The delusive continuities of the Dutch Caribbean diaspora

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5 May 1995 was a special day: the Germans had capitulated fifty years earlier, putting an end to five years of Nazi occupation of the Netherlands. The Breestraat in Leiden was the scene of brass bands, old Harleys and jeeps against a background of *tableaux vivants* referring to the Occupation. In between marched war veterans: British, American and Canadian.

I thought of Frank Koulen, who could have been walking here too if he had not died ten years earlier. Born in New Nickerie, Surinam in 1922, he died in Terneuzen, Zeeland Flanders in 1985. It seems easy enough to outline his biography. He was born into the Creole working class, into a family of absent men – his sons were the first males in four generations to transmit the name of Koulen.\(^1\) He was brought up by his grandmother until she died. Then his mother took over the task of raising him, but she died soon afterwards too. Eleven years old by now, he ended up in the Tilburg Lay Brothers’ orphanage. The Brothers thought he showed promise and enabled him to learn a profession after completing full primary school education. He trained in metalwork, but Surinam did not have much to offer. In 1939, at the age of sixteen, he emigrated to Curaçao to work in the Shell refinery there. Like most of his fellow countrymen, he lived in the Sufferant district, better known at the time as ‘Surinam village’. It was there, not in the Netherlands, that the first chapters of the modern Dutch Caribbean migration history were written.

In 1943 he signed a five-year contract with the navy.\(^2\) The marines were trained in the United States and England before being deployed in the liberation of the Netherlands. In September 1944 they set out from Normandy for the Netherlands. The offensive was halted in Zeeland Flanders and was not completed until the spring of 1945. That winter Koulen met a young woman from Terneuzen, and they married in 1947. When the first of their seven children was born, Koulen was serving in Indonesia – very much against his will, but still under military discipline – where the Dutch were using force to try to avert independence. In 1949, when he was called up again, he asked to be released from service because of his objections of principle. In the end he was granted an honourable discharge. The rest of his story is a modest variation on the rags to riches theme. As a small-scale entrepreneur and especially as the driving force behind a steadily growing jazz centre, Koulen made a name for himself in
Zealand. In terms of education and work, his children reached heights which their father had only dreamed of during his difficult childhood in Surinam. He revisited his country once, in 1980, but despite his pride in his origins and his race, it was a disappointing encounter. The hated colonialism had come to an end, but he noted with regret that he was unable to accept the lethargy and provincialism of life in Surinam.

It is not just my own involvement - Frank Koulen was my father-in-law - which is my reason for telling this story. I have told it here to introduce a reflection on the contrast between early Caribbean Dutch history and today, and the significance of that prehistory for present-day migrants. It would be a good thing if biographical sketches like that of Koulen were typical of Caribbean history in the Netherlands, but that is not the case, as the title of this chapter suggests. Second, more and more I have wondered whether an early history like that of Frank Koulen has any significance at all for the masses of later migrants and their children. I have grown more sceptical about that as well. And finally, the existence of different, often contradictory versions of this very story has gradually helped me to realize how cautious we must be in interpreting all the individual histories.

These reflections are the thread running through this chapter. I have tried to find a solid basis for them by once again outlining the course of the historical events and by testing my ideas against the results of a modest street research among Caribbean Dutch.³

PRELUDE: THE SLAVES

But let us start at the beginning of the story. The history of Surinamese and Antileans⁴ in the Netherlands goes back to the earliest years of colonization. It is the same story that can be told for all of the Caribbean colonies and their mother countries. The Indians who were taken to the ‘fatherland’ as exotic curiosities; the slaves who went too as servants and status symbols; the colonial elites, who tried to find a trace of ‘refined’ living in the Netherlands; and their children, who went to study there. There were never very many of them; in that respect the history of the Dutch Caribbean differs from that of the neighbouring countries. In eighteenth-century England, the number of blacks, mainly from the West Indian colonies, was estimated to be some tens of thousands. The relatively large-scale migration of both slaves and free persons from the French Caribbean led to far-reaching legal restrictions. The mixture of economic and racist arguments used at the time reads as an unheimische prelude to present-day debates. As for Spain and Portugal, large numbers of Africans were living there long before the conquista. This black population was constantly supplemented in a roundabout way through the slaving concerns in the New World.

By comparison, the presence of Caribbeans and Africans in the Netherlands was negligible. By far the largest proportion of all blacks who arrived there came from Surinam, followed - though a long way behind - by Curaçao. They were
few in number. Even at the peak of the Surinam plantation economy, the third quarter of the eighteenth century, hardly more than twenty slaves and a few free coloureds left for ‘patria’ each year, and the vast majority of them returned later. These figures were even lower during the preceding and subsequent periods. The conclusion must therefore be that, prior to the twentieth century, the presence of Afro-Caribbeans in the Netherlands was negligible. This is even truer of Africans. The contrast with England, France and the two Iberian countries is clear. It is not difficult to explain. While the centre of gravity of the colonial empires of the other European countries was in the Atlantic world, the Netherlands focused on Asia. The Dutch trading posts in Africa and the slave colonies in the Caribbean were always of secondary importance.

What remains of this period are lost trails and a few nice anecdotes. I have collected and described a lot of them, and enjoyed doing so. Nice anecdotes, even though they are often heart-rending – but it is hard to attach any more importance than that to them. The free Indian Erikeja Jupitor, who made a notarial statement in Amsterdam in 1688 on behalf of a soldier who had served in Surinam as an interpreter. The anonymous slave who was taken to the Netherlands around 1700, joined the Reformed Church there, but seven years later, back in her own country, returned to her own belief that was ‘much more pleasing to the senses’. Quasje, banished from Surinam for trading weapons with the maroons, but eventually sent back from the Netherlands by a judge who sympathized with Quasje’s regret at having to depart two years earlier, ‘leaving behind his wife, children and livelihood’. Free orphans from Paramaribo, who were to receive a Protestant education in the Amsterdam Orphanage and were enabled to learn a craft before embarking on the journey back. John Gabriel Stedman’s slave Quaco, with whom Stedman was so contented that he took the youth with him to Europe, only to give him away there as a present to the Countess of Roosendaal. The slave Virginie from Curaçao, who waged a bitter struggle on both sides of the Atlantic for her own freedom and that of her children. J.J. Jonas, born a slave, who, ‘despite her black colour’, developed in the Netherlands to become a ‘well-educated Lady, who spoke French as purely and fluently as the best Parisienne and was as fluent in German and English as in Dutch’. The black man skating over the frozen Amsterdam canals, immortalized by the German poet Freiligrah in his poem ‘Der Schlittschuhlaufende Neger’ (1833).

