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BEING CREOLE

***Exploring the evolving of the Surinamese-
Creole identity and their embodiment practices
during celebrations***

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*Members of the NAKS division Difrinti Siri won the Keti-Koti pageant show,
A show celebrating Surinamese-Creole culture in honour of the abolition of slavery.*

ABSTRACT

Current conversations on national and global platforms aim to deconstruct the colonial views attached to the interpretation of creolisation and the ideas of what a creole person is. The aim of this PhD research is to contribute to ongoing conversations about the anthropological notion of creolisation, enriching existing studies about post-colonial identities. By drawing from the oral history of the Surinamese-Creole in Suriname and in the Netherlands, I utilise lived experiences to provide a more diversified lens for understanding the development of creolised societies. By amplifying the voices of research subjects, who have often been silenced in previous studies, I actively demonstrate the importance of acknowledging their knowledge without altering it to fit academic concepts. The research was also inspired by my lived experiences as a mature, female, Creole, Dutch-speaking higher education student in a highly Eurocentric anthropological education space. Although participant observation is the overarching research methodology, I also applied narrative analyses, image work, and autoethnography to provide insightful new ethnographic data. The questions leading this research are as follows: In what ways does the existence of labels and categories of being Creole enhance or diminish processes of creoleness, and to what extent do these processes become significant to the safeguarding and continuation of their socio-cultural identity? To what extent do typical Surinamese-Creole celebrations, either public or private, dictate the socio-cultural evolution of the different categories of Surinamese-Creoles in Suriname and abroad? This research must allow the next generation of Surinamese-Creoles, no matter the socio-cultural space, to embrace their Surinamese-Creole cultural heritage to strengthen their socio-cultural identity.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABOP	<i>Algemene Bevrijdings- en Ontwikkelings Partij</i> – General Party for Liberation and Development
BEP	<i>Broederschap en Eenheid in Politiek</i> – Brotherhood and Unity in Politics
CARICOM	Caribbean Community: Established in 1973, CARICOM represents twenty countries: fifteen member states and five associate members. One of the aims is to offer the best prospect for Caribbean economic development, especially for the Member States ¹ .
ICH	intangible cultural heritage
NAKS	<i>Na Afrikan Kulturu fu Sranan</i> – organisation for the conservation of the African culture in Suriname)
SEEKA	It means to restore in the <i>Aucanisi</i> language, which is a local language from one of the Maroon tribes in Suriname.
SDG's	Sustainable Development Goals: A collection of 17 global goals set by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015 for the year 2030 ² .
NDP	<i>Nationale Democratische Partij</i> – National Democratic Party
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NPS	<i>Nationale Partij Suriname</i> – National Party Suriname
UN	United Nations: An organisation of independent states formed in 1945 to promote international peace and security ³ .
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation

¹ *Who we are* – CARICOM accessed 21.07.2021.

² *THE 17 GOALS | Sustainable Development (un.org)* accessed 21.07.2021.

³ *United Nations | Peace, dignity, and equality on a healthy planet* accessed 21.07.2024.

GLOSSARY

B

Blakamang dei – the celebration of Black heritage

F

Fiti Fu Wini – fighting to win

Feydrasi fu Afrikan Srananman – the Federation of Afro-Surinamese People

W

Wang Rutu – being from one origin. All have one heritage.

PREAMBLE

The choice of this research subject is a result of my personal journey in becoming a university student studying social anthropology at the University of Kent in England. Being a Black mature female student who was born and raised in Suriname, my socio-cultural background took centre stage during group discussions or lecture presentations. In Suriname, there was never any reason for me to critically reflect on my ethnic identity and how it could shape people's perception of me as a person. Being Creole was inseparably part of me being a girl from the small town of Wageningen, a girl raised in a strict Christian home, and a girl who had 'aunties' from Javanese, Hindustani, and Amerindian backgrounds, even though they were not blood relatives. There was never a reason to question my creoleness until I came to the UK and was asked to write a reflexive essay on political economy theorists such as Sidney Mintz and Eric Wolff. That was my very first introduction to the notion of creolisation and my creoleness being a topic of ongoing discourses on post-colonial identities and societies.

As I continued my journey as an anthropology student, I experienced a subtle shift in my awareness of being a creole woman and a growing curiosity in knowing how my creoleness came to be. I could not relate to the way creoleness was described and portrayed by anthropologists with a Eurocentric point of view. Robert Baron's (2011) article 'Amalgams and mosaics, syncretism and reinterpretations' states, 'Creolization is a slippery concept, powerful in its ability to characterise emergent cultural forms, but eluding precision in its definition', which perfectly illustrates the paradox I have experienced when engaging with literature about creolisation. The main argument that I identified throughout the literature about creolisation and decided to challenge throughout my research was that of creole communities containing creolised forms that maintain the identities of components derived from source cultures. This argument, in my opinion, calls for a very narrow and one-sided exploration of the dynamics present in the emergence of creole cultures. Trying to relate the occurrences of cultural practices to source cultures takes away a very basic human act, which is the tendency of all human beings to give meaning to their environments based on what they already know. One could argue that the cultural practices in the source cultures were also invented based on what those communities already knew. The question can even be asked whether it is just creolised communities that should be traced back to source cultures. Are the cultural practices in Westernised communities also not derived from a source culture?

The tendency of some creolists to determine the creoleness of creole societies based on similarities in source cultures took away from the resilience of these creole societies and their innovations to reinvent their own identities, usually amid turmoil. The only way to receive validation of their creoleness was through the ability to prove their connections to a source culture – yet another way of making these communities dependent, taking away their independently earned self-identity. The way I respond to the arguments of these creolists emerges from the way I was 'allowed' to fit into the Eurocentric space of the university. Being a creole person was too confusing to explain. Highlighting elements of my culture that are recognisable with West African cultures made it easier for my peers to categorise me in their way of understanding the world. It was uncomfortable and felt as if I was neglecting other aspects of my cultural identity to feel whole and accepted as an individual. Thus, I began looking for theorists who provided theoretical frameworks resonating with my personal lived experiences as a creole woman from Suriname.

Encountering the work of the late Caribbean academic Edward Kamau Brathwaite, who postulates that the notion of creolisation should be described as a process resulting in subtle and multiform orientations from or towards ancestral origins (Robert Baron, Anna C. Cara, 2011 – 249), gave me the space to facilitate an understanding of my own story and to utilise it as a lens through which I could further unpack my own experiences of being a Surinamese-Creole woman. The need to unpack my own lived experiences and transfer these into a valuable research project is nurtured by concerns that I identified in the discourse of post-colonial identities and notions of creolisation. One main concern is the absence of the oral stories of creole people, their local lives narrated through their own voices, and conceptualisation of social roles and structures that exist in their communities and are informed by their own perceptions of life as people.

The disconnect between the voice of the creole people, who are the subjects of the discourse of creolisation, and the academic voices, who are the theorists, was disturbing to me. I personally felt that this disconnect, and the absence of local voices in anthropological discourses, was the main cause of my socio-cultural background continuing to make me an object of research in the academic space in which I existed as a student. In Suriname, my ethnic identity as a person did not define how others perceived me, while in England this same ethnic identity made me feel like an outsider and a slightly different person. This determined my deliberate choice to lay the foundation for further exploration of being a creole, by unpacking anthropological theories that argue what it means to be a person. Prior to addressing the notion of creolisation, I critically reflected on anthropological questions, such as what defines a human being as a person. This question, and the corollary interplay between qualities of humanity and qualities of personhood, challenges us to reflect on the most basic aspects of our existence.

In his article, 'Personhood: An essential characteristic of the human species', Frederick White argues that 'human social order recognizes the personhood of human beings within two competing constructs – an existential construct that personhood is a state of being inherent and essential to the human species, and a relational construct that personhood is a conditional state of value defined by society'. This argument equipped me to shape the structure in which I wanted to unpack the different theoretical points of view on the notion of creolisation in relation to personhood. By utilising the theoretical framework that I constructed, I then continued to explore the core of the research: a critical analysis of the Surinamese context in which the Surinamese-Creole is perceived as part of an ethnic group called Creole.

The research analysis is supported by my commitment to deliver new ethnographic data from the field to enrich the ongoing discussions on the notion of creolisation and its relevance to studies of post-colonial identities. It is no coincidence that creolisation is often studied in the context of colonialism. The story of the Surinamese-Creole people is one steeped in colonial history and shaped by the multi-culturality of local social life in Suriname. This multi-cultural aspect in relation to a colonial history and enslavement has contributed to the existence of different forms of being a Surinamese-Creole person and the application of labels and categories to distinguish these different forms of being a creole in Suriname. It is through these labels and categories that the emerging journey of creole communities in Suriname can be unravelled. The labels serve as vehicles of oral stories transmitted through generations of creole families in Suriname. Simultaneously, they are capsules capturing local life and providing a peek into the processes of giving meaning to social occurrences during the different development stages of Suriname as a post-colonial society.

Furthermore, the embodiment of being a creole in Suriname is not absorbed in daily life as much as it is during a variety of celebrations. It is during these celebrations that Surinamese-Creole people feel the need to express their creoleness. Bringing in these different aspects of being a creole person in Suriname and describing how it is ingrained into the Surinamese identity provides a rich array of data that could help diversify the arguments put forward by academics about the development of creolised societies. Therefore, the research will be guided by the following leading questions and sub-questions:

- 1) In what ways does the existence of labels and categories of being Creole enhance or diminish processes of creoleness, and to what extent do these processes become significant to the safeguarding and continuation of their socio-cultural identity?
 - How do labels come into being within the Creole community?
 - In what way do these labels maintain boundaries among the different categories of creoles in Suriname?
 - To what extent does the ethnic diversity in Suriname influence the integration of the different categories of Surinamese-Creoles in Surinamese society?
 - What is the relationship between continued family histories and the existence of labels and categories amongst creole people in Suriname and abroad?

- 2) To what extent do typical Surinamese-Creole celebrations, either public or private, dictate the socio-cultural evolution of the different categories of Surinamese-Creoles in Suriname and abroad?
 - What are typical Surinamese-Creole celebrations, and how do Surinamese-Creole families prepare for such celebrations?
 - What are the norms, values, traditions, and customs individually employed by Surinamese-Creoles to express their creoleness during these celebrations?
 - What is the significance of embodied practices as a means of continuing the Surinamese-Creole identity during these celebrations?
 - To what extent can these celebrations be considered vehicles to explore the origins of being a creole person in Suriname and the present-day experiences of being a Surinamese-Creole?

Prior to entering the field, I pre-drafted the scope of the research by further unpacking these research questions. Unpacking and understanding the role of labels and categories amongst Surinamese-Creoles especially became important to properly address the research questions. Therefore, I developed the following additional questions around the existence and impact of these labels and categories and utilised these as guidelines while doing my fieldwork:

- Which labels are being employed by creole people to enhance their identification process within Surinamese society?
- To what extent do Surinamese-Creoles publicly embrace these labels?
- What are the limitations, requirements, expectations, and intentions behind or attached to these labels and categories?
- What are the various responses in society to these labels, and how do they affect creole people's perception of using *Creole* as an ethnic identification?
- What are the agencies charged with the application of these labels?
- Which material objects are employed to sustain the use of these labels?
- What are the socio-cultural dynamics embedded in these labels (gender roles, social class, status, hierarchy, etc.)?

Each chapter in this thesis will outline a thorough exploration of the main argument of the research, complemented with a summary of my own reflections at the end of each chapter. The ethnography gathered from the field to support the theoretical framework is partially autoethnographic and informed by my own lived experiences as a Surinamese-Creole woman. The field site is Suriname, Paramaribo, which was a deliberate choice, as I wanted to create a research space in which I could capture my life history from the time when I was living in Suriname and interweave this with my experience of now being a Black woman living in a Eurocentric space where being a creole serves as an invitation to be seen as an object of research for post-colonial discourse. To follow the influence of transnationalism in the evolution of the Surinamese-Creole identity, I extended my fieldwork beyond Paramaribo and engaged with Surinamese-Creoles in the Netherlands. This was to obtain a cohesive insight into the evolution of the Surinamese-Creole identity beyond the borders of Suriname.

Observing these families in the diaspora allowed me to use their journey so that my methodology to apply autoethnography would also entail reflections of engagements with informants whose experiences resonate with my current lived experience as a Surinamese-Creole in diaspora. I deliberately chose those families who are living in areas where many Surinamese-Creoles live so that I could also observe the influence of an environment infused with Surinamese-Creole cultural elements that was not geographically part of Suriname.

In Chapter 1, the Introduction, I lay out the different contexts related to the research topic and the relevance of the research to the field of anthropology. In Chapter 2, I lay out the anthropological notions relevant to my research and the methodologies I applied for the execution of the research. The anthropological theories served as a guideline to critically analyse consistent ethnographic data collected from the field against the main research argument. In Chapter 3, I critically reflect on my own positionality as the researcher in the field and the way it has shaped the progression of the research in the field and my engagement with my informants. Chapter 4 describes and illustrates present-day Surinamese-Creoles. I discuss the way in which family structures help maintain the

application of labels and groupism in the Surinamese-Creole community. The chapter also includes detailed accounts of boundaries that are established by families and transferred from generation to generation as a form of safeguarding the continuation of creole family histories. Chapter 5 then provides an in-depth view of the emergence of the Surinamese-Creole identity and the way the unpacking of oral stories contextualises the relevance of Surinamese history to the existence of current-day Surinamese-Creole social life. The chapter utilises oral history as a vehicle to explore the origins of the Surinamese-Creole identity and provides a thorough analysis of the social and cultural practices and the association with historical events in Suriname. The oral stories allowed me to approach the notion of history from a non-Eurocentric perspective and utilise it as a research methodology to gain insight into the continuation of Surinamese-Creole identity and the way it has been preserved through family histories. To continue my autoethnographic approach, I then reflect on my own lived experiences and observations from encounters with my informants to then contextualise the origins of becoming Surinamese-Creole.

Chapter 6 provides detailed accounts of ways in which Surinamese-Creoles actualise the past in the present to sustain the continuation of their Surinamese-Creole identity. Throughout the thesis, I continue to refer to the employment of rituals and social practices, as these remain very central to the actualisation of the Surinamese-Creole identity. Chapter 7 then introduces the reader to typical Surinamese-Creole celebrations and how these serve as vehicles to embody, express, and cultivate the Surinamese-Creole identity. The chapter distinguishes public celebrations and intimate family celebrations and dives into the different nuances of embodying being Creole depending on the purpose of the celebration. Religion and spirituality become central to understanding and unpacking the different forms of Surinamese-Creole celebrations. I also address the complexities of notions of religion and spirituality and the way Surinamese-Creoles interpret these from their own perspectives and experiences. It is in this chapter that I further unpack the following research question: To what extent do typical Surinamese-Creole celebrations, either public or private, dictate the socio-cultural evolution of the different categories of Surinamese-Creoles in Suriname and abroad? It is mainly in Chapters 6 and 7 that I zoom in on the role of material cultures, as these are very central to celebrations.

Chapter 8 observes Surinamese-Creoles as part of a multi-cultural society. In this chapter, I employ the following sub-question: To what extent does the ethnic diversity in Suriname influence the integration of the different categories of Surinamese-Creoles in Surinamese society? The chapter also critically explores the social occurrences that led to Surinamese-Creole culture becoming dominant in representing Surinamese culture. By positioning Surinamese-Creoles in a multi-cultural space to further explore the evolution of their socio-cultural identity, I aim to provide the reader a holistic understanding of the creation of different categories of Surinamese-Creole. This chapter also preludes the concluding chapter, which critically reflects on the Surinamese-Creole identity subject to globalisation and the impact of global matters that are inevitably influencing the future of this identity. I critically analyse the notion of transnationalism, and I compare my own transnational journey with that of my informants in the Netherlands.

The concluding chapter, chapter 9, continues to provide a thorough answer to the research questions and justifies the main argument of my research. The validation of my main argument is based on the results of critical analyses of the data collected from the field. I then continue to recommend follow-up themes with the potential for further research. In conclusion, I summarise research outcomes that I anticipate becoming valuable to the ongoing debates about creolisation, post-colonial identities, and conversations about rewriting the history of Surinamese-Creoles. The application of my findings by others to continue research about Surinamese-Creoles would be the ultimate recognition I aspire to achieve. This would prove that my efforts to utilise my research as a platform to share the story of my ancestors in their own way of interpreting their social life have paid off.

My gratitude goes to all my informants and all those who have shown me genuine support throughout the whole journey of the PhD.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

*No sidon na bakra sturu fu seri yu nengre oso bangi – Do not despise your heritage.
(Surinamese-Creole proverb)*

In this introduction, I will lay the foundation for the discussion throughout the thesis to further unpack my main argument. My main argument challenges early creolist scholars' idea that creole communities are considered extracts of source cultures. Charles Stewart (2007), in his book, *Creolization: History, Ethnography, Theory*, speaks of the negative connotation that is attached to the notion of creolisation and who a 'creole' is. The implication is that the enslaved underwent a transformation after they were brought from their country of origin (the Old World) to the colonies (the New World) and therefore were no longer associated with their relatives in their country of origin. Another idea is that the creole cultures emerging in the colonies relied on elements extracted from source cultures and could therefore be considered a mere extract from dominant source cultures (Herskovits Melville, 1941). My argument to counter these ideas of creoles and creolisation is aligned with Edward Kamau Brathwaite's (1974) call to disrupt the Eurocentric model of creolisation and instead apply a model that incorporates 'blood flow'. His recommended model of 'blood flow' is a metaphor illustrating physical and cultural interrelationships. Brathwaite argues that 'all resident cultures should be perceived as equal and contiguous despite the accidents of political history, each developing its own lifestyle from the spirit of the ancestors but modified and increasingly so through interaction with their environment and the other cultures in that same environment'.

His argument supports my call for acknowledging the birth of the Surinamese-Creole through a dynamic, fluid, and interactive process of the engagement of enslaved Africans with the other cultures they encountered in the colony of Suriname. As Brathwaite mentioned, the interaction happened despite the accidents of political history. In the case of Suriname and the emergence of a creole community, I want to flip this narrative and instead unpack its accidental political history, as I consider it to be the point of departure to understand the processes through which the emergence of the creole communities in Suriname took place. This political history is layered with historical, social, and political occurrences from the past which are still noticeable in present-day Suriname.

In the introduction, I will unpack these different layers of political history in Suriname, which will give the reader insight into understanding the existence of the different labels applied to distinguish creole people in Suriname. Furthermore, the introduction addresses recent developments that shifted the narrative of the emergence of the Surinamese-Creole identity. Globalisation exposed Surinamese local life to developments such as decolonisation debates, quests for reparations, and an increase in the popularity of Africanism expressed through music, dance, and fashion. In particular, the younger generation strongly associates with these rapid developments and is now in search of an identity that will help them find stability amidst the pressure to adapt to these changes. I describe how the Surinamese Government and other relevant organisations in the field of culture and community development respond to the global quest to acknowledge the impact of a disturbing history of colonisation on the existence of post-colonial identities and the divide among African descendants in Surinamese society. And then I relate these changes to the way in which they become visible on socio-cultural levels in Surinamese society.

The cited Surinamese-Creole proverb holds a twofold interpretation. One hints at the tendency of people in post-colonial societies to prefer adapting to the lifestyle and cultural practices of the former colonisers. Simultaneously, this proverb urges the descendants of the enslaved to honour and embrace the socio-cultural identity created by the ancestors and transferred from generation to generation. The relevance of the proverb to the Introduction is my advocacy for a disruption of early creolist ideas of the origins of creole cultural practices, instead a call to embrace these cultural practices as cultural heritage unique to a specific geographical location, despite the existence of traces of other dominant cultures.

1.1. The historical context

To describe the historical context of Suriname, I want to draw on historical events depicting the creation of the colony of Suriname. Suriname was founded in 1651 by the English as a British plantation colony, and after 16 years under English governance, it was ceded to the Dutch in 1667 (Gloria Wekker, 2006; Richard Price & Sally Price, 1992). The company authorised by the Dutch Government to govern the colony of Suriname was the West Indian Company. The Republic of the Seven United Netherlands granted full mandate to this company to govern Suriname, and in 1683, the first governor of the colony of Suriname, Lord van Sommelsdijk, was sworn in⁴. With this deed, the official status of Suriname as a Dutch colony was sealed.

Alex van Stipriaan, a Dutch scholar specialising in Afro-Caribbean history, particularly that of Suriname and the Dutch Caribbean and processes of creolisation in the Black Atlantic⁵, speaks in his book *Surinaams contrast – Roofbouw en overleven in een Caraïbische plantagekolonie 1750–1863* (1993) of a fundamental change in the Caribbean scenery after the invasion by the European conquerors. The autochthone Amerindians, the official inhabitants of that geographical location, were banished, and new societies consisting of Europeans, enslaved Africans, and, in a later stage, Asians were established. His reference to the banishing of the Amerindian inhabitants, prior to the establishment of the colony of Suriname, urges us to also address the history of Suriname before the arrival of the Europeans. Although this research draws on colonial and post-colonial events, observations during my orientation visit indicated that historical narratives from prior to Suriname becoming a colony continue to play an important role in the social and cultural practices of the Surinamese in general and the Surinamese-Creoles in particular. The history of the original inhabitants of Suriname, the Amerindians, has been documented as a collection of oral stories by Dutch scholars, such as Michiel van Kempen in his literary work *Sirito – 50 Surinaamse vertellingen* (1993) and Frederik Paul Penard and Arthur Philip Penard in their book *De menschetende aanbidders der zonneslang* (1907).

Anton de Kom, one of the icons in Suriname's colonial history who is known for his fierce resistance against the colonial administration, wrote in his book *Wij slaven van Suriname* about the time before the arrival of the Europeans (1934. p15). His description depicts the Amerindians as strong, peaceful, intelligent people who were rulers over the Guianas, also referred to as 'De Wilde Kust' by the European invaders. He draws his knowledge about the Amerindians from narratives recorded by early European writers about the colony of Suriname, such as Mr. Jan Jacob Hartsinck (1770) and J. Wolbers (1861). Both European writers lived in the colony of Suriname prior to the abolition of slavery. Their narratives portray a positive image of the Amerindians, in contrast with oral histories in which the Amerindians are depicted as warlike, barbaric people⁶. In conversations with Amerindian informants, they shared some oral stories about the encounters of their ancestors with the colonisers of Suriname. Some of these stories talk about the arrival of the Europeans and how it was experienced by the then-Amerindians. I choose to recount these oral stories because of the strong association of Surinamese-Creoles with the Indigenous oral history in the embodiment of the Surinamese-Creole identity. The following oral story describes the origin of the names *Suriname* and *Paramaribo* based on Indigenous oral history.

The oral stories about the land, before the arrival of the Europeans, imply the existence of two Indigenous tribes who settled on the shores of the Suriname River. Eurocentric labels address these two tribes as the Arawak and the Carib⁷. In the event of reclaiming history, these tribes reclaimed their native Indigenous names, which are *Lokono* (instead of Arawak) and *Kalina* (instead of Carib). Oral stories continue to imply that the name *Suriname* was derived from the very first Indigenous tribe that

⁴ https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/_sur001183001_01/_sur001183001_01_0023.php accessed 21.07.2021.

⁵ <https://www.eur.nl/people/alex-van-stipriaan-luiscius> accessed 21.07.2021.

⁶ Cornelis van Aerssen van Sommelsdijk was one of the first governors (from 28 November 1683 to 19 July 1688) of the colony of Suriname appointed by the West Indian Company. He is known for numerous accomplishments in Suriname, but mostly for his cruel attacks against the Amerindians (Derde tijdvak. van 1683 tot 1804., *Geschiedenis van Suriname*, J. Wolbers – DBNL accessed 27.08.'23).

⁷ Jan Jacob Hartsinck 1770. Tweede hoofdstuk. *Beschryving der Indiaanen., Beschryving van Guiana, of de wilde kust in Zuid-America*, Jan Jacob Hartsinck - DBNL accessed 27.8.2023.

inhabited the land, which was called the *Surinen*⁸. Their oral stories tell us that the Indigenous village was named after the Chief, a fierce warrior, *Para Moro*. 'River' in the Indigenous language means *rebho*. The name of the village became *Para Moro Rebho*, which means *dorp van het Opperhoofd aan de rivier*, 'village of the Chief at the river'. The Europeans, of course, did not master the language of the Indigenous people and pronounced the name of the village *Paramaribo*.

Although the oral stories remain uncertain, Michiel van Kempen and Alex van Stipriaan argue that the creation of the colony of Suriname was driven by the greed of the European invaders who wanted more than just engaging in fair trade with the *Lokono* and *Kalina*. To achieve their goal, wars were instigated between these two tribes, resulting in the enslavement of a majority of the *Lokono*⁹, presumably with the support of the *Kalina*. The Amerindian village down the mouth of the Suriname River was captivated by the Europeans and transformed into a vibrant city with wooden white painted townhouses, a waterfront, and a marina. This marks the beginnings of the colony of Suriname, and from this new settlement, trade was facilitated with neighbouring establishments. Since then, the name of the capital of Suriname has been *Paramaribo*¹⁰. The Suriname River connected the colony with the rest of the world. The Suriname River, to this day, remains important and, from a historical point of view, symbolises the arrival of all the different ethnic groups who came to Suriname, willingly or forced.

The history of enslavement and colonisation in Suriname is marked by acts of inhumane activities and brutality towards the enslaved population, oppression, and the enforcement of Eurocentric socio-cultural practices (Jean Jacques Vrij 2013. p46). The Amerindians resisted the brutality of slavery, and in 1686, the then-governor Cornelis van Aerssen van Sommelsdijck terminated the enslavement of Amerindians and signed a peace treaty with them¹¹. The termination of Amerindian enslavement marks the beginning of the use of African enslaved people on plantations. The colonial rulers turned to the lucrative trade of enslaved Africans¹². Anton de Kom, in his book *Wij slaven van Suriname*, vividly describes the arrival of the enslaved Africans and the sharp contrast of their circumstances on the ships in relation to those of the Europeans on the same ships (1934. p29). The Surinamese-Creole culture consists of several oral stories telling the journey and the arrival of their African ancestors. Most are embedded in songs, quotes, and children's games. In Chapter 4, I will unpack these stories and explore their relevance to the preservation of the Surinamese-Creole identity. Not all enslaved Africans submitted to enslavement in Suriname. Studies from Richard and Sally Price (2008) and John Gabriel Stedman (1796) vividly describe the fierce resistance of runaway enslaved Africans.

Cruelty towards the enslaved and the enormous discrepancy between them and the European colonisers led to regular escapes of slaves from the plantations into the rainforest. There, they established their own communities governed by their own rules, norms, and values. The Europeans would address them as Maroons, and soon these Maroons became a threat to the plantations. The plantation owners suffered enormous economic loss due to plantations being burned down, families being raped and murdered, and other brutal actions executed by the runaways as a form of retaliation. Pressure from the plantation owners led to the colonial administration seeking a peace treaty with the Maroon communities. On 10 October 1760, the first peace treaty was signed between the colonial administration and the Maroon group the *Aukanisi*. Shortly after, in 1762 and 1767, respectively, two other peace treaties were signed with the *Saamaka* and the *Matawai*. The treaties recognised the Maroon communities as legally accepted independent socio-ethnic groups in Suriname. To this day, Maroon communities are governing their territory, and the Surinamese Government is subject to the decisions and agreements made by the head Chiefs of the communities. The Amerindians, who fiercely resisted enslavement, moved deep into the interior and established

⁸ <http://suriname.lingers.eu/EersteBewoners.php> accessed 21.07.2021.

⁹ *de geschiedenis der surinaamse indianen « indianen (wordpress.com)* accessed 21.07.2021.

¹⁰ *de oudste geschiedenis van paramaribo. – plantage jagtlust* accessed 21.07.2021

¹¹ *Cornelis van Aerssen van Sommelsdijck (suriname.nu)* accessed 27.08.2023.

¹² *According to various studies about the transatlantic slave trade, an approximate number of 10.5 million Africans were taken captive and transported as slaves to colonies in the Americas. The slave trade lasted for approximately 366 years.*

their own communities. These communities later became safe havens for the runaways, teaching them how to survive in the jungle.

The abolition of slavery was declared on 1 July 1863¹³. However, one cannot speak of freedom, as the Dutch Government invented another way of protecting its economic stability. The enslaved were forced to work another 10 years on the plantation before being allowed to enjoy their freedom. Although they were offered a stipend, this was insufficient to support them in establishing their own futures after abolition. In anticipation of the end of the 10-year mandatory working contract with the enslaved, the Dutch invented yet another way of securing economic power. They recruited contract workers from their former overseas colonies such as Java, Indonesia; India; and China. Officially, the Chinese were the first immigrants recruited to work on the plantations. They arrived in 1853. But the fierce recruitment of immigrants to secure the continuation of the plantation economy started in 1873. British Indians from India were tricked into signing a foul work contract to be employed on the plantations in Suriname. Between 1873 and 1916, many Hindustani immigrants arrived in Suriname, and from 1890 to 1939, there was an active recruiting of Javanese immigrants from Java to work on the plantations in Suriname (Jacob van Lier 1949 and Hans Ramsoedh 2014). The arrival of contract workers marked a new phase in the history of colonial Suriname. This was the beginning of the current socio-cultural and political constructions that one encounters in Suriname nowadays.

1.2. The socio-cultural and ethnic context

To understand the current socio-cultural constructions in Suriname and the Surinamese-Creole positionality in these constructions, it is important to unpack ethnic and socio-cultural developments occurring in the creation of the colony of Suriname. Suriname became a Dutch creation known as the envy of all the others in the Americas. It was flourishing and produced more revenue and consumed more imported goods per capita than any other colony in the Caribbean (Richard Price & Sally Price, 1992). Sadly, in comparison to the ratios in the other Caribbean colonies, it was also known as the plantation colony, with the highest rate of brutally exploited African slaves. With the establishment of Suriname as a Dutch colony, Dutch ideologies, norms, values, customs, and practices were imposed as the norms to be considered a civilised member of society. Dutch laws came into effect for the governing of Suriname. Christianity was introduced as the epitome of being a virtuous man or woman (Cynthia Macleod 1987; Gloria Wekker 2016). Enslaved people were forbidden to practise their own religion, have their own space, receive education, earn an income, and have access to adequate health care. Everything non-Dutch was dismissed as uncivilised, barbaric, and even demonic. The Dutch developed separate laws and decrees for the enslaved community to control their existence in society. John Gabriel Stedman, a Dutch-born Scottish soldier deployed to assist with counter-attacking the runaways during colonial times, describes in his book *The narrative of a five-year expedition against the revolted negroes of Suriname* (1796) how these laws were subject to the individual interpretation of the slave owner and thus allowed them to do as they saw fit for their 'property'.

In comparison to the ratios in the other Caribbean colonies, Suriname was known as the plantation colony with the highest rate of brutally exploited enslaved Africans. Jacob van Lier, a Surinamese-Creole sociologist and historian, describes in his book *Samenleving in een grensgebied* (1949) the composition of the colony of Suriname and the evolution of society with the arrival of each other ethnic group, such as the Portuguese-Jewish people. The ratio of Africans to Europeans was extremely high, as well as the ratio of Africans to Creoles and of recently arrived Africans to seasoned slaves. By the mid-eighteenth century, the street scenery in Suriname was predominantly enslaved

¹³ Hans Ramsoedh *Van samenleving in een grensgebied naar integratie in Suriname*, *OSO. Tijdschrift voor Surinaamse taalkunde, letterkunde en geschiedenis*. Jaargang 33 - DBNL accessed 27.8.2023.

Africans, a handful of a mixture of Africans with Europeans, and a smaller group of Europeans in power over the large group of enslaved people.

In his diary, John Gabriel Stedman (1796) vividly gives detailed accounts of the colony of Suriname, the lavish lifestyle lived by the Europeans in power in contrast with the screaming poverty of the enslaved population. The houses of plantation owners and other high officials in the colony were decorated, oozing wealth and prosperity, with precious materials such as *delfst-blauw* porcelain, gold and silver cutlery, ornately crafted mahogany canopy beds and wardrobes, white cotton or broderie bed linen, and luxury lace and crochet. The architectural landscape consisted of majestic government buildings and houses built from wood, the exterior painted white and the windows green with stately stoops made from bricks in front. Meanwhile, at the front of these statuesque houses, there would be a couple of poorly constructed, wooden, unpainted houses consisting of no more than two rooms. These houses would serve as accommodation for the enslaved. An account of these details is deliberately made, as this scenery still exists today in Suriname, particularly in the capital. The architectural contrasts become significant in Chapters 3 and 4, where I will further unpack the relevance of these symbols with the embodiment and continuation of the Surinamese-Creole identity. I will provide an anthropological account on the relevance of landscapes in relation to collective remembrance and the embodiment of one's socio-cultural identity.

During colonial times, communities in the interior of Suriname established by the runaways gradually spread throughout the whole rainforest. Eventually, there was a significant development of African descendants situated in the interior of Suriname and African descendants living in the capital and the coastal area of Suriname. In his book *Saamaka dreaming* (2017), Richard Price gives a detailed account of the organisational structure and the systematic governance by the Chief of each tribe. Their way of living differed from those on the plantations and became subject to numerous studies aiming to investigate the lives of runaway enslaved Africans in comparison to those who remained enslaved until the abolition of slavery. The Maroon communities developed into six significant tribes, distinguished as the *Saamaka*, *Aukanisi*, *Matawai*, *Pamaka*, *Kwinti*, and *Aluku*. Each one of these tribes derived its name from the river where they settled their first establishments (Yvon van der Pijl, 2007). Yet, the acknowledgement of these societies by the colonial administration and later by the Surinamese Government has not been on a level of equality for a long time. From 2010 to 2015, one of the Maroon-led political parties, the BEP, became part of the political coalition in power. Many Maroons gradually became more visible in prominent positions¹⁴ and in the higher education system. The younger generation especially demanded their rights to be part of the overall development in Suriname. There was a visible shift in the stigmatising of Maroon communities, and they found their rightful place alongside the Creoles in Paramaribo and other districts. Conversations, debates, and discussions arose regarding the benefits and necessity of uniting the Maroons and the Creoles as descendants of enslaved Africans. Since then, there has been a steady increase in the development of the Maroons, and their presence on the political, social, educational, and trade levels is not to be ignored or marginalised any longer (Gloria Wekker, 2006; Yvon van der Pijl, 2007).

After the arrival of the enslaved Africans, the Amerindians established their own communities in the interior of Suriname. Currently, they consist of six tribes: the *Lokono*, the *Kalina*, the *Akurio*, the *Trio*, and the *Wayana*. The Amerindians remain misrepresented in history books and previous studies written by European explorers. Lord Cornelis Ascanius van Sypesteyn was one of the governors of Suriname during colonial times. In his work, *Beschrijving van Suriname – Historisch, Geographisch, en Statistisch overzigt uit officiële bronnen bijeengebragt* (1854), he paints a picture of Suriname as it was perceived by the Europeans. He confirms the existence of several Indigenous tribes and makes mention of their nomadic lifestyles. His descriptions reveal prejudice, racial profiling, and denigration

¹⁴ In the recent years since 2000, this increase in Maroons in prominent positions has become visible in their participation in political parties, in Parliament, and conferences on the international level and in their establishing their own socio-cultural groups.

of the Amerindians' lifestyles. Descriptions such as 'savage Indians' support the superior attitude of the European invaders and their patronising thoughts towards the original inhabitants.

Lord van Sypesteijn continues to address the Amerindians as war mongers and paints their deliberate instigations for war as prime challenges for the early European settlers to succeed in their attempts to occupy the land (1854, 4). These sorts of negative depictions instigated by the European settlers have been haunting the Indigenous community in Suriname, placing them in a constant position as the underdogs, being subject to illegal occupancy of their land, disruption of their cultural practices, and an ongoing absence of decent facilities such as housing, health services, education, and proper transportation. However, the spiritual force of the Amerindians remained pivotal for those Surinamese-Creole individuals whose cultural identity is ingrained in the typical Surinamese-Creole religious belief system, named *Winti*. This belief system will be further described in this thesis. The core of it is based on the spiritual guidance provided by the Amerindians to the enslaved Africans upon their arrival. Each believer in *Winti* has a deep respect for the Amerindian culture, specifically the spiritual powers of the shaman. Thus, even being marginalised in Surinamese society, the Amerindians are considered a spiritually highly skilled community, and, as such, they have often lived in harmony with the Creole and Maroon communities.

In the colony, the offspring of the enslaved born out of a sexual encounter between a European man and an enslaved African woman were called creoles. Sexual encounters between European women and enslaved men were forbidden. Some of the European men would pay a ransom for the creole child so he or she could be raised in freedom. In the case of a sexual encounter between a European man and a free (African-descendent) woman, the child would automatically be considered a free person in the colony. The status of being a free Creole enabled segregation among the free people and the enslaved Africans. Gradually, free Creoles would adapt to the lifestyles of the wealthy Dutch families and utilise their status of freedom to establish their own group of elites in society.

Enslaved people in the capital, Paramaribo, considered themselves to be of better status than the plantation slaves, and within the community of slaves it was an unwritten rule that the seasoned slaves should be treated with respect by the newly arrived slaves¹⁵. The newly arrived slaves were named *sowtu watra negre*, which literally means 'negro from the salt water'. Besides the Dutch, there were other European settlers who helped shape not only the socio-cultural and economic image of the colony but also the socio-cultural identity of Surinamese-Creoles. These were Portuguese-Jew plantation owners, Lebanese merchants, Scottish and English plantation owners who remained in the colony after the English transferred the colony to the Dutch, German missionaries, and Polish and German soldiers who were sent on missions to Suriname to combat the numerous and severe attacks of the runaway slaves on plantations. Each one of these European forefathers has left their mark in Suriname, which can be traced back through family names, traditional recipes, traditional dress, place names, names of monuments or buildings, and oral stories.

With the arrival of contract workers (between 1873 and 1937), Suriname quickly became a melting pot of different cultures. Hans Ramsoedh, a Dutch-Surinamese historian, describes in his article 'Van samenleving in een grensgebied naar integratie in Suriname' (2014) that this melting pot did not occur without challenges. He draws on the notion of acculturation to analyse the integration of the different ethnic groups in Suriname. He refers to the dynamic relations between the ethnic groups and the way these relations are influenced by socio-economic and political developments. He describes that with the enforcement of Dutch norms, values, and legislation, each one of these ethnic groups became subject to a form of 'vernederlandsing', which means 'being Dutchified'. However, each one of the ethnic groups, including the enslaved, managed to preserve elements of their culture of origin. The following describes the gradual blending of the different ethnic groups after the colonial period. The former enslaved, specifically in the coastal area, developed intimate relationships with the migrants. Relationships between Chinese male contract workers and former enslaved women

¹⁵ *Conversations with Christine van Russel, owner and curator of the Koto Museum (a museum exhibiting the traditional dress of Creole working-class women, including typical creole household ware and craftsmanship).*

especially became prominent. With this mixture of intimate relationships came a new breed of Creole people: In this case, it was a creole who was a mixture of Chinese with African, or Chinese with Creole.

With such a large palette of mixtures, Creoles invented labels to categorise the type of creole that one was – labels such as *Mulat* for African-European, *Mestiez* for African-Amerindian, and *Karboeger* for African-*Mulat*. In this manner, the Creole people strategically attempted to create categories which were related to the social status of the Creole person within society. The *Mulat*-Creoles projected themselves as the ‘high society’ of the community of Creole people and acted as such. Their European descent was mostly Dutch-European, Jewish-European, or German/Scottish-European. After the abolition of slavery, it was predominantly this group of *Mulat*-Creoles who held prominent administrative positions alongside the colonial government in the country (Cynthia McLeod, 1987; 1993; 1996; 2000). Usually, the mixture of a Creole person can be recognised by their family name. There are Creole people with very Dutch family names, i.e. Bakker, Chinese family names, i.e. Tjin A Sjoie, Jewish family names, i.e. de Miranda, German family names, i.e. Duyzer, or Scottish family names, i.e. Douglas¹⁶. Soon, the palette of mixtures amongst the Creole people extended, and now a Creole person in Suriname isn’t necessarily an African mixed with a European.

The differentiation of Creoleness quickly became a complex layer of a mixture of different ethnicities with African, and being acknowledged as a Creole was now dependent on geographical location and the way a family would acknowledge their African descent (Albert Helman, 1977). To this day, this remains the situation in distinguishing Surinamese-Creoles from other ethnic groups. In the next chapters, the gradual development of the Surinamese-Creole identity will be further unpacked against the backdrop of socio-cultural and economic occurrences. The economic occurrences that will be significant for the development of the Surinamese-Creole identity are the rise of the gold mining industry in 1875 and the balata bleeding industry in 1889. Hans Ramsoedh (2014) explains that the rise of both industries evoked a mass immigration of creole people to the capital of Suriname, Paramaribo. Men, especially, would journey to the interior of Suriname in search of good fortune, leaving their spouses alone in the city with the children. This phenomenon of creole women living alone with their children for long periods of time evoked social practices that are now significant to the creole identity in Suriname. In Chapter 5, I will further draw on the characteristics of the Surinamese-Creole family and analyse their relevance to the continuation of the creole identity in Suriname.

The integration of ethnic groups in Suriname has now become the unique selling point of the tourism sector and also the inspiration to create slogans to represent Suriname. Fredrik Barth (1969) argues that ethnic distinctions do not depend on the absence of social interaction and acceptance. On the contrary, these ethnic differences are the promoters of the building/establishment of embracing social systems. In other words, it is not because of the absence of social interaction and acceptance that there are, so to speak, ethnic distinctions. It is because of their existence that social systems are being developed to learn and stimulate how to embrace ethnic distinctions. Relating this argument to my research, in Suriname the tourism sector promotes (via national and international platforms) artefacts that are significant for the Maroon or Creole cultures as artefacts representing Afro-Surinamese culture (objects such as the *pangi*, the *angisa*, and the *koto*, which are traditional clothes of respectively the Maroons and the Creoles).

Most people in Suriname would wear a *pangi* to show their Surinamese identity, even though it is specific traditional clothing from the Maroons. During public celebrations especially, this cross-cultural embracing of artefacts and food becomes vivid. There is a visible integration of a diversity of ethnic elements in arts and crafts, music, theatre productions, and clothing¹⁷. Because of this integration, celebrations of Afro-Surinamese origin exhibit elements from both the Maroon and the Creole

¹⁶ <https://www.hindorama.com/over-het-ontstaan-van-surinaamse-familienamen-prof-dr-c-choenni/> accessed on 20/08/'23.

¹⁷ The archives of NAKS serve as proof of this increase, as well as the performances that they showcase and cultural events that they organise on a regular basis. The arts and crafts scenery in Suriname includes a significant increase in Maroon artwork.

cultures. As Mrs. Siegmien Staphorst, director of NAKS, stated in my interview with her, 'It seems as if art, music, dance and theatre performance are the only areas where the clear-cut lines and boundaries between the different ethnic groups become insignificant and even blurry.' And this is what I encountered during my time in the field: a vibrant mixture of socio-cultural practices, the sharing of lived experiences where the mixture of ethnicities seemed to be indispensable, and the label of being Surinamese was the only label without a complicated attachment of differences in lived experiences. Navigating this melting pot served as my basis for uncovering and understanding the core of the Surinamese-Creole identity, which, as the research showed, mirrors this overarching diversity in ethnicity in Surinamese society.

1.2.1. *Existence of social class*

Marxism's central concept of social class is applicable to the political and social scenery in Suriname. As Anthony Marcus and Charles Menzies argue, 'Marxism holds that conflict to be an inevitable part of the economic laws of motion of an expansionary system built on economic competition between capitalists for the social surplus and between workers and capitalists for the social wage' (2005. P14). They address the economic competition present in class-divided societies to be the result of leadership or the political means and will to fight. Yvonne van der Pijl, a Dutch-Surinamese anthropologist, describes the socio-political situation in Suriname as politically fatal and pauperising (2018. p20). Although Surinamese people tend to claim that everything is at peace and in harmony in Suriname, Yvonne van der Pijl and other Surinamese scholars continue to address the subtle racial struggles among the ethnic groups – between the Hindustanis and the Creoles, the Creoles and the Maroons, and the Amerindians with the rest of Surinamese society, whilst the Amerindians continue to be the underdogs.

This divide in social class is deeply rooted in historical events that have subsequently and deliberately been imposed by the former colonial powers in Suriname. Astrid Boedhoe, a graduate Master of Law from the *Anton De Kom* University in Suriname, wrote her thesis on the fundamental Indigenous rights of the Indigenous tribes in Suriname and addressed the politics of power surrounding this topic (Astrid Boedhoe, 2016)¹⁸. With the claims for Indigenous rights and the emerging voices of other ethnic groups claiming their recognition in the development of the colony into an independent country (namely the Maroons, the Creole people, and the Hindustani people), the unity among Surinamese people has become a subject of discussion. The cultivation of being Surinamese is based on different interpretations of historical events, which often leads to politicians making use of racially informed depictions to gain political power. The positionality of Surinamese-Creoles is often subject to these depictions because of the historical representation of Suriname. The rise of the goldmining and balata industries evoked a large concentration of Surinamese-Creoles in Paramaribo, resulting in an excessive concentration of socio-cultural creole practices in local life in Paramaribo (Hans Ramsodh 2014. p15). After 1895, with the termination of the agreement with the contract workers, the majority chose to stay in Suriname and seek opportunities to build a stable life. Unfortunately, their living circumstances on the plantations were deplorable. The creole people continued to move to the city, enrolled in education opportunities, and were employed in a variety of jobs, from laundry women to public servants. The former Hindustani contract workers engaged with the craftsmanship they were familiar with. They became goldsmiths, grocers, merchants, and tailors and gradually moved their businesses to Paramaribo. After the First World War, there was a steady group of Hindustani elites living in Paramaribo and engaging with the creole community there. Their children would receive education from creole schoolteachers. However, they maintained their own socio-cultural practices and began to establish their own religious, political, and cultural organisations.

¹⁸ <https://vids.sr/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Astrid-Boedhoe-thesis-Grondenrechten.pdf>.

The process of urbanisation for the Javanese contract workers happened during the war in the period 1940–1945. Like the Hindustanis, they sustained their own cultural practices and established their own organisations. This segregated development of urbanisation is the root of the current-day social class divide in Suriname. The creoles continued to flourish in government positions, and the Hindustanis quickly became the largest ethnic group in Suriname. After the war, the Hindustani and the Javanese contract workers established small agricultural businesses at the outskirts of Paramaribo, which led to the phenomenon of a large concentration of creole people in Paramaribo and a high concentration of the descendants of contract workers in the districts surrounding Paramaribo. Interaction between Paramaribo and the surrounding districts was mainly based on economic gain. Although there has been a gradual change in the socio-economic scenery, the fundamental segregation between the descendants of enslaved Africans and the descendants of contract workers continues to influence the social class structures in Suriname.

1.3. The political context

Suriname faces regular elections, most occurring after 5 years of governance. These elections are signified by political power struggles, bureaucracy with the electoral regulations, dishonesty towards the electorate, and the tendency of ‘jumping ship’ by politicians. Securing stability on a socio-economic level remains a constant failure for each government. Political analysts Wouter Veenendaal and Honourata Mazepus (Universiteit Leiden September – October 2022) conducted a large-scale survey to analyse the public opinion of the Surinamese people regarding the democratic system and the role of politicians. The results were concerning. The majority expressed feelings of distrust towards politicians and concerns about the democratic system in Suriname. There was an overall longing for the restoration of democracy, equality for all citizens, and an independent judicial system.

Hans Ramssoedh, in his article ‘Het democratisch tekort in Suriname’ (2008), imputes the failure of democracy and the political system in Suriname due to the nature of the political structures, such as the institutions and political parties, and the culture, such as the norms and values in the country. Political structures in Suriname are tainted by a long history of corruption, bribery, and exploitation of the less privileged in the society. Hans Ramssoedh, and with him other Surinamese scholars such as Jack Menke (2005), argues that there has been very little change in the governing of Suriname since the country became an independent state. The phenomenon of a class-divided society¹⁹ remains and continues to dictate the functioning of political structures. As for the political culture, the existing political parties reflect a policy of ethnic segregation and ideologies based on ethnic sentiments.

On 1 April 1937, the administration of Suriname, *Koloniale Staten*, was replaced with *De Staten van Suriname*, allowing Surinamese political representatives to partake in the governing of Suriname²⁰. However, just 2% of the Surinamese population had the right to vote. In 1948, universal suffrage for men and women was introduced in Suriname, and May 1949 was the first time that general elections were held. *De Nationale Partij Suriname* (NPS), which represented the creole population, won the elections in both that year and in 1951. In 1955, they lost their leading position, and the then-political party representing the Hindustani population, *De Verenigde Hindustaanse Partij* (VHP), offered a collaboration with the NPS under the name *De Verbodderings politiek* (Hans Ramssoedh 2014. P23).

The leader of the VHP, Mr. Jagernath Lachmon, had a vision to unite the Creoles and the Hindustanis, who were political and social rivals. At the elections of November 1973, the NPS won the elections by forming a coalition with three other parties, one of which was the KTPI, which represented the Javanese community. The VHP ended up in the opposition, and unfortunately, the vision of Mr. Lachmon didn’t succeed, and to date, there is a visible rivalry between both ethnic groups. The rivalry, some say, finds its origin in colonial times when the Hindustanis swiftly became

¹⁹ *Marxism identifies class-divided societies as follows: the exploitation of the majority by a minority that controls the ability of society to produce goods and services* (Anthony Marcus and Charles Menzies, 2005).

²⁰ https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/_gid003193801_01/_gid003193801_01.pdf accessed on 20/08/’23.

the largest ethnic group in Suriname yet didn't receive enough respect and recognition from the then-Creole elite who positioned themselves as the upper class alongside the Dutch.

In 1974, the then-prime minister of the Creole party NPS initiated negotiations with the Netherlands for the independence of Suriname. As the negotiations between the then-Surinamese Prime Minister Mr. Henk Arron and the Dutch Government continued, the political and socio-cultural environment turned violent. This period in Suriname's history is marked as a power struggle between the Hindustanis and the Creoles. The coalition parties, led by the NPS, were all in favour of independence; however, the then-opposition party *de Vooruitstrevende Hervormings Partij* (VHP), previously known as *de Verenigde Hindustaanse Partij*, was against the idea of independence. Mr. Jagernath Lachmon believed it was too premature for Suriname to stand on its own feet. The negotiations were at risk of failing because of the lack of one more vote to endorse the proposal for independence. The night before the final approval of the proposal for independence, 24 November 1975, one member of the VHP, Mr. George Hinduri, the second-in-command of the VHP, left and gave his vote to the coalition party. Suriname gained independence, and his act became one of the most disputable in the history of the Surinamese Parliament.

Some considered George Hinduri's decision an act of nationalism, but large numbers of Hindustanis considered it an act of betrayal. As the tensions increased between both ethnic groups, many Hindustani and Creole people fled the country. The Creole prime minister and the Hindustani party leader, Mr. Jaghernath Lachmon, eventually came to an understanding for the sake of unity among the Surinamese people. On 25 November 1975, Suriname became an independent state with its own government. With independence, the Creoles, who were already in high governmental positions, formed the new Surinamese Government, supported by a small number of Hindustani political leaders. By that time, the Hindustani population was almost as large as the Maroon and Creole populations together, and alongside the Creole people, they swiftly moved into the centre of political power. Shortly after independence, Suriname went through a turbulent period of political power struggles, social and economic instability, and social inequality.

As the situation continued to remain unstable, the Surinamese people faced devastating events of scarcity at all levels. The military coup resulted in a period of military dictatorship, and large numbers of Surinamese people, namely Creole, Hindustani, and Javanese, continued to flee the country in the pursuit of a better future. The phenomenon of immigrating to the former motherland led to the birth of the saying 'Holland het land van melk en honing', meaning 'Holland is the land of milk and honey' – a saying that is to this day relevant in Suriname among those facing socio-economic struggles. The saying means more than just a longing for a better life. It encapsulates the expectations of those in Suriname towards their family members in the Netherlands to continue to take care of them and supply their socio-economic and cultural needs to survive the continued socio-economic instability in Suriname. These expectations built an inseparable bond between both countries and an ever-remaining dependency between families in Suriname and in diaspora for socio-cultural growth.

The civil war, which occurred from 1986 to 1992, largely affected the Maroon communities in the interior of Suriname. Undocumented resources (mostly oral resources) relate this war to the subtle power struggle between the Creoles and the Maroons, which originates from the time of slavery. The war reporter Ellen de Vries (2005) wrote a book documenting facts, descriptions, observations, transcriptions of interviews, and conversations with people related to or involved in this war. Different sources claim different events to have led to this war. Whichever stories reflect the accurate occurrences of events, the fact remains that because of the civil war, large numbers of Maroons had to flee their villages in search of refuge in the capital, Paramaribo, which caused a major disruption on a socio-economic and cultural level²¹.

²¹ Conversation with Andre Mosis and Henna Guicherit, both experts in Maroon culture.

The Maroons, being unfamiliar with the city lifestyle, faced a culture shock. The lack of proper shelters forced them to establish their own communities in the most deplorable areas of the capital. To this day, there are neighbourhoods in Paramaribo known as former Maroon refugee camps. These neighbourhoods suffer the most from a lack of adequate facilities such as proper schools, access to water and electricity, deplorable roads, and proper housing. Sadly, successive governments failed to upgrade the infrastructure of these neighbourhoods. Criminality rates, poverty, and the number of dropouts and teenage pregnancies remain high in these neighbourhoods²². Political leaders continue to abuse the dire situation of the Maroons and continue to promise development in return for their votes. Successive governments took advantage of the divide between the Maroons and the Creoles to promote the unification of these two ethnic groups to gain political benefits and power²³.

The political history of Suriname shows the Creoles considering themselves to be more educated and more civilised than the Maroons. For years, it has been public knowledge that the Creole people in Suriname have held powerful and influential positions within the government and, as such, have initiated various political and socio-economic programs with the aim of restricting (whether this was deliberate or not) the development of the Maroons²⁴. In recent years, there seems to have been a drastic change in this picture. There has been a steady increase in the development of the Maroons, and their presence on the political, social, educational and trade levels is not to be ignored or marginalised any longer (Gloria Wekker, 2006; Yvon van der Pijl, 2007).

1.4. Global developments dictating the continuation of the Surinamese-Creole identity

Suriname is often considered to be part of the Caribbean, due to Surinamese history having similarities with the Caribbean history of enslavement and immigration. As such, academics and other relevant socio-cultural institutions are actively involved in discussions of establishing a more relatable socio-cultural identity for the descendants of Africans in the Caribbean²⁵. By officially launching the term *Afro-Surinaams* on 10 October 2016²⁶, the then-Minister of Regional Developments, who is of Maroon descent, made an urgent call for unity amongst African descendants in Suriname.

And yet, 160 years after the abolition of slavery²⁷, the never-ending question of the 'originality in Africanism' amongst the Maroons and the Creoles, both being descendants of enslaved Africans, continues to be a theme of public discussion. Fierce debates evoke unsettled emotions of discomfort and disturbance between the Creoles and the Maroons in Suriname. The unspoken prejudice between these two ethnic groups in Suriname remains an obstacle to achieving unity. The question of Africanism has been challenged by various scholars who have carried out studies amongst the Maroons in Suriname (Sydney Mintz & Richard Price, 1992). The majority of these studies claim that African cultural elements are more present in their original form of practice in the Maroon culture than in the Creole culture. The observations of these scholars have fuelled the subtle power struggle between both ethnic groups and remain a main point of concern in validating the rights to claim African descent. The fact-based commonalities of Maroon cultural practices with some of the West African cultural practices have become an advancement for some Maroons to consider themselves proper Africans as opposed to Creoles. This is a sensitive matter which is not publicly discussed.

²² <https://www.statistics-suriname.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/HUISHOUDENS-IN-SURINAME-PARWAN-2014-2016.pdf> accessed 21.07.2021.

²³ Conversation with Henna Guicherit, cultural anthropologist, who did research amongst Maroon communities in relation to their disadvantaged position.

²⁴ Conversations with Dr. Henna Guicherit, Siegmien Staphorst, and Andre Mosis (June–July 2019).

²⁵ Conversation with the Director of NAKS, Mrs. Siegmien Staphorst, on 27 June 2019.

²⁶ Starnieuws Suriname: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tBO-phQNKeE> accessed 21.07.2021.

²⁷ The date 1 July 2023 marked 160 years since the abolition of slavery. However, when the colonial government announced the abolition of slavery on 1 July 1863, the mandatory condition was that the enslaved had to work 10 more years on the plantations to allow plantation owners to adjust to the new situation. This period is known as 'de Staatstoezicht'. Therefore, many agree that, in reality, the abolition of slavery was after the 10 additional years; thus, they celebrate 150 years since the abolition of slavery rather than 160 years. (1863 of 1873? Wanneer werd de slavernij nou (echt) afgeschaft? (nos.nl))

As was mentioned before, the Creoles have for years claimed a position of superiority in the country, resulting in the misconception that everything Surinamese is related to Creole culture²⁸. With the launching of the term *Afro-Surinaams*, which should serve as an overarching label to categorise both the Maroons and the Creoles as one unified ethnic group, the government has moved a step further by encouraging the promotion of Afro-Surinamese cultural events, which should raise awareness of a mutual history, mutual descentance, and therefore one specific Afro-Surinamese culture. On 13 June 2019, NAKS, the main non-governmental organisation in Suriname advocating for the preservation of the Afro-Surinamese cultural heritage, launched its program *kriyoro wiki*²⁹. This event aimed at celebrating Afro-Surinamese culture in every facet and raising awareness amongst Afro-Surinamese people and the rest of Suriname about the richness and potential of the culture and the importance of preserving it for the next generation. The name of the event, *kriyoro*, which means 'Creole' in *Sranantongo*³⁰, evoked a few mixed feelings and opinions amongst both the Creole and the Maroon people in Suriname. On one hand, some were of the opinion that the event should not be associated with the term 'Afro-Surinamese', since the majority of the activities reflected solely Creole cultural practices, whilst others, on the other hand (in this case, some members of the Maroon community), refused to be involved in the *kriyoro wiki* events, as the name *kriyoro* didn't resonate with their language or cultural experiences.

The younger generation is in search of heroes that resonate with their own perceptions of history, and, as such, they are willing to cross boundaries to associate themselves with historical heroes that are not necessarily from their own ethnic group (Yvon van der Pijl, 2007). As such, being a Creole has suddenly been put to the test in the host land and has been placed under the microscope for thorough analysis. The historical interpretation of the term 'creolisation' can no longer escape the arbitration of modern scholars such as Stephan Palmié (2006), who criticised the use of hybridity as a justification for the notion of creolisation. He refers to the increase in a population consisting of mixed ethnicities in Europe and questions whether this should be labelled as creolisation too. This critical question inspired me to explore and unpack the creoleness of my own creole people in Suriname and, in my research, to challenge the idea of creolisation to be applicable solely in the context of enslavement. I realised from ongoing debates related to decolonisation movements that, for some, the term 'Creole' continues to hold a negative and derogatory connotation. My research should facilitate the opportunity to continue shifting the longstanding stereotypical narratives of creolisation. Young artists, musicians, and songwriters no longer want to be placed in one specific category of Afro-Surinamese descent, and therefore, they have developed a whole new way of experiencing their own Afro-Surinamese roots. Usually, this is a mixture of elements from the Maroon and Creole cultures³¹. One famous quote amongst the Surinamese people is '*Eenheid in verscheidenheid*', which means 'unity within diversity'.

This research was developed during the preparation of activities leading up to the celebration of 160 years since the abolition of slavery in former Dutch colonies. These activities oozed a deep longing for recognition among the Afro-Surinamese people in Suriname and the Netherlands. Calls for reparations intensified, demands for official excuses made by the Dutch king increased, and voices celebrating Afro-Surinamese cultural practices and lived experiences took centre stage. Doing archival research and a visit to The Black Archives in the Netherlands introduced me to detailed descriptions of laws enforced by the colonial government to 'discipline' the enslaved. These laws were an absolute violation of current-day laws to respect basic human rights. The public debates to justify the requests for reparations are based on these inhuman acts performed on enslaved Africans. In conversations with some of my informants, they share stories of descendants of the enslaved who, to this day, still suffer, mentally and physically, because of the brutal treatment of their ancestors. In a conversation I had with the chairman of one of the Afro-Surinamese Foundations *Fedrati Fu Afrikan Srananman*, Mr. Iwan Wijngaarde, he marked this deprivation of socio-cultural value as the core of the socio-economic disadvantages experienced by large groups of Afro-Surinamese people.

²⁸ Conversation with Dr. Henna Guicherit on 15 June 2019.

²⁹ Homepage NAKS: <http://nakssuriname.com/> accessed 21.07.2021.

³⁰ Sranantongo is the lingua franca in Suriname. It is a creole-based language with its roots in colonisation.

³¹ Conversations with artists and cultural experts, such as Andre Mosis, who is from Maroon descent, and Iwan Wijngaarde, who is the president of the organisation Feydrasi fu Afrikan Srananman (July 2019).

1.5. Conclusion

Outlining the historical, social, and political context of Suriname has revealed relevant background information to understand the mechanisms dominating and dictating current local life in Suriname. Understanding their world is pivotal to the process of unpacking the creole identity and analysing its relevance to the personal history of my informants. The notion of Africanism, being at the centre of the creolisation debates, especially allows the Creole people to rediscover their ethnic identity and identify their African heritage throughout their social and cultural practices. Observing the developments surrounding the *kriyoro wiki* event opened a window of interesting information in relation to the concepts and entitlements that people use for ethnic division (even though they are of the same descent) and the politics that are played with labels to gain (consciously manipulated or not) rights and privileges. It seemed as if people felt challenged and threatened in maintaining and guarding their self-established socio-cultural identity. Therefore, I reckon that stripping this notion of its negative connotations could ultimately lead to the reunification of the Maroons and the Creoles as the descendants of enslaved Africans in Suriname.

By having observed a small portion of the differences and similarities in the lived experiences of the Creole people in relation to those of the Maroons, I got a better understanding of the complexity of the creole identity. Belonging, personal identity, and locality are other aspects emerging from the debates surrounding the public debates of reclaiming history. My observations revealed that the diversity in ethnic categorisation amongst the Creoles and the Maroons specifically relates to perceptions of historical events and embedded family histories related to the time of slavery. The diversity of the Creoles is related to differences in geographical location, skin colour, cultural practices, and social class (Gloria Wekker, 2006; Yvon van der Pijl, 2002). The open question that is yet to be answered is as follows: Would it be a possibility to achieve unity amongst the Afro-Surinamese people? Or as Andre Mosis, a well-known artist and music director in Surinamese society, stated in my interview with him: 'What is the benefit of imposing one specific label to unify both ethnic groups? They might as well both go their separate ways and individually strive to achieve recognition for their individually lived experiences.' He then made a comment that would be significant for my research: 'There is so much diversity amongst the Maroons and the Creole people that unifying them is doomed to be a fiasco anyway!'³² It is specifically this diversity in lived experiences that seems to be causing a challenge in achieving common ground in the debates surrounding the term 'Afro-Surinamese'.

And then there is the current development of globalisation introducing Surinamese-Creoles to broader discussions of creole nationalism, decolonisation, reparations, reinventing and rewriting the history of enslaved Africans, etc. Amid it all, Surinamese-Creole people are facing the challenge of preserving their Creole identity, without getting lost in the majority's opinion of a mandatory presence of African elements in their culture in order to be recognised as African-American. In Suriname, this challenge is even more pressing because of the divide amongst African descendants. Placing both groups under one umbrella as Afro-Surinamese might seem a good start in the right direction, yet the fact remains that Surinamese-Creole people are still figuring out for themselves what the parameters should be for being categorised as Creole. Because of the hybridity in this culture, and other matters such as geographically determined lived experiences of being a Creole, it remains a challenge to establish one specific description for Surinamese-Creoles. It is because of this dilemma that the government and other organisations might be missing the point in trying to unify the Afro-Surinamese people. Maybe one step prior to unifying would be achieving cohesiveness amongst Surinamese-Creoles in agreeing on what the Creole life is.

Transnationalism adds to this dilemma and therefore demands from us as researchers a broader spectrum in analysing the mixed elements of Creole life, whether we should address it as something static or dynamic. Moreover, transnationalism constitutes an increase in social and geographic mobility, and, as such, one cannot expect the identity of a person to remain static. It is because of this ever-evolving process in the shaping of identities and cultures that I am inspired to highlight the

³² *Conversation with Andre Mosis on 25 July 2019.*

dynamics in the application of labels and boundaries as a means of achieving diversity amongst Creoles in Suriname. The addition of exploring this process through celebrations allows me to demonstrate the opportunity of new possibilities once the focal point for unity is redirected from Africanism to a cultural aspect that can serve as a bridge and mediator to identify similarities and differences without any judgements.

The successes achieved by NAKS in unifying Creoles and Maroons through the arts of dance, drama, and song/spoken words prove that attempts to achieve collectiveness, a mutual sense of belonging, and mutual acceptance of a common African heritage can be achieved through a common denominator. So, I made the conscious decision to divert from the term *Afro-Surinaams* and only focus on the diversity amongst Creole people in Suriname, with the aim to understand how Creole people move across groups by utilising their own established concepts of ethnic identity and the role of self-invented labels and those being imposed upon them in the construction of group boundaries. Therefore, the research also aims to draw new insights into how the actualisation and prolonging of an identity that has collectively been embraced enhances the process of negotiating and nurturing categories amongst the Creole people in Suriname.

