

# THE NETHERLANDS, A CARIBBEAN ISLAND: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC ACCOUNT

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**Abstract:** Almost every critical essay penned about West Indians in Western Europe describe them as residing in places where rampant ethnic discrimination and racism, institutional and every day, are part and parcel of their life. Understandable and truthful as this may be, I argue in this essay that we need to develop a language that does not unwittingly reinforce the ethno-racial divide between Aboriginal Dutch (the so-called natives) and Dutch Antilleans. Employing an autoethnographic account—autobiography enriched by ethnographically based sociological analysis—I present an alternative picture where the agency of Dutch Antilleans in their quest to transform the Netherlands into a hospitable multiculturalism is highlighted. The richness of life that they are helping bring about, which crosscuts and continuously unravels the racialized Manichean representation of the Netherlands, needs to complement the existing writings on the *secdonarization* of the Caribbean Diaspora in the West.

**Keywords:** The Netherlands, Dutch Antilleans, racism, ethnicity, multiculturalism

“Whatever you describe to another person is also a revelation of who you are and who you think you are. You cannot describe anything without betraying your point of view, your aspirations, your fears, your hopes. Everything.” (James Baldwin, in Standley and Pratt 1989: 180)

“To recognize the embodiedness of our Being-in-the-world is to discover a common ground where self and other are one. For by using our body in the same way as others in the same environment, one finds oneself informed by an understanding which may be interpreted according to one’s own custom or bent, yet which remains grounded in a field of practical activity and thereby remains consonant with the experience of those among whom one has lived.” (Michael Jackson, 1983: 340-341)

I am often asked by colleagues from the USA who are versed in the critical race and postcolonial theorization of the difficulties of being black in Europe how it feels to be a Dutch Antillean living in the Netherlands (c.f. Essed & Trienkens 2008; Jones 2007; Botman et al

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2001). Before I can answer, a dynamic yet implicitly static oppressor versus oppressed frame is erected, in which I am expected to present a narrative of the struggle for ethno-racial recognition. In tandem with up and coming European academic superstars with Caribbean roots, such as Barnor Hesse, they await my echo of “It’s their world and were just living in it” (1997: 375). I am expected in other words to endorse a very superficial reading of the embattled politics of exclusion that Hesse (1997), Kobena Mercer (1994), and Paul Gilroy (2005) present us with. These authors like their mentor Stuart Hall (1991) remind us that boundaries are constantly being breached, blacks aren’t passive victims undone of class and other kinds of diversity. Work must continuously be done to uphold the racial myth of a Manichean world (see also, Werbner & Fumanti 2012). So what do I answer?

I smile and I then proceed to explain to that for me belonging to a society is a matter of context, degree, and agency. No equal rights bearing human being living in a society can ever be totally outside of that society. One is always inside in a particular way, at particular times and places, with particular others. We are embodied beings always grounded in particular environments with objects and others through which we move and with which we interact. It is this continuous shifting mix, with all the agony and struggle, which influences, when one is asked to reflect beyond the particularities of one’s immediate being in the world, how one imagines and appreciates society. I choose to imagine myself as an agent actively integrating with multiple others and therewith co-constructing the ever-changing imagined collective called Dutch society. So without me, no Netherlands.

This way of being in the world is not what my interlocutors want to hear. I know this for whenever I begin with an upbeat story of my agency in re/making the Netherlands, I am told something to the effect of ‘Yes, but tell us about your experiences with racism even though you are Dutch’. I am expected to renounce my specific bodily experiences for an imaginary abjected black body and to talk about being or feeling myself exclusively a legal alien, and sometimes even an illegal Other, maligned by the populist and racist winds they read so much about (de Haan et al 2010; de Jong 2010; Geschiere 2009).

I startle them when I reply that the Netherlands is my home, for it is a Dutch Caribbean island. I live in it and think about it as though it was a Caribbean isle. Most find it interesting...in an amusing kind of way. After the amusement comes the reproach.