The transience of these fragments of the past is in sharp contrast to comparable events elsewhere. The English experience is particularly interesting in this connection. The massive presence of West Indian slaves there repeatedly raised the question of whether slavery was acceptable on British soil. This question was answered in the negative in a test trial in 1772. Although this verdict turned out not to have a definitive character, the Somerset case is still regarded as a milestone on the road towards the abolition of slavery in the British West Indies. Moreover, several race riots occurred in this period in British cities. The simple fact that there were so many West Indians in England made it impossible to forget or ignore the slavery issue.
In the Netherlands, on the other hand, the presence of Caribbean slaves was so limited that a clear policy on their status was never formulated. Right up to the last day before the abolition of slavery on 1 July 1863, the few slaves who had been taken to the Netherlands with their masters had no secure basis on which to claim their freedom. Their almost invisible presence meant that the Dutch were confronted even less with the facts of slavery in the Caribbean colonies. Unlike the English situation, the presence of blacks in the Netherlands was hardly visible, devoid of political or social significance, and did not hasten the abolition of slavery.

THE EXODUS AND THE ILLUSION OF CONTINUITY

While the arrival of slaves ended by definition after 1863, there was continuity in a different type of migration: that of the colonial elite. In the search for expansion of the colonial horizon, and especially for good education, the better-off Surinamese and Antilleans kept on travelling to the Netherlands. The motive remains unchanged today, and is one of the few continuities in three centuries of migration history. The difference lies in what came afterwards; the return that used to be taken for granted at one time gradually became a receding horizon.

Statistically, this Caribbean history in the Netherlands hardly looks any more than a footnote to a larger story. The number of West Indian students who studied in the Netherlands in previous centuries was rarely more than a handful at any one time. The situation did not change until after the Second World War. By the end of the 1950s there were a few hundred Antillean and particularly Surinam students, and their numbers multiplied in the course of the following decades. All the same, they remained on a modest scale, and the percentage of students among the Caribbean population in the Netherlands actually declined. Seen from a wider perspective, however, the presence of Caribbean students in the Netherlands acquired an enormous importance. By means of their Dutch education, the orientation of the colonial elites was unambiguously attached to ‘Patria’. Moreover, paradoxically, the experience of a period of study in Europe was eventually to play a decisive role in the development of postwar Surinam nationalism (the same is true, though to a lesser degree, of Antillean nationalism). More than the awareness of economic and perhaps even constitutional dependence, the inevitability of a period of study in the mother country has left its mark on practically every Dutch Caribbean intellectual. Even the Surinam nationalism of the 1950s and 1960s, and independence in the 1970s, are unthinkable without the Dutch intermezzo that the protagonists once went through.

During the first half of this century ‘other’ Surinamese and Antilleans found their way to the Netherlands too on an incidental basis. Enterprising individuals, mainly men, most of them from the Afro-Surinam working class. They too are a source of wonderful anecdotes. The ‘professional Negroes’, especially musicians, who skilfully exploited the exoticism of their appearance and their artistic talents, had come a long way since the end of the nineteenth century, when Surinamese could literally be put on display without benefiting from it
themselves at all. There were also a few sailors, labourers and clerks. The best
known of the migrants is the Afro-Surinamese Anton de Kom. De Kom (b. 1898)
went to the Netherlands in 1922. He soon became active in the anti-colonial
movement and – in secret – in the Communist Party. As such he was a source of
concern to the Dutch authorities. After returning to Surinam in 1932, he was at
the centre of serious riots which earned him a compulsory ‘repatriation’ to the
land of the ruler. In 1934 he published *We Slaves of Surinam*. This book made
De Kom one of the first in the Caribbean – leaving aside Haiti and the Spanish-
speaking Caribbean – to rewrite the history of his country in an anti-colonial
manner. A German translation was published almost immediately in Moscow.
During the war he was a member of the Resistance, was arrested and deported
to Germany. This remarkable Surinamese died in the Neuengamme concen-
tration camp on 24 April 1945. Most of his relatives – his wife was Dutch – live
in the Netherlands, but it is the university of Surinam which bears his name, a
heritage of the period of military rule under Desi Bouterse.

These migrants remained isolated cases with a high curiosity value until the
1960s. Frank Koulen was known as ‘the Negro’ in the harbour town of Terneuzen
– he was the only one. In 1946 the total size of the Surinam community in
the Netherlands was estimated at 3,000, and in 1966 at 13,000. The Antillean
component accounted for no more than a few thousand persons. Compared with
the next stage, but also compared with what had already been a dramatic emigra-
tion from other parts of the Caribbean towards the United States and Britain, the
exodus from the Dutch Caribbean was thus still modest in scale. This can largely
be explained by the spectacular economic growth of Curaçao and Aruba from
the late 1920s on. The oil refineries and all the sectors expanding around them
provided a lot of jobs, both for the local population and for immigrants; those with
the status of fellow citizens (from Surinam and the Windward Islands) received
preferential treatment. The oil boom did not really die out until the late 1960s.
Besides, the Surinam economy went through a strong growth period from the
1940s as a result of the bauxite. Furthermore, there was a weak labour market in
the Netherlands. There was even a clear emigration surplus after 1945. This only
changed in the 1960s, but this was the time when the specific recruitment of
labourers from the Mediterranean countries started. Unlike the situation in
England and France, in the Netherlands hardly any labourers were recruited from
the Caribbean.