As such, I hope to contribute new data, through the local voices of my informants, and add new insights to the broader conversations about creolisation and the way African cultural elements were juxtaposed, coexisted, or were combined, to varying degrees of complementarity, with elements of European derivation (Robert Barron, 2011 – 244). By contributing to these conversations, it is paramount to me to disrupt the tendency of creole societies to be mostly defined by the presence of African cultural elements. Therefore, my focus is unravelling the unique elements of the Surinamese-Creole culture, which should expose the innovation, the resilience, and the creative skills of the oppressed enslaved Africans who managed to re-establish their very basic rights of being people and embodying an identity, which were stripped from them by the colonisers. Showcasing their strength and perseverance embedded in their cultural identity should help the new generation to embrace the creole identity, even though it remains under scrutiny of theorists and other organisations and individuals involved in post-colonialism debates.

With the notion of creolisation being contested, the legacy of enslavement and colonialism becomes a subject of debate. Demands to counter-tell the history of slavery and the quest to include the voices of marginalised groups arise, and the desire to freely and proudly embrace one's own history increases among the younger generation of creole people. The promotion of creole nationalism amongst the younger generation of African descendants in the Caribbean is described by Françoise Lionnet as 'an active phenomenon producing new identity formations and vibrant artistic and political performances' (UCLA 2014). People become more aware of taking ownership of their own history, creating their own ancestral stories, and resisting the idea of having to stay mute due to being a minority. With this research, I aspire to produce a document valuable enough to contribute in a constructive way to the movement of Creole nationalism.

CHAPTER 2 THEORETICAL CONCEPTS AND APPLIED METHODOLOGIES FOR THE RESEARCH

In autoethnography the researcher uses personal experiences and highly personalized accounts in a culture to reflexively look more deeply at self-other interactions, turning the ethnographic gaze inward on the self (auto), while maintaining the outward gaze of ethnography – looking at the larger context wherein self-experiences occur. (Jacobs, D. T. 2008; 190)

In this chapter, I would like to lay out the way the research has been executed. I will discuss the theoretical framework that I have developed for the analytical part of the research. Drafting a theoretical framework equipped me as the ethnographer with a pre-established structure through which my experiences in the field were observed, thoroughly analysed, and processed. Prior to entering the field, we as ethnographers consciously prepare and argue our reasons for doing research. My reasons for doing this research informed my decision to select existing theories on creolisation, personhood, ethnicity, groupism, post-colonialism, post-colonial identities, and other theoretical arguments relevant to these notions. In this chapter, I will discuss these notions in detail and unpack their relevance to my research.

The quote at the beginning of this chapter indicates that my research involved autoethnography, which was applied as a methodology to reflect on data encountered in the literature and in the field. Further in the chapter, I describe the other methodologies that I applied during my fieldwork, such as participant observation and the application of life histories. As my research addresses current public debates, I engaged with these ongoing debates to become knowledgeable. I provide detailed accounts of the insights I gained and then discuss the way this knowledge became relevant to the further analysis of my research results. Then, I discuss the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, as most of my research was conducted during the pandemic. This called for a thorough mapping of the field and applying some creative methodologies to continue the fieldwork, about which I will go into detail further in the chapter.

2.1. Developing the theoretical framework

Preparing the theoretical framework requires critical thinking, prior knowledge of the research subject, the development of some guidelines to strategise which theoretical concepts will be most relevant and then validating these choices. I prepared for my theoretical framework by asking myself the following critical questions: What is the identified need or topic of interest that justifies this research? What could be the added value of this research to existing studies? Who will be the informants? What is already known about their living environments and relationship to the research topic? The important decision to make in this process was as follows: What would be the most efficient methodology to conduct the research and ensure fruitful results? Preparation in advance of the research helps the ethnographer to be keenly aware of their positionality to the people to be studied.

However, sometimes, thorough preparation can paralyze the ethnographer and create challenges in the field, such as a) being restricted from going beyond the pre-established theories and preconceived notions, b) observing through a one-sided lens, filtering the information through notions constructed by theorists with a Eurocentric view, c) failing to consider that the field is undergoing constant social changes, risking that the informants' experience might be misrepresented, and d) the lack of creativity and flexibility to adjust to the demands of the field, instead holding on to the pre-constructed research framework and trying to manipulate these demands. The last two challenges reflect my own concerns while preparing my theoretical framework. To paraphrase Jeffrey Cohen (2022), 'we enter the field with theoretical and emotional baggage that can color and influence our

work'. The reality was that the theoretical notions applicable to my research were mostly informed by Eurocentric perceptions and therefore failed to properly represent the local world of my research subjects. To contextualise my concern, while reading through the study done by the famous Herskovits couple (1958, 1936), I encountered descriptive information of particular practices in the Surinamese-Creole community. However, these descriptions were far from the actual meaning of these practices. The only reason why I was able to identify the misrepresentation was because of my own position as a Surinamese-Creole and my familiarity with those practices.

There are a couple of Surinamese-Creole ethnographers; however, within the field of anthropology, their studies often become secondary to classical Caribbean studies such as those of Sydney Mintz and Eric Wolf. I realised that continuing to draw on the studies of these renowned writers would require properly validated argumentation and drawing on my own perceptions of the study of anthropology. The reality is that my perceptions have already been coloured through my social anthropology studies, where the predominant educational norm is Eurocentric. To take preventive measures and minimise the impact of the Eurocentric education system, I decided to consider non-Eurocentric sources to enhance my theoretical notions. In this case, current debates on topics such as Black awareness, post-colonial socio-cultural identities, uncovering hidden histories of colonialism and enslavement, counter-storytelling, and conversations from the British Museum to celebrate the Era of Reclamation served as potential additional sources. I integrated this newly gained knowledge into the theoretical framework to complement my analysis on the debates about post-colonialism and post-colonial identities.

2.2. The theoretical concepts

The notions of creolisation, post-colonialism, and post-colonial identities were utilised to lay the foundation of my research. From these theoretical concepts and related debates, I further developed my academically constructed research arguments and critically analysed the insights that I gained from my fieldwork. To thoroughly analyse the notion of creolisation and the emergence of creole as a socio-cultural identity, I first unpacked the notion of personhood. Through understanding the way a human being becomes a person, I prepared the next step of understanding why and how human beings become part of a pre-established group in a society. This is where I unpacked the concept of ethnicity beyond groups, which emphasises the importance of not treating ethnic groups as islands on their own within a society (Rogers Brubaker, 2002; Fredrik Barth, 1969).

Once I understood the role of ethnic groups in relation to becoming a person, I then moved beyond the boundaries of ethnic groups so I could further explore the meaning of being Creole in a Surinamese context. It was valuable to my research to observe how creole people in Suriname are moving across other ethnic groups: how they develop their own categories of being Creole, how they are installing labels to maintain these categories, and how they are inventing group traits to distinguish each category of being Creole. The notion of post-colonialism served as the vehicle to lead me to uncover the local history of Surinamese-Creoles and the effect of colonial power on the shaping of this history. Understanding how colonial powers are interwoven in present-day local creole life in Suriname allowed me to gain new insights which could be used to complement current-day debates around creole societies.

2.2.1. *The notion of creolisation*

The notion of creolisation is applied in different contexts, varying from ethnic hybridity in colonies to a hybridity of languages spoken in post-colonial communities. The quest for the notion of creolisation, therefore, is very much inspired by the curiosity to unpack its hybridity. As Charles Stewart (2007) states, the question became, 'What transformations did creoles undergo, and how did they differ from their Old-World relatives?' Currently, the notion of creolisation aims to unravel the socio-cultural identity of the descendants of enslaved Africans brought to the Americas with the aim to determine to what degree Africanism can be identified in their socio-cultural life (Françoise Lionnet, 2014).

The nature of the cultural life of the descendants of Africans in post-colonial societies has been a lively theme of debate from the late eighteenth century onward (Melville J. and Frances S. Herskovits, 1936). Whilst some have emphasised the newness of the hybrid culture that developed under the new settler conditions (Price, 2001; Mintz, 1996), others have preferred to emphasise the still-significant links with the cultures of the original societies in Africa. Clearly, the study won't be able to resolve this dilemma; however, the ongoing heated debates do indicate that there is an urgent need for new insights, new focus points to reach a mutual agreement about acceptable terminology to describe the integration of the enslaved Africans in the New World. Yet, the question remains whether this description should focus on the absence of African elements in the newly established cultures, or whether the focus should be on the capability of the enslaved Africans to, despite being uprooted and displaced, still develop a cultural identity that has managed to survive and be passed down for centuries. If the more contemporary approaches towards creolisation succeed in overruling the former historical implications, there might be a new beginning on the horizon for Creole people.

By addressing the notion of creolisation and the definition of the term *creole*³³, there occurs a strong connection with the understanding of people's lifestyle, identity formation, and attempts to establish a *home* as a place of comfort and security. Furthermore, the notion implies that there has been a transfer between two worlds which should be understood as a process of being uprooted somewhere and 'planted' elsewhere. To fully comprehend this transferring process and the formation of live interpretations during this process, it is necessary to have a closer look at the term *world*. In the case of creolisation, the word 'world' has been placed in the perspective of African enslaved people being transported against their own will from one world to another world, from the Old World – Africa – to the New World – the Americas. This implies that the enslaved Africans were moved from one existing world to another that was unknown to them.

The book *World – an anthropological examination* by João de Pina-Cabral (2017) provides valuable theoretical insights to further explore the term 'world' and bring it into relation to the notion of creolisation. The world as an anthropological concept challenges ideas such as the existence of more than one world, people creating their own world, and the idea of the world being just a cosmological concept accommodating an ontological hierarchy. The suggestion of two separate worlds is what forms the basis of the debates on the notion of creolisation. This implication of people being transported from one world to another also perfectly demonstrates the core argument of how we interpret the world. João de Pina-Cabral argues that there is rather one world, being inhabited by humans and animals through their own interpretation of what they encounter in that world, whether the interpretation process is through intentional thinking or propositional thinking (João de Pina-Cabral, 2017). Taking this statement into consideration, we might ask ourselves whether indeed the enslaved were forced to live in another world or were just forced to adapt to the world from another perspective – in other words, encountering the world in another *habitus* situation.

Making mention of the world as a *habitus* brings us to the other aspect of creolisation, which is how they transformed this new encounter into a new home. As stated in João de Pina-Cabral's book, the words *world* and *home* should not be considered the same. Going back to the statement of the enslaved Africans being transitioned from one world to another, this transition process is further analysed by other critics and described as the enslaved being forced to develop a new culture. Richard Price (2001) states in his article 'The miracle of creolization: A retrospective' that the transition of the enslaved African from the Old to the New World caused him to be alienated from his culture and traditions of origin and to establish a new culture, influenced by the present culture and traditions in the New World. He describes this as the re-creation of an African-influenced society. João de Pina-Cabral describes the difference between *world* and *home* as the process whereby humans give meaning to that which they encounter in the world – this process being the application of the scaffolded mind of humans (2017), to create their own world, which then can be referred to as

³³ 'Creole' with a capital C is an ethnonym (that is, the name of an ethnic group that defines itself by using that name); 'creole' or 'creolisation' with small letters refers to people that one considers to be creole. Both 'Creole' and 'creole' are related historically, but they refer to different takes on the historical phenomenon. The former (with a capital initial) refers to a form of self-identity; the second (with small initials) refers to a way of being in the world that even people who might not choose to call themselves Creole might have.

their home. By attributing meaning, we try to make sense of the features of the environment we are in. And while we try to make sense of the features we encounter, we develop concepts of understanding and translate these through language and visualise them in material things (João Pina-Cabral 2017, Tim Ingold, 2011).

Going a step further in this meaning giving process, João de Pina-Cabral also argues that we build on what has already been established by others before us. And then we access these previous concepts through memory: 'To enter the world of human communication (to acquire a scaffolded mind and engage in symbolic thinking), we have to be enticed into humanity by other humans who had already been enticed by others before them, and so on, and so forth' (João De Pina-Cabral 2017). This statement perfectly demonstrates how the ability to be sustained in the world as a human depends on interconnection with other humans. We may assume that, when being confronted with another perspective of the world, enslaved Africans drew on historical events memorised from their past family and community life and built a new home. This they did by translating immaterial concepts they encountered into tangible objects supported by symbolic meaning. The *New World* was not so much a physical *other world* as it was the perception formed through the encounter of another aspect of the world which was new to them³⁴.

2.2.2. *Diversity among creole people*

In the unpacking of the notion of creolisation, there is also this tiring question of whether the creole culture should be seen as just a culture flavoured with African traditions or a newly established African-based American culture (Richard Price, 2001). However, this question immediately becomes problematic as soon as questions of identity and ethnicity arise. Analysing the processes of identification and ethnicity among creole groups holds some interesting and intriguing insights.

Previous studies on the different creole categories revealed that this categorisation was very much intertwined with the geographical location related to a colonial history. In each one of these locations, the conditions to be considered creole were different (Stephan Palmié, 2006). As it was so brilliantly formulated in the book review *Creolization: History, Ethnography, Theory*, by Holly Norton (2009), the truth behind the concept of creolisation is not so much the political, economic, and social needs of mixing a disparate group of people. It is very much rather that the presence of oppression and conflict in the colonised societies imposed social relations, causing a disparate group of people to establish social structures, forming privileged groups to distinguish themselves within ethnically plural societies. It is from this perspective, combined with my own experience and knowledge on the formation of Creoles as an ethnic group in Suriname, that I will further explore the relation between the Creole as an ethnic group and the diversity of groups that can be observed within this same ethnic group.

2.2.3. *Development of the creole identity*

Prior to analysing the creole identity, I explored the most relevant theory on how humans develop their identity. The four-step model of personhood was the most applicable to the notion of creolisation. In the module, step 4 provides thorough insight into the development of humans, where their being-in-the-world means being-with-others (João de Pina-Cabral 2017: 106). This concept perfectly concludes the argument about how enslaved Africans re-created their social life by drawing on what was memorised from others and established by others before them. The essence of personhood is that one can only become 'a person' by being exposed to others. In the engagement process with others, the person is triggered to become aware of the self and the fact that he/she is different from the other. Through intersubjective engagements, the person identifies with others and, by applying reflexivity, he/she then develops his/her own identity (João de Pina-Cabral 2017: 110 – 113). While engaging with others, the person is likely to adapt to what he/she sees others doing around him/her. This might explain the influence of Western-European customs and traditions in Creole cultures. After

³⁴ The difference between 'New world' with a capital N and 'new world' with a lowercase n is that the former refers to the geographical location of that other part of the world where the enslaved arrived. The coloniser named it the **New World**. The latter refers to the word **world** being the dwelling environment, the life context of the enslaved people. In this case, it represents the transitioning of the enslaved between two experienced worlds.

all, the society they ultimately inhabited was also the habitat of Amerindians and Western conquerors and colonisers.

The point that I am trying to make is that through the ongoing cycle of personhood, enslaved Africans achieved their mixed-race identity, which is also referred to as their ethnic status. The term 'creolisation' was to refer to the hybrid formations that emerged in the contact zones and slave societies of the New World, South Africa, and the Indian Ocean (UCLA, Françoise Lionnet, 2014). The difference between creolised societies and other mixed societies is the history of slavery as being the binding factor in the occurrence of the mixture between ethnic groups. Although Creoles have a history of slavery in common, the difference in classification of who should be considered Creole depends on the social, political, and economic relational structures within that specific society. To clarify the aspect of classification in creolised societies, it is necessary to have a closer look at different interpretations of the term *creole* in these societies.

From various ethnographies, there are descriptions of people who call themselves Creole. Such examples are in Jamaica, where 'creole' refers to everyone from Jamaican background except East Indians, Chinese, and Maroon; in Trinidad, 'creole' refers to descendants of enslaved Africans, including Amerindians and East Indians; in French Guyana, the term refers exclusively to all non-whites; and, in the French Antilles, the term represents the local-born whites. In Mexico, this term has been installed by elites born in the colony to distinguish themselves from those born in the colonising country (Stephan Palmié 2006, Holly Norton 2009). In Suriname, the term 'creole' refers to a wide range of people, all having in common descent from the enslaved Africans who endured slavery (Cynthia Macleod, 1993). Yet, the social status of each creole person was also dependent on their skin colour and their percentage of being mixed with European blood. As the former descriptions of creole categorisation show, being classified as a Creole very much had to do with the ability to distinguish oneself from other groups within that same society. This ethnogenetic process can also be referred to as 'group separation'.

We can now safely argue that enslaved Africans developed a new culture as part of engaging with the world. According to Lola Romanucci-Ross and George de Vos (1995), culture also serves as the breeding ground for identity formation. Groups in a society afford identifiable patterns related to established traditions, beliefs, and rituals to serve as a symbol in representing the self and the social identity. These patterns can be noticed in food practices, dance traditions, and styles of clothes, or they can be expressed through life-ideologies such as beauty, femininity, and masculinity. By agreeing to a mutual understanding of the symbolic meaning behind these patterns (usually the understanding is communicated through language), the group commits to the upholding and representation of these patterns. As such, they create their own distinct identity with the purpose of distinguishing themselves from the rest of society. These patterns are very much noticeable in creolised communities and form the pride of many Creoles to distinguish themselves from other creole societies. Here, we see the newly invented culture used as a means of distinguishing one's identity and culture from other newly invented creole cultures, even though they carry a mutual history of forced encounter with an unfamiliar world.

2.2.4. *Moving beyond ethnicity and identity*

This research will analyse Creole people in Suriname as an ethnic group consisting of a diversity of groups, each with their own interpretation of being Creole. For a thorough observation and in-depth analysis, it is relevant to apply the notion of ethnicity without groups, which will allow me not just to observe the Creoles as an ethnic group but also to see the networks of interaction, negotiation, manipulation, and identification crossing the various groups within this ethnic group. The opportunity that arises with this new approach of *groupness* versus *groupism*³⁵ among the Creole people is to study the different categories of creole in Suriname. Studying the concept of groups will allow me the possibility to see how people might use a group for temporary purposes yet belong to a group that

³⁵ 'Groupness' refers to the process that takes place in groups between group members, and 'groupism' refers to the tendency of scholars to treat groups as externally bounded entities (Rogers Brubaker, 2002).

gives them a permanent status within society³⁶. Before moving beyond the boundaries of ethnicity and identity, I first want to describe the approach to creole ethnicity based on the creolisation model.

2.2.5. *Creole ethnicity analysed through the creolisation model*

The notion of ethnicity as a form of identity is at the core of the creolisation model. Lola Romanucci-Ross and George de Vos (1995) describe an ethnic group as 'a self-perceived inclusion of those who hold in common a set of traditions not shared by others with whom they are in contact'. The debate regarding the ethnic identity of African-Americans, specifically the extensive research of Melville Herskovits and his successors on the presence of Africanism in the hybrid cultures of Black people in the settler societies of North and South America, often failed to focus on the processes of cultural integration and dynamic creativity that these societies manifested. This failure became a breeding ground for both white segregationists and Black Power separatists by overemphasising the distinctness of Black Americans in new social formations (Jerry Gershenhorn, 2004).

However, the recent movements of Creole nationalism positioned themselves against the polarities of the Herskovits generation, allowing contemporary anthropologists to see creolisation in its dynamic and constitutive aspects, hopefully contributing to reducing the ethnic controversies that have haunted this ethnic group for centuries. Lola Romanucci-Ross and George de Vos (1995) argue that 'group separation is found most frequently in composite societies and results from the inclusion of groups of supposed different cultural, or ethnic origins'. They further argue that ethnicity can be used both expressively and instrumentally within plural societies and sometimes can also cause social instability. Based on the definition of group separation and the contribution of ethnicity in a plural society, I want to draw on the different categories of being a creole. These categories reflect the actions of distinct groups within creolised societies in securing, satisfying, and instilling their need to gain status, privileges, or recognition. This separation, as said before, resulted in the discrimination, exclusion, and oppression of others. Surprisingly, very often, the categorisation would be installed by creole people who considered themselves to be better offspring due to their mixed race or their privileged position of being born and raised in a higher social class.

2.2.6. *The relevance of groupness instead of groupism to understand creole identities*

Considering the diversity of categories in the Creole ethnicity, the impression of Creoles as one monochrome ethnic cultural bloc, being homogenous in their traditions, customs, norms, and values, is being challenged. Rogers Brubaker speaks of groupism as 'the tendency to treat ethnic groups, nations and races as substantial entities to which interests and agency can be attributed, as if they were internally homogeneous, externally bounded groups, even unitary collective actors with common purposes' (Rogers Brubaker, 2002). Applying groupism for social analysis of ethnic groups blinds us to the dynamic processes that are going on between the different groups. Therefore, he advises us to see groups as constructed, contingent, and fluctuating, which means that there is a dynamic interaction happening between groups where boundaries are constantly being invented, adjusted, and extended by those using the group as a form of categorising themselves in a society. Ethnicity, race, and nation should be conceptualised rather in relational, processual, dynamic, eventful, and disaggregated terms. Using Rogers Brubaker's arguments, we should now see ethnic groups, status groups, and social class groups within the Afro-Surinamese community from a point of practical categories, cultural idioms, cognitive schemas, discursive frames, organisational routines, institutional forms, political projects, and contingent events. It means thinking of ethnicisation, racialisation, and nationalisation as political, social, cultural, and psychological processes and seeing not the group as an entity but groupness as a contextually fluctuating conceptual variable (Rogers Brubaker, 2002).

³⁶ *Think of a person's family network as a group. In this case the group is a permanent group and cannot be changed. However, a person using an ethnic group to identify with might change over time depending on the person's preference, perception, and identification needs. It is interesting to observe the family as a permanent group and analyse what the role of 'family' as a group is in relation to a person's choices of belonging and or moving between different groups outside the family.*

This approach seems to be a more reasonable one to further reflect on the occurrence of different categories among Creoles.

2.2.7. *The roles of categorisation, framing, and organisation in the process of becoming creole*

Reflecting on Rogers Brubaker's arguments of applying groupness, I developed the following sub-question: What is it that actually happens in these groups? What are the dynamics that manifest in some sort of politically determined status system within groups?

Shifting attention from groups to groupness allows us to observe the phases of extraordinary cohesion and moments of intensely felt collective solidarity among people in the group. However, we should be watchful not to consider high levels of groupness as constant, enduring, or definitionally present. This statement creates the impression of people who either permanently or temporarily group themselves for various purposes. In other words, they create categories for the purpose of constructing the group. A category is therefore not a group. It is at best a potential basis for group formation or groupness. Categories are considered imposed structures in the form of labels which then can serve as a mould for group formation.

If we relate this explanation to the diversity that we can witness among the Creole people in Suriname, this process opens windows of various useful insights, such as a) exploring the degree of groupness associated with a particular category in a particular setting and the political, social, cultural, and psychological processes through which categories get invested with groupness or b) asking how people do things with categories. This includes limiting access to special resources or activities by excluding categorically distinguished outsiders, but it also includes more mundane actions such as identifying or classifying oneself or others. c) We can also analyse the organisational and discursive developments of categories – the way they are institutionalised and embedded in culturally powerful and symbolically resonant myths, memories, and narratives (Rogers Brubaker, 2002).

If we further explore this notion of categorising, we come to a point where we need to find a mode of distinguishing groups from categories. The recommendation is to treat groupness as a variable, and then we can attend to the dynamics of group-making as a social, cultural, and political project, aimed at transforming categories into groups or increasing levels of groupness (Roger Brubaker, 2002). To explain it in terms of using groupness within social analysis: *groupness* is an independent variable that is causing a certain dynamic/response/behaviour/attitude between groups or group members (information on group dynamics may be applicable here as well, even using Actor–Network Theory to describe the dynamics in the group). *Groupism*, then, is a dependent variable. Its formation is dependent on groupness. This explanation is also what I will employ in describing the diversity of groups that consider themselves Creole and, as such, claim the Creole ethnicity.

In the analysis of groupness, the practice of framing is another layer to understand dynamics. Framing is a mechanism that is employed by group members to constitute their perceptions, ideals, and expectations of a group. It is through the lines of framing, also described as labelling, that groupness is constructed. When we study how people apply framing, we recognise systems of classification, categorisation, and identification. These can be formal and informal (also observed through written or unwritten rules and customs) and reflect the way people utilise their background or inherited (transferred through generations) knowledge that is also embedded in institutionalised routines and practices. It is through these lines of embedded knowledge and embodied actions that people recognise and experience objects, places, people, actions, or situations as ethnically, racially, or nationally marked or meaningful (Roger Brubaker, 2002). This notion of framing justifies the intention to also study objects, places, and locations and their roles in the occurrence of diversity among the Creole people in Suriname. Also, the role of embedded knowledge and embodied actions should be another valuable element to study diversity, as these are considered breeding grounds for strategies of effective group-making. Here, the importance of collectiveness between group members is also relevant. In the research, it will be of great importance to identify collectively embodied practices and embedded lived experiences to draw conclusions on how these enhance the need for creating one's own category of *being Creole* within the Creole ethnic group.

Roger Burbaker (1969) also draws our attention to the role of organisations in the creation of categories. According to him, they also help fuel the process of groupness. Organisations possess certain material and organisational resources, and through their members they can utilise these to institutionalise ideologies and create ethnic categories. Examples of such organisations are churches, political parties, ethnic associations, socio-cultural organisations, government departments, etc. Some of these organisations may represent themselves, or may be seen by others, as organisations of and for particular ethnic groups. Suriname's history of slavery and colonialism depicts a clear picture of organisations and their influence in creating ethnic categories. Among the Maroons and the Creoles especially, the influence of organisations was prominent. In the research context, I drew on this phenomenon and showed its relevance to the research.

This research is also an opportunity to thoroughly explore the current involvement of organisations in the creation of diversity among the Creole people. Through their structures, these organisations direct the level of fluctuation in the group process and the identification of members in the group (the conditions and the standards to be considered as a member of the group). By imposing boundaries, they aim to manage the exclusion or incorporation of members per group. On the contrary, the boundaries are not affected by the mobility of people across groups. Moreover, organisations cannot restrain the influences of other groups. Interactions between group members or people choosing to use more than one group as a means of identification create a dynamic process of constant change, expansion, and adjustment. To emphasise the relevance of the afore-described arguments, I refer to situations, in the case of the research, celebrations, where Maroons and Creoles make use of elements from each other's cultures to create music, art, dance and theatre performance, etc. Even though the Creole people from time to time 'dip their toes' into the Maroon culture, and the Maroons do the same, the boundaries between these two groups still stand.

2.2.8. The notion of post-colonialism and post-colonial identity

The relevance of looking into traces of colonialism in present-day Surinamese-Creole communities is justified by the fact that traces of the Dutch and English colonial histories are still evident in Suriname. These traces are noticeable geographically – in the layout of the different districts, in Suriname's constitution that still contains laws originating from colonial times, and in the architecture typical to Paramaribo – which is also listed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. It all exudes the grandeur that the Dutch and English colonisers deemed necessary in making Suriname a colonial creation. The question supporting the validity of the notion of post-colonialism in my research is as follows: To what extent are these traces of colonialism still influential in the embodiment, development, and transmission of the socio-cultural identity of the Creole as a separate ethnic group in Suriname? As argued in the key guide to understand the characteristics of post-colonialism, 'post-colonial studies stand at the intersection of debates about race, colonialism, gender, politics and language' (Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, 2007).

Through the collected data, I unpacked traces of colonialism with social life and social practices in the Surinamese-Creole community. This entanglement has been identified through unpacking colonial thoughts, colonial social structures and depictions, and the existence of objects and artefacts stemming from colonial times. I critically analysed how these are embedded in the formation of the creole identity. I critically analysed whether there would be a need to strip the creole identity of colonial depictions. And if so, what would be the response of the older generation, who were born and raised with these colonial thoughts? Would they be able to adjust to this shift in their lived experiences, and how would this shift affect the relation and the transmission of inherited knowledge between the older and the younger generations? These questions equipped me to analyse the possible impact of debates about post-colonialism and post-colonial identities and to embrace the implementation of post-colonial concepts as a way of reconstructing and scrutinising historical events. My questions were informed by an interesting statement that I came across in the key guide for post-colonial studies. The editors state, 'we need to be careful about falsely prescribing post-colonial theory as a panacea and should keep in mind the firm grounding of post-colonial discourse in the historical phenomenon of colonialism' (Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, 2007).

The unpacking of notions of post-colonialism shaped my understanding of transnationalism in relation to the Surinamese-Creole identity in diaspora communities. In my preparatory interviews, I noticed an interesting trend among the younger generation of Surinamese-Creoles in the Netherlands. Most expressed the desire to discover their African roots and preferred to identify with West African culture. They would take on a West African traditional name, embrace West African traditions, and wear West African traditional clothes, and the well-known Ankara fabrics, significant for African dress, gained huge popularity among these youth. Interestingly enough, as I got more involved with my informants, I realised that my interest in West African culture also increased.

2.2.9. *Social remembering in relation to post-colonial identity*

Memory is central to social life (Jennifer Cole, 2001). It is through social practices that people enable or disable memories and thus act upon or think about the world they inhabit. Social life in post-colonial Suriname is infused with colonial depictions, thoughts, structures, and customs. It would be interesting to study how, through social remembering, Surinamese-Creoles manage to weave together their local world with a world that was forged during colonial times and how they continue to remake and transform their world in post-colonial Suriname. The notion of post-colonialism is interwoven with notions of memory. By unpacking these two notions, we receive a glimpse of people's memories of the past and the role of these in their present-day activities. Therefore, the application of memory in this research would be more from an anthropological point of view rather than a psychological one. However, the psychological process cannot be excluded because the visible social and cultural practices are activated through the individual consciousness and the choice of techniques, tools, and objects that people utilise to shape their memories. In this process, we distinguish individual and social memory; thus, memory is constituted by public representation and simultaneously through the individual consciousness visible in social practices. By observing how people activate processes of remembering in their everyday lives, I will draw insights from the way memory helps to shape the Surinamese-Creole identity.

Many scholars argue that memory is central to the constitution of subjectivity and identity. Applying the notion of memory will add an extra layer to the understanding of post-colonial identities shaped through a colonial and, in the case of my research, also an ancestral past. In Chapters 4 and 5, I will draw on observations where I noticed the embodiment of the Surinamese-Creole identity happening through evocations of the past. In these acts, I explored how memory served to enhance the act. Daily life activities also allowed me to observe the identity of the Surinamese-Creole people, and these activities evidently showcased traces of an ancestral and colonial past. For example, some Surinamese-Creole people honoured their creoleness by taking a flower- and perfume-infused bath on one dedicated day of the week. The use of certain material objects in the bathwater revealed a reference to the person's ancestral past. Further in the thesis, I will go into detail about these material objects and their relation to ancestral connections. Observing these actions of activating memory informed my understanding of family histories and their relationship to individually shaped memories.

The notion of social remembering led me to continue to draw on Surinamese-Creole family histories and their memories. Each family had their own memories, and these were shaped through collective social memories from their community or from the country. This observation confirms the idea that memory is either locked inside people's heads or available in collective representations and embodied practices of rituals. During celebrations, the activation of memory seemed to take centre stage. Celebrations thus serve as a tool to thoroughly observe, experience, and analyse the intersection between memory, history, and identity in the present-day Surinamese-Creole identity. Hereby, Lambek and Antze's argument that memory is not composed of a fixed set of memories but lies in the dialectical, ceaseless activity of remembering, forgetting, assimilating, and discarding (David E Sutton. 2001: 9) becomes of interest to further explore the correlation between remembering the colonial past and enacting colonial thoughts in the embodiment of the Surinamese-Creole identity.

2.2.10. *Analysing the notion of affordance in relation to social remembering*

In the notion of memory, there is this understanding that memories are activated through objects. Social science analyses emphasise that the process of perceiving and knowing the world is fundamentally shaped by the ways in which people interact with the world by means of artefacts and a multitude of other aspects visible in the material environment (Jennifer Cole, 2001). The theory of affordances provides the tools to explore the level of agency attributed to aspects of the material environment, such as objects. The idea of people engaging with an external world acknowledges the fact that there are real objects in the world existing independent of our conscious knowledge or awareness of them (Ernesto Spinelli, 1989).

Another fact recognised by these scholars is that our way of connecting with existing objects is through our senses. This way of connecting through our senses facilitates further unpacking of the term 'habit memory' as introduced by Connerton (David E Sutton. 200;11). According to David Sutton, Connerton introduces us to seeing memory in the context of a performance. Thus, in the activation of a memory, it is not just the cognitive component that comes into play but also the person's habituation to the environment. Sutton continues to draw attention to Connerton's statement that there are other types of memories, such as those found 'sedimented in the body'. Therefore, understanding the application of 'habit memory' by utilising our senses to connect with existing objects will require analysing bodily experiences and the impact of sensory experiences and practices. But Sutton also urges us to be vigilant of the ways that societies divide the work of the senses differently to make sense of the world.

Each society has its own understanding of utilising the senses to make sense of what is being observed in their environment. In this case, I want to focus on the role of objects in social remembering and how this dictates differences in memories attached to social, historical pasts. Material objects can be classified as man-made or organic and are separate entities with their own structures. The issue arises when we want to move further in trying to define the meaning of these objects as a reality that is applicable to all societies. The key factor is that a material object that we presently perceive or remember as perceived before cannot be considered the true meaning of that object by everyone. Our cognitive ability plays an important role in this process of memory. After all, it is through our mental capability that we impose meaning on what we perceive in our surroundings. Understanding how what we experience is linked to our mental capacity to construct meaning forms the starting point for phenomenological theory. The main idea of this theory is that the world as we experience it is an appearance to us, a phenomenon – meaning that our mind is never capable enough to know the thing itself within its true meaning. We only know it from the way it appears to us (Ernesto Spinelli, 1989). And it is from this standpoint that the founder of *phenomenological theory*, Edmund Husserl, decided to further explore the dynamics between our consciousness and the appearance of things. The theory, as developed by him, claims that the objects which we perceive exist as they are, through the meaning that each of us gives to them. In other words, one specific object can have two completely different meanings in two totally different cultures, solely because the existence of the object depends on the meaning that has been imposed on it through the way it appeared to that person in that environment. To be more specific, in our Western culture, we perceive a book as a book, for that is the meaning that has been given to it from our Western point of view. However, this same book can have a totally different meaning in a culture where there is no familiarity with books. As such, it can easily be interpreted as a 'weapon'. Because of this, the reality of the material objects remains open to a multitude of interpretations.

Another layer to the formation of our reality of object existence is the influence of imposed collective viewpoints. That we give meaning to an object does not only depend on our own personal point of view, but it is also rather a consensus achieved through collective viewpoints representing a whole group, or culture that we are part of, that makes us accept this imposed meaning of the object. This new dimension of reality leads us to the fact that the role of collectiveness in constructing our reality and the memories attached to this reality should not be underestimated. It is only by collective consensus that an object can become a reality in one's experience.

In the understanding of the Surinamese-Creole identity and sensory meaning to shape a reality, I am looking into the organisation and the application of categories as a means of group formation. As previously described, the creole community in Suriname is divided into different groups. The differences are dependent on geographical, religious, and mixed-ethnicity factors. The actors (group members) dictate the cultural traits and features to maintain the (self-established) boundaries per group. These features serve to judge and structure the performance in the group. Studying the established cultural traits and features reveals valuable information about the differences in the embodiment of the Surinamese-Creole identity per the categories of creole people in Suriname.

Through the features that are upheld in the group, I managed to observe the role of habit memory in relation to the continuation of the Surinamese-Creole identity. The following questions served as a guideline to help describe my observations: a) How are the boundaries established to distinguish the different categories among creole people informed by social remembering? b) How does the meaning and application of material objects differ per category of creole people in Suriname, and to what extent is this difference determined by social remembering? c) In relation to habit memory, what is the habituation observed in the environment of these different groups of creole people, and how does it translate in their memory of colonial life? d) What criteria are upheld by the group to differentiate their social memories from others?

2.3. The public debates related to colonialism and enslavement in Suriname

Being in full support of the critical notes on traditional anthropology, specifically Tim Ingold's (1996) argument in which he states, 'Why should it be supposed that all the great debates of anthropology took place in the ever more distant past, and why were anthropologists not at the forefront of public and academic debate on the great issues of the day?', I was determined to actively engage with the public debates about the impact of colonialism and slavery visible in post-colonial socio-cultural and economic structures. I was curious to know if the ideas inspired by public conversations, such as rewriting history by including the voices of the colonised, would mean eliminating and erasing the impact of the colonial past – and if so, what the point of departure would be to reinvent the colonially stained Surinamese-Creole identity. In conversation with the social anthropologist João de Pina-Cabral, he pointed out to me, 'Slavery is long gone. People keep it alive as a threat, but in complex imaginary ways, and not in actual, practical ways. Class and educational borders are now used to symbolise slavery as a myth. Not so much a myth as in an untruth, rather as a meaning-making narrative.' His point of view about slavery struck me because I have never considered slavery to be something long gone. And yet I understood what he was saying.

The fact that the institutions and structures enforced during the colonial past continue to influence daily conversations is a testimony that, in my opinion, slavery remains an important part of local life in post-colonial societies. An example of the conversations inspired by slavery time is the debates about rewriting the history of colonialism and enslavement by including the voices of the victimised, the proclamation of the Era of Reclamation³⁷, and calls for the inclusion of Black voices in the production of academic discourse³⁸.

The Surinamese-Creole community in Suriname and abroad is not spared from these heated debates. In particular, the younger generation is passionate about discovering their roots and uncovering the hidden cruelties of slavery. The former colonising empires cannot escape the pressure and must bear the systematic interrogations of activists, Black academic societies, and human rights organisations. Most, including the Netherlands and England, attempt to reconcile the inhumane act of enslavement by making available government budgets, funding, and donations for the study and organising of events related to facilitating the voices of underrepresented and victimised communities.

³⁷ In 2020, Bonnie Greer, a famous playwright and former British Museum trustee, launched the project called 'Era of Reclamation'. Continue to read about it here: [Bonnie Greer: the Era of Reclamation | British Museum](#).

³⁸ In 2021, the Advanced Higher Education Strategy 2021–2024 was launched with the aims to increase diversity, equality, and inclusion in higher education; [Advance HE Strategy 2021 - 2024 | Advance HE \(advance-he.ac.uk\)](#).

I embraced the opportunity to become involved in one of these initiatives by volunteering at one of the oldest and largest NGOs promoting the Afro-Surinamese culture in Suriname, NAKS. The NGO was desperately seeking manpower to access several funding opportunities and establish collaboration with similar organisations in the Netherlands. One highly topical subject in the process of reclaiming Black history was the search for ancestral roots. Young people in the Netherlands with their roots originating from Surinamese-Creole parents were desperately searching for their ancestral histories – this, to reclaim their identity as people of African descent and to publicly embrace and express their honouring of Surinamese-Creole cultural practices. Workshops to learn about tracing your ancestors and putting together your family tree became very popular, and funding to facilitate these workshops was granted by the Dutch Government.

Another event that involved me in the public debates related to post-colonial societies was my participation in the WorldFest and Global Majority reading groups. Both events aimed to empower critical literacy and establish diversity and inclusion as a way of shifting the Eurocentric narratives dominating Western academic higher education institutions. The invitation for the WorldFest reading group promised a transformative experience: 'The WorldFest and Student Success event will be part of a series of podcasts for liberating the minds of students from multiple voices and multiple authors from the Global South. It's hoped the event will contribute to developing a conversation around diversifying the curriculum and building cultural validity in our school.' Through the application of counter-storytelling, Black academic staff strive to encourage Black and other minority students to utilise their voices and their lived experiences to enrich existing course material and the curriculum in general. The groups I got involved with were both representing the voices of the Caribbean to uncover hidden stories of oppression, entrapment, self-representation, fabricated perceptions of social class, and the complexities of racially constructed identities during slavery. The readings were in line with my research topic, being Creole, and the storylines suited the lived experiences of most of my informants. The following paragraph provides a brief introduction to two of the readings that became relevant to my research and equipped me with additional context to supplement my theoretical arguments.

The first reading that I drew inspiration from was *Wide Sargasso Sea* written by Jean Rhys (1966). The story was inspired by the author's own Jamaican-Creole background³⁹. Enslavement shapes many of the relationships in Rhys's novel – not just those between blacks and whites. This is also the case for social relationships in Suriname. The existence of different ethnic groups in Suriname originates from the time of slavery, and the relations developed between the different ethnic groups were forged in a socio-cultural environment infused with racially constructed perceptions of social and economic status. The subtleties of race and the intricacies of Jamaica's social hierarchy play an important role in the development of the novel's main themes. Whites born in England are distinguished from white Creoles, descendants of Europeans who have lived in the West Indies for one or more generations.

Further complicating the social structure is the population of Black ex-slaves who maintain their own kinds of stratification. Furthermore, there is a large mixed-race population, as white slave owners throughout the Caribbean and the Americas were notorious for raping and impregnating female slaves. Elements of this social structure in Jamaica resonate with the social structures that have been described by previous theorists about the creoles in Suriname. These complexities in race identity are part of my personal lived experiences as a Surinamese-Creole woman, and a crucial part of the boundaries and labels established by Afro-Surinamese people to maintain the self-established categories among them. The relevance of these complex racial identities to the current debates

³⁹ The author was born Dominican. She was born to a white father and a Creole mother. 'Creole' in the West Indies stands for a white person born on the Island, but with a small percentage of Amerindian or African genes. The term 'Creole' is applicable to the hybridity caused by mixed-race occurrences. It can be applied to a language but also can be used to categorize a group of people. In other parts of the world, the term represents a specific ethnic group. The overall origin of the term 'creole' stems from the transatlantic slave trade. In Suriname, the descendants of the enslaved Africans who did not flee the plantations are called Creole. However, during colonial times, this was different. Creoles were those born from a white-European father and a mulatto mother. They looked like white people. Gradually the term was adopted by each one descending from enslaved forefathers, and currently it is considered a separate ethnic group in the multi-ethnic Surinamese society.

promoting Black awareness is the way identity conflicts are made manifest among the younger generation of Afro-Surinamese people.

In this manner, power structures based on race always appear to be on the brink of reversal, especially in the case of mixed-race youngsters with European and Afro-Surinamese roots. During the family tree workshops, two questions about identity and ancestral heritage remain vital yet evoke discomfort in the case of ethnic hybridity: a) to which ranks you belong and b) how to define your identity. These very same questions also seemed to be fitting for me to apply during my fieldwork, especially when engaging with informants who do not feel entirely comfortable identifying as Surinamese-Creole people. Being creole does not always mean that people feel comfortable embracing this identity; some might experience it as restrictive and uncomfortable to navigate in a society that is ever changing and developing. It would be interesting to observe how people are adjusting the label of 'creole' to fit the social dynamics of society.

Furthermore, this reading enriched my understanding of the agency of objects in the process of memory and history being shaped by past events. In this argument, it was the role of these objects or artefacts becoming important to justify the reclamation of Black cultural practices – conversations such as the returning of artefacts to the people they belonged to. My question to understand the importance of these demands was as follows: What could be the value of these artefacts in the reclaiming of one's identity? The description of patois songs telling the stories of their ancestors and, as such, serving as a capsule of history revealing society's perception of socio-cultural identities, answered my curiosity. I was convinced and became determined to extend my observations of creole embodiment to the role of artefacts in the continuation and transmission of the creole identity among Surinamese-Creoles. I developed the following interview questions to inform my quest about this level of embodiment: a) Which capsules of the past do you still carry in your life and in your family? b) What do these objects mean to you and to your family? In Chapter 4 of this thesis, I aim to draw on my experiences of embodiment. This is where I will further unpack this notion of the agency of objects in the embodiment of identity.

Colourism is another theme significant to conversations about post-colonial identities. Jean Rhys's book and another author, Gloria Wekker, extensively addressed this phenomenon as a post-colonial socio-cultural challenge in present communities of African descendants. Gloria Wekker identifies as Afro-Surinamese living in the Netherlands⁴⁰. In her book, *White Innocence* (2016), she draws on her personal lived experiences as a Black woman born in Suriname and raised in the Netherlands. She contests existing perceptions and expectations of being a person of virtue, as these are informed through white standards of virtue⁴¹. Beauty standards and requirements to be considered a respectable civilian, as perceived in the countries of origin of the enslaved, were discarded and described as savage. To this day, the standards for being a person of virtue have been based on white-European perceptions. In Suriname, people with a lighter skin tone are called 'bonkoro', which

⁴⁰ Gloria Wekker is an Afro-Surinamese Dutch scholar whose extensive body of work has brought questions of colonialism, race, gender, sexuality, and diaspora to the forefront of critical scholarship on the Netherlands and the Dutch Empire. In the Dutch context, Gloria Wekker has been fundamental to understanding and confronting racial and colonial legacies and the varying ways in which these are reproduced in the Netherlands today. Gloria Wekker's writing and passion have transcended the bounds of academia and inspired scholars and activists who continue to grapple with the legacies of empire today. In 1984, she became a founding member of 'Sister Outsider', an Amsterdam-based literary circle for lesbian Black women named after Audre Lorde's famous text by the same name. She has inspired an entire new generation of scholars and activists in the Netherlands and beyond to take up questions of colonialism and race and to do so intersectionally. Recently, she was named one of the most influential Dutch academics.

⁴¹ External reviews: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0141778918813330>. Wekker's analysis is fresh in illuminating how this phenomenon extends into all strands of Dutch life. Furthermore, by contextualising her notion of 'white innocence' within 400 years of Dutch colonial history, Wekker illuminates the situated nature of 'white innocence' and its history in both constructing and being constructed by ideologies culturally specific to the Dutch. Unlike countries such as South Africa and the US, the terms 'race' and 'racism' are hardly used within a Dutch context. Wekker argues that the muting of these terms contributes to the Dutch understanding of themselves as an anti-discriminatory people, as the Dutch cultural imagination conflates speaking the terms 'race' and 'racism' with practising racism itself. However, as Wekker demonstrates through her discussion of the privileged terms 'autochtoon' and 'allochtoon', using racialised language is not alien to the Dutch. Although the dominant white-Dutch mainstream understands these preferred terms as merely meaning 'from the Netherlands' (autochtoon) and 'not from the Netherlands' (allochtoon), Wekker argues that 'within the binary pair...race is firmly present' (p. 23). In other words, in practice, 'autochtoon' becomes conflated with whiteness and a successful claim to Dutch nationality and belonging, while 'allochtoon' serves to signify outsider status and racial 'otherness'. Ultimately, Wekker's text invites scholars to interrogate intricacies of whiteness by examining their entanglements with national ideology, culturally specific histories, and contemporary constructions of belonging.

is derived from the French expression 'bonne couleur', meaning 'the right colour'. This expression originates from slavery times but is still being used to this day and is embedded in *Sranantongo*, the lingua franca in Suriname.

The following statement from Gloria Wekker (2016) depicts the way that Dutch-informed perceptions to this day remain visible in Surinamese local life: 'I am intrigued by the way that race pops up in unexpected places and moments, literally as the return of the repressed, while a dominant discourse stubbornly maintains that the Netherlands is and always has been colour-blind and antiracist, a place of extraordinary hospitality and tolerance toward the racialized/ethnicized other, whether this quintessential other is perceived as black in some eras or as Muslim in others.' She continues to argue that one of the key sites where this paradox is operative, I submit, is the white-Dutch sense of self. Four hundred years of Dutch imperial rule play a vital but unacknowledged part in dominant meaning-making processes, including the making of the self.

These depictions of societies' ideas, expectations, and requirements for being civilised have become the very foundation of Dutch society. Challenging these representations evokes such anger among the white-Dutch community. Their response makes it seem as if the whole foundation of society is being threatened. One particular event could serve as an example to justify this statement: it is the yearly celebration of Saint Nicholas, a typical Dutch celebration for children as part of the Christmas holidays. For centuries, this celebration included Black Face, a racially depicted figure. Recently (2014), activists initiated a yearly demonstration named 'Kick out Zwarte Piet'⁴². It started in the Netherlands and quickly spread to the Dutch Antilles. The activists protested the existence of the racially depicted figure 'Zwarte Piet' in this children-oriented celebration and demanded that the Dutch Government remove this figure from the celebrations. However, the response of large parts of the white-Dutch community was aggressive, violent, and racially tainted.

The significance of this celebration for my research is that it is also an event highly celebrated in Suriname. In particular, Surinamese-Creole children are familiar with this event – hence my zooming in on the debates around white depictions forming the foundation of socio-cultural structures in the Netherlands. The Netherlands being the former coloniser of Suriname, it makes me curious to explore how much of these white depictions remain active and visible in Surinamese-Creole celebrations, and more importantly, the responses of Surinamese-Creoles to the demonstrations against established social structures and institutions that have been enforced by the Dutch Government and former colonial administrators to satisfy their needs and their notions of what a Dutch state should look like. Black Face as part of the Saint Nicholas celebrations is a prime example of such Dutch-infused notions. It is through Gloria's book that I was also introduced to the notion of the cultural archive (Said 1993). Edward Said describes the cultural archive as a storehouse of 'a particular knowledge and structures of attitude and reference...[and,] in Raymond Williams' seminal phrase, "structures of feeling"'. Gloria Wekker summarised this notion of the cultural archive as 'a storehouse of ideas, practices, and affect, that which is in between our ears, in our hearts and minds, regarding race, based on four hundred years of imperial rule' (2016,49). The interesting part about this reading group was that I did the reflections on the book with my fellow social anthropology students. Their responses were informed by their anthropological knowledge, and their critical feedback, which was and was not influenced by a personal association with the Surinamese-Creole culture, helped me gain an outsider's point of view on some of the debates surrounding post-colonialism. This helped to critically reflect on my own experiences and remain objective in the analyses that I made.

⁴² Kick Out Zwarte Piet | Caribisch Netwerk (ntr.nl) accessed 20/07/2023.

2.4. The methodology applied for the execution of the research

Anthropological research is executed through two main approaches: one being an academic approach and the other through fieldwork. The academy serves as the place where the theoretical concepts are produced to serve as the blueprint for the anthropologist to navigate the field. And the field then becomes a practical space to challenge and explore pre-constructed theories. However, once the anthropologist enters the field, these theoretical concepts become subject to what is encountered in the field. The interpretation of these notions will take shape through the information being shared by the local people. In the dialogue that takes place between local information and theoretical notions to generate knowledge, it is important to take into consideration the experiences and reflections of both the anthropologist and the informants. Therefore, it is expected that the theory sometimes could get in the way of understanding and translating the human world as it is in that particular space and time. To secure an accurate and trustworthy process of collection (data, information from the field) and production (academic theory), the application of methodology becomes beneficial. In the case of my research, the following methodologies were applied to achieve a consistent and accurate dialogic engagement between the social life that I would encounter in the field and the intellectual baggage that I would prepare and carry with me in the field.

2.4.1. *Preliminary work*

First, I did a preliminary trip to Suriname to gather information on current socio-cultural events that are carried out by non-profit organisations for the Afro-Surinamese community. The aim was to observe current developments in the Surinamese-Creole community and what dynamics were to be witnessed throughout these developments. The results of this preliminary phase equipped me to prepare my fieldwork. During this preliminary phase, I also established a diverse network of contact people who could guide me through my time in the field and help identify potential informants for research in Suriname.

2.4.2. *Fieldwork*

Doing fieldwork is an essential part of the research that one conducts as an aspiring anthropologist. To be recognised as an anthropologist, one must physically enter the field and socially immerse oneself for at least one full year in the daily life of the research subjects. This long-term personal engagement, referenced as ethnographic fieldwork, is a method to help generate theoretical insights that could not be generated in any other way (Jon P. Mitchell 2010: 1). By adopting the expectations of the subjects of research and learning about correct social behaviour, the ethnographer employs social learning as a tool to 'fit in' and simultaneously better understand how social functions operate. However, each field is different, and each ethnographer is different. Thus is the ethnographer required to practise a certain level of flexibility and willingness to respond to the limitations and opportunities encountered in the field. We can safely argue that the field is agentic and, as such, shapes the ethnography and the way we engage with it. The expectations for conducting fieldwork, according to conventional ethnography, are that the ethnographer follows themes or topics across spaces, implying that the ethnographer becomes submissive to what the field provides. Ethnographic knowledge should never be built from a singular perspective but should be accompanied by other tools such as survey work, formal and informal interviews, testing hypotheses, and, most importantly, establishing a proper mixture of informants from different socio-economic backgrounds. The following paragraphs illustrate the way in which I diversified my ethnographic work.

2.4.3. *Applying autoethnography*

Choosing to do autoethnography was my way of utilising my voice in the process of either challenging or enriching existing notions of my own people, creoles in Suriname. My choice was also influenced by the increase in Black voices and post-colonial communities to counter-tell the stories of their people and, as such, contest the Eurocentric contextualising of their story. Telling their own stories is a way of resisting deeply rooted, existing misinformed notions about their way of living. Through my current job as the Senior Diversity Mark Officer, I am exposed daily to the devastating impact of

Eurocentrism on the positive representation of the socio-cultural identities of non-white people. I have had conversations with academics, students, and researchers from Black or Asian backgrounds who have shared their commitment and contribution to disrupting the existence of Eurocentric views and whiteness in the production of research and new knowledge. Their efforts strengthened my decision to utilise my personal lived experiences and collect the life histories of my own people to disrupt the misinformed notions of their local life. Nothing prepared me for the main challenge of doing autoethnography: to remain objective. I needed to find a way to switch between being the Surinamese-Creole woman who wants to tell her story and the Surinamese-Creole woman who aspires to become a contemporary anthropologist. To paraphrase Matthew Engelke (2002), 'ethnographers should strive for a balance of being "inside" and "outside" to find an appropriate tone in the field'. My way of securing my objectivity was to practise reflexivity by constantly asking myself questions such as why I felt a certain way, what else I could have done to improve the output that I received from a field experience, whether my actions influenced the outcome, and if so, why and how they became influential.

2.4.5. *Participant observation*

The dominant method to achieve intimate engagement with informants is referred to as 'participant observation'. As Jeffrey Cohen describes it in his article 'Problems in the field: Participant observation and the assumption of neutrality' (2010), 'our role as participant observers allows us to watch, learn, and actively involve ourselves in a range of interesting activities'. The above description of participant observation responds to a very conventional understanding of ethnographic fieldwork.

Prior to engaging in my informants' daily lives, I took relevant measures to ensure that I would not breach any ethical concerns. One of my main actions to secure the privacy of my informants was to properly discuss the reasons for my research and seek their consent in writing or audio recording, prior to collecting data from them. I used pseudonyms for those who preferred not to be mentioned in this thesis. Some would share their experiences with me but specifically ask that I would not describe them in my ethnographic accounts in this thesis. I respected their choice and instead used the information they shared just to broaden my knowledge. In the case of utilising my personal experiences, I made sure to make my family, including my husband, aware of the bits of my life story that refer to their involvement as well. Only those who gave me consent to share details are included and referenced in this thesis.

On the occasions where I took part in the daily life of some selected families, I made sure to first ask their permission, and learn about their rules, norms, and customs, prior to engaging with the rest of their family members. Mostly, my interactions with these families were to observe their ways of planning and organising their own family celebrations. Some of the families were recorded on film so that I could draft a comparison of four different Surinamese-Creole family histories and their family structures.

While attending workshops about Surinamese-Creole culture, I learned that most of these workshops were focused on learning skills and techniques to make traditional Surinamese-Creole objects such as head ties, traditional clothes, typical creole dishes, etc. While I was invited to take part in private and public celebrations, I was able to observe my informants' preparation processes (physically, mentally, and as a family), their intentions of organising or attending the celebration, and the relevance of it to their being Surinamese-Creole. I did volunteer work in two non-profit organisations in charge of planning and executing public events for both the Creole and the Maroon communities. This allowed me to observe the process, the actions and decisions people take, and the ideas that unfold during the planning, interpretation, and evaluation of these public events. To assure a proper representation of my informants, for instance, in the case of recording them, I would regularly request feedback about my interpretation of my observations, whether written or processed in videos.

2.4.6. *Important participant observation skills – reflexivity and memory*

Being reflexive along the journey of being a participant observer was vital to my personal development. Living in the United Kingdom for more than 5 years shifted and coloured the lens through which I would observe social behaviour and social functions. One way to push myself through this barrier of learning was to engage in a more active way of applying reflexivity. Some of my main methods entailed filming myself preparing to attend an event, filming the person with whom I had conversations, taking pictures while at an event, and asking others to film me while I was engaged with an activity during an event. By doing so, I could re-live these moments, do self-evaluation on my own interactions during events or encounters with informants, and adjust my behaviour for future or follow-up encounters. This methodology also allowed me to collect visual material of me and my informants.

Memory lies at the centre of ethnographic practice (Jon P. Mitchell 2010: 8). The role of memory can be observed on two levels. In the field, we heavily rely on the memories of our informants to share with us their lived experiences. The other role of memory becomes significant after the completion of fieldwork. Post-fieldwork memory determines the way we as ethnographers filter the collected data through our memory and contextualise these. In my situation, doing autoethnography, I often found myself navigating different roles, and, as such, I utilised memory as a tool to contextualise the data. Some of the data came through the recollection of my own memories as a Surinamese-Creole person. Being aware of the existing discussions on the anthropology of memory, I want to avoid, for now, going into detail about the different arguments. In this specific context of using memory for my ethnographic work, I am referring to what David Sutton refers to as Lambek's statement, Western memory production (2001). It is a more practical way of defining the production of memory, which is the 'freezing of words and images, put frames around them, and rendering remembering mechanical and impersonal' – thus, a more semantic way of producing memory. I taught myself to focus on the small details, such as scents and noise related to that place, the colour of clothes, the colour of someone's voice, how I felt while being in that space, a particular behaviour, and the repetition of words while the person shared information. Sometimes, my memory served as a filter to help me give meaning to my field experiences or to reflect on the memories shared by my informants. The meaning giving process would happen by trying to find an explanation for the unfamiliar based on my own memories of similar events.

This way of utilising memory reminds me of the theory of affordances, which argues that our way of connecting with existing objects is through our senses. Us giving meaning to things does not only depend on our own personal point of view, but it is also a consensus achieved through collective viewpoints representing a whole group or a culture that we are a part of. David Sutton continues to describe in his book, *Remembrance of repasts – an anthropology of food and memory* (2001), that memories are not just stored images, but very much formed as an interaction between the past and the present. This element of the notion of memory became evident while doing participant observation when I was gathering information about local histories. This, I would do by sharing memories between me and my informants and based on the similarities and differences in the details of our memories about a particular event, I would draw new narratives about the local history of the Surinamese-Creole people.

2.4.7. *Life histories*

This research employs a narrative approach, offering insight into historical, socio-cultural, and political events from the period of Suriname being a colonial creation to current events during the time of my research. As such, it lays the foundation for anthropological analyses, which are then complemented by oral stories and personal narratives of my informants. The advantage of applying narrative analyses is that it facilitates in-depth conversations with informants, probing the surface of the informants and rendering visible the personal, private aspects of lived experience (Paul Atkinson 2010; 3). Conversations with my informants revealed the existence of multiple historical experiences

and the role of these experiences in employing social organisation among the creole people in Suriname. The historical experiences have been transferred from generation to generation and are embedded in their daily life activities. The privileged access to personal lived experiences and translating these into life histories was an opportunity to further explore the extent to which local history is interwoven in the creation and continuation of the creole identity on a personal level. By carrying out several life histories, I engaged with different generations of Surinamese-Creole people. These life histories served as a tool to build rapport with my subjects, simultaneously serving as evidence to prove existing dynamics in the process of re-creating, prolonging, and actualising family history within the evolving framework of ethnic definitions.

One of them had an interesting story that served as the basis for further developing my chapter on Surinamese-Creole families. He shared the story of his grandmother, with whom he grew up. She is a typical Creole woman and was involved in different activities to safeguard, transfer, or upgrade the Creole culture. She was a so-called patron for one of the most popular Creole women's associations. With the collection of life histories, I managed to understand what it means for a Surinamese-Creole to be a creole person in a particular geographical space and time period. Also, I used their lived experiences as a point of departure to understand the formation and transmission of their identity that had been passed on during and after colonial times, from generation to generation. I used this methodology as an opportunity to facilitate the voices of Surinamese-Creole people who have been excluded from Western academic discourse while theorising fundamental concepts such as culture, personhood, history, memory, belief, religion, rituals, and spirituality. In being excluded, the narratives of Surinamese-Creole people continue to be subject to stereotypical assumptions about their ways of life, their traditional practices, and their positionality in society.

2.4.8. *Qualitative interviews*

There are some topics that arose from field experiences that were employed as conversation starters to facilitate in-depth qualitative interviews with some of my informants. In the processing of the collected data, I developed subthemes based on these topics. Examples include the following:

- *Being religious versus being spiritual:* In conversations with my informants, topics related to the *Winti* religion and Christianity would always dominate the conversation. Some would prefer me to address their engagement with the *Winti* religion as something spiritual. The term 'spirituality' would be used in different contexts, which would evoke my curiosity about the local interpretation of spirituality and religion. I realised the importance of also exploring how both served as measures to establish boundaries or promote acceptance within different Surinamese-Creole groups.
- *Cross-cultural influences:* During celebrations and other events, it was interesting to notice a wide variety of people from other ethnic groups associating with Surinamese-Creole culture and adopting elements of this culture as part of their identity. Within the Surinamese-Creole community, specifically those associating with the *Winti* religion, there are cultural practices consisting of elements of the Indigenous culture to enhance the spiritual experience of being creole. These cross-cultural influences seemed to be central to the emergence and further development of the Surinamese-Creole identity.
- *Gender roles:* In my observations, I've noticed that the Creole women are very much in charge of preserving and transferring socio-cultural practices. I became curious to further explore the relation between the women and the men and the extent to which this informs the interpretations and expectations of embracing the Surinamese-Creole identity.
- *Significance of material objects in embodying, prolonging, and expressing creoleness:* I am curious to know how these objects have agency or are being attributed to certain properties to serve as affordances on different occasions. During social and cultural practices, it was interesting to see how one specific object would serve different purposes depending on the occasion and who would oversee the event. There was also an emphasis on the indispensable presence of such objects in completing a ritual or experiencing a celebration. Such objects included traditional dress.
- *Ancestral agency:* During private celebrations, I observed people often consulting their ancestors for advice about future decisions that needed to be made. The ancestors, for them, are very much part of the now and the future. Being able to communicate with the ancestors

served as a requirement to be accepted in some of the creole groups. In an interview, I was accused of not being a real Creole because of my lack of knowledge and experience with this practice.

- *Constituting Creole traditions through transnationalism*: Most Surinamese-Creole families have family in the Netherlands. The Netherlands, being the former colonial power in Suriname, still has a great impact on the development of Suriname's society. Changes in socio-cultural practices impact family members living in both countries. During some events, I noticed an impeccable presence of Dutch culture, specifically in the traditional clothing, the use of food items during ritual performances, and the discussions on the use of certain labels among Creole people.

2.4.9. *Image work*

I employed image work (both video and photography) as another methodology to capture the ways in which people scaffold their interpretations of being Surinamese-Creole. I encouraged some of my informants to write what they experienced daily, or stories they could remember about their family. They would share these stories with me through WhatsApp messages, and I would analyse them. When we met again, we would talk about questions that I had based on what they shared with me. There was a social media page where I shared self-invented stories about the Surinamese-Creole lifestyle and people could engage with these stories, providing me with information about their own knowledge or experiences. I elicited narratives concerning the older and the younger generations' 'interpretations' of being a creole person. The image work also served as a tool to document narratives of people's experiences during public and private celebrations. Creating visual material was a way to replace the act of taking notes. I found it difficult to take notes while talking to informants. Filming allowed me to listen to them, engage with them, build rapport, and make them feel comfortable. Recording them, I noticed, encouraged them to realise how important their information was to my research. I would put in effort to make them become comfortable and willing to share the most intimate details of their experiences. And when I went home, I would make sure to write down short notes about the experience, accompanied by my reflexive thoughts. Replacing most of the note taking with filming required strengthening my observation skills. It became an exercise to enhance my memory so I could properly and vividly memorise details. This methodology was also relevant to my choice of doing autoethnography. Prior to my fieldwork, I documented my own journey as a Surinamese-Creole living and working in the UK, and I continued to apply this technique of mini-video productions to four Surinamese-Creole families that I selected and interviewed in Paramaribo. These videos enriched my collected data and helped me to reflect on the events after returning from the field. It turned out to be a useful methodology to minimise misinterpreting my observations during these celebrations and other relevant events.

2.4.10. *Linguistic analysis*

I was prepared for much of the data to be in the local language spoken among Surinamese-Creole people, *Sranantongo*. It is the lingua franca in Suriname. To speak *Sranantongo*, however, as I had been away for a long time, I had to bring my familiarity with authentic *Sranantongo* up to speed. I also anticipated that the language would be another layer in my research to uncover and unpack the Surinamese-Creole identity. The language is spoken in different forms. Part of the language is rooted in the *Winti* religion and therefore does not contain the usual wordings and expressions spoken on a regular basis. In the language, there are also embedded elements of the Surinamese-Creole identity, but it requires an expert level of understanding of the language to be able to identify these elements. Therefore, I took extra lessons in *Sranantongo*, and I attended a workshop about the *Winti* religion to gain a basic understanding of *Sranantongo* as spoken in *Winti*.