Did I forget about the Middle Passage? Did I forget about the Kala Pani? Did I forget about the hundreds of thousands of black and brown bodies, African and Asian men and women and children, worked to death? Did I forget about what was done to my great-grandmothers and great-grandfathers? All at the hands of the aboriginal Dutch! And did I wish to be blind to the struggles of blacks today? For the record, I did not. Instead what I do is contribute to that branch of anthropology and essayistic writing popularized by the likes of Nigel Rapport (2008), Caryl Phillips (2002), Michael Jackson (1983) and James Baldwin (1963) that seek to ethically interrupt the important political abstractions concretized in varied forms of identity politics and aligned academic productions that may inadvertently reproduce the racial and ethnic camp thinking that is being combated.

As such what follows is the kind of answer based upon my radical bodily subjectivity born of inter and intra-subjective encounters in specific environments. Nowadays to get critical interlocutors to see the Netherlands as I see it, I begin by offering a clearing by way of a seemingly unrelated letter I wrote some two years ago:

*Dear Alyah,*

*Your aunties Sabah and Naima with whom I have been best friends for years asked me to write a eulogy to commemorate the passing of your father Yusef. I started doing so, but with every line I wrote, I recognized that I should actually be addressing you. Yes, you, a five month old infant. It is in you that his hopes and dreams live on. If your father did not have faith in love and life he would not have conceived you. No matter how bleak a moment you will face when you grow up, and those moments will surely come, you must always remember that you are a symbol of his faith.*

*I address this letter to you not as an academic to a child, as the learned man to the novice. Such is the foolishness of those who take their social status far too seriously. I am writing you because I realize that one of the most important aspects of human life is the passing on of advice. What I offer is advice. Sift through it and you use what you like.*

*I cannot offer you a credible explanation as to why your father was murdered. All I can say to you is that God, the beautiful name men and women of all cultures have given to Universal Justice, does not sleep. And God was not asleep the day your father died. So why did God then*

*let such a terrible crime happen, you may ask yourself when you are old enough to fathom what happened. I advise you to never contemplate such thoughts. Such a question is not worth asking. It leads to madness and what's more, it is actually not the right question to ask.*

*You should be addressing your question to mankind, for it is we who constantly show disregard for each other's lives. Your father's death and I do not mean to trivialize it by saying this, is an echo of one of the consistent sounds our species has been making. When you realize this, despair disappears and hope appears. For anything that we have created, we can re-create differently. God can lend a helping hand in these endeavors, for goodness comes to those who struggle and fight for their goodness and the goodness of others. I/We, meaning I am because We are, and We are what We are because of how each and every individual acts and thinks, is simplest and truest philosophical formula. You do well to remember this formula.*

*All this means that when you grow up you will have to decide what role you will play as a co-creator of the kingdom of mankind. In the Netherlands, this little hamlet of that global kingdom, persons of Moroccan descent have a bad name. From my fellow academics who earn their bread and butter researching the so-called marokkaanse problem, the Moroccan issue, you can get all the statistics about the felonies committed by Moroccan problem youth and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism among this sector of the Dutch population. From the mouthpieces of popularized barbarism, and by that I mean populist politicians and columnists, you can get a sense of the current sentiment that lives in the hearts of too many Dutch citizens. From defenders of the Moroccan "community"—academics, liberal politicians, and columnists—you can get counterarguments to demolish the equating of the term Moroccan with crime and religious fanaticism. I refuse to offer you that.*

*I refuse to use your father's death as a social cause, whether it be a liberal cause or a conservative one. Your father did not die for a cause. He died because many of us reduce ourselves solely to passion driven beings because we are socially reduced to unthinking beings. Your father's killer was such a being. You have every right to be angry with him. You do not have any right to hate him. Anger and hatred must not be confused. My way of not confusing them is to always*

*remember that the person I am angry with is also somebody's child. Hating him or her is dehumanizing that person and therefore indirectly doing violence to the mother and father of the perpetrator of the offence. Moreover it makes the hater a passion driven being, a being that does not combine passion with thought.*

*You must never let that happen to you and we who love you must do our utmost best that this does not happen to you. And if we do our best and you do yours, when you are a grown woman, the Moroccan issue will be but a distant memory. You will be able to climb into trams, walk in the parks, and go to job interviews, without the sneers and the fears. You will also be aware of the new scapegoat (a recently arrived group). If you remember that I/We philosophy, you will not participate in that latest hysteria. You will combine passion with rigorous thought, which when done well breeds morality.*

*I promised your aunties Sabah and Naima to write a eulogy. I wrote a letter to you. I hope that one day you too will write a letter to someone who needs to hear words of hope in the storm that we call life.*