So when an exodus did get under way in the late 1960s, first and above all in
Surinam, and later in Curaçao as well, there was not only a change in numbers
but a qualitative change. For the first time, emigration to the Netherlands
outstripped migration within the Caribbean parts of the Kingdom. From now
on Dutch Caribbean migration was to be extremely conservative; the goal is
practically always the relatively safe mother country. As for the situation in the
Netherlands, the exoticism disappeared, and in a certain sense too the heroism
of the prehistory of courageous individuals, musicians, nationalists. The new
migrants represented for the first time a cross-section of the societies from which
they came. The surplus of men disappeared; the ethnic diversity of Surinam
displaced the former Afro-Surinam preponderance; and most of the migrants were now from the lower classes. Education and work were still a motive for migration. Yet while the chance of success in those sectors fell, the orientation towards Dutch welfare state provisions grew. These provisions were and still are relatively favourable; this, however, soon turned out to be not entirely positive. A part of the current Dutch Caribbean population is dependent on them, which keeps them in a paralysing stranglehold. A comparable ambivalent blessing lay in the continuing growth of the Caribbean Dutch population. The increasing numbers and concentration created the condition for the emergence of ‘ethnic’ enclaves which functioned as havens in a heartless world. However, precisely this new security may have hindered integration and social mobility.\(^5\)

In the meantime the Caribbean community in the Netherlands has continued to grow. The Surinam community today is estimated at over 275,000. The Antillean community, mainly from Curacao, has increased to the present figure of 90,000.\(^6\) It is typical that the statistics have become not only more refined, but also more problematical in a number of ways. The current practice of classifying the second generation in the statistics as Surinamese or Antillean may correspond more closely to the ideas of their parents and to that of white Dutch than to the feelings of many members of the younger generation themselves.

The growth of the Surinamese population in the Netherlands was most spectacular around the time of independence (1975). Settlement and naturalization in the Netherlands have become considerably harder since 1980, but illegal immigration continues. Furthermore, the share of the second generation is growing fast, and the third will soon be on the way. The Antillean group, mainly from Curacao, still consists mainly of the first generation. Finally, the constitutional situation has contributed to the negative phenomenon that, while the migration between Curacao and the Netherlands is two-directional, the one between Surinam and its former mother country is in fact only a one-way traffic. This is another depressing result of decolonization, which has not failed to have an impact on Surinam nationalism.\(^7\)

The notion of ‘delusive continuity’ will now be clearer. There are a number of constants in Caribbean migration to the Netherlands. People from the Caribbean came to ‘patria’ from the earliest days of colonization. There was always a strong orientation towards the mother country. The Dutch reactions to the predominantly coloured migrants – a subject not yet discussed here – were never free of problems. However, it is the fault lines which are more significant. The number of migrants has become incomparably larger and their presence is permanent. This has given the diaspora a significance of an entirely different kind, both in the Netherlands and in the Caribbean. The latter point is clear; the failure of the independence of Surinam is closely connected with the exodus, and the island communities of the Antilles too have been profoundly affected by the scale of the emigration. The former, the relatively large-scale and far-reaching effects of the Caribbean diaspora in ‘patria’, was often expressed in a more reserved attitude towards Caribbean migrants on the part of the Dutch. The question of race relations gradually lost its former relatively easy-going character.
Events could hardly have proceeded differently, given the rather profound changes which the Netherlands underwent in the postwar period. The first wave of immigration from Indonesia was followed in the 1960s by the predominantly spontaneous influx of migrants from the Caribbean and the migration from the Mediterranean, which was initially organized from the Netherlands. More recently, the ‘foreign’ population has been enlarged with refugees and people seeking asylum. Now that these ‘newcomers’ account for around 7 per cent of the population, the Netherlands has been forced to become a multi-ethnic society, whether it likes it or not. This is particularly true of the large cities; more than 25 per cent of the population in Amsterdam is classified as of foreign extraction, and the corresponding percentage for young people is twice as high.

There are now good grounds for speaking of the emergence of an ethnic underclass. In terms of a number of socio-economic criteria, the ‘foreign’ population lags far behind the ‘native’ population, and although there are large differences within the various ethnic groups, generally speaking the gap between ‘foreigners’ and ‘natives’ is widening. The fact that this assumes less dramatic forms in the Netherlands than in many other immigration countries is closely connected with the social safety-net which still covers all aspects of life. However, state intervention of this kind has tended to disguise rather than prevent the marginalization of a very large number of new Dutch. With the ongoing contraction of the welfare state during the last few years, they too are beginning to experience how precarious it is to depend on a hand which can take as well as give.

In relative terms, the situation of the Dutch Caribbean diaspora is not so bad. There is a fairly large middle class, and according to the main socioeconomic indicators the position of Dutch citizens of (partly) Caribbean extraction is more favourable than that of the migrants from the Mediterranean. Understandably, however, the Surinamese and Antilleans do not compare their situation with that of other immigrants, but with that of the ‘native’ Dutch – and that picture is not so rosy. In addition, there is a degree of xenophobia and racism among the ‘native’ population; although its actual scale is the subject of debate, it is undeniably more pronounced than it was a few decades ago. This is the background against which one should view the concern and often anger or disenchantment of Caribbean Dutch at life in the capital. Materially it may be a better life than in the Caribbean, but by now it is by no means satisfying in terms of the new local standards which they have appropriated – to pass over the satisfaction, appreciation and happiness that many are unable to find here.

The new situation which arose as a result of the recent large-scale immigration confronted the Netherlands with ‘others’ in an unprecedented way. While Italians were still considered pretty exotic around 1960, since then the borders have been extended (for ‘Europeans’), but on the other hand it has become more difficult for outsiders to become ‘Dutch’. Once again, this is much easier for someone from the Antilles or Surinam than for a Turk or Moroccan – as is clearly shown by interethnic relations and marriages – but it has indisputably become more difficult than it used to be. It is this trend which sometimes makes the older Caribbean migrants so bitter about the present-day situation, and which makes it
virtually impossible for black youths to believe that things really were better ‘in the old days’ than they are now.

INTERPRETATIONS

If the fault lines are clearer than the continuity of the migration history, it is natural to ask what that early history still means for the present-day generations of Caribbean Dutch. There is not much point in raising this question for the more distant past; the answers are hidden too far back in time. We can ask ourselves what the experiences were of the earlier migrants who lived in a ‘different’ era. One wonders how did they feel in ‘patria’, that Surinam slave, that Curaçaoan child of a shon and his slave girl, those children from the colonial elites? How were they treated there? It is substance for speculation, but hardly anything serious can be said. Travellers from the elites have scarcely left any testimony. All that is left of the others are some scattered anecdotes and the occasional testimony. Only recent history has left a wide trail of bureaucratic and personal papers in its wake. In addition, the fact that it is in the imperfect tense means that those involved can still have their say.

