1 Introduction

Post-colonial immigrants and identity formations in the Netherlands

Ulbe Bosma

1.1 Introduction

Whereas the post-colonial condition has been extensively discussed in the Anglophone and Francophone countries, hardly anything of this has resonated in the Netherlands. This book explores how this phenomenon is related to the specific histories and composition of the various post-colonial groups in this country and the peculiarities of Dutch society. The least one can say is that post-colonial immigrants in the Netherlands came from highly diverse backgrounds. Among them were metropolitan Dutch (who were repatriated during and after the Indonesian War of Independence), Moluccan militia, Indo-Chinese, Afro-Caribbeans and Surinamese originating from India, Java and China. This heterogeneity is not specific for the Netherlands, however. In the Dutch case, one could even claim that one can speak about ‘post-colonial migrants’ as a distinct category, because probably more than 90 per cent of these newcomers were already Dutch citizens before their arrival in the Netherlands. Their elites were steeped in Dutch culture and often had had their (academic) education in the metropolis or colonial mother country. One can also point to the agendas of post-colonial migrant organisations, many of which, one way or another, were shaped by colonial issues.

But there are also counterarguments. Almost half of the post-colonial migrants to the Netherlands found themselves in the same dire social and economic circumstances as labour migrants. This was particularly the case for post-colonial immigrants who were not immediate descendants of metropolitan Dutch, were usually lower educated and entered the Dutch labour market in the 1980s. Another objection would be that even if colonialism shaped Dutch culture, it is not something very visible. Again, the Netherlands is not exceptional in this regard. The only pan-European publication on post-colonial immigrants even has ‘invisible’ in its title: Europe’s invisible migrants (Smith 2003). This invisibility has been noted by quite a
few Dutch scholars, some of whom also contribute to this volume. But this point precisely could be turned on its head, into an argument in favour of discussing post-colonial immigrants as a distinct category. Their identity formations are solidly linked to the erratic and convoluted ways in which the colonial past is rendered in Dutch collective memory: compounded by taboos and silences (Bosma 2009; Oostindie 2010; Van Leeuwen 2008).

The most straightforward argument for discussing post-colonial immigrants and their identity formations within a single analytical framework is the fact that they constitute a substantial segment of Dutch society that arrived in huge waves over a relatively short period of time. Decolonisation and post-colonial immigrations changed the Netherlands demographically in a post-colonial society. Today, about 6.3 per cent of the Dutch population comes from the former colonies, or has at least one parent born there. By and large, this figure is smaller than the other Western European twentieth-century colonial powers. France and Great Britain probably have between 7 and 8 per cent first- and second-generation post-colonial immigrants. In Portugal the proportion might approach 10 per cent (Bosma 2009: 349-350; Bosma, Lucassen & Oostindie 2012; Oostindie in this volume). What sets the Netherlands apart from France, the UK and Portugal is that post-colonial migrants only make up half of the extra-European immigrants. Most non-European immigrants in France, the UK and Portugal are from former colonial territories. Moreover, the overwhelming majority of Dutch post-colonial immigrants is Christian and about 90 per cent of the immigrants from Indonesia were designated as Europeans – not as indigenous – in colonial times. Only a tiny minority of a few thousand Indonesians had Dutch citizen rights under Dutch rule. The post-colonial immigrants from Indonesia were therefore a most privileged segment of the colonial society. They were born in the Netherlands, were Dutch or European descendants or were other persons who identified themselves with Dutch culture or at least with the colonial variant of it.

The aim of this book is to explore Dutch post-colonial migrants’ identity formations throughout the processes of immigration and settlement, to examine these immigrants’ relationships with the local Dutch populations and to reflect upon second- and third-generation responses to the post-colonial condition. This edited volume presents an overview of more than 60 years and three generations of post-colonial migration history. It also takes stock of an impressive body of thematic literature that has appeared since the early 1980s. Most of it, pertaining particularly to publications of a more historical nature, has never reached an international audience. Our purpose, therefore, is to present Dutch scholarship in this field to an international audience, but also to bring together literature on the various post-colonial groups in a single book, where possible in a comparative manner.1

Obviously, the contributions are from a variety of disciplines with their own theoretical and conceptual approaches. The authors have nonetheless
found a common point of departure in the post-colonial condition of the Netherlands. One way or the other, all chapters focus on the complexity of identity formations. This term is thus carried by the title of this book. A few words about our use of ‘identity formations’ are apposite here. As a rule, this concept is used for the study of the second generation often in the context of a segmented assimilation (Haller & Landolt 2005: 1183). In this book, however, identity formation is employed in a context that is not necessarily determined by segmented assimilation. It has a wider meaning here, encompassing the first, second and third generations.

1.2 Immigration and settlement conditions

Before discussing the main theme of this book – the dynamic and historically contextualised processes of ‘identity formation’ of different post-colonial immigrant populations – it is also apposite to introduce the different groups and to provide some basic data about them. Dutch post-colonial immigrants came in three different waves. Between 1945 and 1962, almost 300,000 Dutch citizens came from Indonesia. The first group came immediately after the end of the Japanese occupation in 1945, during which half the Dutch population in Indonesia had been in internment camps. A second important wave followed in the 1950s when relations between Indonesia and its former mother country rapidly deteriorated. Ultimately, only 10 per cent has chosen to stay. More than 60 per cent of these so-called repatrianten (‘returnees’) were born in the former colony and were often of part-Indonesian descent. The first round consisted mainly of repatriating first-generation Dutch families. In the successive rounds, immigrants comprised the proportion of Indische Nederlanders who had never been in the Netherlands, as well as other groups who were categorised as ‘socially Dutch’ and therefore eligible for ‘repatriation’. The latter group concerned certain segments of highly educated Indonesians and Christians and, in particular, several thousand ethnic Chinese (Bosma 2009; Oostindie 2010). Last but not least, in 1951, 4,000 Moluccan colonial soldiers arrived in the Netherlands after they had refused to be demobilised in Indonesian territory. Together with 8,000 wives and children, they were ordered to embark for the Netherlands and discharged just before disembarkation in Rotterdam (Smeets & Steijlen 2006: 67, 79). They were loyal to the Moluccan Republic (Republik Maluku Selatan, RMS) that was created in 1950. It was subsequently crushed by the Indonesian state, although a small guerrilla movement managed to survive until 1966.

