

Iron Gongs and Singing Birds:
Paths of Migration and Acoustic Assemblages of Alterity
in the Former Dutch Colonial Empire

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Abstract

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This dissertation investigates the roles of nonhuman (object and animal) entities in auditory practices that construct selfhood, homeland, and memory for people in migration, in order to draw broader conclusions about the aural formation of subject-object relationships in colonial empires and in present-day Europe and the Caribbean. I focus on two sonic objects that have traveled with colonial and postcolonial migrants in the former Dutch colonial empire: (1) traditional Javanese gamelan (pitched percussion orchestra) instruments that traveled with indentured laborers and their descendants to Suriname and the Netherlands, and (2) Caribbean songbirds raised and trained for singing competitions held by Surinamese men in Suriname and the Netherlands. By attending ethnographically to historical and contemporary human encounters with these objects, I argue that individual sensory perception is shaped by historically formed societal paradigms of difference such as "ethnic plurality" in Suriname and "multiculturalism" in the Netherlands, and that such notions of difference perpetuate a colonial zoopolitics that in turn shapes contemporary relations between different groups of humans and between humans and the nonhuman world.

Chapter 1 is concerned with the notion of Javanese ethnicity in Suriname. Through historical inscriptions of colonial listening and ethnographic vignettes of contemporary Javanese performance in Suriname and the Netherlands, I investigate the formation and perpetuation of a sense of Javaneseness with origins in a migration of indentured laborers from the Dutch East

Indies to Suriname between 1890 and 1939. Chapter 2 recounts the development of gamelan music and Javanese-Surinamese culture during the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries by tracing specific sets of gamelan instruments in their circulations between Indonesia, Suriname, and the Netherlands. Chapter 3 provides a contrasting ethnographic exploration, namely of Caribbean songbirds who are bred, raised, and trained to compete in songbird competitions in Suriname and in Surinamese migrant communities in the Netherlands. Chapter 4 develops outwards from these ethnographic studies to pose larger questions about epistemologies of nature and culture that can be traced from Caribbean plantations to contemporary projects of cultural preservation and natural conservation and to discourses of resources, rights, (bio)diversity, sustainability, and environmental justice. Taken together, these chapters interrogate epistemologies and discourses that form culture and nature as separate realms, from the plantation colony to the present, from a perspective informed by aural and multisensory engagements with human and nonhuman difference.

Table of Contents

List of Figures	iii
Acknowledgments.....	v
Note on Translation and Transliteration	x
Introduction: Audibilities of Dutch Colonialism	1
0.1 Acoustemology, Aurality, and the Audibility of Colonialism.....	9
0.2 Colonial Knowledge and the Senses in the Dutch East Indies and Suriname	13
0.3 Suriname Context: Ethnicity and Politics.....	18
0.4 Netherlands Context: "Multiculturalism" and a Nascent Decolonial Critique	29
0.5 Ethnographic Approaches: Musical Instruments	34
0.6 Ethnographic Approaches: Birds and Animals.....	36
0.7 Chapter Summaries.....	40
Chapter 1: Sensing Ethnicity: Javanese Sounds, Spaces, Places, and Memories	46
1.1 Blauwgrond: Senses and Substances of Javaneseness.....	50
1.2 <i>Bersih Desa</i> in Blauwgrond.....	62
1.3 <i>Bersih Desa</i> in The Hague	69
1.4 A <i>Winti Prey</i>	79
Chapter 2: The Javanese Gamelan in Suriname and the Netherlands	86
2.1 Javanese Life on the Surinamese Plantation, 1890-1910.....	90
2.2 Emergence of the Javanese-Surinamese Gamelan, 1910s	94
2.3 Javanese Life off the Plantation, 1920s-1930s	99

2.4 "Peak Years" of the Gamelan in Suriname, 1940s-1960s.....	105
2.5 Javanese Surinamers in the Netherlands, 1970s-Present	113
2.6 Javanese Culture in Suriname, Present	120
2.7 How to Listen to a Javanese-Surinamese Gamelan	124
Chapter 3: <i>De Zangvogelwedstrijd</i> (The Songbird Competition).....	131
3.1 The Songbird Competition in Suriname	135
3.2 Interspecies Male Companionship	140
3.3 History of the Songbird Competition.....	144
3.4 Taxonomies of Birdsong.....	149
3.5 The Songbird Competition in Amsterdam.....	155
3.6 The Wild	161
3.7 The Peacock Dance.....	164
Chapter 4: Policy, Preservation, and the Plantation.....	171
4.1 Culture as a Resource: Colonial Law and Contemporary "Ethnic Plurality"	178
4.2 Nature as a Resource: Extraction, Conservation, Dispossession.....	193
4.3 Rights, (Bio)diversity, and Sustainability in Human and Nonhuman Worlds.....	204
Conclusion: Longing for a Past that Never Existed.....	211
Works Cited	216

List of Figures

Figure 1: Instruments of the Central Javanese gamelan.	4
Figure 2: Instruments of the Javanese-Surinamese gamelan.	4
Figure 3: Johannes Kojo, Amsterdam, 1883.	17
Figure 4: Gamelan gongs at the Colonial Exhibition in Amsterdam, 1883.	17
Figure 5: Map of Suriname.	18
Figure 6: "Difference races in Suriname" colonial postcard, c. 1900.	21
Figure 7: Image of ethnic plurality from the cover of a document from the Suriname Ministry of Planning and Development, 2005.	21
Figure 8: Image of ethnic plurality from a travel website.	22
Figure 9: Telesur ad for Suriname-Netherlands calling cards, 2015.	22
Figure 10: President Desi Bouterse at the songbird competition in 2012.	29
Figure 11: Javanese homes in Commewijne District.	57
Figure 12: A particularly lush Javanese garden around a driveway in Lelydorp.	57
Figure 13: Dhalang Pak Legimin and Gamelan Bangun Wiromo.	65
Figure 14: Pak Sapto takes a turn at the microphone.	68
Figure 15: The audience of Bersih Desa in Blauwgrond.	68
Figure 16: <i>Kembangan</i> (choreographed opening section) of jaran kepong; the gamelan ensemble is visible in the background.	72
Figure 17: <i>Mabuk</i> (trance section) of jaran kepong.	73
Figure 18: Pak Orlando gives a blessing over the slametan food.	75
Figure 19: Melvin Toemin, chairman of RBU, introduces the wayang.	75
Figure 20: The audience of Bersih Desa in The Hague.	76

Figure 21: <i>Kotomisi</i> dresses with batik designs, Republik.	82
Figure 22: Snake spirit possession.	83
Figure 23: Gamelan Orchestra at Mariënburg, c. 1915.	87
Figure 24: Javanese contract workers in Moengo, 1929-30.	100
Figure 25: Gamelan players at Mariënburg during the Royal Visit, 1955.	110
Figure 26: Dance performance in Lelydorp during the Royal Visit, 1955.	111
Figure 27: Still from <i>Javanen Uit Suriname</i> , 1987.	113
Figure 28: Members of Bangun Tresna Budaya, 2019.	116
Figure 29: Henny Kaseran with his gamelan instruments, Blauwgrond, 2019.	122
Figure 30: A twatwa (left), pikolet (center), and rowti (right).	132
Figure 31: A competition round in Paramaribo.	137
Figure 32: Birds and bleachers at the Cultuurtuin, Paramaribo.	139
Figure 33: Trophies, Paramaribo.	144
Figure 34: 1654 map of "Guiana, or the Wild Coast."	150
Figure 35: A training bout in the Bijlmer, Amsterdam.	157
Figure 36: <i>Tari merak</i> peacock dance, Temple Fair, Paramaribo.	167
Figure 37: Pak Sapto speaks at the ICH Roundtable Consultation.	173
Figure 38: A trancing jaran kepeng dancer, Mariënburg.	181
Figure 39: Acrobatics during the jaran kepeng.	182
Figure 40: Pak Sapto at home in Domburg with his collection of wayang puppets.	192
Figure 41: Pak Sapto's personal library of texts on Javanese culture and religion.	192

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I dedicate this work to my parents.

Note on Translation and Transliteration

Surinamers speak a plethora of languages. This work includes terms in Dutch, Javanese, and Sranan (also called Sranantongo or Surinamese Creole). The majority of italicized terms are Dutch; I have tried to note carefully when terms or quoted words are Javanese or Sranan, like so: *kampung* (Javanese: village). The names of Javanese foods, musical instruments and genres, and other objects of culture (such as *batik* and *slametan*) are Javanese words that I have not marked as such (this should be clear from context, and some of these words have entered the Dutch language as common nouns).

When Javanese words are transliterated into the Roman alphabet in Suriname or the Netherlands, it is typical to use a Dutch spelling. In a minority of cases, I have left Javanese words in their Surinamese/Dutch spellings because they are terms that actually differ in pronunciation between Suriname and Indonesia (for example, Javanese chicken soup is called *saoto* in Suriname and *soto* in Indonesia). In most cases, since this work is in English, I use spellings based on English-language pronunciation (for example, *wayang* instead of *wajang* and *kampung* instead of *kampoeng*).

Most interviews were conducted in Dutch and the translations are my own. Translations from oral histories, websites, archival documents, and scholarly works in Dutch are also my own unless otherwise noted.

Introduction: Audibilities of Dutch Colonialism

"This is the genuine (*echt juiste*) melody." Soerat Irodikromo, a practitioner of Javanese-Surinamese culture, tells me this as he guides me through a piece for gamelan, the Indonesian orchestra of pitched percussion instruments. There is a particular style of gamelan that is played by people of Indonesian descent in Suriname—a population descended from the 32,962 people who traveled from the Dutch East Indies to Suriname as labor migrants between 1890 and 1939—with its own style of instruments, performance, and repertoire. My first opportunity to play a set of Surinamese-style gamelan instruments with my own hands took place in March 2018, in the town of Moengo in eastern Suriname. I had traveled from the capital, Paramaribo, by car to the home of Soerat and Sandra Irodikromo, who both work as tailors and, in their free time, host a gamelan group which practices on instruments that the Irodikromos keep piled in their open-air shed. At present, their group, Gamelan Laras Ati, only rehearses sporadically and performs rarely; given the current economic conditions in Suriname and particularly in Moengo, not many people can afford to hire them for birthday parties or other events. Laras Ati has been, for a long time, the only operative gamelan group east of the Paramaribo area.

I visited the Irodikromos toward the end of an eight-month fieldwork period studying Javanese music and culture in Suriname (August 2017 through March 2018). Having spent the preceding months and years reading about and discussing the Surinamese gamelan and seeking opportunities to hear it, I had some notions of what to expect at the Irodikromos'. The instruments of Pak Soerat's gamelan set are comprised of simple wooden frames, painted brown, from which are suspended rectangular metal plates with embossed knobs, painted yellow. The players, sitting on chairs, strike these knobs with mallets. Unlike the *gamelan gedé* (large gamelan) ensembles of Central Javanese court traditions, there are no large, round hanging

gongs, and nothing cast in bronze. Since the first sets of instruments were built in Suriname in the early twentieth century, the metal parts of the instruments have been pounded out of scrap metal, typically iron. Pak Soerat explains, laughing, that this particular set was built decades ago with iron that belonged to the mining company Suralco, which built the town of Moengo in the early twentieth century and employed most of its residents: "[The iron] wasn't stolen! Just brought along home." Once liberated from Suralco's factories, the iron was used by a group of players who had relocated from elsewhere in Suriname, leaving their own gamelan ensembles behind, to construct a set of instruments for Moengo's first gamelan group. These instruments were later inherited by Pak Soerat and his group.

Pak Soerat claims that these are the best-sounding gamelan instruments in Moengo, and indeed, as we start to play I am struck by the remarkable beauty of the sound, completely different from the timbre of bronze that rings through the typical imaginary of the paradigmatic gamelan and characterizes most of the gamelan sets I have personally encountered in Indonesia, the United States, and the Netherlands. The iron itself has a flat, hollow sound, and the higher-pitched melodic instruments tinkle with sharp attacks and quickly fading tones. But the *bonang* (a larger instrument that serves an elaborating role), which I am playing, resonates warmly, deeply, and complexly. I attribute this in part to the wooden box structures that serve as both supporting frames and resonators for the gong instruments when constructed in the Surinamese style (a Central Javanese-style bonang is made of small round pot gongs, within which sound resonates). Here, the tones are amplified within the wooden box, which brings another, warmer element to the timbre of metal. The notes fade quickly from the initial attack, but then linger, softly, until they are damped. The punctuating intonations of the large gong, suspended over the biggest wooden box resonator and struck with a rubber mallet, seem to creep up from nothing

into a subtle but lingering tone, somehow simultaneously deep and hollow. Iron, less dense and less strong than bronze, more brittle and prone to rust, has a completely different timbre, and this serves as the basis for the distinct sound of the Surinamese gamelan and, as I investigate in this dissertation, its accrued layers of meaning.

According to Pak Soerat, the instruments themselves are also "*echt juiste*," genuine. He contrasts the genuineness of the Surinamese instruments and repertoire to the gamelan tradition in Indonesia—where his descendants come from, but which he has not yet visited in person. In Indonesia, he explains, consumption demands innovation; gamelan music is constantly "developed" (*ontwikkelen*) in creative ways for a paying public. In Suriname, no one makes money from gamelan music. The small population of Javanese people in the country—around 74,000 in the 2012 census (Algemeen Bureau voor de Statistiek 2013: 46)—and the recent economic downturn do not support cultural practice as a fulltime job. Rather, people learn to play gamelan and participate in other Javanese cultural activities as a hobby in their spare time. And over the decades, according to Pak Soerat, the music has stayed genuine. Here, in the rural districts of Suriname, "nothing changes," Pak Soerat says. "In Indonesia, it does."

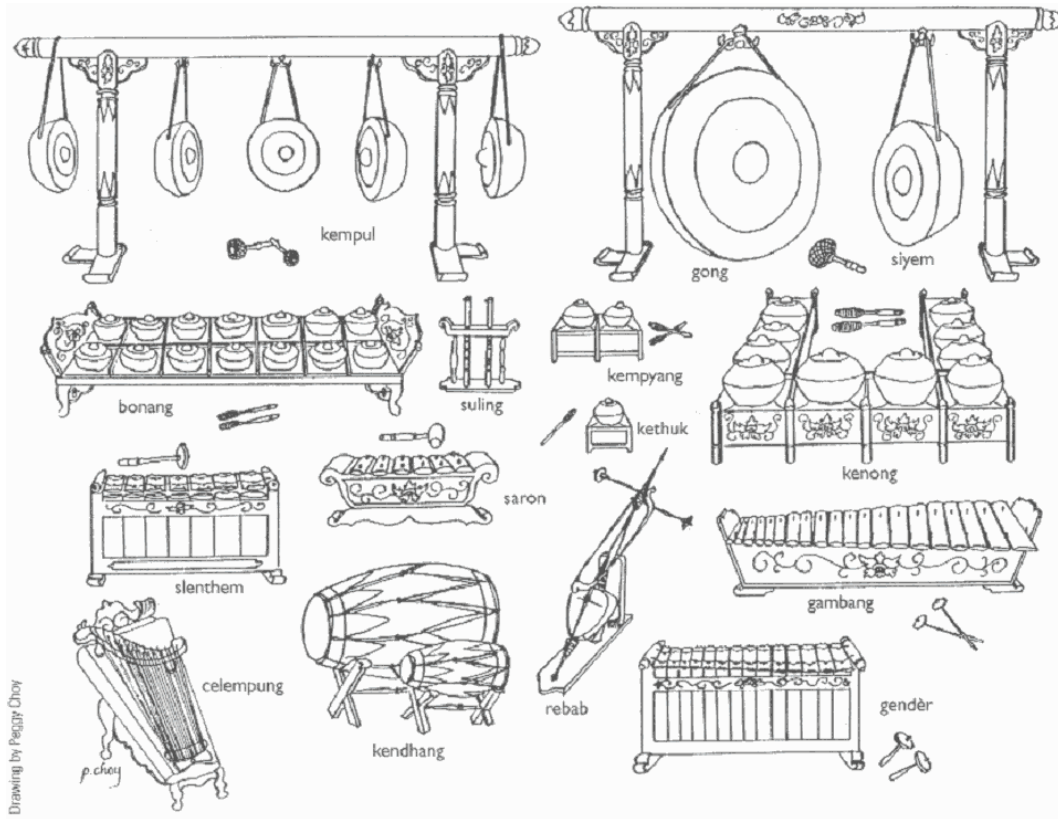


Figure 1: Instruments of the Central Javanese gamelan (drawing by P. Choy; Titon 1984: 235).

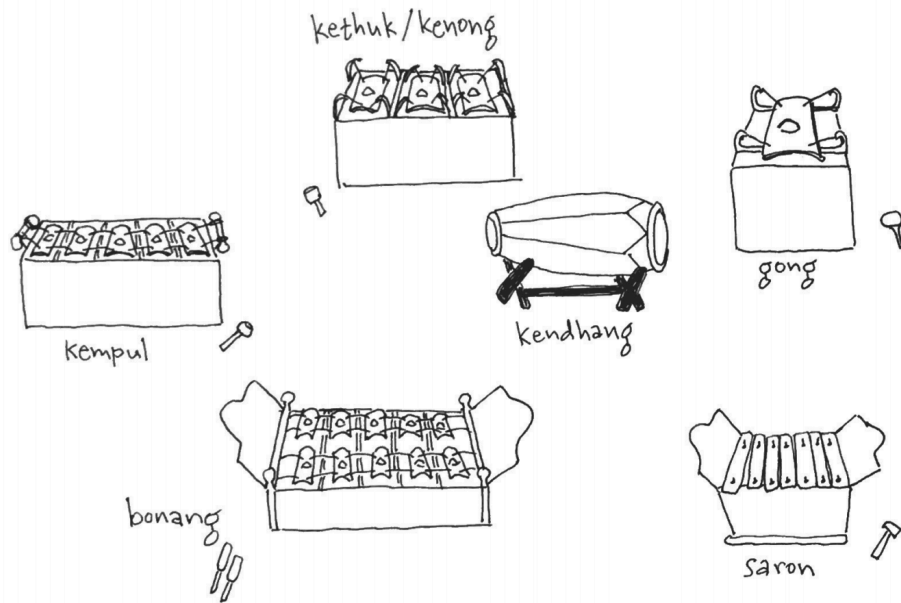


Figure 2: Instruments of the Javanese-Surinamese gamelan (drawing by the author).

I first came to Suriname to investigate this musical tradition, having heard that there were Javanese people and Javanese gamelans in this Dutch-speaking country of less than 600,000 people on the Caribbean coast of South America. When I arrived on my first exploratory trip in 2015, I discovered that there was indeed a living (if somewhat ailing) gamelan tradition among the country's population of ethnically Javanese people, as well as among Javanese-Surinamers who had migrated to the Netherlands.

The other thing that I discovered on that first trip to Suriname was its birds. For a small country, Suriname has a remarkably rich birdlife, with 760 species and subspecies recorded in 2014 (Spaans et al. 2016). Birdwatching brings international tourists on packaged trips to particular sites in the jungle interior, such as Brownsberg Nature Park and the Central Suriname Nature Reserve. During my time in Suriname tracing the gamelan tradition from Paramaribo to Commewijne District, Moengo, and other places in the country, I quickly began to notice birds everywhere. In Paramaribo, the calls of the omnipresent yellow-and-black *grietjebie* (Great kiskadee), which gives it its onomatopoeic name, and other urban birds in the "wild" of the city mingle with the songs of caged birds kept in gardens and on balconies, creating a soundscape that added to the affective experience, even before I opened my eyes in the morning, of being in a place that felt in many ways new and different from anywhere I had been before. I also noticed how frequently gardens and homes were marked by small square cages with tiny songbirds inside, bought from pet shops or trapped in the wild (a common hobby). Finally, but perhaps most remarkably, I saw that birds in these same small cages seemed to accompany men everywhere, in the public, work, leisure, and domestic spheres. The uniform cages, each with a rectangular base and arched dome, traveled around town with men on motorbikes, sat on the sidelines of soccer games, and accompanied men to work. Groups of men congregated on

corners of downtown Paramaribo with cars parked nearby, birdcages in the passenger seats and sitting on the hoods. And on Sunday mornings, dozens of these men and their birds gathered on the central Independence Square, in front of the President's palace near the Paramaribo waterfront, for a singing competition. These birds and their complex companionships with Surinamese men—both in Suriname and in the Netherlands, where they have been brought along on a human trajectory of postcolonial migration—piqued my scholarly interest and became a second object of my study.