Some ten years ago I carried out research on the history of Surinamese in the Netherlands. My research stopped at 1954 – an arbitrary limit except in a constitutional sense. However, it was possible to have conversations with many older Surinamese who had already been in the Netherlands for years. At the same time my colleague Emy Maduro held interviews with older generations of Antilleans. The results of all these interviews did provide some contours of Caribbean life in the Netherlands between the 1930s and the 1960s. In brief, it was a period in which the Dutch hardly came into contact with West Indians or other non-whites. The rarity of such encounters usually had favourable results. It may be true that European culture was permeated by ethnocentrism and a feeling of superiority to the non-West; The Netherlands was no exception in this respect, and this had an effect on the attitude towards coloured migrants. All the same, if encounters took place at all, they were dominated by naïvety and curiosity rather than hostility. Additional research in press and government archives introduced some clouds to this relatively untroubled sky, but did not substantially alter the picture. The same was true of remarks by the various interviewees themselves. ‘In general we were treated well, though I can mention some annoying incidents as well. Fortunately they were not very common. In the last instance, it was easier for Surinamese then than nowadays.’ And so on, often followed by a tirade against ‘some Surinamese’ who ‘today spoil it for the rest’. My Curaçaoan colleague was told similar stories by her interviewees.

What were the contours? What comes over to us today is the indescribable shelteredness of the Netherlands in the middle decades of the century (the period of the German occupation was an altogether different story). The related lack of familiarity on the part of the Dutch with ‘foreigners’, especially if their skin was dark. The continual confusion of East Indians and West Indians. The idea that blacks only lived in Africa and the United States, not in the Dutch colonial
empire. The myths and expectations regarding typical black characteristics, from a feeling for music to sexual prowess. The naïve remarks on skin pigmentation (‘is it colourfast?’), hair, teeth. And, beside that lack of familiarity, a wide range of attitudes, from quiet fascination to undisguised irritation – though there was more of the former than of the latter, most of the interviewees stressed. ‘Well-intentioned curiosity?’ I sometimes asked, and the interviewee usually agreed.

In retrospect, I have come to realize that it is precisely the sheltered quality of life in the Netherlands at that time – incidentally, it should not be taken to imply that present-day Dutch culture is all that cosmopolitan either – which helps to explain the predominantly positive tone of the memories. It was apparently fairly easy for a lack of familiarity to make way for acceptance, once the other was recognized as ‘one of us’. Despite all the external differences, this was an easy step to take in the case of the migrants from the Dutch Caribbean colonies. They spoke Dutch, the Surinamese remarkably well. They generally belonged to the colonial middle class, with its strongly Dutch-oriented culture. And they could often join subcultures with a certain sense of security. The Catholics from Curaçao picked up the thread again with the Lay Brothers and the Catholic universities in the South, while the Moravian background of the Surinam students made it easier for them to relate to the Protestant Free University. Likewise, Anton de Kom found a setting in the Communist movement which immediately recognized him as being ‘one of us’. It was just as natural for the marines stationed in Terneuzen to be assisted by the villagers whom they had just liberated. One of the friendships that it provided in the case of the black but Catholic corporal Frank Koulen was that of the butcher. With winter approaching, he got a girl who lived nearby to knit the corporal a jumper; she later became his wife. Shelteredness implied a tendency to accept people in the same social situation, or like-minded people in a religious or ideological sense, despite what were initially such dominant differences. This openness created the conditions for a certain security.

This almost idyllic picture has to be taken with a pinch of salt. First, it has to be stated that, no matter how well-intentioned the surroundings may have been, isolation was almost always one of the factors which determined the experience. It was not until the 1950s that the Surinam associations gradually began to achieve something of the importance that they had had back in Surinam. In fact, however, it was not until the 1970s in the case of the Surinamese, and the 1980s in the case of the Curaçaoans, that they could boast something of a culture of their own on Dutch soil. It may be supposed that the earlier isolation created a sense of loneliness, and many of the interviewees confirmed this supposition. This is not everything, and perhaps not even the most difficult part. Isolation and loneliness cannot usually be reconstructed from the archives, and the same is true of the feelings of being accepted or not. Interviews with Surinamese or Antilleans can provide some further information on this point, but how much are they prepared to tell a (white Dutch) interviewer, how reliable are their memories, and, depending on the positions they adopt today, how willing are they to suppress or magnify their recollections?
My own experiences with this set of problems have made me more sceptical, not so much about the possibility of reconstructing events, nor even about the recording of emotions, but about how to assess them. Every individual life-story, every individual description of what took place or was experienced at some point in time is a construction which not only varies from one individual to another, but is equally dependent on the context in which the recollection is retold, the distance in time from the original event, and the audience that one hopes to reach (or not to reach). Let me try to make this clear with a few remarks on the stories about Frank Koulen. When I was recording his life story in 1984 and 1985, I had conversations mainly with him and with one of his three daughters. After his death in 1985, when I got to know the family better, I was surprised at the divergences between the stories, and started asking myself different questions. I offer them for consideration.