The exodus from Indonesia was more or less completed by the mid-1960s. By then, some 300,000 had migrated to the Netherlands. But only a few years later immigration started again, this time from the West. In the 1970s, about 180,000 immigrants came from Surinam and from the 1980s
onwards, another 90,000 arrived from the Antilles and Aruba. The Surinamese were driven by the deteriorating economic conditions in their country. Many Surinamese did want to stay when their country became independent in 1975 for fear of political instability and economic chaos. The Surinamese community in the Netherlands stands at 360,000 today – against 475,000 in contemporary Surinam itself. In 2007 the proportion of first-generation Surinamese immigrants was still above 50 per cent, but will fall below that mark soon (Table 1.1). The growth of the Antillean population in the Netherlands, originating from six tiny islands in the Caribbean, came later. Until the 1980s, Antillian migration was predominantly circular in character, but deteriorating conditions, particularly in Curaçao, brought a growing stream of Antilleans who stayed in the Netherlands. Today, the Antillean community in the metropolis is just over 140,000, with still a clear majority being first generation (Table 1.1). The total population of the six islands is some 300,000.

Migration to the Netherlands has been a predominantly Curaçaoan affair, with Aruba following at a long distance. As the great majority of the Antilleans in the Netherlands stems from Curaçao, and the island has only some 140,000 citizens left, the distribution of the Curaçaoan transnational population may well be in the order of 55/45. The Antillean exodus is the most recent of the post-colonial migrations under review here. All Antilleans have continued to enjoy full citizenship and the right of abode in the Netherlands. One consequence of this constitutional arrangement has been a highly intense circular migration.

These large influxes of post-colonial immigrants to the Netherlands were not entirely new. Before the independence of Indonesia and Surinam, extensive colonial migration circuits had been in place. In the nineteenth century, travelling was still confined to the mostly well-educated elites, but in the twentieth century, these colonial migration circuits expanded rapidly, particularly among more educated people. Of the approximately 5,000 Surinamese and Antilleans who were living in the Netherlands in the 1950s, between 10 and 20 per cent had a higher education (Oostindie & Maduro 1986: 211). Likewise, 15 per cent of the first waves of Dutch people returning from Indonesia between 1945 and 1949 had an academic education (Kraak 1958: 226). The level of immigrants’ education declined as the influxes of the respective migrant groups became much larger. This was a source of concern to the Dutch authorities. In the 1950s, the Dutch government was reluctant to admit Indische Netherlanders, particularly if they had never lived in the Netherlands, as Jones details in this volume. Likewise, in the early 1970s, the Dutch government tried to stop the increasing number of Surinamese immigrants by expediting the independence of Surinam. In both cases attempts to stem the migration influxes had little effect.
As far as work (i.e. social-economic attainment) is concerned, conditions changed fundamentally over time. Most crucial was the changing role of the state in the economic sphere. Whereas in the 1940s the government intervened in the labour market on behalf of repatriates from the newly independent Indonesia, in the 1980s and 1990s, the integration of immigrants into the labour market was left to market forces, employers and the labour unions (Amersfoort & Van Niekerk 2006). The impact of this withdrawal was enormous, especially because the Netherlands was suffering from a severe economic crisis and deindustrialisation in the 1980s. In other spheres, such as housing (i.e. spatial patterns), a drastic change also took place. The central coordination of housing and welfare provision in place when the Indonesian repatriates had arrived was disintegrating by the 1970s, exactly at the time the Surinamese were migrating in large numbers. Whereas in the 1950s and 1960s the Dutch government had been able to disperse Indische Nederlanders all over the country, this was no longer the case in the 1970s. As a consequence, Surinamese and Antillean migrants became concentrated in large cities. As far as geographical distribution is concerned, the Moluccans are a special case. In the first decade after their arrival, Moluccan former soldiers and their families were lodged in barracks because, apart from the differences they had with the Dutch government they agreed that their stay would only be temporary. From the 1960s onwards, a slow integration process was nevertheless set in motion, and they were transferred to separate districts across some 60 villages.

If we take intermarriage as one of the parameters of integration, it appears that the affinity post-colonial migrants have with Dutch society is growing over time, and is stronger than that felt by labour migrants. The question of intermarriage vis-à-vis the post-colonial discussion is addressed

**Figure 1.1  Immigration from the Antilles & Aruba, Surinam and Indonesia**

*Source: Central Bureau of Statistics*
by Laarman in this volume. Generally, intermarriage with the indigenous Dutch population occurs much more frequently among post-colonial migrants than among labour migrants from Morocco and Turkey, who started to settle in the Netherlands from the late 1970s onwards (SCP 2007: 39). In the 1950s, more than half of the Indische Netherlander immigrants married outside their own group (Willems 2001: 201). This figure was slightly lower for Moluccans. According to figures from the 1960s onwards, only about one third of them married into indigenous Dutch society. This is a difference that can easily be explained by their isolated housing in barracks (and later on in separate residential areas in Dutch villages and towns) and by the long-held ideal of a return to the Moluccas. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, about one third of immigrant Surinamese and half of immigrant Antilleans are married to indigenous Dutch people. The second generation’s percentages are considerably higher than those of the first.