Together, these two circulating sonic objects, Surinamese songbirds and the Surinamese gamelan, frame the questions, methodologies, and structure of this dissertation. In considering these two objects together, historically and ethnographically, I draw from both Fernando Ortiz's *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar* ([1947] 1995) and from Marilyn Strathern's notion of the "partial connection" (2004). Ortiz and Strathern, writing from very different vantage points, are both concerned with the method of comparison as a mode of pointing from particular objects of study to larger questions about the nature of history, knowledge, and concepts. In *Cuban Counterpoint*, Ortiz also investigates two objects, describing how two agricultural products, tobacco and sugar, are both entangled with Cuba's history of "discovery," human enslavement, foreign relations, and modern economy. Contrasting the two objects, Ortiz posits sugar and the industry that exploits it as a foreign incursion on Cuba, a parasite serving foreign interests, shaped by power and foreign capital, and producing the figure of the slave. Meanwhile, tobacco is indigenous, a "voluntary offering of nature" that shaped a liberated Cuban middle class and produced the figure of the simple but enlightened Cuban countryman. "Tobacco is a magic gift of the savage world," Ortiz writes; "sugar is a scientific gift of civilization" (1990: 46). Together, these "two most important figures in the history of Cuba" (ibid.: 4) have shaped Cuba's history,

economy, and its constitutive paradoxes, counterposing the indigenous and the imported, intelligence and power, freedom and control, folklore and science, the revolutionary and the reactionary. Cuba, as a nation and as an idea, is the relation between these conceptual counterpoints.¹

In this dissertation, circulating gamelan instruments and Caribbean songbirds constitute a tobacco-sugar contrast that points to larger conclusions about the mutual formation and relation of what has been understood as the cultural and the natural, linking colonial history to the present. The gamelan of Central Java has long been a paradigmatic object of human aesthetic practice, described, measured, and appreciated by colonial Dutch scholars in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries² and thoroughly studied by contemporary North American ethnomusicologists.³ Birds have figured prominently as sounding elements of tropical landscapes in travelogues of European exploration and scholarship over the last few centuries (e.g. Stedman [1790] 1988; Buffon 1770), and as symbols or agents of the nonhuman world in multispecies anthropology and "posthuman" theory of the last decades (Feld 1982; Haraway 2008; Kohn 2013). Like tobacco and sugar, these two objects symbolize a larger conceptual dichotomy, pointing to what modernity has considered to be the separate realms of the "cultural" and the

¹ It is also relevant that, as Lisa Lowe points out, Ortiz connected the production of both tobacco and sugar to "people from all four quarters of the globe," including Asian contract workers, who came to the New World, by choice or by force, to participate in these industries. For Ortiz, sugar, linking histories of colonial settlers, native peoples, and enslaved labor, was "'mulatto' from the start" (Lowe 2015: 1). Further, both sugar and tobacco illustrated New World histories of what Ortiz termed "transculturation," a concept intended to "grasp the reciprocally transformative character of cultural encounters under colonialism, as opposed to the unidirectional concepts of 'acculturation' and 'cultural contact' prevailing in British and U.S. anthropology in the 1930s" (Coronil 1996: 66).

² Such as Groneman 1888, 1890; Brandts Buys and Brandts Buys-Van Zijp 1929; and Kunst [1949] 1973.

³ See, for example, Hood 1958; Becker 1980; Sutton 1993; Brinner 1995, 2008; Perlman 2004; Spiller 2008; Benamou 2010; and others.

"natural." Like Ortiz's, the Javanese gamelan/Caribbean songbird contrast can be extended to encompass other conceptual contrasts that constitute ways of imagining and understanding the world: the civilized and the wild, Asia and the Americas, the ancient and the always-present—and, as well, humanly organized and not humanly organized sound.

In what follows, my goal is to deconstruct these conceptual dichotomies while also understanding the power of constructed concepts to organize collective worlds and individual perceptions and experiences. I do this by attending to how these objects circulate and transform, accruing layers of human meaning along their travels. I observe how they are "transcultured" (to again borrow from Ortiz) through their respective circulations from Indonesia to Suriname, from Suriname to the Netherlands, and through their interactions with historically contingent systems of listening, knowing, and conceiving of human and nonhuman difference. From Strathern, I take additionally the notion that comparison always entails "partial connections" that reveal the most in their discrepancies—the places where two objects or systems of knowing the world refuse to line up with and behave like one another (Strathern 2004). Such instances point to the incompleteness of systems of analysis and their failure to encompass the world of things, experiences, and relations. Rather than assuming the validity of concepts (such as "nature" and "culture") to systematically explain the possibilities for how certain types of objects can "behave," my aim is to follow these two objects in their complex relations with human practice, perception, and meaning, in order to scrutinize contingent notions of nature and culture that have long been used to understand them. In other words, attending to the multiple histories and ambiguous meanings of objects (such as the "genuine" instruments of the Surinamese gamelan) can lead to a more complex and historicized understanding of "how ideas behave" (Strathern 1992: xvii). In the next sections, I elaborate the theoretical frameworks (including

"acoustemology" [Feld 2015, 1996], the "acoustic assemblage" [Ochoa 2014], and the audibility of colonialism), geopolitical contexts (Suriname and the Netherlands), and ethnographic approaches (namely to musical instruments and multispecies relations) that I draw from to do this in the chapters that follow.

0.1 Acoustemology, Aurality, and the Audibility of Colonialism

This dissertation locates sonic practices involving gamelan instruments and birds in Suriname and the Netherlands within a broader investigation into the lingering effects of colonial histories that shape perceptions—including aural and other modes of sensory perception—of human difference and of relations between what are perceived as the separate realms of the human (culture) and the nonhuman (nature). The theoretical frameworks of my study are shaped by a genealogy of ethnomusicology scholarship that includes Steven Feld's acoustemology (Feld 2015, [1982] 2012, 1996), Ana María Ochoa Gautier's investigations into aurality and the acoustic (Ochoa 2014, 2016), and recent studies of the audibility of colonialism and coloniality (Radano & Olaniyan 2016; Steingo & Sykes 2019). I aim to contribute to these discussions not by merely providing an illustrative case study, but by historically and ethnographically tracing new links between sound as a way of knowing, subject-object relations reproduced and challenged in acts of listening, and a history of producing and understanding culture, nature, and difference that still resonates in the former Dutch colonial empire and the Netherlands today.

Steven Feld's concept of acoustemology posits "sound as a way of knowing" and frames inquiry into "what is knowable, and how it becomes known, through sounding and listening" (Feld 2015: 12). Thinking about sound in terms of acoustemology emphasizes the role of sounding and listening in everyday life (as opposed to a bounded and privileged realm of what is considered musical) and understands knowledge as relational, situational, and experiential (rather

than a matter of "truth" to be discovered). According to Feld, doing ethnography of sound entails "listening to histories of listening" that shape accepted notions of place, voice, human difference, and relations with the nonhuman world (ibid.: 19). This perspective situates the anthropology of sound within a broader anthropology of the senses, concerned with understanding sensory perception as modes of everyday, experiential knowing that also have their own contingent and particular histories (Porcello et al. 2010; Seremetakis 1994; Taussig 1993).

Taking a cue from Feld, in this dissertation, my primary goal is not to provide a case study in musical diversity; nor an example of a particular cultural relationship with nature in the form of Caribbean birds; nor a systematic description of the aesthetics of Javanese music in a Surinamese context. Rather, I am concerned with representing a Javanese-Surinamese way of engaging with and listening to the gamelan and its links to a particular Javanese-Surinamese history of colonial migration and plantation labor. Likewise, I am less concerned with describing and analyzing the songs and sounds of particular birds than with understanding sounding relations between birds and men that shape everyday experiences of Surinamese life and masculinity, in Suriname and in migrant communities in the Netherlands.

To do this, I draw also from Ana María Ochoa Gautier's investigations into aurality and archives of the acoustic, using in particular her theoretical tool of the "acoustic assemblage" (Ochoa 2014: 22-23; see also Steingo 2016: 125-26). Ochoa formulates the acoustic assemblage as "the mutually constitutive and transformative relation... generated between entities that *hear*, notions of sonorous *producing* entities, and notions of the type of *relationship* between them" (Ochoa 2014: 23, emphasis in original). This formulation of a sonic act places emphasis on hearing as the starting point for a network of relations that involves not just a sound but rather a "notion" of what a "sonorous producing entity" might be, and a "notion" of a possible

relationship between the source of a sound (i.e. the other) and the listener (i.e. the self). Acts, or even imaginaries, of sound thus always draw from and produce (or potentially challenge) the listening subject's conceptions of the self, the other, and the relation between them in ways that "link sound to history, ecology, and cosmology" (Steingo 2016: 23) and are thus entangled with "the very definition of life" (Ochoa 2014: 5). Such a network of relations is generated around any subject who hears, and all entities can participate in multiple networks at the same time, producing a "radical openness" (Steingo 2016: 125) of relations that translates across domains of life and challenges the categories that are imposed on lived experience. Instead, within this openness is the potential to "hear the traces of a fundamentally different acoustic relation" (ibid.: 126) and thus an alternative understanding of the perceiving self, the perceptible other, and the relationship between them.

In her 2014 monograph *Aurality*, Ochoa uses the tool of the acoustic assemblage to investigate inscriptions of sound and listening in archives of European exploration, scholarship, and governance in Colombia. Ochoa explicitly problematizes the historical formation of the boundary between the cultural and the natural by investigating European and indigenous modes of perceiving similar types of sounds—modes that configure the boundary and the relation between the two realms differently. Building on Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's theorization of an indigenous "multinaturalism" in contrast to Western "multiculturalism" (Viveiros de Castro 1998, 2004a, 2004b, 2014), Ochoa proposes an "acoustic multinaturalism" that posits a modern Western constitution of the realms of nature and culture as one historically contingent notion among other possible notions (Ochoa 2016).

In this dissertation, I do not posit Surinamese or Javanese-Surinamese ways of listening as radically different alternatives to modern Western ones in their modes of understanding the

realms of nature and culture and the relation between them. Rather, I aim to examine the formation of notions of these realms in a context that is deeply shaped by plantation colonialism and the modern epistemologies that it entailed. I do this by following my two sonic objects through various acoustic assemblages that entail different listeners and relations with the cultural and the natural, always already contextualized by this plantation history. I investigate historical and contemporary acoustic assemblages that produce notions of the relation between the gamelan and Javanese people (i.e. what modernity has termed "culture") and acoustic assemblages that produce notions of human relations with birds (i.e. what modernity has termed "nature"). The findings are that modern, post-plantation notions of culture and nature are ambiguous, porous, and historically contingent—and thoroughly entangled with particular ways of understanding the world that connect plantation economies with contemporary projects of resource extraction, (natural) conservation, and (cultural) preservation.

With these findings, I aim to contribute to emerging explorations in ethnomusicology and sound studies of the lingering audibility of colonialism in contemporary life—for example, those collected in Ronald Radano and Tejumola Olaniyan's 2016 *Audible Empires* and Gavin Steingo and Jim Sykes's 2019 *Remapping Sound Studies*. The studies in these two collections investigate—speaking generally—colonial formations of subject-object relations between different groups of humans and between humans and the nonhuman world, in various places and contexts, that linger audibly in notions of music, voice, tonality, melody, noise, art, tradition, authenticity, and of types of sounds that are civilized, popular, degenerate, or inhuman. In this dissertation, I explore how colonial modes of hearing human difference and the natural world linger in contemporary notions of ethnicity and migranhood; in national paradigms of "ethnic plurality" and "multiculturalism"; and in ideologies that construct nature and culture as types of

resources to be extracted or protected. I investigate how lingering colonial epistemologies shape contemporary projects and practices—even those carried out with good intentions—that often end up dispossessing and disempowering groups of humans in ways that retrace the same plantation "zoopolitics" (Ochoa 2014, 2015; Llored 2014).

0.2 Colonial Knowledge and the Senses in the Dutch East Indies and Suriname

This dissertation argues that Dutch colonial scholarship, policy, and practice formed not only a notion of the separated realms of the cultural and the natural, but, as well, an understanding of its colonial territories and subjects in Asia and the Caribbean as incommensurate places containing two different kinds of colonial others: one associated with culture, and the other with nature. While the Dutch East Indies was seen as a place of ancient human culture and tradition (including musical), the Dutch Caribbean was viewed as a place of wild nature, uninhabited or sparsely occupied by humans detached from particular histories. In the Dutch East Indies, inscriptions of music and sound—particularly the tones of the Central Javanese court gamelan—are woven throughout a vast archive of exploration, scholarly knowledge, and popular writing, proliferating especially in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁴ In *Music in Java*, for example, Jaap Kunst traces mentions of Indonesian music and musical instruments in Dutch and other European chronicles of exploration starting in the sixteenth century, when Sir Francis Drake described the gamelan as “country-musick, which though it were of a very strange kind, yet the sound was pleasant and delightfull” (Drake 1580, quoted in Kunst 1973: 5). At the center of the Dutch East Indies archive is Java, and particularly Central Java, where the Dutch encountered, dominated, and sometimes worked together with the Sultanates of Yogyakarta (Yogya) and Surakarta (Solo). These Sultanates were associated with

⁴ This archive is documented, for example, in Brom 1930; Nieuwenhuys 1972; Moore 1978; Van Goor 2000; Honings & Van Zonneveld 2015; Kunst [1949] 1973.

centuries-old forms of pre-colonial power and cultural tradition, and helped to form the Dutch imaginary of an ancient, royal, and authentic (pre-Islamic) Indonesia, locating Java as the cultural, historical, and political center of the archipelago and as "a privileged site of cultural authenticity" (Pemberton 1994: 68).

Meanwhile, on the other side of the world, Suriname stood as another, contrasting figuration in the Dutch imagination, a snapshot of dense jungle nature seemingly devoid of human history. Narratives of expeditions in Suriname such as those of John Gabriel Stedman (1790), Pierre Jacques Benoit (1839), Arnold Borret (2003 [from unpublished writing dated 1878]), Herman van Cappelle (1903), and A.J. van Stockum (1904) offered narratives and sometimes drawings of Suriname plantations and wilderness, entangling plantation landscapes, jungle nature, and the bodies and behaviors of the indigenous and Afrodescendant people who occupied these realms. These groups of humans and their practices were typically depicted as part of the tropical nonhuman realm. If an Orientalist image of Indonesia constructed the gamelan as sonic evidence of a particular (imminent, ancient) human culture, then these early images of encounters in Suriname constructed Afrodescendant and indigenous practices, including sonic ones, as being primarily concerned with religious ritual and other forms of survival and practical coping with harsh nature in daily life.

In the summer of 1883, humans, cultural artifacts, and elements of nonhuman nature were brought from both the Dutch East Indies and Suriname to the International Colonial and Export Exhibition in Amsterdam, where they were used to set up immersive exhibits that emulated everyday village life in the colonies for European visitors to observe. The "Indies Park," a main attraction of the fair, featured a *kampung* (Javanese: village) of houses in various traditional styles from Java, Sumatra, and Sulawesi; a small lake with a bamboo bridge; a greenhouse with

live plants from the tropics; and, at the center, a small open pavilion with a Javanese gamelan, where performances of music and dance occurred regularly and filled the park with the resonances of pitched bronze gongs. To these sounds, thirty-eight people brought from Java, Sunda, and Sumatra lived in the structures of the Indies Park for five months, going about some strange semblance of life in the archipelago, tending live buffalo and gardens and carving furniture for the benefit of onlookers. The Indies Park brought familiar images and ideas from the Netherlands' collective colonial imaginary of the Dutch East Indies to actual, sensory encounter for the continental European. A review of the Exhibition described the sonic magic of the live gamelan:

[From the pavilion] reverberates the secretive music of the gamelan, a mysterious, plaintive drone, which mimics the natural sounds of the Indies forest. Dancers dressed in dark brown *sarong* [Javanese: wrap skirts], waving their thin *slendang* [Javanese: scarves], weave back and forth to the strange beat, and when the gamelan occasionally plays in the evening, one can picture a Javanese night and imagine oneself transported under glorious blue-green foliage or a copse of slim palms. (*Officiële Wegwijzer* 1883: 13)

In contrast, the "Suriname Natives" exhibit, which, unlike the Indies Park, received no government funding and required visitors to pay a supplemental admission, was set up in a remote corner of the expansive Exhibition. This smaller exhibit, in an enclosed tent with painted panoramas of jungle and plantation landscapes lining the walls, housed twenty-eight people brought by ship from Suriname, including indigenous Kaliña and Lokono (then called Caribs and Arawaks), Maroons, Creoles, and one Hindustani woman from among the earliest groups of laborers from British India. Like the residents of the Indies Park, the Surinamese "natives" dressed in their respective traditional clothing and built their own homes in the exhibit out of materials brought from Suriname. They also engaged in woodworking and other crafts, and were contextualized by some artifacts that the exhibitors collected in Suriname, which included drums

of African and indigenous origins alongside water jugs and carved wooden stools. Unlike in the Indies Park, there were not staged musical performances in the Suriname exhibit, but rather the various drums and other instruments were artifacts of everyday life, incorporated into whatever semblance of daily practice the Surinamers were able to recreate in the exhibit.

While, in the Indies Park, culture—in the form of textiles and woodwork, architecture, food, and especially music, puppetry, and dance—was on display, in the Suriname exhibit it was bodies that the media described in detail, from the various skin tones to stature, facial features, and bodily behaviors of the respective groups. Scholars of various types also attended the Exhibition, gathering physiological data and making scientific photographs of these representatives of rarely encountered groups from the Surinamese interior without having to travel farther than the Rijksmuseum grounds (Wijngaarde 2000). Scientific photographs taken at the Indies Park and the Suriname Natives exhibit give evidence of the differential ways that these two groups and their bodies and practices were perceived by Europeans. A portfolio by the French researcher R. Bonaparte frames the bodies of Surinamers as scientific objects against plain white backgrounds, giving head and body measurements of each individual human who was on display (Bonaparte 1884). In contrast, archival photographs taken at the Indies Park similarly isolate specimens against a white background for scientific measurement and comparison, but this time the specimens are the instruments of the gamelan. The difference in these two *objects* of study—in the one case, musical instruments; in the second, human bodies—is vast and telling. From the Dutch East Indies, Europeans could learn about culture and cultural difference. From the Dutch West Indies, Europeans could learn about human nature and natural difference. Through both, Europeans assembled an image of their own cultural and natural history, difference, and superiority.

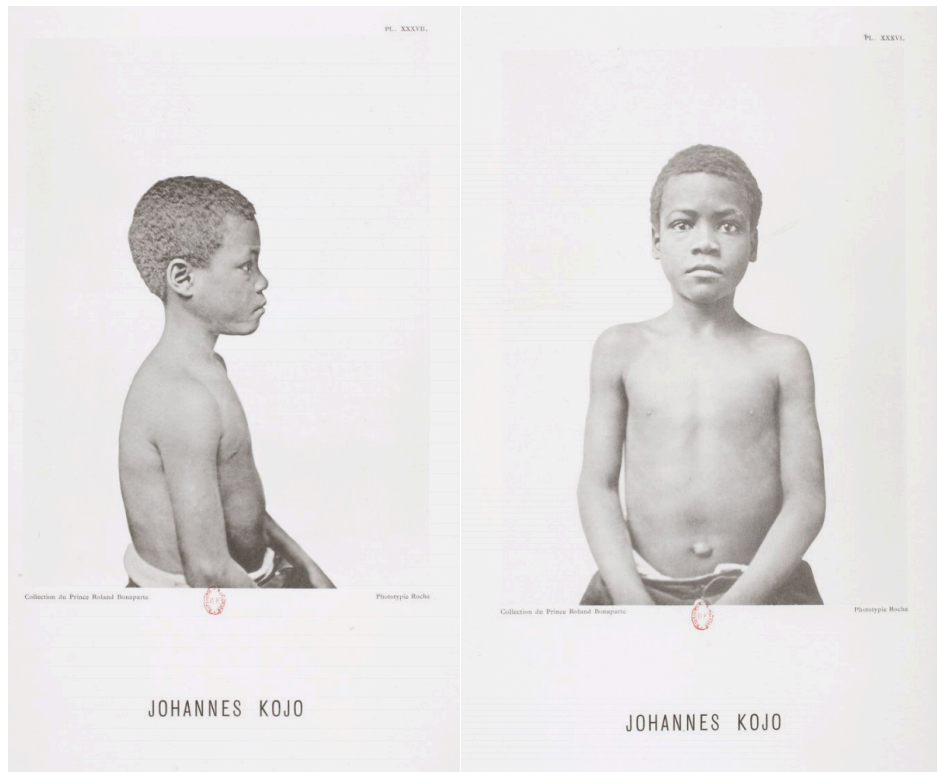


Figure 3: Johannes Kojo, Amsterdam, 1883, M. Hisgen (in Bonaparte 1884).

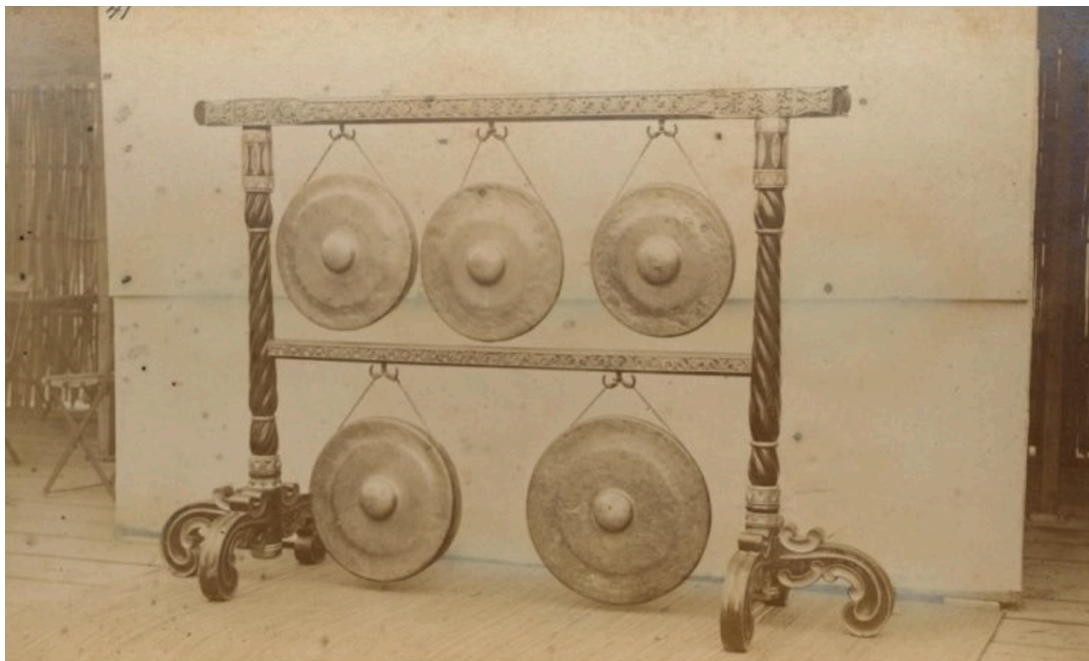


Figure 4: Gamelan gongs at the Colonial Exhibition in Amsterdam, 1883, P. Oosterhuis (Nederlands Fotomuseum Rotterdam).