The degree of acceptance by the Dutch is always a key issue, even more than the feelings which are so hard to discuss which this evokes in the ‘object’. Nothing seems to be a foregone conclusion. A nickname like ‘the Negro’ immediately underscores that the white environment could hardly forget about the difference in physical appearance. But hardly is not the same as never. And was ‘the Negro’ merely a neutral statement, like ‘redhead’ or ‘longlegs’, or was it a denigrating or affectionate term? What was more characteristic: the fact that the white woman wanted to marry this black man, and was allowed to do so, or the fact that various members of her family objected to it? Is it significant that some of the latter soon changed their minds completely? How is one to explain the fact that the various children from this one, tight-knit family – all coloured, something else that was seen in Terneuzen for the first time – have such different ideas about these questions, and have such different memories of their childhood? What is the relation between the development of their memory and their own later experiences, for some in the Netherlands, for others also or predominantly in the highly colour-sensitive Caribbean and the United States? And why does their white mother sometimes tell such different stories? Sometimes I can answer these questions, but I am simply raising them here to emphasize how careful we must be in interpreting all those individual migration stories. It is patently obvious that there is no single story, but an enormous collection of stories, and that the quest for the ‘typical’ story is only meaningful in a limited way. Perhaps we may succeed in reconstructing something of a lowest common denominator of experiences; but the feelings which go along with them cannot be reduced to a meaningful collection of experiences of the same kind. What we can and should do, however, is to reflect on ways of doing justice to the highly divergent stories. A first prerequisite in this respect is the recording and analysis of large collections of data and interviews. In turn, this calls for learning to scrutinize those stories for such obvious variables as ethnicity, nationality, gender, generation, class, kinship, length of stay, and degree of success in the new environment. Even then, the most difficult task is still probably that of searching for the space between what is told and what is felt.
One further remark in this connection. Researchers on Caribbean migration tend to concentrate on the migrants, but in the last resort to write an account in which their experiences and feelings are set within a broader framework. By now we have become aware of the fact that the migrants have their own story. At the same time, however, there is often a tendency to think in classic bipolar terms when it comes to tackling the question of where the ‘real’ stories are to be found. In this sense the research approach I once adopted now strikes me as naïve. It is a particularly inappropriate approach when we are writing about the early migrants, who in the Netherlands at least (characteristically!) chose white partners almost by definition – were able to choose them more easily than in England and in sharp contrast to the United States – and thus had racially mixed children.\(^9\) It seems advisable to be less doctrinaire than our statisticians in this field, who in their quantifying wisdom polish the racist US principle that white plus black equals black. The statisticians decided on their classification on the basis of honourable considerations, but as historians it is better for us to try to represent life in its actual diversity. This implies, among other things, that we should talk more seriously with the white partners and surroundings, and not be too eager to represent the children as Caribbean while they might feel more British, French or Dutch.

**‘CIRCUS FIGURES’**

In 1986 the Curacaoan historian Emy Maduro and myself published the first book on Caribbean history in the Netherlands. Published simultaneously with a volume on the history of Indonesians in the metropolis,\(^10\) *In het land van de overheerser II: Antilliaan en Surinamers in Nederland, 1634/1667–1954* received a relatively large amount of publicity. Some two thousand copies were sold – a large figure for the Dutch-language market. The reviews, largely by outsiders, and personal reactions, mainly from those involved, were predominantly friendly. Ten years ago that all gave the idea of having made a substantial contribution not only to historiography but even to the awareness and to improving the image of the groups involved.

Nowadays it is easier to question the mildly euphoric mood of the time. Who read the book and was satisfied with it apart from a Dutch reading public that had not known anything about this history before? Mainly, I now believe, relatively small groups of Surinamese and Antilleans. First of all, those directly involved, who could now read and get others to read their forgotten history in terms which, despite the necessary academic distance, were still quite flattering. The image in which the older generations recognized themselves was that of serious students, hard workers, who were generally well treated but did not offer the slightest provocation not to be. They were also satisfied because they were not described as white Dutch, but as people who were proud of their origins and who at the same time could cope perfectly with the modernity of the Netherlands.

More politically oriented, nationalistic Surinamese and Antilleans could also feel well served by the book. Of course, the title helped, and the book devoted
considerable attention to the nationalist victories of the diaspora: the pre-war agitation against racism and fascism, the spectacular career of Anton de Kom, suffering and resistance during the German occupation, and the postwar political and cultural nationalism. And then there were the sections on the period of accursed slavery, of course, which once again showed how dependent the slaves were on their masters, but also included stories of clever male and female slaves who, like genuine Anansi/Nanzis, despite all opposition, obtained their freedom.

Once you are out of the warm shower, you begin to realize that not only the distribution of *In het land van de overheerseer*, but in a general sense the interest in the subject, has nevertheless mainly been a matter for a small group of those directly involved, younger intellectuals, and a very limited Dutch public. The absence of any broader or more in-depth follow-up to the book by others is an indication of this. The themes of the few larger publications which did appear suggest the same: a collection of recollections of Anton de Kom, another with fragments from the history of Surinam nationalism in the Netherlands, a work of journalism full of anecdotes on ‘the first Negro’ in all kinds of obscure parts of the Netherlands, a biography of a Surinam jazz musician who preferred to be presented as a black American (even more exotic). Then there was a catalogue of a controversial exhibition on Western images of blacks, in which that theme from *In het land van de overheerseer* was treated in more detail and in a considerably more assertive tone, and the much more distanced treatment of the same subject by Blakely, *Blacks in the Dutch World*. The last two studies raise in particular the question of to what extent the cultural expressions analysed in them really reflect the development of (monolithic?) Dutch culture, and whether it is reasonable to speak about national reactions to a phenomenon (the presence of blacks, or images of blacks) that was completely marginal in the Netherlands until a few decades ago.

The small number of the other publications and their apparently modest impact confirmed my doubts about the importance of publications of this kind, my own included. What do present-day Caribbean Dutch know about their ‘prehistory’? What importance do they attach to it? As part of a larger survey, a non-select group of Dutch of Surinam or Antillean origin were asked what they knew about that early history. The results confirmed my doubts resoundingly. The vast majority of the interviewees thought that Caribbean history in the Netherlands did not begin until the postwar period. Only a tiny minority knew that Surinam and Antillean slaves had been taken to the Netherlands in the past. Precisely a small number of highly engaged Surinamese described the early generation as ‘a handful of circus figures’, a reference to the late nineteenth-century colonial exhibitions with their areas for ‘natives’, or to the twentieth-century ‘professional Negroes’. The prehistory has no point of reference at all to offer for Surinamese of British Indian or Javanese extraction: the diaspora of ‘their’ group began in the 1970s, and they hardly relate at all to the themes of Creole nationalism. Furthermore, there is noorganized transfer of the history of the migrants. In so far as stories are told at all, this is done within a small circle, which is usually
ethnically homogeneous. There have not been many attempts to place the story of the migrants in historical perspective through local television or radio programmes to date.

A conclusion is hard to avoid. You are not dead until you are forgotten. The history of Frank Koulen and all the other early migrants who remain anonymous here continues as long as their immediate relatives and friends still talk about them. But at the same time their stories – and this is even truer of the stories about the eighteenth-century slaves or nineteenth-century students – no longer appear to hold any interest at all for most Caribbean Dutch. The actual rupture in the migration history which can be situated around 1970 has also left its mark in the memory of the diaspora.