Table 1.1  Post-colonial immigrants in the Netherlands, first and second generations, 2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>First generation</th>
<th>Second generation</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Indische Netherlanders and Dutch repatriates</td>
<td>204,000</td>
<td>315,000</td>
<td>519,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Moluccan</td>
<td>26,000</td>
<td>32,349</td>
<td>58,349</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Surinamese</td>
<td>187,483</td>
<td>144,417</td>
<td>331,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Antillean and Aruban</td>
<td>80,102</td>
<td>49,581</td>
<td>129,683</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>497,585</td>
<td>540,868</td>
<td>1,038,932</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Source: Bosma (2009: 30)

Post-colonial immigrants had different levels of education and different degrees of affinity with Dutch culture, but almost all were legally Dutch citizens with the exception of the Moluccans. Many Moluccans had refused to apply for Dutch citizenship during their exile in the Netherlands, and about 80 per cent did not hold a Dutch passport in the 1970s (Jones 2007: 129). The Surinamese – Afro-Surinamese, in particular – and the Indische Netherlanders were the most proficient in speaking Dutch, whereas the Moluccans and Antilleans showed the least affinity with Dutch language and culture.

Throughout the post-war period, the overwhelming majority of the Antillean community in the Netherlands was of African descent, Christian and Papiamentu-speaking. Initially, the immigrants were mainly members of the middle class mostly seeking higher education. Their educational levels were above average and their command of Dutch was good. From the 1980s onwards, the growing Antillean community came to represent a cross-section from the sending islands, from Curaçao, in particular. This meant a dramatic change to the socio-economic profile of new arrivals.
from the Antilles. Middle-class migrants continued arriving, but they were now far outnumbered by lower-class islanders with meagre educational skills, a poor command of Dutch and little affinity with Dutch culture at large. How different this last episode in the history of post-colonial migrations was compared to the opening chapters of the Indische Netherlanders!

1.3 Post-colonial immigrants as a distinct category

Post-colonial immigrants vary widely in terms of their education, employment opportunities, religion and affinity with Dutch society. However, they are generally more familiar with metropolitan society than are labour immigrants from Turkey and the Southern Mediterranean. The great majority are Dutch citizens; a smaller majority have had at least a couple of years of Dutch education and have attended Protestant or Catholic churches. This ‘positive social capital’ that the post-colonial immigrants possessed when they arrived in the metropolis, and which gave them an advantage over other immigrant groups, has been coined ‘the post-colonial bonus’ by Oostindie (2010: 46; Boehmer & Gouda 2009: 43). Part of this ‘bonus’ was also that post-colonial immigrants were Dutch citizens. However, this was a status Dutch lawmakers were in many cases quite reluctant to honour, particularly if the immigrants were not direct descendants of metropolitan Dutch. Whereas in colonial times the importance of loyal citizen-subjects overseas was stressed, as soon as the consequences of these citizens’ repatriation became clear in terms of their housing and settlement costs, the cultural distances between metropolitan and colonial Dutch nationals were emphasised by a process of ‘ethnic othering’. After the transfer of sovereignty to Indonesia, for example, Dutch citizens of mixed descent were systematically encouraged by the Dutch authorities to give up their Dutch passports and become Indonesians. Moreover, the Dutch government systematically discouraged their attempts to leave Indonesia because of its deteriorating conditions in the 1950s. The Dutch government only changed its attitude in 1957, when the Indonesian government simply declared Dutch citizens to be personae non gratae and ordered them out of the country as undesirable aliens. The malleability of the concept of citizenship is explained in chapter 2 by Jones.

Colonial background did indeed carry some drawbacks, too. One cannot ignore the legacies of colonial societies with their racial prejudices. Many continued to exist as stereotypes in post-colonial metropolitan society. It has therefore been argued, as some contributions to this volume suggest, that colonialism continues in new shapes and forms in our present-day post-colonial societies. But even those who do not strictly adhere to the notion of post-colonial continuity still subscribe to the point of view that contemporary Dutch multicultural society is in many – often invisible –
ways connected to the past history of Dutch colonisation in South-East Asia and the Caribbean. The Dutch are post-colonial without realising it and without accepting newcomers from the colonies as agents in the national historical narrative. According to Willems’ contribution in this volume: ‘In spite of the massive cultural interdependence between the former motherland and its overseas territories, post-colonial migrants appear as victims rather than as active agents.’ I will return to the point of ‘victimhood’ later in this chapter. The wider issue is the lack of reflection – the absence of a systematic debate – on the Dutch post-colonial state. This theme also recurs in my own chapter 10. By way of introduction let me just mention a few explanations that apply here.

Firstly, highly diverging from situations in the UK’s and France’s former colonies, Indonesia, the Netherlands’ largest former colony, does not ‘speak back’. On the eve of World War II, about 800,000 Indonesians had some knowledge of Dutch, but the familiarity with the coloniser’s language completely disappeared during the successive Japanese occupation and decolonisation process. Other former colonies did speak back to the metropolis. We see this, for example, through Antillean writer Frank Martinus Arion’s novels, thousands of copies of which have been sold. The books were highly acclaimed by the Dutch readers, but it is questionable whether the author’s sharp critique of the neo-colonial relationship between the Caribbean and Europe had much impact on his Dutch audience.