*Yours Truly  
Francio*

Let me offer some background information before I explain how this letter relates to thinking the Netherlands as though it is a Caribbean isle. I arrived in the Netherlands when I was 18 years of age. I went to live in the South of the Netherlands. The city of Helmond to be exact. The neighborhood where I settled was multi-ethnic. Surinamese, Moroccans, Turks, Indonesians, Roma, Aboriginal Dutch, Dutch Antilleans, Malaccans, West Africans, East Africans, and mixtures of all these groups, lived there. Sometimes side by side, sometimes indifferent to each other, sometimes with each other, but always cognizant that cultural difference was a fact of life. In this way it was like the West Indies where people cannot experientially live a life of cultural homogeneity (Mintz 1996; Benitez-Rojo 1992).

Sabah and Naima, born in Morocco, but having moved to the Netherlands since ages 11 and 8, were some of the first persons I met. Both parents had died back to back, and Naima, just turned 21 was charged with taking care of 18 year old Sabah and Sulaima, her younger sister, who was 10 at the time. Naima was supervised by her older brothers, but they had their own families and this meant that she

had an enormous amount of freedom and responsibility. We immediately hit it off based upon our love for Black Atlantic music and the urban lifestyle that went with that. Shabba Rankin, Bell Biv Devoe, Joe, New Edition, Michael & Janet Jackson, Keith Sweat, En Vogue, Kassav, Juan Luis Guerra, Toni Braxton, Romario, Michael Jordan, Chaka Demus and Pliers, UB40, and Karyn White, were our idols.

These forms of urban popular culture were simply identified with the style of the Dutch Antilleans and Surinamese—Caribbean like—as it was we who acted as the major cultural brokers. What must also be mentioned is that these expressions had a wider impact than those such as Rai music identified with the Near East or North Africa. In fact the latter were considered to a large extent niche items. Being urban and being hip meant being Caribbean like. This was the case for Saba and Naima.

With them I also shared those vital years of transitioning from teenager to young adults. To me they were like sisters. Their older brothers trusted me. We were family, so Yusef, the eldest son of her, Naima and Sabah's brother, Appie, was my family too.

Yusef my *nefi*, Sranan Tongo for my cousin, as I used to call him, was shot in the head when he sought to intervene in a conflict between two rivaling gangs. This happened in the Southern city of s'Hertogenbosch where he lived. Yusef was always trying to show renegade Moroccans another way of living. Trying to do good proved fatal. Being her brother, Sabah immediately called me when she heard the news. We cried together.

I soon realized however that Sabah's tears were not only about what had happened. It was also about the way the murder was immediately being framed. Once again it became an ethnic issue: Moroccan gangs. Once again it was being forgotten that Dutch Moroccans are Dutch too! I understood her.

The hegemonic message in the media and policy documents is that there are the true Dutch and then there are the others (e.g. Emmer & Wassink 2005; for critique of this position, see, Guadeloupe & de Rooij 2007; Essed & Nimako 2006). No matter that the others were born in the Netherlands, are of mixed parentage, or have lived here for years, they remain the Others. This unfortunately is also unwittingly conveyed in many historical and sociological publications bent on keeping it real—giving truthful accounts of what people often think and sometimes do. And there is much to commend in

highlighting the othering of newcomers. There is rampant ethnic discrimination and racism, institutional and every day, there is no denying it, yet it my contention that we need to develop a language that does not unwittingly reinforce these divides. It goes without saying that university based intellectuals are not the only ones in need of a new language as many intellectual spokespersons of newcomers also frame the matter in exclusivist Us and Them terms (e.g. Hira 2009; for a critique of this position see Guadeloupe 2010). Ethnic and religious specificity and the figment of pigment become their badge of honor. Hegemony would not be hegemony if it did not include the spokespersons of the *secondarized*. This habitual exclusionary Us versus Them framing is part of what contributed to Sabah's grief.

Knowing that I write essays and give talks on multicultural conviviality, Sabah and Naima asked me to write a eulogy for Yusef. They wanted a description that reflected their multicultural becoming, the mix of cultures that had shaped Yusef and them. Not, a media representation that reduced them to being only *marokkanen afkomstig van de Rifi gebergte* (Moroccans from the Rif mountains of North Africa).