2.5. Celebrations as the lens to study the research topic

Celebrations served as the lens through which I analysed the diversity among Surinamese-Creole people and the way this diversity translates to processes of groupness, identification, and categorisation. Celebrations are the occasions where the embodiment of the Surinamese-Creole identity becomes vivid. From my personal lived experiences, celebrations are at the core of our way of life. It is during celebrations that we take the opportunity to excessively express who we are as a people, what we have inherited, and how we've managed to secure the continuity of our heritage. We express who we are through the food, the clothes, the music, the dance style, and particular actions during celebrations. My expectation was that these celebrations would therefore be excellent occasions for me to see (a) what the categories (organised by the creole people) correspond to, what their boundaries are, and how they are being negotiated, (b) what interests are in fact being negotiated by means of these labels, and (c) how the celebrations accommodate these interests and what their possible impacts are in daily life. As I executed my fieldwork, I encountered a variety of celebrations. There were celebrations on a public level and celebrations in a family setting. Due to the nature of the public celebrations, I further divided these into subcategories. The next paragraphs explain these subcategories of public celebrations.

2.5.1. Public celebrations promoting Surinamese-Creole culture

As the development of the descendants of enslaved Africans and the awareness about their cultural heritage becomes a hot topic, it occupies the agenda of governments, non-profit organisations, educational institutions, international organisations, and art and culture movements on different levels. Suriname actively participates in this development and awareness process. Activities are initiated, programmes are launched, and policies are put in place to guarantee a results-oriented approach and secure long-term benefits for the target group. Usually, these programmes are related to celebrations that are significant for Afro-Surinamese culture. In Suriname, there are non-profit organisations employing specific events to increase the awareness of the Surinamese-Creole people. These are the following:

- *Feydrasi fu Afrikan Srananman*: Annually, on the first Sunday of the New Year, they organise the *Blakaman Dey*, which is a celebration of Black heritage in Suriname. This event is in accordance with the resolution endorsed by UNESCO in 1978 as part of its World Heritage programmes.
- *Fiti Fu Wini* is working alongside the *Feydrasi Fu Afrikan Srananman* organisation in conserving the cultural heritage of the Afro-Creole people. On a regular basis, and in particular on the 1st of July, they initiate activities to showcase the culture and educate about the parts of the culture that are forgotten.
- The National Reparations Commission Suriname initiated a knowledge centre to do research about the reparations process for slavery and to prepare a document reflecting Suriname's position. This document has been ready since 2017 but still needs to be officially endorsed by the Surinamese Government. In 2018, as part of the celebration of 155 years since the abolition of slavery, the commission organised a conference to inform the community about this reparations process⁴³. As such, Suriname also participated in the 14th meeting of the CARICOM Reparations Commission (CRC) on 14 January 2019. Decisions made during this meeting will also be of benefit to the Afro-Surinamese population in Suriname⁴⁴. Some of the non-profit organisations are anticipating these reparation payments to further develop sustainable programs for the conservation of the culture.

On a regular basis, throughout the year, non-profit organisations organise Afro-Surinamese public cultural events with the purpose of keeping the culture alive. These are celebrations such as *Kabra-prei*, *Banya-prei*, and *Kotoshow*, pageant shows that promote the traditions and clothing of Afro-Surinamese culture, and I had the privilege to attend a couple of these events.

⁴³ <http://nakssuriname.com/zunder-het-gaat-niet-om-afschaffing-van-de-slavernij/> accessed 21.07.2021.

⁴⁴ <http://www.starnieuws.com/index.php/welcome/index/nieuwsitem/48950> accessed 21.07.2021.

2.5.2. *Public celebrations facilitating cultural education in Suriname*

The Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture is responsible for cultural development in Suriname. The Department of Cultural Studies conserves and protects the immaterial cultural heritage of Suriname. In 2017, the Surinamese Government endorsed a law for the protection of cultural heritage in Suriname, which is in accordance with treaties signed with the United Nations. In accordance with this law, the Ministry supports and subsidises educational institutions and non-profit art and cultural institutions in the implementation of cultural education programs. NAKS is one of these non-profit art and cultural institutions advocating for cultural education.

The public celebrations comprising a cultural education element are as follows: a) The celebration of the abolition of slavery: Schools and other institutions organise additional activities to educate about the creole identity and historical events attached to the creole identity. b) The celebration of Independence Day in Suriname (the 25th of November): This event is celebrated by all ethnic groups; however, the Creoles are usually largely involved in the planning, music performance, etc. Again, schools and relevant institutions organise educational activities to educate about events leading up to Independence Day. Students are encouraged to wear traditional clothes to school. It is mainly during this celebration that I noticed the dominating presence of creole culture in the festivities, for instance, in the dishes showcased, the music, the traditional dress, and the performances.

2.5.3. *Other celebrations celebrated in public spaces and in family settings*

a) The celebration of Christmas and Easter. The celebration of these holidays revealed interesting insights into the role of Christianity in establishing categories of creole people in Suriname. b) Celebrating the end of the year. Around this time, there are music manifestations happening all over the capital, Paramaribo. This is also a public event with huge involvement of Surinamese-Creole people in the form of dance, music, food, etc. Surinamese-Creole families, especially those practising the *Winti* religion, would have their own personal way of celebrating this event, and I had the opportunity to compare the cultural practices for this event on a personal and a public level.

2.6. Applying multi-sited ethnography

According to Simon Coleman and Pauline von Hellermann, the field shapes the ethnography and thus becomes agential because of our active engagement with it (2011; 3). They also argued that, based on the way traditional units or objects of study present themselves nowadays, it becomes a complicated task to continue understanding their operational functions through traditionally taught anthropological research (2011; 17). George Marcus (2011:19) argues, 'the past habit of Malinowskian ethnography has been to take subjects as you find them in natural units of difference; the habit of multi-sited research is to see subjects as differently constituted, to see them in development – displaced, recombined'. The application of multi-sited research is not without concerns. Multi-sited research allows the ethnographer to shift from the role of a 'lone' ethnographer engaging in a long-term single-sited space of research to one that constitutes multiple places. There are concerns that arise about multi-sited research having to do with the way that multi-sited ethnographers communicate what they have learned in the field: a) This moving between multiple places, some argue, might not allow the ethnographer to sufficiently study the subjects to be able to contextualise the collected data into validated, evidence-based, and academically approved research. b) Then there also is the fear that ethnography might become more about systems, institutions, formal organisations, the structures of Western rationality, modernity, rather than about the conditions of common experiences, observed as everyday life in its own context (George E Marcus 2011: 18). This concern is very much based on the application of multi-sited ethnography in research with a strong scientific, technical, or knowledge systems approach. c) Another concern is related to the conventional way of applying ethnography – by describing significant differences in functions gathered through consistent long-term observations.

By applying multi-sited ethnography, the ethnographer is not bound to physically conduct a long period of observations in the field to learn from the other. The ethnographer, instead, engages with the 'already known' and 'previously informed' and applies a multi-sited methodology to further explore the developments. As such, there is no existence of the 'unknown', but rather the occurrence of 'the familiar' as subjects of research. The informants no longer serve as 'natives' but become counter-partners working alongside the ethnographer to assist in sharing their journey throughout their *habitus*. Developments within the field of anthropology, such as the anthropology of globalisation and the anthropology of the contemporary, demand a reform, reinvention, or redesign of the applied research methods to continue collecting academically validated data. The Surinamese-Creole identity can be considered a former traditional unit that has become subject to contemporary changes and globalisation. Exploring the origins and the continuation of the Surinamese-Creole identity led me to life histories that are continued through family lines in the Netherlands. Vice versa, I learned how Surinamese-Creole families in the Netherlands influence their family in Suriname to embrace the creole identity. This complexity of the Surinamese-Creole identity, due to historical developments and the migration of Surinamese-Creoles, demanded movement between places and institutions to follow the narratives of my informants and map the ways in which the identity intersects with ideologies derived from globalisation and social practices encouraged by contemporary processes.

Local life in Suriname reveals a strong connection with local life in the Netherlands, the former colonising country. Large groups of Surinamese-Creoles immigrated to the Netherlands shortly before and after Suriname gained independence in 1975. There was a lack of trust in the ability of Surinamese officials to properly govern Suriname. The fear of an upcoming civil war drove people to seek refuge in the former motherland, the Netherlands (Rick Derveld, 1999). Immigrating to the Netherlands in search of a better life or to continue studies has, since then, been a constant phenomenon in Suriname. Most Surinamese-Creole people have family in the Netherlands, and the interconnections between families in Suriname and in the Netherlands are strong. There is a constant circulation of commodities and financial support and an exchange of socio-cultural ideas and family histories between families in Suriname and in the Netherlands.

2.6.1. *Mapping the field site*

The research mainly took place in the capital of Suriname, Paramaribo. This is the home of many creole families. Most of these families also have family ties in the districts near the capital, such as the districts Para, Wanica, and Coronie. Regular visits from families across the capital and the districts are therefore very common. Therefore, it was quite common for me to attend celebrations taking place in one of these districts. Locality dictates the way the creole people differentiate themselves; therefore, attending creole celebrations in these districts revealed in-depth information about the relationship between locality and the inherited identity of my informants. The fact that the continuation of the Surinamese-Creole identity was heavily influenced by family bonds, specifically in the Netherlands, demanded that I extend my field site to the space where most of these family bonds were located. Including Surinamese-Creoles in diaspora allowed for a holistic analysis of the Surinamese-Creole identity. As such, Amsterdam and Rotterdam became part of my field site. This is where most of the Surinamese-Creole families in the Netherlands live and where there is an active, visible presence of Surinamese-Creole cultural elements.

2.7. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on my fieldwork

On 14 March 2020, the Surinamese Government officially announced the need for a total lockdown because of the COVID-19 pandemic in Suriname. With the pandemic came the introduction of phenomena such as lockdowns, family and friends 'bubbles', restrictions on physical engagements, etc. This caused a major disruption to normal local and social life.

2.7.1. *The impact on my applied methodologies in the field*

This sudden change in social life impacted my research and demanded that I become innovative with my research methodologies. Applying participant observation was no longer possible. Allowing people to create their own 'bubbles' to stop the spreading of the virus restricted me from visiting informants. I created my own 'bubble' of informants with whom I had daily contact. It consisted of five informants. And I was allowed to be part of a 'bubble' of family members. This consisted of eight members of my close family.

During the remainder of my time in the field, I navigated between these two 'bubbles'. During this time, I focused more on doing autoethnography by reflecting on the members in my bubble and their response to this drastic change in our social life. The radio, the mobile phone, and television became the only way to connect with the rest of the world. I found myself on a rollercoaster of emotions, such as panic and fear, feeling uncertain and powerless. To constantly be in each other's company led to irritations and aggravation. However, being so close to each other also encouraged more in-depth conversations and spontaneous moments of being reflexive. In hindsight, being forced into living in a bubble resulted in the gathering of personal stories, thorough insight into the life histories of my own family, and insight into the intimate feelings of my informants. Discussing sensitive topics happened spontaneously, and my informants felt more comfortable sharing their genuine feelings about how they saw themselves as creole people.

2.7.2. *The impact on socio-political and economic occurrences in the field*

The pandemic also disrupted the political scenery in Suriname. It was the time of elections. The way political parties dealt with the pandemic, the use of the pandemic for their election campaigns, and the response of the Surinamese people to this election battle brought forth interesting information relevant to my quest in exploring the influence of social life on the emergence and embodiment of ethnic identities in a society. The spreading of fake news evoked stigmatising behaviour towards certain ethnic groups, such as the Chinese, the Maroons, and the Amerindians. They were depicted as the carriers of the coronavirus, and the reasons people shared to justify this stigmatisation were based on the ways of living of these groups. Their social and cultural practices were depicted as savage, reckless, and unhygienic. Ethnic depiction reigned supreme during the pandemic, and some politicians used the spreading of rumours to paint a picture of the incompetence of the sitting government, obstructing the government from putting proper measures in place to ensure the safety of society.

This power struggle between the sitting government and the political parties in the coalition intensified the class divide in Suriname – not just between the different ethnic groups but also between the capitalists in Suriname. The government struggled to control the fluctuating price of primary goods. Attempts to achieve mutual agreements between the Ministry of Trade and the association of wholesale traders quickly took a political turn. There were two different chairs for the same association, and one of them refused to collaborate with the government because of his political preferences. This unstable economic situation, in combination with the existence of the COVID-19 virus, worked as a ticking time bomb in the community. People started to threaten with strikes; private bus drivers and bus transportation business owners threatened to stop their services to the community. People started to hoard food, and the store shelves appeared empty in a very short time. Chinese store owners refused to open their stores, as they were confronted with looting. The class divide also influenced access to medical care for COVID-19 patients and people in need of quarantine facilities.

The population began to panic about the increase in infected people, and instead of following the instructions of the government, they applied their own medicines and rules of precaution. The different perceptions of the virus reflected people's habits of coping with things that were not familiar to their environment. They tapped into what they already knew and were familiar with to give meaning to the unknown. The theory of affordances was activated through the practices and perceptions they applied to deal with the unknown in their daily life. Some of these perceptions and practices were as follows:

- Some people spread the knowledge that the virus would not survive the humidity in Suriname. In their perception, the virus was something that came from countries with cold temperatures.
- Others believed that we had a wealth of medicinal plants and all we needed to do was increase our consumption of herbal teas and vegetables rich in vitamins and prepare soups to boost the immune system. On social media, there were several herbal remedies being shared to inform people about the different types of bush tea. Herbal experts and even spiritual experts would do radio and TV infomercials to promote these herbal remedies.
- People also thought that some areas in Suriname were safe enough to escape the COVID-19 pandemic. These were especially the remote areas. Little did they know that these areas were high-risk areas because of their locations close to the borders, where little to no border control was present. Suriname deals with the issue of open borders and illegal border crossings during the late or early hours of the day.
- The use of a 90% rum named 'Palm' (it's a rum made in Suriname and used for religious and spiritual practices) was promoted as a substitute for hand sanitiser. This was not so much the problem, as indeed it works as a perfect disinfectant. The issue was that people started to believe that they could use this rum every minute, the whole day, rub their skin with it, put it on cotton pads and push it on their noses to avoid breathing in 'corona', and eventually take spiritual baths with it.
- During an interview, one person claimed that holding her breath while talking to someone else would protect her from breathing in the 'corona'.

2.7.3. *The pandemic becoming relevant to my research*

The perceptions and practices applied to cope with the pandemic were an opportunity for me to observe how the act of meaning giving helps people to create structure in their lives and utilise their environments to manage the unknown to make it become part of their lives while they simultaneously learn to adjust to the unknown phenomenon. This was prime information to apply to my analysis of the creation of the Surinamese-Creole identity and the way in which occurrences in the environment might have contributed to the interpretation of the creole identity.

The spreading of conspiracy theories and fake news about COVID-19 prompted the government's active involvement in producing promotional material to create awareness. Promotional materials such as videos, songs, and flyers were produced in the most common languages spoken in Suriname. Artists were asked to produce songs which would resonate with the lived experiences of the different groups in society. It was interesting to observe and experience the creativity of these artists and the response of the community towards this. Music became the main vehicle to achieve awareness. People used music to express their thoughts and frustration with the pandemic and to share humorous incidents. Creativity and language dominated this methodology of creating awareness, and it helped people to become less anxious and feel less isolated. People's responses to the pandemic, the coping mechanisms they applied, and their ways of interpreting knowledge shared about the virus served as opportunities occurring in the field to compare the creation, the development, the continuation, and the embodiment of the Surinamese-Creole identity. Although the origins of this identity cannot be compared to the occurrence of a pandemic, the disruptive impact of the pandemic can be compared with some elements of the disruption that was caused by Africans being captivated, enslaved, and transported against their will to another continent and forced to start a completely new life in an environment unknown and unfamiliar to them.

2.7.4. *The need to adjust the field site*

With the enforcement of total lockdowns and travel restrictions, it became a challenge to continue physical fieldwork, and ultimately, I was forced to return to the Netherlands. I then continued fieldwork by applying digital fieldwork methodologies. And once the travel restrictions were lifted, I commenced physical fieldwork in the diaspora communities in the Netherlands with my Surinamese-Creole informants. Most of these informants were pre-selected through the NGO NAKS in Suriname, where I volunteered during my time in the field.

2.8. Applying a digital field site

During my fieldwork in Suriname, one of my informants introduced me to a digital platform promoting Surinamese-Creole cultural practices. She was convinced that I would benefit from the group discussions about topics relevant to the continuation and embodiment of the Surinamese-Creole identity. The digital platform was founded and managed by four Surinamese-Creoles living in the Netherlands and consisted of approximately 3,000 members. Every week, a topic with relevance to Surinamese-Creole cultural practices would be introduced by one of the administrators of the group, and members would be encouraged to engage with the topic and share their personal lived experiences. Members were also allowed to share their own topics and ask questions to broaden their knowledge about Surinamese-Creole culture.

Twice a week, I would visit the platform to observe the exchange of lived experiences and the sharing of knowledge. By engaging in these conversations, I managed to connect with a couple of the members. I shared my research questions with those interested in hearing more about my research, and based on the expressed interest, I continued to build relationships beyond the group. I arranged frequent online meetings with those who showed interest in becoming my informants. The online meetings were to have in-depth conversations about the Surinamese-Creole identity and to conduct in-depth interviews based on my research and sub-questions. The information I was able to collect was of a more narrative nature, which contributes to the narrative approach that I applied as one of my research methods.

By doing digital fieldwork, the methodology of participant observation had to be compromised. Instead, I strengthened my interview skills to gather in-depth information, and I intensified my efforts to build rapport with my informants. This required dedicated time beyond just conducting online interviews. I made sure to stay in touch with carefully selected informants and moved our relationship from them just being my informants to them becoming my friends. Some of them even became like family, and achieving this level of intimacy with my virtual informants proved to be beneficial to me once I was able to continue my physical fieldwork in the Netherlands. These friends ultimately introduced me to events I would not have been able to attend because of the strict rules to become part of the group.

2.9. Conclusion

By mapping my field prior to entering it, I aimed to provide myself with a map as a tool to structure the different dynamics that I anticipated encountering in the field, such as economic-political-social factors that might influence and shape the social lives of my informants. Once I entered the field, I was confronted with the COVID-19 pandemic. It was because of my anticipated measures that I was able to adjust to this drastic change in social life and restructure my fieldwork methodologies. One of the methodologies that proved to be applicable to any changes in the field was the use of image work. Sharing audio-visual materials with my informants strengthened my rapport with my informants and gave them a sense of responsibility. Once my informants felt involved, it became their research, and they became dedicated to collecting and sharing any additional material they thought to be useful. Another advantage of this methodology was that image work was not limited to physical contact with my informants. The audio-visuals could be shared through online platforms, which was useful during the COVID-19 pandemic and thus became my prime methodology when I developed my digital field site.

My active engagement in public debates related to themes relevant to my research led to the development of subthemes and additional research questions to further unpack the core theories of the research. The core anthropological theories of creolisation, post-colonialism, and post-colonial

identities served as my point of departure, but through the process of integrating the fieldwork methodologies with the theoretical research structures, this slightly shifted and was updated with subthemes. The revealing of subthemes such as the existence of the cultural archives, colourism, and white-Dutch self-representation amplified the deeply rooted influences of Dutch colonialism in the existence of the Surinamese-Creole way of life. Using these new insights as an awareness mechanism equipped me to better understand the data shared by my informants without being judgemental. It was important for me to remain objective and avoid colouring my own judgements based on my personal involvement in ongoing debates promoting diversity, inclusion, and decolonising activities. Becoming aware of the additional concerns in the debates about creoleness and adjusting my field approach in such a way that I did not influence my informants served as a prime example of the ethnographer's ability to be flexible.

Utilising my own lived experiences to critically reflect on and analyse collected data had a dual impact. It allowed me to constantly activate my own memories and simultaneously be prepared in that, by re-visiting my memories, there would be occasions where the accuracy and validity of these memories would need adjusting to better reflect the memory of Surinamese-Creoles as a group – this, to guarantee the outcome of the research would resonate with other creole people like me and to avoid the misrepresentation of my research subjects. Constantly being forced to remain objective was vital to my ability to produce academically valuable research, even though parts of the research were informed by my own experiences. My research, being partly an autoethnography, inspired me to become conscious of my own presence in the field and the assumptions and expectations that I carried with me. I made it an integral part of my fieldwork to constantly reflect on my engagement strategies with my informants and secure in-depth conversations with them so that I could move beyond what was observed. In the process of employing reflexivity, I often found myself struggling with Eurocentric perceptions that have shaped my way of knowing throughout the years of my education. Developing reflexive questions, therefore, was my way of securing my objectivity while processing my findings.

The fact that I was also employing a theoretical framework that consisted of predominantly Eurocentric anthropological theories raised another challenge, which I turned into an opportunity while I was in the field. The opportunity was to supplement these Eurocentric anthropological theories with new insights obtained through the collected data and, in cases where it was needed, to rectify misrepresentations about Surinamese-Creoles that had been posed by previous scholars. Including autoethnography no longer was just a way of making my dreams come through, but it more so became a paramount approach to the research, which needed much more detailed attention than the rest of the research – this, for the sole purpose of being able to guarantee the objectivity of the research and the ability of the research results to be representative of the Surinamese-Creole people as a community. My autoethnography became an extension of their voices, and, as such, it needed to be accurate and justified with proper evidence. These reflexive questions helped me to identify opportunities to collect new research data, which I will continue to unpack in the next chapters.

CHAPTER 3 BEING THE SURINAMESE-CREOLE ETHNOGRAPHER

Friday, December 6th, 2019. I finally arrived in Suriname. The moment my feet touched the Surinamese soil, a deep feeling of satisfaction and peace flowed through my whole body. My mind registered that I was home – not just home, but more so that I accomplished doing research in my country of birth. A long-kept desire was about to be fulfilled. I was wondering how I was going to manage the different roles I was about to play: researcher; Rachel, the daughter of my parents who were both excited that I would be staying with them for 12 months; Rachel, who in the past was so involved in community work, organising events, and working closely with some politicians; and the new Rachel, who had been exposed to the European lifestyle and new developments.

This chapter provides the reader with insights into my experiences once I entered the field and took on the role of the ethnographer. This chapter discusses themes such as dealing with intersubjectivity and tapping into my own memories while I was employing participant observation. This chapter also provides reflexive accounts of becoming aware of my positionality as a Surinamese-Creole woman who returned to her home country to conduct research on her own people – the different roles I represented in the field and the extent to which some of these roles interfered with the research. Most of the critical analyses are supported by vignettes describing either my own experience or encounters with some of my informants. The preceding vignette illustrates the first time I entered the field to do my research. This was a pivotal moment for me – not because this moment signified the actual commencing of the research, but because it was symbolic of my long-anticipated aspiration to utilise my study for the benefit of my own people, the Surinamese-Creoles. Being able to use my knowledge and skills to provide them a platform to tell their story felt like showing gratitude towards my ancestors who were captured and brought to a country very unfamiliar to them. The research, and thus the commencement of the fieldwork, was a symbolic tribute to them. This chapter proceeds with detailed accounts of my gradual integration into the social and local life of Paramaribo, my main field site, and the daily lives of my informants. In the conclusion, I reflect on this journey of becoming the ethnographer and how my field experiences helped shape the core of my research.

3.1. Becoming the ethnographer – developing skills and overcoming challenges

Prior to entering the field, one should do some research about the field to become aware of how to best navigate the field. In my case, I was about to enter a field that was supposed to be familiar ground. However, having immigrated to another country over 10 years previously, this familiar space was not so familiar anymore. I had to re-learn and un-learn some of my instilled social behaviours. In *Sranantongo*, the lingua franca in Suriname, there is a saying, 'Go waka nanga kon libi a no wan', which means 'to conduct a short visit and to go and live are not the same'. This saying holds some deep wisdom and implies that the depth of our engagement as one person with others is determined by the purpose of our existence in that mutual space we are in. Just visiting the other does not require us to completely adjust and adopt the social behaviour of the other. But, in the case of deciding to move in and live with the other, the initial requirement would be to first learn all the ins and outs of that new space that you are about to inhabit. Learning the ins and outs does not guarantee a smooth integration, as one will have to submit to what the others in that same space have already agreed on and established as the rules and regulations. In essence, this saying implies that establishing long-term engagement and relationships does require adjustments that are not necessarily pleasant experiences.

Another saying is 'efu den a dansi tapu wan futu, yu musu dansi tapu wan futu tu'. This saying serves as the next advice to make your process of adjusting to the long-term relationship smooth. It literally

means 'if they are dancing on one foot, you just do the same'. In other words, just copy their social behaviours and you should be fine. These quotes are very much embedded in the Surinamese-Creole culture and serve as guidelines to navigate through life. Further in the thesis, I will elaborate on the use of these quotes and the way they shape the way of thinking and way of loving of Surinamese-Creoles. There is always the expectation that one should acknowledge that life cannot be lived in a singular manner. They believe that practising togetherness, striving to provide for and share with others, and creating a sense of community are the ingredients to achieving fulfilment and prosperity in life. Both sayings served as my motto, and I constantly reflected on them in situations where I found myself struggling to adjust.

3.1.1. *Intersubjectivity in conducting ethnographic work*

In the collection of the data, it remains important to know that the data shared by the informants is fuelled by their own concerns rather than those of the researcher. To maintain the relationship with the informant, it often requires taking a stand and being aware of the risk of gaining subjective, one-sided insight about social dynamics in the field. Neutrality as a participant observer becomes a challenge. On the other hand, it remains a fact that we as observers do not enter the field as neutral and passive learners. Instead, we are carrying theoretical and emotional baggage with us (Jeffrey Cohen 2010: 4) that colours how we contextualise the collected data. The notion of intersubjectivity reminds us as ethnographers that we should always consider our actions and the way they might affect others. My previously mentioned mottos very much prepared me as an ethnographer to be aware of intersubjectivity and be considerate about my ways of interacting with my informants. In his book *Minima Ethnographica – Intersubjectivity and the Anthropological Project* (1998), Michael Jackson argues that our understanding of the other never arrives in a neutral or disengaged manner. Our social roles and social relationships in the field can quickly become intertwined with those of our informants, and, as such, colour our understanding of the collected data. The social roles that we take on in the field sometimes can serve as a key to open doors that would have remained closed, but simultaneously, the social roles can become an obstacle to engaging in a subjective manner with the informants. Further in this chapter, I will continue analysing my social roles in the context of my positionality and how that affected my fieldwork.

Prior to entering the field, I had a profound experience that set the tone for the rest of my engagement with the field and my informants. It was the sudden death of my mother-in-law. Experiencing the preparations for the funeral and the funeral itself and then visiting her grave served as my first introduction to gaining first-hand knowledge of the way notions of neutrality, intersubjectivity, and the complexity of different social roles become vivid experiences in the field. As my husband and I were preparing ourselves mentally to face being separated from each other for at least 12 months – in the 20 years that we've been together, we've never been separated for longer than 1 week – we were confronted with the sudden death of his mother. Nothing had prepared us for this horrible occurrence. As a family, we were broken and left with so many unanswered questions. These questions were related to the unfortunate lack of proper medical care in Suriname, the country where I was planning to do fieldwork. Yet, Suriname, being the country where I was born, remained my choice for doing the research.

The sudden death of my mother-in-law introduced me to a world of Creole culture I had never fully experienced before. As odd as it may sound, her death turned into a valuable information source. As we were preparing for her funeral and my husband's departure to attend the funeral, I was introduced to a whole new world of practices related to dealing with death and grief to which I was never fully exposed. It is important to note that both my husband and I are Creole. Being acknowledged as a Creole in Suriname means that at least one of your forefathers was of African descent. However, during my preliminary visit to Suriname, I learned that being acknowledged as a Creole also depends

on other, more deeply rooted factors. One is religious practices incorporated into the way of life. Most Creoles are known for practising Christianity, but many also practise *Winti*.

Winti is a religious system which the enslaved Africans brought from their place of origin in Africa and adjusted to their spiritual interpretations of occurrences in their living environment in Suriname. Amongst Creoles, there seems to be a love–hate relationship between the Christian religion and *Winti*. Some practise both and some practise just one. Those practising Christianity tend to denigrate *Winti* and view it as demonic and misleading. And those who predominantly practise *Winti* view the Christians as traitors and hypocrites because they firmly believe that Christianity was introduced to the enslaved Africans as a powerful and effective tool of division and oppression. Yet, from my own experience, there are also those who are firm Christianity supporters but combine their religion with *Winti* practices. Both my husband and I have been in the middle of this subtle religious way-of-life power struggle.

My husband was raised with *Winti* practices combined with Christianity, and I had a strictly Christian upbringing. My parents both firmly rejected anything having to do with *Winti*. When my husband and I decided to get married, some of his family members were worried that I might convert him to Christianity and cause a divide in his family. Some of his family members refused to acknowledge our marriage and distanced themselves from us. However, as I continued my fieldwork, I came to realise that the differences between the Christian-related Surinamese-Creole and the *Winti*-related Surinamese-Creole became of less significance during certain vital life events, such as death. According to what I've heard from a close friend, *Winti* does not allow conflict and anger between family members to surround the dead family member. My husband travelled to Suriname to attend the funeral, and I stayed in the Netherlands to be with family and friends. Arrangements were made for me to virtually witness the funeral and pay my final respects to my mother-in-law. The following ethnographic account details how I engaged with this experience.

The rituals during the funeral were a mixture of Christianity and Winti. My in-laws practise both. As I was observing and going through all the rituals, I felt uncomfortable. It started with the buying of the clothes for my deceased mother-in-law, my husband, my sister-in-law, and her children. One important decision was the colour of the clothes. This choice was subject to my mother-in-law's preference of colour when she was alive. The dress code was also determined by her preferences when she was alive. Both decisions were determined by her daughter (my sister-in-law) as her only daughter.

My mother-in-law was supposed to be dressed in such a way that she would be the star of the ceremony. From accessories to even her underwear, her clothes were to be in such perfect condition that she would be the shining star. As the wife of the eldest son, I took it upon myself to provide the clothing. And as I was shopping, searching for the best of the best, it felt as if I was shopping for a big celebration, a birthday, a wedding, or something very exciting. I constantly had to remind myself that I was shopping for a funeral. And it was then that I realised, 'the planning of a funeral was almost similar to the planning of a huge celebration'. The only difference was that the person who was about to receive all the attention was dead. Never have I felt such mixed feelings towards an event. A mixture of sadness and joy, beautiful perfection, and such deep emotions of pain and loss.

In the days leading up to the funeral, people came over in the evening to comfort the family. These evenings also had the characteristics of a celebration. The food to be served would be selected carefully. The day before the funeral was the wake. In Sranantongo, the wake is called 'Singi neti', which literally means 'night of singing'. I don't dare go into details yet about this specific practice related to Creole funerals, as it is a very important practice on its own. It deserves much detailed description which I cannot provide at this point. Therefore, I have it marked in my field notes as one event I have to collect much more in-depth data about. The only thing I want to emphasise is that the preparations are very much like a party. A large tent

is built (or rented, in the case of my in-laws) to accommodate guests. Announcements are made via the media to inform and invite people. Drinks and food are prepared, songs are carefully selected, the dress code is again discussed extensively, and a master of ceremonies (which has a different title and role when it comes to leading this particular event) is carefully selected as well.

The day of the funeral reflects a mixture of rituals and practices. The service is very emotional and pretty much focused on comforting the family. Then comes the moment of carrying the casket to the grave. This again turns into a celebration. A music band is hired, and while on the way to the grave, their music fills the air, mixed with the crying of family members, laughter because of the cheerful music, and words of blessings from the crowd towards the deceased. These words of blessing are meant to guide her to her 'new home'. The men carrying the casket are part of the undertaker's service and specifically trained for the job. They dance, turn, jump, and switch the casket from one shoulder to the other as if it is just as light as a feather. Meanwhile, the musicians play one swinging tune after another. Nothing of what they are playing is sentimental and emotional.

All the songs are screaming celebration, joy, and happiness for the deceased. As the men dance past the crowd with the casket on their shoulders, those standing alongside the path to the grave throw flowers towards the casket. Once all arrive at the grave, it becomes silent and official again. You can clearly feel the importance and definite end in that moment. This is when it all becomes emotional and very painful again. I was watching the whole funeral via a livestream, but when that definite moment came, I disconnected the livestream and chose to spend that moment with myself in complete silence. I was trying to process the fact that I would no longer have a mother-in-law; simultaneously, I tried to make sense of the confusing mixture of celebrating life and dealing with death.

As soon as I arrived in Suriname for my fieldwork, my very first activity was visiting the grave of my mother-in-law. I took the firm decision to visit her grave and perform the rituals as was expected in Winti. I did it as a last tribute to my mother-in-law since she was a dedicated believer in Winti. My family has no knowledge about these things, or so I thought. I asked my uncle's wife for advice since she is part of one of the many associations of undertakers. This would be my first time engaging in Winti practices. I must admit, I was nervous. Coming from a strict Christian background, it felt as if I was committing a sin. I spoke to my mum about it, and she had her doubts. I was able to convince her that it was important for my research. Whenever I want to engage with Winti-related practices, I've noticed that my mum becomes nervous until I explain that my engagement is part of my research.

The instructions to visit the grave were the following: 'Buy a bottle of water to bring with you to the grave. When you are at the grave, knock three times on the stone and then mention your name. Tell her that you came to visit her, but make sure to mention that it won't be a regular thing; otherwise, she might have expectations, and if you are not able to meet the expectations, she might cause you problems. Then, while talking to her in a rhythmic manner, pour water on the ground in front of her head-end and tell her what you are about to do; ask her for guidance, ask her for protection, ask her for wisdom, ask her for open doors, ask her to give you signs. And when you are finished, drink some of the water, and wash your face with the rest of it. Then, you can leave, but don't mention that you are leaving. Just tell her to sleep well and then walk away.'

I must admit, while listening to these instructions, I became a bit worried that I might forget the order of doing things, or I might do it the way it should not be done! My uncle's wife was very strict in explaining to me what to do. I couldn't help but feel a bit pressured. The next day after my arrival, early in the morning, I went with my father-in-law to the grave. He didn't ask me if I knew what to do and how to do it, so I asked him to buy me a bottle of water. I noticed that he didn't ask for details; instead, he stopped at a small convenience store and bought me the bottle of water. When we arrived at the grave, he gave me the space to do my thing while watching me closely. He didn't interfere or correct me. When I became too emotional, he hugged me and turned me away from the grave. I didn't even fully register that he kept me

turned away from the grave as I continued to cry. It was only when I returned home, and my mum asked me if I had made sure not to let my tears fall on the grave, that I realised why he had kept turning me away from the grave in moments when I had become too emotional. It was to avoid my tears falling on the grave. I didn't dare ask my mum why my tears shouldn't have fallen on the grave. What I did realise is that, after that day at the grave, my father-in-law and I developed a closer relationship.

This experience with my in-laws introduced me to my first challenge of practising neutrality. I realised that these two different ways of life amongst Surinamese-Creole people might become a challenge for me to properly engage with my informants. In a conversation I had with a prominent Afro-Surinamese culture expert, he explained to me that Christianity was one of the most powerful weapons used by the then-slave masters to create separation, hate, distrust, and disloyalty amongst the enslaved Africans. If there was distrust amongst them, it was easier to keep the enslaved oppressed and the runaways away from attacking the plantations. The two different ways of life could be observed in the smallest details, such as daily life practices, rituals, and lived experiences of the Afro-Surinamese people.

As the notion of neutrality implies, one cannot remain neutral and objective. Instead, making a choice becomes crucial in moving forward and becoming intimate with the informant, more so in the case of selecting key informants. In making a choice, my own lived experiences as a Surinamese-Creole woman who was born and raised in a strict Christian household became a burden that I had to overcome. My Christian background could potentially work for or against me in the field. Remaining neutral would not be an option, as this could be translated as being disinterested, which could lead to mistrust. The following section goes into detail about my positionality in the field. The experiences I am drawing from allow for further in-depth analysis of social roles and the way these can dictate embodying an identity and creating allies. Depending on the circumstances, these identities and allies can become restrictive, or they can serve as a great asset to gain success.

3.2. My positionality in the field

When we enter the field, we should be conscious of ourselves, the theoretical baggage that we carry with us, our own life history, and the way this will interact with the local social relationships that we will encounter. That is what notions such as intersubjectivity and reflexivity teach us. When in the field, we cannot make ourselves invisible (J.H. Cohen 2010). Therefore, it is important to be aware of our position in the field, how we self-identify, and how this can influence our research subjects. Jeffrey Cohen (2010) states, 'we will have to establish an identity for ourselves. One that will correspond with local ideas of morality'. In this case, taking on an identity reverses the notion of human sociality (João De Pina-Cabral 2017: 101). The acceptance of one as a person happens through shared agreements, a narrative context about what it is to be a person. I want to use this same argument to further analyse the different positions that I found myself in and how I navigated hierarchical and power-infused situations.

My position as a Black married woman with Surinamese-Creole roots, coming from a working-class family, born and raised in the suburbs of the district of Nickerie in Suriname, and being the first in my family to pursue a doctoral degree would either work for my benefit or against me. Depending on the self-identification that I would embrace, I was inclined to switch between several social roles. Some of these roles were adopted based on existing expectations of the different communities that I engaged with and unwritten rules of which I was informed, depending on my acceptance in the different groups. One experience during my orientation field trip supports the importance of being aware of your identity and its relevance to pre-constructed and socially agreed-upon narratives in the field. During my orientation visit, I stayed in a Maroon village in the interior of Suriname. The Maroons are part of the Afro-Surinamese community. They have their own established rules and regulations, norms and values that should be followed strictly by everyone living in and visiting a Maroon village. Some of these agreements dictate the way a woman should socially behave and engage with others in the

village. Upon my arrival, I immediately was made aware of my non-Maroon background and thus elaborately informed about the very strict rules for women. I was urged to adhere to them. Not adhering might result in being disrespected by men in the village or eventually being banned from the village.

The rules I had to submit to were not in accordance with my own ideas of womanhood and what I was taught during my upbringing as a Surinamese-Creole girl. Yet, in order to be accepted during my time in the village, I chose to adapt to the temporary role of being a Maroon woman and portraying the expected social behaviour. This experience taught me the importance of compromising my self-identity and taking on an identity that resonates with locally shared agreements to gain acceptance from my research subjects without creating a barrier because of my own position. I used this experience as an example to prepare for my actual fieldwork, pre-analyse my own positionality, and carefully consider the identity I could best embrace and portray to get access.

Being able to investigate what identity would be acceptable in the field allowed me to better define my place in these communities. Being aware that I would never be able to fully temper my positionality, I prepared for possible power struggles I might have had to face in the field due to either my ethnic background, my educational background, my non-Surinamese nationality (when I moved from Suriname, I accepted Dutch nationality and had to give up my Surinamese nationality), or my former position as a Christian youth leader in one of the leading Christian churches in Suriname. In Suriname, the political scenery is very much integrated with daily life occurrences. Affiliation with one of the political parties works as a stain for all family members and becomes a label. My family's longstanding history with one of the political parties also became a possible factor that could have determined my position in the field. In the following paragraphs, I will go through the different social roles that I identified with while being in the field and address the complexities of navigating through the dynamism of social life.

3.2.1. *Being a young married woman alone in the field*

My social identity as being female would not form an obstacle in engaging with my research subjects. Several social, cultural, and anthropological studies about Surinamese-Creole women have shown that this community is very much dominated and dictated by women. Researchers such as Gloria Wekker (2006) and Rudolf van Lier (1949) addressed the sexual position of Surinamese-Creole women in Suriname and its relevance to West African societies, where sexual relationships between women are a common phenomenon. Some studies argue that this prominent role of women in Surinamese-Creole communities is a result of slavery, in which enslaved men were discouraged and forbidden to engage in long-term relationships (R. van Lier 1949 and M. J. Herskovits 1958). The women would engage in same-sex relationships to sustain each other financially and in raising each other's children. Due to the absence of men as the caretakers of the family, the women were forced to take on this role and build their community to survive. Others argue that the leading role of the Surinamese-Creole women in the community is embedded in the *Winti* religion in Suriname.

Elements of *Winti* are very much woven into the daily life practices of those who profess it. Women take an important role in the ritual practices of the *Winti* religion. *Winti* is manifested through different entities, and the most important entity is *Mama Aisa* (Joop Vernooij 2003 and Nel Sedoc 1999), a female personification. Later in the thesis, I will further describe the role of *Winti* and its relevance to the Surinamese-Creole identity. Being married also would not have been an obstacle were it not for the fact that I was alone in the field, while my husband stayed in the UK. It is a fact that young women in Suriname must constantly deal with men who are openly flirtatious. Being married, yet alone, in Suriname translated, for most men, to me being a single woman. My family expressed their concerns about me living alone as a married woman. Their concerns varied from my not being able to sexually engage over a long period of time to not being able to sustain myself financially.

Coming from a Christian household, it was my duty to serve my husband, including meeting his sexual needs. My family was concerned that our being away from each other over such a long period of time could eventually result in infidelity in our marriage. My husband and I are very well known in Suriname. Everywhere I went, the first question would be where my husband was, followed by 'will he

join you soon?', and when I denied that he would join me, the next response was one of concern, or some would even dare to make a naughty comment about me finally being free to do whatever I want. It quickly became one of the main things I had to navigate daily, and I had to seek ways to make my singleness as a married woman not the topic of the conversation. Engaging with male informants, therefore, was more challenging, and my choice of male key informants required thorough explaining to my family and close friends, as they were concerned about the long hours that I would spend with these male informants.

3.2.2. *My Creoleness*

As discussed in the Introduction, the variety of ethnic groups, such as the white colonisers, the Amerindians, the contract workers from China, India, Java, and the enslaved Africans, willingly and unwillingly were engaged in sexual relationships and as a result bore mixed-race children. The hybridity of African descendants with other ethnic groups has led to the birth of the Surinamese-Creole. However, the identification of Surinamese-Creoles is very much a complex combination of geographical location, social class, and the preference of families as to whether they will acknowledge the existence of African descent in the family (Albert Helman, 1977). In this complexity of being identified as a Creole, I have been raised with the firm understanding that my family is Surinamese-Creole, and I identify as such, too. However, during my fieldwork, I was confronted with informants with clear indications of African descent, mixed with another ethnicity, and they would prefer not to be identified as creole. Their preference was to be identified as just Surinamese; otherwise, they would embrace the other ethnicity.

There was another group who identified as light-skinned Surinamese-Creole, *mulat*, because of their European roots. In Surinamese society, amongst the Surinamese-Creole people, there exists the notion of colourism. Usually, the light-skinned Surinamese-Creoles are in a privileged and economic-political high position. Although there also are light-skinned Surinamese-Creoles in the lower social class, usually, they have other-than-European ethnic genes. It is worth noting that the presence of European genes determines socio-cultural differences with other non-light-skinned creoles. The existence of subtle colourism in Suriname finds its roots in the time of slavery when there was deliberate prejudice and favouritism nurtured amongst the slaves by the slave masters (Cynthia McLeod 2000, 2011). The colour of the skin of the enslaved was objectified to determine the value of the enslaved and their role and position in society (Anton de Kom 1934).

When I lived in Suriname, I was used to this prejudice amongst Surinamese-Creoles. Based on my darker skin tone, I was always aware of having to compete with creoles with a lighter skin tone. This competition was reinforced by the fact that I also came from a working-class family. My family had no influence or recognition in the political or socio-economic arena. We were just a simple family from the suburbs. During the time of my fieldwork, I noticed a subtle change in the way some of the light-skinned Surinamese-Creoles would engage with me. They were excited to meet me; there was no hesitancy or prejudice in engaging with me. I realised that their interest in me was very much because of my UK resident status and my education. The colour of my skin became of less importance, and I found myself in social circles that I would have never been able to access before the time that I left Suriname. This was an interesting observation, and I made a note to myself to further explore this shift in acceptance. My position as a Creole engaging with other Surinamese-Creole people was also put to the test based on my knowledge of and familiarity with the *Winti* religion. It is interesting to note that it was specifically the darker-skin-toned Surinamese-Creole people who would use this requirement in a very subtle way to decide whether to accept me in their circles.

The notion of positionality based on my creoleness was my very first evidence-based experience with the notion of categories as imposed structures in the form of labels. Being categorised into different groups because of existing (even if unwritten) rules to determine the level of my creoleness prompted me to create a narrative for myself that would enhance my creoleness to gratify the expectations of the group I desired to become intimate with for the purpose of my research. In being accepted into different groups, I realised that the common denominator was my residential status and current nationality. Both granted me the status of an 'outsider', and in Suriname and the Surinamese-Creole community, it is an unwritten rule to be open, welcoming, kind, and supportive to strangers. I needed

to embrace being alienated by my own people, whom I had known since I was born. This included my family and my friends. Embracing this as my positionality felt strange, often left me with feelings of rejection, and placed me in a position I never anticipated to ever find myself in.

I became Rachel from the UK, or Rachel with a Dutch nationality, and my creoleness became of less importance – until I would indicate my eagerness to engage in deeper conversations about *Winti* rituals and practices. Then, figuratively speaking, I would be invited into the living room, but certainly not into the kitchen. I would remain a guest until they felt they could trust me enough to allow me a ‘peep’ into the kitchen. In the paragraph where I describe the building of an intimate relationship with my informants, I will go further into detail about this level of acceptance by my informants. Access to the community of *Winti* practitioners and followers of the *Winti* religion was the hardest thing to accomplish. It has put both my boundaries, my preconceived notions of good and evil, and my personal self-identification to the test. Yet, it turned out to be the most relevant field experience to teach me how to become a skilled ethnographer, who is now able to balance different tools of data collection, not afraid to stretch my own possibilities yet remain respectful of the boundaries of my informants, and flexibly navigate the different dynamics of the field while using each opportunity and challenge as a valuable learning moment. The next subsection depicts my journey through the field while embodying my role as a participant observer and an ethnographer.

3.2.3. *Being the lone jobless ethnographer*

Once I settled in the field, the syndrome of the ‘lone’ ethnographer became very much vivid in my daily life. This self-image, combined with the fact that I was also a married creole woman with no income, and the first in my family to complete a PhD, caused numerous complicated and sometimes uncomfortable conversations with my family and friends. Being a self-funded student with the sole support of a doctoral loan, doing fieldwork abroad without any other source of income created tremendous pressure on my husband. He had to endure the blame of being too easy on me. I had to defend myself, while often being accused of being selfish.

My choice to do a PhD often felt as if I had willingly signed up for failure. The constant lack of money placed me in a constant state of anxiety. On the other hand, finding myself in such a state taught me to push through my boundaries, to step out of my comfort zone and actively seek possibilities to survive. I forced myself to draw a map of contacts I still knew about in Suriname. This map of contacts consisted of people and events that might be of benefit in helping me succeed with the execution of my fieldwork. Networking made me realise how important it is to maintain relationships, even if these contacts were established a long time ago. Juggling between doing fieldwork and maintaining myself taught me about my own strengths and limitations. My tendency not to be dependent on people was put to the test, and I came to learn that being dependent doesn’t necessarily mean that you are weak as a person. Dependency taught me to polish my negotiation skills to avoid becoming a victim and instead become an achiever and negotiator, even if it was without available means and resources.

Dealing with minimal financial resources also taught me to better identify potholes and prepare in advance to work around these. Unforeseen situations created less anxiety as I taught myself to always look for possibilities instead of limitations and obstacles. And it is with this attitude that I continued to move from the position of the ‘lone’ ethnographer to being the ethnographer with a powerful network. As one of my contacts taught me along the way, ‘if you do not have the capital, always make sure to at least have the social capital’. And that is what my network became, the most valuable resource I could have ever asked for.

3.2.4. *Becoming a volunteer*

Volunteering was my way in, my ‘passport’ to enter the main and important Surinamese-Creole communities. In Suriname, there are several organisations actively involved in the promotion and safeguarding of Afro-Surinamese culture, but there are two organisations that are vital in the safeguarding of Surinamese-Creole culture: the *Koto* Museum and NAKS Suriname.

3.2.5. *Volunteering at the Koto Museum*

This museum advocates for the preservation and knowledge-sharing of the *kotomisi*. Around 1887, enslaved women and free Surinamese-Creole women introduced traditional dress that would serve as fashion to express their resistance against slavery and simultaneously a way to celebrate their talent and knowledge in making something as simple as clothing into a statement of self-identity and a way of life (Ilse Henar-Hewitt 1997).

The story of the *kotomisi* is one that remains relevant and of great importance to the identity of Surinamese-Creole women. Even though there remains a lot of controversy around the origin of the *koto*, the dress of the *kotomisi*, this object is the most recognised material culture attached to Surinamese-Creole culture. In the chapter about the embodiment of the Surinamese-Creole identity, I will elaborate on this object and its relevance to the continuation of the Surinamese-Creole identity. To continue the story of my volunteer job at the *Koto Museum*, working as a volunteer in this museum allowed me to conduct research about the history of Surinamese-Creole women. Simultaneously, working closely with the owner and curator of the museum, Mrs. Christine van Russel, was an opportunity to adopt her as one of my informants and develop our relationship from friends into research partners. I specifically say research partners because my volunteering role consisted of assisting her in collecting data and structuring the data for her next exhibition about the *kotomisi*. Mrs. van Russel has been a friend of mine since the first time she dressed me in a *koto*. I was 15 years old, and I was one of the contestants in a *kotomisi* contest.

That was my first encounter with the *koto* and the story of the *kotomisi*. In hindsight, I believe it was this first experience that ignited a passion in me to become closely involved in the safeguarding of Surinamese-Creole culture. Although I have always been involved in activities surrounding the promotion and the safeguarding of Surinamese-Creole culture, I have never been so intimately involved in the lives of the people who identify as such. Being involved in activities and building an intimate relationship are two totally different levels of engagement, yet my previous experience supported my current needs to do research. Being already familiar with programs and activities within Surinamese-Creole culture was an advantage I benefited from. Mrs. van Russel knew about my previous experiences with socio-cultural activities and felt confident having me as her assistant in the museum. From the point of view of my research, our relationship transformed into a deeper level of connection. She became my promoter, my guardian, and my advisor to further access other Surinamese-Creole communities. My tasks as her assistant included reviewing the policies and procedures of the museum, assisting with the re-decoration of the museum, constructing a 5-year plan of action to gradually introduce the new face of the museum, helping prepare exhibitions in Suriname and in the Netherlands, and guiding tourists/visitors through the museum.

Mrs. van Russel was not just an informant. Her contribution to my research was of the utmost value because of her lineage as a Surinamese-Creole woman – to be specific, a light-skinned Surinamese-Creole woman, who was involved in the safeguarding of a practice that was mostly embraced by dark-skin-toned Surinamese-Creole women. Mrs. van Russel learned about the *koto* and the life of the *kotomisi* through her mother, who again learned the skills and knowledge from her mother, who was a *kotomisi*. Mrs. van Russel stems from a long line of *kotomisis*, and the knowledge and lifestyle have been passed on through generations. The story of Mrs. van Russel is not unique. It is common in Surinamese-Creole families to have a long lineage of *kotomisis*. Yet, not all Surinamese-Creole families preserved this lifestyle. The role and contribution of the *kotomisi* in the development of the Surinamese-Creole identity is of such value that it is impossible to ignore their story. The lore and oral stories of the *kotomisi* in relation to the existence of differences in socio-economic class, status, and the notion of colourism amongst Surinamese-Creoles have narrated the different perceptions of being a Creole in Suriname.

3.2.6. *Volunteering at NAKS, the Committee, Cultural, and Community Organisation*

Another volunteering job of mine was at the largest and oldest non-governmental organisation for the safeguarding of the Afro-Surinamese culture in Suriname. NAKS was founded in May 1947, and their mission is to bring together youngsters and adults of African descent and transfer traditional

knowledge and other cultural elements of our rich culture. To properly achieve our mission, we at NAKS diligently develop products to contribute to the cultural identity and self-image of Afro-Surinamese people. The safeguarding of traditional dress, language, literature, religion, rituals, craft, food, music, theatre, and storytelling are some of the cultural elements that take centre stage in our annual programming. The activities then serve both as cultural expressions and as documentation and preservation.

In 2020, NAKS officially became a UNESCO-accredited NGO and a member of the UNESCO NGO Forum for the safeguarding of the immaterial cultural heritage of different groups in the world. This membership provided them a broader platform to engage with other NGOs world-wide and share their knowledge on the safeguarding of the immaterial cultural heritage of Afro-Surinamese culture. The president of the NGO is Mrs. Siegmien Powel-Staphorst, who has successfully built a longstanding career in the NGO field in Suriname. She has been at the forefront of women's empowerment programs and remains the driving force behind the development of women and young adults. Her influence in the field of socio-cultural development cannot be overstated. In particular, her involvement in the transmission, preservation, and safeguarding of Afro-Surinamese intangible cultural elements is of great importance.

My relationship with Mrs. Staphorst stems from the time when I was working with women empowerment NGOs in Suriname in my role as the project coordinator for one of these NGOs. When I drew my lists of contacts, I wrote Mrs. Staphorst's name with the intent to approach her and explore my options of becoming involved in the activities involving Surinamese-Creole culture as part of Afro-Surinamese culture. Mrs. Staphorst was happy to introduce me to the NAKS community, and because of my residency in the UK, she asked me to become a representative for NAKS in the UNESCO NGO Forum. I happily accepted her offer and quickly became involved in the vibrant and very dynamic cultural scene that is typical of NAKS. I remained the representative, and I am still actively involved in NAKS activities. My tasks entail supporting and initiating public events promoting Afro-Surinamese culture. I am working closely with other members, and, as such, I am directly involved in the implementation of brainstorm sessions with some of the divisions of NAKS to help develop projects supporting the safeguarding and promotion of Afro-Surinamese culture. By doing so, I am exposed to oral stories, knowledge, lived experiences, and traditional practices and rituals related to Afro-Surinamese culture in general and Surinamese-Creole culture in particular.

Over the past years, NAKS has developed a series of cultural products to promote the ethnic and cultural diversity of Surinamese society. It started with the *Alakondre dron*, which is a music ensemble showcasing the rhythm of drums from different ethnic groups. In 2020, NAKS launched the *Alakondre* dance ensemble, which is a composition of the dance styles of the different ethnic groups in Suriname. And in my role as a NAKS representative in the UNESCO NGO Forum, I, together with a couple of members from NAKS, developed the newest project, the *Alakondre Tori* toolkit, which is a collection of storytelling practices from the different ethnic groups in Suriname. Becoming an active member of NAKS accelerated my efforts to actively be included in the intimate circles of Surinamese-Creole people. Simultaneously, my choice to become a member compromised my active membership in the church. The church is not always in favour of the activities employed by NAKS. There is a very biased idea that NAKS solely promotes the *Winti* religion and therefore will not be acknowledged by most churches. My openly promoting my affiliation with and membership in NAKS led to an uncomfortable situation with the church I was attending when I lived in Suriname before. This discomfort increased as my involvement in NAKS intensified. And although none of my church relations ever openly addressed my membership in NAKS, I could observe the distance that some would create. I must admit that much of this distance between me and my church relations also came from my side.

Being exposed to the involvement of the church in slavery, their contribution to the existence of preconceived notions of demonising the *Winti* religion, and evidence of deliberate choices made by the church in depriving the enslaved Africans of their own culture and spirituality reinforced my feelings of doubt, sometimes to the extreme of disgust, against Christianity. I still find myself struggling to navigate between Christianity and the *Winti* religion, and in the chapter about embodiment, I will address this dichotomy in detail.

3.3. Adapting to the lifestyle and expectations of my informants

Earlier in this chapter, I referred to the inability of the ethnographer to remain invisible in the field. Instead, we as ethnographers must learn to navigate through social interactions and remain objective, neutral. Employing intimate participation does not happen without complications. The problem is that once we become intimate with our informants, the rest of the local community immediately associates us with everything our informants represent. Whether we want to ignore it or not, our choice of informants becomes a politically loaded choice. We are seen as 'belonging to them and being part of them'. The 'them' refers to the fact that we become 'the other', and in this case, 'other' does not just refer to being an outsider. It is the position that's been imposed, the outsider who made a choice for a faction in the community.

Becoming aware of this delicate aspect of becoming intimate with your informants for the sake of proper participant observations made me aware of the subtle presence of politics and factionalism, because of alliances. Jeffrey Cohen (2022) addresses these as factors that make fieldwork complicated and restrict the ethnographer in the opportunity of moving in and out of the roles of participant observer and distant observer. Furthermore, Jeffrey Cohen argues that factions in a community are shifting and difficult to predict, particularly during times of social change. An example of such social change can be caused by changes in political hierarchy in a community – power struggles amongst community members, competitions for status and leadership. Due to being considered an alliance, these shifts in power and social changes have an immediate effect on our position as ethnographers in the field, our ability to continue to build bridges, and our actions to actively seek interactions across different groups in the community. During my fieldwork, I was exposed to these challenges caused by the alliances I established.

Learning what our role is in the relationships we establish, recognising the changes that are happening in these relationships, and anticipating possible solutions to minimise the impact of these changes on our own position in the field becomes pivotal in the process of building relationships with informants. Therefore, in the process of establishing intimate relations, it is of the utmost importance that we remain aware of the fact that social relationships between informants and between us as field workers and informants are in constant flux (Jeffrey Cohen 2022). One way to minimise the effects of social change is learning not to become too dependent on the informants and maintaining that thin line between becoming a member of the group yet remaining the outsider and the author of your own research. In the next paragraphs, I draw attention to the complexities in building an intimate relationship with informants, and I share my way of dealing with some complex challenges to minimise any obstacles and rather focus on identifying the possibilities provided to me during fieldwork.

3.3.1. *Attending and coordinating social events with my informants*

Following my arrival in the field, I proactively engaged in various types of activities relevant to my research. Through mapping my network, I had a proper calendar with activities relevant to my research. My activities calendar included a list of public and private parties, public events related to celebrating Afro-Surinamese culture, and family events where I could observe and reflect on my own creoleness. The calendar was supported by a list of people who could introduce me to these events and a geographical overview of the various locations so I could organise my transportation. Attending these events and parties was my way to define my place in the community, engage with potential informants, and learn about the local worldview. It was a weird sensation to distance myself from what I already knew about Suriname and my field site (based on the time when I lived there), but simultaneously it was an enriching experience to observe a familiar space and place as an outsider.

I arrived in Suriname on 6 December 2019. December is known to be the month of an array of private parties and public events involving Afro-Surinamese culture. The list of people to contact contained people well connected with experts on Surinamese-Creole culture, people involved in cultural-spiritual practices relevant to the culture, people of Surinamese-Creole origin who could serve as potential informants, and contacts who could connect me with someone of importance within Surinamese-Creole culture. The following ethnographic account illustrates one event that I attended thanks to the networks I was able to establish. I also illustrate in this ethnographic account how I navigated the field of NGOs involved in safeguarding Surinamese-Creole culture and the way I was deliberate in making a conscious choice to work with one particular NGO.

From the beginning of December to the 24th of December, all activities exude Christmas vibes, biblical morals, and human kindness. Paramaribo is turned into a sea of lights, Christmas lights. Restaurants, party promoters, rental companies for event locations, party shops, you name it. They all circulate flyers, infomercials, and other innovative promotion stunts to attract young and old, locals and tourists, to engage in an array of events. I managed to establish a close relationship with the chair of one of the oldest NGOs safeguarding Afro-Surinamese culture in Suriname. Through this relationship, I was privileged to receive invitations to some quite exclusive events which I would have never imagined attending.

'Broko brede' is what it was called, the event⁴⁵. It literally means 'breaking bread'. Mrs. Staphorst from NAKS recommended I attend the event and sent me the invitation. When I received the invitation, I had no idea what to expect. All she said was, 'You should attend this event on my behalf. It will be worthwhile for your research.' On the flyer, included in the invitation, it was stated that the invitation was for morticians, shamans, medicine men, and all others associated with the practices of Afro-Surinamese culture. I had no idea what would be expected from me since I did not fit any of these roles. The instructions were very particular: Dress in blue and white, or just blue, or just white. Cover your head with a white or blue headkerchief or head tie. Bring along your own calabash to eat and to drink. I had no problem with the first two instructions. Those, I could easily get done. All I had to do was ask my auntie to help me out. But the latter, about the calabash, was a problem. I panicked.

My panic was caused by the word 'calabash', and my suspicions of what they might ask me to engage with when I attended the event. The word 'calabash' evoked my mother's voice in my head: 'Make sure you do not engage in too many Winti activities, because Winti is not good. It is demonic and will cause too many problems.' In Suriname, the use of a calabash is immediately associated with Winti practices. I was worried. Worried about what could happen and, most importantly, about being seen buying this object. One can only purchase a calabash in places such as the market or in shops that sell objects for the use of ritual practices. As a well-known Christian woman, I did not want to be seen in one of these places, buying a calabash. That would be a confirmation to those who were whispering that my choice of studying anthropology was equivalent to choosing the path of doom. I heard about these whispering voices through a close friend who knew one of the people talking behind my back. That's how it goes in Suriname. 'Mofo koranti' is what we say in Suriname. The spreading of rumours. It is one of the most feared things in Suriname. To become subject to the 'mofo koranti'. Me being seen buying a calabash would definitely place me in the crosshairs of these 'mofo koranti' lovers. I hate being talked about.

So, my solution was to ask a newly met friend. She worked at the Koto Museum (I also worked as a volunteer there). I invited her to accompany me to the event (I was allowed to bring a plus-one) and to buy us whatever we needed to adhere to the dress code and the other requirements, such as bringing along a calabash. She was one of the many Surinamese-Creole women who openly embraced the Winti religion; thus, she had no problem purchasing the calabash. I must admit, I was a bit jealous of her being able to freely express her engagement with this part of her creoleness. I was not there yet. I was still testing the waters, and my Christianity still caused so much restriction. She had no problem combining her Christian background with the Winti religion. Seamlessly, she weaved both religions into her own daily life. And still, she was always happy,

⁴⁵ To have a glimpse of this event, please visit the following link for a short video report of the event: *Eerste Broko Brede in multifunctioneel centrum* (youtube.com) Copyright Starnieuws Suriname. accessed 03/05/'24.

very kind, so wise and knowledgeable, and so easy to become friends with. Nothing in her appearance screamed of having many problems from being a Winti believer. We became friends, and I adopted her as my sister. She shared many of her experiences with me, and she became my safe space to get to know what it means to be a Winti believer and remain Christian. So she went, bought the required attributes, and on the day of the event, she waited for me at the entrance of the building.

The building where the event would happen was in a historical part of Paramaribo, Poelephantje. Poelephantje is known to be the place where, during colonial times, the Maroons were allowed to dock their colourful canoes to visit Paramaribo to do their shopping. The colonial authorities made a rule that the Maroons would be allowed to visit Paramaribo, under the condition that they must take off their pangi and kamisa and cover themselves with 'proper' clothes. The pangi and the kamisa are the traditional clothing of the Maroons and consist of a cotton fabric artistically and colourfully embroidered with traditional symbols. The fabric would cover the lower parts of the women. This is the pangi. And the men would wear the fabric across their busts. This is called the kamisa. Most parts of their body therefore remained uncovered, and the European dictators considered this way of dressing to be uncivilised. They enforced their Eurocentric way of dressing on the Maroons by demanding that they take off their own traditional dress and put on clothes deemed proper and civil by the Europeans. The name 'Poelephantje' therefore literally means 'taking off your pangi'. After the end of the colonial period, this part of Paramaribo became of historic value. It also lies exactly at the outskirts of the very first neighbourhood established by the freed enslaved people. Frimangron – that is the name of this neighbourhood. It means 'the place of free people'.

When we entered the building, we were greeted by a young lady accompanied by an older lady, both dressed in the traditional clothing of Surinamese-Creole women, the koto. In front of them, sitting on a wooden table, was a large stoneware basin. The basin was filled with water (I later understood that it was rainwater), perfumed with flowers, perfume, and special essential oils. This water is called 'switi watra' and is meant to cleanse attendees before they enter the event. The 'switi watra' is a very common ritual during Winti-related events. Here I was, being confronted with another symbolic act related to the Winti religion. As we were approaching the ladies, there was a line of people in front of us. My friend whispered in my ear, 'When we are in front of them, just make a small curtsy and stretch your arms with one palm positioned in the other palm as if you are making a cup. One of them will then pour a little bit of the water into your hands. Make sure to properly catch the water and quickly wash your face and arms with it. Then, do the curtsy again and walk away.' As I was approaching the ladies, my heart was pounding in my chest. I kept repeating the instructions in my head, afraid to make a mistake. Then the moment was there. The ladies warmly smiled at us, with the calabashes ready in their hands to pour the water into our hands. I stretched my arms, after doing the small curtsy, of course, and made the cup-like shape with my palms.

As the cold water was poured into my hands, I felt a warmth spreading through my whole body. The scent of the water was sweet, very flowery. I recognised the scent from the time when I was living with my in-laws. My mother-in-law would regularly prepare herself a 'switi watra', and the strong scent would fill the house. Surprisingly, my feelings of guilt, anxiety, and worry melted away, and I felt at peace. We walked into the room, and I noticed the people all dressed in blue and white traditional Afro-Surinamese attire: the ladies in a koto or a pangi with a proper blouse on top, and the men in pants and proper shirts with felt hats on their heads. Some men also had on kamisas across their shirts. My friend handed me a pangi. She had bought it as part of the dress code. I took it and dried my face with it, folded it, and placed it on my left shoulder – just as I saw the other ladies in the room do.