Secondly, decolonisation histories in the Eastern and Western parts of the former Dutch colonial empire were radically different. The mass departure from Indonesia consisted of minority groups directly connected to the waning colonial order. In contrast, the Surinamese exodus comprised a fairly representative sample of the total population and was sparked by the Surinamese government’s greatly contested decision to attain independence by the end of 1975. While the Dutch government was delighted to comply with the mainly Afro-Surinamese quest for independence – partly in hopes of curtailing immigration – a large number of Surinamese voted with their feet. In the following decades, the spectre of the Surinamese exodus would haunt not only the young republic, but equally the former metropolis. The vain hope of the Dutch government of enticing the Antillean population, and its leadership, to accept independence became increasingly linked to the equally futile wish to curtail Antillean migration to the Netherlands. Exactly the opposite happened. The choice against independence made by the Antilleans has not simply confirmed their citizenship within the Kingdom of the Netherlands and their right of abode in the metropolis. These privileges are now key arguments for Antilleans to reject a transfer of sovereignty (Oostindie & Verton 1998: 53-54).

Thirdly, post-colonial immigrations and immigrant settlement processes present a fragmented picture. While the first migration waves from the East – from Indonesia – had arrived in the 1950s, the others from the West
– from Surinam and the Dutch Antilles – came after 1970. Meanwhile, Dutch society underwent a complete transformation. Before 1965, it was a highly pillarised society under shared Catholic, Protestant and Social-Democratic leadership, where each aspect of social life was separated by denomination. The Netherlands had its share of youth protests around 1970 and rapidly secularised in the course of the 1960s and 1970s. Moreover, in the early 1970s, Bagley and other authors could still claim that racial tensions were practically absent in Dutch society (Bagley 1973; Verwey-Jonker 1971). Before the end of that decade, however, the first racist political organisations entered the scene. Meanwhile, youth who were recognisably Afro-Surinamese and Moluccan complained that they were being discriminated against. Economic changes were likewise drastic. The 1950s and 1960s witnessed two decades of high rates of economic growth, whereas in the 1980s, most migrants to the West had to find their way in a society going through a process of deindustrialisation and transformation into a service economy.

As in other European countries, the post-colonial immigrants who were direct descendants of the metropolitan population, or were even born in the metropolis, were comparatively well-educated, often arrived during periods of economic expansion and benefitted fully from a cultural and linguistic affinity with metropolitan culture. This applied particularly to the Indische Netherlanders. For many Surinamese, Antilleans and second-generation Moluccans who entered the Dutch labour market from the late 1970s and 1980s onwards, prospects were rather grim. Unemployment figures among Surinamese, Antilleans and Moluccans were around 40 per cent in 1983 (Veenman & Roelandt 1994: 11, 34). In that respect, they found themselves in more or less the same position as labour migrants and their children. The Netherlands was not exceptional. Elsewhere in Europe – Portugal, for example – the first waves of metropolitan Portuguese who returned from African colonies after 1973 were in a far better position than other subjects of former Portuguese colonies who set foot on metropolitan soil later on. Today Antilleans in France and South Asians and Caribbeans in the UK face the same problems as any other immigrants from outside the Western world. The post-colonial bonus can only be cashed in times of economic boom and bust. Moreover, history has also taught us that in good times, post-colonial immigrants are not the only ones who benefit from rising economic opportunities; other migrant groups profit as well. The post-colonial bonus is often just a temporary and precarious advantage.
1.4 Post-colonial identity formation and construction from an associational perspective

Various contributions to this volume, alongside other publications, note that different post-colonial immigrant groups form distinct ‘memory communities’. (Since chapters 9 and 10 elaborate on the subject of memory communities, I do not do so here). By some authors, the situation in the Netherlands has been labelled as an extremely heterogeneous diaspora (Boehmer & Gouda 2009: 45). First of all, this has been articulated in terms of how immigrants organised themselves upon arrival in the Netherlands. Post-colonial immigrant groups in the Netherlands differed considerably in terms of social capital (e.g. education, religion, ethnic consciousness) and the opportunity structures they met, as did their associational landscapes (Bosma & Alferink forthcoming; Vermeulen 2006). Coming from a plural society, Surinamese immigrants from various ethnic backgrounds – Afro-Surinamese, Hindustani, Maroon and Javanese – all established their own organisations. In this respect, identity politics in the Netherlands were a continuation of the pillarised politics of Surinam. To this it should be added that Surinamese independence was pushed through by the Afro-Surinamese government against fierce resistance by the Hindustani opposition. Cooperation between Hindustani and Afro-Surinamese immigrant organisations proved to be extremely difficult in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Bosma, 2009; Oostindie 2010).

The opposite happened within the group of European immigrants from Indonesia, despite the fact that in colonial times there had always been tensions between white metropolitan Dutch and Dutch descendants of mixed origin, the latter being denoted as the Indo-Dutch or Indische Netherlanders. After the war, these tensions were far from buried, but other issues were momentarily pressing enough to forge a unity among Europeans coming from Indonesia. During the Japanese occupation (1942-1945), most of the European population had been concentrated in detention camps under horrible circumstances, while many males had been deployed as forced labourers under even worse conditions. Even though many Indo-Dutch stayed outside the detention camps, they would find themselves increasingly isolated, threatened and harassed by both the Japanese and the Indonesian populations. About 23 per cent of the prisoners of war and 10 per cent of the other detainees did not survive (Van Velden 1963: 366-374). Things hardly improved for the European citizenry in the immediate post-war years, as the armed fight over the country’s political status became wedded to social and civil struggle and outright criminality. This so-called bersiap period resulted in the death of thousands of European residents. With the transfer of independence, order was more or less restored, but the remaining Dutch descendants felt increasingly marginalised in the
new republic, which, in turn, saw these groups as remnants of a despised racial colonial order.