A MULTI-FACETED DIASPORA

So if the roots of the diaspora only reach back a couple of decades – two generations at most – in the experience of most Caribbean Dutch, can we speak of history at all? I am not arguing for a pointless internecine warfare between historians and (other) social scientists on who the legitimate ‘owner’ of the research object is. Still, we cannot entirely ignore the conclusion that we are addressing a history that is only just beginning, and that it is by no means clear what direction it is heading in. What is studied in a British Caribbean context is a story covering many generations, a history whose contours have gradually crystallized: the bifurcation towards England and the United States/Canada, the varying degrees of success in both directions, the degree of circularity of the migration, and the differences in behaviour and experiences of the various generations involved.

The Dutch Caribbean diaspora is still lacking in clear-cut contours. There is some clarity as regards which topics are analysed to death by social scientists, such as social mobility, position on the labour market, and participation in education. The picture that emerges from this research gives grounds for concern in some respects, but at the same time bears witness to large differences within the by no means uniform Caribbean Dutch population group. The ethnicity factor seems – justifiably – to be receiving more and more attention in these analyses. How could it be otherwise? Even where it is possible to carry out more historically oriented research, we cannot get around the fact that the Caribbean Dutch diaspora actually breaks down into widely divergent groups: the Curaçaoans and the Surinamese of Creole, British Indian and Javanese origin live in social spheres which are to a large extent different from one another. In this respect the British West Indian diaspora is considerably more homogeneous, despite the differences in island characters which are so often pinpointed.

A ready illustration of the importance of these ethnic contrasts is furnished by the indications that the Hindustani Surinam group is more successful in social terms than its Creole Surinam counterpart. Moreover, with respect to the use of leisure time and affective relations, the disparity which was so typical of Surinam is continued, or even reinforced, in the Netherlands. ‘Race’ is certainly
not the only factor in this process. There is still an enormous gap separating the Afro-Surinam world from the Afro-Curaçaoan one. The cultural differences between the two groups were traditionally expressed most clearly in the mutual unintelligibility of their individual languages, i.e. Sranan Tongo and Papiamentu. The linguistic choice made in the diaspora could eventually diminish this cleavage, though, ironically enough, as a result of the ‘colonial’ language. For the time being this process is proceeding at a snail’s pace. While Dutch – with all of its variations of Surinam-Dutch – is gradually gaining ground at the expense of Sranan Tongo among Afro-Surinamese, between themselves Curaçaoans in the Netherlands cling to Papiamentu, that unmistakable mark of their own culture.

In other respects too it is futile to imagine the Caribbean Dutch diaspora in uniform terms. The shorter duration of Antillean history in the Netherlands increases the orientation towards ‘there’. The divergent paths followed by constitutional developments have also had a direct, painful effect on the migration. The continuing ‘post-colonial’ status of the Netherlands Antilles – a relatively autonomous part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands – guarantees Antilleans both a comparatively high standard of living on the islands and the right to freedom of movement between the two parts of the Kingdom and to settle in either of them. It is therefore hardly surprising that there is a large degree of two-way traffic in the case of Curaçaoan migrants. The contrast with Surinam is stark. Not only have the standard of living and the economic prospects there fallen dramatically in the two decades since independence, at the same time independence heralded the end of the possibility of settling freely in either country. The protracted crisis has meant a virtual drying up of the return migration to Surinam. The new constitutional relation also made it more and more difficult to follow the legal route to the Netherlands; hence an increasing number of Surinamese left illegally for the former mother country.

WHERE IS HOME?

How important is ‘there’ today for Caribbean Dutch, and to what extent do Surinamese differ from Antilleans in the way they think and talk? I have tried to obtain some insight into these questions by means of street research. When asked where their close relatives lived, more than half replied that they lived mainly in the Netherlands; only half that number replied that most of their relatives lived ‘there’. As one would expect, the latter figure was appreciably higher for the Antilleans than for the Surinamese – twice as high, in fact. For these Antilleans, then, the word ‘family’ still refers primarily to ‘there’, a stage which the Surinam interviewees passed long ago (Table 8.1).

Of course, the place of residence of the close relatives elicits a natural affinity, and in this sense it is striking to what extent the Surinam Dutch we interviewed in the Netherlands are rooted there. However, this does not mean that they have forgotten their overseas relatives and friends. There were no significant differences between the various groups in the frequency of telephone calls;
**Table 8.1** Domicile of close relatives, related to ethnic background of respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic background</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>H</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>J</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In the Netherlands</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In country of origin</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evenly distributed</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elsewhere</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Abbreviations: C, Creole Surinamese; H, Hindustani Surinamese; M, Surinamese of mixed origins; J, Javanese Surinamese; A, Antilleans.*

**Table 8.2** Dispatch of parcels and/or money remittance to the country of origin, related to ethnic background of respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic background</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>H</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>J</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, ships parcels/sends money</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, does not send anything</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No reply</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Abbreviations: C, Creole Surinamese; H, Hindustani Surinamese; M, Surinamese of mixed origins; J, Javanese Surinamese; A, Antilleans.*

though the number of Surinamese who hardly correspond any more was high, at least in this sample. Nor were there significant differences in the frequency of visits. On the other hand, the majority of Creole Surinamese in particular indicated that they regularly sent food parcels or money (Table 8.2). The considerably better economic situation on Curaçao probably explains why this direct support does not play any significant part in the Antillean Dutch circuit.