We were greeted by the honourable chair of the NGO, Mrs. Claudette Toney. She stood in the middle of the room – an older lady who could have been in her seventies. She was petite and frail, but with piercing eyes and a huge smile on her face. Her handshake was firm, confirming that she was still full of life and strength. She was dressed in full white. She had on the 'bigi koto'. This is the traditional clothing of Surinamese-Creole women that is worn solely for official events

such as weddings or other highly esteemed occasions. Everyone entering the room was instructed to first approach her prior to taking a seat. My friend and I were seated in the front row (afterwards, I realised that Mrs. Staphorst had already confirmed my attendance – hence us being seated on the front row). At first, I felt exposed in the front row. I saw a couple of familiar faces, but none with whom I had an intimate or close relationship. I recognised the familiar faces from public Winti rituals and celebrations⁴⁶.

The evening was filled with sacred ritual acts. It was about breaking bread with each other, requesting guidance and protection from the supreme creator called Anana Keduaman Keduampon⁴⁷ – Christians say Jehovah or Yahweh. We were given rainwater to drink and given bread with butter and cheese to eat and fruits as well – all to eat from our calabashes. We were handed a white candle to light, and together we sang, surprisingly, songs that were very similar to the songs that the Protestant Christian denomination would sing during 'Aria neti'. 'Aria neti' in the Protestant Christian church (in Suriname, we say, 'de Evangelische Broeder Gemeente') is a special night when the congregation sings only songs written in Sranantongo and originating from the time during and after slavery. These songs have a Christian origin but include lyrics referring to the life of the enslaved. Other rituals, such as the blessing of the bread, the fruits, and the rainwater, were performed by the spiritual leader of the evening. A large rectangular table was positioned in the middle of the room. The table was covered with white cotton cloths, and underneath the cloths was a large spread of fruits, bread, and tin pitchers.

The evening was concluded with a special song celebrating the importance of unity. While singing this song, we were instructed to walk towards each other, give a handshake, and, if fancied, a hug as well. I forgot to say that during the breaking bread ritual, we were instructed to share our bread with each other. This happened by walking towards anyone in the room and inviting them to break a piece of your bread, while the person in return would also offer you a piece of bread. Drinking rainwater was also such a profound experience. Rainwater has a particular flavour, but what made it so profound was the explanation from the spiritual leader about the drinking of rainwater. He compared it to our spiritual thirst being quenched by the Highest, and Him rejuvenating our bodies by His eternal powers through the water created by Him. I've never viewed the drinking of water from such a spiritual point of view. Not even the drinking of wine during the Holy Communion, which is typical in the Christian church, has inspired me like the drinking of rainwater did.

⁴⁶ In 2006, the Surinamese government incorporated the Winti interest foundation Tata Kwasi ku Tata Tinsensi into the database of religious organisations. In 2011, the first two Winti marriage officials were appointed. Winti priests were appointed informally already, but still without legal status. In 2014, Dorenia Babel became the first person officially recognised as a Winti priest, appointed by the government in order to develop Winti in the public realm. In 2019, psychiatrist Glenn Helberg made a public call to the Suriname-based Christian denominations to consider Winti as an equal religion.

⁴⁷ Charles Wooding, an Afro-Surinamese sociologist, wrote about traditional healing and medicine in Winti. *Traditional Healing and Medicine in Winti: A Sociological Interpretation* on JSTOR accessed 23/12/23.

The picture⁴⁸ below illustrates the 'handwashing' ritual as part of the 'broko brede' event.



3.3.2. *Navigating with diplomacy to determine my position in the NGO field*

The organisation that was hosting this event is also a non-governmental organisation advocating for the safeguarding of the Afro-Surinamese culture. The organisation is called *Fiti Fu Wini*, which means 'we are allowed to win'. I have had some communication through email with *Fiti Fu Wini*, but I never managed to personally meet one of the representatives of the NGO. They do collaborate with the NGO NAKS, which I had first gotten involved with. However, both have their own separate activities and organise their own events to educate the Surinamese-Creole community about their culture. To remain neutral, I decided to attend the event in my role as a PhD student who came to do research about the Surinamese-Creole culture. I knew that choosing to work with both NGOs could benefit my research and increase my opportunities to become closely involved in the Surinamese-Creole community.

During the 'broko brede' event, I remember sometimes feeling like an outsider, especially during the ritual performances. It was as if I were placed under a magnifier and closely observed as to whether I would perform the acts in a proper manner. But this could just be an assumption because of my own insecurities. The day after, I met with Mrs. Staphorst. She asked about the event, and as I was briefing her on it, I could sense her curiosity to know my feelings towards the other NGO. I had already decided that my choice for NAKS would be definite. I cannot explain what led to my firm decision, but I knew that I felt more at home at NAKS than I did at the other NGO. It could be that at NAKS I felt less alienated as a non-*Winti* follower.

So, I reassured Mrs. Staphorst that I preferred working with NAKS, and once my choice for NAKS was definite, she included me in all the other important meetings and activities at NAKS. She officially introduced me to the rest of the board and nominated me to become the UNESCO representative for NAKS in the UNESCO NGO Forum. And as I continued to integrate into NAKS, I noticed that contact with the other NGO, *Fiti Fu Wini*, remained limited. It was difficult to arrange a meeting with some of the members whom I had met during the 'broko brede' event. There was no reply to my emails, and tentatively confirmed appointments were not followed up on. During my fieldwork, I attended another

⁴⁸ Picture copyright: Irwin Goedhart, *Aflegvereniging Dankbaarheid*, 2019.

event at *Fiti Fu Wini*. I received respectful treatment, but there was no mention of my research, and I did not mention anything, either. As I learned while doing my fieldwork, it is important to keep all options open and remain objective in anything that is related to my research, even if it is about establishing a working relationship with two NGOs that are working in the exact same field.

3.4. Conclusion

This chapter was meant to take the reader on a journey, starting with my experience when I first entered the field and concluding with my initiation into the lives of my informants. The core of this chapter is my journey as the ethnographer and how I managed to embody that role to successfully execute my research. Therefore, in the conclusion of this chapter, I will draw my main arguments that I conclude have been essential in my successful engagement with my field sites. Throughout the chapter, I shared my experiences of becoming a researcher, an ethnographer, a networker, a volunteer, and finally the trustee of my informants. Often, in the field, the lines between the different roles I represented would blur. This observation reflects the most challenging aspect of becoming an ethnographer, which is finding a balance between appropriating ownership over what I produce through fieldnotes and safeguarding proper representation of my research subject. In the execution of my fieldwork, I quickly realised the quite politically sensitive position I found myself in. This political position is what every ethnographer becomes subject to and why the notion of intersubjectivity is of such importance. Questions such as whose side of the story I should represent, whose voice matters the most in the processing of my findings, and how I should keep all stakeholders happy in the process of doing fieldwork became paramount in the decision-making process while navigating the field. Flexibility and, most importantly, diplomacy were key in switching between the different roles and the way I chose to self-identify in the field. Depending on how I chose to present myself, my informants would adjust their engagement with me. It was a matter of being able to 'read' the room and choose the role fitting for that specific 'room'.

Although at times it felt like a safe space to be able to switch roles, it became challenging because of my personal story being part of the research. Certainly, as an ethnographer, I had my own view, my own opinions, my own experiences, and my own ways of knowing. And although it was a constant conscious choice to switch between being the insider and the outsider, my familiarity with the field and my own lived experiences as a Surinamese-Creole provided me sufficient leverage to move effectively in the field and establish social networks. Networking and negotiating my position in the social networks was another way of positioning myself strategically in the field so that I could control the way I would gather data and determine the best ways to efficiently get involved in my informants' daily lives. Control in this sense does not mean manipulating the field. Control relates to my ability to anticipate not only possible opportunities but also challenges and, as such, plan for possible solutions. Yet, the one thing I did not manage to anticipate and be in full control of was my own response to the process, and the changes in my own views once I gained thorough insights and learned about the culture. Protecting myself from getting too emotionally involved was pivotal to the success of my research. That is when I had to rely on support from my own family. Building a support system where I could reflect, release tension, and discuss my feelings helped me to navigate the fine line of being intimately involved while remaining objective and too emotionally engaged.

Everything depended on the way I chose to position myself and how I chose to assert my power. In this case, power should be seen in the sense of being in a position where I could influence and direct the way my informants would be perceived through my research. In my previous chapter, I addressed the existence of literature in which Surinamese-Creoles have been misrepresented. And now, I am in the position to shift this narrative. Roger Sanjek (1990) addresses this power position of the ethnographer through the role of fieldnotes: 'Fieldnotes embody cultural facts apparently under the control of their inscriber' (Roger Sanjek, 1990: 55). Contrary to Malinowski's feeling of control and

ownership, I made the deliberate choice to utilise my power of ownership in favour of my informants, and, as such, the fieldwork and fieldnotes became a shared responsibility.

Encouraging my informants to carry a certain level of responsibility was another way for me to distance myself from the research topic and allow my informants to teach me the ins and outs of the culture. This included learning the language utilised for *Winti* practices and discovering hidden messages in the language that is utilised for ritual practices. Humbling myself as the ethnographer and taking on the role of a learner was a deliberate choice, as it increased my informants' willingness to be involved. Their trust in me grew, and this allowed me to find a balance between supporting my writing with academically justified evidence while capturing in the text the subtleties of the intentions and meanings behind the social or ritual performances. Gaining their trust also served as the key to being accepted into the social circles that provided me access and insight into secluded celebrations and performances. Shared ownership gave my informants the authority to dictate the course I would take with the research and the final aims of the research. I instilled this feeling of shared ownership by constantly involving my informants in every step of the research, while securing a certain level of authority. The level of authority translated to the way I made the final decisions about elements of the fieldnotes that would be important to the thesis, or decisions about the best way to reflect the interpretations of my informants, so that it would become validated data for academic research. In the following chapters, the reader will be introduced to the fluidity of illustrating my informants' voices and my own voice, yet, in the writing, I remain consistent in distancing myself from my informants – this, to secure my objectivity and to establish continuity in my role as the ethnographer, who is looking from the outside into the culture while maintaining reflexivity.

CHAPTER 4 THE PRESENT-DAY SURINAMESE-CREOLE OBSERVED THROUGH FAMILY HISTORIES AND FAMILY CELEBRATIONS

Famiriman dron e prey nanga fowru wiwiri – Family woes are not shared with the world. (Surinamese-Creole proverb)

In this chapter, present-day Surinamese-Creoles are introduced in their most personal social form, which is their family unit. It is a common Surinamese-Creole custom that family stories are not shared with outsiders. This proverb symbolises the very tight and close-knit structures in Surinamese-Creole family systems. Everything happens in a family construction, and conflicts are also resolved in this same context. The family serves as this small unit and space where there is daily active governing, protecting, developing, sharing, learning, etc. The proverb at the beginning of this chapter symbolises this tight bond. This chapter provides detailed ethnographic accounts of conversations that I had with four Surinamese-Creole families. In these ethnographic accounts, I describe my personal experiences while engaging in their social life and critically reflect on ritual performances and embodiment practices that I observed during their celebrations – celebrations that have been organised to celebrate a milestone or to perform a ceremony to honour the ancestors. Describing these four Surinamese-Creole families contributes to contextualising my main argument in the research, which is that the emergence of the Surinamese-Creole should be described through a dynamic, fluid, and interactive process of engagement of enslaved Africans with the other cultures they encountered in the colony of Suriname, rather than considering creole cultural practices as extracts of source cultures. Addressing creole cultural practices as extracts of, for instance, West African culture, in my opinion, calls for a very narrow and one-sided exploration of the dynamic cultural and ethnic integration that these creole communities underwent in the colonies. And it is in the family unit that the ongoing engagement with other cultures, the adaptations of cultural practices, and securing the continuation of practices is best observed.

Prior to unpacking the daily lives of these four Surinamese-Creole families, I unpack historical events that are relevant to the emergence of this specific ethnic group. I unpack socio-economic developments and the influence of social hierarchies imposed by the colonial government during colonial times in Suriname, and then I provide insight into the geographical relevance of places in relation to different categories of Surinamese-Creoles. Additionally, this chapter zooms in on the ways that family relations between creole families in Suriname and those in the Netherlands further shape the embodiment of typical family-oriented celebrations and, as such, dictate the continuation of the Surinamese-Creole identity in Suriname and in diaspora. Through experiences with my informants in diaspora, I illustrate their determination to experience a sense of belonging and the desire to experience freedom. It continues to be the driving force in the new generation's quest to redefine their socio-cultural identity and their urge to rewrite their own history. The intrinsic value of material objects, song, music, dance, traditional clothing, language, food, and space in unravelling the Surinamese-Creole identity cannot be ignored, and in this chapter, they serve as individual lenses to obtain a closer look into the social life of present-day Surinamese-Creoles.

4.1. Exploring the emergence of typical Surinamese-Creole family structures observed in Suriname

Family ties are strong and very often reach beyond bloodlines. Melville Herkovits (1941) describes the phenomenon of children born outside of marriage, *dorosei pikin*, or children adopted into the family, *kweki pikin*. As I was engaging with Surinamese-Creole families, I had to navigate through the existence of neighbourhoods typical for working-class Surinamese-Creole families and family structures originating from the colonial history of categorising the enslaved community and the free

Creoles based on their social status and the colour of their skin. To understand the existence of these socio-economic dynamics in Surinamese-Creole families, I illustrate how notions of categorising and labelling shaped existing Surinamese-Creole family structures and, as such, influenced the norms and values significant for these families. In most cases, oral stories and life histories of families served as the methodology to understand the application of these notions in daily social life.

I established an intimate relationship with these four Surinamese-Creole families and discovered elements of the Surinamese-Creole identity that will only be revealed in a space of trust and mutual respect. As a people whose cultural heritage is tainted with stories of uprooting, displacement, and oppression, the unpacking of their identity requires a more in-depth and intimate approach, as the core of their identity remains hidden in oral histories or symbolic meanings embedded or hidden in socio-cultural practices and objects. Once these are decoded, it is an unveiling of an array of valuable and rich insights about their strength, their creativity to establish an environment that could still serve as a space of comfort, unity, and mutual responsibility. Norms and values, customs, and unwritten etiquette can then be better contextualised. Through the application of life history as a methodology to record oral family history, I gained insight into the continuation of customs, norms, values, and notions of being creole, all being part of a family's history.

4.1.1. *Historical events related to the emergence of Surinamese-Creole families*

Before engaging in the family structures that I observed in four Surinamese-Creole families in Suriname, it is important to reflect on the historical socio-economic developments that shaped the social life of the creole people in Suriname. One of the most important developments was the formation of different categories between the enslaved, the freed enslaved, and the group of free elite Creoles. The established norms to maintain the different categories continued to be fostered through strong family norms and values among Surinamese-Creoles during the time of colonisation in Suriname. This dictated the engagements and marriages that would occur in these families. Marrying or engaging in an intimate relationship beyond one's own social class was not appreciated and was discouraged. Forbidding it was not possible, as there would still be incidental cases of two people from different social classes engaging in an intimate relationship despite their families' disapproval. Opportunities to climb the social ladder through receiving proper education, or through earning a proper income with one's craftsmanship⁴⁹, would gradually lead to bending these strict rules for engagements outside of one's social class.

After 1875, there were promising developments in the gold mining industry. This led to mass relocations of creole men to the gold mines, and after 1889, the rise of the balata industry caused the same effect. Creole men left their families to try their luck in both balata bleeding and gold mining. Rudolf van Lier, in his book *Samenleving in een grensgebied* (1949), describes the family structures that were significant for Surinamese-Creoles during this time as follows: many one-parent families among working-class creole families, and the phenomenon of two women living together and raising both their children due to the absence of their partners. This was referred to as a *matie* relationship. *Matie* in *Sranantongo* means 'friend', but it also refers to a lesbian sexual relationship. These *matie* relationships were a result of the increase in gold mining or balata bleeding and were very common amongst working-class creole families. Gloria Wekker, in her book *The Politics of Passion* (2006), continues to describe the presence of these *matie* relationships that bring together two one-parent families to help raise the children. As Surinamese society evolved in a melting pot of different ethnic groups, with different cultural and religious norms and values, this form of cohabitation was condemned and became taboo in Surinamese society.

⁴⁹ The oral histories as shared with me revealed numerous incidents of creoles from the lower class who, through their craftsmanship as carpenters, or skills as vendors or laundry ladies, managed to earn themselves a proper income and climb up the ladder. Some of these stories are captured in typical Surinamese-Creole proverbs, in songs, or even in the traditional head tie, the *angisa*.

4.1.2. *Economic developments causing the emergence of lower-class Surinamese-Creole families in Suriname*

Albert Helman, in his book, *Cultureel Mozaik* (1977), gives an account of creole involvement in the economic developments in Suriname. Prior to the abolition of slavery, the enslaved were forbidden to engage in any form of activity to earn an income. Those who were free and were the working class would be employed as laundry women, carpenters, vendors, fishermen, porters, and cooks. The middle-class free people worked mainly as teachers, and the elite creole people were employed in privileged positions in the government. Some would become administrators, as well. After the abolition of slavery, the formerly enslaved were forced to continue working on the plantations for another 10 years. This period is known in Suriname's history as the period of *het Staatstoezicht*. After *het Staatstoezicht*, just a small number of the freed people continued to work on the plantations, while others looked for new opportunities to earn an income and sustain themselves. Unfortunately, the then-government did not do much to provide solid economic security for the freed people, and unemployment became a huge challenge among this group⁵⁰.

Those who had been labouring on plantations outside of the capital migrated to the capital in search of better opportunities. However, life in Paramaribo turned out to be not as promising as they had hoped. The working-class creole was confronted with low wages, lack of proper housing, no proper access to health care, limitations to properly accessing education, and the overall deplorable infrastructure in Paramaribo. The migration of creoles to Paramaribo caused the neglect of rural development. The working class inhabited the suburbs of Paramaribo, and these areas became known for prevailing poverty and deplorable housing (Willemsen 1980: 208). To this day, large numbers of creole families continue to live in the suburbs of Paramaribo; while there have been slight changes in their socio-economic situation, successive governments continue to fail in their efforts to secure proper socio-economic facilities for this group. Instead, they remain the subjects of politicians who abuse their power and manipulate these vulnerable families for the sole purpose of gaining votes.

4.1.3. *Social class and geographical locations shaping the norms and values of Surinamese-Creole families in Suriname*

As explained in Chapter 1, categories are considered imposed structures in the form of labels which can then serve as the norm for group formation. To construct and maintain a group's formation, the members of the group develop boundaries, labels, and (un)written rules to which group members should adhere. Geographical location matters in establishing the categories of being creole. This would be determined by your place of birth or the area where your family originates from. For example, I am a Surinamese-Creole who was born and raised in the district of Nickerie, in a little rice village named Wageningen. In Nickerie, my creoleness was of less importance. It was very much about social status and the economic position of my family. My family was considered middle-class, and my sisters and I were raised as such, meaning that there was great pressure on us to obtain high scores at school, we were enrolled in afterschool activities such as membership at the library or swimming club, and our parents would allow us to engage with certain families who were considered of the same social class as us, no matter their ethnic background.

In Nickerie, the Creoles are a minority compared to the Hindustani, the Javanese, and the Indigenous people⁵¹. Creole people adopted cultural elements from other ethnic groups and made them part of their own culture. For example, it was perfectly normal for my mum to be very skilled in the making of typical Javanese snacks, which she would make with her Javanese friends, who became my aunts and uncles, even though they were not blood relatives. In this manner, the Creole in Nickerie differ from the Creole in other districts such as Coronie, Para, Paramaribo, etc. When I moved to Paramaribo to continue my studies, I was labelled as the *Nickerie krioro*, which was a reference to my creoleness in the district of Nickerie. My way of speaking was different, and I was not familiar with some of the customs of the Creole families in Paramaribo, such as eating bread instead of rice during lunch time, or preparing fish with Indian spices, infusing it with green mangos, and utilising Indian cooking techniques such as frying fish in a large wok rather than in a frying pan. My experience of being called a *Nickerie krioro* prompted me to look at the relevance of place in the development of

⁵⁰ Hans Ramsoedh Van samenleving in een grensgebied naar integratie in Suriname, *OSO. Tijdschrift voor Surinaamse taalkunde, letterkunde en geschiedenis*. Jaargang 33 - DBNL accessed 17/11/2023.

⁵¹ Albert Helman, in his book *Culturele Mozaik* (1977), confirms that in the urban parts of Suriname, the significance of the creole became of less importance.

one's identity, in my case, my Surinamese-Creole identity. The notion of place-identity, mostly applied in the discipline of rehabilitation, seems to be relevant here. Place-identity as derived from the self theory focuses on the social and cultural processes that help shape the self-identity of a person. In this process, the physical settings and the properties of that environment contribute to the way a person perceives himself; habitual behaviour is also determined through these processes and the way the person represents himself to others (Harold Proshansky, 1978).

Another social element that would be applied to establish boundaries and evoke the application of labels would be the way in which creole children would be raised – in this case, the phenomenon of being raised by a *nene*, which stands for an older woman who lived with the family and took care of the household and the children. The *nene* was the central figure in family life, especially in the upbringing of the children. Being raised by a *nene* as a creole child would serve as an immediate sign that the family was privileged, economically well situated, and elite. One main fact in these family constructions was that the *nene* would be of the working class, not having her own children, and was usually an older, dark-skinned woman. A difference with such elite creole families living in the suburbs was that the *nene* would be an older Hindustani or Javanese woman.

It is through the *nene* that the creole children would be exposed to other cultural and religious practices, be treated with traditional medicine, and learn about recipes typical of the working class. The matriarch of the family would not engage with these socio-cultural practices typical to the working class, yet she would not prohibit the *nene* from engaging her children in them. The expectation was that as the child grew older, the child would be less exposed and engage less with the practices of the working class and continue to learn how to behave as a member of a proper elite creole family. The children of these families could be distinguished in society-based jobs typical of their social groups, such as doctors, lawyers, high government officials such as ministers, or professors. Their children usually would migrate abroad to continue their studies. I was not aware of this sub-group of creoles until I engaged with some of my informants who were from this social class. As I continued to engage with them, I noticed the (un)written characteristics of their social groups, such as attending colleges, sports clubs, and social events and even using certain typical creole recipes that normally would not be part of my own family's way of cooking. This category of creole families was strongly Christian-oriented and lived in the capital, Paramaribo, on the outskirts of Paramaribo, or in designated neighbourhoods where strict rules and behaviours were instilled to maintain an image of sophistication and wealth.

Then, there was the category of *negre oso pikin*, meaning 'children from the enslaved Africans'. This was another category that I learned about during my time in the field. This category is very much based on the way a family maintains and lives by the rules of *Winti* as a lifestyle. In this category, the colour of the skin is not significant. It is all about the knowledge of *Winti*, the ability to engage with the ancestors, and knowledge about the *Winti* entities. Individuals in this category pride themselves on their ability to continue the knowledge, traditions, beliefs, family stories, and cultural practices from their ancestors, which have been passed on from generation to generation. In this category, I learned about the subcategories of families and the way they engage with the continuation of *Winti* practices within their families. The actualising of these practices is tied to the geographical origins of the family.

As such, I learned about *negre oso* creole families with their roots in Para, in Coronie, in Saramacca, in Commewijne, in Berlijn, in Rorac, in Bersaba, etc., each embodying a different way of the *Winti* religion. The category of *negre oso* creole people was one that was quite difficult for me to navigate. Unpacking socio-cultural practices always needed pre-obtained knowledge about the family's roots. Even the preparation of certain typical creole dishes, especially those devoted to spiritual performances, would differ depending on the place they were from. Thus, for this category, there was a strong presence of knowing where you were from. Even if the family relocated to another place in Suriname or abroad, they would always refer to the place where they originated from. Their ability to distinguish and embrace their creoleness had a deep impact on me. I developed a strong need to know where the roots of my ancestors lay and who they were. This was the main reason for me to engage with the workshop *Stamboom onderzoek*. Attending the workshop, knowing about my ancestors and where they came from, helped me to become comfortable with the subtle changes I experienced in the way I perceived myself as a creole person.

The use of objects also played a role in the way creole people would maintain the groups they identified with. Objects served to represent the family's social status and their belonging to a creole

category. The way these objects would be used and the inheritance of certain objects could tell the story of that particular family. In this case, it was a strong distinction between the different *negre oso pikin*. A calabash is one of these objects. Traditional jewellery is also another way of distinguishing your creoleness and belonging to a category of *negre oso pikin*. To be considered part of the community of *Winti* believers, one needed to know and own certain objects. Further in this chapter, I will provide more details about the way I experienced this social element of belonging to a group and how I was allowed, through possessing objects, to become part of a particular group of Creoles in the *Winti* community.

4.1.4. *Social class observed through my encounter with a Jewish-Creole family member*

Although the Jewish-Creoles are perceived as a close-knit community, I wanted to find a way to also observe their social life so I could gather proper comparative data to provide a holistic view on the life of Surinamese-Creole families in Suriname. I needed to be introduced by someone who was closely related to this community. My work as a volunteer at the *Koto* Museum provided me access to the Jewish-Creole community. The owner of the *Koto* Museum invited me to join her on a visit to one of these families. This was my moment to gain a glimpse of their lifestyle. Below, I describe this moment, which also set the tone to continue exploring factors determining the differences in social class and group boundaries among current-day Surinamese-Creole families.

It was a Saturday afternoon. 12 noon, to be precise. Christine van Russel requested I pick her up at the Koto Museum and accompany her to visit an old friend who was planning to sell some of her antique furniture. When we were nearing the neighbourhood, I realised we might be visiting one of the prestigious Jewish-Creole families in Paramaribo. The neighbourhood is known to be a residential area of renowned Jewish-Creoles. And indeed, Christine pointed to a large house prominently positioned in the middle of a huge and beautifully manicured garden. I parked my car in front of the gate, and Christine rang the bell. The gate was remote-controlled, and as it slowly slid open, we entered the garden and walked up to the side door. Christine's friend awaited us: a tall, light-skinned lady, with medium-length brown-coloured slightly curly hair, brown friendly eyes, and a huge smile on her face. I felt a bit uncomfortable. This was caused by the realisation that I was about to enter the home of one of the most well-known elite Jewish-Creole families, something that would not have happened ever before.

The neighbourhood, this house, and people like her were not part of my lived experiences while growing up in Suriname. Christine introduced me to her and pointed out that I live and study in England and that I was currently in Suriname to do my research as an aspiring anthropologist. While Christine mentioned all these specifics about me, I noticed the lady's face light up, and her interest in me increased. She invited us into her house, and it struck me that the interior was not the regular interior I was used to, that of the middle-class and lower-class families I engaged with. Artworks dominated the corners of the house. The paintings hanging on the wall and the elegant furniture clearly were not from a regular furniture shop. She invited us to have a seat and began to ask me about my research.

The conversation was light-hearted, yet very much about other elite Creole families and events I had never attended before. Quietly, I was listening while I observed the interior. Lots of family heirlooms, I presumed, family pictures, and again, the furniture kept mesmerising me. Because of my readings about life during colonial times, I recognised most of the furniture to be from that period. It must have been a family inheritance passed on from generation to generation. I asked her if that was the case and, with much pride, she confirmed that, indeed, the furniture was all inherited and passed on as part of her family's tradition. And then she talked about her family. They were Jewish-Creole plantation owners, and she continued their longstanding legacy of embracing their Jewish traditions in her family. She shared that she had a distinguished position in the synagogue in Paramaribo, and she spoke about the importance of keeping the Jewish traditions alive for the next generation to never forget where they came from.

Then, she asked Christine to have a look at the antique furniture she was planning to sell. Some of these pieces were more than 100 years old. The furniture was designed with refined artwork, the material was delicate, yet beautiful, representing a lifestyle that exuded wealth and privilege. As I was listening to the stories attached to these pieces, I realised I never inherited antique furniture from my own family. Also, I never saw such pieces in my own family. I do not even know of family stories from my own family that contain tangible, valuable objects associated with the lives of our ancestors during colonial times. What I do know of are some of the habitual rituals they passed on from generation to generation as part of continuing our family traditions. I even know of some recipes that have been prepared in our family and are distinct to our family's history. But none of these stories reflected wealth, privilege, or the inheritance of valuable possessions, or even endorsed the social status of our family name in society.

I was mesmerised by her family's history and felt a strong need to also possess 'something' that signifies my family's origins and roots. This desire, to me, was a vivid example of the gap between the lifestyle of my own middle-class Creole family and this lady's upper-class privileged family. The selling price of the antiques was another fact confirming the difference in lived experiences between two different categories of being creole. Christine herself is a descendant of a freed elite Creole family during colonial times. Yet, after we left her friend's house, she admitted that even she was impressed by the strong, visible presence of the long line of family wealth and inheritance of her friend's family.

As it was described in the previous chapters, the colour of the skin and the presence of European genes were very much dominating factors in distinguishing and categorising different types of creoles in colonial Surinamese society. And, as illustrated in my ethnographical account, today, the prejudice, preconceived notions, social class, and prestigious social roles remain visible among the Surinamese-Creole community and continue to dictate the way cultural identity is embodied, passed on, and preserved through family stories. In the next paragraph, I will continue to further unpack the relevance of family histories in relation to portraying Surinamese-Creoleness during family festivities.

4.2. The family histories of four present-day Surinamese-Creole families

The previous ethnographic account illustrated how a Jewish-Creole family embraced their family history, how they preserved it and passed it on through generations. This experience inspired me to explore other Surinamese-Creole families, what their family history involved, and how they actualised it through their family lines. There were four families with whom I did life history documentaries to experience their family history and how that has shaped their way of embodying their creoleness.

Each family had their own story, which contained their religious preferences, their way of expressing their creoleness, the family construction, and their social status and role in society obtained through historical developments in the family. Below is a summary of each one of the life histories that I did⁵² – to allow the reader a sneak peek into the lives of these families. Obtaining a sense of their family history should allow for a better understanding of the next paragraphs, in which I will go into detail about the celebrations organised in family settings and the way these serve as opportunities to actualise creoleness. For privacy reasons, I am not using the real family names but rather letters in alphabetical order to distinguish them.

4.2.1. *Family A*

Family A is an upper-class family situated in a middle-class neighbourhood in the south of Paramaribo. I established a close relationship with the matriarch of the family and regularly visited her at home. She had just turned 95 when I was introduced to her. I attended her birthday celebration, which was a very typical Surinamese-Creole birthday celebration, and met the rest of the family.

⁵² The actual videos about the life histories of each one of these families are in Dutch and will be used for a documentary series about the lives of Surinamese-Creole families, which I aspire to do as post-doctoral researcher.

Further in the chapter, I will go into detail about the sorts of celebrations that are typical for Surinamese-Creole families. When asked why she considers herself to be a Creole, she simply said, 'because of my ancestors who were enslaved Africans'. She did not go further into detail about her creoleness. To her, it was obvious she was categorised as a creole person. She said, 'People with as dark a skin tone as mine automatically should know that they are creole.' I explained the difference in using the term 'creole' during colonial times, and then she responded by saying that all of that has changed. According to her, the creole people, no matter the colour of their skin, all have in common that their ancestors were once slaves.

During the party, I witnessed a very tight family bond among the family members. Children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and great-great-grandchildren were all very closely involved in the planning of the birthday of the matriarch of the family. By the time she and I had our conversations, her oldest child, a son, was 70. She and her family lived a financially secure and stable life, mainly because of the support of her father, who made sure his daughters were properly established in life. Her husband was a bus driver and managed to climb up the social ladder and obtain a respectable position in society by becoming one of the most dedicated trade union leaders in Suriname, who also dedicated his time to supporting and educating other young adults and leading them into politics.

She shared stories about her father, who worked himself up the social ladder and possessed a prestigious reputation in society. He took care of his daughters to make sure each one of them learned a skill to be able to take care of themselves, rather than rely on a husband to take care of them. She was able to set up her own little boutique, which was thriving. She came from a family of four girls and one brother. The brother was the oldest and not from her mother. He had a whole other mother and never lived with them. She had two sisters, whom her father had with another woman, and the other two sisters, including her, were from the same mother and father. She is the oldest daughter and the third child of her father. She was 21 when she married her husband, but she gave birth to her first son when she was 19. Her family consists of ten children: six boys (one passed away), four girls, and one adopted child. In Surinamese-Creole culture, the adopted child is usually from a family member who is financially incapable of taking care of their children. The child then becomes the *kweki pikin* in another family member's household. She had such a vivid memory of her wedding day. It was a very Eurocentric wedding, all organised by her father.

Her daughter, who is the third child, and who was the favourite of her own father, sat in the interview to support her mum. She explained that her mother's father had a very strong presence in his daughter's life. He father raised her and her other sister all by himself, with support from his sister. The daughter shared stories of her siblings being raised together with the children of her mother's sister, who also lived in the same neighbourhood. Both sisters took care of each other's children, which was encouraged by their father. She spoke about her own father and how he was also very much involved in their life, just as her mother's father was in his daughter's life. They both shared stories of the family being used to closely involved relationships with extended families and friends, all gathering at their house to spend their days, eat together, and play together. The daughter shared memories of her mother always busy cooking to feed the many children who would visit their home.

When I asked about the norms and values shared, the mother stated that her father taught her and her sisters only the things that related to learning how to be virtuous in life. Being a good Christian and attending church was at the core of their daily life. There was not much emphasis on other typical Surinamese-Creole cultural elements, other than the mastery of typical Surinamese-Creole dishes and pastries. Her father's focus was on teaching his daughters to work hard, become responsible and respectable people in their neighbourhood, obtain a good education, be healthy and physically fit, and be genuine to people. Discipline, mutual respect, honesty, and portraying proper manners were at the core of both generations of the family. Thus, the same norms and values instilled by her father continued to be instilled by her husband in their children.

4.2.2. Family B

Family B is a working-class family situated in a neighbourhood where the majority of families are Surinamese-Creoles from the working and middle class. My contact person in this family was the son. He was the only son of his mother; his younger brother had passed away. His mother married her second husband, the *Duman*, who became his adopted father. He took care of him like he was his only son, hence his accepting his mother's husband as his own father. I met him during one of the many workshops that I attended to learn about the Surinamese-Creole culture. He was one of the trainers. When I told him about my research topic, he invited me to his house to get to know his family, mainly because of his father, who is a *Duman*. Earlier in the thesis, I explained that those possessing the knowledge of communicating with the ancestors and meta-persons based on the guidelines of the *Winti* religion are named *Duman*. This was my opportunity to engage directly with a *Duman* and learn from his experiences about the *Winti* religion. It was also an opportunity to observe family structures in a family that practised *Winti*.

I also asked him about his views on being categorised as a Creole. His response was interesting. From his physical looks, he appears to be a typical current-day Surinamese-Creole, with clear features of a Black person mixed with other ethnic features. He explained that, during his childhood, he struggled to call himself a Creole. One day, he attended a talk where following the question was asked to the audience: 'How does the average Surinamese-Creole with a mixed ethnic background see themselves? Do they see themselves as mixed Chinese, mixed Creole, mixed Hindustani, Creole, or just Surinamese?' This question resonated with him, as he had been struggling with his own racially mixed background. The family from his mother's side is Chinese. He then explained that his great-great-grandfather, who was full-blood Chinese, married a creole woman. Thus, their offspring are mixed Creole-Chinese, including his mother. From his father's side, the great-great-grandfather was a German plantation owner who fathered children with four different Amerindian women.

One of these children was his father's great-great-grandmother, who conceived children with a creole man – hence his father being a mix of Amerindian, Creole, and German. It is this mixture of ethnicity that made it difficult for him to identify as a Creole person. He had been raised with Chinese and Amerindian cultural traditions. Creole traditions only became part of his life through his father, who taught him a lot about creole culture. But still, he preferred to identify as a mixed Chinese person. In *Sranantongo*, they say *basra chines*i. When I saw his mother, I saw very strong Chinese features. He then jokingly added, 'I have no flag', which is what I often heard other Surinamese-Creoles with a mixed ethnic background say. He was also very particular in stating that his family roots from his mother's father's side are from Para, from the plantation *Vierkinderen*. It was interesting to see how much he knew from his family history.

Then, I was introduced to his father, the *Duman*. My engagement with this family was eye-opening and introduced me to the way *Winti* practices and norms and values derived from the *Winti* religion are seamlessly woven into their daily lives. His father spoke about ritual practices that are performed as parts of important rites of passage that the different family members go through. Some of these rites of passage were not known to me, and when his father noticed my lack of knowledge, he was appalled and asked how it was even possible for me, as a *negre oso pikin*, not to know of these rituals so distinct to creole culture. I then explained to him that I was raised in a strict Christian household. He then said that my being a Christian should not be an obstacle to engaging with *Winti*. Then, he explained to me some of the rituals, including the *switi watra wasi*.

In addition, he explained the importance of possessing a calabash as a Creole person because of its representation of our ancestors. He mentioned that the calabash was important for feeding myself, for feeding my spiritual guardians, for taking a ritual bath, for performing rituals of healing for myself, etc. My contact admitted that he was struggling to accept Christianity, as he saw it as something that had been utilised to diminish the religion of our own people. He also admitted to combining the Christian way of praying with praying according to the guidelines in the *Winti* religion and attending church services only during certain holidays, such as Christmas and Easter. According to him, both religions worship the same God; they just use different titles to address God. The experience with this family revealed another way of being Creole. In conversations about celebrations, it became clear that their

family celebrations were inseparable from the performing of rituals which consult the ancestors and meta-persons. Unfortunately, I did not experience one of these celebrations, but because of what I learned from them, I was able to properly prepare myself for another celebration that I was invited to, which included rituals informed by the *Winti* religion.

4.2.3. Family C

Family C is an upper-class family situated on the outskirts of Paramaribo. In this area live a mixture of middle-class and working-class families, most being of Hindustani ethnicity. I have known this family ever since I moved to the capital, Paramaribo, to continue my studies in high school. I was one of the family and obtained a pretty good understanding of their family history. This is a typical creole family that, during colonial times, would have been classified as free elite Creole because of the colour of their skin and their social status. However, the way they live their life is far from distinguishing themselves from the other communities of Surinamese-Creoles. The whole family is dedicated to safeguarding Surinamese-Creole culture. They are also actively supporting vulnerable families and utilise their networks and prominent position in society to advocate for the preservation of Surinamese-Creole cultural heritage. I have a very close bond with the mother, who taught me everything about the life of creole women during the time of slavery, particularly the women who invented the famous traditional clothing in Surinamese-Creole culture, named the *koto*. These women were called *kotomisi*, which is representative of another category of creoles embodying creoleness as part of their Surinamese-Creole identity. Further in this chapter, I will go into detail about the *koto* and its relevance to the evolution of the creole culture in Suriname. With their own resources, they established a renowned museum that exhibits the life of typical Surinamese-Creole families during colonial times, and the museum visualises the oral history of the emergence of the *koto* and the *kotomisi*.

My contact person in the family inherited her knowledge and resources about the *kotomisi* from her mother, who in her turn inherited knowledge about the *kotomisi* lifestyle from her own mother, who was a *kotomisi*. Her mother had a prominent position in society and established an organisation which would educate young women in life skills, knowledge about Surinamese cultural heritage, and entrepreneurship. My contact person spent her whole life amongst *kotomisis* and was also raised by them. Her family is familiar with both the Christian and the *Winti* norms and values and utilises elements of both to instil their own family values that have been passed on from generation to generation. My contact person is also familiar with the custom of being raised by a *nene* who exposed her and her siblings to different cultural elements from different ethnic groups. Her own children experienced the same. The phenomenon of being raised by a *nene* has been discussed at the beginning of this chapter in relation to the different categories of being a creole person.

This family proudly embraces and embodies their creoleness, specifically through elements of the *kotomisi* way of life. Celebrations are always organised, representing elements of *kotomisi* socio-cultural practices and ritual performances, including the traditional clothing typical of the *kotomisi*. Embodying this lifestyle is ingrained in the family's history and passed on to the next generation in the family. It is through this family that I learned about typical creole dishes, the use of typical creole home remedies, creole jewellery, craftsmanship, and other skills distinct to the creole community in colonial times. Oral stories and knowledge to decode the hidden messages and symbols embedded in Surinamese-Creole art and cultural expressions are the forte of this family. Spending a day at their house is synonymous with peeking into the life of the *kotomisis* and indulging in the very dynamic and flamboyant lifestyle of these creole women. There are many other Surinamese-Creole families whose family history is rooted in a long line of *kotomisis*, but this particular family has made it their calling to ensure continuity in this element of being creole and transfer the knowledge to the next generation of Surinamese-Creoles in Suriname and abroad.

Obtaining a proper education is key in this family. But what I mostly witnessed was the entrepreneurial drive that consumes each member of the family. Each one of them exudes a great talent for turning their knowledge and skills into a business. This, my contact person told me, is part of the family genes, but it is also something that was typical for the *kotomisis* back in the day. It is

through entrepreneurship, setting up small businesses, that most of these *kotomisis* managed to secure themselves some financial freedom and contribute to the financial security of their offspring, siblings, and close friends. A strong sense of unity and togetherness has been at the centre of the *kotomisis*' way of life, and this same collectiveness and solidarity is what I witnessed in this family.

4.2.4. Family D

Family D is a working-class family situated in the centre of Paramaribo, which has a good mixture of middle-class and working-class families from all ethnicities. I was introduced to this family through my contact with Family C. My contact person was one of the brothers who worked as a volunteer in the *Koto* Museum. Once he heard about my research, he was excited to share with me the story of his grandmother and her influence on his own life. He was raised by her, and she was the reason why he was so knowledgeable about the lifestyle of typical working-class creole women in Suriname. His grandmother was also very familiar with the *kotomisi* lifestyle and taught him everything a *kotomisi* needed to know to sustain herself, such as making her own *koto* and her own *angisa*, preparing the most delicious food, and knowing the songs and dance styles that are to be performed during the different events that a *kotomisi* committed to attend as part of her life as a *kotomisi*.

His grandmother had her own *kotomisi* group with whom she would perform during different socio-cultural events. She was a typical working-class creole woman who had lived during colonial times and taught him a lot about that time. Being the youngest grandchild, she took him under her wing and raised him and his youngest sister, which is very typical for Surinamese-Creole grandparents to do. He shared with me that his grandmother was very strict. She was a hardworking woman who knew how to do a lot and, as such, earned her income through many different streams of work. She was a true leader who knew how to organise events, inspire other women, and advocate for the betterment of women in general. He described her as a strong-willed woman with a very big heart, yet she could be very opinionated and sharp with her words. She was highly respected in her community, and people adored her. He showed me pictures of her, and these pictures confirmed her to be a very beautiful mixed-race creole woman.

The interesting thing about his life history is that he was able to draw most of his family tree, which gave me a peek into the development of family lines during the time of slavery and colonisation. Just like my contact person from Family B, he also came from a long line of mixed-race family members, in which Chinese, Amerindian, and European ethnic roots prevailed. He proudly called himself a Creole and justified this by explaining that the enslaved who ultimately mixed with all the other ethnic groups in the society managed to establish their own identity and their own unique ethnic group. It is through their uniqueness of being a blend of different ethnicities that Creoles can adapt in any cultural setting – hence his pride to be named a Creole. He told me that his grandmother also embraced her creoleness with much pride.

His family is a large, typical working-class family who worked their way to becoming part of the middle class. He explained that his grandmother had seven siblings, all girls. His grandmother's mother was a full-blood Amerindian from Guyana who married, at a very young age, a creole man from Barbados. Together, they lived in Suriname. His grandmother conceived two children, of whom the son was the father of my contact person. His grandmother had her son with a full-blood Chinese man, and her son fathered 18 children in total with different wives, of which two were with my contact's mother, thus including him. He himself has no children, and his wife passed away at a very young age. Through the knowledge that he inherited from his grandmother about the creole lifestyle of the working and middle class, he has become a skilled tour guide in the museum and supports it by organising workshops and talks. He is also a very good cook who knows how to prepare every single dish that is asked of him. I enjoyed listening to the songs with hidden stories about the creole way of life, and his expressive way of sharing tantalising stories about the creole working-class women in the colony.

4.3. Analysing the family histories from an anthropological point of view

As stated before, the aim of this research is to provide new ethnographic data to complement existing research about the lives of Surinamese-Creoles and include the voice of Creoles and their own interpretation of their social life. With the insights obtained through the application of the life history methodology, I want to proceed and compare the views and experiences of these four families with theoretical arguments that are relevant to the discussion of creole family structures in post-colonial societies. The first anthropological study about Surinamese-Creole family structures that I engaged with was that of Melville Herskovits and Frances Herskovits (1936). Some claim it to be a thorough reflection of daily life in the colony, reflecting the socio-cultural practices of the enslaved community. John Stedman's narrative manuscript (1796) about social life in the colony of Suriname is another ethnographic writing that is considered to provide a fair illustration of how the enslaved community lived. Then there are the dairies, travel journals, and literature written by the then-academic experts in the fields of history, religion, and social studies (most being Dutch Europeans). What the Eurocentric written works of literature about creole life in Suriname have in common is that there is a strong emphasis on the family structures of Surinamese-Creoles being predominantly one-parent family units, with the mother figures dominating the organisation of family life. They present the phenomenon of one-parent matriarch-centred creole families as problematic, the aftermath of colonialism. Claims of these one-parent families being the root of cultural identity conflicts experienced among the young generation of Surinamese-Creoles in diaspora are often based on critical, judgemental notes of creole family structures⁵³. These critical notes are formed through the Eurocentric standards of what a proper and healthy family should look like (Patterson, J. M., & Garwick, A. W. 1998).

I also studied the literature of Surinamese scholars and Dutch scholars with Surinamese roots – to name a few, Julia Terborg (2002), Gloria Wekker (2006), Harold Jap A Joe (1993), Trudi Guda (1984, 2005), Humphrey Lamur (1993), and Albert Helman (1977). The common denominator in the works of these Surinamese authors is that they drew their perceptions and definitions of creole families from their own personal lived experiences and thus had a less judgemental and victimising interpretation in comparison to their Dutch colleagues. For instance, Humphrey Lamur (1993) in his article, 'The slave family in colonial 19th-century Suriname', addresses the fragmented and incomplete ethnographic data that has been employed to draw conclusions. Through his study of social life at the Surinamese plantation Vossenburg in the 19th century, Lamur proves that the overall idea of prevailing mother-headed households among the enslaved was opposed to the lived experiences of creole families in Suriname. Although missionaries and the colonial government infiltrated and imposed their own Eurocentric ideas of the way family units amongst the slaves should be structured, the enslaved community, just as they did with the imposed Christian religion, developed their own norms and values to facilitate the need for family structures. Lamur reports the frequent occurrence of double-headed households that lasted for years on the plantation. And even though there were also instances of polygamy, Lamur describes that in the case of the Vossenburg plantation, the male in question would make sure he had the means and resources to take care of co-wives, making sure they did not live too close to each other (Humphrey Lamur, 1993).

Another study about the family structures amongst Surinamese-Creoles, written from a Surinamese perspective, is that of Trudi Guda. In her narrative manuscript about the life of a well-known *Duman* in Suriname in the 19th century, she represents in his own words the family structure he grew up in. She describes the detailed memories that he shared with her about social life and the existence of married couples among the creoles around that time. He speaks about his upbringing by his grandmother, who lived with her husband, his grandfather. But he also speaks about his fathering children with several women, of whom he took good care (Trudi Guda, 1984: 15-17). Gloria Wekker writes about *mati* relationships but also makes mention of some of these women still being engaged in long-time relationships with their husbands⁵⁴.

The socio-historical notions of creole families continue to be narrated through perceptions of slavery, sexuality from the male perspective, poverty instilled through social class systems, and results of matrilineal principles originating from the land of origin of the enslaved, Africa, and they continue in the new living environment through memory. For this research, I chose to limit the relevance of these ongoing debates about creole family structures. Instead, I want to base my further analyses about the

⁵³ 24850_UBA002000731_06.pdf (uva.nl) accessed 31/03/2024.

⁵⁴ *The Politics of Passion: Women's Sexual Culture in the Afro-Surinamese Diaspora* by Gloria Wekker (kent.ac.uk).

relation of celebrations and the evolution of the Surinamese-Creole identity on the ethnographic data as collected through my informants. One interesting observation to make is that multiple elements of the ethnographic accounts that have been described by the Surinamese and Dutch-Surinamese scholars were also observed by me in the life histories of the four families and during engagements with my other informants in Suriname and in the Netherlands. The phenomenon of double-headed households, whether this included co-wives, was addressed as part of my informants' family experiences, and the aspect of siblings not being from the same parents was also often mentioned in the family stories that were shared with me. One thing that was the constant common denominator was that the harmony, collectiveness, and socio-economic development encountered in these families never depended on the existence of a double-headed family unit. The ability to ensure the continuity of inherited norms, values, work ethics, skills, customs, and religious beliefs passed on from generation to generation served as the basis for these families to secure the wellbeing of each one of the family members. Thus, it was not about the construction of the family unit; it was about the content poured into the family unit and the nurturing of this content. Therefore, I will continue to focus on the norms, values, talents, skills, social practices, religious beliefs, and other forms of cultural inheritance to use as my point of departure to further unpack family celebrations and their relevance to embracing the Surinamese-Creole identity.

4.4. Being Surinamese-Creole observed through family traditions and rituals

In the Surinamese-Creole culture, there are several ritual performances, ceremonies, celebrations, and religious obligations that are considered rites of passage. The theoretical framework to understand rites of passage in communities (Arnold van Gennep, 1960, 2004) allows us to categorise and better understand these different ritual and ceremonial practices. I applied van Gennep's three phases of rites of passage to categorise the ceremonies based on the phase they represent in the person's life, namely rites of separation, rites of transition, and rites of incorporation. I'll give a brief example of each one of these categories applicable to Surinamese-Creole family celebrations and the sort of ceremonies that apply per category:

Rites of transition – the most prominent ceremonies that are observed across the Surinamese-Creole community in the Netherlands and in Suriname, no matter the choice of religion, are mandatory Baptism, Holy Communion, and Confession of Faith ceremonies serving as the rites of passage for the person to transition from being born as a heathen to becoming a reborn Christian. For the *Winti* believers, adhering to these Christian-oriented ceremonies serves as a form of placing the *kra*, which is the soul, under the protection of the most-high God, before allowing meta-persons (in *Winti*, they are addressed as *wenti*) to engage with the person.

Rites of separation – these I observed during the funerals of my mother-in-law and her sister. The ritual performances served the purpose of separating us, the direct family, from them. They were no longer part of life on earth and thus not like us. But also, the rituals served to prepare them for their journey to the afterlife, to become proper ancestors who would find eternal peace yet be able to engage with their family in times of need. The rituals to engage with the deceased as ancestors are not performed during the funeral or the wake. These are permitted to be performed at least 1 year after the funeral. In the period between passing away and becoming an ancestor, it is believed that the deceased undergoes another transition, which is from becoming a *lala yorka* (becoming a new spirit) to becoming a *kabra* or a *profen* (becoming a seasoned spirit). The belief is that 40 days after the funeral, the deceased will officially transition to the spiritual realm, and after at least 1 year, they will have properly settled in the afterlife and be able to guide their family members. These rituals of engaging with the deceased as an ancestor were not explained to me in depth. I learned about them through workshops that I attended and through online talks about *Winti* and the afterlife. Usually, the in-depth details are shared amongst insiders or with family members who seek guidance from a *Duman* to engage with their ancestors.

Rites of incorporation – the wedding of my godmother, who is the youngest sister in my father's family. Technically, her marriage can be considered a re-marriage, as she had already been living with a previous partner whom she did not marry but had a long-term relationship with and conceived

three children with. At the time she married her second partner, her children were all adults living their own separate lives. Marriage in the Surinamese-Creole culture indicates a longstanding historical paradox. The concept of a Christian marriage was introduced to the enslaved by the missionaries as part of the Christianisation process⁵⁵. Prior to the missionaries being allowed to Christianise the enslaved community, marriage according to Eurocentric standards was not allowed amongst the enslaved. In the early stages of Christianisation, the enslaved were allowed to sign an agreement of living together, witnessed by the priest or the reverend. The agreement was named *verbontu*, which served as proof that the couple officially lived together in one household. Shortly before and after the abolition of slavery, marriage was promoted to the enslaved community as a form of officially becoming part of society and, as such, transitioning from one social role into a more virtuous status⁵⁶. Due to the institution of marriage being abused and misused, mainly as a form of manipulating the community of the enslaved and freed slaves, there emerged opposing feelings about marriage. These remain vivid, especially amongst the working class of creole people in Suriname. Gradually, with the modernisation of society, but mostly due to the rise of the Pentecostal and Evangelical churches where marriage is part of the holy Sacraments, marriage gained popularity, especially amongst young Christians. Rituals as part of the marriage ceremony differ, and the increase in debates about decolonisation is now infiltrating the religious and socio-cultural practices associated with marriage. Young people who desire to embrace their roots as descendants of enslaved Africans prefer to incorporate traditional rituals into their wedding ceremonies.

Unpacking the practices performed during the different ceremonies would certainly allow for a thorough exploration of the theory of rites of passage and how that applies to the ritual ceremonies in Surinamese-Creole culture. But it would steer away from the main purpose of this research. Unpacking these ritual ceremonies would serve better as follow-up to my research, as it would allow for new ethnographic data to support the realisation that there is no way to determine definitive classifications of rites and to emphasise that not all rites of passage are applicable for clear-cut categorisation (Arnold van Gennep, 1960: 4). The information I encountered in the field proved, just as in the case of the discussions about religion, creolisation, and notions of time, the validity of the current critique on the notion of rites of passage and the need for a broader understanding of the ceremonies as experienced in different communities. Including the interpretations as explained and experienced by the communities (representing their voice without trying to translate it into definitions that accommodate ways of knowing from Eurocentric points of view) should facilitate more insight into questions such as the how and why of these ceremonies. In conversation with one of the *Duman*, it became clear to me that some of the ritual ceremonies are not necessarily addressed as rituals. He rather preferred addressing them as blessings. To him, rituals had very specific characteristics that differed from blessing performances. Thus, the application of certain terminologies does not always correspond with the way the performers interpret and categorise the performance.

Therefore, instead of contributing to these valid debates, in this stage of my research, I will utilise my ethnographic data to provide a detailed ethnographical account of one of the ceremonies that I attended and use it as an example to explore in depth how this rite of passage facilitates embodying the Surinamese-Creole identity. I will further explore which ritual performances in this particular rite of passage disseminate the historical events and occurrences of becoming a Surinamese-Creole. Being able to gain insight into the dynamic process of the evolution of the identity would provide valuable ethnographic data to determine the practices that become fluid in the constitution of the Surinamese-Creole identity and the practices that continue to be vital and indispensable in the transmission and continuation of the Surinamese-Creole identity. Thus, for my research, it was relevant to focus on observing aspects of the Surinamese-Creole identity that remained constant and those that became fluid throughout the process of identity evolution. I also explored the social function of celebrations,

⁵⁵ Professor Humphrey Lamur, in his article about the slave family in colonial 19th-century Suriname, gives detailed accounts of missionaries instructing the enslaved to marry their partners as a form of becoming respectable people in society. *The Slave Family in Colonial 19th-Century Suriname* on JSTOR accessed 1/4/2024.

⁵⁶ Ellen Klinkers *De zending onder de plantageslaven in Corone, OSO. Tijdschrift voor Surinaamse taalkunde, letterkunde en geschiedenis. Jaargang 13 - DBNL* accessed 1/4/2024.

the agency of the material objects involved in ritual performances, and the role of language utilised as a vessel to communicate symbolic messages that are often embedded in ritual performances.

4.4.1. *An ethnographic account of a ceremony honouring the ancestors as part of transitioning into a new decade of life*

The following ethnographic account illustrates a celebration that contained ritual performances to facilitate ancestral veneration. The rituals were followed by rites of incorporation, which I will have to describe from an outsider's perspective. Some of these rites were performed in an intimate family-oriented setting, which, although I was invited, I did not attend due to a misunderstanding in communication. Therefore, I did not obtain full insight into understanding some of the rituals that I observed. I cannot claim my interpretations to be the correct ones.

Apart from my involvement with the four families in Suriname, I also fostered an intimate relationship with key informants in the Netherlands. They were my support system and helped me navigate the socio-cultural life of Surinamese-Creoles in the Netherlands. All had a prominent position in the Surinamese-Creole community in the Netherlands and, as such, introduced me to several cultural events and intimate family celebrations in the Netherlands. In this paragraph, I draw on my experience and involvement in a ceremony organised by one of these informants from the Netherlands. She involved me in her celebration called *Aisa prisiri*. This was a celebration in anticipation of her 56th birthday to honour her ancestors, receive their blessings, and request guidance from her spiritual guardians for the next decade of life. She was one of my first informants who gave me full access to experiencing rituals and celebrations related to the *Winti* religion.

The *Aisa* in the *Winti* religion represents the mother of the earth, and *prisiri* refers to celebrating; thus, *Aisa prisiri* literally means 'celebrating the *Aisa*'. Celebrations, ceremonies, and rituals involving the *wenti*⁵⁷ and the ancestors are casually called *winti prey*. A *winti prey* is a celebration in honour of the ancestors and the *Winti* entities who act as the guardians of the person. *Winti prey* are usually performed to celebrate a prosperous ending of rituals of healing, or rituals performed to consult the ancestors and the spiritual guardians for support in resolving family matters or protection whilst dealing with challenges experienced in life. The *Duman* is vital in the preparatory rituals and the execution of the *winti prey*. He, or in some cases she, possesses the knowledge to prepare medicinal herbs and ritual baths as part of the preparation rituals to engage with the spiritual world. The *Duman* also facilitates communication with the meta-persons and the ancestors. During the ceremonies, the *Duman* must be able to ensure proper instances of transcendence, whereby individuals engaged with the *winti prey* are temporarily possessed by meta-persons (in the *Winti* religion known as *wenti*). In the embodiment of the *Aisa prisiri*, possession by meta-persons has a vital role. João de Pina-Cabral (2008) addresses the phenomenon of meta-persons as the occurrence where a person is unconsciously capable of transcending, moving beyond their own existence, and becoming possessed by non-human entities who are capable of consciously informed behaviour such as speaking, dancing, eating, etc.

This element of the Surinamese-Creole culture is not one that can be understood from an outsider's point of view. One must be fully engaged with the rituals, ceremonies, and rites to grasp the complexity of the spiritual practices, the unwritten rules, and restrictions of the *Winti* religion, specifically the aspect of engaging with meta-persons. Much is encoded and taught by the *Duman* or a *Winti* priest during intimate consults or as preparation for the family-oriented ceremonies. The knowledge has been transmitted from generation to generation through oral stories. Proper documentation and academic studies are scarce, and in the case where there is documentation, the information remains dense, complex, and difficult to digest from a rational point of view.

⁵⁷ The *wentis* are the meta-persons, deities, and entities represented in the *Winti* religion who are spiritual guardians assigned by God to protect and guide humans. The belief is that most of these entities came from Africa with the enslaved and therefore possess knowledge and details about social life and spiritual knowledge that resemble that of the West African communities. The *Aisa* is one of the *wenti* in the *Winti* religion. Zaalman scriptie (1).pdf accessed 31/03/2024.

From a historical point of view, the origins of the *Winti* religion cannot be defined through definitive structures. Scholars who studied the involvement of the enslaved in religious practices always defined the origins of the *Winti* religion from three moments in the history of the transatlantic slave trade (see Chapter 4). However, there are two historical factual moments in the colonial history of Suriname that shaped ritual practices in the *Winti* religion. The relevance of these events remained consistent through transmitted oral stories, and they continue to dictate rituals of ancestral veneration. These moments are the arrival of the enslaved Africans by boat, the shelter provided by the Amerindians to the enslaved upon arrival, and their escapes to the interior. The boat returns in the ritual practices as a tangible object, referenced in songs and prayers, or represented through certain plants and other objects in the ritual bath. The reference to the boat is to symbolise the arrival of the ancestors. In the case of the Amerindian reference, the family's history of enslavement is related to the shelter provided by the Amerindians for the enslaved. When the meta-person in the personification of an Amerindian possesses the person, this represents the ancestors of that family and the meta-person they engaged with while receiving shelter from the Amerindian during the time of slavery.

The celebration was private, invite-only. My husband and I went. It was our first time attending such a celebration together. The following ethnographic account illustrates the conversations that I had with my friend leading up to her celebration and my observations while attending the event.

Our very first conversation was about her having a dream which entailed her late great-grandmother instructing my friend to do a celebration in honour of her as her great-grandmother. My friend described the dream with specific details, such as the type of celebration it needed to be, the colours of the clothes that she had to wear, the location to organise the celebration, and when to organise this celebration. I was wondering how she knew it was her great-grandmother, and she replied to me, saying, 'I met her in my dreams, and from a young age, I would dream about her. Once, I told my older sibling, and he took me to a Winti priest to do further research. This Winti priest, through specific rituals, was able to call my great-grandmother's spirit and ask her to affirm that she was the one who would visit me in my dreams. My great-grandmother confirmed that it was so and that she chose to be my spiritual guardian.

'Since then, I've known she is with me, and whenever there is something about to happen, I see her occurring in my dreams, giving specific instructions and messages on what I need to do.' As I was listening to her, I thought of my own experience of dreaming about an elderly woman who would visit me in my dreams. I never saw her face, but she would show me things or talk to me about things that I had no knowledge of, until the things would happen. I told one of my other informants about this dream, and she said, 'That is your "bigi sma" (ancestors). Each one of us has our own "bigi sma", but it is up to this "bigi sma" to show her- or himself if they deem it to be necessary.' When I shared this with my mother, she was not surprised, and neither was my dad. Both immediately tried to figure out which ancestor it could be. They both did this by recalling their own childhood memories about their parents or grandparents.

My dad was convinced that it was his own grandmother (my great-grandmother from his mother's side), and my mum suspected it could be her own great-grandmother from her mother's side, which would be my great-great-grandmother. None of these two great-grandmothers were known to me, and through a very vague picture, my dad showed me his grandmother. My mother was less successful in finding me a picture of her great-grandmother. The most important thing in this personal experience of mine is that my parents were not surprised at all. They rather saw it as something that eventually would happen. My dad claimed he had known it since I was born, as his own great-grandmother had appeared to him in a dream to tell him even before I was born. It is important to note that I was raised in a strictly Christian household. Speaking about ancestors and dreaming about them was never the subject of our conversations with our parents. Yet, here I was, in conversation with my parents about a topic that I thought they would be very dismissive about.

Going back to my friend's event – she had already prepared me for her great-grandmother to appear on the night to show herself and enjoy the celebrations. I had no idea what to expect. I was a bit worried about what I would 'see'. After all, this great-grandmother had passed away without my friend even knowing who she was. When we arrived at the place, it was an outdoor place somewhere on a farm in the Netherlands. The area had some similarities to Suriname's countryside, large trees and woodland-like. Everyone was dressed in the colours blue and white, wearing our Surinamese-Creole traditional clothing, which is the women in a kimono (that's a wrap dress) and the men in a long cotton shirt, white pants, and a felt hat – this, as per the instructions of my friend. There was a large marquee decorated with different angisa fabrics. Large, wooden benches were arranged along each side of the marquee. A special area was decorated with several objects and fabrics. This was the corner dedicated to the spiritual guardians of my friend, especially her great-grandmother.

Then, it was time; the musicians started to play the drums while singing a song. Slow, with devotion – that's how the lead singer sang. I saw my friend walking towards the marquee, followed by a small group of people, her close family with their children and grandchildren. My friend was dressed in a white cotton koto and a white angisa. It looked like a procession. Everyone was quiet. I could feel the silence. It was an atmosphere of respect, honour, and devotion. Almost the same feeling as when I am in church to attend Holy Communion. I felt a bit emotional. I cannot describe why. It could have been the atmosphere; it could have been me experiencing something like this for the very first time.

As my friend entered the middle of the marquee, I could see her eyes. She had a gaze as if she were not with us, but far away. She did not greet anyone but had a smile on her face and looked around the marquee. Everyone would turn towards her and do a curtsy. I did the same, and so did my husband. This was not his first time experiencing something like this. He told me his mum would organise such events often, as she also had her own 'bigi sma' who needed attention from time to time. My husband was raised in a household that was dedicated to practising the Winti religion. Then, my friend stood in front of the lead singer. He continued singing with such devotion, honouring her presence. She continued to smile, and I saw tears streaming from her eyes. The song stopped and switched over into a song that was a bit more up-tempo. The rhythm of the drums swelled. Everyone started to form a circle and dance. It was like a line dance, with my friend and some of her siblings in the middle.

The Duman was closely guarding the whole event. He guided my friend as she walked into the marquee, drying her tears as she was crying, and now guided her again as she was moving slowly in the circle of dancing guests. And then it happened, as the music continued to take on a faster pace: I saw my friend closing her eyes, standing still, and then starting to shake. As soon as that happened, the Duman covered her with a large white cotton scarf. The name of the scarf is a 'tapu skin pangi'. It's usually worn when someone is in deep mourning. Very graciously, she started to dance, leaning backwards, swinging her body sideways. The Duman hugged her and sprinkled her with perfume, a special perfume only used for rituals like this. One of his assistants came with a small calabash with water. Carefully, he gave my friend some water to drink. I learned it was not tapwater, but rainwater. She continued to dance, her moves slow but graceful, her eyes still closed. Her facial expression was almost angelic. I couldn't recognise her. She looked like a totally different person. I was intrigued but kept dancing in the circle. Everyone else was. It was just her close family members with whom she walked in the marquee who continued to dance with her.