As I sat back and reflected on what I had put on paper I realized that it was a poetic exultation of my teenage years in the Netherlands. All those whom I was closest to implicitly worked at balancing the conquistador and nativo spiritual logics in themselves. So not only Sabah and Naima, but also Geertje and Mike and Dragana and Hassan and Martijn and Mercus and Wincho. All of which were individuals that could be categorized as Dutch citizens belonging to various ethnic formations—Surinamese, Moroccan, Yugoslavian, Malaccan, Antillean, and aboriginal. None of us denied our cultural roots. In fact we were proud of our ancestry. Yet to limit the possibility of the erection of walls of cultural incompatibility that ethnic and religious pride can cause, we practiced the dozens; we made jokes about each other's background. For instance my mimicry of the speech of Hassan's uncles seeking to make themselves understood in Dutch would earn me a curse out by Hassan as others laughed. Yet he too would be the first to be critical of Dutch Moroccans who sneered at anything Dutch; those that were too religious centered. And whenever I began to exalt my Arubanness too much I would be on the receiving end when Naima would tell stereotypical jokes about the laziness of Antilleans. When Wincho, one of our Antillean friends, did not show up on the block in time, she would say something to the effect of:

*hullie Antillianen kennen wel het goeie leven. Wincho die doet net als de mensen op Curacao, de hele dag uitrusten zodat hij s' nachts beter kan slapen* (You Antilleans know about the good life; Wincho behaves like the people on Curacao. He rests the whole day so he can sleep better in the evening). I too had to acknowledge that not all that was Antillean or Aruban was good. There was a lot of complacency and use of the colonial argument among Antilleans (our ancestors worked hard, so we are entitled to work less). None was excluded from this process. For instance Geertje, whose grandparents were both born in Helmond, had to admit that behind a lot of the talk that *buitenlanders* (foreigners) weren't hired because they lacked so called the *Nederlandse normen van punctualiteit en arbeidsethos* (Dutch norms of punctuality and an untiring work ethic) there was also the cold hard fact of racial prejudice. So our version of the dozens was a way of teaching and helping each other to be open to the other cultural ways by being critical of our own. Looking back I realize that every day while hanging on the block we built a common world through transcultural play that allowed for difference.

What was equally remarkable was actually the manner in which we positively embodied all the cultural material that was to our disposal. Knowing and being able to do cultural types was an asset. A way of crossing seeming ethnic specific lines until what mattered most was the quality of one's crossing not the ethnic group to which one belonged.

This ability to cross, to code switch in terms of cultural expressions and ethnicity seemed very Dutch Caribbean to me. It was what I was accustomed to. Doing multiple ethnicities was the norm on Aruba, where I was born.

I would exchange some Spanish words with my Dominican grandmother and other recently arrived immigrants from Latin America, speak Dutch in school or to expats from Holland (or to my mom who loved the language), rhyme and reason in Papiamentu and Aruban English with my family and with my friends, and employ the standard variety of English when engaging with tourists or having to read out verses in church or other official community functions. Every language switch was accompanied with an adjustment in my behavior and mode of being (which could be labeled temporarily essentialist). I would be proud of Aruban or Antillean teams whenever there were pan-Caribbean sporting events. Then it was *Aruba ariba* (Aruba at the top). We are the best baseball players in the entire hemisphere. In a



dance of meringue or bachata I would be enamored with my *Dominicanidad* (Dominicanness). *La Republica* (The Republic; an endearing name for the Dominican Republic) was in me via my grandmother. When engaging with persons from the politically independent British isles I would be adamant that the Dutch in my Dutch Caribbean status was not simply an accidental adjective. We weren't colonial people, we were part of the Dutch Kingdom. At other times when West Indian cricket was lauded, or the intellectual prowess of British and French Caribbean intellectuals and musicians, such as Bob Marley and Aime Cesaire, were taught at school, I would be the first to foreground my British and French roots. My identity was contextual and relational.