Once in the Netherlands, the repatriated – almost half of whom were colonial civil servants and their family members – sought to organise themselves in order to rescue their pensions. The funds for pensions were under threat of disappearing, after responsibility for them had been transferred to an unwilling Republic of Indonesia. Another issue was that during the Japanese occupation of Indonesia, the majority of Dutch men (as well as women and children) had been interned and during these years their salary payments had been discontinued. A final bone of contention was that the Netherlands government was quite reluctant to help Dutch citizens repatriate to the Netherlands when, in the early 1950s, many of them lost their jobs in Indonesia and fell on hard times. At the time, the government took the position that Dutch who were born and raised in the Dutch East Indies would fit better in a future Indonesia than in the Netherlands. It spoke of this category of people as ‘oriental’ Dutch, whose future would be within Indonesian society, a debate that is also examined in this volume by Jones. What mattered for the moment is that one way or another all repatriates felt that they were treated as second-rate citizens who had to stand up for their rights. And this created a solidarity that bridged colour and social divisions amongst them. Indische and repatriate associations in the Netherlands could rely on the organisational skills they had developed in the colonial days, when they started setting up organisational branches, collecting membership fees and circulating journals over the immense distances of the Indonesian archipelago. Post-war organisations, such as Pelita (established to help women who lost their husbands in prisoner-of-war or other Japanese camps) and NIBEG (an organisation of prisoners of war and other former detainees), had thousands of members and branches throughout the Netherlands. Moreover, in the 1950s and 1960s, welfare work for the repatriates from Indonesia was coordinated by the Centraal Comité van Kerkelijk en Particulier Initiatief voor Sociale Zorg ten Behoeve van Gerepatrieerden (Central Committee of Churches and Private Initiatives for Social Care of Repatriates, CCKP) – with many local committees all over the country – in which non-governmental organisations of repatriates and the churches worked together (Willems 2001: 102). Integration policies were coordinated at a national level and the Indische organisations operated likewise.

The geography of the Surinamese organisational landscape was completely different. Not only was the plural society, but also the different positions vis-à-vis Surinamese independence reflected in the Surinamese organisational landscape. During their years of settlement, Surinamese immigrant organisations were far more divided than the Indische ones in terms of ethnicity, scale and membership figures. Moreover, and in contrast to the Indische associations, Surinamese organisations in the 1970s did not
become involved in policymaking at a national level, but in social work at the municipal level and sometimes even in unrewarding and dangerous activities for semi-volunteer organisations, such as providing help to drug addicts. The difference becomes clear if we look at the first fifteen years of settlement. Between 1945 and 1960, Indische Netherlanders and repatriates established twenty new national organisations and only three local ones, whereas between 1975 and 1990, the Surinamese established 67 new national and 330 new local (IISH database 2008).

1.5 Towards the mildly multicultural minority policies of the 1980s

Even though strong doubts had been expressed about the capacity of Indo-Dutch, who had never been in the Netherlands before, to integrate into Dutch society, Dutch government, churches and welfare workers were united in their efforts to complete the process of integration within fifteen years. They were not so naive as to believe that a full assimilation was possible; their aim was just to make sure that the newcomers were able to cope with the demands of the labour market and all the practical exigencies of daily life. Special attention was given to the allegedly wealthy lifestyle of the colonies, which needed to be tweaked and twined into frugal housekeeping. They had no illusions whatsoever that the newcomers would ever feel entirely Dutch; mentally, they would stay in their own milieu (Bosma 2009: 145-146).

The community development approach – with its separate facilities for newcomers and its strong assimilationist features – had worked very well during the Indische repatriation. It went down as a success in Dutch history to such a degree that it became commonplace to speak of a ‘silent integration’. Facilitating this process was that the bitterness accompanying decolonisation forged a unity among the metropolitan Dutch and Indo-Dutch who had to leave Indonesia. This proved the case even though in daily life the two hardly mixed, just as they had never done in colonial days. Moreover, that their future rested in Dutch society was no point for debate. This came in contrast to Moluccans in the Netherlands. Up until the mid-1970s, they thought – or at least it was the official position of their leaders – that they would return to the Moluccas as soon as their own Free Republic of the Moluccas was established. Unsurprisingly, this delayed their integration into Dutch society and fostered a politicised and oppositional identity vis-à-vis Dutch society. The entire world saw how, between 1975 and 1977, radical second-generation Moluccans hijacked trains and took hostages, even at a primary school, resulting in several innocent casualties.

The model of Indische integration still dominated in the 1970s, but it met resistance from both Moluccan and Surinamese organisations.
Moluccan organisations considered integration policies to pose a threat to their ideal of a Free Republic of the Moluccas. Their organisational life was highly fragmented and fraught with rifts and tensions, but still united in one powerful interest organisation, the Badan Persatuan, which according to its leadership should be recognised as the Moluccan government in exile. Meanwhile, the relationship between Surinamese organisations and the Dutch Ministry of Welfare was rather frosty. Initially, Surinamese organisations held on to the ideal of a return to Surinam, which in the view of the Dutch government was unrealistic (Bosma 2009). In marked contrast to the close collaboration between repatriate organisations and the Dutch government over the issue of housing, Surinamese spokesmen condemned attempts by the government to disperse the Surinamese across the Netherlands as an attack on their newly gained sense of Surinamese nationhood (Surinam having only become independent in 1975). There was mistrust between the Ministry of Welfare, Surinamese organisations and contemporary local welfare foundations staffed by Surinamese (Bosma 2009).