Then, she stopped dancing, one arm on her hip, while leaning with the other hand on a beautifully decorated cane, her eyes open. She looked around and smiled, still with that gaze in her eyes – as if she weren't present. The Winti priest then guided her to her special corner and placed her on a chair. We, as guests, were invited to form a line and, one by one, approach her to greet her. As you approached her, you had to do a curtsy again, wait for her to spread her arms, and then hug her. She wouldn't talk but continued to smile. When I approached her, I was wondering if I would see

some sign of her recognising me. She looked at both me and my husband, smiled, and immediately spread her arms to hug us both simultaneously. My husband took off his hat as he did a curtsy for her. She hugged him again. But she did not say a word and did not mention our names.

I kept wondering if she gave us that smile and warm hug or if it was her great-grandmother. And as the evening progressed, she changed clothes and continued to dance. There were instances where I could tell it was her because she would speak to her guests, walk up to them, chat, and laugh. She also came to me and my husband, greeted us, hugged us, and thanked us for coming. Then, there were moments where she had that gaze again, wouldn't speak, but smiled and walked around the marquee or danced very gracefully on her own while being guided by the Winti priest and some of her family members. Sometimes, during the moments that she had that gaze and just a smile (these were the moments when her great-grandmother would take possession, I was told by one of her family members), she would approach some people and give them a spontaneous hug. Often, she would approach me and my husband and hug us. I was told it was a privilege to be hugged when she was in this state, as actually it was the great-grandmother who was showing gratitude to the people, she allowed to be close with my friend. The night came to an end, and when the music stopped, my friend sat in her special chair – weary but satisfied, as she told us when we said goodbye to her.

Days after, when we spoke about the event, reminiscing about the experience, she told me that her great-grandmother again appeared in her dreams and told her that she was satisfied and that she would continue to guide her through life. She also gave her a couple of other messages, but my friend was not specific about the details. This, I was told, is not to be shared with outsiders. This is between the person and their spiritual guardian. I kept wondering if one day I would be asked to organise such an event for my own 'bigi sma'. When I shared my experiences of the event with my dad, he smiled and said he prays that when it is my turn, he will be there to see and experience it. But, he said, 'There is no need to start preparing for it. It will happen if and when your own "bigi sma" wants it to happen. Not all "bigi sma" require this, and if you push for it, it might turn out to be a disaster. Just continue to be yourself and focus on what you want to become. Your "bigi sma" makes her own decisions and will inform you if the need is there for it. Other than that, you just need to know that she is there to guide, protect, and take care of you.' And that was that for me.

This personal encounter introduced me not only to the phenomenon of meta-persons but also to a social form of engaging with the past and obtaining knowledge about someone's family history through the presence of an ancestor in the form of a meta-person. In conversations with other informants, I learned about instances where the ancestor, as a meta-person, would share details about events that happened in the past, which the family didn't know of, but the results of the event continued to affect a person or an entire family. The ancestor who manifested in one of the family members would be consulted to help solve these unexplained occurrences in a person's life or in the family system. Usually, the interference of the ancestor would be facilitated with the assistance of a *Duman*, but in some cases, the cause and solution would be communicated in a dream by the ancestors to a family member. The phenomenon of meta-persons and ancestral engagements is sometimes also applied in the search for a family tree. Creoles who are practising the *Winti* religion consult their ancestors and utilise the possession of meta-persons to reveal the history of their family and determine their lineage. This was also the case with the preparatory ritual performances for my friend's ceremony. In the next section, I'll compare this experience with my arguments on oral history, historicity, and the fluidity of time in relation to the embodiment of the Surinamese-Creole identity.

Pictures to illustrate my friend's celebration, the *Aisa prisiri*⁵⁸

Picture 1: My friend accompanied by her close family. She is entering the marquee and is dressed in a white koto. The white koto is in honour of the Aisa wenti. In the picture, her face has been covered in red for privacy reasons.



1

Pictures 2 and 3 illustrate an example of the way the koto of my friend was covered with a white cotton scarf called a 'tapu skin pangi'. Because of privacy reasons, I am using a picture of another event instead of a picture where my friend is covered with a cotton scarf. The 'tapu skin pangi' is worn when someone is in deep mourning or during sacred rituals related to the dead. In the case of my friend, it was used as a way of honouring the kabra (an ancestor) who took possession of her.



2



3

⁵⁸ Picture 1 credit: 2023, M. Baarn.

Pictures 2 and 3 credit: 2023, Facebook group 'Aflevereniging Dankbaarheid'. The pictures represent the celebrations to honour their fifth anniversary as an encoffiner society.

4.4.2. *Embodying Surinamese-Creole identity during ceremonies dedicated to the ancestors*

As I previously explained, I utilised the *Aisa prisiri* not to explore the rites of passage in Surinamese-Creole culture, but to understand how the ceremonies related to the rites of passage help shape the current-day Surinamese-Creole identity. Before I go into the details of my analyses, I first want to refer to my arguments in Chapter 4 that should set the tone for my reflections on the ceremony. In Chapter 4, I speak about the notion of historicity and its application in Surinamese-Creole culture in relation to understanding time. To quote my statement, 'The notion of time is perceived in the Surinamese-Creole culture through different perspectives, depending on the context in which it is applied. Time in the sense of defining the difference between past time and present time often becomes a blurred line.' In the same chapter, I also draw on the observations of Eric Hirsch and Charles Stewart (2005), who address the difference between history and historicity, referring to 'a human situation in flow, where situations of the past and the future assume present form'.

The past is an important element in the way Surinamese-Creoles embody their creoleness. It's a huge part of their social life. To understand the Surinamese-Creole, it is important to first understand how they interpret their social life. And to understand how they give meaning to their social life, it is important to unpack social events relevant to their past that are embedded in oral stories and cultural practices that are performed in their present social life. The *Aisa prisiri* is a perfect example to visualise how the past became part of the present, the timelines became less linear, and the past was no longer behind us but manifested right in front of our own eyes in the present during the ceremony. The manifestation of the past had the main goal of helping prepare a good fate for the person's future. In this case, my friend's ancestor was manifested as a meta-person to be present before and during the celebration to help pave the way for the next decade in my friend's life that she was about to enter.

As it appeared in my conversations with my friend, dreaming was another important aspect of her preparations for the celebrations. It is through dreaming that she claims to have received the very first instructions from her ancestor. Receiving instructions from the ancestors is another way for Surinamese-Creoles who are followers of the *Winti* religion to make life-changing decisions or to give meaning to their lives. For them, being a Creole is intrinsically related to regular engagements with the ancestors, honouring and acknowledging the *wenti* who manifest as meta-persons and living daily social life through the guidance of the *wenti* and the ancestors. The indignation of the *Duman* in Family B about my lack of knowledge about *negre osi pikin* rituals, and his claiming that due to this lack I cannot consider myself to be a proper Creole person, proves the importance for this category of Surinamese-Creoles to engage with *Winti* practices, which predominantly involve the phenomenon of meta-persons, in order to be seen as true Surinamese-Creoles. For them, *Winti*-related ceremonies are not just rites of passage. The ceremonies are necessary to actualise the inherited socio-cultural practices that underline and showcase being a Creole. They dictate the difference between Creoles who do not belong to the same category. The ceremonies and *Winti*-related practices act as the norm to help maintain the rules, structures, and labels that have collectively been determined and passed on through generations to sustain being a creole in a multi-cultural society.

The fact that scholars still entertain large debates about the phenomenon of engagements with meta-persons as a way of giving meaning to social life (Michael Lambek 2003, Mary Douglas 1966), and Matt Hodge's (2015) valid question of whether anthropology should deal with dreams as a way of engaging with the historical past, proves that these ceremonies and celebrations to actualise one's cultural past remain scrutinised about their potential of being accepted as academically valid and proper resources to draw conclusions and definitions about non-Eurocentric ethnic identities. However, referring to the current ongoing debates about post-colonialism, and the need to strip existing socio-scientific studies and other academic narratives from imposed Eurocentric perceptions of knowledge, I want to introduce the experience of my friend's celebration, supported by her explanation and interpretation of what it means to her to be a proper Creole woman, as a new way of looking at the Surinamese-Creole identity and creole identities in general in post-colonial societies. Creolists such as Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiant, Jean Bernabé, and Lucien Taylor (1997)

claim that creole identities are constitutive of complexity and multiplicity and should therefore not be analysed through the sole lens of Africanism and Eurocentrism. To understand the creole identity is to engage with extensive transculturation and aim to unravel the meaning of the different layers through one's own experience and interpretation of the creole person (Stuart Hall, 2006).

As Matt Hodges stated, 'dreaming might be the motor for local history and the mediator for historical and religious change'. I want to complement his statement with João de Pina-Cabral's observations that the colonial space opened pockets of relative freedom, allowing colonial subjects to entertain beliefs of a non-monotheistic nature (2008: 241). Hodge's question and de Pina-Cabral's statement, in my opinion, must encourage us to employ another perspective of observing socio-cultural phenomena in human life. Turning the direction of observation should lead us into viewing notions of identity embodiment and ancestral ritual performances from the side of the research subjects, without trying to analyse their interpretations through frameworks that facilitate the Eurocentric way of producing knowledge. As Robert Baron describes it, applying metaphors familiar to creole societies helps visualise their interpretation of life – for instance, using metaphors such as soups and stews⁵⁹ to represent and illustrate the multi-cultural layers of social life encountered in creole societies (Robert Baron, 2011: 253). Rather than simplifying the complexity of the socio-cultural practices that I observed, I chose to deliberately align my thoughts and ways of processing information to the way in which the creoles engaged with *Winti* did. Submitting to their interpretations allowed for new perspectives and liberation from applying one norm for knowledge. Democratising my perceptions led to new ethnographic data and insights into what it means to be Surinamese-Creole.

The pride with which my informants confirmed their belonging to the category of Surinamese-Creoles practising the *Winti* religion made me consider the way some scholars describe possession by meta-persons. As Michael Lambek stated, 'carrying the ancestral knowledge to activate history in the present can be a "burden"'. Here, in my opinion, we witness another misinterpretation of non-Eurocentric lived experiences. For the Surinamese-Creole who practices the *Winti* religion, the term 'burden' would never be associated with instances of transcendence. In the case of my friend, the *Duman* from Family B, the *Okomfo* Mrs. Babel, and other informants, they chose to speak of a sacrifice that one makes to satisfy and honour the ancestors and the *wenti* who provide protection, prosperity, and blessings. Those who are 'chosen' to be possessed by an ancestor and, as such, become the vessel through which the family receives directions, solutions, and new skills for the prosperity of the whole family are considered privileged.

Adhering to the rules, norms, and values of the *Winti* religion requires strict dedication, mandatory commitment to abstentions related to food and sexual engagements, especially when a woman is on her period, absorbing regular rituals such as ritual baths, and restrictions from engaging with worldly events such as attending night clubs and bars. Some of my informants spoke of body aches as aftermath of the transcendence and possession by meta-persons; others spoke of instances where some people, because of being chosen to become a *Duman*, a *Dresiman*, or the spiritual head of the family to guard the welfare and wellbeing of the entire family (in *Winti*, it is called the one with the *bere wenti*, meaning the *wenti* that is the head of all the other *wenti* in the family), had their restrictions and mandatory commitments amplified. Yet, it was not described as a 'burden'. These sacrifices were compared to the ones that are committed by Christians to gain access to the heavenly paradise, to receive the never-ending blessings from God, and to allow Him to pour prosperity into one's life. I noticed that most *Winti* believers would make comparisons with customs and norms in Christianity to prove the validity of *Winti* and come to the religion's defence when receiving criticism or rejection. Being the one chosen for the transcendence rituals or to become a *Duman*, *Dresiman*, or the holder of the *bere wenti* was rather carried as a 'badge of honour'. I was told that being chosen makes one become distinct in a family or community of Surinamese-Creoles.

⁵⁹ In Suriname, the metaphor of the traditional dish called *moksi alesi* – which is a rice dish mixed with a variety of ingredients all prepared in one pot – is often used to refer to the diversity of ethnic groups and cultural heritage that Surinamese society consists of.

4.5. Cultural practices to maintain the Surinamese-Creole identity

The *Aisa prisiri* not only introduced me to another category of being Creole. I was also privileged to observe the agency of material culture that helps to maintain the standards and norms of being Creole in this category. The material agency was manifested through traditional clothing, the use of language, traditional recipes, and the use of objects. The meaning attributed to the material culture remains hidden and becomes known only by those initiated into the *Winti* religion.

Since the emergence of Christianity, possessing certain items such as holy olive oil to bless your house, incense when praying, a holy cross, or a rosary was considered important to actualise being a Christian. The same goes for the *Winti* religion. When I was finally accepted into the inner circles of *Winti* believers, my friend gave me a selection of the most important attributes that one must possess to be considered a proper Creole who respects *Winti* practices. These attributes served as my first aid to help facilitate the presence and guidance of my ancestors and the *wenti* in my life. It is called a *baskita* and contains items such as specialised oils and perfumes, incense, rum, special drinks, a *pangi* (the traditional wrap), a special chalk, sea salt that's been ritually purified, a special candle that is not as the regular candles (this one is part of a plant indigenous to the Amazon), and a couple of other things, depending on the phase I am at, to engage with *Winti*.

As one becomes more engaged, the sort of attributes for ritual practices will differ. I felt honoured when I received the *baskita*, and when I told my dad, he expressed his gratitude to my friend, thanking her for taking care of my necessities even though it was his responsibility as my father to do so. I am not fully educated about the use of the different attributes, but through conversations with my dad and my friend, I learned step by step how to engage with them. This change in adapting to the *Winti* religion had no huge impact on my perceptions of being a Surinamese-Creole. It felt natural, and it felt like something I should have done a long time ago. It felt as if I was finally complete, and combining the *Winti* religion with Christianity never once felt like betrayal. It rather felt like an addition to facilitate a holistic embodiment of being Surinamese-Creole. Below follows a detailed unpacking of the agency of material culture in the embodiment practices of Surinamese-Creoles.

4.6. Traditional dress representing the Surinamese-Creole identity during celebrations

The ceremonies associated with the *Winti* religion require a diversity of traditional clothes. The choice per ceremony depends on the purpose of the ceremony and the *wenti* and ancestors that will be honoured during the ceremony. As there is a wide range of traditional clothes distinguished by colour and symbols, I do not want to elaborate on these. They provide the perfect opportunity for follow-up research as a post-doctoral researcher. Unpacking these different traditional clothes and their given meaning allows for a more in-depth approach to the *Winti* religion and the way it structures the socio-cultural life of the *Winti* believers, which is a rather complex layer in the Creole socio-cultural identity. In this thesis, the focus is very much on the evolution of that creole identity without singling out one aspect of being creole. Unpacking the complexities of the *wenti* practices in relation to the creole identity will lead us down a path of engaging in the anthropological discourse of meta-persons in relation to the self and the notion of personhood.

Instead, I will focus on one traditional clothing item that is worn by all Surinamese-Creoles, regardless of the choice of religion or the category of creole they associate with. This traditional clothing item is called the *koto*. The *koto* is the most common material object to serve as an affirmation of the Surinamese-Creole identity⁶⁰. However, the oral stories related to the origins of the *koto* call for

⁶⁰ The *koto* was inscribed in June 2014 as Dutch cultural heritage of the Afro-Surinamese community in diaspora on the Immaterial Cultural Heritage Safeguarding List of UNESCO (*Angisa binden en koto maken - Immaterieel Erfgoed*). The inscribing as Dutch cultural heritage causes a bit of controversy amongst Surinamese-Creole organisations. According to some, the *koto* was forbidden by the Dutch colonisers and thus should never be considered part of Dutch cultural heritage. More of such controversy in the adaptation of creole

criticism, ongoing debates, and rejection by some radical Creole nationalists. Some claim the *koto* was invented by the slave master's wife, while others claim to have strong evidence-based knowledge that the *koto* was an invention of the enslaved women who managed to free themselves from slavery and, as such, designed this dress as a statement of their freedom. The many variations of the *koto*, including the symbolism attached to the fabric and the design of the *koto*, make the latter version of the origins of the *koto* more believable.

Documents in the *Koto* Museum, oral stories embedded in the typical Surinamese-Creole quotes, and a thorough study carried out by the curator of the *Koto* Museum support the idea that the *koto* was an invention of enslaved women to manage obtaining their freedom through their own endeavours. But, as it is with many other elements of Surinamese-Creole identity, and typical in determining the origins of practices and the use of objects in creole societies, the origins of the *koto* remain the topic of fierce debate associated with the decolonising and rewriting of the history of the Afro-Surinamese people. However, in this case, I will circumvent the quest of determining the true origin of the *koto* and redirect my focus to its representation in Surinamese-Creole culture.

The dress represents different occasions important to the embodiment of the Creole identity in Suriname. These occasions are distinguished based on the design and fabric of the *koto*, the application of symbols, and the ritual purpose of the occasion. Reflecting on the origins of the *koto*, it emerged as an object to facilitate social status. It was invented after the abolition of slavery and was used as a symbol of freedom, independence, and wealth. The women who invented the traditional clothing were called *kotomisi*. The *koto* habituates the historical development of the creole women who have contributed significantly to the emergence of the Surinamese-Creole identity⁶¹ and are considered the bearers of existing norms, values, customs, social practices, and cultural performances that distinguish the creole community from other ethnic groups in the colony.

The different styles of the *koto* represent the different categories of creole women during colonial times – from the women who were working in the field to the women who were part of the household of the plantation owner. And then there were the *kotos* that were refined, made of delicate fabric, and richly adorned. These were made for the creole women who were part of the elite Creole community. They were called *Sisi*, which is a reference to them being not officially married to their usually white-European husbands, but concubines. Those who were married were called *Misi*, which translates as 'misses'. The *Sisi* would dress their personal and most favourite housemaids in expensive *kotos* so they could flaunt them and, as such, exhibit their wealth⁶². The *koto* has always been subject to socio-economic change and, as such, is utilised, especially during celebrations, to showcase one's social status, financial wellbeing, and embodiment of the Surinamese-Creole identity. The more engaged a person is in creole culture, the more the *koto* and the occasion it is worn for will be attributed to historical representation.

In the *Winti* religion, the *koto* is an object that constitutes the complexity of symbolism and spiritual endowment. The meaning given to the *koto* becomes dependent on ritual performance, and it serves as an object to help facilitate the spiritual possession that is aimed for through the performance of the ceremony. For instance, for an *Aisa prisiri*, the colour of the *koto*, the way it will be worn, and the designated moments when the person whom the ceremony is for wears the *koto* will all be determined by the *Duman* in close collaboration with the person whom the ceremony is for. My friend's ceremony started with her wearing a crisp white cotton *koto* and on top of that a large white cotton shawl covering her whole upper body. This manner of wearing the *koto* symbolises deep mourning if worn during a funeral. But if this style is worn during the *Aisa prisiri* ceremony, it symbolises the ancestor to whom the ceremony is dedicated. The ancestor in this case is called *kabra*, which means that the ancestor has been deceased for longer than 1 year, and in most cases at least longer than 5 years. In

cultural heritage as part of Dutch cultural heritage continues to dominate the ongoing debates about reparations, decolonisation, and demands for official apologies expressed by the Dutch Government and King.

⁶¹ Several studies about the free elite creole and Black community in colonial Suriname reveal that it was mostly the women who dictated the emergence of these different group of free people and also introduced the different labels, norms, and values to maintain the groups and distinguish themselves from others in society. Redalyc. THE FORMATION OF A FREE NON-WHITE ELITE IN PARAMARIBO, 1800-1863 accessed 05/04/2024.

⁶² In the book Ma Kankantri (2007), the authors Francois Henri Rikken and Nelli Sedoc vividly describe the rivalry that would occur between the *Sisi* as they flaunted their extravagantly dressed-up housemaids.

general, the *koto* in the *Winti* religion represents the ancestors. The person wearing the *koto*, therefore, is referenced as *wan bigi sma*, which means an elderly person who commands respect.

Pictures illustrating different styles of the *koto*⁶³

Picture 1: Christine van Russel in her Koto Museum depot, where she has a large number of kotos stored. Some are more than 100 years old. Christine wears a traditional koto, which is called a 'bigi koto'.

Picture 2: Christine van Russel surrounded by other kotomisi. They all wear a 'bigi koto'. The occasion was the launch of Christine van Russel's latest book Prodo fu koto. In the book, she shares her knowledge, oral stories, historical events, and other facts about the origins and the development of the koto.



⁶³ Picture copyright 1: Rachel Gefferie, 20211.
Picture copyright 2: Christine van Russel, 2023.
Picture copyright 3: Rachel Gefferie, 2023.
Picture copyright 4: Natasha Ristie, 2023.

Picture 3: Me wearing a modern version of the koto. The occasion was the 18th UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage Meeting in Botswana, 2023.

Picture 4: A modern version of the 'bigi koto'. It is called 'Moderne koto' and consists of less fabric and fewer layers.



3



4

4.6.1. Traditional clothing and its celebratory purpose reshaped through globalisation

While the *koto* was once invented as a form of resistance against oppression and re-establishing the diminished identity of the enslaved, nowadays it has become a subject of controversy. The controversy surrounding the *koto* and the phenomenon of being a *kotomisi* stems from the different oral stories narrating the emergence and the use of the *koto* during colonial times and also the agency attributed to the *koto* depending on the category of creole embodying the *koto* and the occasions it is used for. Creoles who are Christians wear the *koto* as a way of remembering the time of enslavement and colonialism, but they do not engage with the spiritual meaning given to the *koto*. *Winti* believers embrace the *koto* as a way of reconnecting with their ancestors and representing the lives their ancestors endured during colonialism. They attribute a much deeper-rooted historical meaning to the *koto* and associate it with ritual performances constituting engagements with the *wenti*. To this category of Creole, the *koto* becomes a vessel that habituates oral stories and coded messages about the wisdom, the creativity, and the knowledge that their ancestors possessed to facilitate the continuation of an identity that they were able to construct through the memories they carried within them about their place of origin, Africa.

As I have referenced Roger Brubaker's arguments about groupness instead of groupism, we've noticed that each group contains actors (group members) who manipulate and dictate the cultural traits and features to maintain the (self-established) boundaries in the group to secure the existence of the group (Rogers Brubaker, 2002). Within the Surinamese-Creole community, there are people and cultural-educational groups who serve as gatekeepers to safeguard the continuation of the Surinamese-Creole identity and its proper transmission through material objects and intangible experiences. The design and fabric choice, the applied symbols, and the occasion of use are elements of the *koto* that are closely monitored by these gatekeepers to preserve its representation of the Surinamese-Creole identity.

However, the new generation of Surinamese-Creole people in the Netherlands adapted the design and representation of the *koto* to Eurocentric fashion developments. The result is that the traditional

koto, as it was created in Suriname, differs from the *koto* that we nowadays see in the Netherlands. The new designs, the symbols added to the fabric, and the way some people choose to wear the *koto* (for instance, the *koto* never consisted of a petticoat, but now the younger generation in the Netherlands incorporates wearing a petticoat underneath the dress so it can be more voluminous) are causing differences in opinions between the gatekeepers and the new generation. The main point of discussion is that, according to the gatekeepers, the elevated *koto* cannot be considered a proper representation of Surinamese-Creole culture.

The subtle conflict about what should be considered proper representation of the Surinamese-Creole identity in this time of modernisation calls for a closer look into the evolution of the Surinamese-Creole identity and the way in which the infiltration of globalised ideas is tolerated in the process of development. First, it would be helpful to define what globalisation means. Sekh Rahim Mondal (2007) argues that there is no set definition for the notion of globalisation. Instead, this phenomenon refers to the currents of trade, finance, culture, ideas, and people, brought about by sophisticated communication technology, modern travel, and the world-wide spread of neoliberalism, such as the idea that trade should be unfettered by government regulations (Sekh Rahim Mondal, 2007). Thus, reflecting on this statement, the infiltration of new designs, modernised objects, adjustments to the existence of the *koto* as a cultural object, and the modernisation of traditional ceremonies and celebrations are things we cannot avoid and instead should anticipate.

The important question to ask then is as follows: Has the *koto* not always been subject to developments in the socio-cultural space of colonisation, through the invasion of fashion developments from Europe and the neighbouring countries? Previous studies, diaries, and oral stories about the *kotomisi* lifestyle reveal that the *kotomisi* were very keen on incorporating every single new and popular development into their lifestyle, the designs of the *koto*, and the *angisa* as the head tie. In fact, in the book *Angisa Tori* (2008), the author Christine van Russel documents stories narrating the way the *kotomisi* would dictate the economic value of imported fabrics and other adornments such as lace and cotton handkerchiefs through their lifestyle. The merchants would collaborate with the *kotomisi*, who would determine an appropriate name for the fabric⁶⁴, after which the promotion of the fabrics would happen through lavish celebrations organised by the *kotomisi*. Oral stories tell about the invention of parties such as *Sneew bal* (Snowball), *Bloemen bal* (Flower ball), and *Franse bal* (French-themed ball) – all parties organised by the *kotomisi* with influences from developments in the field of fashion in Europe.

If we closely analyse what is happening in the Netherlands with the embracing of the *koto* and the evolution of it through incorporating Eurocentric influences, then one can conclude that it is actually a continuation of what the *kotomisi* initiated through their collaborations with merchants. They manifested their identity as creole *kotomisi* and their privileged position in society through creative responses to the developments happening around them. Their identity originates from the ability and the desire to adapt to change and make it their own. Thus, the new generation in the Netherlands has to live daily through the quick changes in society due to globalisation. And while they are holding on to their inherited cultural identity, they simultaneously adapt to these changes that are directing their position in society. One of my informants in the Netherlands explained the changes in the use of the *koto* as follows: 'If you do not go with the flow, you will find yourself quickly at a standstill, and the younger generation won't even be interested anymore in being a Creole in Europe.'

This comment is evidence of the fact that adjusting cultural heritage due to globalisation is not so much a desire; it is rather a necessity. Discussions during my participation in the yearly UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee meetings⁶⁵, about the need for the reviving and modernising of cultural

⁶⁴ In the books *Angisa Tori* (2008) and *Koto Fu Prodo* (2023), Christine van Russel describes how the *kotomisi* use eventful happenings, such as the introduction of the first car in Suriname or scandals occurring in daily social life, as inspiration to invent a name for the fabric. Once the fabric is given a name (usually one that would assure sensation in society), the fabric is published by the merchants, and the *kotomisi* who gifted the name organise a lavish event to showcase the fabric. This marketing strategy ensures proper sales for the merchants, and the *kotomisi* gain popularity and good profits as well.

⁶⁵ As I was asked to represent NAKS Suriname, the NGO I volunteer for, in the UNESCO ICH NGO Platform, I had the privilege of attending the 17th and 18th Intergovernmental Committee meetings of UNESCO. The yearly meetings are aimed to facilitate continuous evaluation and adjustment of the safeguarding regulations and the Convention of 2003. Eighteenth session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage - intangible heritage - Culture Sector - UNESCO accessed 06/04/2024.

heritage because the younger generation rapidly loses interest in safeguarding their own cultural heritage, urged NGOs and bearers of cultural practices to become flexible and more lenient in their ways of transmitting and continuing their cultural heritage. Tourism proved to be one of the main impacts of globalisation and the need for modernising cultural heritage. However, the NGOs and the bearers unanimously agreed that the adjustments also come with a risk: the risk of losing the old traditions carried by their ancestors and of their cultural heritage becoming a rather commercialised trade, which takes away the deeply embedded norms and values that should support society in containing their distinct identity. As mentioned by Michael Kearney (1995), and with him other scholars studying the influence of globalisation in the field of anthropology, the discussions about the impact of globalisation can no longer be avoided. According to him, 'we are dealing with the intensification of world-wide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa'. His statement illustrates the subtle conflict that I illustrated about the *koto* as one of the material objects exercising agency over Surinamese-Creoles and the way they facilitate the evolution of their creole identity during celebrations.

4.7. The agency of music, dance, and songs observed during celebrations

In the previous chapters, I addressed the value of oral stories, songs, and typical Surinamese-Creole quotes to uncover the hidden history of the life of the creole community during and after enslavement in the colony. The stories revealed elements such as the power struggles between the different social classes, the survival struggles of the enslaved community, political occurrences, socio-economic struggles, etc. But these stories also revealed the embedded norms and values of fostering a strong identity and the implementation of rules and labels to establish a distinction from other ethnic groups in society. Transmitting these oral stories often happened through songs and *odo*, but the most important element in this transmission was the use of language.

In the *Winti* religion, language takes centre stage and reveals an array of information expressing the origins of the Surinamese-Creoles. I learned about *krioro tongo*, which is different from *Sranantongo* and regarded as the spiritual language to communicate with the ancestors. *Sranantongo*, I was told by those who were very keen on differentiating *krioro tongo* from *Sranantongo*, is the language that evolved as the enslaved engaged with other ethnic groups. I also learned about spiritual languages distinct to each *wenti*. Each one of the *wenti* has their own wisdom, expressions, and way of speaking. The most common spiritual languages that are utilised in *Winti* rituals are *kumanti tongo* and *luangu tongo*. Both are utilised to communicate with the *wenti*. Being able to speak and understand the language requires proper training in the rituals and ceremonies distinct to the *wenti*, combined with spiritual possession to receive guidance from the *wenti* who equips the person with the knowledge of speaking it. In conversation with a *Duman* and by attending online talks, I learned about the origins and the purpose of *kumanti tongo*.

It is important to know that the language contains terminologies and definitions originating from West African spiritual languages and practices. Some words are associated with a sacred space, a geographical location, or a community in West Africa. Because of these connections, spiritual language is also utilised as a vehicle to reconnect the *wenti* or the ancestor with their place of origin in West Africa, through rituals of transcendence. This reconnecting happens through songs, dance, and the application of drum rhythms designated to a *wenti* or the occasion of the ceremony. In the next paragraphs, I will go into examples of songs and music-dance styles that facilitate reconnecting with the ancestral past and, as such, help to actualise the cultural identity of the creole in Suriname during these intimate celebrations and ceremonies.

4.7.1. *The Banya, a ritual performance where spiritual language and rhythms dictate the embodiment of being Creole*

Melville Herskovits (1936) provided elaborate descriptions of the ceremonies and celebrations that he witnessed in Suriname amongst the creole people. One of the ceremonies was the performance of the *Banya prey*. He described it as a celebration to honour the gods of trade, mostly performed and organised by the women involved in any form of trade, usually women who sell in the market⁶⁶. This explanation does not correspond with what I learned from my informants. The *Banya prey*, I was told, is performed in honour of the ancestors. Trudi Martinus Guda (2005) also describes in her thorough study about this form of dance that the *Banya* is a ritual performance in honour of the ancestors. The difference from the description that Herskovits provides about the *Banya* illustrates the nuances in interpretation that can occur when a researcher depends on the interpretation of informants without obtaining an insider's view on what is being performed. I noticed nuances like these in interpretations of other cultural elements, as well.

The *Banya* is a separate subject that can provide in-depth ethnographic data about the way in which the enslaved community utilised ancestral veneration as a way of shaping their communities and educating the younger generation about the norms and values passed down through generations. It is not just a dance ritual. It encompasses preparatory rituals, such as prayer rituals, to consult the ancestors prior to performing the *Banya*, followed by children's games to re-enact the lifestyle of the ancestors. Songs and dances invite the ancestors, and changes in different traditional dress styles are made, depending on the segment of the *Banya* that is being performed. There is also a theatrical section where social issues are re-enacted to request the attention and guidance of the ancestors and also to educate the audience about these social challenges. Then, there is a segment of performing a spiritual dance competition, which showcases the courage, strength, and persistence of the ancestors during slavery, and a segment of storytelling, which also serves as an opportunity for collective solidarity and support towards each other. The *Banya* can be performed based on different themes, but it remains a ritual performance where the honouring of the ancestors is central.

The essence of the *Banya prey* in relation to facilitating the continuation of the creole identity in Suriname is that the *Banya* consists of historical elements that allow the participants – these can be family or people of the same village or plantation – to come together and reconnect with the roots of their cultural identity. Throughout the different segments of the *Banya*, participants hear about personal historical events and lived experiences that took place in the social life of the enslaved and how these social events helped shape the cultural identity of the ancestors. These stories are embedded in the songs and the oral stories that are performed during the *Banya*. Participants witness games played by their ancestors as children in the time of enslavement. They learn about the life lessons that are captured and illustrated through these games.

The games taught the enslaved children about the dangers and abuse they were exposed to and the skills they should master to survive these dangers. The games also taught the enslaved children about social skills such as knowing how to take care of their personal hygiene, etc. Furthermore, during the *Banya*, participants learn about the turmoil that their ancestors were exposed to and how they overcame it through clever solutions and physical strength. One example is that the *Banya* dance style includes movements made with the feet as if the dancer is walking backwards. As the dancer proceeds to dance backwards, the footprints are simultaneously swept away. The moral of this dance style is that, during the time of slavery, the dancers would indicate the escape routes to their companions, who would closely watch the direction that the dancers would swing their bodies and make footprints. Then, the dancers, by turning around, would wipe out the footprints again so no one could notice. These were the clever ways of communicating messages to each other that outsiders wouldn't understand. As such, the songs, the rhythms of the drums, and the oral stories also tell of encoded messages that the ancestors utilised to survive enslavement.

⁶⁶ 3. *Daily Life, Suriname folklore*, Melville J. Herskovits, Frances S. Herskovits - DBNL accessed 06/04/2024.

I personally experienced the educational part of attending a *Banya*. I had the privilege of attending two different *Banya prey*, and even though I attended through online streaming, I learned a lot about my ancestors, more than I had ever learned in school or through conversations with others. It is important to note that not every Surinamese-Creole automatically engages with a *Banya prey* – due to the stigma that still surrounds this social dance performance. Those not associating with the *Winti* religion paint the *Banya* as an idolatrous event. The stigmatisation, as it is with most of the ritual performances associated with the *Winti* religion, stems from the time of slavery when the plantation owners came to realise the enhancement of collectiveness and unity amongst the enslaved through these socio-cultural events. For me, once I was educated about the role of the *Banya* and how it facilitates unity amongst Creoles, I stripped myself of all presumptions and engaged with all the segments with an open mind. It was then that I discovered the powerful educational part of the *Banya*, the way in which it helps to enrich one's knowledge about cultural heritage and, as such, helps instil self-awareness to embody and showcase one's Surinamese-Creole identity with pride.

Pictures⁶⁷ illustrating the *Banya*, a ritual dance performance

Pictures 1, 2, and 3: An Illustration of the Banya dance. The essence of the dance is to move backwards while swinging angisas as handkerchiefs in the hands.



⁶⁷ Picture copyright: NAKS Wan Rutu, 2023.

Pictures 4 and 5: An illustration of the traditional games performed as part of the Banya. Picture 4 is a performance of the 'susa', and Picture 5 illustrates one of the 'kanga' games. Both are games that re-enact the daily social life of the ancestors during the time of slavery.



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4.8. The role of food in Surinamese-Creole celebrations

Studies have shown that the role of food in a culture allows insights into the development of that culture's identity (David Sutton, 2001). Sutton explains that 'the ability of food to both generate subjective commentary and encode powerful meanings would seemingly make it ideal to wed to the topic of memory' (David Sutton 2001: 6). Another study that justifies analysing the role of food in relation to celebrations dedicated to the continuation of the Surinamese-Creole identity is Richard and Sally Price's article 'Turning Coo Coo' (1996). Their article helps in understanding the way Surinamese-Creoles in the Netherlands utilise food as a way of activating their memories about Suriname. The Prices argue that food, specifically traditional dishes, symbolises home. And re-creating the dish, the acts related to the preparation of that dish, and customs to consume the dish, are considered acts of re-enacting life, daily life, in the country of origin.

These observations inspired me to further analyse the agency of food during the celebrations that I attended, particularly those celebrations with a spiritual ritual element. Instead of going into detail about one of these events, I will illustrate a conversation I had with one of my informants in the Netherlands regarding the sorts of dishes that should be prepared during one of these ritual performances. I will describe some of these dishes and explain in what way the dishes help to re-enact socio-cultural life. In the case of these dishes being prepared during celebrations, the relevance of the food is to re-enact the socio-cultural life of the ancestors during the time of enslavement. The role of the dishes in this case is then to facilitate and represent the presence of the ancestors in a person's life. Sometimes, the food is also prepared as an offering, or as a way of inviting the ancestors to come and participate in the celebration or the ritual performance. The essence of my reference to food in this section about actualising the Surinamese-Creole identity through family celebrations is to showcase how families use food not only to activate memories but also to assume their cultural identity through preparing food that directly connects them with the origins of their identity as Creole.

The following are dishes connected to a ceremony, or a celebration performed as part of *Winti* rituals. The rituals associated with these dishes serve to reinitiate and strengthen family bonds, which are also represented through the ingredients included in the dish and the rituals performed while consuming the dish. Food, through these dishes, is given agency, the ability to serve as a negotiator between the natural and the spiritual world. It is also attributed to providing spiritual strength and evoking wealth and wellbeing. These same dishes are also prepared daily in Surinamese-Creole households. Other ethnic groups also prepare some of these dishes that I will describe. However, the preparation of an everyday-life dish differs from when it is prepared for ceremonial purposes.

Fodu nyanyang fu gi Pranasi nyanyang – this ritual is performed after the plantation, the yard, or the village has been cleaned by the residents. The residents are usually a gathering of families who all have their roots in that particular area. My informant explained that this ritual differs per village or plantation. The ritual, as he described to me, is performed by Creoles living in Para from the plantation *Overtoom*. They prepare a rice dish made from peas and two racks of boiled chicken eggs, and one rooster with red feathers is then slaughtered and cut in half. One half is broiled, and the other half is stewed. As the dishes are prepared, there are no additives added to the dishes – just a little bit of salt and some fresh herbs. Once the dishes are prepared, the ritual performance of transcending begins.

The aim is for the person who is appointed to be the spiritual head of the family to be possessed by the *bere wenti*, which translates as the head *wenti* of the family. Once the *bere wenti* is present, the food is spread on banana leaves in the middle of the plantation or the yard. The person possessed by the *bere wenti* then takes some of the food, mixes it together, and scatters it in all four corners of the plantation or the yard where the residents are gathered. The four corners represent the four areas where the *wenti* of that plantation dwell to serve as the protectors of the families. Once this ritual is done, the rest of the families are invited to eat some of the food and scatter the remainder in the yard. This ritual resembles nurturing a harmonious life between the ancestors, the *wenti*, and the creole family members of that area. The dishes each represent the sort of dishes that the *wenti* present in

that specific plantation. And feeding the *wenti* their favourite food should secure prosperity and health for the family members living on that particular plantation.

Kabra tafra performed prior to a *Banya prey* – as described before, the *Banya prey* is a socio-cultural ceremony performed in honour of the ancestors. Prior to the commencement of the actual *Banya prey*, there are a couple of rituals to carry out. One of these rituals is the preparation of a ritual buffet to share food with the ancestors. This buffet is called a *Kabra tafra*, meaning a table set for the ancestors, who are also called *kabra* or *profen*. I will not go into detail about the dishes that are set at such a buffet, but the essence of these dishes is that each one of them represents the dishes that the ancestors would eat during the time of enslavement. Again, in this case, the seasoning of the dishes is limited to just some salt and some fresh herbs. The table is set up with traditional drinks that stem from the time of slavery, rum, which serves as the most important element on the table, as it is meant to facilitate the 'entering' of the ancestral spirits into the present day, and some savoury dishes, which include traditionally prepared fish and plantains and soup. The fish and plantains are roasted on charcoal and firewood to resemble the way the ancestors would cook during slavery. And then there are some sweets prepared from corn, coconut, and peanuts.

Once the table is set, there is a ritual performance to invite the ancestors. The purpose of the ancestors taking part in this buffet is to invite them to provide guidance to the family. Ancestral spirits possess some of the family members sitting at the table and then speak through them to share about life during slavery and things that went wrong on the plantations, such as an ancestor who engaged with a negative spirit, which brought on a curse and therefore continues to affect the family. The ancestors then share knowledge on how to resolve what went wrong, and they provide guidelines and tools such as ritually prepared medicine to serve as a protection for the family, so they can continue to prosper as a family. The *Kabra tafra* resembles a family meal where conversations are held about the developments within the family, and solutions are discussed to facilitate continuous growth within the family.

Food, in these particular examples, serves as the mediator to facilitate the ancestors and persuade them to come and join the family in the present time and 'talk' with the family about life challenges and opportunities. These rituals also showcase a collapsing of the past and the present in one space, for one particular purpose, and during one specific occasion. Time during these rituals no longer serves as the indicator of events. It becomes rather a channel through which the past travels to enter the present, and food serves as the vehicle to facilitate a proper journey to enter the present.

Picture⁶⁸ to illustrate an example of a *Kabra tafra*



⁶⁸ Picture copyright: M. Ligeon, 2023.

4.9. Conclusion

To conclude this chapter, the most relevant question to ask is the following: How are Surinamese-Creole families and celebrations connected? Concluding the chapter with this question also allows us to answer the following sub-questions in support of the two leading questions of the thesis: How do Surinamese-Creole families prepare for celebrations, and what are the norms, values, traditions, and customs individually employed by Surinamese-Creoles to express their creoleness during celebrations?

When I studied the evolution of the Surinamese-Creole culture, it was paramount to observe the process of evolution not just through current developments but also through the agency of language, music, dance, songs, and food. They serve as the vehicles to ensure the preservation and transmission of cultural heritage from generation to generation. And it was in the intimacy of the family unit that celebrations took on deeper meaning and that aspects of the Surinamese-Creole identity came to life, which wouldn't necessarily be exposed or exhibited in public. It is through this personal social form that I witnessed the importance of celebrations in the continuation and evolution of the Surinamese-Creole identity. The descriptions of the four families showcased the ongoing engagement of Surinamese-Creoles with other cultures and the adaptation of cultural practices from these different cultures. The diversity of these families was also reflected in the differences in applying cultural practices during celebrations. The diversity expressed during the ritual performances and embodiment practices during family celebrations diminished the primary notion of creole cultures being considered extracts of source cultures.

As the chapter also discussed the ways the relationships between creole families in Suriname and those in the Netherlands dictated how typical family-oriented celebrations contributed to the continuation of the Surinamese-Creole identity, I obtained valuable insight into the evolution of the creole identity in diaspora. I observed how their dynamic and interactive engagement with other cultures in the Eurocentric society became visible through the agency of food, dance, and songs, and in the ritual performance for the ancestors in the host country (their home away from home). Referring to the sub-question of how norms and values, traditions, and customs are individually employed to express creoleness during celebrations, I relate the desire for a sense of belongingness in Surinamese-Creoles in diaspora with processes of remembering and conclude that the choice and application of material objects, cultural practices, and rituals to activate the memories from home are dictated by and adapted to the new social daily life they are exposed to in the host country. To clarify this concluding argument, I am drawing on the experience of my friend's celebration in the Netherlands, her *Aisa prisiri*. I observed the integration of objects ordered in Suriname, ingredients from Suriname, and traditional clothing made in Suriname, just to be able to re-create the feeling of home. Even the presence of certain family members from Suriname at the celebration in the Netherlands was addressed as highly valuable to the success of the rituals to be performed for the celebration. To adapt to the non-Surinamese environment, she went to the extent of renting a countryside space that would help to re-create the feeling of being back home, away from the city, to perform the ancestral celebration. In Suriname, usually these sorts of family celebrations are performed at the outskirts of the city.

Another important conclusion about the relevance of family and celebrations is that family celebrations are performed through a collective social memory that has been passed on through family generations; however, as the family celebrations usually evolve around one particular family member, adaptations to family customs are based on individual preferences and processes of meaning giving regarding the way they desire their celebrations to turn out. Therefore, family celebrations cannot account for obtaining a general impression of what Surinamese-Creole celebrations are, nor can they account for a general picture of who the Surinamese-Creole is nowadays. However, this individualistic interpretation of being creole helps to shape the narrative of the diversity amongst Surinamese-Creoles in the way they embrace their socio-cultural identity.

In my observations, food proved to be the most visible tool in exhibiting the evolution of the Surinamese-Creole identity. Food evokes memories of home and becomes the vehicle through which connections are made with the ancestors. Food holds aspects of the Surinamese-Creole identity that represent the origins and history of the becoming of the creole person. It vividly represents the dynamic and active integration with other cultures around them during colonial times. Food is the most obvious symbolic evidence of the dynamic, fluid, and interactive process of engagement of enslaved Africans with other cultures around them. Food also validates the argument of diversity in Surinamese-Creole identity, depending on the geographical location. Surinamese-Creole families pride themselves in possessing family recipes that have been transferred from generation to generation. Usually, as became evident during my engagement with the Jewish-Creole family, the family recipes hold oral stories of the ways in which the family became a melting pot of different ethnicities through the generations.

When asking about Surinamese cuisine in general, some typical traditional Surinamese-Creole dishes are promoted to represent Surinamese cuisine. However, these exact same dishes take on a different purpose and role once they are prepared in the context of ritual performances such as *Winti* prey, which is a much more intimate and family-oriented celebration. The same goes for the application of songs and dance styles. They can be performed just for entertainment purposes and during public performances, but when performed in the close-knit space of family, they take on a different meaning. And it was through the depth of meaning experienced during family-oriented celebrations that I was able to reveal layers of the Surinamese-Creole identity that are intrinsically embedded in family histories and become visible during family celebrations.

As I was engaging with the different families, I had to shift in and out of my role as a researcher. Building rapport with families was best achieved by presenting myself as an insider. Shifting in and out of an insider's perspective as the researcher reminded me of the way in which the enslaved were forced to navigate a hybridity of socio-cultural and religious practices in daily social life. Maybe this could be addressed as one of the elements of the Surinamese-Creole identity: Its significance is the ability to be fluid and adjust to different occasions depending on needs, yet it contains its embedded encoded wisdom and knowledge of survival through adversity, social change, and turmoil.

CHAPTER 5 THE EMERGENCE OF THE SURINAMESE-CREOLE EXPLORED THROUGH ORAL HISTORY

Fu sabi pe yu komopo yu musu sabi yu grawan tori – To know your heritage it is important to know the history of your ancestors first. (Toka-Ya educational centre, 2021)

This chapter utilises oral stories embedded in the Surinamese-Creole culture to reveal how the Surinamese-Creole came into being. Therefore, the following sub-questions will be utilised to illustrate the relevance of existing oral histories with the roots of the Surinamese-Creole identity: To what extent can these celebrations be considered vehicles to explore the origins of being a creole person in Suriname and the present-day experiences of being a Surinamese-Creole? This question refers to celebrations – this, because I have used attending events as an opportunity to connect with my interlocutors. To illustrate how I engaged with my interlocutors and gathered the oral stories they have preserved through generations, I start the chapter with a vignette describing my involvement in an event. The vignette sets the scene, where young adults of Surinamese-Creole heritage living in Suriname and in the Netherlands participate in a workshop about ancestral research with the aim of knowing more about their families' histories and their cultural identities.

April 2022.

It is a Saturday afternoon in England. I have been asked by NAKS, the Afro-Surinamese organisation in Suriname (after returning from the field, I continued to work as a volunteer. I am virtually involved in the organising of their activities), to organise the workshop, 'Ancestors Unknown – opzoek naar jouw Afro-Surinaamse roots'. The workshop is a collaboration between NAKS and the Foundation Zieraad in the Netherlands. The objectives of the workshop are a) to teach Afro-Surinamese youngsters about their ancestral history, teach them how to explore their personal family roots, and strengthen their socio-cultural identity; b) to establish a transnational community of Afro-Surinamese youngsters in Suriname and in the Netherlands; c) to encourage the transfer of cultural knowledge and lived experiences between Afro-Surinamese youngsters; and d) to create awareness amongst Afro-Surinamese youngsters about learning their history from a non-Eurocentric perspective. The participants would learn to accomplish the above objectives by applying family history research. The participants were young people from Paramaribo, Suriname, and from Amsterdam, the Netherlands, between the ages of 19 and 35 years. It was an online workshop spread over a period of five weeks, 2 days a week, with the possibility to attend online consultation hours during the week.

The workshop started with an icebreaker. Participants were asked to choose an object that reflects who they are or how they view themselves, followed by sharing with their peers one thing they were deeply afraid of. The following questions served as an introduction to training day one: Why is family tree research important? What are the different starting situations of the participants? What are you aspiring to achieve with your family history research? The atmosphere, although online, was amicable. Participants were curious and had a lot of questions about different topics. Topics such as oral histories, interviewing, and intergenerational dialogues were discussed during the five weeks of training. The presentation on Surinamese family names during the period before 1828/1832, when there were no official family names yet, the period after 1828/1832, when the first civil registry in Suriname was introduced, and the Manumission Act gained lots of attention from the participants. Hidden histories, such as the Netherlands' and Britain's history of enslavement in Suriname, evoked reactions of surprise, and the virtual plantation tour about the history of the plantations revealed facts that they had no idea about. The training concluded with an excursion and guided tours to the National Archives in Suriname and in the Netherlands.

There, the participants were allowed to conduct active research to discover their ancestral histories.

Through archival research and my fieldwork, I realised that stories about the origins of the creole identity were ingrained in the history of Suriname – however, not so much in the history that was captured through previous studies or literature. The stories narrating the birth and evolution of the creole identity in Suriname are embedded in the oral history that has been transmitted from generation to generation. This is what the referenced Surinamese-Creole quote at the beginning of the chapter also refers to: You should first gain knowledge about the life of your ancestors, to then be able to know who you are. I struggled to properly gather these oral stories in a structured and systematic manner, as these stories revealed multiple layers of historical events intertwined with family histories and events typical to particular geographical locations.

Then, one of my mentors gave me the following advice: ‘Why do you not try to write the chapter backwards, starting and ending at the site of origin? You describe your encounter with the people, then, progressively, give us, from references to the things you saw, the political and ethnic history that you need to provide to your readers. Then, go back towards the more distant events of the past, so you end with the site of origin where you started the text.’ I brought into practice what he advised and thus started to record my own personal experiences with oral history embedded in the Surinamese-Creole identity.

This is also how I structure this chapter. From the vignette, I unpack the notion of history from an anthropological point of view, and then I continue to describe historical events in Suriname’s history narrated through the eyes of my informants, followed by an ethnographic account illustrating social and cultural practices in current daily life that my informants perform to honour their personal histories.

5.1. History and its relevance to the unpacking of the Surinamese-Creole identity

Prior to engaging in conversations about Suriname’s history, I made sure to study some relevant literature about Suriname’s past, mainly the past of the enslaved Africans and life during colonial times in Suriname. One study that I encountered about historical recordings of the socio-cultural life of the enslaved was ‘Surinaamsche Negervertellingen – bijdrage tot de kennis van West-Indische negerfolklore’ (‘Surinamese negro stories to provide insight into the West Indian negro’s lifestyle’) (1916), written by H. Van Cappelle and M. H. Nahar. This study consists of stories describing the daily lives of the enslaved, told through the lens of a white historian and assisted by a Surinamese person who helped to describe the socio-cultural practices that the white scholar witnessed and was interested in knowing more about. Melville Herskovits published a similar study named, ‘The myth of the Negro past’ (1941). When I read both studies, I had to force myself to read about my own people’s history, observed, explained, and criticised through a very Eurocentric lens. One main obstacle was to be confronted with terms that are nowadays considered racially tainted and unacceptable, for instance, the free and confident use of the ‘n-word’ throughout the whole study. I encountered several misrepresentations of socio-cultural practices that I am very familiar with, and some of the critical analyses of these practices felt rather insulting, denigrating, and misjudged. Still, I used these literatures to select specific practices that I observed to exist in the present time. My curiosity was to enquire from my informants how much they knew about these past practices, the history related to these practices, their recollection of these practices, and finally, the way these practices contribute to the continuation of the Surinamese-Creole identity.

Conducting the training, listening to the stories and lived experiences of the participants, and learning about their own individual journeys to know about their ancestors served as a window into their own family histories and the way it has helped shape their awareness of being Surinamese-Creole. The first layer that I unpacked in my quest to understand the Surinamese-Creole identity was the personal history of my informants. Silvia de Groot, a Dutch historian who specialises in the history of Suriname and more specifically in the Maroon culture, describes in one of her works her use of oral resources to gain facts about one of Suriname’s well-spoken historical events (Silvia W. de Groot 1980). By

interacting with the community, analysing local songs, unpacking local quotes, and actively involving herself in ritual practices, she was able to gather bits and pieces of a story that no historian had ever before managed to write up in the correct order of events. She draws her interest in oral traditions from Jan Vansina, the famous Belgian anthropologist who promoted the idea of oral tradition as a form of recording historical facts from a society that lacks the tradition of writing up their history. The interesting part in this is that both academics were white, studying non-white cultures, and thus not members of the cultures they studied. Yet, the information collected and described by Silvia de Groot was very accurate and properly reflected the locals' experiences. She even received the highest honour from the Chief of one of the Maroon tribes in Suriname.

Because of my experience with regular misrepresentations of the local life of Surinamese-Creoles by some white anthropologists and historians and the exclusion of local voices in the studies by these white academics, I contemplated the reasons that made Silvia de Groot and, with her, other academics such as Richard and Sally Price succeed in writing literature that was honoured and acknowledged by the non-white communities that they studied. One reason that I am very sure has led to their successful engagement with the communities is that, in our Surinamese-Creole culture, we have an explanation for an outsider, usually a white person, who manages to properly adjust to our culture, understand it, and know how to properly pass it on. The explanation is that this person was one of our ancestors who has been reincarnated. Due to a history of colonisation, it is normal in our creole culture to discover that one has a white ancestor. Another explanation would be that the person has been sent by our ancestors to support us with additional knowledge or a skill that is not necessarily available or known to us. The skill or knowledge is also associated with the obligation placed upon us by our ancestors to tell our stories to the outside world, or to reveal valuable wisdom from our ancestors that could contribute to the betterment of the world.

It is very common for Surinamese-Creoles to make references to the past and the involvement of the ancestors. Things that took place in the past remain important in the present and are even attributed the ability to influence the present and the future. Recalling this habit of explaining occurrences in the present, based on the influence of past events, I acknowledge that I also tend to use the past as an explanation for things occurring in my daily life. This recalls another experience that I had during one of my lectures. It was a lecture on historicity. The lecturer asked us to reflect on the way we depict history. He asked, 'Is history something that lives in the past for you, or is it something that is very much part of your present?' Most of my fellow students were white, and their immediate response was, 'History is all about what happened in the past. Thus, it is behind us.' I caught myself and another fellow student, who was Asian, struggling with the question. We both explained that history is very much part of our present life, and we gave examples of how history continues to live on through the belief that our ancestors are still with us, guiding us through our lives, helping to shape our future path. The lecturer then utilised our examples to further dive into the notion of historicity. I recall this moment to be one of the few moments where I felt seen and relevant to my studies.

5.2. History and time defined from a Surinamese-Creole perception

Referring to the previously described experience, some might explain history by assuming that time is linear; thus, history is an accumulation of events that have passed and are behind us. I will not rehash the debates in the field of anthropology about the conceptualisation of history. For my research, I explored history from the perception that history is intrinsically connected to time. The notion of time is one that is complex and abstract. Interpretations of the future, present, and past through a concept of time remain subject to the way people choose to conceptualise their understanding of how the past should be perceived, what the present means, and whether the future should be conceptualised as a linear occurrence. Both concepts of history and time can be interpreted differently depending on the people's way of perceiving happenings in their social and local living environments. The fact remains that Eurocentric concepts of history and time can be utilised to serve as indicators to identify and define the occurrence of events in community life. Vera Da Silva Sinha (2016) conducted research amongst three Indigenous societies in the Amazonia in Brazil. She studied their concepts of time, contrasted the universal concept of metric time with event-based time, and made an ethnographic film

named *Time in Culture* about her work with these three tribes⁶⁹. Her film brought back memories of my own childhood and the way my parents would direct us to do certain chores depending on the time of day. They would never refer to metric time, but rather mention a specific happening, such as a rooster crowing, white butterflies coming into the house, the sun going down, and so forth, to determine what time it was for us to do certain chores. Because of this, we were never really focused on the time as defined by a clock. As I got older, time defined by a clock became more relevant and started to dictate the way I would organise my day. However, this childhood experience has remained part of me, and in an unconscious way, I still conceptualise certain duties in my daily life based on happenings in my living environment rather than based on metric time.

The notion of time is perceived in the Surinamese-Creole culture through different perspectives, depending on the context in which it is applied. Time in the sense of defining the difference between past time and present time often becomes a blurred line. Surinamese-Creoles consider time to be fluid. An event that happened in the past can recur as a form of evidence in the present. For instance, when a child is born with a particular mark on the body, it is said that in the past, an ancestor of the child (in most cases, the ancestor was a slave) obtained a permanent scar due to torment. With the birth of the new baby, the scar appears as a mark on the baby's body to evidence what happened to the ancestor in the past. My informants regularly shared similar stories. The intertwining of past and present time with historical events contains similar aspects of historicity, yet, in this particular case, the most important aspect is that for Surinamese-Creole people, time is not necessarily subject to metrics. They interchangeably choose their understanding of time to determine happenings during a certain period based on spiritually justified evidence.

Another experience was metric time being attributed with agency so that it could attract and evoke occurrences. Usually, these occurrences were of a spiritual nature and not to be understood from a cognitive perspective or governed by a human. For example, I was told when being out after midnight to be extra careful, as that is the time when evil spirits are wandering, looking for a human body to possess. These same beliefs of wandering spirits during the midnight hours are assumed during ritual practices for a wake. When the clock strikes midnight, rituals are performed to avoid the infiltration of evil spirits. Another one is not to clean the house after 6 pm, as it is bad luck and signifies you sweeping away all the prosperity that must be kept in the house. At the end of the year, you are urged not to cross rivers, as there is a great chance that you'll disappear. 'Mofo yari' is what it is called in *Sranantongo*, meaning that during the transition from the old year into a new year, there are supernatural forces at work looking for an offering to strengthen their supernatural powers for the new year. Another example of conceptualising time with an inexplicable event is the saying 'a dede fosi eng ten' – 'he died before his time' – which is used when a young person suddenly or tragically dies. The saying explains this sudden death in that the person passed away before becoming of old age. The same goes for a child whose intelligence is above the expected average intelligence for a child. The saying then is, 'a lepi fosi eng ten' – 'he has aged before his time' – meaning the child is spiritually much older than is proven by their actual age.

These experiences with perceptions of history and perceptions of time demanded me to subdue my understanding of history and time to multiple interpretations and utilise a non-Eurocentric approach to history and time as my point of departure to engage with my informants and gain insights into their way of perceiving history and utilising time as a conduit for the recollection of their memories.

5.2.1. *Historicity in Surinamese-Creole daily life*

The difference between history and historicity is that historicity refers to 'a human situation in flow, where situations of the past and the future assume present form in relation to events, political needs, available cultural forms and emotional dispositions' (Eric Hirsch & Charles Stewart, 2005). In the previous paragraphs, I addressed some Surinamese-Creoles' ways of engaging with their past. The past takes centre stage in their social life and in the practices, they engage with to showcase and embrace their creoleness. Understanding their creoleness requires understanding their social life, and

⁶⁹ (29) *Time in culture* | Vera da Silva Sinha - Academia.edu accessed 11/03/'24.

to understand the origins of their social life, it is important to unpack social occurrences that have helped shape their past. Eric Hirsch and Charles Stewart (2005) have closely associated the concept of historicity with the idea that understanding an individual requires one to move beyond the person and have a closer look at their social past. In the case of Surinamese-Creoles, their social past is intrinsically linked to the history of Suriname. The fact that the evolution and continuation of Surinamese-Creoles is ingrained in the history of Suriname required me to have additional conversations with my informants about their life experiences associated with these historical events. The conversations revealed a difference in their explanations of historical facts compared to data recorded in studies, official documents, and reports about the history of Suriname.

While sharing their personal histories, I observed some interesting nuances in my informants' recollections of historical events. Their recollections of Surinamese historical events relevant to their creoleness were informed by specific happenings in their personal lives. For instance, when asked what they knew about the history of Suriname becoming an independent country, they would share their knowledge through their personal experiences and refer to experiences such as their participation in creating a human flag on the day when Suriname officially gained independence from the Netherlands, or how their parents were proud to dress in traditional clothing and head to Independence Square to witness the raising of the first Surinamese flag.

In other instances, they would utilise historical events to acknowledge present-day achievements, or to explain occurrences that took place in the present. The historical event would then be considered the reason, cause, or origin of the present-day event. This was mainly the case in sharing a memory of a past event that evoked a spiritual encounter, or historical events that led to the development of a skill as a form of survival. Another nuance was the sharing of historical events through the re-creation of objects attached to a particular past event. Further in the chapter, I will draw on my participation in an activity that was in honour of celebrating the abolition of slavery. The abolition of slavery is another example of a written history of Suriname that is enriched with oral history from Surinamese-Creoles. This activity involved the re-creation of an object associated with the way of living of the enslaved. This object has become a symbol of honouring the lives of the ancestors. The personal experiences of these historical events added another layer of knowledge to the written history of Suriname and revealed valuable social context relevant to understanding the social structures through which the Surinamese-Creole identity took shape. The colonial past was often part of their recollections and revealed how this past remains vivid in the present day. Their embodiment of history was a representation of family stories that have been passed down through generations. This act of recollecting historical facts based on personal lived experiences is very much interwoven with the notion of remembrance. Further in this chapter, I will utilise ethnographic accounts to illustrate this connection.

5.2.2. *The role of memory in relation to historicity*

This was not my first time hearing informants sharing memories and relating them to dreams. It was therefore important for the further development of my research to describe the relevance of memory and historicity. Both are intrinsic to the practices of my informants when actualising the past in the present. Memory plays an important part in people's attempts to connect with the past and their ability to give meaning to occurrences in their environment. To continue my commitment to engage with notions that better reflect the non-Eurocentric experience of my creole people, David Sutton (2001) addresses Paul Connerton's approach to memory as 'knowledge of how to do something' by attributing the term 'habit memory' (David Sutton, 2001: 11). This form of memory was brought into context with ritual performances. As previously described, the Surinamese-Creole would actualise their history through claims of craftsmanship as talents inherited from their ancestors, or their family history being revealed through dreams. One element I did not include was the way in which they would activate the involvement of ancestral infiltration. This is where rituals would come into play. As the participant who described the dream about his ancestor shared with us, he first performed a ritual involving seven days of fasting and praying. In the case of inherited skills, one of my informants (whose identity I choose not to reveal), who was an excellent cook, told me about rituals she needed to perform on a regular basis to facilitate the constant presence of her ancestors so they could

continue to bless her with the inherited skill of cooking. But she would also talk about rituals she had learned from her mother. These rituals would need to be performed prior to preparing large orders of food. These rituals were to help her complete the order properly and, as such, secure the satisfaction of her customers. I heard experiences like this also from other informants. The ritual aspect seemed to be vital for a proper execution of the practice and to secure maximum results.

Conner's notion of habit memory is based on people being able to memorise a situation because of their habituation to the environment in which the situation occurs. Their cognitive processing of the memory is enhanced by the fact that they have been exposed to it and experienced it before. I utilised his argument to understand the relevance of the rituals performed and memorise how to perform them. All informants who engaged in ritual practices to perform a task or obtain results mutually confirmed that the knowledge to perform the rituals was passed on from generation to generation and that they no longer needed to memorise the order in which to perform these rituals. It became a habit, part of their daily life, a normality. This explanation is in line with Connor's argument that the memory is sedimented in the body. However, the challenge created due to the explanation of my informants is that while relying on the memory of their elders who have taught them how to perform the ritual, the actual knowledge to continue performing the rituals comes from the ancestors, while simultaneously the rituals serve to secure the continued presence and guidance of the ancestors.

This is when I noticed the experience of my informants and their application of memory creating an ambiguity for Connor's notion of habit memory. Because of the prominent presence of the spiritual aspect in recalling memories, it becomes a not-so-straightforward argument to state that memory, in this case, is a habit ingrained in the body. This kind of ambiguity is typical of the way Surinamese-Creoles perceive and interpret occurrences in their social life, which, I argue, justifies my inclination to impose theoretical notions as the dominant tool to observe and explain field experiences. Instead, I choose to depart from my informants' perceptions and use these to highlight the areas where the theoretical notion fails to represent the informants' points of view. By facilitating their voices in the research analysis, through descriptions of information they shared with me, I offer new data which should complement the notion and broaden its applicability in other communities similar to Surinamese-Creoles.

5.2.3. *Ancestral influence in actualising history*

The way in which Surinamese-Creoles experience history is layered with complexity. As described before, history is considered a source of valuable knowledge to learn from and apply in present-day activities; it is utilised to consult those who went before us and seek their assistance to gain an understanding of current-day occurrences and to envision our future. History also serves as a way of reconnecting with our roots, knowing where we come from. In all these different ways of engaging with the past, memory and remembrance play an important role. History cannot be narrated, transmitted, without the transmitter remembering what was told by predecessors, or remembering what was witnessed or experienced in the past.

The presence of ancestral influences was always associated with the Surinamese-Creole embodiment practices of the past. In my attempt to remain objective in my observations, while combining these with my personal experience with ancestral involvements, I engaged with the study of Michael Lambek (2002). His study about the way the Sakalava historical consciousness is constituted (M. Lambek, 2002: 4) revealed many similarities to the way Surinamese-Creoles embrace history to secure the continuation of their cultural identity. I use his insights as a mirror to reflect on my own experiences and those of my informants and to critically analyse the meaning and the role of history, in relation to the influence of the ancestors, and the employment of both in the present-day activities of us Surinamese-Creoles. Furthermore, I will unpack his ideas of 'bearing' history. As Michael Lambek argues that carrying the ancestral knowledge to activate history in the present can be a 'burden', I will utilise the experience of my informants who were charged with this task yet did not describe it as a 'burden'. They rather saw it as a privilege: they were the chosen ones. Some informants shared incidents where some people would do anything they could to obtain this privilege.