Shortly after this 1883 Exhibition, in 1890, the first indentured laborers were brought from the Dutch East Indies to Surinamese plantations to replace enslaved Afrodescendants after the abolition of slavery in 1863. Picking up at this moment in history in Chapter 2, I argue in this dissertation that Europeans' incommensurate conceptions of colonial subjects in the East and West Indies—the former as people of culture, the latter as people of nature—emerged from an entanglement of colonial scholarship, sensory perception, and policies of domination of people and lands. This incommensurability became particularly acute when Indonesians and other groups of Asians were brought as laborers to the Caribbean and were governed side by side with Afrodescendants and Amerindians. In this dissertation, I argue that notions of human difference that emerged from this colonial conundrum still linger in postcolonial policies and practices that attempt to manage human activity and elements of the nonhuman world in Suriname and the Netherlands today.

0.3 Suriname Context: Ethnicity and Politics



Figure 5: Map of Suriname (wikipedia.org)

Suriname is a small country located at the peripheries of a number of large geopolitical entities that carve the contemporary world into regions: the Caribbean, mainland South America, Amazonia. It is part of a continental mainland while also operating as a figurative island, and in many senses its closest historical, economic, and cultural connections are with its former colonial metropole, the Netherlands. It is impossible to reach any other country without crossing water or the Amazon, and more airlines make the nine-hour flight between Paramaribo and Amsterdam than between Paramaribo and any other destination. These expensive direct flights are often sold out well in advance, filled by passengers who travel in either direction to visit family or conduct business, and they also transport mail and imported products in both directions.

Throughout this dissertation, I refer to Suriname as Caribbean.⁵ The "notoriously fuzzy" boundaries of the Caribbean region (Trouillot 1992: 19) are conducive to encompassing disparate national histories, connected by European (Dutch, British, French, Spanish, Portuguese) domination and exploitation. The Caribbean has been historically constructed by various European tellings of its history that served to claim ownership of its territories and resources (Palmié & Scarano 2011: 2). In the twentieth century, the history of the region has been rewritten by official decolonization processes and by anticolonial scholarship, such as works by C.L.R. James and Eric Williams (Trinidad and Tobago); Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire (Martinique); Elsa Goveia and Walter Rodney (Guyana); Fernando Ortiz (Cuba); Douglas Hall and Sylvia Wynter (Jamaica); and Arturo Morales Carrion and Arturo Alfonso Schomburg (Puerto Rico). In Suriname, Anton de Kom similarly produced an anticolonial history that renarrativized its

⁵ This dissertation does not touch on the six Caribbean islands that remain part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. At present, Aruba, Curaçao, and Sint Maarten are autonomous constituent countries of the Kingdom, while Bonaire, Sint Eustatius, and Saba are special municipalities of the Netherlands. The (ongoing) colonial histories of these islands have received even less scholarly attention than that of Suriname, but are outside the scope of this work.

particular history of plantation colonialism, Afrodescendant enslavement, and Asian indentureship, though his only book, *Wij Slaven van Suriname* (We Slaves of Suriname; 1934), has never been translated to English and has thus not entered the canon of Caribbean anticolonial historiography.

Caribbean histories are united in their heterogeneity, constructed through disparate but overlapping colonialisms and series of unfree and "free" labor migrations. In many Caribbean countries, these historical processes have produced social fabrics characterized by human difference, which, in contemporary times, is typically understood under the rubric of "ethnicity." Ethnicity in Suriname is uniquely Surinamese, but simultaneously formed by contingent notions of human difference in the Caribbean, Latin America, the colonial Dutch empire, and contemporary Europe. In this dissertation, I scrutinize Suriname's "ethnic plurality" paradigm of human difference primarily by investigating the historical and contingent formation of the ethnic group known as Javanese. First, here, I briefly discuss Suriname's other ethnic groups, mutually formed and inextricable from its history of colonial labor migrations. While taking account of historian Anouk de Koning's (2011a) critique that scholars of the Caribbean and of Suriname in particular focus far too much on ethnicity, serving to reinscribe its exaggerated importance in Surinamese/Caribbean life, I also believe that Suriname's ethnic groups and its celebrated "ethnic plurality" as a whole deserve scholarly scrutiny as constructed, relational, and historically contingent notions that deeply affect individual experiences of everyday life.



Figure 6: "Difference races in Suriname" colonial postcard, c. 1900 (Tropenmuseum)



Figure 7: Image of ethnic plurality from the cover of a document from the Suriname Ministry of Planning and Development, 2005 (Tjon Sie Fat 2009: 26)



Figure 8: Image of ethnic plurality from a travel website (exotischereizensuriname.nl)

Figure 9: Telesur ad for Suriname-Netherlands calling cards, 2015

As depicted in Figures 6 through 9, images that index Suriname as a nation often show smiling faces and traditional clothing-clad bodies that represent its various ethnic groups (*bevolkingsgroepen*). According to the most recent 2012 census, these groups officially include (starting with the largest percentage) Hindustani, Maroon, Creole, Javanese, Mixed, Indigenous, Chinese, Caucasian/White, and Other. Here I give a brief overview of the meanings of each of these descriptors in a Surinamese context.⁶

"Creole" initially meant people of European descent who were born in the colony, as it did in British and Spanish colonies in the Americas (Khan 2004: 7 on Trinidad; Wade 2010: 27 and Cañizares-Esguerra 2007: 155 on Latin America), and later evolved to connote mixed African and European descent. In Suriname, "Creole" now generally means the descendants of enslaved Africans who were freed upon the abolition of slavery, given a Dutch-language and Christian education, and who mostly settled in and around Paramaribo (versus its related but somewhat different meanings in Jamaica, Trinidad, Guyana, French Guiana, and the French Antilles; see Cañizares-Esguerra 2007: 75). As in most of Latin America, the Creole ethnic group in Suriname is associated with the nationalist movement that led to Suriname's independence, and with business entrepreneurship or civil service, economic success, and the country's political and social elite. Creoles are also sometimes glossed as "Afro-Surinamese" or just "Surinamese."

⁶ The terms and meanings of each of these groups have shifted over time, as has the overarching term for such a taxonomy of human difference. Since Suriname's first census in 1921, censuses have employed the terms *landaard* (something like "national character"), *etnische groep* (ethnic group), and *ras* (race). While the currently prevalent term, *bevolkingsgroep*, translates to the more neutral "population group," I translate this as "ethnicity" because it follows similar "naturalizing" logics that link and conflate notions of culture and human nature (such as heritage, genealogy, biology, country, landscape, and character) in modes further elaborated by Wade (2002), Omi & Winant (1994), and others.

Being Creole in Suriname is defined in part through its contrast with the country's other Afrodescendant population, the Maroons.⁷ While Creoles are generally urban, Christian, Dutch-speaking, and involved in modern economic pursuits, Maroons, who are descended from enslaved Africans who fled plantations starting the eighteenth century, are generally seen as primitive jungle-dwellers who still speak African languages and practice African religions. (In actuality, many Maroons live in cities and even in the Netherlands, or have otherwise adopted modern ways of life while dwelling in the interior.) The presence of Maroons connects Suriname to other mainland South American countries that border the Amazon jungle region, where people fleeing enslavement could hide and build communities that persist to the present (some islands, like Jamaica, have Maroon groups as well). Suriname's Maroons include six groups: the Saramaka (also spelled Saramacca or Saamaka), Ndjuka (also known as Okanisi or Aukaners), Matawai, Kwiinti (or Kwinti), Paramaka (also spelled Paramacca or Paamaka), and Aluku (also known as Boni). According to the 2012 census, there are over 117,000 Maroons in Suriname.

Part of what makes Suriname's heterogeneous social fabric typically Caribbean is the presence of descendants of laborers from Asia (see Lowe 2015, Khan 2004, and Beckles 1995 on South Asian descendants in the British Caribbean; in music, Peter Manuel [2000] writes about Indian music in Trinidad and Guyana, and Andrew F. Jones studies Chinese music producers in Jamaica). Around the abolition of slavery in 1863, indentured laborers were brought to Suriname from China (in 1853), British India (in 1873), and the Dutch East Indies (in 1890). This has resulted in significant populations of Chinese, "Hindustani," and Javanese Surinamers, whose ancestors' disparate histories of origin and arrival were gathered and homogenized under these

⁷ While "Maroons" is a disputed term and it is preferable to call each Maroon group by its own distinct name, the term is still widely used in Suriname and in scholarship on Suriname to refer to members of these groups in general (see Campbell 2012: 27 for further discussion of the problematic existing terminology for Maroon groups).

labels. These groups are sometimes still referred to as Asian "immigrant" populations in Suriname.

According to the 2012 census, there are over 20,000 indigenous Amerindians in Suriname. Indigenous or Amerindian groups in Suriname include the Kaliña (Caribs) and Lokono (Arawaks) in the coastal region (lowlands), and the Trio (Tirio or Tareno), Wayana, and smaller settlements of at least twelve other Amazonian indigenous peoples in the south of the country near its border with Brazil (highlands). The concerns of Amerindians are often conflated with and subsumed under the concerns of the much larger group of Maroons, despite the two groups' very different histories. Suriname's Amerindian groups have generally received little scholarly attention (though see Brightman 2016).

A final ethnic category I mention here is "Mixed" (*Gemengd*). Mixed may seem a catchall category that would be a popular identification in a country with many ethnic groups that inevitably intermarry, but in Suriname it actually means something very specific—not just general hybridity or fluidity among ethnic identifications, but rather a particular formula of ethnic inheritance traceable back to a specific instance of the intermarriage of individuals who were each firmly tied to one of Suriname's main ethnic groups, usually with Creole in the mix (for example, a Creole father and a Chinese mother, or a Creole mother and a Hindustani father). Thus, "Mixed" still evokes discrete, bounded ethnic identities rather than a fluid hybridity. Similarly, other terminologies of mixing in the Americas—such as *mestizo*, *mestizaje*, *mestiçagem*, and mulatto—each have varied and specific meanings that reflect particular paradigms of understanding human difference and its possibilities for changing over time (see Khan 2004 on Trinidad and Wade 2009, 2010 on Latin America).

Ethnicity and ethnic divisions and tensions are intertwined with Suriname's colonial history and its postcolonial politics (for example, through its system of ethnically aligned political parties, which I discuss in reference to the Javanese in Chapter 2). At points in this dissertation, I refer to economic conditions and political instability in Suriname that, due to the constraints of space and scope, are necessarily left somewhat vague. Here, while remaining brief, I want to give some context regarding Suriname's postcolonial politics, especially considering developments that unfolded during the writing of this dissertation.

In formerly colonized nation-states, colonial history and postcolonial politics are inextricably intertwined. Suriname gained its independence from the Netherlands in 1975. While the transference of power was peaceful, the event was surrounded by ethnic tensions and violence and general instability, which instigated the mass migration of many Surinamers across ethnic groups to the former metropole (one estimate holds that one-third of the country's population relocated to the Netherlands in the 1970s and 1980s; BBC 2018). Independence was followed by decades of political and economic instability, which I summarize here very briefly.

In 1980, a violent military coup positioned Desi Bouterse, then a sergeant, as leader of the country, a position he held until 1988 and again briefly in 1990. On December 7, 1982, in the middle of the night, fifteen prominent critics of the military regime (some of whom were associated with a counter-coup attempt) were gathered from their beds and brought to Fort Zeelandia (which served as Bouterse's headquarters), and, in the following days, assassinated. In this event, ethnicity was entangled with political violence, as many of the critics of the Creole-led military regime were associated with Hindustani or other non-Afrodescendant political parties and ethnic backgrounds. The assassinations initiated another wave of migration to the Netherlands, especially of intellectuals and known opponents of the regime. Also in response to

these events, the Netherlands eventually withdrew its large aid package from Suriname, causing Bouterse's government to seek foreign aid and trade agreements with other countries such as Cuba and Libya; there was also an increase in drug trafficking, which has contributed to Suriname's informal economy over the last decades (Boerboom & Oranje 1992; Hoefte 2014).

In 1986, the *Binnenlandse Oorlog* (Interior War) between the Surinamese military (headed by Bouterse) and the Surinamese Liberation Army (headed by Bouterse's former bodyguard Ronnie Brunswijk, an Ndjuka Maroon) took place in east Suriname. That year, an infamous massacre of at least thirty-nine people (mostly women and children) by the Surinamese military took place in Brunswijk's home village of Moiwana. The civil rights group Moiwana '86 was established soon after with the still unfulfilled goal of seeking legal justice for this and other atrocities committed during the Interior War. Once again, the violence, while political, also had an ethnic flavor, pitting the Creole-led military against the Maroon "jungle commando." The war, which continued for six years, also had deep and lasting effects for Maroons and others in Suriname; Maroon villages and the town of Moengo were evacuated, and many relocated to Paramaribo or fled to French Guiana (Price 1995; Hoefte 2014).

Suriname returned to electoral democracy in 1991, and Bouterse was convicted in absentia in the Netherlands of drug trafficking in 1999 and sentenced to eleven years in prison; he has since not set foot in the Netherlands or countries that have an extradition agreement with the Netherlands. (His son, Dino Bouterse, is currently imprisoned in the United States for drug trafficking and other charges.) In 2010, as the leader of the National Democratic Party (NDP), Bouterse was elected president through an ostensibly democratic process, and was reelected in 2015. The reign of the NDP has been characterized by (continued) ethnic clientelism, opportunism, abuses of executive power, and strongman practices; this period has also seen a

downward economic spiral, with inflation rapidly increasing particularly in the last decade (Hoefte 2014: 200-206).

In the most recent developments, which occurred in late 2019 during the last stages of writing this dissertation, Bouterse, the prime suspect in the 1982 "December Murders" (and still the current president), was finally convicted after over a decade of political maneuvering including unconstitutionally granting himself amnesty. This news is hugely significant for family members and political opponents of Bouterse who have been seeking justice for these assassinations for almost forty years. Bouterse has been sentenced to twenty years in prison, but has not yet been arrested. It is unclear what will happen next.

The December Murders and surrounding events of political and ethnic violence shaped many of my interlocutors' lives, including setting them—many as young children or teenagers with or without their parents or other family accompanying them—on a course to the Netherlands. Like handed-down family stories of plantation violence, stories of more recent political violence were usually not central to my conversations with interlocutors, but were at times peripherally mentioned or implicitly present, giving a more complex context to notions of identity and tradition that emerged from ambivalent histories.

On a global stage, little is known about Suriname and its politics. When the December Murders conviction occurred on November 29, 2019, the New York Times reprinted two very brief articles on the event from the Associated Press and Reuters; it was not considered breaking news. Recent books on Bouterse (including Hira 2017; Jurna 2015; Reeser 2015; and Evers & Van Maele 2012) have been written in Dutch, published in the Netherlands, and have not been translated for an English-speaking audience.

Incidentally, Bouterse is known to be a breeder and keeper of Surinamese songbirds and, in earlier years, a frequent attendee of the songbird competition that takes place weekly in front of the presidential palace in Paramaribo.



Figure 10: President Desi Bouterse at the songbird competition in 2012 (image from Surinaamse Zangvogelbond)

0.4 Netherlands Context: "Multiculturalism" and a Nascent Decolonial Critique

At present there are estimated to be over 350,000 people of Surinamese descent in the Netherlands (Statista 2019). Considering that the total population of Suriname itself is less than 600,000, it is not surprising that being Surinamese is often a transnational identity, constituted by a community whose members often have one foot in Europe and one in the Caribbean. Being Surinamese in the Netherlands is contextualized both by notions of ethnic difference brought from Suriname, and by Dutch notions of difference shaped by its recent transformation into a postcolonial, "multicultural" nation.

The Netherlands' postcolonial history is marked by waves of immigration from different places, beginning with Indonesia around the time of its independence in 1945. Decades of Dutch colonial involvement in Indonesia (where, as opposed to Suriname, many Dutch civil servants

and private business owners relocated their whole lives and families for decades) produced generations of people of mixed Indonesian and European descent, who form an ethnic group known as "Indische" or "Indo." Of the 300,000 people who came from Indonesia to the Netherlands between 1945 and 1962, more than half were Indos. This mass migration is often discussed in Dutch discourses retrospectively as a successful "integration" of a migrant group (especially since many of them already spoke Dutch), although the perspectives of the migrants often reveal a different story of the difficulties of arrival and assimilation (Essed 1986; Essed & Hoving 2014). There are now four generations of Indos in the Netherlands, numbering over a million individuals, and in the last few decades there has been a resurgence of Indo identity, spurring scholarship, novels, cultural festivals, and a monthly periodical, *Moesson*, that shares Indonesian recipes and interviews with Indo celebrities.

Surinamese migrants in the Netherlands come from all of Suriname's ethnic groups (though less so Maroon and Amerindian), and, following Suriname's lines of ethnic division, have typically settled in different places in the Netherlands (for example, Javanese Surinamers have gathered in The Hague and in communities in the northern and southern provinces, while Rotterdam and Southeast Amsterdam have large Afro-Surinamese communities). In 2008, there were around 32,000 people of Javanese-Surinamese descent in the Netherlands (Kopijn & Mingoen 2008). Javanese Surinamers often feel invisible as an ethnic minority group in the Netherlands; since there is a much larger group of Indonesian and Indonesian-descended people in the Netherlands, they are often assumed to be Indonesian rather than Surinamese.

Nevertheless, as I discuss in the chapters that follow, there are several active cultural organizations for Javanese Surinamers including gamelan and dance groups, and there have been a number of projects towards increased visibility and knowledge about Javanese-Surinamese

history, such as documentaries by the Javanese-Surinamese filmmakers of Docu125 (*Jaji: Lotgenoten* in 2017 and *Leliëndaal 100* in 2019), a series of oral history books led by the Javanese-Surinamese-Dutch anthropologist and cultural activist Hariëtte Mingoen (Djasmadi & Mingoen 2015; Kopijn & Mingoen 2008; Djasmadi, Hoefte & Mingoen 2010), and an ongoing initiative, also led by Mingoen, to collect and donate Javanese-Surinamese photos, documents, and life stories to Dutch municipal archives in cities with Javanese-Surinamese communities (STICHJI n.d.). Another project initiated by Mingoen is getting the Javanese-Surinamese gamelan on the official list of Dutch Intangible Cultural Heritage (www.cultureelerfgoed.nl), which I discuss in Chapter 4. Members of Suriname's other ethnic groups who have settled in the Netherlands have their own cultural organizations and activities, such as large public celebrations of the holiday Ketikoti (Sranan: Broken Chains, the anniversary of the abolition of slavery) and the annual summer Kwakoe Festival, which are both centered around Afro-Surinamese history and culture.

Around the same time as the waves of migration from Suriname in the 1970s and 80s, there was also an influx of migrants from the Netherlands Antilles. There are currently over 140,000 Antilleans in the Netherlands (the total population across the six former Antillean islands is around 300,000; Bosma 2012). Around the same time, through guest worker programs, waves of migrants came first from Southern and Eastern Europe, and in later decades primarily from Turkey and Morocco. At present, Turks and Moroccans are the two largest minority groups in the Netherlands, and also among the most discriminated against. In media, especially coming from the Netherlands' conservative right wing, these groups are often characterized as criminals who are unable to assimilate and as dangerous Muslims who are taking over the country (Essed & Hoving 2014; Weiner & Báez 2018). (Many Indonesians and Javanese people from Suriname

are also Muslims, but are almost never the target of such Islamophobic portrayals or sentiments; rather, they are typically portrayed as "assimilated" minority groups who have adopted Dutch values and ways of life.)

The several major waves of different groups of postcolonial and labor migrants arriving in the Netherlands over the last half-century, along with many other smaller groups of migrants from all over the world, have resulted in an uncomfortable "multiculturalism" that has only recently been the target of concentrated self-reflective critique in Dutch academic and popular spheres. Pervasive Dutch discourses of difference have long conflated Dutchness with whiteness, for example through use of the terms "*autochtoon*" (autochthonous [person]) and "*allochtoon*" (allochthonous [person]), which are used simultaneously to mean from here/from elsewhere, Western/non-Western, white/non-white, and Dutch/non-Dutch. Thinking through the logic of these terms becomes quickly problematic: for example, could a recent migrant from Germany, who would be seen as an "autochtoon," be somehow more "from here" than a Dutch citizen of Afro-Surinamese descent, born and raised in the Netherlands, perhaps to parents who were also born and raised there—who would still be seen as an "allochtoon"? This terminology (which has only recently been widely challenged as problematic) implies so. Other common discourses about difference in the Netherlands, such as those of "tolerance" and "assimilation," have similarly problematic implications, putting the burden on postcolonial and labor migrants to fit in with Dutch norms and not to cause problems. On the right-wing end of the political spectrum, anti-immigrant and Islamophobic political parties, such as the Partij voor de Vrijheid (Party for Freedom or PVV) and the Forum voor Democratie (Forum for Democracy or FvD) have had a sharp rise of support in recent years, gaining exponentially more seats in the Dutch parliament in recent elections.

On both the academic and popular front, postcolonial and decolonial critiques of Dutch colonial history in Indonesia and the Caribbean and its involvement in the slave trade have begun relatively recently and only picked up momentum in the last few years (Schols 2019; Weiner & Báez 2018). In the 1980s and 90s, a handful of Dutch historians and anthropologists, such as Philomena Essed (1984, 1986), Sandew Hira (1985), Alex van Stipriaan (1993), Frances Gouda (1995), Ewald Vanvugt (1996), and Susan Legêne (1998), began to critically investigate the country's colonial involvements and the general Dutch attitude toward its former colonies and postcolonial migrant communities. Only recently have such perspectives become more common in the Dutch academy (including employing the language of a Latin American/global discourse of "decolonization"; see Hira 2012 and Weiner & Báez 2018), and begun to appear in the discourse of the public sphere.⁸ There are, however, plenty of Dutch scholars, young and old, who maintain the perspective that colonialism and slavery are "something that happened over there, far away, not for very long, and with little consequence for Dutch society today" (Small 2011: xii, quoted in Weiner & Báez 2018).