But there was also an accumulative process at work for at my most encompassing moments I would come to the deep realization that what I shared with the rest of the people living in the Caribbean basin was that we all came by boat or plane and mixed with the few remaining indigenous peoples who had arrived earlier on foot or via canoes. We were one big family. Color, hair and bone faded to the background as we established kinship beyond "race". For instance Cabeza, my fair skinned Venezuelan neighbor, who bore no visible traces of black Africa as I did, had to be called *tio* (uncle). In fact he was my uncle, correcting me when I had to be corrected. Likewise he displayed absolute deference to my grandmother calling her *mai* (mother). Like a mother she would scold Cabeza who had a predilection for weed, throwing dice, and engaging in fist fights. My grandmother was a *mai* for most in the multiethnic neighborhood I grew up in. This was my Caribbean. Ridden with unresolved racial and class and gender conflict, but still my Caribbean. We were all the offspring of the conquistadors, the native Americans, the Africans, the Asians, and the rest who contributed to the work of belonging to these lands. As such all heritage was our heritage. *Nativo* and *conquistador* spiritual logics living unsteadily and therefore creatively in one body. This was in the terms of the philosopher of the Caribbean experience, Edoard Glissant (2002; 2000), our becoming Creole in practice that for some was also an explicit and well-articulated consciousness.

What I later came to realize was that Glissant also made the argument that the world was becoming Creole. That the Caribbean experience could be perceived in many places. The multicultural neighborhoods in the Netherlands were beginning to resemble my Caribbean experience. It was *as if* it were a Caribbean island. That is

why Sabah and Naima were my sisters too regardless of sociological notions of ethnic distance. And this was why here too I encountered towering figures that reminded me of my grandmother, women who were mothers for all who lived in these multicultural Dutch neighborhoods.

From my teenage years I remember Annette Slijngaard. *Mevrouw* Annette, she insisted that we call her miss, is the Surinamese born mother of my friend Mike. She inspired so many immigrant and working class children in Helmond. Having finished the Mulo (high school equivalent), and being good with numbers, she was employed as a part-time administrative secretary in a factory. Her “husband” was a welder. In the afternoons she would invite school kids of various hues, ethnicities, and religious persuasions, into her home to do homework.

There were always cookies and the loving strictness of Miss Annette heartening them to do their best. These sessions meant the world to many of these kids whose parents proficiency in the Dutch language was limited or who disbelieved in the possibility of social and economic ascent. She taught them to be critical in relation to the ethnic enculturation of their parents and other community leaders. Annette was also the first to tell them that a nickel could become a dime and a dollar. As such she was the first to see their report cards. She was teaching them to balance the conquistador and nativo spiritual logics that animated their individual becoming.

Years later I spoke to Miss Annette while conducting fieldwork on the politics of belonging in multicultural neighborhoods. She told me that she was simply putting into practice what she had learnt in Suriname; what she felt was lacking in the Netherlands. It was not solely biological mothers and fathers that raised their children, it was those in the community that were older and had time on their hand. Besides biological parentage there was multicultural social parenting. And those who took up that function beyond ethnic exclusivity had to be culturally ambidextrous. They had to be able to do multiple cultural expressions and know what young people liked. When she arrived in the Netherlands in the 1960s there was little understanding that in multicultural settings integration into a dominant ethnic stream or closed particularities had to give way to integration with each other into an open commonwealth that did not seek to erase differences. In my talks with her I realized that my letter to Yusef’s daughter was about practicing this mode of becoming and being together. We were

the offspring of multicultural social parenting, and the process was alive and well.

What Miss Annette did yesterday was being kept alive today by Bea or I should say *Oma* Bea and Ingrid, a mother and daughter I met in the overwhelmingly working class district of Feyenoord in Rotterdam (*Oma* is the Dutch word for grandma; used as an endearing term of respect in working class neighborhoods). Both were born in Rotterdam and consider themselves *rasechte Rotterdamers* (authentic Rotterdammers). But then as *Oma* Bea reflected such meant very little these days. Today Rotterdam was *multicultureel* (multicultural understood in the sense of multiethnic since the arrival of newcomers from the former colonies and the Asian and Southern and Eastern European guestworkers). *Oma* Bea in her sixties could still remember how the neighborhood of Kruiskade had become Kroeskade (kroes in Dutch is the name given to the tightly coiled hair of many Afro-Dutch; so here it relates to the concentration of persons with that hair); How this development had become the talk of the town. The so-called *messentreckende* (knife totting) Surinamers, a stereotype about the aggressive behavior of these newcomers, both repelled and appealed to young women like her.