Another question is that of the affinity which Caribbean Dutch feel with ‘here’ and ‘there’. Once again, the sample suggests that the Surinamese, especially the younger generation, identify more closely with their new home country than the Antilleans do; but in both cases this orientation remains ambivalent (Table 8.3). Further questioning confirmed the natural supposition that most of them also feel a close affinity with ‘fellow countrymen or countrywomen’. In general, they also feel a close affinity with ‘fellow countrymen’ in the Netherlands; this affinity extends to a lesser extent to Caribbean Dutch from elsewhere. At the same time, however, the orientation of Surinamese and Antilleans in an intimate sphere like that of choice of partner shifts towards Dutch partners alongside or even in preference to ‘fellow countrymen or countrywomen’, a shift which is confirmed by the impressions one gets from walking down the street today.
Table 8.3  Affinity with the country of origin and/or the Netherlands, related to age and ethnic background of respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnic background</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainly with the Netherlands</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainly with c.o.o.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With both</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Declines choice</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No reply</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Abbreviations: I = < 20 years; II, 20–29 years; III, 30–39 years; IV, 40–49 years; V, ≥ 50 years; c.o.o., country of origin; C, Creole Surinamese; H, Hindustani Surinamese; M, Surinamese of mixed origins; J, Javanese Surinamese; A, Antilleans.

Table 8.4  Desire to remigrate eventually to country of origin, related to ethnic background and sex of respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic background</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will return</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditionally positive</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will stay in the Netherlands</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No reply</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Abbreviations: C, Creole Surinamese; H, Hindustani Surinamese; M, Surinamese of mixed origins; J, Javanese Surinamese; A, Antilleans.

Note: Category of 'conditionally positive': respondent expresses intention to remigrate, but makes return conditional upon significant improvement of the situation in the country of origin.

Finally, the bitter reality of the differences in the standard of living ‘there’ is directly expressed in the prospects of ever going back (Table 8.4). Most of the Antilleans assumed that they would return. This was appreciably more complex for Surinamese. A large majority responded that they would (re)settle in Surinam at some point in the future, but most of the members of this group tied this wish to a number of conditions. The reality of the migration statistics suggests that they were expressing a wish or a socially desirable reply rather than a genuine option.

The results of this modest sample suggest a clear-cut difference between Curaçaoans and Surinamese; on the other hand, neither gender nor generation seem to play an important role in this sample, nor does the ethnic background of
the Surinamese. While both groups retain a sense of affinity with the country of birth and with fellow countrymen both in the Netherlands and in the Caribbean, there is much less likelihood that the Surinamese desire to return expresses a real option. This difference cannot be explained in terms of a significantly better position of the Surinamese in the Netherlands, but is connected with the troubled situation in Surinam itself. One might expect that the orientation towards ‘there’ will decrease further among later generations. The fact that this does not emerge from the statistics indicates that the younger Dutch generation of Surinam origin still feels a certain involvement with that country, but also that among the older generation of Surinamese too, the orientation has shifted, in the direction of Bakrakondre. The fact that this is apparently much less true of the Antilleans is partly due to the more favourable situation on their island. In addition, it is relevant that the Antillean migration to Ulanda started up later and was on a smaller scale – the island still exists for them as the paradise overseas, while the Surinamese lost their Eldorado long ago.

In all kinds of gradations, the lives of these migrants, and especially of their children, are still firmly orientated on ‘here’ and ‘there’, on a Caribbean background and on the mother country that never had such a direct significance before. One might be tempted to forget that this orientation has remained remarkably limited. Despite the fact that many have found their feet in the Netherlands, for many others Bakrakondre or Ulanda has completely failed to offer the opening to social success or personal development. The statistics on the labour market, education, housing, etc. point in the same direction as those on medical consumption or crime: there is still a long way to go, and many will deny that the right route has been chosen. All the same, the option of a different destination is hardly of any importance; the rather worn metaphor of the umbilical cord linking the mother country with the former colonies is more relevant than ever. This is striking, and is evidence not just of the time-hallowed intertwining of interests which is so often cited, but equally of the postcolonial ‘trap’: although the Netherlands may not be an easy destination, it is still the country where there is the best chance of success, and where failure can be concealed the longest.

The Dutch Caribbean case is not an isolated one. Generally speaking, the Caribbean migration to Europe is much more heavily influenced by the attractiveness of what by Caribbean and American standards is an extremely extended welfare state – a magnet which turns out to be a trap now that many of these facilities are being curtailed. This is as true of the West Indians in England and of the nègropolitains in France as it is of the Caribbeans in the Netherlands. These former subjects enjoy more privileges than other groups of immigrants, such as unconditional citizenship and access to social services. All the same, their situation is sometimes even less favourable than that of other immigrants. In the case of the USA, the parallel contrast can be drawn between what were generally characterized – until recently – as successful West Indians, on the one hand, and the Puerto Ricans in New York and its vicinity who are often regarded as losers.
The awkward question rears it head: are (post)colonial traumatization and patronizing perhaps factors which make it difficult for the *nuyoricans* in the USA, the Jamaicans in England and the Martiniquans in France to make full use of what is in theory a relatively favourable starting position? Might the same apply to migrants from the Antilles and Surinam in the Netherlands? Might the frustration of many Caribbean Dutch about the lack of success be connected with unrealistic expectations, the result of a feeling cultivated for generations that everything is better there, and a feeling which became attached to this later on that *Ulanda* or *Bakrakondre* is obliged to give after having taken for so long? There seems to be a lot to be said for such a hypothesis, and for the conclusion that this attitude not only increases frustration but also has a paralysing effect; not just because the discontented stop believing in their own ability, but also in the sense that the number of those who decide to seek their fortune outside the Netherlands is still negligible.¹⁵ For those who fail to seize the opportunities, the protection afforded by the mother country can imperceptibly be transformed into a stranglehold.

**OLD STORIES AND A NEW FUTURE**

The history of Dutch Caribbean migration is marked, not by continuities, but by a fault line which has emerged in the last decades. Furthermore, there is no single history which unites Surinam and the Antilles. Finally, while the Dutch Caribbean migrants are part of a much larger story about Caribbean migrations, there are hardly any traces of an awareness of this fact. No matter how much has been said about a shared fate, the Caribbean diaspora is still essentially divided, ignorant and uninterested in the parallel histories.

What does all this mean for the historiography of the Dutch Caribbean diaspora? First of all, it would be incorrect not to differentiate between Antilleans and Surinamese. In fact, it even seems misguided to attribute a single past to the different ethnic groups from Surinam. Another point which should be borne in mind is that the circularity of the migration currents, the continuous come and go of migrants which is so often assumed in studies of the Caribbean diaspora must be investigated and not taken as given. In view of the fact that the gap between the Netherlands and Surinam seems to be growing, it is no longer so natural that historians of the diaspora should continue to let themselves be guided by the ever more mythical idea of the first generations of migrants, as if the transatlantic crossing were to remain a constant two-way traffic. The Antillean migration history seems to fit the standard Caribbean pattern better than the Surinam one-way traffic. But perhaps it is sensible not to accept the cherished ideas on a Caribbean migration movement, which is always two-directional, too readily.