This dissertation aims to contribute to this scholarly and public conversation about colonialism and its lasting impact in the Netherlands and elsewhere in the world. In the chapters that follow, I argue that colonial history has shaped sensory perceptions of human difference and

⁸ Debates about racism in the Dutch media and public sphere have recently crystallized around the figure of "Black Pete" (Zwarte Piet), the enslaved black assistant of Dutch Santa Claus who appears every Christmas, often in the form of white adults and children dressing up in blackface, complete with painted-on thick red lips and wigs of dark, curly hair. Protests and counter-protests have brought Black Pete to Dutch courts and to a global stage. The UN conducted an investigation into the Black Pete phenomenon in 2011 to determine whether the practice was a racist violation of human rights, and found that it was, officially condemning it. There has been a plethora of scholarship on Black Pete, who is defended by many Dutch people as innocent fun for children and as cultural tradition. See Schols 2019, Weiner & Báez 2018, Wekker 2016, Essed & Hoving 2014, Van der Pijl & Goulordava 2014, Small 2013, in addition to other scholarship and a plethora of Dutch news articles on the subject.

modern notions of nature and culture that organize the contemporary world. Suriname's present-day political and economic instabilities, though perhaps not inevitable in their particular manifestations, are inextricable from a history of colonial dispossession. As I discuss in Chapter 4, many contemporary local and global projects of preservation and conservation are based on an ideological inheritance, traceable back to plantation colonialism, that has constructed human and nonhuman worlds as resources to be extracted. Such projects, while often carried out with good intentions, serve to reinscribe forms of colonial difference as well as the notion that Europe (now extended to include Euro-descended North America) should manage the resources of the rest of the world. The "postcolonial" Netherlands is not a world that has left its colonial history behind, but rather one that is deeply, inextricably formed by it.

0.5 Ethnographic Approaches: Musical Instruments

"Instruments mean," writes Regula Qureshi (2000: 810). Ethnomusicologists encounter, listen to, touch, play, and sometimes collect musical instruments in the field, attempting to formulate a relationship between the materiality of musical objects and the production of sound, emotive experience, discursive description, and formation of individual and collective meaning that results. Non-human materials and skilled human labor—both in constructing instruments and eliciting musical sounds from them—produce feelings and meanings related to class, gender, ethnicity, race, and nation. The circulations, accumulated meanings, and "social lives" (Appadurai 1986) of instruments have been investigated by, among others, Paul Berliner (1978) on the Zimbabwean *mbira*, Regula Qureshi (2000) on the Indian/Pakistani *sarangi*, Amanda Weidman (2006) on the violin in South India, Kevin Dawe (2003) on the Cretian *lyra*, Maria Sonevytsky (2008) on the accordion, Eliot Bates (2012) on the Anatolian *saz*, Peter Allen Roda (2013) on the North Indian *tabla*, and Megan Rancier (2014) on the Kazakh *qyl-qobyz*.

Eduardo Kohn (2015) and Arturo Escobar (2017) have specifically identified attending to objects, things, and materialities as aspects of the "ontological turn" of the last decades. Kohn writes that "ethnographic attention to materiality problematizes the relationship between human (social) subjects and nonhuman objects," and that studies of the material world have been one realm of anthropology that has been able to "bring nature into culture and culture into nature" (Kohn 2015: 315, 316). Escobar writes similarly that studies of objects, things, and materialities have contributed to a general reexamination of "what we come to know as 'reality'" and specifically of "the divide between nature and culture and the idea that there is a 'single nature' to which there correspond 'many cultures'" (Escobar 2017: 241). The studies collected in Amiria Henare, Martin Holbraad, and Sari Wastell's *Thinking through Things* (2007) and Daniel Miller's *Materiality* (2005) exemplify ethnographic approaches to objects that lead to scrutiny of greater ontological categories such as the cultural and the natural. In music studies, Eliot Bates (2012), Peter Allen Roda (2013), and Paul Théberge (1997) have picked up, in particular, Bruno Latour's (2005) actor-network theory approach in ethnographic studies of the *saz*, the *tabla*, and sound technology, respectively. These studies challenge the assumption that musical agency takes places in spheres of solely human sociability.

Such forms of "object-oriented ontology," including in music studies, have been associated with a "posthuman" turn towards considering material objects and other nonhuman entities as having social lives and agency in their own right, and have been at times critiqued for leaving behind concerns of human politics in favor of debates about whether objects, things, and materiality can best be understood as assemblages, extensions, relations, affordances, networks, meshworks, or bundles of semiotic properties (Kohn 2015). In contrast, while attending to the behaviors of objects as having the potential to illuminate the gaps in epistemological systems of

understanding them, I see my own study as still firmly in the realm of human concerns, politics, and histories. Specifically, I position my ethnographic study of the instruments of the Javanese gamelan within an "anthropology of the senses" that considers the human faculties through which we perceive material objects as having their own histories that are shaped by inherited modes of understanding human and nonhuman realms (Porcello et al. 2010, Seremetakis 1994, Taussig 1993). An example of such a study is Amanda Weidman's critical history of the violin in South India, which traces its travels and changing meanings as it transforms from a European to a "native" instrument becomes, "almost literally, the voice of Karnatic music" (2006: 52). Shaped by discourses on authenticity, fidelity, human voice, Indian-ness, and progress that influence the style and technique of its performance and the perceptions of its various listening audiences, the meaning of the violin is caught up in its materialities and sonic qualities, produced by the friction of bow on strings, that are heard as reproducing the human voice with exceptional fidelity. Over time, the materiality and timbre of the violin shape South Indian concepts and perceptions of the voice. Similarly, in my study of the instruments of the Javanese gamelan in Suriname, the materialities and timbres of instruments do work on human perceptions, meanings, and histories.

0.6 Ethnographic Approaches: Birds and Animals

"Human nature is an interspecies relationship," writes Anna Tsing (2012; quoted in Haraway 2008: 19). My analysis of relations between Surinamese birds and Surinamese men is guided in part by Anna Tsing and Donna Haraway's observations that human selves are born of interspecies interactions, interactions that are entirely "ordinary," even in their many forms of transgression of the epistemological boundary historically constructed between human and nonhuman worlds (Haraway 2008: 2-3; see also Haraway 2003; Tsing 2012, 2015). Here, I

briefly review approaches to animals and, in particular, birds in ethnographic studies, pointing to the ways in which attending ethnographically to interspecies relationships—like the circulations of material objects—can highlight the ambiguities and partialities of notions of nature, culture, and subject-object relations.

A number of studies that focus on multispecies relations in human world making have come from ethnographic research with indigenous groups in South America (Viveiros de Castro 1992, 2004a; Stolze Lima 1999; Kohn 2013; De la Cadena 2015; Ochoa 2014; Guss 1995; Seeger 1987). "Multinaturalism," "perspectivism" (Viveiros de Castro 1998, 2014; Stolze Lima 1999), beyond-the-human semiotics (Kohn 2013), and other theorizations of indigenous ontologies that emerge from these studies analyze and represent radically different ways of perceiving the domains of the nonhuman and human and the relationship between them, which depart from the culture/nature and subject/object dichotomies that broadly characterize understandings of reality in the modern West. Birds and other animals figure into this literature as nonhuman entities whose presence and interactions with humans suggest other forms of nonhuman agency and subjectivity. For example, in a self-reflective passage in *How Forests Think*, Eduardo Kohn recounts how, after a harrowing experience during fieldwork, focusing in on a tanager in the wild through his binoculars the next day finally "snapped [him] back into the world of life" (2013: 47) from which his internalized anxiety had made him feel profoundly separated. He interprets this experience as evidence of how interspecies connections draw people beyond the world of uniquely human semiotics, into the "larger mind" that humans and animals share. Through indexical alignment with the perspective of a bird, Kohn is regrounded in the world beyond his symbolic human thoughts, in what he calls the "open whole," which entangles

humans in a world beyond the symbolic and beyond "that which exists," including also nonhuman modes of thinking, interpreting, and imagining the future (ibid.: 66).

Indigenous relations with birds and animals figure into two monographs that helped to shape contemporary ethnomusicology in the 1980s: Steven Feld's *Sound and Sentiment* (1982), a study of the Kaluli people of Papua New Guinea, and Anthony Seeger's *Why Suyá Sing* (1987), a study of the Suyá or Kisêdjê people of Brazil. Feld draws in part from Lévi-Strauss's (1966, 1969) work on myth (which also features human relations with birds) to represent "sound as a cultural system" (Feld [1982] 2012: xxiv) that takes into account myth, ritual, and sounding relations with the nonhuman world as an experiential, everyday entanglement of sound, ecology, and cosmology. Kaluli knowledge about birds connects myth, sentiment, and modes of inhabiting the spatial, natural, and emotional worlds in which everyday life is situated. In a complex ornithological taxonomy, bird categories are entangled with human categories and human listening; the most important feature that allows birds to be classified even by young, inexperienced members of the community is the sounds that different birds make and what sentiments they are perceived to express. Feld argues that Kaluli sonic relations with birds "both actively communicate deeply felt sentiments and reconfirm mythic principles" (1982: 14)—both of which are foundational to the Kaluli's sense of self in their forest environment and to their relations with the nonhuman world around them.

In *Why Suyá Sing*, Seeger finds that for the Suyá, animals constitute one source of songs that come from outside the human community and, once learned (via transmission to humans in a temporary part-animal state), are used to sing the cosmological order into existence. (The other source of songs is foreign humans, another sort of alter-species.) Feld and Seeger both found forms of what ethnomusicologist Marina Roseman, based on her own study of the Temiar of

Malaysia a decade later, calls "a *collegial permeability* between entities that the post-Cartesian Western cosmopolitan philosophy hierarchically differentiates as 'human' and 'nonhuman'" (1998: 110, emphasis mine). The questions that emerged from Feld's and Seeger's research challenged what had been accepted as basic conceptual differentiations in ethnomusicology, such as human personhood versus animality, music versus sound, and culture versus nature. Feld and Seeger and their intellectual descendants cast music not as bounded human heritage or tradition to be passed down, preserved, or forgotten, but as radically open forms of relation that posit possibilities for understanding human and nonhuman worlds and the relation between them (Ochoa 2016: 134).

My own research aims to contribute to investigations into multispecies acoustemologies and to the epistemological and ontological questions that they raise about the formation of modern Western notions of separated realms of culture and nature. In its historical aspect, my project dialogues with the work of scholars such as Ana María Ochoa (2014) and Rachel Mundy (2018) who investigate inscriptions of human perceptions of bird and animal sounds and bodies in archives of colonial and scientific knowledge. In its ethnographic aspect, this dissertation contributes to investigations of "collegial permeability" of the boundary between human and nonhuman realms, but in the context of the urban, cosmopolitan, modern lives of Surinamese men in Paramaribo and Amsterdam (rather than in indigenous life and myth). In this sense, my study of birds and men, while shaped by the questions that Feld, Seeger, and other ethnographers of indigenous worlds pose about human-nonhuman relations, also shares much with, for example, Donna Haraway's reflexive studies of her relationship with her dog—an "ordinary" interspecies companionship that situates collegially permeable human-nonhuman relations in the modern Western setting of the suburban United States (2008: 2-3). Similarly, outside of

academic scholarship, I have been inspired by the memoirs of Helen Macdonald and Len Howard, two British women who have reflected deeply on their own relationships with birds: MacDonald (2014) on her experience training a hawk while grieving for her recently deceased father, and Howard (1952, 1956) on spending the last decades of her life living in the British countryside in the sole company of birds, who freely came and went from her home while she documented her observations of them in great detail. Macdonald's and Howard's studies are autoethnographies of humans who became themselves through their relationships with birds.

0.7 Chapter Summaries

The chapters that follow draw from fieldwork conducted in Suriname during the summer of 2015 and from August 2017 to March 2018, and from ethnographic fieldwork and archival research conducted in the Netherlands during the summer of 2017 and from May 2018 to August 2019. I begin with a small reflection on my methodologies and positionality during these experiences. I arrived in Suriname in 2017 expecting to acquire information and knowledge by conducting formal interviews with experts on Javanese-Surinamese music and Surinamese birds. These plans were quickly thwarted. In the sphere of Javanese culture, a primary problem was locating people who would sit down for a formal interview with me and speak as experts. I often found myself traveling along seemingly infinite chains of people referring me to other people, who might eventually refer me to a book written by a Dutch or North American scholar. Regarding birds, a gathering of knowledge and expertise occurred each Sunday for songbird competitions and training. However, as I describe in Chapter 3, the social sphere of the songbird competition is almost exclusively male (even among the birds) and Surinamese (even in the Netherlands), and has not been the object of much anthropological study. As a white American woman who also often got lost in the constant code switching between Dutch (which I speak

non-natively) and Sranan (of which I understand very little), it was a challenge to enter this sphere and to carve a role for myself there. In the later period of my fieldwork, this endeavor was aided by bringing a Dutch male companion who also spoke Sranan. (My role in this social setting was perhaps the most clear and comfortable to all involved when the birdmen could joke congenially with my companion, in man-to-man modes, about me in my presence.)

In the Netherlands, I did succeed in conducting more formal interviews with a number of helpful, generous informants on both Javanese-Surinamese music and birds, and much of the knowledge I gained from these interviews inform and shape the chapters and arguments that follow. But, by the time I left Suriname, I had already established my primary and perhaps, in the end, most effective methodology, which was listening. In all sorts of formal and informal settings, I observed and listened to people talking about music and birds, but also, more generally, about life in Suriname: present conditions, past memories, and the pleasures and challenges of everyday life. Thus, knowledge, wisdom, and expertise often presented themselves when I least expected it, typically in the guise of casual, everyday conversation and interaction. For this reason, as readers may notice, much of my ethnographic data in the chapters that follow comes in the form of paraphrased sentiments from my field notes rather than directly quoted words that were captured on audio recordings.

Chapter 1, "Sensing Ethnicity: Javanese Sounds, Spaces, Places, and Memories," is structured around a comparison of two parallel events that took place in Paramaribo (Suriname) and The Hague (the Netherlands), which were both celebrations of the Javanese holiday Bersih Desa. To contextualize these events, I connect the notion of Javanese ethnicity in Suriname to Dutch colonial labor policy that brought workers over from the Dutch East Indies and theorized them as a homogeneous group—"the Javanese"—with collective characteristics related to their

potential as plantation laborers. Through historical inscriptions of Dutch ears hearing gamelan music in Suriname in the 1930s and 1940s, I scrutinize essentializing forms of hearing and constructing Javanese ethnicity. I then visit my two ethnographic scenes, exploring active constructions of relations between place, memory, and identity for Javanese Surinamers in multisensory modes at these participatory events. I theorize Javaneseness as a quality of places, objects, sounds, and substances as well as people, which needs to be perpetually reestablished through sensory perception and collective participation in Javanese activities and aesthetics. Finally, I describe a scene where Javaneseness unexpectedly permeates an Afro-Surinamese event, making its presence known aesthetically and sensorily and thus betraying the way ethnicity and its substances are expected to behave under Suriname's paradigm of "ethnic plurality."

In Chapter 2, "The Javanese Gamelan in Suriname and the Netherlands," I construct a narrative that traces Javaneseness and Javanese people from Indonesia to Suriname to the Netherlands by following particular sets of gamelan instruments in their developments and circulations. I begin with a set of instruments that were shipped from Semarang (Central Java) and arrived on a Surinamese plantation in 1904, to give Javanese indentured laborers something wholesome to do in their spare time. In the following decades, gamelan music proliferated in Suriname through the construction and circulation of homemade instruments built out of scrap iron and other locally found materials. Gamelan music could be heard ringing first throughout the many Surinamese plantations that employed Javanese laborers in the early twentieth century, and then in other places in the colony where Javanese people relocated in search of employment opportunities, from the rice farming districts in the west to the bauxite mining town of Moengo in the east. Over time, a distinct Javanese-Surinamese tradition grew that referenced both a past

in Java and a future in Suriname. Starting in the 1970s, following another mass migration, this Javanese-Surinamese tradition traveled to the Netherlands. I end the chapter by parsing discourses of listening that reveal the histories and meanings that are heard in the timbre of the iron instruments of the Javanese-Surinamese gamelan.

In an attempt to recount this history from both a musical and a Javanese-Surinamese perspective (as opposed to a Dutch perspective, which is generally what has been documented in available written archives), I draw heavily from R.H. Djojowikromo's self-published book *Het Ontstaan van de Javaans-Surinaamse Gamelaninstrumenten en –Cultuur (The Origination of Javanese-Surinamese Gamelan Instruments and Culture, 2011)*. This work compiles Djojowikromo's (also known as Pak Harrie) decades of experience hearing, learning, and performing gamelan and *wayang* (shadow puppetry) in Suriname and the Netherlands, as well as his formal and informal collecting of the recollections of elders, going back to the generation who arrived in Suriname as indentured laborers. Pak Harrie grew up in Moengo in Eastern Suriname "in an environment where, almost every day, gamelan music was practiced" (Djojowikromo, September 20, 2018, email to author), and is now himself an elder of the Javanese-Surinamese community located around The Hague, where he performs with the Javanese-Surinamese gamelan ensemble and cultural organization Bangun Tresna Budaya. Pak Harrie and Pak Orlando Kromopawiro have been key interlocutors in this historical research, supplemented by the oral histories collected and published by Hariëtte Mingoen and her collaborators. This musical history has not been previously published in English, which makes it crucial to include an in-depth historical chapter in this dissertation.⁹

⁹ I also want to note that in telling this history and describing the development of the Javanese-Surinamese gamelan in this chapter, I at times contrast the Javanese-Surinamese gamelan with instruments, repertoire, and tradition in Central Java. There are a wide variety of village and

Following this examination of the materials, circulations, perceptions, and meanings of musical instruments, in Chapter 3, "*De Zangvogelwedstrijd* (The Songbird Competition)," I turn to my second sonic object of study, a few types of Caribbean finches who serve as the companions of Surinamese men. Many of these birds are trained by their human companions to compete in singing competitions that are held weekly in Suriname and seasonally in three cities in the Netherlands. I describe and compare the Surinamese songbird competitions in Paramaribo and in Southeast Amsterdam, exploring discourses and constructions of Caribbean life, freedom, wild nature, and masculinity that surround them in both places, and drawing also from a deeper history of sonic zoopolitics in the Caribbean and Latin America. In this chapter, I draw from Fred Chiang's book *Kooizangvogels in Suriname* (*Caged Songbirds in Suriname*, 2008) and conversations with Sjaam Sardjoe in Paramaribo, Suniel Cheddie in Amsterdam, and other birdmen in both places to recount particular training processes and competition rules. My goal in this chapter is to suggest (rather than schematize) the multiple modes of relations between Surinamese men and their birds in the Netherlands and Suriname.

The final chapter, "Policy, Preservation, and the Plantation" (Chapter 4), begins in Paramaribo, at a formal discussion of local and transnational initiatives related to UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage. By considering this project of cultural preservation alongside discourses and processes of extraction and conservation of natural landscapes in Suriname, I scrutinize the discursive and ideological formation of human and nonhuman worlds as cultural and natural resources to be separately managed. I connect these

court gamelan traditions in Indonesia and within Central Java. Readers with knowledge about gamelan traditions in Indonesia might be frustrated by my seemingly monolithic notion of Central Javanese gamelan instruments and performance. This comes from the limitation in scope of this dissertation and the primary distinction I aim to make here between different colonial histories in Java and in Suriname and their manifestations in music; this limits my ability to attend to the wide variety of gamelan traditions and styles in Java and other parts of Indonesia.

contemporary discourses to a history that begins on the Surinamese plantation (where laboring bodies and monoculture crops were isolated, reproduced, controlled, and exploited by European owners) and that is further shaped by an entanglement of Dutch colonial scholarship and policy in the East Indies and Suriname, which theorized and enacted an unequal distribution of humanness among different groups of colonial subjects. From these linked histories of the human and nonhuman, I trace emergent notions and discourses of cultural diversity and biodiversity, rights, property, and sustainability. I investigate the relationship of these notions to a persistent colonial zoopolitics and to the unequal effects of contemporary ecotourism, resource extraction, and projects of (natural) conservation and (cultural) preservation in Suriname. This chapter brings my ethnographic counterpoint of gamelan instruments and Caribbean birds into dialogue with scholarship that "thinks from the plantation" (Moore 2019) in scrutinizing the linked processes of colonialism, capitalism, climate crisis, and environmental injustice, and in interrogating modern Western epistemologies of culture and nature in all of these contexts.

Chapter 1: Sensing Ethnicity: Javanese Sounds, Spaces, Places, and Memories

In 1932, the Dutch journalist C.K. Kesler traveled to Suriname to write a series of articles on its various population groups: Amerindians, Afrodescendants, British Indians, Javanese, Chinese, and European Jews. This series on "the people of our West" was published in *Tropisch Nederland*, a metropolitan semi-monthly discussing concerns related to the colonies, from the cultivation (or "culture") of indigenous crops to accounts of travels, sights such as ancient ruins, and cultural practices such as courtly dance in the Dutch East Indies. At the time of Kesler's visit to Suriname, there were 29,572 people of Javanese ethnicity in the colony, comprising 24% of the total population (Hoefte 1998: 79), and plans for Javanese "migration" and retention in Suriname were expanding, considered a promising solution to the colony's ongoing economic problems and labor shortage since the abolition of slavery.

In his article on "the Javanese," Kesler weighs the suitability of this group of indentured laborers as "colonists," reciting assessments that also appear in contemporaneous debates within the colonial administration: due to their alleged collective "characteristics" (*eigenschappen*), the Javanese are not good at saving money like British Indian laborers are, and their primary goal is to return to their homeland, for which they perpetually long. On the other hand, compared to Afrodescendants and Amerindians, the colorful traditional clothing and manners of self-presentation of the Javanese give a "calm, civilized impression," even though the Javanese in Suriname do not come from the higher rungs of Dutch East Indies society. This impression "emerges strongly, for example, in their musical expressions," Kesler writes. "From time to time, walking in the *Cultuurtuin* [Culture Garden] at sunset, one hears the sound of the gamelan, so nicely in harmony with the tropical nature, ringing out from the Javanese *kampung* [Javanese:

village]. If compared to the beating on a negro-drum, one realizes immediately the great distance that lies between brown and black" (Kesler 1932: 325).