Post-colonial immigrants definitely played a role in inducing the Dutch government to formulate a new, mildly multicultural minorities policy. The Moluccan hijackings and frictions with the Surinamese convinced the government that certain groups in Dutch society would maintain patterns of identity formation distinct from mainstream Dutch society. At the same time, the idea of the welfare state and community development as such came under increasing scrutiny. It was felt that immigrant organisations should become more involved in policymaking, but that separate welfare organisations for minorities, the so-called ‘categorical facilities’ that were also product of pillarisation, were impeding rather than encouraging integration. The newly formulated minorities policy – and particularly the expressed desire to speak to immigrants directly – should be seen against the backdrop of a government struggling against powerful welfare conglomerates, which, according to some contemporary observers, had placed themselves between the government and the population (Van Doorn & Schuyt 1978). The minorities policy of the early 1980s tried to break this deadlock by making a distinction between welfare work and political empowerment. Underlined was the importance of the Dutch government talking directly to immigrants themselves, rather than to the professional national welfare network (WRR 1979: 17). Moreover, there was broad political consensus that national welfare policies should be decentralised, a process that had already been set in motion in the 1970s, but began seriously to take shape from 1983 onwards. As Van Heelsum and Vermeulen demonstrate in this volume, the support of central and local government for Surinamese organisations in Amsterdam diminished. A very important conclusion is that Dutch multicultural policies aimed at engaging newcomers in municipal politics, even if they were not Dutch citizens, did not lead to a proliferation
of migrant organisations (Vermeulen 2006; Bosma 2009: 203-204; Van Heelsum & Vermeulen in this volume).

Interestingly enough, however, immigrants continued to organise themselves and this pertains also to the Indo-Dutch and the Moluccans, whose second generations reached adulthood in the early 1980s. In the 1980s, identity politics of first- and second-generation immigrant spokespersons found an increasingly supportive audience, both within their own groups as well as in the political arena. In some cases new memory communities were forged. The war in Indonesia brought, from the 1970s onwards, Moluccans and Indische Netherlands together, whereas the history of slavery had been a common concern for Afro-Surinamese and Afro-Caribbeans. These are also, by far, the two largest post-colonial memory communities in the Netherlands. Cross-ethnic Surinamese identity politics did not emerge. The question of Surinamese independence had been a source of bitter contest between, on the one hand, Afro-Surinamese leaders who advocated rapid decolonisation and, on the other, Hindustani and Javanese who were anxious to preserve their relationship with the Netherlands. The Caribbean islands were also deeply politically divided. In the Dutch Caribbean, the second-largest island, Aruba, successfully applied for a separate statute within the Kingdom of the Netherlands, loosening its ties with the largest Caribbean island, Curacao.

1.6 Culture of victimhood

By the early 1980s, a new page had been turned in the identity formation of Dutch post-colonial immigrant groups. This was, however, hardly set in motion as a result of the newly inaugurated, mildly multicultural minorities policy of the Dutch government. Rather, it was developments within these groups that mattered. In 1981, the coup by Bouterse ended the precarious democracy of newly independent Surinam, which came as a deep disillusion to all who had championed the cause of releasing Surinam from its colonial chains. While in the 1950s and 1960s, the decolonisation of Africa had been a central issue for black people around the world, following the astounding success of the 1977 American television series *Roots*, the Atlantic slave trade and the African diaspora became central to black identity formation. Here we see the emergence of the memory community of the Black Atlantic, the well-known concept of Gilroy, as Oostindie points out in his contribution to this volume. Slavery and slave resistance have played a central role in the post-war historiography of the Caribbean. Meanwhile, the migrations of the British, Dutch and French Caribbean to Europe, and their intellectuals, demand that attention to their legacies and perspectives be paid in the metropolitan academia and media. Black culture
is now solidly positioned in the West, but is also quite distinct from other post-colonial identity formations.

As discussed by Steijlen in this volume, during the 1960s and 1970s, Fanon’s *Black skin, white masks* belonged to the select libraries of young Moluccan intellectuals. But in the 1980s, nostalgia became an identity marker, facilitated also by the increased opportunities to return to the country of origin. Relations between the Netherlands and Indonesia had drastically improved during the 1970s and airfares went down rapidly from 1980 onwards. In 1982, the Moluccan magazine *Tjenkeh*, which was edited by young Moluccan intellectuals, reported that there was a lot of ‘nostalgia and identity strengthening’ happening (*Tjenkeh* 1982). Within existing structures – mainly magazines, museums and Pasars (i.e. ethnic markets) – there was a growing interest in colonial history and in Indonesian culture overall. ‘Indische’ became increasingly associated with history and identity. At the same time, the Moluccan focus on Indonesia increased. Whether looking to the Indische journal *Moesson* or the Moluccan *Marinjo* or *Tjenkeh*, we see the same tendency to reflect on the past. The 1980s were also the beginning of the quest to include in Dutch history writing the experiences of the Moluccans, descendants of slaves and non-white Dutch from Indonesia. Members of the second generation of Indische Dutchers distanced themselves from the often colonial mentality of most of their parents’ organisations. Second-generation Moluccan intellectuals distanced themselves from the ideal of a Free Republic of the Moluccas. They considered this political quest as too compromised by colonial revanchism and too focused on the special relationship that had existed between the Moluccans and the Dutch in the colonial army. Following this trend, a few years later, *Moesson* had to defend itself against criticism by Indische intellectuals that it was indulging in politically insensitive, colonial nostalgia. Members of the second generation created their own organisation. These ‘Indische descendants’, as they were known, sought to leave colonialism behind and relate to modern Indonesia, or even to a much vaguer notion of urban Asia (Bosma 2009: 258-259; Van Leeuwen 2008: 326-327).