It was a desire rather than a burden – sufficient reason for me to contest the idea of depicting it as a burden.

5.3. Storytellers and storytelling safeguarding the oral history of Surinamese-Creoles

Scholars argue that history not only exists in oral narratives but also in a wide range of rituals and embodied practices. In the case of my research, I focused more on oral stories related to spiritual encounters and the involvement of the ancestors. It is through these stories that I discovered the strong connections with historical happenings and the preservation of the Surinamese-Creole identity. These stories were predominantly shared by informants who practise the *Winti* religion. The main religions practised by Surinamese-Creoles are *Winti* and Christianity. *Winti* is a religion that includes cultural-spiritual practices and rituals with elements of West African spirituality⁷⁰. In Chapter 5, I will go into detail about the origins of this religion typical of Surinamese-Creole culture. One aspect of the *Winti* religion is that the ancestors are always present, never considered as part of the past, and actively interfere in a person's life. The belief is that the ancestors dictate, influence, and help realise a person's fate.

Storytelling as part of the *Winti* religion is more than just oral narrating. It is a combination of songs, rituals, and bodily movements (Albert Helman, 1977: 87). Storytelling, in the Surinamese-Creole community, is a skill one inherits from the ancestors, who in turn have been gifted by the gods. Therefore, storytellers are highly regarded and become pivotal in transmitting knowledge about specific cultural elements and the wisdom of the ancestors. These stories are not told just for the sake of storytelling or as a form of entertainment. There is a rich range of historical happenings and knowledge preserved in these stories. The stories serve as capsules containing the stories of the ancestors and their journeys through the transatlantic slave trade. The storytellers are the bearers of the knowledge secluded in the story. They possess the skill to reveal the knowledge hidden in the story, the experience of choosing the proper setting, the appropriate event, and the corresponding bodily movements to perform the story. Not all stories can be shared at any given event. The purpose of the story and the hidden knowledge in the story determine the sort of occasion in which it would be appropriate to share with the audience. Yet, the performance of these stories in general serves the purpose of reaffirming and continuing the Surinamese-Creole identity. As such, it can be considered a social practice to embody history.

5.3.1. *The Anansi stories – stories that carry deeply rooted history relevant to the origins of the Surinamese-Creole identity*

My first encounter with storytelling as a way of learning about the ancestors and their way of life was through my involvement with the NGO NAKS. I was asked to write an article on storytelling for the UNESCO ICH Magazine named *HeritageAlive*. The choice was to write about the *Anansi stories*. Through the NAKS⁷¹ archives, I came across audio recordings of two *Anansi storie* storytelling experts in the creole community in Suriname. They shared knowledge about the structure of these stories, the purpose of these stories, the occasions when such stories are told, and the unwritten rules and requirements to carry out the rituals associated with the performance of the *Anansi stories*.

The origin of the *Anansi stories* is inextricably linked with enslavement. The stories are part of the West African culture. The enslaved Africans carried elements of their culture and incorporated these in the

⁷⁰ To learn about the *Winti* religion, I took part in a workshop named 'the Fundamental norms and customs within *Winti*'. Such workshops are common in Suriname and amongst the Surinamese-Creole community in the Netherlands. The aim of these workshops and seminars is to teach the Surinamese in general and the creole community about this religion. During colonial times, the practising of the *Winti* religion was depicted as idolatrous and thus forbidden. This led to the religion being practiced secretly, hidden from the outside world. In 1971, the then-minister of Justice, Jhan Adhin, lifted this prohibition, justifying his decision by stating that the non-acknowledgement of *Winti* as a proper religion was considered a form of religious discrimination.

⁷¹ NAKS is the largest and oldest non-governmental organisation in Suriname, which is actively involved in the safeguarding and transmitting of cultural elements of the Surinamese-Creole culture. They have their own documentation centre named *EuFrie*, where all relevant and valuable data, documents, and archives about Surinamese-Creole culture are stored and processed for further study about the creole culture in Suriname.

re-creation of their own distinct creole culture in Suriname. In the West African culture, the spider is attributed with divine powers received from God and therefore can overcome any challenging situation in life. The spider is considered sacred; he is one of God's representatives on earth with a purpose to educate people in the ways of life⁷². In the *Anansi stories*, animals are attributed human features. The animals communicate with humans and can teach them skills. The animals are either representatives of God or evil supernatural entities. They can either bless humans with gifts or they can cast a spell on them. The stories are highly spiritually charged and therefore not considered to be told on any occasion by any random person.

Nowadays, some of the *Anansi stories* have been rewritten to fit the imagination of children. As such, they are promoted as fairy tales in which the main character is a spider who constantly finds himself in precarious situations. Due to his cleverness, he always manages to escape the dire situations he finds himself in. These stories are utilised to instil norms and values into children's lives. The *Anansi stories* are not indigenous to just the Surinamese-Creole culture. They exist in other communities of descendants of enslaved Africans in other parts of the world, each with their own unique way of ingrain the stories about *Anansi* the spider in their culture. Many authors have published about the *Anansi stories* from Suriname, but I deliberately choose to utilise one author's perspective on these stories: Anton de Kom⁷³, who has had a significant positive contribution to the existence of literature that provides detailed insight about the life of the enslaved community in colonial Suriname. As a Surinamese-Creole, he writes from a non-colonial perspective. In 2020, his book *Anangsieh stories, verhalen van de spin uit Suriname – stories of the spider from Suriname* was republished with in-depth descriptions about the origins of the *Anansi stories* and their relevance to the enslaved community in Suriname.

Scholars such as Melville J. and Frances. S. Herskovits (1936) and Herman van Capelle (1916), who are well-known writers about Suriname's folklore, also wrote extensively about the *Anansi stories* during colonial times. Unfortunately, when I read their literature, I encountered significant misinterpretations of the purpose of the stories and even prejudiced observations depicting the stories as superstitious and evidence of the 'idolatrous' lifestyle of the enslaved community. The context and performances of the *Anansi stories* have been analysed by these scholars through the application of Eurocentric perceptions of morals, virtue, and religiosity. By describing the Surinamese-Creoles' way of giving meaning to occurrences in life as superstitious and idolatrous, these scholars allowed room for the Surinamese-Creole identity to become subject to stigmatisation and misconceptions. With the emergence of a new generation who is reclaiming their creole identity and embracing their culture, there is a gradual change in the existence of such misrepresentations. From conversations with my informants, I learned that the *Anansi stories* harbour hidden messages of courage, survival, and the enslaved conquering adversity and obtaining supernatural powers to resist oppression. While the stories reveal a strong connection with the West African culture, they also reveal enslaved individuals' ability to adapt, re-create their own way of life, and re-establish themselves as human beings even though the slave traders reduced them to being livestock⁷⁴.

Although some of the *Anansi stories* are currently told to children as fairy tales, there remain *Anansi stories* inherited through generations that are performed for the sole purpose of enhancing ritual and

⁷² *Anansi verteltraditie - Immaterieel Erfgoed*. In 2016, the *Anansi stories* were officially recognised as Immaterial Cultural Heritage from the Surinamese and Caribbean diaspora in the Netherlands. Since then, they have been inscribed on the ICH UNESCO list for the Safeguarding of Immaterial Cultural Heritage. accessed 15/03/2024.

⁷³ Anton de Kom was born during colonial times in a typical Surinamese-Creole middle-class family. His father was born a slave, and his mother received manumission whilst born in slavery. Anton de Kom fiercely advocated for the betterment of the immigrants and ex-enslaved in the colony. However, the then-colonial authorities falsely incriminated him as a rebellion leader. They depicted him as a threat to the colony of Suriname, and he was imprisoned and deported to the Netherlands, where he was forced to spend the rest of his life as a political prisoner. Ultimately, he passed away in one of the many concentration camps. It was not until 40 years after his death that he was finally recognised as one of the fierce and rightful freedom fighters in the history of Suriname. His book, *Wij Slaven van Suriname – We the enslaved from Suriname*, was first published in 1934 and consisted of rich data about the life of the enslaved in the colony of Suriname. Sadly, his book was not properly acknowledged at first, but after the official acknowledgement of him as a resistance fighter, the book was also officially recognised, and in 2020, the 16th edition of the book was published.

⁷⁴ During my master's studies in social anthropology, I did research about the Golden Age in the Netherlands and its role in the transatlantic slave trade. I did research in the Dutch National Archive and encountered letters from slave traders and lists of their stock. That's where I read about the enslaved mentioned as livestock rather than human beings. The same accounts for the wills written by plantation owners. When describing their possessions, the enslaved were described as goods. @38–32 | Nationaal Archief last accessed 17/03/2024.

sacred practices to honour the ancestors. In a conversation with a *Winti* priest, in Suriname called a *Duman*, I was told that these sorts of *Anansi* stories are told during a wake or during a *prey*, which is a sacred celebration as part of the *Winti* religion in honour of the ancestors. The main purpose of the stories, then, is to connect the participants with the ancestors so that they can come and share their wisdom, educate in the supernatural powers of the gods, and provide guidance to their offspring. The performance during such occasions differs depending on the purpose. During a wake, there is a storyteller specialised in *Anansi* stories, and he utilises an interactive method, inviting the audience to participate in the story by stating questions and anticipations about the course of the story. In this case, the moral of the story usually reveals the wisdom, skills, and knowledge that the deceased showcased during their life. This is to honour the life they lived and to invite the deceased to continue sharing the knowledge as they transcend to join the ancestors. During a *prey*, the structure is different. In this case, there is a more spiritual approach, where the *Duman* is in charge and facilitates the possession of participants by the ancestors, who then share stories revealing their encounters with the world of the plants, the animals, and other entities in the spiritual world.

5.4. The value of Surinamese-Creole oral stories for academic research and analyses

The challenge in utilising storytelling to determine the evolution of the Surinamese-Creole identity was to justify the validity of these stories to sustain the academic value of my research. One critical reflection was the following: How much of the stories can be validated as truth? Another challenge to utilising these stories for academic research was the fact that some of them contained elements where animals were attributed human qualities, such as speaking, dancing, etc. Some scholars described these stories as fairy tales; others described them as myths. My informants strongly contested the stories to be fairy tales and claimed that they are based on truth. In particular, in the *Winti* religion, it is normal to believe that the animal world and nature are charged with supernatural powers and that humans can interact with these supernatural forces through a spiritual consciousness.

I am aware of ongoing anthropological debates about the engagements of humans with notions of supernatural interventions, rituals of engaging with the spiritual world, and the validity of these notions to anthropological research. The general observation with the difficulty in defining the meaning and academic value of these notions is that they contain infinitely rich perceptions while also including open-ended quests. But in my case, I found it particularly challenging to decide how to maintain the academic value of my research and simultaneously remain dedicated to my commitment to voice my informants' perception of their local and social life through my research. Because of memory being intertwined with oral history, I considered Tim Ingold's (1996) view of memory in relation to history. He argues that in the sharing of a memory about events that took place in the past, the representation can never be similar to what those who have lived through the event have experienced. While the memory is being shared, it is coloured by current circumstances and the experience, or the narrative has undergone several adjustments based on occurrences that took place after the actual event happened.

His argument was relevant for the instances where I noticed that the exact same historical event was told with differing details by different informants. However, this applied to the stories with an absence of spiritual and supernatural elements. Thus, in such cases, while collecting the oral histories and lived experiences of my informants, I questioned their truth to remind me as the ethnographer that there is a possibility of the existence of more than one 'truth' to the same story. As with ethnographic work, the data collected in the field is subject to the living circumstances, the socio-political constructions in the field, the relationship between me and my informants, and their personal views on the topics discussed. Therefore, the context of these oral stories could have been subject to influences of the space in which I recorded the story, how the informant engaged with me, and the context in which the story was told to them.

In the case of the stories containing elements of spiritual and supernatural infiltrations into human daily life, I needed to be able to go beyond the intrinsic link between memory and history. In this case, I needed to develop valid arguments to justify the utilisation of Surinamese-Creoles' interactions with

the supernatural world as an added value to enrich existing academic notions of oral history ingrained in the ethnography of ancestral intervention during embodiment practices for the continuation of socio-cultural identity. Michael Jackson (2017) urges that anthropologists should strive to explore and analyse the relational concepts of individuals with each other, the functions of these relations, and the transitions that are facilitated through the employment of sequences. This allowed me a more flexible framework to critically reflect on those scholars who portrayed a misrepresentation of Surinamese-Creole culture and develop my own arguments to justify the value of my newly acquired data.

I decided to use as the foundation of my arguments the literature about the *Anansi stories* where some scholars describe these stories as superstitious and idolatrous. I analysed these stories through the lens of the informants to understand their view and the relevance of their interpretations to the continuation and representation of the Surinamese-Creole identity. Those practising the *Winti* religion had the immutable belief that the *Anansi stories* reveal the secrets of the spiritual and the natural world, which simultaneously allow insights into hidden wisdom that is carried by animals and plants. One of the experts in the *Anansi stories* explained this immutable belief as follows: 'To access the spiritual world that is hidden for us human beings, one needs to elevate to a level of consciousness that goes beyond the human beings' cognitive abilities. Once you've reached that stage, you will be able to gain new understanding about the cohesiveness between human beings, the animal world, and the world of the plants. Once you can contain the balance between these three different worlds, you will master the skill of understanding the importance of the natural and spiritual world to the existence of the human world. This is the ultimate way of living a conscious life that all human beings should strive to obtain.'

After I critically analysed his passionate testimony, I analysed the role of Christianity as experienced by Surinamese-Creoles – this, because of the position of some authors who, in their literature, reject the *Winti* practices as part of Surinamese-Creole culture while glorifying the practices of those Surinamese-Creoles who practise Christianity. In my analyses, I discovered similarities between the *Winti* religion and Christianity. The Christian followers portray a passionate belief in the Holy Trinity, which consists of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit – all three being entities that can only be experienced from a spiritual sense of consciousness. The claim is that once a person is able to engage with these three entities, experiences of supernatural occurrences happen – experiences such as divine dreaming, hearing a voice, or seeing a vision. All these experiences serve the purpose of securing a prosperous future, protection from evil, or understanding challenges experienced in daily life.

My descriptions of Christianity and the *Winti* religion provide for human beings' longing for access to a world that goes beyond human consciousness. Both utilise stories to teach their followers valuable life lessons and skills to deal with the challenges and difficulties in humans' daily lives. Michael Jackson argues that humans create supernatural agents because of our inconsistency in governing our self-established hierarchical social, economic, and cultural structures (Michael Jackson, 2015: xiv). For example, social equality and the interference of personal passions are results of the ineffectual governing of us humans. Michael Jackson continues to state that for us to contain these excesses, we need the existence of a higher power that is immune to being bent to our will or persuasions to favour us over others. Yet, the abilities of the higher power should not be out of reach of humans. As he illustrates, it is 'beyond us, yet ourselves'. His argument resonates with my own reasoning to contest the misconceptions of the aforementioned scholars who diminish the spiritual role of the *Anansi stories* in the embodiment of Surinamese-Creole culture.

To further justify the validity of utilising the oral stories of my informants that contain spiritual encounters and ancestral interventions for academic research, I want to draw on early scholars' perspectives on religion – scholars such as Emiel Durkheim (1915), Evans-Pritchard (1976), and Stanley Tambiah (1990). The overall observation of these scholars, which they used as their point of departure to understand the value of religion in human social life, was that one of religion's most important functions is to reinforce the collective conscience, as it has greater power to influence social action and create social solidarity. Earlier in the chapter, I addressed Eric Hirsch and Charles Stewart's (2005) argument that to know about an individual requires understanding the individual's

social past. I also mentioned my choice of moving beyond the Eurocentric understandings of history and time, instead allowing the informants' own perspectives to tell their own stories.

Giving preference to their interpretations of their own way of life is a form of applying the methodology of counter-storytelling⁷⁵ to shift the focus of ongoing debates about abstract and complex anthropological notions and instead enrich these debates with new data that allows for new insights. Thus, since we should depart from the Surinamese-Creole social past to understand the evolution of their creole identity, we should apply their own way of interpreting their past, rather than altering and questioning the validity of their interpretations by using pre-established academic frameworks. It was important for me as the ethnographer to adapt to my informants' way of life and represent this from an objective point of view, rather than altering their personal lived experiences. If their social past involves oral stories about supernatural powers helping to shape who they should become in daily life, and if the ancestral infiltrations help them achieve a way of life that is accepted by the rest of their community members, then this is the way I will continue to describe their social past. And if these oral histories are mutually agreed upon in their community and facilitate solidarity amongst the members, then I will use them exactly as they have been described and use them as a lens to further reveal insights about their own reality of being a creole person in Suriname.

5.5. Songs narrating historical events that dictated the emergence of the Surinamese-Creole identity

As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, some historical events in Suriname are directly associated with the origins of the Surinamese-Creole identity. Previous paragraphs described how some of these historical events are embedded in stories and material objects. Another way the story of the Surinamese-Creole identity is associated with historical events is through songs. Songs, dance, and music regularly dominated the conversations that I had with my informants. Some of the songs are well known in Surinamese society; other songs are known to experts and bearers of the Surinamese-Creole culture. Just as it is with the storytelling practices, some of these songs are sacred and performed during appropriate events and specialised rituals. In the following sections, I will unpack the songs that are known to most Surinamese people. These are the songs that capture the colonial history of Suriname and the relevance of events during this colonial period to the Surinamese-Creole identity.

5.5.1. *Songs capturing the arrival of the Chinese contract workers and their engagements with the creole people in Suriname*

In my quest to look for the influence of immigrants on the development of the creole people in Suriname, I encountered some interesting oral stories captured in songs. I recall the first time I learned about one song that is popular among Surinamese-Creoles. The song is called '*Piaw Piaw Piaw yu e go meki mi law*' ('*Piaw Piaw Piaw*, you'll make me go crazy'). '*Piaw Piaw Piaw*' refers to a well-known social game fervently played by Chinese men and women in Suriname. The song captures the arrival of the first Chinese contract workers, which was around 1853⁷⁶, and the integration of their customs and practices into the daily lives of the enslaved community. Playing this game, which is gambling-related, became popular among the freed Creole men and women but caused numerous scandals.

⁷⁵ Counter-storytelling is used to magnify the stories, experiences, narratives, and truths of underprivileged communities. Everywhere we turn, the world is filled with dominant culture narratives. 'Dominant culture' refers to the practices, norms, and ideas that have the most power and influence in social, institutional, and economic structures. The dominant culture keeps minority experiences in the background and is sustained through various levels of society. Things like history, textbooks, movies, fiction, academia, and media have all been centred around the experiences and lives of the dominant culture. Minority populations interacting with these forms of media may feel deeply excluded as they encounter stories and narratives that do not fit or apply to their lives. Counter-storytelling Highlights Minoritized Voices - Noise Project accessed 20/04/2023.

⁷⁶ *Contractarbeiders in Suriname* | *IsGeschiedenis* accessed 18/09/2023.

Oral stories telling of prenuptial relationships developing between the Chinese contract workers and Creole women during colonial times are known as part of Suriname's colonial history. In the district of Coronie, especially, this was a very common phenomenon. The existence of Creole families with Chinese family names such as Tjon A Meeuw, Tjin Liep Sjie, and San A Jong attests to the existence of the intimate relationships between the Chinese immigrants and the Creole women. Oral stories of Chinese convenience stores on each corner of Paramaribo and the habit of calling the owners of these Chinese stores *omu*, which means 'uncle' in *Sranantongo*, are other sources of validating these regular intimate encounters.

Today, the habit remains in Suriname to call Chinese storeowners *omu*. However, during colonial times, *omu* was usually the father of the mixed-race children living near the store or in the smaller houses in the yard of the store. By referring to him as *omu*, the mother attempted to keep the kinship between her children and the Chinese store owner a secret – the reason being that most of these sexual encounters in Paramaribo with the Chinese storeowners were secretly done – contrary to the relationships formed in the district of Coronie. There, it was common for the Chinese contract workers to establish legitimate relationships with freed creole women on the plantations.

Being a volunteer at NAKS, I was asked to write an article about the hidden history of the intimate encounters of the Chinese contract workers and the freed Creole women in Paramaribo, resulting in the phenomenon of creole gold- and silversmiths with Chinese roots. Exploring this angle of the impact of the Chinese immigration on socio-cultural developments in Suriname helped me unpack another layer of the relations between Chinese contract workers and creole women. In this case, the children born out of these relationships were legitimate children carrying the name of their father and sent to China to be raised and educated in the norms, values, and customs of Chinese culture. One of my informants for this article, Henk Uiterloo, told me the story of his father, Doremious Uiterloo, who was raised by a Chinese goldsmith and was taught the art of jewellery making. He shared stories of creole women relying on these Chinese-Creole goldsmiths to design their jewellery so they could honour their spiritual guardians or celebrate milestones in their lives.

Memories of his childhood revealed the socio-economic entanglement between both ethnic groups and the ways in which they supported each other to achieve socio-economic stability. He recounted times when his father would facilitate the creole women to take credit and make their jewellery. Because of the emotional value of the jewellery, the women would build a close relationship with the Chinese-Creole goldsmiths, share family woes, and ask for advice to overcome these. The women contributed to the flourishing of these gold- and silversmiths, and in return, they contributed to the continuation of family traditions embedded in typical creole family jewellery. Today, this personal relationship between creole families and Chinese-Creole goldsmiths continues to exist as part of the creole family's tradition to purchase jewellery to mark milestones in the family's history or to honour the spiritual rituals in the family's traditions.

5.5.2. *Songs capturing the arrival of the Hindustani and Javanese contract workers and their engagements with the creole people in Suriname*

Then there are songs capturing the arrival of the immigrant contract workers from India. They arrived in 1873 and mainly inhabited the outskirts of the capital, Paramaribo⁷⁷. The integration of the Indian contract workers was not as spontaneous as it was with the Chinese contract workers. Another song capturing the lives of the Indian immigrants and their role in the development of the colony of Suriname is a song written by the Surinamese legend Julius Theodoor Hugo Uiterloo, better known as Lieve Hugo or Iko. He was a famous musician, songwriter, and singer for the music genre *Kaseko* in Suriname and abroad, mainly in the Netherlands. His song '25 November' was written in honour of

⁷⁷ *Hindostaanse contractarbeiders in Suriname, 1873-1916* | Nationaal Archief accessed 18/09/2023.

the Independence Day festivities. Unfortunately, he never experienced the day, as he passed away three days before the proclamation of Suriname becoming an independent state⁷⁸.

In one of his songs, he nods to hidden encounters between Creole men and Hindustani women that, according to oral stories, would happen in the evening in the rice fields. Stories of this sort are not openly talked about today. This affirms the taboo surrounding intimate encounters between Hindustanis and Creoles during colonial times. Even during post-colonial socio-cultural developments, it remained forbidden and unacceptable in both ethnic groups to allow intimate encounters. Although modern-day developments led to a steady blurring of strict separations in cultural practices between the Hindustanis and the Creoles, it remains less of a commonality to observe intimate relationships between people from both ethnic groups in Suriname.

However, as I was working on yet another article for NAKS, I came across some interesting information providing valuable insights into one aspect of cultural integration between the Creoles and the Hindustanis in Suriname. I was charged with writing an article about the history of typical creole jewellery. My approach was to tell this history through the eyes of creole people. The best way to collect these stories turned out to be through publishing a call for family histories and pictures of typical creole family jewellery via social media platforms such as Facebook. Surprisingly, a Surinamese-Hindustani woman, living in the Netherlands, responded to my call and shared with me pictures, including oral stories attached to the pictures about typical jewellery that was known as creole jewellery. In a conversation with me, she shared that this jewellery originated from Indian contract workers. According to her, the Creole women noticed the typical Indian earrings and bangles made by the female Indian contract workers and were inspired by these. They adapted the designs and made them part of their jewellery collections.

I encountered similar stories of typical Surinamese-Creole artefacts, the origins of which, after unpacking the historical narratives of these artefacts, were traced back to the contract workers. One of such objects is the sarong, which is the typical wrap skirt for Javanese women. However, creole women also made the sarong part of their traditional clothing. The patterns significant to the sarong fabric were adapted as well and became symbolic of traditional dress in honour of one of the deities in the *Winti* religion named *Tata Fodu*.

5.5.3. *Songs capturing historical events that influenced the geographical development of creole people in the colony*

Another song that harbours historical elements of Suriname, significant to the development of the creole identity, is the song named 'Peroen Peroen'⁷⁹. One morning in the year 1799, a guide who stood on the lookout saw some English warships sailing in the river. He raised the alarm and then began to tell other guides to pass this message to each other. After the commander of the fortress, Peroen, was notified of this, he proclaimed, 'Let come what will. I will have the English squadron in such a wreck that they will return to the ocean on nothing but boards.' Meanwhile, the squadron, commanded by Hugh Seymour and Thomas Trigge, approached the fortress unhindered, and instead of resisting, Peroen decided to surrender. This story became a song of ridicule towards the commander, Peroen. The song goes as follows:

⁷⁸ *Feest van Surinaamse muziek - NRC accessed 30/09/2023.*

⁷⁹ *Songtekst and explanation copied from the YouTube video accessed on 16/09/2023; (64) The Surinam Golden Gate Boys - peroen peroen mi patron - YouTube.*

'Peroen Peroen Mi Patron'

'Sien, san dee na mofo sien dee kom, Peroen, Peroen, mi patron?' ('Do you see what's coming down the river, Peroen?')

'San wani kom, mik a kom: Ingrisiman sa tjari pranga Go na jobo pan!' ('Let come what will. I will have the English squadron in such a wreck that they will return to the ocean on nothing but boards.')

'Bakoeba, Bakoeba, kaserie, kaserie, Nimo, nimo, jaâsabo.' 'Bosro ma pinka Bosro ma bo!' ('He surrendered and baked them cakes.')

'Ala dem griekiebie din sab'na fien fien wroko, O Codjo, Codjo, fai dom, joe dom so kita, kita, kai koi!' ('The small bird knows his work, how to use the wind', meaning: 'You as a captain don't know what you are doing, while the birds do – Codjo, how are you so dumb?' Peroen's name is substituted by Codjo, which, according to tradition, was the name given to someone born on a Monday who was considered dumb.)

'Sien, san dee na mofo sien dee kom?' ('Do you see what's coming down the river?')

Nowadays, this song is part of a children's game in Suriname. This song tells the story of the time when the English ruled Suriname. Suriname was founded in 1651 by the English as a British plantation colony, and after 16 years of governing it, they ceded it to the Dutch in 1667 (Gloria Wekker, 2006; Richard Price & Sally Price, 1992). In 1795, when the French conquered the Netherlands and established the Batavian Republic, the then-Dutch king, William of Orange V, fled his kingdom and took refuge in the English kingdom. To avoid the Dutch colonies being conquered by the French, the Dutch requested the English to oversee their colonies, including Suriname⁸⁰. This period is known in Suriname's history as 'Het Engels tussenbestuur', from 1804 to 1816. In his book *Geschiedenis van Suriname*, the Dutch historian, Julien Wolbers, vividly describes this period of English occupation. The arrival of the English changed the scenery of the Surinamese colony. Some of their influences remain visible in Suriname's current architecture, customs, and cuisine.

The relevance of the English occupation to the creole identity is visible on different levels. One layer has to do with the geographical habitat of Surinamese-Creole communities in Suriname. The English recruited English and Scottish plantation owners, and they established plantations, namely in the districts of Coronie and Nickerie⁸¹. After the abolition of slavery, the plantation owners were required to provide their ex-slaves with legal names. Many chose to give their own family name to their slaves, a family name originating from their lineage, or the name of their original place of birth. As such, most family names from creole people in the districts of Coronie and Nickerie originate from English and Scottish family names or places. In this section, I want to draw on my personal experiences and stories from my childhood.

When composing my family tree, I attempted to trace the origins of my family name, Gefferie, and the name of my mother's family, Braithwaite. Both names indicate English relevance, but I still haven't found a proper and valid connection. My personal account of English influences comprises my memories of visits to my mother's family in the district of Nickerie. Even though they were born and raised in Suriname, I vividly remember experiencing and hearing clear English references in their way of speaking. My mother's lineage is from Guyana, which was known as British Guiana⁸². I remember

⁸⁰ *Suriname gedurende Engeland's overheersching. Julien Wolbers (Vierde tijdvak., Geschiedenis van Suriname, J. Wolbers - DBNL)* accessed 16/09/2023.

⁸¹ *Slavenhouders in Coronie: uitsluitend Schotten en Engelsen!* Accessed 01/10/2023.

⁸² *Colonial Office and predecessors: British Guiana, formerly Berbice, Demerara, and Essequibo, Original Correspondence | The National Archives* accessed 01/10/2023.

their way of speaking being referred to as *Bajan*, which is a Guyanese-Creole language with loaned words from West Africa, Indigenous languages, and old-style Dutch.

Bajan is commonly spoken in the district of Nickerie, so it was not strange for me to hear people speaking this English-Creole language. The dishes significant to the district of Nickerie are typical British-English dishes, such as pound cake, or the names of the dishes would indicate that they were inspired by British-English dishes. An example of such a dish is the 'Ingrisi-boru' cake, which is a cake originating from the Surinamese-Creole culture, yet the name *ingrissi* means 'English'. Another dish is the 'pepperpot', of which I did not find relevance in the British-English cuisine, but the name of the dish is clearly English. My mother would use English words while speaking Dutch or *Sranantongo* with us, which was very normal and common in the district of Nickerie. Words such as 'breakfast' indicated the late morning hours. During the workshop 'Stamboom onderzoek', I delivered a presentation on this important element of the Surinamese-Creole identity, and most of the participants were surprised to discover their roots originating from British Guiana.

The influence of the English, over the years, has steadily integrated into Surinamese culture in that some things are no longer considered English but rather typical Surinamese. One example is the fact that in Suriname, we drive on the left side of the road. This is one of the many regulations declared and implemented during English rule. In Nickerie, there remains a strong presence of British Guianan culture. This is noticeable in the food, the spices, the music style, and the language. In the district of Coronie, the traces of English rule are noticeable in silent witnesses such as the street names and the names of the plantations. Although the family names show connections with typical English and Scottish family names, there is seldom an actual kinship connection to be detected. The family name in this case serves as a lead to explore the plantation where the ancestors served as slaves. The responses of some participants, in the case of discovering their family name to be related to the slave owner, evoked strong emotions of rejection and disgust, which is understandable and one of the many subjects of discussion in current debates, including discussions about whether to accept the given family name and the implications of the name to the development of the personal identity and the identity conflicts experienced by the descendants of the enslaved – discussions which, in my opinion, need to be supported by thorough analyses and research.

5.6. Oral stories capturing historical spaces and places relevant to the development of the Surinamese-Creole

In this section, I aim to draw on oral histories related to a space in my research field, Paramaribo, and the social agency of this space in the emergence and the continuity of the Surinamese-Creole identity. The concept of space in anthropological terms is utilised for a thorough argument of its relevance to the exploration of oral history. In his article 'Area, Space and Culture', Damien Ehrhardt (2015) argues that space is considered an indefinite expanse that surrounds and contains all objects, and the environment is affected for a particular purpose. Social and cultural practices in Surinamese-Creole culture are inextricably connected to a space or a place. There is a sacred or ancestral element attributed to the place and space, and the context of this sacred or ancestral element is embedded in oral stories of historical encounters.

In the following section, I provide a detailed ethnographic account to illustrate my personal experience while exploring a particular space in the field and learning about its historical relevance to becoming Surinamese-Creole. This space represents the most iconic landmarks in Paramaribo, such as *Palmentuin*, the Presidential Palace, *Fort Zeelandia*, Independence Square, and *Waterkant* at the Suriname River. These landmarks have each painted the journey of Surinamese-Creoles in reinventing, shaping, developing, and embracing their socio-cultural identity.

5.6.1. *An ethnographic account about the oral history attached to relevant spaces in Paramaribo, Suriname*

Part of my methodology to take on my role as an ethnographer while remaining objective was to re-explore the main locations in my field site. The inner city was one of these main locations. I wanted to rediscover the history of this area and its relation to the evolution of Surinamese-Creoles. Thus, I booked a city tour with an experienced tour guide, who quickly became one of my main informants. As I embarked on the city tour, I listened to the tour guide and discovered objects that I'd never noticed before. I heard stories associated with street names and buildings, and this experience introduced me to a different side of the inner city of Paramaribo – one that is seamlessly weaving the past with the present. In this context, Kirin Narayan's notion of place becomes useful to further explore my experience. He argues, 'Placenames can reveal complex transcultural histories' (2012, 29). To justify the relevance of his argument to my research, I will share a detailed account of this city tour in the following paragraphs.

17.00 in the afternoon. I am in Paramaribo. I have arranged a city tour with the tour guide, Yves Tjon. He is the president of the Suriname Tour Guides Association and is in charge of the tourist information centre, located in downtown Paramaribo. At the tourist information centre is where I am expected to meet with Yves. The plan is to do the city tour near the end of the day when the sun goes down. Then the walking will be far more pleasant. In Suriname, temperatures can go up to 35 degrees, and one would need proper attire to withstand the intense heat to enjoy a walk. Since I am not a fan of the extreme tropical heat, I happily agreed not to walk in the piercing hot sun. So, here I am, sitting on a wooden bench at the cabana of the tourist information centre, a bottle of fresh spring water in my hands. To be precise, the tourist centre is at the Waka Pasi, a boardwalk recently designed under the authority of the former First Lady.

The irony is that the Waka Pasi is built near the location that the Indigenous people identified as the area where the Chief of the Amerindian tribe lived at the time that the European settlers conquered the land. If you recall, I described this story earlier in this chapter. The Waka Pasi, in the historical perspective, is the place where Chief Para Moro lived with his people, and the canal that is constructed at the Waka Pasi is the remainder of the waterway that was part of the Suriname river and served as the docking place for their canoes. The irony, or, shall I say, my encounter with history, does not stop there. The canal is named after the first governor of Suriname, Mr. van Sommelsdijk, who commissioned the construction of the canal for proper drainage. The canal was not named after the Amerindian Chief who first lived there.

This was my first time hearing these two stories related to this place. My recollection of this part of downtown Paramaribo was that it is part of the garden of the Presidential Palace. The garden of the Palace is a large space planted with tall palm trees – 'Koningspalmen' is what they are called. One part is made accessible to the public and is used for the celebration of most public holidays. That part of the garden is named De Palmentuin (because of the palm trees) and popularly known as the designated area for Indigenous celebrations. Never did I know that the attachment of the Indigenous people to this area was because of the history of the great Chief Paro Moro. Yves, my tour guide, told me the story of Waka Pasi, the van Sommelsdijk canal, and Palmentuin once we commenced our walk. It is his favourite story to tell as he passionately believes that the honour of this Great Indigenous Chief should be restored and recognised properly by the government.

We made our way through the Palmentuin to the next historical stop, Fort Zeelandia. Fort Zeelandia is another place that is tainted with many different historical events. I mentioned this place earlier when introducing the European history of Suriname. I prefer not to go into detail about the space of Fort Zeelandia, as I will do that further in the research. For this vignette, I want to focus on the square where we arrived after our visit to Fort Zeelandia: Independence Square, another such space that is filled with historical and present events. Independence Square is associated with the

yearly parade during the celebration of Independence Day in Suriname. It is also known to be the place where the yearly ritual bath takes place in honour of the celebration of abolition, and on the day of Diwali (a Hindu religious celebration), a huge *dia* (tea light) is placed in the centre of the square to symbolise light conquering darkness. One can conclude that Independence Square signifies the place where national holidays are celebrated, holidays which celebrate all the different ethnic groups in Suriname.

Referring to present events, the square is covered by a large marquee decorated with fabric in the colours of the Surinamese flag. In the middle of the square stands firm and tall a Christmas tree, decorated with lights, bows, and other ornaments that have an enchanting effect on the little children standing around the tree and being photographed by their proud parents. The Christmas tree tells us that it is that time of the year to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. It is customary in Suriname to start the celebration of this holiday with the official lighting of the Christmas tree, accompanied by a public concert. Children's choirs and individual performers bless the ears of invitees with songs, poems, and theatre performances, all in the light of the Newborn Child. Whoever has not been invited can still enjoy this spectacle by standing alongside the marquee and on the sidewalks of the square. Now you understand why the huge marquee was decorating the square.

Yves and I walked past the marquee to the near end of the square. From this angle, the Palace stands prominent and right in front of the square. The Presidential Palace and the square are divided by a road leading up to the Fort Zeelandia area. The balcony, famous during colonial times for government officials greeting their subordinates, provides the perfect angle to overlook the whole square. On the square across from the Palace is the flagpole with the Surinamese flag proudly waving in the wind. Yves pulled me a bit closer to the fence of the Palace. He then told me a story that I had never before heard in relation to Independence Square: the murder of the governor, van Sommelsdijk. Yves spoke with a bit of triumph in his voice. He told me the story of a large group of outlaws from the Netherlands who were summoned by the State of Holland to be shipped to Suriname and perform duties under the authority of Governor van Sommelsdijk.

The governor ordered the convicts to manually dig the van Sommelsdijk canal to upgrade the drainage from the Suriname River inland. If you recall, I started the city tour at the Waka Pasi, where the van Sommelsdijk canal is also situated – the same canal that previously was the waterway for the Indigenous Chief and his people. These felons were not in agreement with the hard manual labour and could not stand the piercing heat in this tropical country. They took up their tools and headed towards the Palace to express their dissatisfaction. The governor, who would not comply with their complaints, refused to lend them a listening ear and instead threatened them with execution. The outlaws immediately responded by opening fire on the governor and killing him in cold blood. All of this happened in front of the Palace and the square in the middle of the now-present road leading towards Fort Zeelandia. I think I know why Yves had a whiff of triumph in his voice while telling me the story. His advocacy to restore the honour of the Indigenous people and their historic connection to this space might have been justified through the killing of this governor.

Pictures⁸³ visualising the relevant spaces related to oral histories, as explained in the ethnographic account

Pictures 1, 2, and 3: Waka Pasi, the Suriname River, and the van Sommelsdijk canal.



Pictures 4, 5, and 6: Palmentuin with the 'Koningspalmen' and Fort Zeelandia.



Pictures 7, 8, and 9: Independence Square and the Presidential Palace.



⁸³ Picture copyright: Yves Tjon, President Suriname Tour Guides Association, 2021.

5.7. Conclusion

In this chapter, history served as the predominant lens to reveal historical experiences in which elements of the Surinamese-Creole identity are embedded. Oral stories became the vehicle through which I navigated the different layers of practices and events in which the influences of past happenings on the evolution of the Surinamese-Creole identity became evident. Commencing the chapter with a vignette in which I shared my experience during a workshop about family histories was a deliberate choice. It was meant to draw the reader into the experience of many Surinamese-Creoles who are abroad and considered to be in diaspora. I resonate with this group, as I am also in diaspora. It was a mutual confession from us participants in diaspora that many of us are confronted with the piercing question, 'What do you mean when you say you are creole?' This is a regular question asked when we find ourselves in spaces where there is a lack of knowledge about and familiarity with our Surinamese-Creole people. But it is a question that also creeps up on us from the insight, 'What makes me a creole?' As we integrate into a society that is predominantly led by Eurocentric views, it becomes an internal battle to remain grounded in what has been taught to us about who we are as creole people. Definitions of existing ethnic labels undergo constant shifting due to the increase in calls for decolonising approaches, namely in academia, education, and other sectors in society. Post-colonial identities are under scrutiny and have become subject to numerous debates. History, historical heritage, and cultural heritage are re-examined in a quest to rewrite history and facilitate the voices of those who have been left out of historical accounts.

Although these changes are meant to increase the recognition of underrepresented communities, indirectly, they become a threat to the existence of post-colonial communities that are rooted in a social past that was shaped and painted through colonial infiltrations. Suddenly, Surinamese-Creoles witness cultural elements and social practices passed on to them from generation to generation, being judged by and made for colonial thinking. Cultural and social practices that have been familiar to them are now depicted as imposed and soiled with Westernised influences. What was experienced as authentic to who they are is now depicted as hybrid. Not many realise how much instability is caused in the experiences of the older and the younger generations when it comes to embracing and preserving their inherited creoleness. Considering this reality, which is also mine, and which some of the participants also expressed during the workshop, I made the deliberate choice not to alter the oral stories of my informants, even though some might reflect elements of colonial perceptions.

By using the oral histories as shared by my informants, I committed myself to staying as close as possible to the lived experiences of my informants' social pasts. As described in this chapter, the application of historicity urged me, as the ethnographer, to know the person beyond the person's social present, which means to engage with their social past. To support the idea of objectively exploring a person's social past to know the aspects that shaped who they currently express themselves to be, I want to draw on João de Pina-Cabral's argument that a person's becoming happens within a narrative context where what it is to be a person has already been mutually agreed upon (João de Pina-Cabral, 2017: 101). The Surinamese-Creoles, in their social past, developed a shared agreement of structures, labels, and categories that would determine the sort of creole that a person would become in Suriname's colonial society. Observations and experiences proved that these structures, labels, and categories still exist in the present day, even though there is a slight shift in the acceptance of these structures. It remained relevant to follow the Surinamese-Creole historical journey through these same structures, and by doing so, I managed to uncover elements of the Surinamese-Creole culture that were underrated, in some cases not acknowledged, yet proved to be valuable in illustrating the continuity of the Surinamese-Creole identity. Such was the value and impact of the material objects, and the way in which the agency attributed to these objects continued to be relevant to the development of the creole on a socio-economic and cultural level.

The connection between the oral histories, the mastering of certain skillsets, and the dependency on ancestral guidance in the present day was another layer that revealed prime information to further explore the embodiment practices of Surinamese-Creoles in relation to preserving and showcasing their identity. The historical relevance of these oral stories served not solely to re-live history, but more so to help carve their path for the future. The fact that bodily practices were associated with

historical occurrences, and the ability of the ancestors to sustain themselves during turmoil, presents the opportunity to further explore the role of history and the agency that is attributed to this history to facilitate the continuity of the obtained cultural identity. History, in this sense, thus became the conduit through which Surinamese-Creoles derive affirmation for their ability to master certain skills so they can continue to secure a stable future for themselves. As I am observing this way of interpreting the role of oral history in the continued identity of the Surinamese-Creole, I notice a form of transmitting habits that comes through the need to survive and continues to be experienced as such, even though the living conditions have significantly changed. History continues to instil habitual practices that, in the past, came forth through different historical events. I base my analyses on the way my informants explained to me the importance of continuing the inherited skills of their ancestors. They explained that it is an obligation, as it is due to these skills that their ancestors managed to survive and secure a future for them.

Discovering a close connection of the origins of the Surinamese-Creole identity with events that took place in the history of Suriname was another avenue to further analyse the becoming of creole people in Suriname. Often, these historical events in Suriname were connected to a particular space or place that continued to hold great value to Surinamese-Creoles and their practices to celebrate their cultural identity. Originating from an uprooted background, the value of these places and spaces often reached beyond just a historical value. Ancestral presence and supernatural engagements dominated these spaces, and the narratives attached to them. The affordances of the space facilitated accessibility to the ancestors and thus played a dominant part in the validity of the historical value of that particular space to the Surinamese-Creole culture. It was through the transmission of oral stories that the affordances of these spaces were affirmed.

The integration of cultural elements from other ethnic groups in the Surinamese-Creole culture is another aspect that is often overlooked when discussing the hybridity and the colonial relevance of the Surinamese-Creole identity. The focus is mostly on the presence of European elements in Surinamese-Creole culture; however, the existence of other non-European elements in Surinamese-Creole culture proves their adaptability to change in their living environment and the fluidity of the boundaries that they established to create their own ethnic and cultural identity. Adapting to the practices of the other ethnic groups affirms the validity of utilising the notion of affordances as a means of understanding the diversity within the Surinamese-Creole identity. It also explains the current-day existence of diversity in being a Surinamese-Creole, including the dominance of the creole culture in the showcasing of Surinamese cultural heritage. This hybridity, explored from the involvement of non-European cultural elements, validates Edward Kamau Brathwaite's (1974) call for exploring creolisation through a physical and cultural interrelationship model that promotes the idea that the creolisation process maintains ancestral traditions while modifying the interacting cultures. He calls it the prismatic concept⁸⁴. During the workshop about the family histories, participants were introduced to archives of Hindustani and Chinese immigrants with the notification that due to the integration of other cultures in the Surinamese-Creole identity, the search for the ancestors and family stories requires the involvement of the family trees of the immigrant workers. The surprise and relief expressed by some of these participants was evident in the fact that the concept of creolisation too often remained explored just through a Eurocentric lens, therefore limiting the possibilities and opportunities for creole people to view their identity beyond colonial barriers and transmitting traumatising oral stories.

Memory was another element of great relevance to the application of history as a vessel harbouring the story of the Surinamese-Creole people. All the participants engaged in the workshop about family histories with a desire to know more about their roots, the lives of their ancestors, and evidence of inherited skills, habits, features, and even emotional experiences like their ancestors. Inheritance was the predominant factor in their search for their family history. Dreams played a huge part in experiencing encounters with the ancestors, but signs were also noticed in their environments, for

⁸⁴ *The prismatic concept conceives of all resident cultures as equal and contiguous, despite the accidents of political history, each developing its own lifestyle from the spirit of the ancestors, but modified and increasingly so, through interactions with the environment and the other cultures of the environment, until residence within the environment – nativisation – becomes the process (creolisation) through which all begin to share a style, even though that style will retain vestiges of their original ancestral heritage (1977, 42).*

instance, a shadow reflected in the mirror, the touch of a light breeze. These observations revealed that history to them wasn't static and no longer relevant. It was rather dynamic, an evolution, and charged with agency over their present life. Reflecting on this way of absorbing history affirms the relevance of the notion of historicity. Matt Hodge's (2015) question of whether dreams can be perceived as a syncretic practice for temporalising the past becomes of interest, as well. This question will be further explored in the next chapter, as I believe it cannot be explored separately from the role of embodiment practices and spiritual encounters. In conversations with my informants, dreams were always mentioned in the same breath as ritual practices, supernatural experiences, and insoluble happenings in their lives.

Hearing the stories, discovering the history of their ancestors and the connections with historical spaces in Suriname, reactivated the appreciation of the participants in the workshop about family histories for material objects, ritual practices, norms, and values embedded in Surinamese-Creole culture. The ongoing debates about creole practices harbouring colonial influences became of less value, and most participants reckoned that the newly obtained insight into oral history equipped them with sustainable knowledge to better express who they were as creoles and what value they attributed to their creoleness. Thus, enrichment through historical knowledge created opportunities to develop strong arguments to engage in debates about their own cultural heritage and simultaneously better embrace their own identity.

The overall conclusion to validate the importance of this chapter to my research is that the collection and analysis of the oral history of the Surinamese-Creole identity allowed for new insights into the notion of creolisation. The value of utilising history as a vehicle to understand how a person came into being helped to draft a new approach to understanding and explaining the diversity of Surinamese-Creole people while avoiding engaging in the often racially charged stories of the creoles' engagement with other ethnic groups. This new approach promotes unity rather than segregation. It has laid the foundation for an inclusive approach in the next chapters, where I will continue to unpack other elements related to the Surinamese-Creole identity. Celebrations were less addressed in this chapter, as I wanted to keep the focus on the historical aspects attached to the emergence and continuity of the Surinamese-Creole identity. In the following chapters, the aspect of celebrations will be highlighted, as well as the way it has served as the lens through which I observed the way the Surinamese-Creole identity is currently being experienced and embraced.

CHAPTER 6 ACTUALISING THE PAST IN THE PRESENT TO SUSTAIN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SURINAMESE-CREOLE

Opo fu libi na gro fu yu srefi – To succeed in life, one should be committed to their own personal development. (Surinamese-Creole proverb)

This chapter addresses the following sub-question related to the research question: What is the significance of embodied practices as a means of continuing the Surinamese-Creole identity during celebrations? Unpacking this question throughout this chapter allows me to further strengthen my argument that the Surinamese-Creole culture should not merely be considered a hybrid culture with elements of source cultures. This chapter aims to exhibit the Surinamese-Creole culture as one that continues to evolve. This chapter also goes into detail about cultural practices developed by the ancestors of Surinamese-Creoles and then explores how these cultural practices continue to be employed by present-day Surinamese-Creoles to actualise the past and utilise it as a vehicle to inform them about their present-day social life and the future that is in front of them. This chapter allows for the exploration of historicity as an anthropological concept, but through the lived experiences of the Surinamese-Creole. In this chapter, understanding the agency of material objects that help facilitate the actualising of the past becomes important to further unpack the way history continues to contribute to the continuation of the Surinamese-Creole identity.

The existence and influence of historical events on present-day practices and ways of living can be observed through the dual function of passing on an oral story. Tim Ingold (1996) argues that the telling of a narrative based on past events can be viewed from the perspective of the story being told and transferred as a way of keeping alive the memory of what has happened in the past, or the story can be told as a way of teaching the listeners how to employ a certain skill or practice. The quote referenced at the beginning of this chapter is one of the many proverbs employed by the creole people in Suriname to define their socio-cultural heritage. The proverb emphasises the value of being able to recollect historical experiences and applying them to future events. It suggests that the past should be seen and used as a tool to shape the present. Through the stories that have been shared with me about past events that have helped shape the creole identity, I came to realise that some of the stories had the function of transferring, preserving, and continuing the legacy of the ancestors and some of the stories served as ways to learn the skills of the ancestors and continue to apply these in the present day. These skills are actualised in the present day of the creole people through the exhibition of certain craftsmanship or cooking skills, or employing a specific job, such as being a teacher, a nurse, a housemaid, a laundry lady, a cook, a vendor, etc. The relevance of historicity in relation to inherited skills is that when my informants spoke of their skills, or their jobs, they systematically would refer to their ancestors to clarify the expertise they showcased while employing the skill. Being able to continue the talents of their ancestors was, for them, a way of affirming their creoleness.

6.1. Actualising the past through inherited skills and dreams

Dreaming about ancestors and learning about oneself through dreams was another way of activating the past for present-day happenings. This act of dreaming was discussed during the same workshop, 'Ancestors unknown', in which I participated. Dreams about ancestors are quite a common occurrence in Surinamese-Creole culture. Dreams are considered messages from the people who have gone before us. The dream, then, becomes their way of remaining in touch with their offspring to help guide their lifepath. When Matt Hodges (2015) reviews the powerful dreams and visions that have happened in the mountain village of Koronos, which have changed the local history of that village, he poses a critical statement that dreaming might be the motor for local history and the

mediator for historical and religious change. He supports his statement with the question of how anthropology should deal with such events.

His statement, and the question about anthropologists' views on the role of dreaming in actualising history, was my motivation to further unpack the way in which Surinamese-Creole people consider dreaming as another way of consulting the past for changes happening in their present day. An example of dreaming was when one of the participants of the workshop shared that in his quest to know who his great-grandmother was, he decided to seek answers through dreaming. To activate the support of his ancestors, he first carried out seven days of fasting and praying. After concluding this, he one day saw a vision of an older woman in a dream. The woman spoke to him and mentioned her name. He made sure to write this name down and actively searched for the relevance of that name with his own family history. Through stories that elders in the family shared with him, combined with a thorough investigation of archives about the enslaved, he discovered that the name he received through his dream coincided with the name of the woman whom he discovered to be an ancestral mother on his mother's side.

When he shared this story, no one questioned the validity of it. One of the instructors confirmed that through dreams the ancestors will reveal themselves to us. We just must respectfully ask them to do so. I won't aim to answer Matt Hodges's very valid question, as the answer is subject to different perceptions, just as other ongoing anthropological debates are. Instead, I will continue to utilise my personal experiences and those of my informants to add more context to this debate. One important observation that I do want to contribute to the discussion, and which became relevant to my own research, is that the activation of history through dreams might be interlinked with the notion of memory. The experience, as shared by the participant, made me curious to further explore if and how memory was interconnected with dreaming. He explained that he had the dream the same day one of his elders shared with him the story of her own dream about her mother, who shared with her that one of her offspring was seeking answers about their family history.

6.2. An ethnographic account of actualising the past through material culture

In the following vignette, I will share my experience of taking part in a workshop in which the skill of re-creating a traditional object is taught. This is where I will also discuss the agency of material culture in reliving history and transmitting knowledge inherited from the ancestors. The workshop was part of the activities in anticipation of celebrating the abolition of slavery on the 1st of July. I will first describe my experience and finalise it with an analysis of the experience and its relevance to the narration of historical events through material culture and the way they are preserved in the present. While analysing the influence of this material object in activities, I also revealed its role in the socio-cultural and economic development of the Surinamese-Creole people.

It is Monday, December 9th, 2019. I have been invited to a workshop named 'angisa binden'. Some quick background information on what the angisa is: The angisa is a headkerchief which is artistically folded and pinned in various shapes. It is part of the traditional clothing of Surinamese-Creole women. A woman who wears an angisa combined with the traditional dress named the koto is called a kotomisi. This traditional clothing is very commonly used as one of the symbolic traditional dresses from Suriname. The angisa and the koto are worn during various events. Depending on the theme of the event, a specific angisa will be worn. In the choice of fabric, the way it's folded and pinned, messages and stories are incorporated. In order to decode these stories or messages, one needs to be educated about them first. The angisa is a material object containing coded messages about the lived experiences of the Surinamese-Creole people.

In my previous job as a project coordinator, I initiated a lot of these workshops. Back then, the purpose was to keep the custom of wearing the traditional headkerchief alive and transfer the skills of folding it into a masterpiece of art. I've never participated myself, nor learned how to create the headpieces. I always felt a bit intimidated because I knew that one must be very creative in order to make a proper angisa. I went to the workshop, not to participate, but to observe...what a relief that was! I didn't want to embarrass myself...that's for sure! It was supposed to start at 6 pm. I made sure

to be there on time. The workshop was to be held in a church, a very well-known church of the Moravians. In Suriname, the Moravians are also named Evangelische Broedergemeente Suriname (EBGs). Most Surinamese-Creole are members of this church. I wasn't surprised at the location. The EBG is known for providing workshops to its members, and these do not necessarily have to be Christian-related workshops. Thus, I was expecting it to be a workshop provided by the board of this church.

My friend Vivie invited me to the workshop. She is a Surinamese-Creole and can be considered part of the small number of high-class Creole families in Suriname. Her family is well established. She has a respectable position as a general practitioner, and her dad is a famous and well-respected professor. She didn't share many details about the workshop. The only thing she said was, 'You should attend. It will be very helpful for your research.' I trusted her and went with low expectations. Based on my previous knowledge about these types of workshops, I expected the participants to be a group of women, a mixture of senior ladies and ladies in their late 40s and a mixture of middle- and working-class women – women who were housewives or who worked as civil servants. Never have I seen a woman like Vivie taking part in such classes. But I wasn't surprised by her participation. She has always been interested in everything related to her cultural heritage as a Surinamese-Creole.

Most of the women were senior women. One or three were my age (in their 40s). I know for a fact that one of the ladies was 75, as I asked her. She was sitting next to me, and she kept saying that she's been an active person since she was young. According to her, it keeps her young. While I was listening to her talk about God, I found it interesting to know how she would think of the angisa as part of the traditional dress, the koto. It is no secret that the purpose of wearing a koto and angisa is not just for traditional clothing but also for practices specifically related to the Winti religion. If there is one thing that perfectly symbolises the complicated integration of both the Christian religion and the Winti religion in the Creole culture, it is these two material objects. When the participants were instructed to lay their headkerchiefs on the table, I curiously watched what types of headkerchiefs they would have. I know for a fact that the fabric of the headkerchief also reveals whether the purpose of the angisa is for Winti-related practices, general events, or church-related events. Usually, this could be identified through the symbols on the fabric or the type of fabric. Hers were all church-related headkerchiefs (they had biblical proverbs and symbols). She only had one that was meant to serve for a general activity, meaning that the fabric had no specific symbols on it.

The workshop was opened by a female representative of the church's board, and after her introduction, she introduced the person in charge of the workshop and three examiners. The person in charge was a man, and the examiners were three senior ladies. I realised that today wasn't just the workshop, but the exam for those who participated in the workshop. This was their chance to showcase their skills and how well they had improved in mastering the art of folding and pinning an angisa in a specific shape representing a specific story and/or message. The workshop leader instructed them to place all their materials needed for the exam in front of them on the table. Colourful headkerchiefs appeared out of large bags, some had plastic boxes full of silver-tone pins and pens, and some had a small handkerchief or tissues in their hands, wiping sweat from their foreheads.

I overheard a lady to my right at the other end of the table talking to the lady next to her, I suppose her friend. She was hoping and praying that she would pass the exam, and she said, 'Then at least I'll have my official proof that I am qualified to ask for money to make an angisa for people.' 'You can earn a lot of money once you are able to make the most creative and beautiful angisa,' her friend responded. The fee for participation was SRD 250 excluding material, and for the exam, you must pay an extra SRD 150 – thus a total of SRD 400, which could be quite a lot of money for someone who is a housewife dependent on the sole income of her husband. This made me wonder what type of work or income these ladies had. I made a note of my thoughts, hoping I would have a chance to ask at least one or two of the ladies to tell me more about their stories.

With a man delivering the workshop, another assumption of mine proved to be wrong. I assumed the organisation behind this would be a women's organisation with some Christian relevance. It turned out that he was the president of the Young Men's Christian Association Paramaribo South-West (YMCA). During my time in Suriname, I was familiar with the YWCA (Young

Women's Christian Association Paramaribo), and they would initiate workshops like this. I wondered what a man had to do with something as feminine as the angisa. This, to me, was a material object solely related to women. With a deep voice, he welcomed the ladies. He was a very tall and masculine creole man, with Asian features noticeable by the shape of his eyes. Once he started to speak, there was complete silence. It was clear that he had authority and was very much respected.

It was quite an interesting group of women, all clearly of creole descent. As I saw the fabric from my own friend, I looked over to the other ladies to see what type of fabric they had. Based on the sorts of patterns on the fabric, I made assumptions about who was involved in Winti-related practices. When I was eavesdropping, I could identify most of the conversations as being about Winti. Quite a lot of these ladies spoke openly about their engagements with Winti-related practices. I was not surprised. It is public knowledge that within the EBGs' church, people do not mind openly talking about their involvement with the Winti religion.

There was one lady with her child. She might have been in her 30s, with her child maybe 2 years old. The reason why she stood out was because of her child's actions. This child, a girl, would walk around the whole room, go to every one of the ladies, be cuddled by everyone, but then go straight back to her mum, take out her mum's breast from her shirt, and then suck on it as if no one was watching. After doing that for a couple of minutes, she would tuck the breast back into her mum's shirt and then walk around again. Everyone in the group was enchanted by this cute little girl who had no shame showing the world that she was still sucking on her mum's breast. I became curious and then paid closer attention to the mum. I was curious to know who she was, how old she was, what she did for a living, and what her family circumstances were. She also had this aura of sadness, as if she were tired and worried at the same time. It was because of the expression in her eyes.

Another lady was so determined to master the folding techniques that she even started to talk to the headkerchief. When she noticed me watching her talking to the fabric, she burst into laughter and said with a firm tone of voice, 'If it doesn't work with me, I have to talk to it for it to behave.' And by 'it' she meant the fabric. This, to me, was another sign of relevance with Winti practices. It is known for a fact that when people prepare the koto or the angisa for a specific Winti ritual, they tend to talk to the fabric. She was explaining her talking to the fabric to me as if she was expecting me to know that it is very normal to speak to a fabric to make it behave.

Then there was this lady who was struggling to get her first shape done. Another lady, who walked in right after the exam started, walked towards her and sat right next to her, encouraging her to push through and get it right. This lady, who had walked in right after the exam had started, appeared to be a participant, as well. I picked that up from her jolly conversation with my second mum. She was joking that she couldn't take the pressure of doing the exam with the group. Instead, she preferred doing a re-sit all by herself. To me, this was funny, especially since a re-sit can only be done when one has not passed the exam. In her case, she didn't even do the exam. To me, this came across as if the rules of the workshop and the exam weren't as strict as the instructor had made them seem, or she just didn't care about all the strictness and just decided to do her very own thing. I was used to this laid-back attitude from my previous experiences with workshops like this. People wouldn't really bother and didn't think it was a problem, as they felt it was their money paying for the workshop. And yet, she was there rooting for the other lady to push through.

As I was watching Vivie putting in effort to get all her shapes right, I kept wondering what her real intentions were. Why would she put herself through so much pressure when it was just learning to make an angisa? What did the angisa mean to her, or even better, why would it mean so much for her to pass this exam? How does she deal with the controversy of the angisa and koto in relation to the Christian and Winti religions? She's had a strict religious upbringing, which is what she told me once. Yet, she has so much interest in other Creole practices that are not so Christian-related. I made a note to have a more in-depth conversation with her.

And then the exam came to an end. Vivie passed with flying colours, and so did the 75-year-old lady who sat next to me. The mum with her little girl also passed, and she was beyond excited. Her whole demeanour changed when she heard her results. Happiness gave her face such a

beautiful glow. I realised that this workshop was indeed for her a way to learn an extra skill to gain some extra income.

Pictures of the *angisa binden* workshop⁸⁵

Pictures 1 and 2 illustrate the basic folding technique to make an *angisa*.



6.3. Material culture observed as a vessel to obtain knowledge of the past

Attending the *angisa* workshop was a unique opportunity to witness and observe the actualisation of a cultural practice and a material object from the past. The *angisa*, as described by Christine van Russel in her book *Angisa Tori – The Secret Code of Surinamese Headkerchiefs* (2008), is part of the traditional dress of creole women in Suriname. It serves as an adornment on the head, but with a dual purpose. While it is meant to be purely for beautifying purposes, it also serves as a communication tool to share (hidden) messages with others. The hidden messages are secluded in the patterns of the fabric, in the design in which this head tie is folded, and in the way the head tie complements the rest of the dress. The hidden messages reveal events, stories, and life lessons. Once the message is decoded, the *angisa* as an object becomes a valuable source of historical information about the daily life and the experiences of enslaved Africans in the colony of Suriname.

The workshops included learning about these hidden messages and learning how to keep this skill of keeping secret communication tools alive. Participating in this workshop enabled me to construct a framework through which I could observe its influence, adaptations, and developments throughout the continuation of the practice. By comparing the use of the *angisa* during colonial times in relation to its role in post-colonial events, I found commonalities that validate the *angisa* as a valuable source of visual communication to observe the embodiment of the Surinamese-Creole identity. The notion of material agency⁸⁶ allows us to explore the agency exerted by the *angisa*. For a thorough analysis to reveal the connection between the *angisa*'s agency and oral history, I will unpack the level to which it takes centre stage in the social world⁸⁷ of creole people. Melville Herskovits attempted to explain the role of the *angisa* but terribly failed at understanding this material culture and its value to the life of Surinamese-Creoles. His accounts demonstrate examples of misrepresentations of Surinamese-Creole culture due to the application of Eurocentric points of view. As a Surinamese-Creole, I have

⁸⁵ Picture copyright: Rachel Gefferie, 2019.

⁸⁶ The notion of material agency, according to Tim Ingold: 'The raw material consists of sensations, registered by our receptor organs by virtue of our bodily immersion in the physical world' (Tim Ingold, 1996; 114). The word 'agency' refers to 'things that might authorize, allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, influence, block, render possible, forbid, and so on. In fact, the emphasis is on the ability to make a difference rather than to dominate or manipulate' (Edwin Sayes 2014, 142).

⁸⁷ Tim Ingold argues, 'constructing the social world, according to the notion of material agency, is not so much about the physical constructing process, as it is about the cognitive translation and expression of what is being experienced while dwelling in the environment' (Tim Ingold 1996; 116-117).

been raised with some knowledge about the *angisa*. Therefore, to reflect on the agency of the *angisa*, I utilised my personal experience to reflect on the accounts of Melville Herskovits.

6.3.1. *Facilitating economic stability in the past*

Historically, based on what was shared by my interlocutors⁸⁸, the fabric to make the *angisa* was imported and sold by mostly Portuguese-Jewish merchants. Mainly fabrics with prints and symbols would be used for the *angisa* and the *koto*. Creole women would assign meaning to these prints. The context of the symbolic meaning would be inspired by social events that took place in their community. These events would vary from scandals in the community to political developments or to new technology, such as the arrival of the first car. Christine van Russel (2008) did thorough research on this phenomenon of name giving to customs and practices in West Africa. She draws connections with practices in West African countries, such as Ghana and Nigeria, and some Central African countries, where it is still a custom to name fabrics. Based on the popularity of the stories symbolised by the prints on the fabric, the value of the fabric would increase and the *angisa* would become a commodity with economic value, dictating the social life of creole women⁸⁹ and increasing their economic power. Women would compete to be the first to give a name to a fabric.

Women would purchase the fabric for an *angisa* and store it as valuable property. According to Christine van Russel, the *angisa* had such high value that it could be pawned in exchange for money. Currently, the *angisa* represents just historical value. Depending on the historical relevance (the time it stems from) of the fabric, its value to the owner could be higher. However, reflecting on the reasons for most of the women taking part in the *angisa binden* workshop, the intrinsic economic value of the *angisa* has transferred from the value being determined by the oral stories attached to the fabric to mastering the techniques to make the *angisa*. Currently, possessing the knowledge to tie an *angisa* equals possessing a skill that helps secure economic stability. In the past, this economic stability was secured by the number of *angisa* fabrics one possessed.