Here, Kesler inscribes an act of listening, through Dutch ears, that transforms Javanese sound and its perception into a time- and place-specific "common sense" about Javanese people, revealing what were then considered to be deep truths about cultural and natural difference. Kesler's early twentieth-century Dutch ear interprets the music of the gamelan as a timeless, unchanging soundscape that blends with the distinct natural landscape of the tropics, becoming a sonic part of the backdrop. In his comparative imaginary, musical difference becomes an aural indication of differential personhood, suggesting an inherited, primordial incommensurability that takes sonic form. Place (as in historical origins in Africa versus Asia), time (via inherited tradition, its present manifestation, and a longing for the past), and collective difference (expressed here by Kesler in a racial terminology of "brown" and "black") become sonically entangled in the ears of the white Dutch colonial listener.

In what follows, I explore the interconnected notions of sound, music, culture, nature, origin, incommensurate personhood, and the form of essential(ized) difference that, through Suriname's colonial history and postcolonial independent nationhood, has come to be known as "ethnicity." Ethnicity is tied to entangled notions of space, place, time, and human nature, which underlie ideas such as an ancestral land of origin; contemporary spaces shaped by the dwelling and presence of migrant or minority communities; the continuity, interruption, or adaptation of cultural practices connected to ethnic identity; and the inheritability of ethnic practices and characteristics (Wade 2002, 2010; Omi & Winant 1994; Khan 1993). Through three ethnographic scenes, I explore contemporary situations of ethnic performance, contrasting these

instances of encountering and experiencing the aesthetic, multisensory materials and substances of ethnicity with Kesler's structural, essentializing mode of listening.

Suriname's "ethnic plurality" paradigm, which, as I explore, emerged from the colonial history of various "free" and unfree labor migrations that occurred to support its plantation economy, shapes many domains of everyday life, including the structures and aesthetics of various "ethnic" places and spaces (De Koning 2011a). For example, Blauwgrond, the first site I visit in this chapter, is a well-established Javanese space in Suriname, a neighborhood of Paramaribo on the former grounds of an indigo plantation that is now widely known for its strip of *warungs* (Javanese: casual eateries) serving Javanese-Surinamese food. Abutting some of the wealthiest neighborhoods in the city, Blauwgrond's demographic is heavily Javanese and its cobblestone streets are lined with modest houses built in a style that visually transports the visitor to a rural village in Java. In what follows, I describe how the "Javaneseness" of a place like Blauwgrond, despite this history and visual appearance, is not essential and persistent, but rather constantly "in formation" (Omi & Winant 1994), requiring re-creation through individual and collective encounters with the multisensory objects, substances, and materials that have emerged from Javanese-Surinamese history to bring Javaneseness to life in the present.

In Blauwgrond, it "makes sense" to encounter aesthetic evidence of Javaneseness with the senses in a place with well-established connections to Javanese-Surinamese history. In The Hague, where my second scene of Javanese-Surinamese performance takes place, Javaneseness must be created "from scratch" through objects and materials that have traveled from Suriname or are found or created in the Netherlands to give multisensory presence to a shared history, collective memories, and individual ethnic identity. In the scene I describe, music, puppets, dance, participatory song, and Javanese food and spirituality are all instrumental in transforming

two Dutch public spaces temporarily into Javanese-Surinamese spaces. Finally, in my last scene, through a particular material that has come to aesthetically embody and visually represent Javanese ethnicity in Suriname—namely, batik cloth with wax-printed Indonesian patterns—I explore how one particular ethnic history can sneak into a space where it does not "make sense," subverting how culture and cultural objects are thought to behave by unexpectedly showing up at an Afro-Surinamese possession ritual. Here, Suriname's "ethnic plurality" paradigm of human difference that assigns a discrete, fully formed, and well-bounded ethnic identity to people, places, spaces, and many other aspects of life is betrayed by a small instance of culture "out of place," suggesting that culture, ethnicity, and actual experience do not line up as neatly as this paradigm suggests.

When examined closely, the ethnic identity of objects, activities, people, and histories become, in fact, porous and relational; ethnicity itself is a space for groups and individuals to negotiate multivalent relations with space and time, memory and history, and culture and nature. That identities, materials, and substances of ethnicity do not always "behave" as they should is, in part, why events like those I describe below are needed. In what follows, ethnic identity and history—such as Javanese-ness—are performed back into place, giving ethnicity visual, aural, and even gustatory and tactile dimensions that claim and transform space in experiential, empirically evident ways. Despite the notion that places and spaces in Suriname have inherited ethnic identities through the human mobilities and immobilities generated by its plantation economy and colonial history, I argue that the production of ethnic space is an ongoing process that requires ethnicity to be brought sensorially to the present, in ritual events and in everyday life, through, for example, the sounds, visual aesthetics, and foods that conjure a particular ethnic history. I argue that space, including spaces of ethnicity, is produced not only by human bodies

and social relations (Lefebvre 1991; Massey 1994), but also by objects, materials, and substances that bring their own histories, entangled with notions of ethnicity, nature, and culture. In the scenes I describe in this chapter, music and sound, which provide one mode of structuring ethnic and social space (Sakakeeny 2013; Low 2000; Chavez 2017), are entangled with other sensory elements of Javanese-Surinamese ethnicity, creating immersive, multisensory experiences of connection with a particular colonial history.

1.1 Blauwgrond: Senses and Substances of Javanese-ness

The neighborhood of Blauwgrond is a Javanese world hidden within North Paramaribo, just blocks from where some of Suriname's wealthiest families (mostly of Hindustani and Creole descent) live in gated mansions. Blauwgrond is located off of Twee Kinderenweg (Two Children Way), a main street named after the plantation that used to occupy the space and gave the neighborhood its nickname, "Blue Ground," after the indigo it produced and exported. Turning off of this throughway, the atmosphere changes distinctly. Sandy driveways and alleyways fork off from brick-paved, potholed streets, leading to modest single-story wooden homes showing the signs of stress on wood from the tropical climate, and Surinamese-style structures that feature a small living space raised above flood level on pillars over a car park, often with hammocks lining the upstairs balconies. In contrast to the nearby North Paramaribo mansions set apart by high metal gates, complex alarm systems, guard dogs, and closed windows keeping conditioned air in and mosquitos out, the homes of Blauwgrond are characterized by a permeability of indoor and outdoor space: windows and doors are flung open to social spaces where plastic chairs and woven hammocks are set up under a shelter against rain, but open to whatever breeze may arise from the river nearby. Dogs and children run freely in the neighborhood, casually overseen by whichever adults are present; families having dinner and friends sharing liter jugs of Parbo beer

greet passersby. Javanese homes often feature outdoor kitchens under tin roofs that flow directly into outdoor social space shared between neighboring homes; the boundaries of domestic space are also often marked by colorful, overflowing gardens, sometimes with a caged songbird or two hanging close to the entryway to the home.

Blauwgrond is often referred to, by Javanese and non-Javanese Surinamers, as a *kampung*. The *kampung* is the building unit of the *desa*, or village, in Java.¹⁰ It is also a distinct way of structuring space (see Dasai 2018; Van der Veen & Ter Steege 2016) that was used in the design of settlements to house Javanese laborers who arrived on Surinamese plantations in the early twentieth century. These settlements, which often form the basis of Javanese places in Suriname today, are still notable for the way they structure space: small wooden homes sitting directly on the ground (i.e. lacking foundations or pillars that lift them, which is common for homes in frequently-flooding, swampy Suriname), with tin roof-covered outdoor spaces and small gardens, are organized around dirt alleyways and shared courtyards, and in the center sit community spaces such as the mosque, the cemetery, and the open performance space where religious rituals and cultural events are held. Historically, the homes were built of natural materials (such as palm leaf roofs and pounded-dirt floors) and the settlement surrounded by cultivated vegetable-growing land (or in Java, rice fields) and grazing land for cattle. Presently, in Suriname, "kampung" or "desa" has come to refer generically to a modern neighborhood where a lot of Javanese people live. These neighborhoods often exist in the same places—sometimes using the same structures—as settlements that were created by the colonial government of Suriname to house plantation laborers, for example in Mariënborg, where the first

¹⁰ In Java, a *desa* is a political unit, a municipality. A *kampung* is a non-political unit of the organization of community and domestic space within the *desa*. *Kampung* and *desa* can both be translated as "village" and both connote rurality and agricultural life and a particular Javanese organization of domestic and communal space.

Javanese laborers' initial task was to construct their own accommodations. (The later-formed, post-indentured-labor-era Javanese town of Lelydorp, for example, is also structured in a kampung style and is widely known by its nickname, simply "Desa," Javanese village.) In Blauwgrond, within the gridded city blocks, the homes are connected with dirt roads and communal space in traditional kampung style.

The heart of Blauwgrond, for which it is known in tourist guidebooks and to hungry Surinamers of all ethnic groups, is Josephine Samson Green Street, a strip lined with the neon signs of some ten to twenty *warungs*, typical casual Javanese eateries widely known in Suriname by this Javanese terminology (casual eateries in Java are also called *warungs*). The *warungs* range from a simple takeaway spot with no clear name, known for its fried plantains with spicy peanut sauce, to the newer Miroso, an upscale sit-down restaurant that serves a broader menu of Indonesian dishes outside of the Javanese-Surinamese standards. The standards include *bami* (fried noodles), *nasi* (fried rice), *saoto* (chicken soup), *pecel* (vegetables with peanut sauce), *teloh* (fried cassava) served with *bakkeljauw* (spicy dried fish), *tahoe lontong* (blocks of rice and tofu with shredded chicken, sprouts, and a sweet, spicy soy sauce), *dawet* (an intensely sweet pink beverage flavored with coconut milk and lemongrass), and various Javanese sweets. Allegedly, during the plantation era, *warungs* had already sprouted up, patronized by the Javanese workers who gathered at recreational musical events and parties, and when the plantation closed, the *warungs* continued, gaining popularity and becoming a staple of Surinamese casual dining across ethnic groups.

Food—especially Javanese food as well as other popular dishes such as Hindustani *roti* (flatbread with curry), Creole sandwiches with *bakkeljauw* (spicy dried salted cod), and Surinamese-Jewish *pom* (taro root casserole)—is often the first theme that comes up when

discussing my time in Suriname with strangers. Surinamese cuisine is both a source of national pride and a parallel to the country's paradigm of "ethnic plurality." Surinamese food, like Surinamese ethnicity, is understood within the framework of a collection of different place-based identities with different colonial histories that maintain their historical separation structurally in the present by, for example, being served in different eateries that specialize in Javanese, Hindustani, Creole, Chinese, and even (more recently) Maroon cuisine. At the same time, many Hindustani, Creole, Chinese, and even the one Maroon restaurant in Paramaribo have Javanese *nasi* (fried rice) and *bami* (fried noodles) on their menu, which have become ubiquitous staples of the Surinamese diet across ethnicities.¹¹

The history of ethnic foods in Suriname is tied to a colonial plantation economy that necessitated the arrival of groups of unfree and "free" humans to provide labor, and, as well, facilitated the importation of elements of nonhuman environments from elsewhere in the world. European administrators and plantation owners organized the import of plants and seeds to be developed for mass production as monoculture crops (such as coffee, cacao, and certain types of rice). But different groups of enslaved African and indentured Asian laborers also individually transported plants and seeds for ritual and culinary uses, which were then cultivated in gardens on and off plantations and eventually incorporated into Suriname's "wild" natural landscape (Janer 2007, Heilbron 2012, Van Andel et al. 2015). As Suriname's colonial plantation economy structured human difference in ways that still resonate in the country's national paradigm of "ethnic plurality," it also influenced the development of natural landscapes, humanly organized

¹¹ In another example of ethnic boundary-crossing in restaurants, my favorite Hindustani roti café in downtown Paramaribo had a menu of daily lunch specials posted that read: "Tuesday: *nasi* [Javanese: rice]; Wednesday: *rijst* [Dutch: rice]; Thursday: *moksi alesi* [Sranan: mixed rice]; Friday: *biriyani* [a Hindustani dish based on rice]"—emphasizing the fundamental role of rice across Surinamese ethnic cuisines, as well as the taxonomy of foods that establish Javanese, Dutch, Surinamese, and Indian modes of preparing rice as discrete dishes.

space, and places and practices that incorporated both human and nonhuman elements—such as plant cultivation and cooking—in ways that persist in the present.

Take, for example, the Javanese garden. During my time in Suriname I grew familiar with the phenomenon of the Javanese garden in Paramaribo and elsewhere in Suriname: neatly potted orchids surrounding the home perimeter give way to a lush, heterogeneous mass of colorful flowering bushes, stalks of lemongrass and jasmine used for cooking and tea, and leafy mango, almond, or tamarind trees. Javanese gardens walk a balance between cultivated control and an effect of overflowing wildness. A particularly impressive one will cause passersby (Javanese or otherwise) to comment, "Oh, a Javanese must live there." Surinamers of Javanese and other ethnicities frequently pointed out to me that such a garden, brimming with colorful tropical flowers and fruit trees—often also marked by birdcages containing various types of songbirds on the porch or in the yard—must be Javanese. Why was this? Everyday discourses suggested that there was something inherent to the nature of "the Javanese" that was drawn to beautiful nature, sweet tropical fruits, and the equally sweet songs of birds.

European gardens, in the colonies and in the metropole, have for centuries created physical and ideological boundaries between cultivated and "pure" nature (Strathern 1992, Grove 1995). The Cultuurtuin (Culture Garden), now a park in Paramaribo, was a space where the Dutch experimented with the cultivation of various indigenous and imported plant species (such as cacao, coffee, hemp, rubber, rice, corn, bananas, pineapple, citrus, palms, flowers, and spices) for large-scale monoculture production and export, bringing capitalist rationality to isolated elements of the tropical landscape. Javanese gardens, on the other hand, welcome the wild into the domestic. Unlike plantation ecologies, which produced homogeneous monoculture crops en masse (Tsing 2016, 2017; Escobar 1999), Javanese gardens bring together heterogeneous

varieties of flowers, fruits, herbs, and vegetables native to the Caribbean, Southeast and South Asia, and elsewhere. The small, intensely colored red or pink blossoms of a flowering *faja lobi* (Sranan: "fiery love") bush—the ubiquitous national flower of Suriname that is actually native to South Asia and likely arrived with indentured laborers from British India—is a typical accent in a Javanese garden, providing one small example of the entangled histories that have flourished, creating new "native" landscapes that now comprise distinctly Surinamese aesthetics. Javanese gardens also often include ingredients for Javanese-Surinamese home cooking, such as lemongrass and other herbs, mango trees, and vegetables such as *kembang turi*, an Indonesian cabbage-like vegetable that is typically cooked with butter.

I posit that the phenomenon of the Javanese garden can be attributed not to notions of a particular Javanese human nature that is somehow innately drawn to birds and flowers, as everyday discourses may suggest, but rather to a history that tied together plantation labor, colonial government policy, and the epistemological separation and physical organization of domains and spaces of culture and nature. When Asian indentured laborers finished their five-year contracts on Surinamese plantations, the colonial government enticed many (especially Javanese laborers) to remain, in part by offering small plots of land to former laborers on or near the plantations where they worked, hoping to retain them as "colonists" who would start their own small-scale agricultural endeavors while also remaining an on-call labor force providing seasonal, temporary work to nearby plantations at low wages. This strategically promoted both large-scale and small-scale agriculture at the same time. The plots of land were assigned and "rented" from the government at a nominal fee. The right to live there, build a house, and develop the land could be passed down to later generations; however, since the land remained the property of the government, it could not be sold or traded.

After the decline of Suriname's plantation system, which was in its death throes by the mid-twentieth century, a conundrum resulted for the former laborers and their descendants who still occupied these plots. In rural Commewijne District, growing fruit and flowers on small plots of land to sell at the market in Paramaribo hardly made enough money to improve circumstances, and there was little other opportunity for employment in the districts; but moving elsewhere to seek opportunity meant forfeiting the land and home that one was entitled to occupy but not to sell. As a result, generations of ethnically Asian—especially Javanese—Surinamers remained tied to the plots of land that their laboring ancestors were allotted, and tied to their agricultural past as well, continuing to do small-scale and subsistence farming and other small jobs in poor rural villages (Hoeft 1998).

At present, it would be unsurprising to find a Javanese Surinamer working in agriculture, selling certain types of fruits and vegetables at market in Paramaribo, cooking at a warung, and/or maintaining an extensive, half-wild home garden in the city or the districts. These are considered stereotypical Javanese activities, but also give evidence of lingering ties with a particular history of plantation labor, land policy, and relations with cultivation and food. In everyday discourses, as innocuous as pointing out a particularly beautiful Javanese garden from a car window while passing by, a colloquial common sense of the "ethnic" that blurs notions of culture and human nature emerges, translating aesthetic and sensory perception (for example, the visual and olfactory properties of a blooming, fragrant garden) into common sense about Javanese-ness. Specific colonial histories disappear into empirical evidence of ethnic difference, discursively constructed as essential qualities that exist outside of time, place, and past and present conditions—qualities that become simply "Javanese."



Figure 11: Javanese homes in Commewijne District (Photos by author unless otherwise indicated).



Figure 12: A particularly lush Javanese garden around a driveway in Lelydorp.

Music and sound have also been sites where logics of ethnicity are interpreted as empirical common sense, as evidenced by Dutch acts of listening to difference inscribed in travelogues, journalism, and literature, such as the example I describe in the opening of this chapter. Another example comes from Johan van de Walle, a Dutch journalist who moved to colonial Curaçao to work at a metropolitan newspaper. In 1942 to 1946 he was sent to Suriname by the Dutch government to report on activities there while the Dutch government was exiled to London by the Nazi regime. In 1975, Van de Walle published a memoir about his time in Suriname, which included traveling the colony with then-Governor J.C. Kielstra. Kielstra had previously worked as a civil servant in the Dutch East Indies, spoke fluent Javanese, and his tenure was marked by efforts to improve conditions for rural Asian populations (which I discuss further in Chapter 2 and Chapter 4).

In his memoir, Van de Walle writes, "Sometimes, wandering, you came across a small Javanese settlement. Around the fall of evening, a few men played on the gamelan, hidden in the field and invisible from the path, drifting in and out of presence. The delicate sounds of the Javanese carillon [*klokkenspel*] filled the landscape with longing, with homesickness [*heimwee*]" (1975: 58). Again, as in Kesler's description, the sound of the gamelan elides with the natural landscape, the individual human players not visible to the listener or reader, but rather disappearing into a field. Van de Walle paints a picturesque image of tropical nature, coloring these sounds with twilight, which, close to the equator, briefly fills the landscape with an enchanted, glowing orange light.

What I am primarily interested in here is the notion that a characteristic allegedly common to Javanese people—namely, a nostalgic longing for the homeland—is somehow supported by, and can be heard in, Javanese musical expression. The supposed "homesickness"

of "the Javanese" runs through Dutch government documents, starting at the end of the nineteenth century, that debate whether Indonesians are suited for plantation labor in Suriname and should be "recruited" for this purpose. While having a number of traits that were seen as positive for the situation (such as having an allegedly inherent "docility" compared to recalcitrant British Indian workers [see Hoeffte 1998: 44-51 for more discussion], and being "more civilized" [*beschaafder*; Hensen 1892] and "better developed" [*beter ontwikkeld*; "Javanen" 1892] than Creole and British Indian laborers), the nostalgia and homesickness of "the Javanese" in Suriname is repeatedly cited as a barrier to their adaptation to life as a migrant population, accounting for their alleged inability to think towards a future, work hard, save money, and improve their own conditions in Suriname.¹² Continuity of homeland tradition, via religious rituals such as slametans and performative genres such as gamelan music and Javanese dance, seemed to provide evidence that Javanese people in Suriname were stuck in a collective past, unable to adapt to a modern life of labor and capital accumulation.

Parallel to the connections drawn between Javanese people and agriculture, I argue that this alleged "homesickness" of the Javanese, discursively constructed as inherent and natural, also has a functional, historical explanation. In oral histories conducted with the earliest generation of laborers who traveled from the Dutch East Indies to Suriname (Djasmadi et al. 2010; Kopijn & Mingoen 2008; Grasveld & Breunissen 1990), stories of emigration were often tied to coercion and false promises of what the conditions would be like in Suriname; some even described it as kidnapping (Grasveld 1987). Laborers arriving in Suriname found slave-like conditions, long hours and low wages, and little recourse to complaint. At the end of the initial

¹² This logic is reinscribed in more recent scholarly studies, such as the Dutch anthropologist Annemarie de Waal Malefijt's 1963 book, *The Javanese of Surinam*, based on her dissertation as a PhD student in anthropology at Columbia University.

five-year contracts, few had actually accumulated any wealth that they could bring back to Indonesia, which was a reason to remain in Suriname, farming the small plots of land provided by the colonial administration. What was intended to be a five-year stint to improve economic conditions often transformed into a new, permanent life in Suriname. Ultimately, only around 20% of laborers from the Dutch East Indies returned from Suriname to the Indonesian archipelago (compared to 33% from British India; Hoefte 1998: 65-6).

Given the false promises, harsh conditions, and failure of plans to return, it seems perfectly reasonable that many laborers from the Dutch East Indies "longed" for their homeland, perhaps regretting the decision (voluntary or involuntary) to come. Attributing nostalgic longing to an inherent Javanese character on the part of the colonial administration, then, conveniently explained away a legitimate reaction to legally and ethically questionable practices of recruitment and policies of labor. (Similarly, the "recalcitrance" of British Indian laborers and comparative "docility" of Javanese laborers in Suriname was a convenient way to formulate the former group's perfectly legitimate use of available channels to complain about labor conditions as British subjects, while the latter group, as Dutch subjects, had little recourse to official complaint; their complaints could only be made to authorities who also represented the prioritized concerns of the plantation owners.)