In time *Oma* Bea got to know some Surinamese women who were working in the old folks home where she too was employed. They were strong ‘no nonsense’ women who invited her into their homes. There she learnt about the multicultural social parenting that Miss Annette practiced. About how a kitchen and living room could be a *buurthuis* (community center), a *kantoor voor maatschappelijk werk* (office for social work), and a temple for a *Winti pre* (for the practice of Afro-Surinamese spirit possession). She marveled at first at how Surinamese had so many family. Everyone was each other’s cousins and sisters and uncles and aunts. Well at least some of the times. When they wanted a favor everyone became a *Oomu* (uncle) or *nefi* (cousin) or *tante* (aunt). Biology and ethnicity was trumped by social relatedness. It is not that biology or ethnic specificity did not matter. It is just that it didn’t matter all the times. And so *Oma* Bea became family. And family visited each other’s homes.

*Oma* Bea credits these women with teaching her to be a strong woman when she was reeling from a husband who was unfaithful and who was bullying her. These women taught her that there was nothing wrong with being a single parent. That there was no shame that her husband did not find satisfaction with her. That that was how men

were. They told her things such as “*straathonden zijn ze, trouw tot een andere slet voorbij komt.*” (they are streethounds who remain faithful until another bitch arrives on the scene) She was advised that if she could not take it anymore she should leave her husband. There were many other fish in the sea. And beautiful brown ones to boot. No less faithful. But yes men would be men. When she finally did decide to leave her husband, her new – Surinamese - family was there when some of her biological kin did not look at her. She and her little Ingrid, 14 at the time, visited their houses without scorn. Without their support she would never have been able to follow through with the divorce and the life of a single mother.

Eventually Oma Bea became active in the *bewonersorganisatie* (volunteer organization of tenants) and other welfare related activities. She was quite something as she was the one who could talk to the Surinamers. The one who as the gossip went had a *neger* (black man) from time to time. In the end she decided that that was not her route, as like her ex, Ingrid’s father, these men were indeed “*straathonden, trouw tot een andere slet voorbij komt.*” In love she was unlucky. She invested her libidinal energy in doing volunteer work for the neighborhood.

Ingrid’s daughter had better luck. She followed her mother and was active as a concierge in a *speeltuín* (a municipally funded and run playground) and had a steady boyfriend, Robert. Oma Bea, who was Ingrid’s number one volunteer and confidant, did not think much of Robert as he had so many *schulden* (debts) and was unemployed for some time. All that mattered to him was the soccerclub Feyenoord (which carried the same name as the district) and *bier* (beer). But also her Ingrid and their two daughters. And though he protested, he accepted that Oma would reside with them. Ingrid had told him it was either that way or she was going to leave. He loved Ingrid and so he accepted. For Oma Bea, Robert wasn’t much, but he was good as far as men can be good. So yes her daughter was lucky.

Today she was helping out her daughter at the Speeltuín, and her Ingrid was a hit because she spoke Sranan (a creole languages spoken by Surinamese Dutch) and could communicate with the *Antis* (Antillean Dutch) and *Mocros* (Moroccan Dutch) and the rest of the *nieuwe Rotterdammers* (newcomers in Rotterdam). The speeltuín was a place where *Surinaamse feestjes* (Surinamese parties) or *Antilliaanse bruiloft recepties* (Antillean wedding receptions) were held. But Ingrid also remained true to tradition as whenever there was a Feyenoord

match or in the evenings the Speeltuyn was transformed into a *bruine café* (a working class pub) where *smartlappen* (traditional working class aboriginal Dutch music with blues thematic) en *top 40* (primarily North Atlantic oriented popular music) could be heard. Bea had made sure that this *tata* (Surinamese for native Dutch) heritage had also been passed down to her Ingrid. And Robert had cemented it. The municipality tolerated the antics of Oma Bea and Ingrid this for it was one of the best running speeltuinen.