The Dutch Caribbean population numbers 365,000, and will continue to grow. However, it is bound to become increasingly Dutch, although at the same time it is creating it own niches in a dominant culture which, in turn, partly as a result of the spectrum of migrations, is also continuously caught up in a process of
relatively profound change. All the same, it is obvious that Caribbean culture in exile is under much heavier pressure than the culture of the ‘mother country’, no matter how much globalization embraces all cultures. In this sense the commonly voiced belief in the resilience of those Caribbean cultures which even flourish in the relative isolation of the diaspora seems to be overoptimistic. Similar caution should be exercised regarding the belief in the ‘transnational family networks’ which are supposed to link the Caribbean diaspora with what is perhaps too readily labelled ‘home’. The prehistory of the current diaspora may go back a long way, but it took a decisive new turn a couple of decades ago. Historians will increasingly have to write a story of detachment from ‘there’ and the often difficult, often discouraged attachment to ‘here’. A lot of this work is already being done by an army of social scientists, but the fact that even the liveliest studies lack a sense of history would appear to say something, not only about the researchers and their interests, but also about the low level of interest in the history of the migration on the part of their interviewees.

Still, there are wonderful tales to be told, and they are told. When I first recorded stories of this kind more than ten years ago, I had hardly any idea of their depth and scope, nor of the inevitable, almost systematic distortions, repetitions and clichés they contain. The challenge is undoubtedly to search further for stories, and in the process to raise different, less obvious questions and to make connections. The stories are there, even though the earliest, from before the exodus, are growing more and more scarce. Particularly the older generation of Surinamese and Antilleans from the single round of street interviews indicated that they passed on the stories of their own histories, stories which are certainly given a hearing. Historians can help to preserve those stories, but they should do so without romanticizing them. The ‘old’ stories of isolated migrants in an almost 100 per cent white world belong definitively to the past.

Surinam war veterans have often complained bitterly that their role in the Second World War was never noticed. It is a justifiable complaint, but at the same time this will never change: they were simply a minimal group. Their stories run into the dozens only. They are no match for the stories of millions of others. Only now has that all changed, only now are the Caribbean Dutch a visible group in Dutch society. But it does not matter to the veterans any more. Their history remains an early footnote to the exodus. A few observers of the 5 May parade may be reminded of touching memories of a Caribbean migrant, but that history is not the same as the history which is being written today.

NOTES

1 The surname was taken to Surinam around the turn of the century by another migrant worker. Balata bleeder Samuel Frederik Koulén, born in Berbice in 1881, was recorded as living at Achterstraat 5 in Nieuw Nickerie, although at the time of the census he was ‘away (in the forest)’, 1921 Census, Nickerie District. (Balata is a rubberlike substance produced from the latex of the balata tree; the labourers who worked in the interior of the Guyanas to extract latex from the trees were called balata bleeders.)
After the German occupation of the Netherlands and the Japanese occupation of Indonesia, these two Caribbean colonies were the only ‘free’ Dutch territories.


The Netherlands Antilles consisted of six islands until the separation of Aruba (1986). The migrants are predominantly from the main island, Curacao. Therefore, in this text ‘Antilles’ and ‘Curacaoans’ are generally used interchangeably.


The population in Surinam itself is estimated at less than 400,000, that from the Netherlands Antilles at 215,000 (160,000 of them on Curacao), and that of Aruba at 85,000. More than half of the interviewees in the street survey were unable to provide a reasonable estimate of the number of people ‘there’, or of the number of their fellow countrymen in the Netherlands.


In 1954, the *Statuut* or Charter of the Kingdom of the Netherlands was promulgated, granting for the first time a high degree of domestic autonomy to the two Caribbean partners in what then became the tripartite Kingdom. Whereas Surinam became independent in 1975, the Netherlands Antilles and (since its secession from The Netherlands Antilles in 1986) Aruba still function within the same regime, and have repeatedly declined to move from their present semi-autonomy to full independence.

Scholars like Chamberlain and Olwig, despite their correct and theoretically interesting emphasis on the importance of family networks in the migration process, do not pay much attention to the consequences of interracial relations for the family network, which is then by definition no longer exclusively Caribbean (in terms of origin or orientation). This approach may be justified to a large extent in the US or British context, but it is clearly too restrictive for dealing with the French Caribbean and Dutch Caribbean migration history. Cf. Mary Chamberlain, ‘Family narratives and migration dynamics: Barbadians to Britain’, *New West Indian Guide* 69 (1995), pp. 253–75; and ‘Absence and the “Consolation of Freedom”: British-Barbadian identities’ (unpublished paper, presented to the International Conference on Oral History, Columbia University, New York, 18–23 October 1994). Karen Fog Olwig, *Global Culture, Island Identity: Continuity and Change in the Afro-Caribbean Community of Nevis* (Reading: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1993); and ‘Life stories: individual and family in the migration process’ (unpublished paper, presented at the KITLV/Royal Institute of Linguistics and Anthropology, Leiden, 8 May 1996).

Harry Poeze et al., *In het land van de overheerser I: Indonesiërs in Nederland, 1600–1950* (Dordrecht: Foris, 1986). In translation, the title would be *In the Land of the Ruler.*
11 Anansi/Anancy/Nanzí/Nancy—a character in African/Caribbean folklore—is a spider who assumes different shapes and forms to escape from numerous scrapes.


14 The interviews were held in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, Leiden and Zoetermeer in the summer of 1995. I would like to thank the interviewees for their willingness to reply to the questions. A total of 103 interviews were conducted and processed. The research findings were processed in forty tables, four of which are reproduced here; the other relevant results are summarized in the text. I would like to thank Ronnie Lammers, Ineke ten Kate, Paul van de Koevering, Ingrid Koulen, Marco Last and Roselle Servesana for the enthusiastic and conscientious assistance that they lent to the research.

15 Though a small tributary of the Surinam diaspora has developed in the United States during the last few decades.