Van de Walle's hearing of the gamelan links Javanese people, collectively, with notions of time on other scales as well. The brief but sonically and visually vivid anecdote entangles the perceived cyclical structure of gamelan music, in contrast to the linearity of Western classical forms, with a tropical presence-in-the-moment opposed to modern, capitalist, goal-oriented time. This listening also takes place in the vague, collective timelessness of "sometimes" rather than being anchored to a specific occurrence involving individual musicians on a particular day. Also

at play, perhaps, is the "imperialist nostalgia" (Rosaldo 1989) that characterized many Dutch hearings of the gamelan and sensory encounters with other Indonesian objects particularly after the 1945 Indonesian Revolution, evoking an alleged "good old days" (*tempo doeloe*) of Dutch occupation (De Mul 2010, Drieënhuizen 2014, Gouda 1995).¹³ Certainly present is a broader European tendency to perceive and speak about Asian artistic traditions and activities in the tense of the "timeless eternal" (Said 2003: 72). Hearing Indonesian expressions as ancient, timeless, and collective places the practices of individual musicians in the present outside of the timescale of human activity or individual experience and, instead, on the timescale of nature, perceived as static and perpetual.

The primary question that defined "Javaneseness" in Suriname—namely, the suitability of this group of humans for the slave-like agricultural labor that they were intended to execute—shaped collective characterizations that informed the development of a notion of Javanese ethnicity in the context of Suriname, permeating both societal structures and everyday instances of empirical encounter and sensory perception. "The Javanese," as a homogeneous group, were seen as physically able, resilient to the tropical climate (as opposed to white Europeans who allegedly were physically unable to labor in the heat and humidity), and resistant to some tropical diseases. They were "docile" though "nostalgic." The question of suitability, phrased in terms of the collective properties of the human laborers known as "the Javanese," thus blurred the cultural and the natural, naturalizing qualities like docility and recalcitrance as inherent, and culturalizing physical strength and immunity to disease as characteristic of a group of people from the same geographic origin. And, furthermore, cultural practices and their aesthetic properties, such as

¹³ Further, Van de Walle uses the term *klokkenspel* for the gamelan, an old-fashioned term for a carillon that etymologically evokes a connection between modern clocks (*klokken*), church bells (also called *klokken*), and the measuring of time, entangling gamelan music and time at yet another level.

music and sound, were heard to reveal these sorts of apparent deep, essential truths about the nature of the humans who created and perpetuated them.

In the scenes that follow, I describe present-day engagements with materials and substances that have emerged from Javanese history to constitute Javaneseness, such as musical instruments, songs, and sound as well as the textures, tastes, and smells of gardens, produce, spices, and food. These objects and multisensory materialities bring their own histories of Javanese encounters with various aspects of new human and nonhuman landscapes and material and social conditions on Surinamese plantations. The sensory qualities of these different types of substances attest to histories that connect plantation labor, agriculture, gardens, and Javanese-Surinamese cuisine; and musical practice in its continuities with tradition as well as necessary adaptations to new physical and social landscapes, conjuring memories and imaginaries of Java and of a Javanese past in Suriname within the framework of individual Javanese-Surinamese lives in the present.

1.2 *Bersih Desa* in Blauwgrond

On a Saturday evening in November 2017, the neighborhood of Blauwgrond is undergoing its annual cleansing. The occasion is *Bersih Desa*, a Javanese holiday for the spiritual and literal "cleansing of the village."¹⁴ In Java, *Bersih Desa* is a holiday that pays tribute to the

¹⁴ Adherents of Javanese spirituality (called *kejawen* or Javanism, which is typically syncretized with Islam), observe a sequence of life cycle events (pregnancy, birth, circumcision, marriage, death) as well as holidays associated with the solar and lunar calendars. All of these occasions are typically observed with a ritual feast (*slametan*). The most important annual holidays are Bodo Kupat (the end of the fasting month) and *Bersih Desa* (associated with the harvest). Bodo Kupat is an Islamic holiday, while *Bersih Desa* is associated with pre-Islamic spiritual practice.

There seem to be infinite collective and personal varieties of Javanese spirituality and Islamic practice—usually, but not always, entangled with each other—observed in Suriname. This is evidenced, for example, by the large number of mosques that have been built as a result of groups splintering off from other groups to exercise a slightly different set of practices and beliefs; in a heavily Javanese neighborhood like Blauwgrond, in Paramaribo, there are

deep metaphysical history of place and to the sites where the spirit and human worlds have historically interacted. There, the spiritual cleansing of the village occurs through events conducted at sites associated with the village's guardian *endhang* (Javanese: spirit) or other important historical/spiritual landmarks that happen to lie nearby, in addition to the literal cleaning of home and community spaces, and personal forms of spiritual and moral upkeep. Villages in Java have various distinct manners of observing Bersih Desa, though it almost always involves a wayang kulit performance based on a Dewi Sri tale, featuring the goddess of fertility and the harvest; next to the wayang kulit there is typically a *slametan* ritual feast (Geertz 1960, Pemberton 1994, Koentjaraningrat 1985).

In Suriname, Javanese places do not have such deep historical connections to spirit and human histories that have occupied and shared the same spaces for centuries; Javanese history in Suriname starts only in 1890. In what I describe here, the performance of Bersih Desa itself—through the communal sharing of food, participation in music and puppet theater as performers and audience members, and community and individual forms of spiritual and physical cleansing—helps to reinscribe and perpetuate the "Javaneseness" of a place like Blauwgrond. Through such events, Blauwgrond is reconnected to its own colonial plantation history of the last century, and spiritually and aesthetically reconnected to a pre-colonial and a contemporary Java on the other side of the world. The Javaneseness of Blauwgrond is conjured into its physical

sometimes more than one mosque per block, offering different variants of Javanese Islamic practice. (Other groups of Muslims in Suriname, such as a minority group within the descendants of laborers from British India, have their own mosques.) Meanwhile, some practitioners of Javanese spirituality in Suriname do not identify as Muslims at all. For more on Islam among Javanese Surinamers in Suriname and the Netherlands, see Hoefte (2015), Vernooij & Bakker (2002), Van Wengen (1975), De Waal Malefijt (1971), Steenbrink (2002), Landman (1992), Ichwan (1999), and Towikromo (1997).

spaces through aural, visual, olfactory, and gustatory encounters with the materials and substances of Javanese ethnicity.

On the evening of Bersih Desa in Blauwgrond, the parking lots of the Javanese mosques on Jan Pasar Sarno Rebo Street are full, and the air is thick not only with post-rain humidity and mosquitos, but with the lively, rhythmic sounds of the Surinamese-style iron gamelan emanating from a large, high tent set up in a vacant lot. The ritual feast (*slametan*) for Bersih Desa has already occurred earlier in the day, and tonight the main event is the shadow puppet show accompanied by the neighborhood gamelan ensemble, Gamelan Orkest Bangun Wiromo. The gamelan plays some opening music as the audience begins to arrive. The guests are from the neighborhood as well as other parts of Paramaribo, the districts, and even include some vacationers from Holland, visiting family back home in Switi Sranan, "Sweet Suriname." Some guests are associated with the Javanese Islamic Association (one of its associated mosques in Blauwgrond is serving as the host of this event). Many, including all of the gamelan players, are wearing festive clothing in various patterns of Javanese wax-printed batik cloth imported from Indonesia, and many of the men wear batik *blangkon* (traditional Javanese headwraps).

Around 9:30 p.m., after the gamelan plays some opening music while the audience arrives and *saoto* soup is served from the temporary kitchen set up behind the large screen, the wayang itself begins. The first section of the wayang establishes the story, which is a Dewi Sri tale. The guests keep arriving, a continuous soft chatter filling the tent as new guests make the rounds, greeting those who are already here. Pak Sapto Sopawiro, known as the last professional *dhalang* (puppet master) in Suriname, and other older men involved in Javanese cultural activities have traveled here from Lelydorp and Wanica District. One of Pak Sapto's adult students, Pak Legimin, is tonight's puppeteer, performing a full-length wayang on his own for

one of the first times. Representatives from the Indonesian Embassy and a well-known Javanese politician make brief appearances and give a round of handshakes, but do not stay for long. Another round of soup is served, along with refills of Fernandes, a popular Surinamese soft drink, in different brightly colored flavors. In the second section of the wayang, the puppets begin their quest, traveling, dialoguing, and occasionally fighting, as the gamelan plays repertoire based on short, repeated melodies that can be played faster and louder for fight scenes or slower and quieter for scenes of calm dialogue between mythical royals. (Many of these pieces are similar to Central Javanese repertoire, but slightly altered in their "Surinamese" versions.)



Figure 13: Dhalang Pak Legimin and Gamelan Bangun Wiromo (Photo: Charles Chang)

Around midnight, the introductory section of the wayang comes to a close and the mood changes. This is the central section of the play, where the puppet Semar and his sons Petruk, Gareng, and Bagong—characters in the "coarse" (*kasar* in Javanese) aesthetic, but gods

nevertheless¹⁵—intervene for a comedic break. For an hour or more, the dhalang speaks through these characters, telling jokes and cleverly expounding on the themes of the tale in an entertaining manner. In a court-style wayang in Yogyakarta or Surakarta, this section is typically a break from the high Javanese that the "refined" (*halus* in Javanese) puppet characters use. Instead, Semar and his crew use relatable everyday language to draw the audience's attention to their jokes and words. In Suriname, these characters can also speak Dutch, Sranan, even phrases of Sarnami (the language of Hindustani Surinamers) and English (in contrast, the "refined" characters such as Arjuna and Dewi Sri speak only Javanese, even in Suriname; Sopawiro 2018). And, most importantly, the "coarse" characters can sing.

The songs depend on the particular skills, repertoire, and desires of the performing dhalang. Tonight, Pak Legimin leads the puppets, and the audience, through a selection of Pop Jawa (Javanese pop from Indonesia) songs from the 1970s and 1980s. As the puppets dance on the screen, the audience, until now occupied with eating and chit-chatting, turns full attention to the performance and many, especially the older audience members, sing along with words they know by heart. Members of the gamelan group and other guests from the audience take a turn with the microphone or get up to dance in front of the crowd. Jokes and laughter punctuate the Javanese lyrics, which are typically innocuous-seeming sentiments with double meanings that reveal insights into matters of the heart and body. For example, the lyrics of "Tul Jaenak," a song sung tonight that is originally by the Indonesian band Koes Plus and was popular in the 1970s,

¹⁵ For more on the aesthetics and iconography of puppets, see Holt 1967, Mrázek 2005, Brandon 1970. Specifically on Semar and sons, see Holt 1967:144ff, Mrázek 2005:359ff. From Holt: "The iconography of the wayang puppets externalizes functional role, hierarchical status, and temperament, and, sometimes, also a hero's age, state, or mood" (1967:140). Wayang puppets in Suriname are either imported from Java or made locally in a similar style, with the same array of characters (Sopawiro 2018).

begins, "Javanese sugar is always sweet, / *kripik* [a Javanese sweet] is eaten gladly."¹⁶ Javanese sugar, of course, refers to Javanese women, sweetness to sexual appeal, and the song goes on to specify that sweets that are not sweet enough are quickly discarded.

"Tul Jaenak" and other pop songs from the era are accompanied by the same neighborhood gamelan ensemble that has performed the opening sections of the wayang, now following the melodic contours and breaks of the collectively-sung verses, punctuated by the lively drumming on the *kendhang*, a two-headed drum, and the deeply resonating gong. The kitchen volunteers circulate with coffee, Parbo beer, and Styrofoam boxes of Javanese chips and sweets to fuel the participatory energy. The singing, dancing, and laughter go on into the night; at almost two in the morning, when I depart with my ride home, the performance is still going strong. When this participatory section eventually winds down and the narrative tale of the wayang starts to be resolved, the audience will filter out into the night, satiated with food and a collective good time. The successful Bersih Desa event will be documented with photos, videos, and comments on Facebook the following day. The cleansing of Blauwgrond is complete for this year.

¹⁶ "*Gula jawa rasane legi / Kripik mlinjo dipangan asu.*" Translated from Javanese to Dutch (including the subtexts) by Orlando Kromopawiro.



Figure 14: Pak Sapto takes a turn at the microphone (Photo: Charles Chang).



Figure 15: The audience of Bersih Desa in Blauwgrond (Photo: Charles Chang).

Despite the fact that Blauwgrond is well established in Suriname as a Javanese place—where Surinamers of all ethnicities frequent the strip of warungs serving casual Javanese food, where the neighborhood is comprised of aesthetically Javanese-style homes organized in

kampung style, and where the demographic is majority Javanese, descendants of the laborers who used to work on the plantation that was located here—events like Bersih Desa, I argue, are necessary for constructing and perpetuating the Javaneseness of space, place, and collective and individual experience. The multisensory materials of ethnicity, experienced in direct encounter through watching, listening, singing, and eating, bring Javaneseness to this evening's event, to fill the space of the performance and the broader space of Blauwgrond, and to linger in the everyday lives of audience members once they have returned home. Memory, history, and the notion of a homeland are evoked multisensorially in interactive, collective encounter, and will imbue Javanese home cooking and recorded gamelan music in the homes of many of the attendees with new meaning and new memories.

In Blauwgrond, Javaneseness is enacted through the sensory qualities of encounter, in the present, on the same grounds where Javanese-Surinamese colonial history took place, on the indigo plantation that gave the neighborhood its name. In the next section, I examine a similar practice—another celebration of Bersih Desa—that takes place in the Netherlands, requiring the sounds, visual aesthetics, smells, and memories evoked by Javanese-Surinamese instruments, songs, foods, and spices to travel across an ocean, to the former colonial metropole. Unanchored from the spaces where this particular history took place, I investigate how Javanese-Surinamese spaces are produced "from scratch" in the Netherlands, transforming Dutch public spaces with no particular connection to Indonesian or Surinamese history into temporary spaces of Javaneseness.

1.3 *Bersih Desa* in The Hague

A Bersih Desa celebration is also held annually in The Hague, hosted by Rukun Budi Utama (Javanese: "United in Seeking Prosperity," or RBU), a sociocultural organization that

began thirty years ago as a wellness and social support system for Javanese-Surinamese elderly in the Netherlands. RBU still supports two homes for the elderly close to The Hague, and now serves more generally as a central node in a network of Javanese-Surinamese cultural organizations, organizing a number of events throughout the year that involve local gamelan ensembles and dance groups. These events, which often combine traditional performing arts with Pop Jawa groups or DJs alongside catering by local Javanese-Surinamese cooks, occur in various rented performance spaces, sometimes owned by fellow Surinamers who will give a community discount.

Bersih Desa 2018 is comprised of two days of events on a weekend in September. The primary components of the holiday—the slametan ritual feast and the wayang kulit puppet show—occur on Sunday. These events take place in a municipal building that is rented out to various non-profit community organizations in The Hague. The preceding day, on a nearby soccer field, RBU has organized a Javanese cultural festival that also kicks off a new season for the community soccer league. The "cleansing" aspect of the holiday, in the form of literal cleaning as a service to the community, takes place after this festival: RBU members and volunteers will clean up the trash generated by the event.

The festival consists of a series of Javanese-Surinamese cultural performances by groups from The Hague and from farther afield. Members of Budoyo Mekar Sari, a local dance group, perform classical Javanese dances in the indoor clubhouse, where Javanese food is also being served. On the soccer field, a local club gives a demonstration of *pencak silat*, Indonesian martial arts. The main event of the day, attracting the largest crowd of spectators, is *jaran kepeng*, the "horse" trance dance performed by young men "riding" woven bamboo horses. The jaran kepeng group, which also includes older members playing live music on a small ensemble of

Surinamese-style gamelan instruments, is from Delfzijl, a municipality far in the north of the Netherlands where a small Javanese-Surinamese community is located. They have traveled to the Hague with their performing members, instruments, costumes, props, and family members in two vans, which will return back north after the performance, the dancers sleeping and recovering on the way. At the festival, they set up their gamelan instruments and props on the soccer field, clearing a large space within a ring of spectators in which to perform.

After the opening ornamental section (*kembangan*) of the jaran kepong, in which the dancers perform a choreography of "refined" (*halus*) gestures in unison using their bamboo horses, the four instruments¹⁷ of the small gamelan ensemble (*gamelan cilik*) that accompanies jaran kepong lead the dancers into the trance (*mabuk*) section of the performance. Under the supervision of the *gambuh*, the group's spiritual leader who has cultivated the ability to conjure spirits through extensive spiritual training including fasting and meditation, the trancing dancers experience sudden seizure-like fits of movement as they become possessed. They first embody the spirits of horses, eating grass and drinking water out of buckets, and then monkeys, peeling coconuts with their teeth.¹⁸ The gamelan plays an array of simple, short-form jaran kepong repertoire with lyrics during the choreographed opening dance. During the trance, the instruments play calmly but loudly, hammering away at repetitive melodies that shift the sense of time, even for the non-trancing observers, from linear passage to an encompassing, cyclical

¹⁷ The instruments in a Surinamese *gamelan cilik* are a drum (*kendhang*), a gong, one structural instrument (combined *kethuk/kenong*), and a two-octave melodic instrument (*saron*) played with two wooden mallets simultaneously (similar to the style usually associated with the wooden *gambang* in Java).

¹⁸ In Suriname it still sometimes occurs that the trancing jaran kepong dancers catch and kill a chicken with their bare hands and teeth; I observed this once, at the 2015 Javanese Day of Arrival celebrations in Mariënborg. People joke that this is the biggest difference between jaran kepong in Suriname and the Netherlands, due to strict animal rights policies in the latter country and the lack of such regulations in the former.

perpetual moment. At one point, one of the trancers jumps on top of the drum and dances, balancing there while the drummer continues to beat complex rhythms. Eventually, one by one, the young men are led out of trance by the gambuh, who burns incense to thank the inhabiting spirits for their service. The whole performance lasts about an hour.¹⁹



Figure 16: *Kembangan* (choreographed opening section) of jaran keping; the gamelan ensemble is visible in the background.

¹⁹ For more on jaran keping in Suriname see Gooswit 1988, 1991. On its origins in East Java see Groenendael 2008 and Kartomi 1973.



Figure 17: *Mabuk* (trance section) of jaran kepong.

Through such distinctly Javanese-Surinamese uses of this community space as jaran kepong, pencak silat, and other forms of dance and cultural performance, the soccer field is transformed temporarily into a Javanese space. After the performances, the first element of Bersih Desa occurs through literal cleaning, the RBU volunteers staying late to restore the field and indoor clubhouse space to cleanliness, no sign remaining of the celebration of Javanese-Surinamese culture and community in the Netherlands that just occurred. Thus, the space is both cleaned and cleansed in the spirit of Bersih Desa, simultaneously removing and reinforcing its temporary state of Javanese-ness.

The following day, Bersih Desa continues at a rented community space closer to the center of the city. The audience is older, on average, than that of the day before; while performances of pencak silat and jaran kepong tend to attract a younger crowd as forms of popular entertainment, the slametan feast and wayang puppet show draw, generally speaking, an

older audience interested in religious observation and/or "art form"—rather than "popular"—aspects of cultural performance. At both events, there are also many families present, ranging from young children and teenagers born in the Netherlands to older Javanese-Surinamers who emigrated to the Netherlands as young adults with still-vivid memories of a previous life in Suriname. Many of the elders wear batik clothing, purchased in Holland or on vacation in Indonesia.

Both the slametan and the wayang are abbreviated versions of their traditional forms. Live gamelan accompaniment is provided by an ensemble from The Hague, Bangun Tresna Budaya (BTB). Pak Orlando Kromopawiro and Pak Harrie Djojowikromo of BTB share the duties of dhalang, and Pak Orlando leads the slametan. He gives brief Javanese, Islamic, and Christian prayers (respectively in Javanese, Arabic, and Dutch languages) over a tray of the various traditional slametan dishes that have been prepared earlier by a team of volunteer cooks. Then Styrofoam boxes of food are distributed to the guests (free for the residents of the nearby Javanese-Surinamese homes for the elderly; for others guests, a few euros). Unlike in Indonesia and Suriname, where the guests typically nibble a bit at the food and then take the rest home to eat communally with the family in the domestic space, here the just-blessed food is eaten publicly while the wayang begins (and with plastic silverware rather than hands, and out of the Styrofoam boxes rather than the banana leaves used to wrap the food at slametans in Java and Suriname).



Figure 18: Pak Orlando gives a blessing over the slametan food.



Figure 19: Melvin Toemin, chairman of RBU, introduces the wayang.



Figure 20: The audience of Bersih Desa in The Hague (Photo: RBU Facebook).

This Bersih Desa wayang, like the one in Blauwgrond, also tells a story about Dewi Sri. Pak Harrie and his puppets tell a tale in which Dewi Sri is abducted and must be recovered so that her kingdom can enjoy the fertility and rich harvest that her presence ensures. A printed pamphlet that gives an explanation of Bersih Desa and a synopsis of the wayang story in Dutch is distributed to the audience. Pak Harrie has condensed the typically three-hour narrative into one hour. All of the puppets speak primarily in Dutch mixed with some Javanese, and they inhabit a modern world with reference made to Internet and USB sticks. These adaptations are intended to hold the attention of an audience that is, generally speaking, not accustomed to sitting through hours-long puppet shows in Javanese, and to accommodate a younger generation of Dutch Javanese Surinamers who often do not speak or understand Javanese well or at all (R.H. Djojowikromo, September 20, 2018, email to author).

Unlike in Blauwgrond, the audience sits more or less quietly and attentively through the narrative portion of the much shorter puppet show. The performance takes place indoors on a

stage in front of folding chairs in neat rows, in the afternoon rather than the evening, and soft drinks, but no alcoholic beverages, are for sale. But as the wayang nears the end of the narrative opening and enters the middle section, a familiar shift occurs. As Pak Harrie hands off dhalang duties to the younger Pak Orlando, the "coarse" ogre puppet Semar and his sons greet the audience in a variety of languages, starting in Sranan²⁰ ("*Fawaka!*"), followed by Chinese ("*Ni hao!*") and French ("*Bonjour!*"). As the puppets joke and interact, members of the audience turn to the program booklet, which includes the Javanese lyrics to sixteen popular songs from the 1970s and 80s by popular Indonesian artists such as Mas Mulyadi and Waldjinah, and start to sing along. "Tul Jaenak" by Koes Plus, also sung at Bersih Desa in Blauwgrond, is included. This time, in a sunlit gym with no alcohol present, the participation is a bit more mellow, but many of the older members of the audience set the booklet aside, quietly singing along with the lyrics by heart, and younger people who do not know the songs read the words or just clap to the beat.