6.3.2. *Recording and passing on occurrences in past social lives*

As previously described, the fabrics to make the *angisa* were representative of occurrences in and the organising of social life. Another aspect of the *angisa* that also captured social life is the different shapes in which the *angisa* would be tied. Examples of such shapes are the *Oto baka* (the back of a car), the *Wacht mij op de hoek* ('meet me around the corner', which implies forbidden sexual encounters), and the *Frans ede* (a shape inspired by the French fashion style introduced by the European women in the colony), which represent some of the significant happenings of daily life. The next page provides pictures of some of the head ties that I describe. The community of the enslaved was restricted from engaging in and showcasing any behaviour that would allow them to consider themselves equal to their 'owners'.

Communication, dressing up, dating and prenuptial situations, recreation, and education were social activities curtailed significantly by enforced laws, regulations, and policies to eliminate any advancement of the enslaved⁹⁰. These tight and inhumane restrictions forced the enslaved to become creative and use innovation to still exercise their rightful need to engage with basic human practices. Thus, objects such as the *angisa* served as vehicles to find a way around regulations preventing

⁸⁸ In conversations with Mrs. Christine van Russel, one of my main informants and the curator of the Koto Museum in Suriname, she shared with me an array of oral stories revealing the life, practices, experiences, and customs of the kotomisi during colonial times. The *angisa* was an inseparable part of the daily clothing of the kotomisi. Most of the oral stories were attached to the objects representing the lifestyle of the kotomisi. The *angisa* was one of these important objects.

⁸⁹ In his book, *The Social Life of Things*, Appadurai, Arjun (1986) speaks about the value of an object determined through exchanges that happen in social life.

⁹⁰ A description of the 'slavenreglement' introduced by Governor van Sommelsdijck in 1683. Prior to this regulation, there was the regulation introduced by the English and Zeelandic colonial rulers; *De Ontwikkeling van de Rechtspositie van de vroegere Plantageslaven in Suriname*. door Dr. A.J.A. Quintus Bosz, Emancipatie 1863-1963 - DBNL accessed 27/09/2023.

normal social life engagements such as sharing knowledge, news, and gossip, and enjoying relationships. The stories or messages would be hidden in the patterns and the different shapes of the *angisa*, and the ability to decode the message was reserved solely for those who were part of the enslaved community. As such, the *angisa* also served to establish their own identity, preserve their inherited and re-created traditions, and separate themselves from other ethnicities in the colony.

6.3.3. Material culture utilised as a communication tool to resemble social relationships of the past
The *angisa* Miss de Neef is one of the most popular *angisas* and tells the story of a very famous concubine during colonial times. Historical narratives of Miss de Neef are also captured in one of the traditional clothing styles of the Surinamese-Creole women. Being the concubine of a high-ranking official in the colony, Jacob baron Schimmelpenninck van der Oije, she found it necessary to distinguish herself from the other concubines in the colony and designed her own clothing. Currently, this particular traditional clothing is named *Miss de Neef* and is associated with being a woman of virtue and with class. The story of Miss de Neef⁹¹ reflects the historical narratives of the introduction of concubine relationships among the creole women in the colony of Suriname, commonly referred to as 'het Surinaams huwelijk'⁹².

During colonial times, it was strictly forbidden for the white-European men to engage in sexual encounters with the enslaved women. Governor General van Aerssen van Sommelsdijck issued a ban by law for European men to sexually engage with enslaved and Amerindian women. Breach of this ban was penalised with a hefty fine. European women who dared to entertain sexual encounters with enslaved men risked being banned from the colony. From the beginning, the number of white men in comparison with white women was quite high, and after the recession in 1773, there was a steady decrease in European families in the colony. Aside from this phenomenon, the administrators appointed for the management of the plantation preferably had to be unmarried. The governor general noticed the strains from the limitations to establish a proper family and decided on an easing of the ban.

This was the beginning of the condoned phenomenon 'Het Surinaams huwelijk', referring to white men in the colony taking (freed) creole women as their concubines. Marriage between the two races was still forbidden by law; thus, it was important for the Europeans to find another solution to facilitate these relationships. Again, colonial rule interfered with the regulation of these interracial relationships and introduced the idea of appointing a creole concubine to be the house manager – this, to disguise the intimate relationship to the outsider. If the men still decided to engage in a marriage, the creole concubine would remain taking care of the household, but her position as the first 'wife' would automatically become of less importance. In conversation with Christine van Russel, she shared stories of many creole women who engaged in concubine relationships and achieved economic freedom.

Miss de Neef was one of the most popular concubine creole women belonging to this community of creole elites. She was actively involved in doing social work, and her partner, Jacob baron Schimmelpenninck van der Oije, was dedicated to facilitating opportunities through the government to help execute her activities for the underprivileged. Today, a neighbourhood in Paramaribo and a street name are silent witnesses of the concubinage of Miss de Neef and this high-level colonial officer in Suriname. The Creole elite would establish their own community of concubines and become

⁹¹ Neef, Francina Jacoba Elisabeth de (1864-1948) (knav.nl) accessed 27/09/2023.

⁹² Angela van Leeuwen (1984) in her article 'het Surinaams huwelijk' on the occurrence of the many sexual relationships that the white high-ranking officers would have with Creole women in the colony. *Het Surinaamse huwelijk* Angela van Leeuwen, OSO. Tijdschrift voor Surinaamse Taalkunde, Letterkunde en Geschiedenis. Jaargang 3 - DBNL accessed 30/09/2023.

a group of elite creoles in society⁹³. To date, this distinction of a small group of elite creole people is noticeable in Suriname's society. The phenomenon of concubinage became very common among creoles⁹⁴, but not as it was practised during colonial times. Thus, concubinage these days is not necessarily an intimate relationship between a white man and a creole woman.

Another very popular *angisa* that tells the story of concubinage in colonial Suriname is the 'Tangi Masra', which means 'thank you master'. This *angisa* refers to the story of a freed creole woman who was in a concubine relationship with a freed high-ranking creole man. One day, he decided to marry her, which, to her, was a great honour and immediate elevation of her status within the community of creole elites. The *angisa* was introduced alongside an *odo* (these are Surinamese-Creole proverbs) to show her gratitude for the honour bestowed upon her to become a wife. To date, prenuptial relationships in the Surinamese-Creole community, sexuality, and manhood remain subjects of study because of the phenomenon of single-parent households among creole families and the relevance of historical events that might have influenced and shaped the current-day existence of these single-parent households.

Pictures visualising the different shapes of the *angisa*⁹⁵

Pictures 1 and 2: The name of this angisa is 'Let Them Talk', and it is categorised as a 'Trobi angisa', meaning the head tie implies a quarrel is going on or it instigates a quarrel. Picture 1 is the back of the angisa, and Picture 2 is the front of the angisa.



Pictures 3 and 4: The name of this angisa is 'Wacht mij op de hoek', which means 'wait for me around the corner'. It is categorised as an 'Afspraken angisas', which designates the head ties that served as communication tools between lovers to make secret arrangements. Picture 3 is the back of the angisa, and Picture 4 is the front of the angisa.



⁹³ Numerous scholars did research about the community of the non-white elite in the colony of Suriname. A number of articles were written and studies done about this group, as they managed to establish their own society and evolve into an important social group dictating social life in Suriname. [Redalyc.THE FORMATION OF A FREE NON-WHITE ELITE IN PARAMARIBO, 1800-1863 accessed 01/10/2023.](#)

⁹⁴ After the emancipation in 1863, colonial rule encouraged ex-slaves to engage in marriage; however, a very small number choose this form of relationship and preferred concubinage copied from the Europeans. [admin.+article.pdf accessed 01/10/2023.](#)

⁹⁵ Picture copyright: Natasha Ristie from Angisa Misi, which is a small business specialising in the making of angisas and kotos. 2021.

Pictures 5 and 6: The name of this *angisa* is 'Bel mij op mijn cellulaire', and it is categorised as one of the more contemporary head tie models. It means 'call me on my mobile phone' and was introduced when the first mobile phones came to Suriname. Picture 5 is the back of the *angisa*, and Picture 6 is the front of the *angisa*.



6.4. Surinamese-Creole material culture sustaining the reclaiming of socio-ethnic identity

Oral stories surrounding the origins of the *angisa* and the *koto* vary and often form the source of heated debates. Therefore, the organising of workshops such as the *angisa binden* workshop can also be considered a form of reclaiming socio-ethnic identity by using it as a mediator to bring together the historical values of the *angisa* and the stories of the *kotomisi*, who created the *angisa* as part of their dress, and also as a form of communicating and passing on their daily life experiences. During the workshop, women share their experiences of wearing an *angisa*, and their experience is intrinsically related to wearing a *koto*. One cannot wear an *angisa* without wearing a *koto* or a *Miss de Neef* clothing piece.

The continuation of workshops teaching people how to make the *angisa* can be considered one of the many forms in which Surinamese-Creoles attempt to safeguard their cultural heritage. The oral stories embedded in the *angisa* celebrate the *koto* as it complements the shape, fabric, or occasion of the *angisa*. However, the existence of controversial historical narratives contesting the origins of traditional dress becomes a threat to the continuation and acceptance of the *koto* as part of the inherited culture. The divergence of opinions is related to determining the origins of traditional clothing. Some claim that the *koto* was introduced by the women of the slave masters; others, including Christine van Russel, who wrote several articles about the *koto* and organises daily museum tours telling the story of the *koto*, claim that it was introduced and advanced by freed creole women (2008). In the next chapter, I will further dive into the *koto* becoming subject to controversy and misinterpretations of the past.

The experience with the *angisa* workshop equipped me with valuable data to observe the *angisa* as part of present-day Surinamese-Creole social life. I explored present-day Surinamese-Creoles' engagement with the *angisa* as a social form to mirror the past.

The tradition of creating a shape for the *angisa* inspired by developments in society remains relevant; however, it has become of less importance to daily social life than it was during colonial times. Instead, creating a shape for an *angisa* symbolises the designer's inherited talent to continue a skill possessed by his or her ancestors. An example is the *angisa* 'bel mij op mijn cellulaire', which was designed in 2010 during the competition, 'Designing new *angisa* shapes'⁹⁶. The shape of the *angisa*

⁹⁶ *Hoofddoeken met een boodschap - Parbode*. Accessed 30/09/2023.

had references to the features of a mobile phone, which was a nod to the increase in popularity of choosing a mobile phone as the first choice of communication instead of a landline.

Being able to create a shape based on a social occurrence elevates the respect and acknowledgement that a designer would receive in the Surinamese-Creole community. In particular, among Surinamese-Creoles, it is considered a great privilege to possess the skills of an ancestor and secure the continuation of the skill. This skill supports the belief that the ancestors continue to live on and affirm their presence through the knowledge and skills that their descendants possess. For Surinamese-Creoles, especially those practising the *Winti* religion, the ancestors are not considered to be in the past; they actively become part of the present and are considered to act as guides to help prepare a prosperous future. During the workshop, one of the participants very passionately confessed that the only way she was able to accomplish the workshop task was because of her great-grandmother being with her every day during the workshop, guiding her, taking care of her, so that she could properly execute the different techniques.

6.5. Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to unpack the following question: What is the significance of embodied practices as a means of continuing the Surinamese-Creole identity during celebrations? The focus in this chapter was on the embodiment of cultural practices. Embodying practices requires knowledge of skills, traditions, and customs that have been passed on from generation to generation. In the case of Surinamese-Creole cultural practices as described in this chapter, embodiment mainly happened through actualising the past. Although this thesis's lens to study the evolution of Surinamese-Creole culture remains celebrations, this chapter took an in-depth look at the role of objects and the way they help to facilitate connecting with the past. Connecting with the past is central in embodiment practices, as they are about cultural practices developed by the ancestors. In the ethnographic accounts, I described how these cultural practices continue to be employed by present-day Surinamese-Creoles as a vehicle to inform them about their present-day social life and the future that is in front of them.

Processes of remembering, again, became important in this chapter to understand how the evolution of the Surinamese-Creole identity continues. However, throughout the chapter, dreaming was one aspect of the process of remembering that helped to facilitate the knowledge and skills to embody cultural practices. The importance of dreaming to be able to continue traditions and skills associated with being a creole was an essential part of social life for my informants. The act of dreaming was their way of receiving messages from their ancestors, engaging with them, and inheriting their skills. Thus, the transmission of skills and knowledge to embody cultural practices was experienced through dreaming.

Memory, specifically collective memory, was the channel through which Surinamese-Creoles continued to activate cultural practices that contributed to cohesive and mutually accepted cultural practices that are collectively accepted as part of the Surinamese-Creole identity. That is what the ethnographic account of the *angisa binden* workshop confirmed. This example showed a significant difference in the role of dreaming and the role of collective memory in continuing certain cultural practices. Dreaming facilitated a process of actualising being creole through an individual process of memory, whilst acknowledging the *angisa* and the stories embedded in the *angisa* were facilitated through a process of collective social memory inherited from the lived experiences of Surinamese-Creoles as an ethnic group. The example of obtaining skills through dreaming versus continuing a cultural practice through collective memory confirms what was stated at the beginning of the chapter, which is the idea that memory is either locked inside people's heads or available in collective representations and embodied practices of rituals. And it is through this actualising of a collective social memory that Surinamese-Creoles as an ethnic group continue to shape, evolve, and transmit cultural practices that are distinct to them being creole.

CHAPTER 7 UNPACKING CREOLENESS THROUGH SURINAMESE-CREOLE CELEBRATIONS

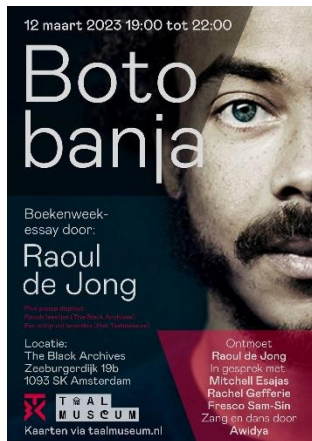
Fa yu futu meki, na so yu o waka – Everyone's purpose in life is dictated by the way they have learned to navigate life. (Surinamese-Creole proverb)

As I have discussed present-day Surinamese-Creoles, described my observations of family structures in social daily life and their celebrations, and unpacked the emerging story of Surinamese-Creoles through oral history, I have now arrived at analysing how Surinamese-Creoles give meaning to the notion of creoleness. In the previous chapter, I discussed the actualising of the past and the way this helps to sustain the Surinamese-Creole identity in the present. In this process of actualising, objects take centre stage. The difference from the previous chapter is that in this chapter, I will dive into celebratory Surinamese-Creole events that are more public. The lived experiences and expressions of being creole of my informants will serve as vessels to navigate the way creoleness is given meaning in Suriname and in the Netherlands. By doing so, I am unravelling another layer in the complexity of understanding what it means to be creole. The sub-question applied in this chapter will assist in further unpacking the main argument of the thesis. The sub-question in this case is the following: To what extent can Surinamese-Creole celebrations be considered vehicles to explore the origins of being a creole person in Suriname and the present-day experiences of being a Surinamese-Creole?

Throughout my intimate involvement in the lives of my informants and while analysing my fieldnotes, I realised that spirituality and religion continued to be the overarching themes. Therefore, I also give analytical accounts of Surinamese-Creoles' relation to notions of religion and spirituality and the ways in which these influence the meaning giving process of creoleness during celebrations. The chapter ultimately should contribute to further understandings of the cohesiveness between social and cultural practices, rituals, and Surinamese-Creoles' interpretations of history to continue to preserve their inherited socio-cultural identity. The Surinamese-Creole proverb at the beginning of this chapter symbolises this cohesiveness as it indicates that the way Surinamese-Creoles have shaped their own socio-cultural identity dictates their positionality and future evolution as an ethnic group in society.

7.1. Belongingness and nostalgia facilitated through a collective Surinamese-Creole identity during the celebration of a typical Dutch public event

In this section, I want to draw on one event that I took part in during my fieldwork in the Netherlands. Participation in this event allowed me to witness and experience the way in which Surinamese-Creoles in the Netherlands actualise the collective Surinamese identity and employ elements of Surinamese-Creole culture to emphasise being Surinamese and to design the decoration and the content of the evening. It was the celebration of the yearly Book Festival in the Netherlands. This event is prestigious and honours renowned authors in the Netherlands. During the event, there is a selection of authors who are required to produce a literary work, and two are ultimately crowned the Book King and Book Queen. That year, in 2023, Raoul de Jong, a young writer with Surinamese roots, was crowned Book King. This was the first time that a writer with Surinamese roots received this prestigious award. The fact that his literary work contained elements of one of the most sacred ritual performances in Surinamese-Creole culture made this recognition even more special. He utilised the *Banya* dance, which is a ritual dance performed in honour of the ancestors, as a metaphor to share the stories of other Black writers who dared to write about their experiences of discrimination, stigmatisation, and prejudice as they were navigating spaces dominated by Eurocentric perceptions.



The flyer promoting the event to celebrate the book Boto Banja. The author, Raoul de Jong, with Surinamese roots, used as a metaphor one of the most sacred Surinamese-Creole ritual performances to illustrate the importance of acknowledging and honouring Black voices that helped shape the world of literature on an international level. Picture credit: Fresco Sam-Sin, 2023.

The Surinamese community in the Netherlands was not invested in or closely involved in the Book Festival. With the crowning of Raoul de Jong, there was a drastic change. The Surinamese community showed gratitude to de Jong's deliberate choice to represent Surinamese-Creole culture on such a prestigious, yet very Eurocentric, platform. To show their appreciation, prominent organisations in the Surinamese community, such as The Black Archives and the organisation Things That Talk, led by Fresco Sam-Sin, came together and organised a special cultural event to honour Raoul de Jong. I was closely involved in the organisation of this event, as my research served as an inspiration to Raoul de Jong's writing process. I was asked to serve as the bridge between the community of Surinamese-Creole intellectuals and the bearers of knowledge about Surinamese-Creole culture. To secure the evening as a great success, the organising partners, including myself, combined resources and their networks to make sure every element of the evening would be a proper representation of Suriname in general and the Surinamese-Creole culture in particular.

It was during this event that I saw the community of Surinamese intellectuals and Surinamese-Creoles who are closely involved in the safeguarding of the Surinamese-Creole culture coming together to collectively celebrate this milestone for the Surinamese community in the Netherlands. The evening was filled with cultural performance, and a *Winti* priest was invited to open the evening with a ritual performance in honour of the ancestors. Each one of the attendees went the extra mile to be dressed in Afro-Surinamese (meaning either from the Maroon culture or the Creole culture) traditional clothing. The decorations were Surinamese-Creole material objects, and the music and performances were traditional Surinamese-Creole.

The audience was excited and engaged in each segment of the evening. After the formal part of the evening, there was room for socialising. It was then that several people approached me to share how much this evening brought back memories of their childhood and that it had been a very long time since they felt this cohesiveness and collectiveness of being not just a Surinamese person in the Netherlands but a Surinamese-Creole. There was an atmosphere of liberation, pride, mutual respect, and genuine interest in embracing the Surinamese-Creole culture. The boundaries between the intellectual community and the rest of the Surinamese-Creoles were blurred that evening. The ongoing differences in opinions about religion and spirituality associated with ritual practices in the Surinamese-Creole culture were put aside. One of my informants, a young adult who runs a bookstore in an underprivileged neighbourhood in the Netherlands (this is where a lot of Black people, including Surinamese-Creoles, from the lower class reside) approached me after the event and told me how honoured she felt to be able to freely mingle with a group of people whom she normally would never be in touch with. She seized the moment and shared about her activities and efforts to safeguard and promote Surinamese-Creole culture. These confessions made me realise that Surinamese-Creole culture indeed seems to serve as a facilitator to evoke feelings of unity and

collectiveness amongst Surinamese people in diaspora and equip them with a sense of pride and belonging when expressing their shared loyalty to their home country, Suriname.

7.2. Spirituality and religion at the centre of Surinamese-Creole celebratory events

Before going into the relevance of spirituality and religion in the Surinamese-Creole culture, I am sharing a field experience. This experience directly influenced my decision to dive further into the role of religion and spirituality in Surinamese-Creole culture, without making this research about these two notions. I was invited by Siegmien Staphorst, chairperson of the NGO NAKS, to attend the following event.

In the synagogue in Paramaribo, there was a book presentation of the book *God zij met ons Suriname*, written by the Dutch sociologist and journalist Herman Vuijsje (2020). He explores religion in Suriname and the way in which it serves as a glue to unify the different ethnic groups. He investigates similarities and differences in spiritual performances, ritual and cultural practices, and norms and values embedded in the religion. During his fieldwork, he stayed with a Surinamese-Creole family for over a year and gained close insight into their daily life practices and engagements with Christianity and *Winti*. He addressed topics that are very much considered to be taboo in the Surinamese-Creole community. One of these topics was the existence of *wisi*⁹⁷. At the end of the book presentation, during the socialising, I had the opportunity to meet other people, such as religious leaders, *Winti* practitioners, and prominent people in the Surinamese-Creole community. I listened to their conversations and observed interesting interactions between renowned Christian leaders and *Winti* practitioners.

The conversations predominantly were about *Winti* gaining more public recognition and being a dignified religion. The reason why this new development around *Winti* was so newsworthy is that, for years, *Winti* was diminished as being superficial, unholy, and idolatrous, with practices characteristic of the social life of lower-class Surinamese-Creoles. The misconceptions around *Winti* were that it was practised by people with a darker skin tone, whose socio-economic status was less fortunate. *Winti* practices have always been surrounded by a haze of mystery and shame by some who admit their involvement in it.

In the book *Ma Kankantri*, the priest Francios Henri Rikken (2007) tells the story of the well-established free Creole mistresses, who usually were Jewish-Creole, and their secret and indirect engagement with *Winti* practices through their slaves. They wouldn't want anything to do with *Winti*; however, when things turned bad in their households because of illness or misfortune, they would secretly request their slaves to consult *Winti* priests but demand their name not be mentioned, as it would be humiliating and a public disgrace to their privileged position in the social circles of the elite Creole women in the colony. I heard more of such stories from my informants, about upper-class Creoles secretly engaging with *Winti* practices. So, listening to this group of middle- and upper-class intellectuals freely discussing a topic that was associated with the lower class was interesting to me. I found it to be intriguing to witness that a topic previously considered to be unholy was discussed in a synagogue, the holy and sacred space of the Jewish-Creole community in Suriname. The fact that most openly agreed that *Winti* deserved recognition by the government as a proper religion triggered my curiosity to further explore the role of *Winti* as a religious practice and the way it serves as a vessel harbouring hidden, valuable elements that could be decoded to gain insight into another layer of the Surinamese-Creole identity.

Ongoing debates about notions of religion, spirituality, engagements with the supernatural, meta-persons, and rituals involving spiritual possession indicate that these notions cannot be defined by straightforward explanations. They are subject to multiple interpretations, depending on the way in

⁹⁷ In Suriname, *wisi* is considered to be the dark side of the *Winti* religion. Just as everything in life has a positive and a negative side, good and evil practices, such is the case in *Winti*. *Wisi* is what everyone is afraid to talk about. *Wisi*, according to oral history, is the act of doing another person harm by performing evil works on the person. This can be done in different ways and with different objects. Within the Surinamese-Creole community, the act of *wisi* is one that is not openly spoken about, yet it often seems to control people's lived experiences when sharing their knowledge and engagement with *Winti*.

which the community gives meaning and purpose to these notions as part of their local and social life. Some scholars, such as Melville Herskovitz, Henri Francois Rikken, and Herman van Capelle, wrote sceptical accounts about the spiritual encounters that they observed in the local life of the Surinamese-Creole community.

Sally and Richard Price, during their stay with the *Saamaka* Maroons in the interior of Suriname, witnessed and engaged with the rituals and spiritual encounters performed on a regular basis in the village. Their accounts are written from a more objective point of view, allowing the reader insight into the spiritual encounters without debating the validity of the rituals. Yet, their descriptions could not provide the deeper meaning behind these encounters and the intrinsic value of these rituals to the *Saamaka* Maroons' interpretation of the way in which a human being must become part of and live with other beings in their living environment. These sorts of personal insights and understandings can only be provided if the person was born and raised in that same environment.

My statement is inspired by what João de Pina-Cabral (2017) teaches us: that the emergence of a person is a layered process. The layers in this process justify why the best way for an ethnographer to properly represent the meaning giving of socio-cultural performances of the community is the dual functionality of secondary intersubjectivity. The first purpose of secondary intersubjectivity is that a child, in the process of becoming a person, understands the world through understanding others in their direct living environment. Secondly, the secondary intersubjectivity also serves the purpose of the child making sense of others who are in their direct living environment through understanding the world they are raised in (João de Pina-Cabral, 2017: 106). This might sound a bit confusing, but in simple terms, it means that humans learn to become people through shared intentionality that is employed to collectively understand and give meaning to the affordances attributed to that environment. This shared intentionality does not automatically apply to all humans, as the process of meaning giving depends on the narrative context about becoming a person that has been collectively agreed upon in a particular community. It takes an insider from that community to understand the others in the same community, explain the way in which that community has agreed to understand their world, and understand the meaning and purpose that has been attributed to the affordances in their environment.

Since the notions of religion and spirituality will be utilised for the sole purpose of unpacking their relevance to the understanding of the Surinamese-Creole identity, I therefore will approach these notions as part of the shared agreement that members of Surinamese-Creole communities have collectively decided what religion and spirituality look like and their contributions to the process of someone in that community becoming a person. To further contextualise my preference for approaching the notions of spirituality and religion as elements of a shared agreement and shared intentionality in the process of secondary intersubjectivity in a community, I want to draw on a conversation that I had with a scholar in the field of social anthropology. The following is a vignette of this conversation.

'I have just had the occasion of delivering a small module to Portuguese-speaking Chinese MA students about the way Brazilians think of themselves. The whole discussion turned out to be about "religion". They were really challenged by the Brazilian texts I gave them to read. The Chinese do not really have the category "religion". When they say the word, they translate "religion" (a 19th c. neologism, by the way); it means something like what we most likely would have translated as either "blind creed" or "superstition". Although there are temples growing all over the place in China, the Chinese still believe (and state so emphatically) that "the Chinese are not a religious people", which for them implies that "we cannot understand all this stuff about religion and the Devil in Brazil". Why am I telling you this? I think you must be careful with the way you use "religion" to characterise Winti. It is a dangerous word because it codifies and objectifies practices that, in real life, tend to be complex, overdetermined, vague, and superimposed.

'You can say that everything human is like that, and I am prone to agree with you. But still, when one says "religion", one is immediately creating boxes for things that are normally very much outside the box. In conclusion, I mean that you must see the practices that go by the word "religion" as part of people's complex relation with their cosmos, part of people's need to find structure in chaos,

*part of their need to bring together the different strands that cross through their lives. A sense of making the world come together and making sense of the need to remain alive*⁹⁸.

Evans-Pritchard and Victor Turner are both well known for their extensive research in the anthropology of religion. Both their works provide rich insights into notions of belief, symbolism, rationality, and rituals. In his book *Theories of Primitive Religion*, Evans-Pritchard (1965) argued that beliefs in spiritual beings, as he observed among his informants, should be considered sociological facts and not theoretical facts. His sole concern was their relation to each other and to other social facts (1965:17). As such, he found no interest in further exploring whether there was an actual existence of spiritual beings, nor did he have the willingness to further engage with his informants and attempt to adapt to their conception of these spiritual beings.

Victor Turner (1962), on the other hand, while conducting his research on *Chihamba*, an Ndembu religious ritual, argued that the academic study of religion is doomed to fail. His recommendation was, 'For one to achieve a glimpse or if possible, a full comprehension of spiritual truths, a humble vision is required' (1962: 92). According to him, a humble and innocent attitude was not part of the anthropological account. I can attest to the first part of this argument containing a level of truth. It was only when I was able to put aside my own preconceptions of religion that I succeeded in having more in-depth conversations with my informants who were *Winti* believers. Once they felt safe and comfortable with me and realised, they could trust me and see me as one of their own, they shared with me experiences of their own spiritual encounters. The lived experiences of the *Winti* believers and their insiders' knowledge of the supernatural were closely guarded and accessible for insiders only. On the other hand, the Christian believers were very open about their own spiritual encounters and proudly expressed these as holy and blessed. They openly spoke about it as a privileged experience that one could only achieve through full devotion. The *Winti* believers considered their engagements with meta-persons to be privileged, as well. However, they would not describe it as holy. Instead, these encounters signified that they respected their ancestral way of life and, as such, received blessings from the ancestors, who then facilitated the guidance of meta-persons in the lives of their descendants.

Turner's argument becomes of great value if one simultaneously masters the ability to contain this humble vision throughout the processing, analysing, and sharing of the collected data. Usually, it is in the analysis process that anthropologists struggle to contain a non-biased, non-judgemental, non-Eurocentric attitude. Evans-Pritchard (1965) and Victor Turner (1962) advised that the key to understanding one's inner life lies in the application of one's own lived experiences. I found this advice to have a dual outcome. On one hand, this approach, when applied by an ethnographer with a Eurocentric view, leaves room for employing Eurocentric, subjective, and prejudiced theoretical analysis about the inner life of the research subjects. Usually, as I discussed my experience with the anthropological accounts of my own people in Suriname, these analyses were a misrepresentation of the informants' own interpretations. On the other hand, utilising your own lived experiences as an ethnographer could help to use personal experiences as a way of building rapport with the informants and use them as a 'mirror' for self-reflection to further analyse and process the newly obtained experience or knowledge. I used the latter to properly engage with the way my informants interpreted their religious and spiritual encounters. I used my own experience as a Surinamese-Creole woman who grew up in a strictly Christian household, but I also used my own experience of becoming part of my husband's family, who are *Winti* believers.

During conversations with my informants, I would tap into both experiences and share with my informants in an honest and truthful manner my preconceived notions about *Winti*, but I would also admit my lack of knowledge and assure them of my willingness to strip myself of my own presumptions and learn from their point of view. My approach of surrendering to their guidance, while still being open and honest about my preconceived notions, gave my informants the confidence that they could trust me, that my interest in their way of interpreting the supernatural was genuine, and that they could rely on my willingness to depart from a place of mutual respect. The mutual respect

⁹⁸ Supervision conversation dd 13.12.'21 *Argumentations to the interpretation of the notion of religion.*

especially increased the respect and acceptance they showed to me. It is because of this mutual respect that I could openly question the things I had difficulty understanding. The following paragraphs illustrate the conversations and engagements I had while diving into the next layer of revealing the boundaries, labels, and groupism embedded in the Surinamese-Creole identity. In this case, *Winti* served as the lens through which I did my observations. I preferred exploring *Winti* in depth over Christianity, because of its entanglement in the lives of all Surinamese-Creole people, even those who strongly contest the *Winti* religion. Throughout my field experiences, I noticed that even among Christian believers, elements of the *Winti* religion could be observed in their daily lives – some noticeable through their way of communicating, some embedded in habitual behaviour.

7.2.1. *Understanding Winti and its relevance to Surinamese-Creoles*

Asking a Surinamese-Creole person to explain what *Winti* is leads to an explanation that would read somewhat like this: '*Winti* is the religion of some Afro-Surinamese people who believe in the protection of their ancestors and guidance from gods.' Yet, this general explanation does not capture the full comprehension of *Winti*. Resources explain the origins of *Winti* to be West African. *Winti* means 'wind' in *Sranantongo*⁹⁹. *Winti* is a lifestyle practised by Afro-Surinamese people, who inherited the practices and beliefs related to this lifestyle from their ancestors who were brought to Suriname as enslaved Africans. It wasn't until I had a conversation with Mrs. Babel, *Okomfo Fu Kondre*, that I realised the importance of addressing *Winti* as a lifestyle rather than a religion. In one of my many conversations with her, she corrected me by firmly stating that *Winti* is a way of living and not a religion. It entails more than just believing in spiritual guardians. *Winti*, as she described it, helps the person to employ knowledge, develop customs, and adhere to norms and values to evolve into a respectable human being in society. *Winti* lays down rules, regulations, and structures for becoming an adult, establishing a partnership between a woman and a man, the conceiving and raising of offspring, the harmonious existence of family, and the inseparable interaction between humans and their living environment, including the flora and fauna and natural resources in that environment.

Winti grew from the beginning of the 'Middle Passage'. In his essay 'It started on the other side: continuity and creativity in Afro-Caribbean culture' (2009)¹⁰⁰, the late Surinamese Professor Harold Jap A. Joe explained the emergence of *Winti* as it is observed and practised in Suriname through three different historic stages. The first was when the captured Africans were held hostage in the dungeons of the fortresses of the West Coast of Africa. Being kept in miserable circumstances with no hopes for a way out, their only escape was developing a solidarity achieved by a strong sense of spiritual awareness. With everyone originating from different areas on the West Coast, there was a variety in the way people expressed their spiritual consciousness. Bringing the different expressions together led to the emergence of a cohesive mixture of spiritual beliefs. The second stage was on the ships during the transatlantic crossing. People developed collective ideas, rituals, and ceremonies to cope with what was for them a hopeless situation.

And the third stage was when they arrived in an unfamiliar land, an environment not known. The enslaved were forced into finding ways to give meaning to their new environment whilst fulfilling their needs as social beings. Christianity was enforced as a prerequisite for the enslaved person to be accepted as a human being. The ability to survive in a predominantly white governed society became an act of finding a middle ground between the enforced Christian morals and values of the white men and the conscious decision to hold on to the norms and values, beliefs, and practices of the land of origin, Africa. For the enslaved community, *Winti* as a religion facilitated elements of cohesion, community, and coherence and became a vehicle for the construction and rehabilitation of their socio-cultural identity. It also emphasised the otherness of the slaves and was a power against the white Europeans. Fear of mysticism, the unknown, and supernatural occurrences was effective in the society of those days. But the slaves were, in this field, the masters (Penard 1912: 170-171).

This inevitable middle ground called for the emergence of a hybridity in spiritual manifestations among the enslaved population in Suriname. *Winti* emerged as the dominating form of spiritual embodiment and would be combined with the ruling Christian norms and values. This form of absorbing spirituality

⁹⁹ Joop Vernooij, *Mission studies*, 2003.

¹⁰⁰ In Edwin K. Marshall (red.) *Engagement en distantie. Wetenschap in vele facetten. Essays presented to Prof. Dr. Humphrey E. Lamur in honour of his appointment as professor at the Amsterdam University 2006*, pp. 90-91.

was forcefully outlawed by the white oppressors and categorised as an illegal and demonic practice, and in 1874, there was a legal ban on the practice of *Winti* as a religion in Suriname¹⁰¹. It was not until 2011 that the Minister of Home Affairs acknowledged the importance of initiating stakeholders' discussions regarding legalising the practices of *Winti* and accepting it as a recognised religion and respected lifestyle of the Afro-Surinamese community in Suriname¹⁰². On 1 January 2014, Mrs. Dorinia Babel was officially installed as the *Winti* high priest, also addressed as the *Okomfo Fu Kondre*, in Suriname. Her role is to guard proper education in, employment of, and adherence to the *Winti* religion by the practitioners.

Winti involves ritual practices to facilitate transcendence and engagements with non-human entities, meta-persons. To explain the non-human concept as applied in *Winti*, I am drawing on Marshall Sahlin's explanation: 'these are entities to which consciousness is attributed, such as spirits, gods, sacred animals, devils, or ancestors' (Sahlin 2013; 2017a; 2017b). *Winti* distinguishes gods who manifest themselves as *Winti* and the ancestors who are named *kabra*, *yorka*, or *proven*. The *Winti* entities are classified in four proto-elements: fire, air, water, and earth¹⁰³. They manifest their connection with humans through these specific elements, and their characteristics are related to specific animals such as snakes, tigers, eagles, and crocodiles. Whenever one of the entities possesses a person, his or her mannerisms will be like the specific animal related to the entity. In the cycle of these non-human entities communicating with humans, the person's own self is of great importance. The self is called *kra*. According to the *Winti* religion, no non-human entities can possess a person without receiving permission from the *kra*.

Winti acknowledges the existence of one God who oversees all living things, including the non-human entities. God is referenced as *Anana Keduwaman Keduwapon*, which translates as the West African name for 'honourable grandfather'. Some *Winti* priests also refer to God as *Anyame*, which is derived from the Akan people's God named *Nyame*, which means 'He who knows and sees everything'¹⁰⁴. The Surinamese-Creole *Winti* practitioner believes that *Winti* entities and the ancestors are assigned to a person from birth, with the assignment from *Anana Keduwaman Keduwapon* to serve as the guardians of the person. According to the belief that some of the entities reside in animals and plants, there is a range of animals, plants, and herbs considered to be sacred and thus forbidden to be consumed or harvested. Their properties become paramount in the enactment of rituals. Through the mediation of *Winti* priests, communication with the entities and ancestors is established. The *Winti* priests are categorised according to their gifted skills¹⁰⁵. Those gifted with the knowledge of healing are named *Dresiman* and are specialised in processing plants and herbs into medicine to heal the sick and troubled. Those gifted with the skill to communicate with the meta-persons are named *Lukuman* or *Obiaman*. They master the skill of communicating with them to reveal obstacles and challenges in the life of a person or a family. The *Okomfo Fu Kondre*, the *Obiaman*, and the *Dresiman* are considered the gatekeepers of the *Winti* knowledge, and their task is to educate, guide, and assist those willing to accept *Winti* as a religion and lifestyle.

7.2.2. My own experience with *Winti* rituals

To gain a deeper understanding and insights into cultural practices associated with *Winti* and the way they came into effect during celebrations, I made great efforts to better understand my informants' way of experiencing spirituality and interpreting religion. And as previously described, I deliberately confronted my own prejudgments of *Winti*, to be able to put them aside so they couldn't become an obstacle for me to engage with my informants properly and genuinely. It was intimidating and scary to step into a world I was not familiar with; therefore, I made sure to have a support system of people who would understand my fears and simultaneously help me navigate this new environment. One of my informants advised that before engaging with the world of *Winti*, I needed to align myself with my own spiritual guardians and ask for their permission and protection. The following ethnographic account illustrates the way I followed up on this advice. It was also my very first time performing rituals associated with *Winti*.

¹⁰¹ H. Vuijsje, *Ontwikkelingsfuncties van religieuze organisaties in Suriname*, UVA, Sociografisch Instituut FSW, 1974.

¹⁰² <https://www.waterkant.net/suriname/2011/02/26/erkenning-winti-in-suriname-durven-aankaarten/>.

¹⁰³ Henri J. M. Stephen, 2008.

¹⁰⁴ Julien Zaalman, ...

¹⁰⁵ Henri J. M. Stephen, 2008.

One day, my informant Lucy¹⁰⁶ told me, 'Since this will be your first time really engaging with Winti, you will need to prepare and protect your spirit.' What she meant is that I needed to take a ritual bath to ask permission of my ancestors, my spiritual guardians, and God to guide me and, most importantly, protect me from all possible evilness that could be cast upon me, mostly out of jealousy. According to her, people could become jealous of me because of my privileged life that people assumed I had in the United Kingdom. She continued, 'The ritual bath needs to be done by your mother; she's the one who gave life to you. Only then will it be effective.' Another important element of her precise instructions was that it had to be done in the yard where I was born and raised as a child. In Sranantongo, they say, 'tapu na doti pe yu mama beri yu kumba titei'. This literally means 'on the soil where your mum buried your umbilical cord'.

I called my mum and told her what I was advised. As soon as she heard that it would also serve as a protection for me, she was on board to perform the ritual. She struggled to accept that my research involved exploring Winti practices, but if it meant that this would be her chance to secure my safety, she was willing to do anything. The problem was that she had never ever done something like this before, and she also did not possess the knowledge of the different attributes to utilise for the ritual. But the problem was solved when she approached one of the 'sisters' in her church. My mum knew that this church member, who was a devoted churchgoer, was also very much engaged with Winti. This is nothing strange among Surinamese-Creoles.

The 'sister' precisely described for my mum what to do, and she even offered to buy the proper plants and perfumes to be used for the ritual bath. My mum did not want to be seen buying these things since she regularly led the service in church. Once my mum had everything, she instructed me to travel home. My main field site in Suriname was Paramaribo, and my place of birth was in Nickerie, Wageningen, which required a 3-hour drive. Upon my arrival, my mum got everything in place and prepared us both for the performance of the ritual bath, which was planned for the next day. Her preparations included a passionate prayer explaining to God the reasons why she had to engage with the ritual. It almost sounded like a request to God to understand the need to disobey and to support the ritual, since it was mainly because she wanted to protect her daughter.

The next day, it was time to do the bath. My mum was instructed to do it at 6 pm (it needed to be sunset), and she chose one corner of the garden where she felt comfortable doing it. This part of our garden was properly out of public sight. For the whole day, we were both a bit nervous. And when 6 pm came, my mum handed me a cotton wrap, which is called a pangi. It is distinct to the Maroon traditional wear, but it is also used by Surinamese-Creoles. Usually, Creoles use it to perform Winti rituals, and each pangi, I later learned, is dedicated to a wenti entity. I was not sure which Winti entity my pangi was dedicated to, and I am sure my mum did not know either.

The perfumed water had been prepared the day before and set overnight in an aluminium basin covered with a cloth. It smelled rich, flowery, with a soft, earthy undertone. I could see some rose petals floating in the water. My mum had a calabash in her hands. The calabash is also very significant to these rituals. As she stood behind me, she held the calabash filled with the perfumed water above my head, and while mumbling words of protection, prosperity, and health in between God's name, she poured the water over my head. It was cold. I started to shiver (I was wrapped in just the pangi and nothing else) as she continued pouring the water, until it was all finished. We went back to the house. My mum instructed me not to dry my skin but to sit on the balcony and let the air dry my body. There I was, sitting on the balcony, smelling like a bunch of roses and more, while drinking a warm cup of tea, my mum sitting next to me, and we did not say a word. We both sat in silence for a while, each with our own thoughts.

Reflecting on this very first encounter with a ritual associated with Winti was surreal. It felt a bit strange doing this with my mum, but at the same time, it also felt safe and comfortable. She is my mum. And even if she did not really know what she was doing, her thoughts of prosperity and her

¹⁰⁶ For privacy reasons, I have used pseudonyms to protect the identities of some of my informants who didn't want to be named in this thesis.

willingness to do anything (even going out of her comfort zone) just to protect me meant more than the ritual bath itself. I had no spiritual encounter during the ritual bath, but the moment she did the first pouring of water, I felt this deep connection with my inner self. I was very aware of doing a ritual that has been done for hundreds of years by my ancestors who came as slaves to this country, Suriname. It was then that I knew I wanted to know more; I wanted to connect with them, just as I had heard stories of my informants who connected with their ancestors and depended on them to guide them through life. This was the first time that I felt comfortable embracing thoughts about *Winti*.

Pictures of the different sorts of *pangi* used by Creoles for ritual performances¹⁰⁷

Picture 1: A collection of the different pangi, each dedicated to a wenti entity.



1

Picture 2: An example of a pangi dedicated to the 'Ingi wenti'. Further in the thesis, I will provide further details about the relevance of Amerindian cultural heritage in the Winti religion.



2

¹⁰⁷ Picture copyright: Jah Bless, a woman entrepreneur in Suriname specialised in the making of traditional Surinamese-Creole clothing, 2020.

7.3. Celebratory events to safeguard, promote, and actualise the Surinamese-Creole identity

The previous accounts about the becoming of the Surinamese-Creole, the predominance of Surinamese-Creole culture in Suriname, the emergence of *Winti*, and its position in Surinamese-Creole culture form a proper foundation to continue unpacking the evolution of the Surinamese-Creole identity. Celebrations have been utilised as a lens to continue exploring the evolution process by diving deeper into understanding the application of labels, the impact of groupism, and boundaries applied as part of actualising the Surinamese-Creole identity. Celebrations in the Surinamese-Creole culture serve as the ultimate occasion to observe the coherence of social practices, rituals, habitual activities, remembrance, and a collectiveness in preserving, transmitting, reinventing, and embodying their cultural identity. As I explored the roles of various celebrations relevant to Surinamese-Creoles, I focused on practices to transmit cultural inheritance, rituals to embody and portray cultural identity, and the involvement of material agency to safeguard the continuation of inherited cultural practices.

Based on my previous observations in this chapter, that elements of Surinamese-Creole culture are predominant in Surinamese culture, I will first explore celebrations in Suriname that involve public exhibition of Surinamese-Creole culture and explore how the rituals, ceremonies, and performances involved in these celebrations help enhance the Surinamese-Creole identity and facilitate continuity. In the next chapter, I will then continue to unpack the relevance of celebrations in the context of family structures and family histories distinct to Surinamese-Creole families. This separate approach of exploring the Surinamese-Creole identity through celebrations allows for a two-dimensional understanding of the contexts in which the cultural identity evolves, in the context of family-oriented events and the public context where the involvement of 'outsiders' becomes relevant to the way in which the Surinamese-Creole culture is embodied. In this case, the context refers to the impact of the space where these celebrations take place. Simultaneously, this separate approach allows for ethnographic data that will provide comprehensive insights about the role and purpose of celebrations in conjunction with the sorts of ritual performances and ceremonies that are employed to embrace the Surinamese-Creole identity. The celebrations will also provide insight into the different ways of embodying the Surinamese-Creole identity based on the application of categories of being Surinamese-Creole.

7.3.1. *Anthropological notions and global developments relevant to Surinamese-Creole celebrations*

Ceremonies, public and private, have formed the basis of anthropological research in notions of cultural festivities and social celebrations. Ceremonies involve rituals as part of rites of passage and performances enhancing the aesthetics and amplifying the significance of the ceremonies. The form in which such happenings take place would depend on the purpose of the ceremony. I applied the anthropology of performance (Victor Turner, 1987-1988) as my point of departure to unpack the meaning of celebrations from an anthropological point of view. Victor Turner claimed that social processes in communities are performative, with, at their core, a ritual action. He drew his inspiration from Milton Singer's (1972) observations of the way prayers, rites, ceremonies, ritual readings, etc., were organised in social life in the Indian community that he studied. Singer labelled these practices as cultural performance and stated that these were the elementary constituents of a culture, each with a limited time span, a beginning and an end, an organised program or activity, a set of performers, an audience, a place, and an occasion of performance (Victor Turner, 1987-1988: 23). Turner identified different types of rituals¹⁰⁸, which he categorised as social rituals, religious rituals, and aesthetic

¹⁰⁸ *A ritual is a stereotyped sequence of activities involving gestures, words, and objects, performed in a sequestered place, and designed to influence preternatural entities or forces on behalf of the actors' goals and interests. Rituals may be seasonal, hallowing a culturally defined moment of change in the climatic cycle or the inauguration of an activity such as planting, harvesting, or moving from winter to summer pasture; or they may be contingent, held in response to an individual or collective crisis. Contingent rituals may be further subdivided into life-crisis ceremonies, which are performed at birth, puberty, marriage, death, and so on, to demarcate the passage from one phase to another in an individual's life-cycle, and rituals of affliction, which are performed to placate or exorcise preternatural beings or forces believed to have afflicted villagers with illness, bad luck, gynaecological troubles, severe physical injuries, and the like. Other classes of rituals include divinatory rituals; ceremonies performed by political authorities to ensure the health and fertility of human beings, animals, and crops in their territories; initiation into priesthoods devoted to certain deities, into religious associations, or into secret*

rituals (Victor Turner, 1987-1988: 11). The purpose of rituals, as Turner argues, is to facilitate transformative behaviour, which is determined through classification, categories, or even contradictions in cultural processes.

Although Turner's analyses of rituals include those rituals that are part of daily social life, I limit the application of his analyses to those rituals that are observed in the ceremonial performances during celebrations in Surinamese-Creole culture. Within the anthropology of performance, Victor Turner, and with him other scholars, has defined performances in different contexts, for instance, the performance of social interactions in daily life. However, to properly represent the purpose of the celebrations and their relevance to Surinamese-Creole culture, I am targeting the form of performance that includes an artistic, creative, consequential element associated with historical, social, economic, and political occurrences. In the case of public celebrations, the focus will be on cultural performances rather than the performance of culture. Lauren Griffith (2020) in her essay 'Performance'¹⁰⁹ discusses at length the difference between these two forms of performance. Griffith clarifies, 'A cultural performance *is* a performance whereas **performing culture** refers to the ways in which our everyday words and actions are reflections of our own enculturation and can therefore be studied as performances, whether we consciously think of them in that way or not' (Nina Brown, Thomas McIlwraith, Laura Tubelle de González, 2020: 15).

In this chapter, the cultural performances during public celebrations are explored with the purpose of understanding the position of Surinamese-Creoles in the social networks of Surinamese society and the way in which these social networks help to reaffirm the cultural identity of Surinamese-Creoles. Some of these public events became of great political interest to the Surinamese Government. They expressed interest in safeguarding Surinamese intangible cultural heritage, which includes traditional festivals, ceremonies, and cultural celebrations, through inscription on the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List¹¹⁰. This announcement evoked the dedication of NGOs in Suriname that are concerned and invested in the safeguarding of Surinamese-Creole culture.

The opportunity that their cultural heritage could be acknowledged by a globally recognised organisation rekindled their interest and ignited feelings of pride amongst Surinamese-Creoles in Suriname and in the Netherlands – a new wave of publicly expressing and embracing the culture discerned among the new generation of Surinamese-Creoles. The number of public cultural events is increasing, including the number of youngsters who are joining local socio-cultural organisations. This eruption of displaying Surinamese-Creole cultural elements is not only because of the opportunities provided by UNESCO but also due to the intensification of the ongoing debates about the impact of colonialism and slavery on post-colonial societies and the descendants of enslaved Africans. Other global organisations (whether these are non-profit or commercial) have become interested in promoting the cultural heritage of these communities, which have been underrepresented for decades¹¹¹.

Those cultural elements containing ceremonial, creative, and artistic elements are increasing in popularity and are infused in contemporary art, festivals, fashion events, theatre performances, etc. Rituals that were once discarded as savage and not refined by some early scholars¹¹² are now

societies; and those accompanying the daily offering of food and libations to deities or ancestral spirits or both. Victor Turner on Ritual (thury.org) accessed 27/03/2024.

¹⁰⁹ Dr. Lauren Miller Griffith's essay is part of the book, *Perspectives: An open introduction to Cultural Anthropology*, 2nd edition.

Performance – Perspectives: An Open Introduction to Cultural Anthropology, 2nd Edition (pressbooks.pub) accessed 27/03/2024.

¹¹⁰ In my voluntary position as the representative of the UNESCO-accredited NGO NAKS in the UNESCO ICH NGO Platform, I facilitated a training about the inventory framework from UNESCO. During this training, the Secretary General of UNESCO in Suriname expressed the desire of the Surinamese Government to inscribe Surinamese cultural heritage on the ICH Safeguarding List. This training was held on 7 January 2024.

¹¹¹ See the series of the British Museum, 'The Era of Reclamation', launched in 2021. Bonnie Greer: *the Era of Reclamation* | British Museum accessed 28/03/2024.

¹¹² Clifford Geertz provides detailed accounts of some of the problematic views of early anthropologists such as Levi-Strauss. He highlights segments of the ethnographic notes in which Levi-Strauss positioned himself as the well-educated and refined scholar studying the 'savage' (1973, 345-351).

considered to be culturally enriching and contemporary tribal art¹¹³. In the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, UNESCO defined cultural performances as follows: 'Social practices, rituals and festive events are habitual activities that structure the lives of communities and groups and that are shared by and relevant to many of their members. They are significant because they reaffirm the identity of those who practice them as a group or a society and, whether performed in public or private, are closely linked to important events. Social, ritual, and festive practices may help to mark the passing of the seasons, events in the agricultural calendar or the stages of a person's life. They are closely linked to a community's worldview and perception of its own history and memory' (UNESCO ICH convention, 2003).

As mentioned before, the number of public celebrations with cultural elements is increasing. Ceremonies that previously would have been performed behind closed doors, out of public sight, are now being promoted as cultural events for which one can purchase tickets to attend and witness the mysticism of these ceremonies. This rise in popularity has a positive impact, but due to the association with commercial benefits, the risk of these ceremonies becoming more of a staged performance rather than an elementary constituent in the cultural process of the community is also increasing. Youngsters seem to consider their ability to master the mysticism embedded in some of these ceremonial performances as an opportunity to gain economic benefits and recognition in the artistic industry. Globalisation thus has altered not only the identity of the Surinamese-Creole abroad but also the way in which they perceive, portray, and continue to utilise their cultural identity.

In the following section, I will draw on one particular public event that is celebrated both in Suriname and in the Netherlands and that has significant meaning for the Surinamese-Creole community. I will utilise this event to demonstrate the developments that I have previously described, including the role of space, place, occasion, and social networks, on the impact of the celebration and how that has influenced the development of the Surinamese-Creole identity.

7.3.2. *Celebrating the abolition of slavery*

During my fieldwork, I attended several public celebrations that included Surinamese-Creole cultural elements. Most of these public celebrations are closely related to historical events that dictated the emergence of the Surinamese-Creole. Some celebrations served as a perfect example of ritual performances and embodiment practices that would differ depending on the space where celebrating the occasion took place. One such event is the celebration of the abolition of slavery. The abolition of slavery is celebrated as a public holiday, with festivities organised all over the country, but it is also honoured in a more intimate setting, such as in small family groups or by cultural organisations where access is on a members-only basis.

It is also an event where the conjunction between Christianity and *Winti* as the predominant religions amongst Surinamese-Creoles becomes visible. This day holds great spiritual and cultural value for the Surinamese-Creole community and involves the honouring of the ancestors. The rituals performed to honour the ancestors depend on the religious context in which the honouring takes place. I made sure to experience the celebration in a Christian-induced setting and in a space where the *Winti* religion prevailed.

The involvement of the government in the planning of the public celebration is always politically loaded. Since this is a celebration that regards the history of Surinamese-Creoles, the aesthetics of the performances, the financial support provided for the organising of the activities, and the

¹¹³ In December 2023, UNESCO launched a report on the African fashion sector and organised a conference named 'Fashioning Africa's Future'. The conference and the report promote the opportunity for the African fashion industry to benefit from the longstanding craft of traditional weavers, pattern makers, and traditional African clothing tailors to be acknowledged and supported to develop their craft into business opportunities to compete in the global fashion industry. African fabrics such as the well-known Ankara and other fabrics containing symbols were presented and ingrained in contemporary fashion designs. *Fashioning Africa's future: UNESCO showcases first-ever report on the continent's fashion sector at Lagos Fashion Week | Diversity of Cultural Expressions* accessed 28/03/2024.

performance of habitual rituals become subject to the political agenda of the coalition in government. It is during public celebrations with ethnic cultural elements that the political occurrence takes centre stage. Due to the multi-ethnic society, politicians often play on the sentiments of the different ethnic groups when organising public events – as a way of pursuing voters' preference. Just as it is with the commercialisation of cultural elements, the political infiltration also causes the alteration of ritual practices and abuse of ceremonial performances to manipulate the audience's engagement and commitment. The vulnerability of ceremonial and cultural performance through public exposure relates to Victor Turner's concern about the contradictory segment of rituals as a form of inducing transformative behaviour. He illustrates this with the example of an ethnographic experience where the rituals to facilitate the succession of village headmen have been manipulated in favour of one of the candidates who wished not to let his fate depend on the performance of traditionally established rituals (Victor Turner, 1987-1988).

This example mirrors what I witnessed during my fieldwork in Suriname. I entered the field during the time of elections and experienced the transfer of office after the elections. Elections in Suriname are very much ethnic-centred and, as such, dictate the course of political campaigns. Most of the campaigns involve large public music and dance festivals, including cultural performances. During the campaign season, two of the political parties (both have many Surinamese-Creole and Maroon followers) decided to perform a ritual at one of the sacred locations in the interior of Suriname. This sacred space represents the border between the plantations on the coast and the escape route of the Maroons. For both the Maroons and the Surinamese-Creoles of that area, the space is guarded as holy ground. The political leaders of both parties went to perform a ritual named *sweri*, which means 'to be sworn'. Their justification for performing the ritual was that there was a need for unity between the Surinamese-Creole and the Maroon communities. However, this unity could only be achieved through performing a libation and a *sweri*. After the *sweri* and the libation, both political leaders hugged and firmly pledged to facilitate a strong unification of both ethnic groups – this, for the salvation of the descendants of enslaved Africans. The ceremony was performed publicly and became a news item on the local news. Most followers from both parties were excited and had an emotional response to this event.

The libation and the *sweri* are both sacred rituals embedded in the *Winti* religion and were performed by the ancestors during the time of slavery. The meaning of both rituals is to facilitate peace, harmony, and unity in the community. The libation is performed to call on the protection of the ancestors in times of turmoil, to pay respect to the ancestors prior to inquiring about their wisdom, or to show gratitude for their continuous guidance. It is a common ritual performance during the celebration of the abolition of slavery and is performed to seek the blessings of the ancestors for the celebrations and to pay respect for their endurance during the time of slavery. The *sweri*, however, is something that is not necessarily performed in public nor as part of a cultural performance with an element of entertainment. In both the Maroon and the Surinamese-Creole communities, the *sweri* is guarded as a sacred and intimate ritual attributed with agency to impact a person's life in the case of breaching the prescribed rules that assure the efficacy of the *sweri*.

Some sceptics discarded the performance of the two political leaders, and some cultural experts even condemned the purpose for which the rituals were performed. Some cultural organisations publicly disapproved of the performance and called it exploitation of cultural heritage, which brought shame on the descendants of enslaved Africans and does not serve as a proper example for the younger generation to be proud of their cultural heritage. In summary, this publicly performed cultural performance, which contained elements that are attached to the celebration of the abolition of slavery, caused a lot of controversy because of the political agenda attached to it. After the elections, one of the political parties gained more votes and quickly turned the sworn unity into rivalry and utilised their privileged position to dominate and openly slander the other party. Critics referred to the cultural performance to emphasise the validity of the concerns they had then expressed.

7.3.3. *Celebrating the abolition of slavery from a religious point of view*

Rituals are intrinsic to the celebration of the abolition of slavery. The rituals performed during the celebration, and often in preparation for the celebration, are always in honour of the ancestors, the enslaved Africans. All the rituals contain a religious element which, depending on the preference of religion, is practised in a particular space, at a particular time, and with particular objects. The existence of different categories of being Surinamese-Creole is very much informed by the choice of religion. As discussed in the previous chapter, the elite group of free Creoles in the colony committed to the established norms and values of the European colonisers. These norms and values were steeped in Christianity. Besides the colour of the skin, adapting to Christianity served as the norm for the enslaved to be accepted as virtuous citizens. The norm to utilise skin tone became less important as Surinamese-Creoles continued to integrate with other ethnic groups. However, being accepted, meaning being baptised and conducting the Confession of Faith, in a Christian community, remained the norm to be considered a respectable person.

This norm is evidenced by the decree introduced by the colonial administration as part of the preparations for the abolition of slavery that took place on 1 July 1863. The decree entailed that all enslaved must be baptised and converted to Christianity prior to achieving their freedom¹¹⁴ – this, to ensure that they would have obtained proper Christian values to know how to live life in a responsible manner. From 1856, it became mandatory for plantation owners to allow missionaries for mass Christianisation of the enslaved community (Ben Scholtens, 1994: 36). On 1 July 1863, there was a public church service for the enslaved community to celebrate their freedom and ask for God's guidance in their newly obtained status as free citizens in the colony. The church service at the main church, the Mama Kerki (Mother of Churches), from the Protestant Evangelists in Paramaribo, the *Evangelische Broeder Gemeente*, was the largest on that day, and to date it has remained the main church for hosting the public church service on the day of celebrating the abolition of slavery.

Surinamese-Creoles attend the service in large numbers, dressed in Surinamese-Creole traditional clothing fit for church. After the church service, there usually is a procession showcasing the traditional clothing, which ends in a fun fair at their recreation centre with traditional games, cultural performances appropriate for church, traditional Surinamese-Creole food named *fositen nyanyang*, and religious music with influences of traditional Surinamese-Creole music. The whole event is organised by the main Church of the Protestant Evangelists in collaboration with a couple of other churches in Paramaribo. Other non-Protestant Churches have adapted this tradition and organised their own services and cultural activities to celebrate the day.

This tradition and ritual behaviour of organising and attending the church service on the day of celebrating the abolition of slavery and then showcasing the cultural elements of Surinamese-Creole culture as a way of embracing their cultural heritage, reminds me of Victor Turner's analysis of rituals and their co-dependency on the concept of structure. Turner states that 'societies must maintain a balance between *communitas* and structure in order to survive, generally taking the form of a cycle where structure is temporarily suspended during rituals that reignite a sense of *communitas* in various ways depending on the type of ritual' (Victor Turner, 2008: 96-97). Surinamese-Creoles embody their sense of community by collectively attending the church service and showing the re-enactments of food, clothing styles, games, and music in remembrance of their ancestors. During this service, Surinamese-Creoles, irrespective of class or religious differences, are united through the shared history of enslavement.

Nowadays, when re-enacting the church service as it was done on 1 July 1863, it is no longer about becoming a virtuous person to be accepted in a Eurocentric colonial society. Now, the church service

¹¹⁴ Marijke Schillings Joannes Romme met een missie in Suriname, 1864-1889, *OSO. Tijdschrift voor Surinaamse taalkunde, letterkunde en geschiedenis*. Jaargang 30 - DBNL accessed 28/03/2024.

serves as a space where the descendants of the enslaved come together and perform cultural practices such as typical songs sung by their ancestors and games played by their ancestors or preparing food as their ancestors would have prepared it. The purpose now is to honour their Surinamese-Creole identity, regardless of the diversity that is now to be witnessed amongst Surinamese-Creoles. Based on the people who attend the church service in remembrance of the time of slavery, it is evident that there are no longer norms to differentiate who would be more creole than another due to the colour of the skin and the percentage of European genes.

Those attending the church service utilise as the sole norm (to be considered Surinamese-Creole) the acceptance that their roots are steeped in the history of enslavement. The only boundary that stems from the time of enslavement and remains applied is what was enforced by the missionaries. The missionaries demanded that the enslaved ban their own religion, which was *Winti*, and fully convert to Christianity. The missionaries deemed the *Winti* religious practices to be demonic¹¹⁵, but not all abandoned their beliefs in *Winti*. Most continued to combine both religions, and some of the churches tolerated it.

Hybridity in religious practices is part of the Surinamese-Creole identity¹¹⁶. If you are a Surinamese-Creole, it is not a surprise to be a Christian and simultaneously a *Winti* believer. Within the *Winti* religion, it is very common to demand that you be baptised and do your Confession of Faith, as part of honouring your ancestors and aligning with your spiritual guardians. Nowadays, with the infiltration of notions of decolonisation and rewriting history, some *Winti* believers consider Christianity as part of European oppression and thus discard all that refers to Christianity from their *Winti* practices. On the other hand, with the increase in new denominations of the Christian religion, such as Evangelical and Pentecostal Christianity, *Winti* is absolutely condemned and taught to be the work of the devil to destroy humankind¹¹⁷. These new developments in the field of religion introduced new waves of friction among the Surinamese-Creole community and the defining of their Surinamese-Creole identity and cultural heritage. The disagreements, specifically among Surinamese-Creoles in the Netherlands, continue to influence the way in which Surinamese-Creoles choose to portray who they are as creole people and in the way they celebrate their creoleness during public festivities and other cultural-awareness educational events.

There is another ritual that takes place on the same day, celebrating the abolition of slavery, related to religious practices and enforcing the sense of community among Surinamese-Creoles. This ritual is called *switi watra wasi* – a cleansing bath. It is one of the important rituals in the *Winti* religion. The difference between the church service and the *switi watra wasi* is that on the day of the celebration, it is performed in an intimate family setting. The bath is prepared with rainwater; the notion here is that rainwater comes from the heavens and, as such, is clean. The water is further infused with perfumes, essential oils, herbs, and other attributes determined based on the sort of *switi watra wasi* that one prefers to do.

There are different *switi watra wasi*, each afforded spiritual healing powers and dedicated to specific occasions. The choice of *switi watra wasi* is based on the needs and the desires of the person who will be taking the bath and also the occasion for one to take a bath. The main purpose of the *switi watra wasi* is to give thanks to the ancestors, to cleanse the physical body and the soul from external negative influences, and to give thanks to and satisfy the spiritual guardians, who are named *wenti*. On New Year's Eve, there is also the performance of a *switi watra wasi*. This one is done in public

¹¹⁵ Marijcke Schillings Joannes Romme met een missie in Suriname, 1864-1889, *OSO. Tijdschrift voor Surinaamse taalkunde, letterkunde en geschiedenis*. Jaargang 30 - DBNL accessed 29/03/2024.

¹¹⁶ *Religie in ontwikkeling*, Sranan. Cultuur in Suriname, Chandra van Binnendijk, Paul Faber - DBNL accessed 29/03/2024.

¹¹⁷ In 1984, the late Balie Brashuis, who was a former *Winti* priest and converted to Pentecostal Christianity, wrote his autobiography sharing his life story of being a *Winti* priest and the demonic practices related to the *Winti* religion. Dr. Franklin Steven Jabini is another Surinamese author who wrote about the *Winti* religion from a Christian point of view. He is of Maroon origins. Search Results - Springer accessed 29/03/2024

and is performed to allow the public, thus not just the Surinamese-Creoles, to experience the cleansing as a way of being cleansed from negativity and old habits and entering the New Year with new resolutions. This *switi watra wasi* has less relevance to the Surinamese-Creole ancestors and is being promoted as a cultural element originating from Surinamese-Creole culture but representing Surinamese culture.