In some sense, however, the 1980s were belated echoes of earlier prominent and often politically engaged projects, namely of identity formation in the context of anti-colonialism and racism. The Indo-Dutch had their project of advocating the value and universality of Creole culture, which was also a clear sign of resistance to mainstream assimilation. Their champion was Tjalie Robinson, leader of the Tong Tong movement of the 1950s and the 1960s. This was both a revival and a continuation of the Indo-Dutch emancipation movement that had constituted such a powerful force in colonial days. But contrary to the colonial situation, it was not an emancipation that sought acceptance by colonial elites. This was heavily tilted towards metropolitan European cultural hegemony. Instead, as Willems outlines here, Robinson’s cultural agenda was inspired partly by what he considered
to be mestizo cultures in Mexico and Brazil (Willems 2008). The emancipation of the Indo-Dutch (in colonial times first named Indo-Europeans; later on Indische Netherlands) that had already begun in the 1880s was far from complete when they arrived in the Netherlands in the 1950s; this was the task Robinson took on with his Tong Tong movement. Willems observes how Robinson’s critique of what he thought of as the materialism and technological shallowness of Western society – his sense of ‘transnational’ or universal belonging – fell completely on deaf ears in the Netherlands of the 1950s and 1960s. Robinson became, however, a valuable source of inspiration in the 1980s and 1990s, when the identity formation of the younger generations of the Indische Netherlands took place in the context of a multicultural society. He himself would not be part of this renaissance, having died in 1974.

In the early 1980s, the Indische Netherlands were not a subject of the newly formulated minorities policy, precisely because they were considered already integrated. The second generation nonetheless tried to jump on the bandwagon of multiculturalism. And as Pattynama describes in her contribution, chapter 9: in these years, they responded to their parents’ ‘silences and contradictory stories about the Dutch East Indies’, particularly in the literary field. The older generation meanwhile expressed its wariness of the new multicultural ‘pampering of newcomers’. They struggled to be included in the central chapter of Dutch identity formation: World War II. One of their greatest grievances was that their massive internment in Japanese detention camps (some 100,000 Dutch civilians were interned and an additional 42,000 had been prisoners of war) had not been given proper recognition within Dutch society. There was also the nagging issue of their salary back pay, which had never been addressed and continued to be a bone of contention between the Dutch government and the, now elderly, former Dutch civil servants of colonial Indonesia (Meijer 2005). In total, Indische Netherlands established 43 war-related organisations, 37 of which were founded after 1979 (Bosma 2009: 246). The identity politics of the Indische organisations related to World War II in Indonesia were dominantly vocal.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the government became more open to claims relating to the consequences of the Japanese occupation of Indonesia between 1942 and 1945. Indische Netherlands and repatriates, as well as Moluccans who had endured lasting physical and psychological damage as a result of the war, became eligible for a ‘war victim’s allowance’. Somewhat belatedly, their rights were brought on a par with those who suffered persecution during the German occupation of the Netherlands. For the first time in 1970, the anniversary of the capitulation of Japan was commemorated on 15 August instead of also on 5 May, the day German troops in the Netherlands had surrendered. It was conceived by the Dutch government as the first and last separate commemoration. But ten years
later, another commemoration was held on 15 August. This time it was organised by a union of 23 Indische organisations and the Moluccan Badan Persatuan. Since 1980 this separate commemoration has become an annual event. In 1988, victims of the war in Asia were granted their own monument in The Hague. In spite of the fact that the Indische Netherlanders were explicitly excluded from the Dutch minorities policy, they were rather effective in maintaining a memory community centred around World War II, and in obtaining government sponsorship to this end.

In her book *Ons Indisch erfgoed* (‘Our Indische heritage’), Van Leeuwen concludes that the memory community of Indische Netherlander victims of World War II was the only such community in which colour did not play a role. She typifies it as depoliticised identity politics, successful in wrestling funds from the government, but too late for the first generation and at the price of not coming to terms with the colonial past (Van Leeuwen 2008: 344-345). What does remain are the Indisch Creole cuisine and the Tong Tong Fair (formerly Pasar Malam Besar), proudly claiming to be the largest Eurasian fair in the world and attracting between 130,000 and 160,000 visitors every year. From the 1980s onwards, festivals became the places where all post-colonial populations, not just the Indische, framed their cultural and social agendas within the context of a multicultural society. Ethnic festivals, in particular, became the arenas where this took place, as Alferink demonstrates in this volume. In terms of a bridging role between newcomers and the recipient society, these festivals increasingly interest government authorities. Rotterdam does little to hide its objective of using ethnic festivals as an instrument for ethnic marketing. Yet ironically, the various ethnic festivals of post-colonial migrant groups hardly receive any government subsidies, despite the fact that together they attract between one and two million visitors every year.

Festivals are, however, not the venues where fundamental discussions about the colonial project and its post-colonial legacies take place. In fact, festivals completely eclipsed earlier, and often more politically engaged, platforms about post-colonialism, centred on racism and gender discrimination. These platforms and similar manifestations crossed the boundaries between different immigrant groups in the Netherlands. In Amsterdam, for example, educated Moluccans, Antilleans and Surinamese established the Platform van Democratische Buitenlandersorganisaties (Platform of Democratic Immigrant Organisations), which works to fight against discrimination and racism. In other instances, progressive Antilleans, Surinamese, Turkish and Moroccans collaborated to protest against discrimination. But these were often exceptions to the rule. Nowadays, it is only in the academic realm that these boundaries are crossed, though this does not reflect a real rapprochement of different post-colonial groups. The post-colonial effects of the racial and gendered hierarchies of plantation societies are analysed through the lens of post-colonial gender studies. Then we arrive
at themes like the role of hypergamy, ‘whitening through marrying’, a phenomenon typical of plantation societies, not only in the West Indies but also in Java. As Laarman notes in her contribution, racial, class and gender inequalities are mutually reinforcing each other. They constitute both a complex and hotly debated field.