Later, Pak Orlando tells me that this tradition of inserting gamelan-accompanied Pop Jawa songs from "back then" ("*toen*," meaning in this case the 1970s and 80s) originated in the community of Javanese Surinamers in the Netherlands active in cultural performance. He himself transcribed some of these songs for Bangun Tresna Budaya to play. He is not surprised that the practice has now circled back to Suriname. He explains that the songs that are preserved in this way are typically by Indonesian artists who traveled in person to give live performances in Suriname in the 1970s and 80s, sponsored by Javanese associations and the Indonesian Embassy. These hits from decades ago are more or less forgotten in Indonesia, he says, but because of the difficulty of circulating popular culture from Indonesia to the Javanese community in Suriname

²⁰ Also called Sranantongo, Surinamese, or Surinamese Creole

at that time, whatever did make it over became wildly popular and is preserved not only in memory but also through continued engagement and continued listening. As *campursari*, a Javanese genre that mixes gamelan and popular styles and instruments, evolved in Indonesia over the last decades, Suriname watched from afar, and Pak Orlando and others were inspired to do their own genre-mixing experiment, blending sounds from the early and late twentieth century. None of these creations have been professionally recorded, but instead circulate through live performance and videos posted on Facebook. At Bersih Desa, these songs conjure not just memories of a past Java-as-homeland, but also individual memories of listening in Suriname to live gamelan music in the 1960s or Pop Jawa songs in the 1980s, or of a childhood with recorded Pop Jawa or gamelan music as a sonic backdrop to home life with migrant parents in the Netherlands.

In The Hague, the wayang performance comes to a close as Pak Harrie returns to the dhalang role with Dewi Sri and the other puppets and resolves the tale: Dewi Sri is rescued and returned to her homeland and bountiful harvests are thus restored. The kendhang leads the music of the iron instruments to a close. The deeply resonant timbre of the gong echoes through the rented performance space as the volunteers begin to clean up the Styrofoam boxes and plastic cups, removing traces of the particular Javaneseness that was performed, heard, and shared within, as was done on the soccer field the day before.

Writing about Mexican migrant communities in the United States, Alex Chávez describes how, in situations of migration and other forms of transit and mobility, not only do bodies move through places, but places move through the circulations of bodies; spaces are "altered by our having been in them" (2017: 234), as embodied memories of past places ring out and transform new spaces. To this I add that it is not only through the circulations of human bodies, but also of

objects, materialities, and sensory substances that place moves through space. At Bersih Desa celebrations in Blauwgrond and The Hague, Javanese-Surinamese ethnicity is conjured and created through the materialities of gamelan instruments, wayang kulit puppets, and the woven rattan horses that the trancing jaran kepong dancers; through listening to music and joining in song; and through sensory encounters with the substances of Javanese sounds, Javanese foods and spices, and Javanese textures, like the material of batik clothing. Even elements of the spirit world travel to take part in this process. Pak Mariman, the leader of the Delfzijl jaran kepong group who migrated from Suriname to the Netherlands in 1975, has said that he had eighteen *endhangs* that he could conjure in Suriname, but that when he moved to the Netherlands only eight of them came along, implying that spirits travel much the same way that humans and their objects do (Grasveld 1987).

Through similar processes, the empty lot in Blauwgrond and the soccer field and rented community center in The Hague are transformed into multisensory places of Javanese experience and Javanese life. In the next section, I visit one more scene where sensory materials of Javanese ethnicity make an appearance in ethnic performance and ethnic space, but this time "out of place," further complicating notions of how ethnicity works and how objects, materials, and categories of culture and nature are thought to behave.

1.4 A *Winti Prey*

In his inscription of the Javanese gamelan in Suriname that I quote in the introduction to this chapter, Kesler writes that if one compares the gamelan "to the beating on a negro-drum, one realizes immediately the great distance that lies between brown and black" (Kesler 1932: 325). In what precedes, I have discussed notions that have shaped and informed what Kesler hears as "brown," an Asian musical tradition in the Caribbean, captured in the ethereal sonic backdrop of

the gamelan that aurally colors the natural landscape. But what about the "black," the form of personhood heard in "the beating on a negro-drum"? What histories of encounter and difference have shaped the meanings of "brown" and "black" in Suriname and their allegedly vastly different aural manifestations? After all, notions of ethnicity are not constructed in isolation, but in relation to other groups—in contrast to the logic of ethnicity that suggests that inherent qualities circulate with people and collectives, persisting despite external factors, to demonstrate the essence of a human collective. Despite pervasive logics of this "plural" model of difference in Suriname, I caught glimpses there that suggested other ways that difference, culture, nature, and human personhood might be seen to work.

On a hot day at the beginning of the small rainy season in mid-December, I traveled to the prevalently Afrodescendant town of Republiek in Para District, on the border between the populated coastal district and the densely jungled interior.²¹ There I was invited to attend a public *winti prey*, a ritual of music, dance, and trance connected to the Afro-Surinamese Winti religion (a complex of beliefs, rituals, and healing and medicinal practices connected to African roots, which has manifestations in both Creole and Maroon communities in Suriname and is also practiced among Afrodescendant Surinamers in the Netherlands; see Wooding [1972] 2013; Stephen 2003; Roemer 1998; Wekker 2006; Bilby 1999).

²¹ Para District is a former plantation region with a different colonial and ethnic history than the heavily Javanese Commewijne District. Unlike Commewijne plantations, many of which were able to survive into the twentieth century with the hiring of British Indian and Javanese indentured laborers (as I discuss in the following chapter), many plantations in Para were quickly divided into plots of land and sold following the abolition of slavery in 1863. Some, such as the large plantation Onverwacht, were sold to a collective of formerly enslaved Afrodescendants after they had gained their freedom and right to own property. These different histories and their links to different groups of plantation laborers—reinscribed in countless structural and everyday ways in "ethnically plural" Suriname—is, in part, why Para District is an Afrodescendant space while Commewijne District is a Javanese space in the present.

This winti prey took place at a winti healer's compound. The musicians, dancers, and audience gathered together under a semi-permanent open-air wooden structure with a tin roof. On one side, a gathering of men, mostly young, provided the music on an array of pitched and unpitched percussion instruments, complimented by their voices, which collectively followed the call-and-response patterns that the leader of the group, an older man, initiated. In the center of the space, in the middle of a swept dirt floor, was an offering of an array of plants and leaves, fabrics, a candle, and a bottle containing rum, some of which had been poured into a small bowl. This assemblage of items was surrounded by white chalk symbols that stood out against the dark dirt, illuminated by the flickering candle as the sun descended. Plastic chairs ringed the offering at a distance, at the edges of the pavilion, leaving a spacious circle for dancing. The dancers, all female and sometimes including female members of the audience, progressed in a slow circle around the offering, stepping slowly to the pulse of the music, song after song.

Since I attended this event as a break from my usual observations of Javanese cultural activities in Suriname and thought of it as belonging to a completely different cultural realm, I was surprised, upon arrival, to see almost all of the dancers—Afro-Surinamese females across a wide span of ages, from small children to seniors—wearing white dresses tailored similarly to a *kotomisi* (a style of Creole dress with a history tied to plantation slavery), but appliqued with decorative shapes cut out of brown-and-yellow-printed batik (traditional Indonesian wax-dyed fabric) in traditional Central Javanese patterns. Many of the dancers also used pieces of batik cloth as headwraps, worn in a traditional Afro-Surinamese *angisa* style. At an Afro-Surinamese winti event taking place in a historically Afro-Surinamese settlement in a majority Afro-Surinamese district for an almost exclusively Afro-Surinamese audience, I had no expectation of perceiving any element of such a distinctly and specifically Javanese aesthetic. The prevalent use

of traditional, recognizable Javanese batik material was a shock to my senses, seeming completely out of place in the context of the event at hand.



Figure 21: Kotomisi dresses with batik designs, Republik.

I started to inquire. An older woman sitting near me explained that this particular winti prey was meant to conjure a specific winti,²² or spirit, who typically took the form of a snake, which was symbolized by the colors brown and yellow. (Colors are often afforded the power to affect the happenings at a winti prey; at another event, the audience was requested to wear blue and white, and not black. This is also true during the possession portion of jaran kepeng; audience members should never wear red, as it draws unwanted attention from the possessing spirits.) At this winti prey, brown and yellow would help to call forth the snake spirit, and traditional Central Javanese wax prints offered the perfect brown and yellow patterns for the job.

²² I have also heard the Afro-Surinamese term "winti" used by Javanese Surinamers to refer to the spirits (typically called, in Javanese, *endhangs*) that are conjured during the trancing portion of a jaran kepeng.

Once I understood how to look, the batik did indeed have a snakelike visual effect. Later in the evening, one dancer, her face and limbs covered in white chalk, became possessed by the snake winti while fully covered by a large swath of batik cloth, from which she emerged to dance snakelike around the space and among the musicians before the winti was eventually expelled from her body.



Figure 22: Snake spirit possession.

Other attendees gave answers in the same vein: the batik was used because the colors of the fabric symbolized and invited the snake spirit. There was no mention of cultural hybridity, ethnic diversity, or Suriname's celebrated plurality to contextualize this apparent cultural borrowing. Later, I reflected on my expectations—both my surprise at seeing Javanese cultural elements at an Afro-Surinamese winti prey, and my assumption of a certain type of explanation that would acknowledge what I perceived as cultural fusion. I realized that my expectations of this event were shaped by the very "ethnic plurality" mindset I planned to critique: I understood Surinamese cultural expressions as taking place firmly within one ethnic domain, or, if not, then

according to an intentional hybridity that would draw from multiple bounded traditions, becoming itself a symbol of plurality and fusion.²³

Rather, the explanation that I received was in a sense more simple: in a sociopolitical space containing people of different histories, beliefs, and worldviews and thus a number of "cultural" traditions, the material manifestations of such traditions—such as food, music, visual arts, artifacts, and, in this case, textiles—once produced, became a resource for other cultural uses. Rolls of brown-and-yellow batik fabrics sit on shelves next to boldly colored West African prints²⁴ in textile shops in downtown Paramaribo, both types of fabric equally available to any customer who wants to make a dress in any style, for any occasion. In this sense, the material products of cultural activities associated with various groups whose ancestors arrived in Suriname as enslaved or indentured workers from elsewhere become part of the local landscape of sensorily perceptible materialities—thus more similar to the behavior of elements of "local nature" from elsewhere, such as fruits, plants, and trees, that have become part of the local natural environment of Suriname than to the way "local culture" is generally understood to behave. Objects and instances of culture, in the Surinamese landscape of ethnically-specific places, spaces, monuments, cuisines, musics, clothing, holidays, and political parties, are

²³ Examples of this type of celebratory ethnic/cultural fusion in Suriname include (1) the 2017 collaborative dance performance *Kulturu Fu Bro* (Sranan: "Culture to Breathe"), featuring four dancers of Javanese, Hindustani, Creole, and Maroon descent and dressed in their respective traditional clothing, which was performed at the Caribbean Pavilion of the 2017 World Expo in Astana, Kazakhstan and later in The Hague, and (2) the ensemble *Ala Kondre Dron* (Sranan: "Diverse Drums"), which consists of up to 25 drummers playing Javanese, Hindustani, Afro-Surinamese, indigenous, and Latin American percussion instruments in syncopated rhythms fusing various cultural traditions, often accompanying song and dance. *Ala Kondre Dron* has toured (as a smaller group) in the United States and Cuba.

²⁴ The history of wax printing in Indonesia and West Africa is tied through Dutch colonial involvement and Dutch attempts to mechanize the Indonesian artisanal tradition of batik and to export the results elsewhere in the world (Lowe 2015: 136)—a fascinating and understudied history which is outside of the bounds of discussion here.

typically conceived of as firmly attached to particular histories and inherited identities, continuing to stand for traditions, beliefs, and worldviews perpetually attached to elsewhere—in other words, sensory symbols of difference that carry ethnic/cultural meaning and can only encounter and interact with other ethnic objects and meanings in certain ways. In actuality, small instances of culture "out of place"—like the prevalent use of batik prints at the winti prey—betray "common sense" notions of how culture, nature, and ethnicity work, revealing instead a vast landscape of objects and aesthetic substances that become resources for making sense of and expressing the complexities of life and self in the private and public domain.

Chapter 2: The Javanese Gamelan in Suriname and the Netherlands

"The history of the gamelan in Suriname is inextricably bound with the history of contract labor."

- "Surinamese Javanese Gamelan,"
Intangible Heritage of the Netherlands
<https://www.immaterieelerfgoed.nl>

A photo taken circa 1915 by the photographer Augusta Curiel depicts a group of Javanese laborers, gathered around gamelan instruments, likely the first gamelan in Suriname. The performers and audience are all male, from spectating youth to the more wizened-looking (whether due to age or to a life of outdoor labor) players. They assemble under an *emperan*, a traditional Javanese semi-closed veranda structure that houses community gatherings, built on sturdy wooden pillars and decorated with palm leaves as one would find in Java. The fringes of palm drape and blow in the wind and dried, broken-off fronds carpet the dirt floor. The players are seated, gathered so closely that many of the instruments are not visible. The tone of the photograph is serious and focused, whether due to the occasion of a gamelan performance or of having a photograph made, which would have been rare at the time. At the back, people crowd in, standing on support beams and holding up babies, to see or to be seen by the camera's gaze. The gamelan players wear clean white clothes, likely their best, protected from the wear and tear of agricultural work and domestic life on the plantation, and their heads are covered with hats or wrapped cloths in Javanese style; the spectators are also dressed up, including one man wearing, somewhat incongruously, a dark, Western-style jacket.



Figure 23: Gamelan Orchestra at Mariënborg, c. 1915, Augusta Curiel (Stichting Surinaams Museum).

This photo, which has been reprinted in books and at least one exhibition about Javanese Surinamers (Djasmadi & Mingoen 2008), represents a moment in a musical and cultural history and in a narrative of colonial labor migration. Both the people and the musical instruments in this photo traveled from the Dutch East Indies to the plantation colony of Suriname, where a need for labor after the abolition of slavery led to a particular form of Javanese music and Javanese existence on the other side of the world from Java.

This chapter is about plantation logics—of labor, space, and human difference—and human histories that are made sensuous and audible in the present through the materiality, timbre, style, and repertoire of circulating musical instruments. In what follows, I trace the history of Javaneseness and the development of the Javanese gamelan in Suriname (and eventually the Javanese-Surinamese gamelan in the Netherlands) by attending to several specific

sets of circulating instruments, depicted in archival and contemporary photos. Through the structures and sounds of these instruments I construct a chronological history of the development of Javanese lives and Javanese-ness in Suriname. Musical instruments and musical sound are surrounded by discourses of listening that form and reinscribe their meaning (Feld & Fox 1994; Qureshi 2008). I contextualize these specific instruments and their stories within the discourses and descriptors that reveal how the sound of the Javanese-Surinamese gamelan, entangled with the history of Javanese labor migrants in Suriname, is perceived. Over the course of the twentieth century, through the movements and transformations of individual human lives and individual sets of instruments, a migrant musical tradition from Java transformed into a local Surinamese practice, and then became a migrant practice, once again, in the Netherlands. I argue that this particular colonial history is heard in the very materials and timbre—as well as style and repertoire—of the Javanese-Surinamese gamelan. The stories and histories of instruments and human lives that I recount in what follows shape and guide modes of listening, hearing, and understanding in the present.

My analysis draws from the propositions that plantation structures still organize people, space, and institutions in a world that is generally seen as post-plantation (Tsing 2015: 38-40; Davis et al. 2018), and that the "sensorial practices of colonialism" (Taussig 1993: 60) shape the meanings of material objects in the present (Taussig 1993; Seremetakis 1994). Tracing the circulations of objects in the form of raw materials and commodities traveling between New World plantations and Old World consumers has been a technique for understanding how plantation systems gave rise to modern capitalism (Mintz 1985; Ortiz 1947; Norton 2018), including highlighting the entanglements of Asia and Asians in colonial organizations of human and nonhuman worlds (Lowe 2015; Cañizares-Esguerra 2018; Khan 2004). Here I take musical

instruments as circulating objects that, in sensory interactions with performers and audiences, give sound to material, human, and colonial histories in the present (Qureshi 2008; Weidman 2006; Rancier 2014). Following Nadia Seremetakis, I understand sensory perception as the intersection between material culture and historiography—or, in other words, between everyday encounters with material objects and the large-scale histories and sociocultural changes that affect lives in greater-than-everyday ways. I argue, following Michael Taussig, that history, sensory experience, and the making of meaning are inseparable in "sensuous moment[s] of knowing" (1993: 45), in which the listening and knowing subject is "mirrored" in the materialities and timbres of the sounding object.

I argue that common discourses that surround acts of listening to the Javanese-Surinamese gamelan reveal and shape its power to give sensuous meaning to a particular history of colonial labor migration for Javanese Surinamers in the present. Three particular, overarching discourses consistently arise in talk describing the sound of the gamelan in Suriname: namely, that the Surinamese gamelan is (1) "coarse" (Dutch: *grof*), as opposed to the "refined" aesthetic characteristic of musical genres found in the court cultures of Central Java; (2) a blending of many regional Javanese/Indonesian styles, with an ability to absorb and adapt new influences; and (3) "traditional" or "authentic," as opposed to "modernized" cultural performance in contemporary Indonesia. Each of these descriptors frames the Surinamese gamelan in opposition to better-known Javanese gamelan traditions in Indonesia. These qualities, which entangle colonial history with present manifestations of cultural tradition, are heard in the very materialities of the Surinamese gamelan, in the timbre of wooden mallets striking iron; and they give sound to a different colonial history, via Suriname, from the more widely known and better documented history of the Netherlands's direct involvement in the Dutch East Indies.

How is listening to these instruments a moment of simultaneous perception and representation of the past, a "sensuous moment of knowing" history and self, that shapes and is shaped by notions and experiences of Javanese-ness in the present? In what follows, I investigate how the iron instruments of the Surinamese gamelan are imbued with the sonic signifiers of a Javanese history that is defined by transatlantic migration, lower class origins, plantation labor, and adaptation, disruption, and loss. I argue that this history is heard—not just symbolically, but literally—in the materialities of instruments, such as the distinct iron keys of many Surinamese gamelan instruments. I trace several sets of gamelan instruments, in Suriname and the Netherlands, from the early twentieth century to the present, piecing together a musical history of Javanese presence in Suriname. At the end of the chapter, I return to consider descriptions of the Javanese-Surinamese gamelan as coarse, traditional, unchanging, old, and comprised of an amalgamation of styles and influences, to examine how these qualities are heard and what they bring, through the senses, to the present about a distinct, transnational Javanese-Surinamese past.

2.1 Javanese Life on the Surinamese Plantation, 1890-1910

The former sugar plantation Mariënborg, in Commewijne District, where Curiel's²⁵ photo was taken, is where the story of the Javanese gamelan in Suriname begins. Commewijne District, across the Suriname River from the port city of Paramaribo, was the heart of the plantation colony, its land carved into rectangular plots that housed plantations producing sugar, coffee, and cacao. Mariënborg Plantation was the largest and most successful agricultural endeavor in Suriname, housing what was for a time one of the most modern sugar factories in the Americas (De Koning 2011b). Under the ownership of the Nederlandsche Handel-Maatschappij (the Dutch

²⁵ Augusta Curiel was of European—likely Portuguese Jewish—ancestry, and owned a photo studio on Domineestraat, Paramaribo, from 1904 until her death in 1937. Her photos provide a number of the earliest images of Javanese life in Suriname (Van Dijk et al. 2007).

Trading Company), Mariënborg produced and exported sugar cane, sugar, molasses, and rum for a century, reaching its peak of size and productivity in the 1930s (Hoefte 1998: 4). The plantation and factory were repeatedly infused with government money until, in the 1980s, it was sold to the government of Suriname and dismantled. Today, the factory buildings, worker barracks, company store, staff housing, and remnants of heavy machinery and train tracks can still be seen, but as an unfunded and more or less unmaintained open-air museum, verdant jungle nature sprouting out of the towering, rusting abandoned structures. The population of Mariënborg, like Commewijne District at large, is still overwhelmingly Javanese, the descendants of contract laborers who, even after the expiration of their initial contracts, remained tied to the plantation and its grounds.

Mariënborg, dependent on the availability of cheap labor, was a logical place for the initial experiment with recruiting contracted workers first from British India and then from the Dutch East Indies. The first group of Javanese laborers arrived at Mariënborg in 1890, initially contracted to work there for five years. The early years of Javanese life on Surinamese plantations, when the workers were still considered temporary, were concerned with labor and subsistence, with no thought given by the plantation administration to the workers' quality of life or to their general contentment with the arrangement.²⁶ But as Javanese workers increasingly came to be seen as a potential solution to Suriname's ongoing post-abolition labor problem, representatives of the plantations and the Dutch administration of Suriname began to discuss

²⁶ As I mention in the previous chapter, one reason why Javanese laborers came to replace British Indians on Surinamese plantations was because people coming from the Dutch East Indies had only the Dutch colonial government as recourse to complaint—a government that also represented, and typically prioritized the interests of, Surinamese planters. British Indians, on the other hand, could and did complain about plantation conditions, as documented in archives of correspondence with the British Consul in Suriname (Hoefte 1998).

how best to retain these migrant workers past the expiration of their contracts and to shape "the Javanese" in Suriname into an efficient, cheap, and sustainable labor force.