This *switi watra wasi* performance as part of the public New Year's Eve celebrations is less embraced by Surinamese-Creoles who are firmly dedicated to the *Winti* religion. In conversation with some of them about the public *switi watra wasi*, they confided in me that a proper *switi watra wasi* should never be performed in public, as it is an intimate, sacred, and spiritually strengthening ritual tailored to the specific needs of the family or the individual taking the bath. It is a very personal and family-oriented ritual with very specific acts depending on the occasion. From the selection of the herbs and other attributes to the selection of the time of day to take the bath, they are all carefully planned rituals to ensure the effectiveness of the bath. They consider the publicly performed *switi watra wasi* as a decoction of the actual ritual bath, thus being of less significance and not worthy of a proper representation of Surinamese-Creole culture. Yet, they had no problem with it being performed as a representation of Surinamese culture. I noticed more of such disapprovals of Surinamese-Creole cultural elements performed during public celebrations. The same argument would be utilised: public cultural performances are mere decoctions of Surinamese cultural heritage but deemed worthy enough to serve as a representation of Surinamese culture.

Pictures illustrating the *switi watra wasi*

Picture 1¹¹⁸: 'Switi watra wasi' as part of the public rituals at Independence Square during New Year's Eve.



1

Pictures 2 and 3¹¹⁹: 'Switi watra' prepared for ritual performances in an intimate family setting.



2



3

¹¹⁸ Wijngaarde: laten we in 2024 met respect en liefde met elkaar omgaan - KEY NEWS SURINAME accessed 03/05/2024. Picture credit, 2024 Key News Suriname.

¹¹⁹ Picture 1 copyright: Facebook group 'Wi Sranan Rutu' 2019.

Pictures 2 and 3 copyright: 2018, Facebook group 'Afiba Mi Rutu'.

7.4. Conclusion

To conclude this chapter, I want to first draw on the occurrence of Surinamese-Creole culture prevailing over Surinamese culture on a political level and socio-cultural level and for the representation of Surinamese cultural heritage. The history of hybridity in the emergence of Surinamese-Creole culture seems to have set the tone for it to become the dominant culture in the representation of Suriname as a country. This dominance makes me reflect on the notion of creolisation, first from a Eurocentric point of view. At the beginning of the thesis, I expressed my concerns with this notion in relation to it being applied predominantly for societies that have been subject to colonialism and the focus of the hybridity being on the presence of European influences. In the case of the colonial history of Suriname and the emergence of Surinamese-Creoles, the current interpretation of creoleness is less focused on European influences and more steered towards the integration of the descendants of enslaved Africans with the other ethnic groups that inhabited the colony during and after slavery. The core of their creoleness remains the shared history of enslavement, but the pride of their creoleness is expressed through the ability to culturally adapt to other cultures and absorb elements of those new cultures and make them their own, while remaining the prime culture representative of the country.

Observing this dominance of creoleness in the way public celebrations represent the Surinamese-Creole culture and contribute to its development, I want to refer to one of the lead research questions as stated at the beginning of the thesis: To what extent do the celebrations, either public or private, dictate the socio-cultural interaction between the different groups of creole people in Suriname? The example of the New Year's Eve experience at the Central Market proved that there remains a harmonious relationship where there is a seamless blending of cultural elements through music, songs, and dance. The use of Surinamese-Creole elements to represent Suriname generally is not considered a problem. However, the differences arise when these elements are promoted to be significant to Surinamese-Creole culture. This is when the essence of rituals, performances, ceremonies, and norms becomes of utmost importance, and the differences in interpretation and application of rituals among Surinamese-Creoles and the way they embrace their cultural identity become vivid.

In the embodiment of ritual practices, religion becomes the leading cause of differences among Surinamese-Creoles. History proved a tolerant policy to allow a hybridity in religious practices, but the intensity of ongoing debates about the need for decolonisation, stripping the cultural practices of Eurocentric practices, and reclaiming the knowledge of the ancestors infuses the differences among Surinamese-Creoles and alters understandings of what it means to be a Surinamese-Creole. Currently, the views on being a Surinamese-Creole are very much constituted through two main perceptions, one being a perception inspired by Christian norms and values and one inspired by deliberate choices to strip *Winti* from the stigmatising labels of being idolatrous, mystic, and demonic. This repromotion of *Winti* in a positive light calls for some Surinamese-Creoles to rigorously discard elements of Christianity that were previously seamlessly woven into the social life of those practising *Winti*.

Even so, the rise of global developments embracing tribal and non-Eurocentric cultural heritage is also causing differences in directing and expressing the evolution of the Surinamese-Creole identity. The younger generation now claims its cultural heritage, it seems, for economic benefit, for social status, and to reinforce the mystical powers claimed to be possessed by their ancestors. The rituals containing supernatural elements are being abused, as they are now openly exposed as a form of entertainment, and the Surinamese-Creole identity often becomes subject to manipulation through the alteration of public celebrations to accommodate favouritism of social networks.

The younger generation seems to have established new ways of establishing boundaries and attributing labels, in the evolution of the Surinamese-Creole identity. Inspired by the calls for creole nationalism (popular in the Caribbean and some communities of creoles in diaspora), they now prefer the use of ritual elements that are embedded in the *Winti* religion to represent their creoleness. Christianity as part of Surinamese-Creole culture is under attack and, with that, the previously established categories, labels, and boundaries that emerged from the elite free Creoles who gained

their status through their genetic relevance with the Europeans. Skin tone no longer prevails as a way of being categorised as a Creole. My observations during public celebrations have proven that the most prevalent element in establishing boundaries and redefining labels is the ability to decode, possess, and apply the inherited cultural practices and the knowledge transmitted by the ancestors, as well as the ability to gain respect and recognition in society through publicly embodying elements of cultural heritage. Leadership has developed among the new generation of Surinamese-Creoles with the purpose of reclaiming their own history and reinventing their own identity, whether this is through public celebrations or through the ability to freely embrace cultural practices in the intimacy of family traditions.

The fluidity in the application of cultural practices during family celebrations in comparison with public celebrations and the agency to afford rituals provide an interesting observation in the way the Surinamese-Creole identity lends itself to a dynamic adjusting depending on the space and the purpose attributed to that space. Celebrations then seem to dictate the form in which the cultural element will be showcased and the engagement that will be expected from the audience.

CHAPTER 8

SURINAMESE-CREOLE IDENTITY SHAPED THROUGH MULTI-CULTURAL INFLUENCES

Mi na kolibri. Mi e panya mi frey na ala sey – The kolibri is a small bird significant for tropical places such as the Caribbean and South America. The bird has the tendency to fly on different flowers. Thus, this quote draws from the bird's ability to engage with all flowers and compares this with a person's ability to portray proper social skills by engaging with everyone. (Surinamese-Creole proverb)

In Chapter 4, I provided insight into the relevance of Suriname's history and oral history in relation to the evolution of Surinamese-Creoles. This chapter explores how Surinamese-Creoles established themselves in Suriname's ethnically diverse society, and created categories, utilised labels, and established boundaries while evolving their identity as a community whose history is rooted in enslavement. By unpacking historical events leading up to the hybridity of the Surinamese-Creole culture, I provide insight into the way Surinamese-Creoles employed these events to facilitate their predominant position in colonial Suriname. This dominating presence becomes vivid in the representation of present-day Surinamese food, Surinamese music, and Surinamese architecture, and during the celebration of public holidays. This chapter continues to reveal how the Surinamese-Creole culture, throughout the evolution of Surinamese society, became part of the melting pot of different cultures yet continues to dominate the cultural representations of the country through material culture.

During my fieldwork, I realised how often the cultural practices of the Surinamese-Creole community would be utilised to represent the Surinamese culture. For example, when asked about typical Surinamese food, people tend to name dishes that actually are part of Surinamese-Creole cuisine. Even so, when referring to Surinamese music, *kaseko*, which is a typical music style from Surinamese-Creoles, is used as an example. Although the merging of the different ethnic groups in Suriname becomes visible in art, music, and other forms of performance, the presence of the Surinamese-Creole culture in the representation of Suriname remains predominant. This, I also noticed, does not necessarily cause segregation in society, nor alarming issues of racism and discrimination¹²⁰. In particular, during the celebration of national holidays, such as Independence Day, Christmas, and New Year's Eve, the influence of the Surinamese-Creole culture continues to be at the forefront.

8.1. An ethnographic account illustrating Surinamese-Creoles as part of the cultural diversity in Suriname

To illustrate this phenomenon, the following paragraphs reflect an ethnographic account of one of my field experiences in Suriname during the month of December. In Suriname, the month of December is quite a festive month. The festivities start from the 25th of November, the celebration of the Independence Day of Suriname, and intensify towards New Year's Eve celebrations. The organisation responsible for the festivities in the month of December is Surifesta, and Suriname is recognised as one of the most vibrant places to be during the holidays, particularly during New Year's Eve – a recognition which leads to the attraction of hundreds of tourists in the month of December. It is quite customary for Surinamese people overseas to travel in the month of December with their whole families to Suriname. It is the end of the year, and tradition requires them to be in their country of birth for New Year's Eve. Whether they are Creole, Hindustani, Javanese, or Chinese, Surinamese people in diaspora aspire to be in 'Mama Sranan' – as Surinamese people affectionately refer to Suriname – when it is New Year's Eve.

¹²⁰ Issues of racism and discrimination are usually caused through the biased governing of political leaders. However, in daily life, Surinamese people live in harmony and good fellowship with each other.

It is Tuesday, December 31st, 2019, 10 o'clock in the morning. I am in Paramaribo. My mum, who lives in the district of Nickerie, a 4-hour drive away from the capital, came to Paramaribo at the beginning of December. My oldest sister, who lives in the Netherlands, travelled to Suriname together with her family to celebrate the holidays. She booked a hotel in the heart of the city to experience a longstanding tradition of the store owners on the high street in Paramaribo, an estafette of meters-long firecrackers which are laid out in the middle of the road.

My mum was making plans to join my sister in the hotel, and I wasn't sure if that was what I wanted to do as well. Ultimately, I decided to experience this New Year's Eve celebration differently from the way most Surinamese people do, which involves loud music in the city centre where large groups of friends and family gather to celebrate. Instead of heading to the hotel, I dropped off my mum and took a walk downtown, towards the Central Marketplace. This market is divided into an indoor and outdoor space. The outdoor space is one long alley where the fishermen have their stalls. Most of these fishermen are of Guyanese-Hindustani or Haitian origin. As I made my way to the back of the marketplace, the outdoor part, the intrusive scent of fresh fish penetrated my nostrils. My ears became submissive to a cacophony of sounds, each fighting to be recognised as the predominant noise – drums forcefully being played to support the men and women singing typical Surinamese-Creole kaseko songs, and then they made it their own version by throwing in Hindustani words. It is very common to hear Surinamese-Creole kaseko songs with song texts in the Hindi language.

Further down the alley, men were yelling sales specials as part of the New Year's Eve celebration, meanwhile whistling to demand the attention of the female beauties walking past their stalls – the women laughing out loud because of the flattering compliments received from the men. As chaotic as it sounded, it was such a beautiful blending of rhythms; the scent of fish, fruits, vegetables, different types of food, and a large variety of spices, carried on the wings of voices speaking and shouting and singing in different languages. I strolled down the alley, soaking it all in, and I felt so happy. It felt like home. This cacophony of ethnic richness felt typical Surinamese to me.

The celebrations in the inner city in honour of New Year's Eve are largely influenced by music, dance, food, and songs derived from Surinamese-Creole culture. And the Central Market is where each ethnic group incorporates their own uniqueness expressed through dance, music, and food, to freely express their joy in anticipation of the New Year to come. The excitement of ordinary Surinamese hardworking people enabling their ethnic backgrounds to develop a cohesive atmosphere of happiness, without feeling overwhelmed or dominated by one particular group of people among them, justified that although there is a dominance of Surinamese-Creole cultural elements in the symbolising of Surinamese culture, there is no disunity caused among the different ethnic groups. But, as I continued my fieldwork in Suriname, I kept asking myself the question: What made Surinamese-Creole culture remain prominent in displays of Surinamese culture? Understanding how this position of Surinamese-Creole culture became central in the general display of Surinamese culture facilitated a basis for my arguments to further build upon while analysing the embodiment of the Surinamese-Creole identity, specifically during public celebrations.

8.2. Surinamese-Creole culture shaping society in colonial Suriname

One development in the history of Suriname that I find justifiable to answer my curiosity is described by scholars such as Ellen Neslo (2015), Wim Hoogbergen, and Okke ten Hove (2001). They published extensive research about the existence of an elite group of free creole people in the colony of Suriname in the period from 1762 to 1863. All refer to the social life in colonial Suriname being a display of social practices of the Europeans, the enslaved community, and the community of free

people, including the elite creole people¹²¹. In the following paragraphs, I will thoroughly illustrate how this group of free creole people came about and their influence on the shaping of colonial Suriname. Through these developments, it will then become evident why the emergence of free creole people in colonial Suriname initiated the phenomenon of Surinamese-Creole cultural elements dominating Surinamese culture.

8.2.1. *The enslaved community in colonial Suriname*

In the coastal area of colonial Suriname, there was a distinction between plantation slaves and city slaves. The enslaved people in the capital, Paramaribo, considered themselves to be of better status than the plantation slaves, and within the community of the enslaved, it was an unwritten rule that the seasoned slaves should be treated with respect by the newly arrived slaves¹²². The newly arrived slaves were named *sowtu watra negre*, which literally means 'negro from the salt water'. They were considered the lowest on the social ladder and would be ignored by both the seasoned slaves and the community of free people. Their life circumstances were miserable, and the treatment they had to endure was beyond inhumane. In the book *Ma Kankantri*, the author describes how the *sowtu watra negre* were feared because of their ability to engage with the spiritual world and perform healing rituals (Father Francois Henri Rikken, 2007). They were the ones in possession of the spiritual powers originating from West Africa.

The social life of the enslaved community, documented in numerous diaries, studies, romans, and articles written by a variety of people, would mostly be depicted as uncivilised. Fresco Sam-Sin, former director of the Language Museum in the Netherlands, wrote a play named *De plantagedialogen*¹²³. The play entails actors reading letters from slave masters in the 18th century who wrote diaries about daily social life on the plantations. The dialogues illustrate the origins of *Sranantongo*, the language emerging from the enslaved community. Through the reading of the letters written in the original language, Fresco Sam-Sin aimed to provide a sneak peek into the life of the slaves and their relationships with the slave owners. Even though it was outdated *Sranantongo*, which I could not always understand, hearing it enabled me to envision the social life of my ancestors. As I was listening to the actors reading the letters, the disproportional relationship between the enslaved and the slave owners became vivid. Some authors, in their writing, romanticised this relationship and spoke of trust and respect between some of the slave masters and their slaves. However, the oral stories revealed that there always was a situation of distrust, fear, and patronisation from the slave master towards the enslaved.

8.2.2. *Engagements between the enslaved and the Dutch settlers in colonial Suriname*

Anton de Kom (1934) in his book *Wij slaven van Suriname* describes sexual encounters, often unwilful and sometimes wilful, of European men with enslaved women. These sexual encounters led to the emergence of a new group of people in colonial Suriname. The children born from these sexual encounters were called Creole. Some of the European men would pay a ransom for the creole child so the child could be raised in freedom. In the case of a sexual encounter between a European man and a free woman of African descent, the child would automatically be considered a free person in the colony. Gradually, the free Creole would adapt to the lifestyle of the wealthy Dutch families and utilise their status of freedom to establish their own group of elites in society. The status of being a free

¹²¹ From 1650 to 1863, the colony of Suriname consisted of four categories of freed Africans and creole people. These were 1) those who received manumission, 2) those recruited to be part of the Corps Redi Musu, a military corps consisting of the enslaved to assist the European military on their missions to eliminate the Maroons, 3) the Maroons, who also were considered free people in the colony after treaties were signed, and 4) a small number of immigrant Black contract workers who came from the surrounding islands to work in the gold mining and balata industries in Suriname. Wim Hoogbergen & Okke ten Hove *De vrije gekleurde en zwarte bevolking van Paramaribo, 1762-1863*, OSO. Tijdschrift voor Surinaamse taalkunde, letterkunde en geschiedenis. Jaargang 20 - DBNL accessed 24/10/2023.

¹²² Conversations with Christine van Russel, owner and curator of the Koto Museum (a museum exhibiting the traditional dress of Creole working-class women, including typical creole household wares and craftsmanship).

¹²³ *De plantagedialogen* (taalmuseum.nl) accessed 05/11/2023.

Creole enabled segregation between the freed people and the enslaved community. On the contrary, sexual encounters between European women and enslaved men were strictly forbidden, and in the case where these encounters still happened, the enslaved men would be severely punished, and the women banned from society.

8.2.3. *The emergence of the different categories of creole communities in colonial Suriname*

In 1683, Cornelis van Aerssen heer van Sommelsdijk was appointed governor over the colony of Suriname. He encountered the colony in a state of complete deterioration and conflict. His immediate action was to restore the once-flourishing plantation economy in Suriname. He explored every avenue possible to achieve his goal, and one of his methods to increase revenue was opening the doors to non-Dutch plantation owners. His decision marked the beginning of the arrival of the Portuguese Jews. They fled from the neighbouring colony of Brazil and were embraced by the new governor as potential plantation owners, mainly because of their wealth. The Jews distinguished themselves from the Dutch, established their own community, and adhered to their cultural practices and religious beliefs. They instilled these, specifically with their house slaves. This resulted in the adaptation of some of these cultural practices by the enslaved community. The Jewish plantation owners mostly engaged with the community of free Creoles, and this marked the emergence of a new community of Creole people with Jewish genes. The small group of Jewish-Creoles and the group of free elite Creoles, just like the Jews, distinguished themselves from the rest of society and became a close-knit community in Suriname. They established their members-only social events, societies of intellectuals, and spaces for leisure activities.

In 2001, Wim Hoogbergen and Okke ten Hove published their article, 'De vrije gekleurde en zwarte bevolking van Paramaribo – period 1762-1863'. The article is an account of the life of the free coloured and Black populations in Paramaribo. During that time, there was a clear distinction between the free coloured people and the free Black people. The application of the label 'creole' would be applied solely to those who were free, of mixed Black-European race, and who had gained respectable socio-economic status. Ellen Neslo, a Surinamese anthropologist, in 2015 published her article 'The formation of a free non-white elite in Paramaribo – 1800 – 1863'. In her article, she attempts to dismantle existing preconceived notions of this group of non-whites and brings to light their contributions to socio-economic developments in the colony of Suriname. Jean Jacques Vrij in 1998 published his article, 'Jan Elias van Onna en het "politiek systeem" van de Surinaamse slaventijd, circa 1770-1820'. This article provides insight into the role of the free Creole community, which established itself as a community of intellectuals. The author describes how their influence has helped shape the political scenery in colonial Suriname.

Each one of these authors provided insight into ways that the social life of the free people influenced the construction and adjustment of the rules and restrictions applicable to the enslaved community and simultaneously determined the shift in the governing structures in Suriname. One main factor in the social life of the free Creole people was the possession of slaves. The phenomenon of free Creoles owning slaves raised questions of morality and contributed to the existence of a hierarchical system that remains influential today among Surinamese-Creoles. The morality of a slave owner who descended from slavery was justified by Ellen Neslo, who, in her article, describes some of the reasons why free people also owned slaves. One of the reasons was to be able to finance the freedom of other slaves. Buying one's own freedom was an investment that most slaves could not afford. It was required by law that the person was able to prove that they could provide for themselves as a free person (Ellen Neslo, 2015. 180). Free people would then buy the slaves from the European slave owners and, as such, helped to finance the freedom of their enslaved brothers and sisters. This was a way to expand the community of free Black people in the colony and gain socio-economic autonomy. To be acknowledged and respected in the European community, the free Creole people

needed to showcase their financial fortune. This financial independence was secured through the ownership of slaves.

Besides the Dutch rulers and the elite Creole community, there were other European settlers who helped shape the socio-cultural and economic image of the colony. These were the Lebanese merchants, Scottish and English plantation owners who remained in the colony after the English transferred the colony to the Dutch, German missionaries, and Polish and German soldiers who were sent on missions to Suriname to combat the numerous and severe attacks of the runaway slaves on the plantations. Each one of these European forefathers left their legacy in Suriname, which can be traced through place names, street names, and names of monuments or buildings. But most importantly, traces of these European settlers remain hidden in the family histories, traditions, and cultural practices of current-day Surinamese-Creoles.

During colonial times, the categorisation of the creole people in Suriname into different types of creoles was very much determined by the sexual involvement of these European settlers with the enslaved community or the community of free Black people. Jerome Egger and Ruben Gowricharn, in their article 'Creolen; ontstaan en ontwikkeling van een ethnische gemeenschap' (2014), describe the gradual merging of the free Creole people and the enslaved community into one collective ethnic group of creoles. This becoming of a collective ethnic group under the label of being creole is of the utmost importance in exploring the creole identity. Egger and Gowricharn argue that this collectiveness became a fact after the abolition of slavery on 1 July 1863. Even though there were clear categories among the different descendants of the enslaved, abolition resulted in referring to all free people as creole, with clearly established boundaries and rules to organise the differences among creoles.

8.2.4. *The immigrant community's position in colonial Suriname*

Socio-cultural practices of immigrants were less on public display because of their being a close-knit community. The reason why the immigrants remained a close-knit community is because of the restrictions defined in their contracts. One strict rule was that the contract worker was not allowed to leave the plantation where he was placed to work unless it was his day off¹²⁴. Otherwise, he needed written permission to leave the plantation. Between 1873 and 1914, Suriname was known as a typical European-Creole society. Social life, the education system, and job opportunities in the capital, Paramaribo, were predominantly dominated and dictated by the elite creole people¹²⁵. After the termination of their contracts, the Hindustani contract workers would send their children to Paramaribo to be educated by Surinamese-Creole educators. As such, their children learned the customs and values of becoming a respected civilian based on what was established by the Europeans and adapted by the Surinamese-Creoles. Thus, Surinamese society was represented through these customs, social practices, and social class structures established by the group of elite Creoles.

8.3. Social class and hierarchy amongst Surinamese-Creoles in colonial Suriname

As the free Creole people managed to possess leading positions in colonial Suriname, social status was established through the introduction of a hierarchical system. Elements of this hierarchy remain visible to this day in Surinamese-Creole communities. The framework to manage the hierarchical system was mainly maintained through unwritten rules. It is mostly through these unwritten rules that the different categories of being creole came into being. During colonial times, the sustaining of the different categories of creoles was enforced by the free people and the Europeans as a way of

¹²⁴ Hans Ramsoedh Van samenleving in een grensgebied naar integratie in Suriname, *OSO. Tijdschrift voor Surinaamse taalkunde, letterkunde en geschiedenis*. Jaargang 33 - DBNL accessed 25/10/2023.

¹²⁵ 39249077006.pdf (redalyc.org) accessed 25/10/2023.

structuring the different residential areas in society, assigning job roles, and aligning cultural practices with different social groups. Ellen Nelson describes that free non-whites would be categorised in different social classes, depending on the social statuses of their European fathers. For example, the children of well-established European fathers would often receive a good education. And then there were children who were the offspring of European soldiers or sailors and free Black women or enslaved women. These would still be categorised as creole but belong to the working class. Thus, the colour of the skin and the socio-economic status of the European parent were some of the unwritten rules applied to determine the socio-economic status of the free non-whites and their positions in the European community.

The irony is that even though the *sowtu watra negre* were the lowest in social status in the colony, they were consulted as *Winti* priests to provide relief from sickness and physical issues terrorising a person or sometimes a whole family. Father Francois Henri Rikken gives an account of one such *sowtu watra negre*, a female, who possessed these supernatural powers and, through her work as a *Winti* priest, was able to buy her freedom. Simultaneously, these *sowtu watra negre* were feared by the seasoned slaves for their ability to perform *wisi* – perform a curse on a person. Therefore, they would often be avoided, and children would be warned not to engage with them. It was these sorts of prejudgements and preconceived notions, nurtured by the enslaved and dictating their daily lives, that allowed outsiders, who did not understand the context through which the enslaved community gave meaning to their new living environment, to portray the enslaved as dangerous, mischievous, and not to be trusted (Father Francois Henri Rikken, 2007).

The freed slaves were generally focused on small-scale agriculture or were craftsmen, whilst the free elite Creoles would engage in jobs such as government clerks, artisans, and merchants. A few were directors of plantations. Fresco Sam-Sin, director of the Language Museum in the Netherlands, as he was aware of my research topic, shared with me a copy of a book written in 1913. The book, *Bruine Mina de koto-missi*, written by J. G. Spalburg (1913), shares the lived experiences of a young creole woman called Mina. Although the story is fiction, it is written based on the actual lived experiences of the free working-class creole women living in the period 1813–1913. These were the free creoles who, because of the lower-class social status of their European fathers, would not be considered as part of the elite Creole people. The writer vividly describes the poverty and the struggles that these women had to face to sustain themselves in society. Their living circumstances were deplorable. Their possessions were very minimal; access to proper jobs, health care, and education was limited. But some of the main factors that stood out were the conflicts, challenges, and envy of the other free Black working-class women. These were based on a difference in skin colour. Creole working-class children were seen as the fiascos of Black working-class females or Black enslaved females who felt the need to gain a lighter skin tone for their offspring and thus bore their children with a European lower-class man. A lighter skin tone among the Black working class was not appreciated, and these children and adults suffered from neglect and prejudice in their community.

8.4. Integration of Surinamese-Creoles in the present day

As discussed in the notion of groupism and groupness, an ethnic group cannot be defined as a separate group, disconnected from others. The notion argues that there is a fluidity amongst ethnic groups and cross-influencing of social practices. The creole identity emerged among enslaved Africans and, after the abolition of slavery, continued to be shaped by Chinese, English, Amerindian, and European socio-cultural practices and beliefs. Even so, there has been a gradual spreading of Creole and the other ethnic groups settling in Suriname. The results of the last census executed in Suriname by the *Algemene Bureau voor de Statistiek*¹²⁶ for the period 2018–2021 show the districts of Nickerie and Saramacca inhabited by a majority of Hindustanis, the district Commewijne inhabited

¹²⁶ DEMOGRAFISCHE-DATA_DEMOGRAPHIC-DATA-2018-2021-februari-2023-1.pdf (statistics-suriname.org) accessed 25/10/2023.

by a large number of Javanese, the districts Paramaribo, Coronie, and Para being the districts with a majority of Creoles, and the district Wanica being a mixture of the three major ethnic groups, Creole, Javanese, and Hindustani.

Although the different categories of creole, as determined during colonial times, are no longer applicable, there remains a subtle difference based on social class. The colour of the skin no longer serves as one of the unwritten rules to determine and maintain social status. Yet, the inherited legacy, the family history, the socio-economic status, and the geographical living areas of Surinamese-Creole families continue to be the main features to categorise their position within society – namely, the longstanding legacy of Jewish-Creole families who kept their social status through establishing their own close-knit communities remains visible in today's Surinamese society.

The same accounts for differences in socio-economic positions for working-class creole families and creole families with a privileged position within society. However, through education, and nowadays through political affiliations, some of the working-class families could climb up the social ladder and gain access to the more privileged creole communities. In the case of socio-cultural life, there remains a more ingrained divide among Surinamese-Creoles. This divide is sustained by preferences for religious beliefs and spiritual practices. Further in this chapter, I will go more into detail about the role of religion and spirituality in establishing different categories of being a Surinamese-Creole.

8.5. Surinamese-Creole culture dominating Surinamese multi-cultural society

Cultural differences can persist, despite inter-ethnic contact and interdependence (Fredrik Barth, 1969). I want to translate this argument as follows: 'Interaction across cultures doesn't mean that one culture risks losing its own distinct norms and values.' I am stating this argument, as it's evidence of the way the Surinamese-Creole identity emerged amidst other ethnic groups yet managed to develop into a separate, distinct ethnic identity. What is interesting to note is that Surinamese-Creoles not only managed to develop their own ethnic identity but, due to their prominent role in the history of enslavement and colonialism and the development of Surinamese society during colonial times, their typical cultural elements became representative of Surinamese culture as a whole. However, observations in the political arena have shown that political parties with a large representation of other ethnic groups advocate for this image to shift and for Surinamese culture to be represented, as well as the cultural elements of the other ethnic groups.

The dominant position of Surinamese-Creoles in their multi-cultural society has come under scrutiny due to rapid social-political-economic and educational developments of the other ethnic groups. But, due to Surinamese-Creoles being so diverse in their ethnically mixed background, this attempt to minimise creole representation in Surinamese culture remains a challenge. The question remains: How do some of the mixed Surinamese-Creoles prefer to identify themselves, as creole or as Surinamese? Most choose Surinamese, just due to their mixed ethnicity being so diverse that it becomes impossible to just focus on one. Yet, in their socio-cultural expressions, the majority tend to adapt to the creole culture, as this has been for centuries the most flexible, adaptable, and accessible compared to other ethnic groups in Suriname.

But then there remains the categorisation of being a Creole within the same Surinamese-Creole ethnic group. Although the categorisation is subtle, it is visible and still matters, as these differences are established through social class, religious practices, and geographical locations, mainly in Suriname. In the case of the differences caused by religious beliefs, the categorisation is vigilantly guarded. This vigilance is fostered through the fear of one being persuaded to despise one's own beliefs and also through the longstanding stigma that has been instilled on the *Winti* religion.

8.6. Conclusion

To present a holistic view of the becoming of Surinamese-Creoles and their processes of evolution throughout history until the present day, it was important to explore their existence as part of the culturally diverse Surinamese society. In this chapter, I explored how other cultural influences in different social contexts, such as colonial Suriname and the arrival of immigrant labour workers, have influenced Surinamese-Creoles. But this chapter also addressed the way the other ethnic groups, specifically immigrants, were influenced by Surinamese-Creole culture.

This section of the chapter answers the research sub-questions that were stated at the beginning of the thesis. These were the following: a) How do labels come to be within the Creole community? b) In what way do these labels maintain boundaries among the different groups of creoles in Suriname? c) How does the crossing between different groups within the Surinamese-Creole community extend, adjust, or eliminate these boundaries?

The main observation in this chapter was the emergence of different categories of being Creole in Suriname. And even though the different categories in the present day are more subtle, the conclusion, based on observations and the analysis of literature, is that these categories emerged through differences in adopting cultural heritage, interpreting historical events initiating the Surinamese-Creole identity, and family legacies that have been passed on through generations. The conversations with informants about the different categories of being Creole have proven that each has their own interpretation of what it means to be a Creole person. To provide an anthropological explanation of the differences in cultural lived experiences within the categories of being Creole, I want to draw from Fredrik Barth's theory on cultural differences and the importance of studying these beyond ethnic boundaries.

Fredrik Barth (1969) states that 'there are groups of people who essentially share a common culture and interconnected difference that distinguish each such discreet culture from all others'. According to him, geographical and social isolation are the critical factors in sustaining cultural diversity. Applying this approach, we might assume that each category of Surinamese-Creole has been developing its social and cultural form in relative isolation, but if we apply the notion of groupness, then we can move beyond the assumption that the different categories of Creole were established as a little island with their own socio-cultural practices. Instead, the notion of groupness forces us to analyse the social interaction between the different groups of Creoles, and the results have shown us how these social interactions have influenced and shaped the social processes across the groups. Because these social processes have been thoroughly analysed and described across all the groups, I was able to draw a broader picture and showcase how the Surinamese-Creole culture and the ethnic identity of being Creole emerged from the interaction of various social-cultural-historical elements, ultimately being established as a rich ethnic identity habituating cultural diversity.

Fredrik Barth (1969) suggests studying the analysis of cultural diversity through the differences in trait inventories. When studying the cultural forms within the different categories of Creoles, which can also be described as traits, I also analysed the effects of the living environment on the group members – the way they integrated occurrences in their living environment into cultural traits. Here, it is important to be aware that the differences in experiencing the Surinamese-Creole culture are not based on obvious differences, but on what the actors (group members) themselves counted and indicated as a difference – their deliberate decisions on what is most significant for them, what they say makes them different from *others*. While considering their living environment, I also considered the role of their direct environment in a commonly shared geographical location with a variety of ecological and historical circumstances. This obviously also sustained the diversity in group interpretations and behaviours towards embodying their creoleness.

Another observation emerging in this chapter and relevant to address in the conclusion is the integration of immigrant ethnic groups with Surinamese-Creoles. In this chapter, I addressed the dominance of the Surinamese-Creole culture and the gradual integration of Surinamese-Creole communities beyond the district of Paramaribo. Hans Ramsøedh (2014) reports that, after 1945, the social interaction between the three most dominant ethnic groups in Suriname, the Creole, the Javanese, and the Hindustani, intensified – one of the reasons being Paramaribo's rapid development into the centre of political-administrative, economic, and social governance. And yet, Paramaribo remains the place where the dominance of the Surinamese-Creole culture is visible, because of the

architecture that hints at the time of enslavement and colonisation. Paramaribo also remains the centre where most investments and policies are implemented to develop social, economic, and cultural life¹²⁷.

After World War II, subsequent administrations failed to work out a proper regional development plan. Paramaribo remained the centre of development, and the outskirts and other districts were neglected and served solely for the supplying of the capital with agricultural goods. It was not until after 1987, with the introduction of the new electoral system¹²⁸, that subsequent governments attempted to develop a strategic national development plan to strengthen the production capacity of the districts and the interior in Suriname. However, during my field visit, it remained a political-economic discussion about the lack of infrastructure, proper policies, and regulations that would enable the district administrations to independently work towards the development of their districts. One government introduced policies to enhance the process of decentralisation, but this process still has not been properly implemented. In a follow-up of my research, it would be interesting to explore the socio-political impact of Surinamese-Creoles in current Surinamese politics – the aim being to investigate whether the historical dominance of the Surinamese-Creole elite in the governance of Suriname, and the imposed idea of the immigrant ethnic groups being less developed, continues to direct the neglect of other districts in Suriname, especially since these districts first were inhabited by immigrant labourers. Thus, this chapter offered us another aspect of being Creole in relation to the socio-political processes in Suriname.

¹²⁷ In 2022, the research institute Stichting Projekta in collaboration with the University of Leiden conducted a thorough survey in Paramaribo with the aim of determining the level of democracy as experienced by Surinamese people. The results show that subsequent governments failed to gain proper trust from the Surinamese people. Most felt neglected and not taken seriously by the various political parties. The lack of proper development in the country and access to sufficient socio-economic opportunities remained a problem. *mazepus-veenendaal-surinaamse-burgers-vinden-democratie-belangrijk.pdf* (universiteitleiden.nl) accessed 25/10/2023.

¹²⁸ The Dutch scholar Rick Derveld describes the political developments in the period 1975–1998 and relates these developments with the gradual integration of ethnic groups and structuring of the district administration. *Rick Derveld Veranderingen in de Surinaamse politiek 1975-1998*, *OSO. Tijdschrift voor Surinaamse taalkunde, letterkunde en geschiedenis*. Jaargang 18 - DBNL accessed 25/10/2023.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION

Ini wan man e bosie hem wefi na fa – Any man decides how to show love to his wife. Everyone has their own way of doing things. (Surinamese proverb)

The above-cited Surinamese-Creole proverb illustrates the way Surinamese-Creoles crafted their own socio-cultural identity – from the arrival of their ancestors as enslaved people in Suriname to the way the new generation of Surinamese-Creoles in Suriname and in the Netherlands continues to construct their future amid a fast-globalising world. The enslaved Africans, in their efforts to establish their own identity, encountered socio-economic and political influences in their living environment. They then adapted elements of these influences and continued crafting, shaping, adjusting, and evolving their socio-cultural identity until the present day. The aim of this chapter is to anticipate the further evolution of the Surinamese-Creole identity by critically analysing current global developments on a socio-cultural and political level and attempting to foresee how these will impact the ongoing crafting process employed by Surinamese-Creoles to maintain their identity.

The concluding chapter combines the outcomes and conclusion of the preceding chapters to then answer the research questions as stipulated at the beginning of the research. This chapter also concludes my own journey and provides insight into my experience of having been the research subject, as well. I reflect on the way the research ultimately has shaped my current thoughts and what my new position is, being a Creole woman living in a Eurocentric space. Finally, I provide new ideas for follow-up research and justification for the need to do follow-up research on the topic of the Surinamese-Creole.

9.1. The continuation of the Surinamese-Creole identity shaped by transnationalism

Transnationalism served as a concept to explore the occurrence of changes and adjustments in the socio-cultural identity of Surinamese-Creoles who live in the Netherlands. But another layer that I added to the notion of transnationalism was to observe how Surinamese-Creoles who have lived in the Netherlands and ultimately returned to Suriname preserved their creole ethnic identity in the Netherlands and have continued to embrace it as they now live in Suriname. This new layer was a way of approaching the notion of transnationalism from another angle and exploring the adaptations of embodiment practices that one makes to embrace their ethnic identity while living in the Netherlands. The research proved that the changes are mostly enforced through the rapid phenomenon of globalisation. What becomes interesting to me in approaching the notion of transnationalism the other way around is to see if these altered embodiment practices of creoleness will be readjusted again once the person returns to Suriname, where embodiment practices are said to be mostly in their 'purest' form.

Most of my informants in Suriname claimed that the cultural practices are still 'pure' in Suriname. The term 'pure' in this case should be translated as the locals in Suriname do so. 'Pure', to them, means that it is closer to the spaces and places where these cultural practices first emerged and were invented by their enslaved ancestors. In the Netherlands, there never was the concept of owning slaves and dictating another person's life through a governing system of enslavement as was applied in the colonies¹²⁹. In the Netherlands, there is also a common saying amongst Surinamese-Creoles when they are making plans to visit Suriname for family rituals or celebrations. They say, *mi e go na*

¹²⁹ During my visits to museums and archives in the Netherlands, I encountered several documents stating that those who brought their slaves to the Netherlands were not allowed to address them as slaves in the Netherlands. One podcast about a Dutch family member who returned to Suriname to explore her roots and her family's involvement in the transatlantic slave trade revealed that her great-grandmother had been raised by a maid named Mina. The maid was of colour, and her great-grandmother knew that Mina had been brought from Suriname as a slave but in the Netherlands became a maid, as it was forbidden to own slaves in the Netherlands. *De plantage van onze voorouders* | NPO Radio 1 accessed 07/04/2024.

gron, literally meaning 'I am going to the ground'. In this case, the ground refers to the original place where their ancestors lived and worked as slaves. *Gron*, in *Sranatongo*, represents the original place of birth, the place where one's roots are rooted.

To illustrate the relevance of approaching the notion of transnationalism from a different angle and analyse the changes in embracing being a Surinamese-Creole, I reflect on my encounter with one of my informants. After living almost his whole life as a young adult in the Netherlands, he returned to Suriname. He was born in Suriname but left when he was just 5 years old. He returned when he was 32 and has been living in Suriname for almost 4 years now. When I met him, he was desperately in search of his purpose in life. Although he would be categorised as a Creole in Suriname, he refused to be called Creole and preferred being addressed as a Surinamese person. He is of mixed racial background, with a strong presence of Chinese and Amerindian ethnicity mixed with Creole. He shared that, in the Netherlands, he has always struggled to fit in because he never knew how to embrace his creoleness. His family was not very much concerned with being creole in the Netherlands. They were more focused on blending into Dutch society and being accepted as proper Dutch. Suriname, for his family, was associated with the place where the rest of the family still lived, but never in the sense of Suriname being the place they still felt attached to and kept vivid in their daily life.

What was interesting was the fact that he had a strong belief in *Winti*; he regularly engaged in ritual baths and used remedies prepared for the protection of his *kra* (soul) and *wenti*. *Winti* was not something he grew up with. He remembers his father, from time to time, engaging with *Winti* practices, but never from the point of it being a family tradition. He strongly believed he was guided by an Amerindian *wenti* Chief. The Amerindian Chief, of course, was a meta-person who, from time to time, would take possession of him in his sleep, never when he was awake. He shared with me that his engagements with the *Winti* religion were not so present when he lived in the Netherlands. However, in Suriname, he felt the strong presence of his ancestors and felt connected to the earth. Comparing his way of engaging with *Winti* with the way those who have always lived in Suriname practise their *Winti*-related rituals, I noticed a rather different and multilateral approach in his ways of embodying his identity as a person with Surinamese-Creole origins. The multilateral aspect was emphasised due to the lack of a clear structure in applying the rituals – amongst my informants in Suriname, I had observed that there was a certain sequence to the application of the rituals and ceremonies associated with *Winti*.

The same sequence of activating these rituals was noticeable in each family structure that was involved in *Winti*. This sequence was absent in his way of applying ritual performances. I also missed a family orientation approach when he engaged in the rituals. *Winti* rituals are always practised in a family-oriented structure, whether these are family by blood or family by association. In his case, there was never the element of 'family' involved when he engaged in the rituals. Then, he had the adaptation of Amerindian socio-cultural practices – the general *Winti* believer would not literally adapt Amerindian customs in their lifestyle, although all *Winti* believers do claim to be possessed by an Amerindian meta-person during rituals of transcendence. He also had a strong need to engage with the lifestyle in the interior without having tangible evidence of belonging to a specific place in the interior, and his roots coming from that specific place. He argued that he was a child from Suriname and thus was allowed to associate his belongingness with any space or place in Suriname.

The difference with his way of embracing his creoleness in Suriname is that for those who have lived all their life in Suriname, being Creole is always associated with a family-oriented legacy attached to a space and a place in Suriname, and the embodiment of rituals and socio-cultural practices is always part of a family tradition, including norms and values that are significant to a certain family which have been passed down from generation to generation. And I figured that that is what I was missing in his story of being a Dutch person with Surinamese-Creole roots who returned to live in Suriname. I continued to compare his life experience with that of another informant who also returned from the Netherlands to live in Suriname.

This person's story was not similar to that of my previously described informant. This other informant was used to activating her creoleness through *Winti*-related practices in the Netherlands. She shared with me that her family was always engaged with *Winti* and that was the way she was raised, even though she was born and raised in the Netherlands. When she returned to Suriname, she continued to be part of her family, and their way of living was similar to the way that of the rest of the family in the Netherlands. There was no difference for her. The only thing that was interesting to note was the way the family in the Netherlands remained closely involved in the way the family in Suriname would actualise their creoleness. What the family in the Netherlands was adding to the rituals – this would be the altering of traditional dress or incorporating modern objects into the celebrations, such as favours for the guests who would attend a ceremonial gathering – was also adopted by the family in Suriname. Even though the family was separated by geographical borders, the family traditions, rituals, norms, and values remained the same. So, for my informant, her change in circumstances was just affected by a geographical difference; however, the family legacy remained the same.

The differences in the lived experiences of these two informants with a transnational history revealed how, in the process of transnationalism, the role of family and the continuation of family legacies in diaspora remain the pivotal indicators in the way creoleness will become subject to globalisation and social change. The altering of the Surinamese-Creole identity only becomes relevant when the engagements and the embodiment practices of the person are compared to those in the land of origin. Once the comparison is not valid, globalisation becomes just a mere external phenomenon that continues to shape the Surinamese-Creole identity in the process of evolving. I am using the case of the gatekeepers of the Surinamese-Creole culture to support my argument. Because of their tendency to compare the alterations and adjustments to the cultural elements of the creole culture with the way the culture came to be during the time of enslavement, they foresee a conflict in the representation of the Surinamese-Creole identity and resist these changes.

However, if one chooses to remove the glasses of comparison and view these changes from an angle of just evolution, then one will notice the opportunities to continue to reinvent the cultural identity whilst preserving the core of the cultural identity, which is rooted in a history of enslavement and survival. This ultimately is where all the different categories of being Surinamese-Creole find common ground. Whether they are Christian believers, are *Winti* believers, or possess a prominent position in society, they all acknowledge one elemental segment of their creole being, which is a history of enslavement. Even if they choose not to identify as Creole but as Surinamese with a mixed racial background, the fact remains that their roots will always trace back to stemming from enslaved ancestors.

9.2. The community of Surinamese-Creoles in the Netherlands

This research also focused on Surinamese-Creoles living in the Netherlands – specifically, the younger generation in the Netherlands is confronted with a society that promotes fluidity in expressing one's identity. Phenomena such as globalisation blur geographical boundaries and challenge people to constantly reinvent who they are and who they want to become. The experience of being a Creole in Suriname differs from the way those in diaspora in the Netherlands perceive their socio-cultural background. People in diaspora long to associate with an identity that allows them to reconnect with the homeland yet doesn't alienate them from the socio-cultural modernisation they encounter in the host land. Simultaneously, this fluidity in identity also impacts those in the homeland through family relations. Frequent interactions between Surinamese-Creole families in the Netherlands and in Suriname allow room for the integration of Eurocentric influences in culturally transmitted practices, beliefs, and norms and values. Socialisation and interaction with other ethnic groups in both societies also lead to new inventions, new influences, and adaptations of cultural elements in Surinamese-Creole culture. In the next chapter, I go into detail about these adaptations to Surinamese-Creole culture and how these become visible through the agency of material culture.

This phenomenon of Surinamese-Creoles in the Netherlands maintaining their creoleness while adapting to the new society alludes to Nadia Lovell's (1998) arguments about the notion of loyalty to a

place and the role of belonging and locality in the understanding of collective identity. In the Netherlands, a collective experience of the Surinamese-Creole identity becomes of much greater importance. There, the embodiment and portrayal of the Surinamese-Creole identity is a form of being able to tie their belongingness to a certain place, in this case Suriname, and particularly a geographical location in Suriname where their family history is rooted. The social relations established amongst Surinamese-Creoles in the Netherlands are very much based on a collective longing to actualise memories of the country they came from, Suriname. Events and celebrations are, for Surinamese-Creoles in the Netherlands, the perfect opportunity to embrace their Surinamese heritage, which will always include elements of nostalgia for the place they were born, or the place where their parents and grandparents came from.

9.2.1. *Embracing creoleness in the Netherlands*

To further explore the evolution of the Surinamese-Creole identity in the Netherlands, I investigated to what extent the different categories of being a creole are applied. In conversations with my informants in the Netherlands, I quickly realised that the very specific categories of being a creole in Suriname no longer matter. In the Netherlands, Surinamese-Creoles prefer to be categorised as being of Surinamese descent. Differences based on social class, socio-economic position, family history, and skin tone no longer serve as the features to determine which category of being a creole one belongs to.

The collectively embraced identity of being of Surinamese origin prevails, although there remain some politics of labels and categories when divining one's position in the Dutch society. There are still norms applied to establish a distinction. The norm has nothing to do with being creole. It is rather to distinguish a privileged position in Dutch society. There is a group of Surinamese intellectuals in the Netherlands, most of which are of Surinamese-Creole origins. Mies van Nieker (2001), in her article, 'Creoolse en Hindoestaanse Surinamers in Nederland; *twee vormen van integratie*' ('Creole and Hindustani Surinamese in the Netherlands: two forms of integration'), provides an explanation for the collective embracing of the Surinamese identity, rather than that of the Surinamese-Creole. She refers to the mass migration of Surinamese people to the Netherlands that took place around the 1970s and 1980s, before and after Suriname became independent from the Netherlands.

Van Nieker explains that during that time, it was not the norm to categorise the migrated Surinamese people based on their ethnic origins. In the Netherlands, they were all considered to be Dutch citizens of Surinamese origin (Mies van Nieker, 2001). Most intellectuals who migrated from Suriname to the Netherlands were of Surinamese-Creole origin. They committed themselves to supporting their compatriots, who usually were of the middle and lower social classes, to settle and properly integrate into Dutch society. There was a collective commitment to adapt to the new environment while maintaining Surinamese socio-cultural identity. However, along the way, the intellectuals managed to secure management and leadership positions within Dutch governing institutions, while the rest of the Surinamese struggled to cope with stigmatisation, unemployment, and fierce discrimination.

The group of intellectuals, who integrated into the community of Dutch intellectuals, obtained their privileged position due to their accomplishments on academic levels, in visual and fine arts, by becoming prestigious novelists, through songwriting, becoming successful in theatre, becoming great musicians, and obtaining prominent positions in Dutch politics. From conversations I had with informants of mine who associate with this group of intellectual creoles, it often seemed as if they would utilise their Surinamese background rather as an added value to their success and an entourage to their distinct achievements. There was no specific evidence of socio-cultural practices to embody being Surinamese-Creole. It was more so a representation of Surinamese customs, such as speaking the lingua franca or engaging with the music, food, and traditional clothing now and then.

This phenomenon of embracing being Surinamese rather than Surinamese-Creole identity can be explained through documents that I encountered in the archives of the liberal organisation, The Black Archives. This organisation is led by young Dutch intellectuals, most of whom are from Surinamese backgrounds. They are a legally recognised institution that organises a diverse range of events to educate about the devastating impact of racism and discrimination, and they frequently organise

public events to advocate for equal rights and equal opportunities for underrepresented communities in Dutch society. This includes the community of Black Surinamese individuals. The archives revealed documents of two main societies, *Wie Eegi Sani* ('Our Own Thing') and *Ons Suriname* ('Our Suriname'), founded by liberal Surinamese intellectuals who lived in the Netherlands during the 1950s and 1960s¹³⁰. They were confronted with the superiority of Dutch culture and the internalised ideologies that everything Surinamese was not considered equal to the 'refined' Dutch culture. Mostly, the use of the lingua franca from Suriname, *Sranantongo*, was one aspect that would strongly be condemned and criticised by the Dutch. The founders of these two organisations employed literature, poetry, theatre productions, and music to liberate the mind of the Surinamese in the Netherlands and to inspire and encourage them to proudly embrace Surinamese culture. However, through these activities and performances, Surinamese-Creole culture would be prevalent.

And then there is the group of Surinamese-Creoles who fully embrace the Surinamese-Creole culture as inherited from their parents and grandparents and choose to publicly embody their Surinamese-Creole identity. Their daily life practices are dominated and informed by typical Surinamese-Creole socio-cultural practices, which they proudly showcase during celebratory events. Most of my informants in the Netherlands were from this community and allowed me access to their personal events and celebrations that were collectively organised to honour special occasions, such as the celebration of the abolition of slavery on the 1st of July, and a ritual performance to honour the ancestors. These are also the people who initiated organisations and community groups to safeguard the continuity and transmission of the Surinamese-Creole culture to the next generation in the Netherlands.

9.3. Becoming the proud Surinamese-Creole woman who now lives in the UK

My story of being a Creole in diaspora started in Sint Maarten, where I exchanged my Surinamese nationality for Dutch. Switching nationality was a necessity to pursue my career in anthropology. Giving up my Surinamese nationality came with some consequences, such as being looked down on by those Surinamese people who have chosen not to give up their nationality, but also the consequence of being seen by the Sint Maarten community as someone who came to the island just for their personal benefit – 'a freeloader' is how they would label those taking on the Dutch nationality. In Sint Maarten, having swapped the Surinamese nationality for the Dutch nationality, my creoleness became my refuge to still feel a connection with my country of origin. Affirming my Surinamese-Creole identity became relevant through owning traditional dress, not necessarily creole traditional dress, and material objects associated with Surinamese culture.

When I moved to the United Kingdom, my Dutch nationality was the key to opening doors and allowing me to easily settle in. My creoleness became of less importance, as my belonging was now determined for me based on the colour of my skin. I became a Black person, rather than a Creole. Doing my research and fieldwork in Suriname, I was confronted with one aspect of my experience of being a Surinamese-Creole person that I consciously never really cared to embrace: It was that part of my creole identity that connects me with the continent of Africa. I always claimed that my history, my story, and my identity are rooted in the story of my ancestors when they set foot on land in Suriname. I refused to allow myself to extend my story beyond Suriname. It always felt like a betrayal. Claiming that I do have African roots felt like not showing proper appreciation for the struggles and the pain that my ancestors endured while being enslaved. It was too difficult to look past this history of brutal oppression and allow myself a peek into the history prior to enslavement.

However, the ability and the necessity to entertain intersubjectivity while doing fieldwork, and the pressing desire to tell the story of my people from a holistic point of view, empowered me to let go of my own preconceived notions and embark on the journey with an open mind and the dedication to align with my informants' way of living, even though it sometimes would be unfamiliar to my own upbringing. Being able to commit to this unrestricted approach was not easy, but it also was not unfamiliar to me, as I had gone through the process before during my relocation to Sint Maarten and

¹³⁰ Category: *Wie Eegie Sani* - *The Black Archives* accessed 25/03/2024

the United Kingdom. I am used to adjusting my own lived experiences to my current living environment so I can gain access and be accepted. In Suriname, during my fieldwork, not only did adapting to the living environment serve as a way of gaining access, but I soon found out that it also served as an opportunity for me to grow into learning who I am as a Creole and expand my knowledge about the history attached to that identity. Gaining knowledge strengthened my self-awareness and equipped me with new insights, which I apply to engage in any conversation regarding my creoleness or contribute from a personal point of view to debates related to creolisation, post-colonial identities, and discussions about the need for decolonisation.

9.4. Concerns about Eurocentric infiltration in the study of Surinamese-Creoles

I entered the field with the limitation of using Eurocentric anthropological concepts to unpack the Surinamese-Creole identity, which is constituted of non-Eurocentric socio-cultural elements, such as analysing the rituals embedded in the *Winti* religion to understand the ways my informants embody their creole identity. Challenging the misrepresentations of the Surinamese-Creole identity by utilising the same Eurocentric notions was not the way to gain new ethnographic data and counter these misrepresentations. However, through the application of reflexivity and by employing the notion of affordances to reveal the different processes of meaning giving, I mastered the skill of shifting in and out of these Eurocentric frameworks to produce knowledge. The addition of applying autoethnography served as a way of utilising my own lived experiences, analysing what I observed through participant observations, and bringing both experiences together to translate the observations into academically valid definitions still resonant with the interpretation of my research subjects.

Through the limitations of my Eurocentrically shaped theoretical framework, I could only apply it to stretch or challenge assumptions from previous studies and, where appropriate, alter these assumptions or bring them into contact with my ethnography. In doing so, I aimed to shed new light on the actual meanings and significance of local social life amongst Surinamese-Creoles and their contributions to the evolution of their ethnic identity. Some of the assumptions that I managed to challenge and shed new light on were previous descriptive studies about the relevance of *Winti*-related ceremonies and rituals to the Surinamese-Creole identity. The assumptions were that these ceremonies were rather infused with idolatrous and superstitious practices. However, through my intimate engagement with some of these rituals, I revealed how actually it is through the ceremonial celebrations in the *Winti* religion that one gets to discover the aspect of the Surinamese-Creole identity where the embodiment, the actualising, and continuity are closely dependent on the role and direct involvement of the ancestors. This is the only segment of the Surinamese-Creole identity where the history of enslavement remains vivid and not just a historical event.

Observations of the Surinamese-Creole identity in spaces influenced by Christianity reveal more of the infiltrated Eurocentric elements, such as the urge to be a person of virtue through being married. Attitudes towards safeguarding and showcasing elements of the Surinamese-Creole culture in Eurocentric spaces (in Suriname and in the Netherlands) were allowed and tolerated for the sole purpose of intellectual performance or to sustain a prestigious position. This was the case during the presentation of the *Winti* religion in the synagogue in Suriname and the honouring of the author of the book *Boto Banja*, who was nominated the Book King in the Netherlands. As long as the *Winti* elements of the Surinamese-Creole culture resemble a Eurocentric-informed perception of intellect, art, and theatrics, there is no resistance to accepting it as part of the Surinamese-Creole identity.

However, once I passed the limiting threshold of Eurocentric assumptions about *Winti* rituals, I discovered an array of rituals and ceremonies that re-enact the lifestyle of the enslaved community, who are the bearers of the creole identity in Suriname. Although these rituals are actualised through spiritual engagements, they still serve as proper momentum to learn about the historical development of Creoles and their innovations to re-create their own identity. Exploring the development of the Surinamese-Creole identity through the experiences of the Christian Creole reveals an identity awareness that is infused with altered perceptions of social class and inherited practices that are a hybridity of Eurocentric and Surinamese values. The *Winti* religion represents the ancestors' strength

to survive, and Christian-Eurocentric practices reflect the way the enslaved community was manipulated into the acceptance of imposed norms, values, and customs.

To conclude, the best way to obtain a holistic understanding of the evolution of the Surinamese-Creole identity is to unpack the hybridity of socio-cultural practices and simultaneously explore the embodiment and acknowledgement of the history of enslaved Africans through the legacy of *Winti*-oriented families and Christian-oriented families. Each has its way of embodying the Surinamese-Creole identity, yet, to understand the complexity of being a Surinamese-Creole, the unpacking cannot be done separately from these two dominating religions in the Creole culture.

9.5. The role of celebrations in the unpacking of the Surinamese-Creole identity

Employing celebrations as the lens to observe the evolution process of the Surinamese-Creole identity has revealed a range of practices and celebrations through which the identity is sustained and transmitted. This section allowed me to gain thorough insights to be able to answer the following research question that was stated at the beginning of the research: To what extent do the celebrations, either public or private, dictate the socio-cultural interaction between the different groups of creole people in Suriname?

The role of public celebrations has proven to have a dual impact on the development of the Surinamese-Creole identity. The increase in the popularity of publicly performing intimate *Winti*-related rituals, just for the gain of tourism and political benefit, is one aspect of public celebrations negatively impacting the representation of the creole identity in Suriname.

Another phenomenon discovered amongst the younger generation of Surinamese-Creoles in Suriname and the Netherlands was the adaptation of ritual performances significant to sacred ceremonies in the *Winti* religion into different music genres, public dance, and theatre performances, and in the fashion industry. I refer to the phenomenon of tribal art, tribal fashion, and Afro-music. Although this is a positive development, still, some of the older generation, especially those involved in the *Winti* religion, expressed concerns about the sacred rituals being abused for the sole purpose of personal fame or for commercial benefit.

This is a valid concern which needs further in-depth discussion in relation to the urgency of safeguarding cultural heritage and reviving cultural heritage that is subject to disappearance due to a lack of interest from the younger generation. It seems like there should be a way to find a proper balance between modernising cultural heritage while safeguarding the origins of rituals and practices. As was proven throughout my research, this has become a global concern with the need for a global debate to find common ground and continue to ensure a steady transmission of cultural heritage from generation to generation. This global concern is closely related to the challenges of committing to the alterations of Surinamese-Creole celebrations and cultural elements due to the influence of globalisation.

As I unpacked family-oriented celebrations, I gathered ethnographic data that was relevant to another sub-research question that I developed to guide me through my fieldwork. The question I am referring to is the following: How are these celebrations being embodied as a means of continuing the different inherited identities in creole families? This is where I revealed the agency of material culture and the way it helps to constitute the embodiment of the Surinamese-Creole identity during family-based celebrations. The role of spiritual language embedded in songs and dance styles proved to be inextricably linked to the facilitating of interactions with meta-persons during *Winti*-related ceremonies and also the transmission of oral stories to educate the descendants of a family about the lifestyle and lived experiences of their designated ancestors during the time of slavery.

The way food became the vehicle to facilitate a proper transfer from the past to the present during rituals of ancestral veneration was another important aspect of the benefit of using celebrations as the lens to closely observe the practices of the continuation and preservation of the Surinamese-Creole identity. The agency of food in this case was not just for consumption purposes, but more so to be

attributed with mediation affordances. It was not just for the nurturing of the body or reactive memory, but its agency was interpreted by Creoles as a tool to persuade the ancestral spirits for continuous guidance and protection in their everyday lives. Although the dishes were prepared with ingredients that were associated with memories of the past, the affordances of the dish were translated as an object that could activate the past and sustain elements of the past, in this case, the ancestral spirits, in the present, during the time of performing a specific ritual ceremony. This was a fascinating observation to me, and therefore I have decided that this would be a potential subject for further research of the Surinamese-Creole identity with the agency of food. In the next section, I address my final thoughts about the research and other topics that I encountered with a potential for extended research about the Surinamese-Creole identity.

9.6. Final thoughts and recommendations for follow-up research

Seeing that I completed this research also with the aim to contribute to ongoing debates about post-colonialism and decolonisation, I am concluding this research with a summary of themes that I identified during my research. These themes were not relevant in this stage of the research but contain proper potential to facilitate further research and continue to expand on the relevance of Surinamese-Creole culture for anthropological research. Below is a brief list of these topics and the recommended areas for study where they would become applicable.

9.6.1. *The relevance of the Creole identity in the face of Black awareness movements*

As I executed my research, I was confronted with some informants who were struggling to accept the recent development of movements advocating for an increase in Black awareness and the discarding or replacing of labels imposed on the Black community by the European colonisers. The label of being a Creole was one of the labels that became a topic of discussion in the process of decolonising existing labels and concepts of social life in post-colonial communities. In the Netherlands, the opinions about the term 'creole' are divided. Those against the term 'creole' believe that the term 'creole' is an invention of the European coloniser to create division and social class in the colonies to continue nurturing prejudice and colourism between the enslaved and the free Creoles.

These differences in opinions also lead to the younger generation of Surinamese-Creoles in the Netherlands being misinformed about the actual historical facts and judging the choices of the Creoles for a certain social life during colonial times without considering the differences in socio-economic and political eras. Some of these youth take on African names or prefer to embrace African traditions, and some prefer associating their Surinamese roots with the Maroon community, as they conclude that, because of their courage to flee the plantations and set up their own communities, they were the real heroes during the time of enslavement. The choices of Creoles during colonial times were made at a time when there was no prominent awareness about the importance of regarding Black people as human beings. As a matter of fact, this current Black awareness movement has become relevant because of the fact that Black people during enslavement were diminished to be less than human. Thus, judging some of the enslaved communities for their failure to resist and instead adapt to the Eurocentric norms and values as a way of surviving adversity seems hypocritical to me.

Further exploring the new developments about Black awareness can help investigate to what extent embracing the Surinamese-Creole identity still serves as a firm foundation for the younger generation in a world that is in constant change due to global social, cultural, economic, political, and technological developments. The same question can be asked of the older generation of Surinamese-Creoles who are forced to adapt to these rapid changes, which allows their cultural identity, as transmitted from generation to generation, to become the subject of heated debates about post-colonial identities.

To expand this notion of Black awareness in relation to the creole identity, another opportunity to facilitate further research could be to investigate whether it would be realistic to rewrite the history of

Surinamese-Creoles. This is a realistic question to ask, as some radical promoters of Black awareness claim that the history of the ancestors should be rewritten. They expect that by rewriting history, the influence of the European colonisers will be erased. Even though I am in support of rewriting the history of enslavement in Suriname, I remain of the opinion that this rewriting would never be achieved from a holistic point of view, if we want the rewriting to be with the aim of discarding the role of the European colonisers and their engagements with the enslaved community.

The validity of my question about the realistic aims to rewrite history has to do with the fact that throughout my own research, I came to realise that a significant aspect of Surinamese-Creole culture is intrinsically connected to the way socio-cultural life was constructed during colonial times by the Europeans. I was not able to explore the history of Surinamese-Creoles separate from the history of the European colonisers in Suriname. Their presence and their rules shaped what the enslaved community adapted to and made their own – elements such as the language, the design and the use of fabric for the *koto*, the adornments to combine with traditional clothing, the origins of typical Surinamese-Creole food, the use of certain material objects, the existence of family names that have references with typical European places and family names, and the list goes on. None of this can be discarded, and if we choose to rewrite the origins of these elements, what would then be the consequence of safeguarding the lived experiences and the life history of our ancestors? How would we honour them? In this case, what would be the relevance of the past in actualising the creole identity? Would it mean that the voices of the ancestors need to be silenced? Their lived experiences, unfortunately, are shaped and tainted through their engagements with the European colonisers and will therefore always represent the voice of the Europeans, as well.

9.7. Conclusion

When I embarked on the journey to do a PhD and do fieldwork about my own people, Surinamese-Creoles, I entered the field with my own perceptions of what it meant to be a creole person in Suriname. My perception was informed by my own lived experiences, what I read in history books, and what I was taught throughout my upbringing as a creole girl. As the quote at the beginning of this concluding chapter indicates, I had my own way of showcasing my creoleness and embracing my creole culture. Little did I know how much of my perception would be adjusted, how much of my lived experiences would be enriched, and how quickly I would be transported into another world of being Creole – one that remained close to me throughout my upbringing and was painted to me as a world associated with demonic occurrences. My main goal in embarking on this journey was to provide my own people a platform to share their own story. I offered myself as a vessel to express their experiences interpreted in their own way. Meaning giving and understanding socio-cultural phenomena from a non-Eurocentric point of view was the central focus as I processed my ethnographic data.

As my journey has come to an end, it has become paramount to me to ensure that the findings of my research become of value to existing debates about creolisation and that the ethnographic data that I have provided might contribute to the altering, rewriting, or complementing of existing studies that have been done about Surinamese-Creoles. Their side of the story is one that cannot be told in just a couple of studies. Their side of the story cannot be excluded from conversations regarding creolisation and post-colonialism. Their side of the story helps to provide a new perspective on these current topics. And their side of the story also deserves to be included in ongoing anthropological debates about identity, religion, the notion of rites of passage, and the anthropology of globalisation. If this becomes a reality, then I know my efforts have borne fruit, and a new horizon has come for my own people and for the ancestors who are ever present to provide guidance and lead the way.

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