I got to know Oma Bea and Ingrid while following up on the work of the Aruban born youth worker Wendell in the wealthier district of IJsselmonde, which is adjacent to Feyenoord. He had developed quite a reputation as a youth worker who could work with the most difficult youngsters of all ethnic backgrounds. And his services were in demand. There were a bunch of youngsters, primarily consisting of Antilleans, who were terrorizing the upper middle class neighborhood called the Verandah. Terrorizing. *Terroriseren*. A heavy a word of course. Top heavy. But then who am I to judge. Everything is relative. The hanging out of these youngsters on street corners talking loudly and cranking their mopeds, constituted a terrorist act, for some of the burgher residents living in the Verandah. Making these youngsters attentive to bourgeois norms of always taking the auditory tolerance of others into consideration, and the working schedule of those who paid most taxes, had little effect. What's more, the style of these youngsters was beginning to attract the decent girls in the neighborhood. Something had to be done.

So the most concerned amongst these well to do IJsselmondse residents stepped to the aldermen, who stepped to the neighborhood police, who stepped to the welfare foundation whose director charged Wendell, their best youth worker to take care of the issue. Being an athletic basketball player and knowing how to combine street lingo with welfare methods allowed Wendell to reach these renegade youths. He gained their trust and that of the troubled middle class residents.

The trouble was that these youths wanted a hangout spot. One in which they could do their do, which means hang without having to engage in any activity if they did not wish to, and one where there were *chickies* (Dutch street lingo for girls) around. It was not an impossible request, had it not been for the fact that these youths had caused so much ruckus in *buurthuizen* (community centers) that the social workers there weren't happy to have them in their establishments.

Wendell had to be creative. Perhaps he could find a solution outside of IJsselmonde as these youths were mobile. They did not spend their whole day in the district. They would just come and hangout at the middle class neighborhood of the Verandah when there was nothing else to do. It was then that he remembered Ingrid and Oma Bea. He had been to an Antillean wedding at the Speeltuyn. He liked Oma Bea's style; multicultural to the bone as he put it. The Speeltuyn was in Feyenoord, another district, but that issue could be resolved since the new informal policy among welfare organizations in the city was to recognize and accommodate the mobility of renegade youths. He contacted Oma Bea and Ingrid and explained the issue. Oma Bea responded that the youngsters were welcome but she had to first have a talk with them. She had to know what *voor vis ze in de kuip had* (what kind of fish she would let into her basin), and the youngsters had to know that Ingrid and her weren't walkovers. He then told the youngsters that he had found them a place where they could hang out unimpeded and where they were welcome.

After a period of getting to know each other the youngsters were given one evening in the week to hang out at the Speeltuyn. Wendell used that day to do *ambulante jongerenwerk* (streetcorner youth work) in Feyenoord supposedly following the youths in their peregrinations. He needed to be there, for there were the occasional struggles and tensions and fights in which Oma Bea and Ingrid and the youngsters had it out. No weed on the premises meant no weed for Oma Bea. But these falling outs were exceptional. All in all the youngsters liked Oma Bea and she liked them.

She called them *haar jongens* (her boys) and like Miss Annette she heartened them to stay in school, find a job or keep the one they had. She was even up in the business of giving them and their girlfriends unsolicited advice on love matters. Many of the youngsters took so much to Oma Bea and Ingrid that they even came to the Speeltuyn on other days than the one allotted. They even became friends with Robert with whom they shared a love for soccer, beer, and Feyenoord. The ultimate symbol of their respect for her was that when they heard that Ingrid and Robert were finally getting married some of them who played in a brassband (these are primarily percussion and horn based ensembles that play during festivals and street festivities; brassbands have become enormously popular among urban youngsters), did a free performance. It was quite a sight to see Oma Bea jamming to the brassband and the boys *hosend* (Dutch term for

dancing in a train-like formation) to *smartlappen*. As an exponent of multicultural social parenting Oma Bea and Ingrid reminded me of *mevrouw* Annette. Yes this was the Netherlands. Yes this was just like the Caribbean. Yes belonging is a never-ending work. Yes I am at home.

Nowadays I know that when someone asks me how does it feel to be Dutch Antillean in the Netherlands, I need to first reply that it makes little sense asking this question. I cannot existentially speak about the Netherlands without including me and what I bring to this society in the making. The question that should be asked is what am I doing to promote and extend the multicultural social parenting that forged me. The Caribbean retention adapted to the Netherlands. And this understanding of multicultural parenting as a Caribbean retention does not lead to a sense of cultural chauvinism but on the contrary to the recognition of my responsibility even in a situation not fully of my making. Doing so and encouraging others all other Dutch citizens to do so is the ultimate expression of being Caribbean; of becoming Dutch.

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