands in 1979 permanently.

Conchita Landburg

Conchita is a 65-year-old teacher and political activist living in the Amsterdam area. She spent most of her childhood living in a small village in Suriname before moving to the capital city, Paramaribo. She first migrated to the Netherlands in 1968 where she rejoined many of her siblings. Eventually, she returned to Suriname in 1980 only to re-migrate to the Netherlands again in 1986.

Joyce van den Berg

Joyce is a 69-year-old former teacher living in the suburbs of Amsterdam. She grew up in all parts of Paramaribo with her parents and siblings. After graduating school in Suriname, she travelled to the Netherlands to further her study in 1964. She has lived in the Netherlands ever since.

Interview Questions

- 1) Can you tell me a little about your childhood in Suriname? Where did you grow up? With your parents? Siblings? Can you tell me a little bit about your parents?
- 2) When you were in Suriname, where and when did you first learn about the Netherlands? In school, the news, music, television? What did you hear? What did you think about it yourself?
- 3) Tell me about the day you made the decision to move to the Netherlands? Who did you make decide this with? What made you decide to do this? Who did you tell?
- 4) What did you do to prepare for the move?
- 5) Did you have to sacrifice anything to move to the Netherlands? Savings, property, the opportunity to be with your family?
- 6) Can you describe to me the day you left Suriname for the Netherlands? What did you feel? Did you have the opportunity to say goodbye to your family and friends? How was it to say farewell? How did you feel? What were your expectations for the Netherlands? What did you bring with you and what did you leave behind?
- 7) Can you go back to the day you first entered the Netherlands? What did you see? What struck you the most about the place? What did you hear? What was your first impression?

- 8) Tell me about where you first lived. The day you moved in. How did it look? Where was it located? Tell me about your neighborhood and neighbors? How did the people look? Was it difficult to find a place to live?
- 9) Tell me about your first day of work. (Or tell me about the day your spouse first left for work?) What did you wear? Where was it located? What did you do? Who did you meet? How did you find your job? Was it difficult to find work?
- 10) When did you first hear the word allochtone? From who? What does it mean? How does the use of that word make you feel?
- 11) How did people relate to you in the Netherlands? What did you think of them and what did they think of you? Other Surinamese people? The white Dutch people? The Moroccans? Indonesians? Turkish?
- 12) Do you feel that your culture is appreciated by the Dutch? Have you ever felt pressured to hide it?
- 13) Tell me about your first/freshest experience with racism? What happened? Who said/did it to you? What did this person look like? What did this make you feel? How did you deal with it? Do you tell people about discrimination? What does racism mean to you?
- 14) Has the way you relate to Dutch and the way they relate to you changed over time? How do you usually deal with racism? What do you teach your children to do?
- 15) Have you ever regretted coming to the Netherlands? Do you feel homesick? Would you miss anything from the Netherlands if you went back? Would you like to go back to Suriname and live there when you are older?
- 16) Are you familiar with Dutch tolerance? What does it mean to you? Do you believe in Dutch tolerance?