1.7 Post-colonialism and pockets of silence

The 1960s and 1970s saw emancipation movements among all post-colonial migrant groups, varying from the Tong Tong movement to Surinamese and Antillean student activists and violent strikes in Curaçao and Surinam to hijackings in the Netherlands. Yet these emancipatory voices became far more subdued in the 1980s, or were transformed into narratives of nostalgia and victimhood. Meanwhile, the concept of post-colonialism had not moved beyond the walls of the academic community. This differs from France and Portugal, where the decolonisation process split the political spectrum and where post-colonialism is used by the left to criticise the dominant political discourses on integration and the colonial past. Sometimes the dominant position may lean towards the so-called ‘balance sheet approach’ which pretends that after all not all was bad in colonialism and that we (the colonisers) also ‘did many good things’. The empires, it is argued, had their inclusive values too: France’s Republican universalism, the UK’s ‘Britishness’ and Portugal’s Lusophony, the cultural community of Portuguese-speaking countries around the world. Recently, ‘Britishness’ has been called to order for its racist connotations, whereas Lusophony has been closely examined with regard to its silence about the colonial past and its association with the late imperialism of the Salazar regime. As Marques (2012) has recently pointed out, the ideas behind Lusophony are soundly rejected by the subaltern voices on black culture of immigrants from Africa and from the shanties around Lisbon. In France, the Republican model of integration is criticised by the left for its basically secular citizenship project that, in spite of its claims, allows discrimination to persist and Muslims to be excluded.

While the positions and debates are still in flux in France, Portugal and the UK, in the Netherlands, post-colonial tranquillity reigns outside academic citadels and, as Boehmer and Gouda (2009) have argued, within most universities, too. Perhaps it is a good sign that the most vexing post-colonial issues were resolved or taken to their graves by the first generation of post-colonial immigrants. Moreover, colonial history is very much a part of the history curricula of high schools and universities, even though in a rather fragmented way. The rediscovery of the Netherlands’ long history of slave trading and slavery does not have the potential to be a highly contested issue in mainstream politics (Oostindie 2009b: 305). As Oostindie
(2009a: 620-621) wrote: ‘[…] the urge to accept Atlantic slavery as part and parcel of Dutch history may have been spectacularly successful, but this does not mean that there is no dissonance’. Neither does it seem to have a bearing upon the perception and rendering of Dutch colonial history at large. And so it can be that the formation of the Dutch East Indies Company in 1602 was celebrated, whereas the Dutch West Indies Company’s activity in the transatlantic slave trade is associated with one of the darker pages of Dutch history. Slavery also existed in the realm of the East Indies Company and on a rather massive scale (Vink 2003; Van Welie 2008). Moreover, after the long overdue abolition of slavery, first in the East Indies in 1860 and then in the Dutch West Indies in 1863, there was an extensive history of indentured labour ranging from Sumatra to Surinam. The decolonisation of Indonesia was accompanied by colonial warfare, a violent and ugly history. More recently, relatives of the victims of the Rawagede massacre committed by Dutch soldiers during the colonial war of 1945-1949 have won their legal action against the Dutch state. Even though Dutch newspapers and television have reported on this, they were hardly able to provide any context to the case. Violence was part of the colonial enterprise from its early beginnings to its very end. Perhaps, the time has yet to come for a critical – and particularly systematic – reflection on the political, historical and cultural consequences of Dutch colonialism. Perhaps the best moment for such a reappraisal was in the early 1980s and the opportunity to do so has thus been missed. The specific constellation of identity formations and memory communities with all their traumas and sensitivities stood in the way of such a revisiting of the colonial past. On the other hand, there might be a new chance with a new generation’s arrival on the scene, willing to reopen the debate by looking at the past from a greater distance. In that case, the relationship between identity formations and ‘memory making’ might be on the agenda as an important subject of investigation for the coming year.

Notes

1 This book is part of a larger project entitled ‘Bringing History Home’, which was initiated by Gert Oostindie, director of the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV). This project has produced three Dutch-language monographs on post-colonial immigrants and post-colonial history in the Netherlands, as well as another English-language book comparing the various post-colonial histories of European former colonial powers, the United States, Russia and Japan (Van Leeuwen 2008; Bosma 2009; Oostindie 2010; Bosma et al. 2012). This introduction draws heavily upon the research conducted by Bringing History Home. Recalling the Indies by Coté and Westerbeek (2005) may be cited as an earlier example of presenting Dutch post-colonial scholarship to an international audience, although the study was confined to repatriates from the former Dutch East Indies.
The adjective ‘Indische’ that will be used throughout the book denotes a belonging to the former Netherlands Indies. The words ‘Indische Netherlander’ refer to Dutch citizens who were born in this colony and who were predominantly of mixed Dutch-Indonesian descent.

An exception to the rule are the Hindustani Surinamese (see Oostindie 2010: 36).

Over the past decade, all islands sent students to the Netherlands, with many not returning to their native homes afterwards. During a short economic crisis in the mid-1980s, migration from Aruba was relatively high and possibly included a disproportionate share from the island’s Afro-Caribbean segment.