In 1904, apparently primarily to give the workers something wholesome to do in their free time and to deter gambling and opium use, the Dutch Trading Company purchased a set of Central Javanese gamelan instruments in Semarang and shipped them to Mariënborg. According to the oral history compiled by R.H. Djojowikromo (2011: 5), along with the instruments came temporary gamelan teachers from Semarang, Surakarta, Yogyakarta, and Surabaya, as well as a set of leather puppets for *wayang kulit* (shadow puppetry). Young male fieldworkers, some with previous musical experience and some without, were selected by plantation management to attend twice-weekly rehearsals and weekly performances of traditional music from Java; Javanese workers from the surrounding plantations came to listen. The ensemble was used to accompany genres such as *wayang kulit* and *wayang wong* (a related genre of theater using human instead of puppet actors) in a traditional court style, depicting mythological and royal figures who spoke in the highest register of the Javanese language. Though this courtly, elite style of gamelan, connected with the sultanates of Central Java, constituted a tradition that would have been largely foreign to the workers from agricultural villages and urban ports in Java and elsewhere in the Dutch East Indies, the sound of the gamelan was nostalgic enough to evoke emotional reactions from Javanese people in Suriname, many of whom had not heard its timbres and melodies for years (Djojowikromo 2011: 22).

The instruments depicted in the photo above, likely the very set that traveled by ship from the port of Semarang, are made of bronze and rest in wooden frames close to the ground, with intricate carvings on their wings and legs that identify where the instruments were made. At front are the two *bonangs*, instruments that are comprised of two rows of small pot gongs suspended

on their frames, here with the points of contact padded by banana leaves to increase the small gongs' resonance. The player of the *bonang barung* (large bonang) on the left side of the photo uses typical Javanese fabric-wrapped wooden mallets, while the player of the *bonang panerus* (small bonang) at right holds two unpadded wooden hammers.

Behind them, at center, is the *kendhang* (drum) player. Typically, in Central Java, the dominant hand plays the larger, deeper drumhead. In this photo, the *kendhang* player holds the drum with his right hand over the smaller, higher-pitched drumhead. This already indicates a divergence of playing style from the Central Javanese court tradition from which these instruments come, which would develop into a characteristic of the Surinamese style. With the dominant hand positioned over the smaller drumhead, Surinamese *kendhang* players bring a rhythmic dynamism to the music, with higher-pitched drum slaps frequently punctuating the musical texture. This gives Surinamese gamelan music a lively forward momentum, in contrast to courtly Central Javanese long-form pieces that are anchored in time by the dominant hand of the drummer beating out a stately, regular pulse at a resonant deeper pitch, reinforcing the meditative inertia of much Central Javanese court repertoire.

On the far right, tickled by palm fronds, is the namesake of the *gamelan gedé* (large gamelan) ensemble, the *gong gedé* or large gong. Strung up by fraying rope, the gong appears dull, worn, and possibly cracking, but at this angle the photographer provides a view of the powerful resonance potential formed by its elegant bronze curves. Between the seated men, one can glimpse a *saron* (melodic keyed instrument) behind the drum, its player appearing to hold two wooden hammers, one in each hand. To the far left is a *gendér* (elaborating keyed instrument) facing away from the photographer; the *gendér* player holds two padded mallets over the instrument's bronze keys, which are suspended by cords over its wooden frame. From what

can be seen in the photo, these instruments are more or less typical of a court-style gamelan gedé from Central Java, as described, for example, by the Dutch musicologist Jaap Kunst ([1949] 1973), who conducted fieldwork in Java not too long after this photograph was taken.

This photo depicts the result of a colonial strategy for transforming temporary migrant laborers into a permanent workforce: importing this set of musical instruments, to improve plantation conditions and logistics for both workers and employers, initiated a process of transformation of a foreign sonic practice to a new local musical culture. This set of gamelan instruments, "out of place" in Suriname, sewed the seeds of a locally grown tradition, beginning to change the local cultural landscape of Suriname as Javanese lives, too, adapted to changing conditions in a new world.

2.2 Emergence of the Javanese-Surinamese Gamelan, 1910s

In the second decade of the twentieth century, policies instituted in the interest of creating a sustainable, permanent Javanese workforce for Surinamese plantations caused the makeup of the Javanese population in Suriname—and the conditions and expectations of migrants and migration—to shift. Instead of urban itinerants found near the recruiting centers, workers with previous agricultural experience were specifically sought, some with families who accompanied them in the move. Bringing whole families was intended to help solve the problem of extreme gender imbalance (Hoefte 2014; Hoefte 1998) and to promote the creation of new generations of laborers. In order to make the move to Suriname attractive to families with established farms in Java, workers now arrived not planning to leave again after five years, but instead expecting to receive a plot of land after the end of their labor contracts which they could cultivate themselves as smallholding permanent or semi-permanent "immigrants" (Hoefte 1998). These "immigrant" laborers arriving in the 1910s brought not only agricultural experience from their *desas*

(Javanese: villages) in Java, but sometimes also firsthand experience playing gamelan music or participating in religious rituals in their villages, thus coming with cultural knowledge that the earliest groups of Javanese laborers in Suriname largely did not have (Djojowikromo 2011).

A 1909 report by a Dutch civil servant in Suriname documents Javanese life on Surinamese plantations from the viewpoint of an administration concerned with the practicalities of running a profitable exploitation colony. The Van Vleuten report (reproduced and annotated in Hoefte 1990) was based on fieldwork conducted by a civil servant, Herman van Vleuten, on furlough from his post in the Dutch East Indies and assigned to investigate complaints about the conditions for laborers on Surinamese plantations. The report speaks to the dismal conditions of hygiene, medical care, labor, and wages on the plantations, finding that complaints were "not entirely ungrounded" (Van Vleuten in Hoefte 1990: 116). One of Van Vleuten's recommendations—demonstrating his familiarity with East Indies life and scholarship as a Dutch-educated lifelong East Indies civil servant—was to facilitate Javanese musical and cultural practices for purposes of entertainment. In a section on "amusement," Van Vleuten observes, "life for the contract workers on the plantations is generally very monotonous. They have practically no appropriate enjoyable activities for diversion. They very rarely hear the tones of the gamelan, which are so pleasing for a Javanese. The contract worker has very few opportunities for dancing or other ways of amusing oneself, as the Indonesian immigrants were used to in Java, such as attending a wayang performance" (ibid.: 93). His practical suggestions for improving conditions for Javanese workers on plantations include concessions to these cultural necessities, such as a recommendation to cheaply build a permanent structure for holding *slametan* (ritual feasts) so that the effort and expense would not have to be wasted on setting up a temporary one in front of a different residence each time there was a Javanese holiday. Further,

Van Vleuten recommends that, so far as it is possible, Javanese laborers should be able to "play the gamelan from time to time or give a wayang performance, as, according to what this report-writer has seen, is indeed done in Java" (ibid.: 94). (He further cautions that, of course, plantation overseers should be careful that such gatherings not devolve into gambling parties or opium use.)

In Mariënburg, the administration of the plantation determined who could participate in gamelan lessons and performance, which did not necessarily correspond with who brought gamelan experience and skills from Java with them—rather, it was used as a reward for obedient work. This conflicted with the way that gamelan fit into life in Javanese villages, where gamelan playing was fluid with other social and life activities, rather than being a set-apart realm for those selected to acquire special knowledge. The sense of elitism that surrounded the playing of the Javanese gamelan at Mariënburg—controlled by the whims of plantation administrators, and reinforced by a repertoire of classical songs from court gamelan traditions that employed the highest level of Javanese language, which was mostly unintelligible to the contract workers from rural Java—was, according to Djojowikromo, the primary reason for the developments that followed (Djojowikromo 2011).

The single set of gamelan gedé instruments also kept Javanese musical life centered around Mariënburg Plantation. Workers on other plantations in Commewijne requested their own sets of instruments to play, but the Dutch Trading Company declined due to the cost. Instead, somewhere between 1910 and 1914, contract workers with gamelan knowledge on Mariënburg and the nearby smaller plantations Voorburg and Zoelen started to secretly build their own gamelan instruments. The instruments were made out of "[oil] barrels and anything else that seemed to be made of iron" (Djojowikromo pers. comm.), the most readily available material gathered from scrap metal on the plantations. It was then pounded into roughly rectangular bars,

embossed with a knob, which constituted the struck parts of the instruments. To tune them, Djojowikromo writes, the workers used the Mariënborg set as a model, copying it as closely as possible by humming its tones all the way home across the river after performances. The head of the drum was made of goat leather. It took around two years to complete the first *gamelan cilik* (small gamelan, with around six instruments) at the citrus plantation Zoelen across the Commewijne River from Mariënborg. The homemade and laboriously constructed scrap-metal instruments were certainly not perfect; "it didn't yet sound how it should," Djojowikromo writes (2011: 26). But the instruments were functional, and Javanese workers in Suriname could now play their "*eigen gamelanmuziek*," their "own" gamelan music, for the first time.

Within a week of the first performance, the news of the new gamelan at Zoelen spread across Commewijne, and people traveled from the surrounding plantations—Johan and Margaretha, Voorburg, Belwaarde, Nieuw Amsterdam, Alkmaar—to attend the second and third performances. Djojowikromo describes it as the beginning of what quickly became "a gamelan music revolution" (ibid.: 27). Between 1914 and 1918, several more gamelans were constructed by laborers on various Commewijne plantations, and once there were instruments, people played them as much as they could. Gamelan music could be heard two to three times per week, especially in the weekends, and audiences assembled for rehearsals as well as performances. The performers included workers who brought gamelan knowledge with them from their villages in Java as well as total beginners, young and old alike (though, presumably, exclusively males, fitting into the thoroughly gendered division of all types of labor and domestic activity in the plantation setting).

By the end of the 1910s, gamelan music in recognizable Central and East Java village styles filled the evening air after work hours on Commewijne plantations. In addition to the

pleasure of familiar aesthetics and sensory memory, it brought a new dimension to plantation social life. Djojowikromo writes, "The feel of the *desas* and *kampung*s [Javanese villages] slowly came back. This recrudescence of cultural art forms simultaneously stimulated the shared social life of the Javanese community, and brought other activities and skills along with it, such as painting, costume-making [for dance], and humble *warungs* (informal eateries)." Women cooked—hot tea and light snacks, familiar from Java and using ingredients that could also be grown in Suriname, such as cassava, rice, and coconut—to serve the audiences that assembled to listen. According to Djojowikromo, "The gamelan instruments meant a new outlook on life for the hardworking Javanese contract workers, their families and their descendants. The invention of the instruments allowed the creation of their own (folk) music, which gave them not only happiness and enjoyment, but also a certain freedom, where they could make their own choices in the area of cultural artistic expression" (ibid.: 52).

The result was the development of a new sound and a new repertoire for the gamelan in Suriname, simultaneously imitative, amalgamative, and divergent from the already-wide variety of gamelan traditions in royal, urban, and rural Java. Javanese classical *gendhings* (melodies) still served as the fundamental patterns, but they were recalled from memory, sometimes distant. Nothing was notated, as the contract workers (especially the earlier generations) were largely illiterate.²⁷ Also, those who came with musical knowledge from Java came from a wide range of villages each with their own gamelan traditions and ideas of how the instruments and pieces should sound, and with only distant or theoretical knowledge of the Central Javanese court gamelan traditions from which the Mariënborg gamelan gedé came. Thus, just as many different

²⁷ Furthermore, gamelan notation, developed only in the nineteenth century, was mainly used for preservation in the archives of the Central Javanese courts, not for use in performing what has largely been an oral tradition; see Sumarsam 1995.

people from different places as far ranging as Sumatra and Borneo came to constitute "the Javanese" in Suriname, musical knowledge from a variety of places and traditions—including the distantly remembered and the imagined—came to constitute the new tradition of "the" Javanese gamelan in Suriname.

The Dutch Trading Company's purchase of a gamelan gedé for Mariënborg—intended to make Suriname more livable for Javanese workers and families in order to facilitate the existence of a sustainable source of cheap "voluntary" labor by giving the workers something wholesome to do with their free time—thus resulted in some unintended consequences. With Surinamese versions of the gamelan instruments constructed through a combination of remembered knowledge, available material resources, and the gamelan gedé as a model, the playing and use of the gamelan in Suriname was removed from the control of plantation owners and directors and taken into the workers' own hands. Where imported materials (a gamelan set and its accompanying cultural knowledge) were planted, a new tradition grew in Suriname, through mimesis, the amalgamation of various traditions and knowledge, and an embrace of inevitable alterity in a new sociocultural and socioeconomic landscape.

2.3 Javanese Life off the Plantation, 1920s-1930s

Over the first half of the twentieth century, Javanese life in Suriname continued to change and develop. In 1916, the town of Moengo was created in eastern Suriname as the headquarters for mining in the bauxite-rich region. This new industry, which would transform Suriname's economy, created alternative opportunities for free workers on Commewijne plantations, offering somewhat better wages and conditions.



Figure 24: Javanese contract workers in Moengo, 1929-30, photographer unknown (Rijksmuseum).

In Moengo, where the above photo was taken, Suralco, a subsidiary of the American bauxite mining and aluminum producing company Alcoa, established its headquarters, and an American company town sprouted from the region's bauxite-rich red-orange soil. This isolated outpost in the east of the country simultaneously presented a novel way of life and a continuation of plantation logics and hierarchies of labor, race, gender, and the organization of space. As on the plantations, domestic space was organized by company-provided structures, and the linked logics of race, ethnicity, gender, and suitability for different types of labor determined many aspects of public and private life. Suralco provided official worker accommodations to skilled laborers with a permanent contract, who were mostly Dutch-educated, urban Afrodescendants (Creoles) with previous experience in civil service, business, or skilled labor.

Suralco welcomed Javanese ex-contract workers as a necessary source of cheap, unskilled labor, just as Commewijne plantations had done a couple decades earlier. In 1920, a ship arrived with 251 Javanese workers who were contracted for five-year terms directly with Suralco instead of a plantation, accompanied by their families. As part of the "company town" ideology, Suralco specifically requested workers who had families or were married, striving to maintain a wholesome and multi-generational social fabric that would also, over the longer term, self-perpetuate as a pool of ready labor by producing new generations. Since these laborers were not provided with official accommodations, an "informal shadow settlement" (Hoeft 2014) housing almost exclusively Javanese families developed in parallel to the worker barracks in Moengo. Under 1940s anti-assimilation laws that I discuss in more detail in Chapter 4, this settlement officially became the self-governed Javanese village of Wonoredjo. In addition to temporarily contracted male laborers, Wonoredjo's female population—mostly laborers' wives—supplied Suralco with cleaning staff, vegetables grown on personal plots, and warungs serving Javanese food to Suralco employees (De Koning 2011b).

Javanese life, overflowing the boundaries of plantations and integrating outwards into the social fabric of the colony from Nickerie District (a growing location for Javanese and Hindustani rice farmers) in the west to Moengo in the east, continued to develop and evolve through the 1920s and 1930s, with newly arriving migrants bringing cultural knowledge from the homeland and meeting well-established Javanese communities in Suriname, including younger generations with no memories of the ancestral homeland. (This led also led to some disputes, such as the debate over whether to pray facing west—as early migrants had done, continuing to orient themselves as one would to face Mecca from Indonesia—or facing east, in the actual direction of Mecca from Suriname; see Hoeft 2015.) As formerly indentured laborers left

Mariënburg and Commewijne, seeking new and better-compensated opportunities in places like Moengo, Javanese cultural performance traveled with them. In this sense, the migration from Commewijne plantations to other places in Suriname brought not only Javanese culture and memories from the Dutch East Indies, but also Javanese-Surinamese culture, already developed for a decade or more in the Javanese-Surinamese center of Mariënburg and the surrounding plantations. In new Javanese communities like that of Wonoredjo, instrument-making knowledge that developed in Commewijne was used to construct additional Surinamese-style gamelan sets out of available materials, such as scrap metal "borrowed" from Suralco's factories.

The decline of Suriname's plantation economy began with the abolition of slavery in 1863. Parallel to the rise of other industries such as mining, this decline accelerated with the acute effects of the worldwide depression that took hold in the 1920s and forced the administration to experiment with new approaches to keeping the colony alive and profitable. Around 1930, the Dutch administration officially shifted to a model of "free" (unindentured) labor, mass "migration," and "colonization," now bringing Javanese families as "colonists," no longer contractually bound to a plantation under the terms of indentured servitude, but intended to start small-scale independent agricultural projects of their own. In quick succession, the Immigration Fund and Immigration Department, which had supported the import of plantation laborers for decades, were dismantled, and the penal sanction (the primary means of enforcing indentured labor) was abolished. By 1935, with the expiration of the last five-year contracts, there were no more contract laborers in Suriname—just "free" migrants, "colonists" coming to try their luck growing various crops in Suriname's tropical soil (Hoefte 1998; Hoefte 1990: 13).

The photograph above, taken in Moengo circa 1930 by an unknown photographer, shows a small group of Javanese laborers posed with a set of gamelan instruments, constructed in a

curious mix of traditional Central Javanese and Surinamese styles. Again, the players are wearing their best, an amalgamation of Javanese dress—traditional batik (wax-dyed) sarongs on both men and women—and elements of Western clothing on the men, including jackets, dress shirts, ties, and scarves. Some of the men wear Javanese hats in a variety of traditional styles, including the wrapped, colorful *blangkon* (associated with Javanese spirituality) and the small black *peci* (associated with a more conservative Islam that arrived in Suriname with later groups of Javanese migrants in the 1920s and 1930s; see Hoefte 2015). One man, dressed all in Western clothing in shades of white, with a tasseled scarf tossed neatly over one shoulder, even wears glasses.

As in the photo from Mariëburg, again only a few instruments are visible in the photograph from Moengo, but they convey plenty of information about the practice of gamelan in Suriname as it spread, evolved, and in some ways remained continuous over the first decades of the twentieth century. The *kendhang*, front and center, remains structurally the same, but is positioned this time with the larger drumhead under the player's dominant hand, indicating a style of playing associated more with Central Java than with Suriname's own "village" style. Looking to the right, however, the viewer sees instruments built in Suriname and in distinct Surinamese style. The seated player in white shirt and *peci* (black hat associated with Islam), holding two wooden mallets, sits behind two melody instruments constructed with rectangular iron bars held by nails on simple wooden frames. (One player sitting behind two instruments indicates the staged nature of the photograph, as one person would not be playing both of these instruments.) Behind him (and to the viewer's right) is an instrument that is constructed in a more obviously divergent style: one iron plate suspended over a wooden box frame with a hole cut into the top, serving as a resonator. This is a single gong in the Surinamese style, sitting alone, with

no player. Behind it, there are also suspended gongs in traditional Indonesian style: a large *gong gedé* and a smaller secondary *gong suwukan*.

What is intriguing about this photograph is the mix of elements from Javanese and Surinamese styles. The gongs in particular raise questions: why are both a Surinamese-style gong and Central Javanese court-style gong present? Where did the large bronze gongs come from? There is no documentation of someone in Suriname with the knowledge or practice of making large gongs in this traditional court style; nor is it documented that Suralco sponsored a set of instruments from Indonesia for their Javanese workers, as the administration of Mariënburg had done a couple decades earlier. It is unlikely that instruments from the Mariënburg set would have made the ten-hour boat trip to Moengo. One can speculate, then, that the gongs were brought by migrants themselves during the later stages of Javanese migration—migrants with more resources, more knowledge, possibly higher status in their villages and with more experience in musical performance, who knew that the instruments could be important for establishing Javanese life on the other side of the world. (This could have been, perhaps, even sanctioned by Suralco as a form of wholesome, collective entertainment, much the same way the Dutch Trading Company allowed and encouraged the playing of gamelan music in Mariënburg.)

In this photograph, the malleability and multiplicity of Javaneseness is represented visually: the Western elements of dress meet the traditional batik cloth, the jewelry, and the instruments in Indonesian and Surinamese style. The various signifiers of status (pristine white jackets, glasses, female singers trained in classical style, and a large bronze gong) seemingly clash with the situation of being a temporary and exploited labor force for a precarious economy, positioned at the bottom of a colonial hierarchy of race and labor. This small group of well-dressed people with Western accouterments, standing perhaps on some sort of wood-planked

stage, diverge from the atmosphere in the photo taken in Mariënborg a decade and a half earlier. Merely fifteen years later and a hundred kilometers away, the nature and status of Javanese labor, and Javanese life, have begun to change. While still shaped by plantation logics of difference, ethnicity, and labor, there is a visual claim here to Javanese space—geographic, spiritual, and cultural space—in Suriname: a claim to a legitimate existence.

2.4 "Peak Years" of the Gamelan in Suriname, 1940s-1960s

With gamelan ensembles now widespread in Suriname—on plantations and within communities of ex-contract workers and free migrants elsewhere in Suriname, such as Moengo—the Surinamese gamelan sound, repertoire, and culture continued to develop. The instruments, knowledge, and sonic culture that traveled with Javanese people to new areas of Suriname came no longer from Java with new waves of migrating laborers, but from Surinamese plantations where it had already developed for decades. Within this Surinamese gamelan tradition, literate men could write new texts, musicians could compose new Surinamese melodies, and various regions of Suriname—even different performing ensembles—developed and promoted their own unique styles and sounds. New genres arose, in instantiations that referenced, but diverged from, those in Java. For example, at *tayup* parties—formally organized parties where female ledeks performed as a source of income—ledeks and male guests sing together in interactive dialogue-like duets from a repertoire of songs whose tunes and lyrics would be familiar to most participants. In Suriname, new dialogue-format songs developed, using exclusively low Javanese (*ngoko*), and later even Sranan.²⁸ Likewise, low Javanese language, popular entertainment, and gamelan accompaniment continued to develop together in theatrical genres such as wayang kulit, wayang wong, and *ludruk*, a form of theatrical

²⁸ Gooswit and Karijopawiro (1997) describe a *tayup* party in Suriname and transcribe the text of a few Surinamese songs, some of which are still popular among older generations.

performance that initially used all male actors and entertained with cross-dressing and physical humor.²⁹

During and after World War II, post-plantation Suriname experienced dramatic economic growth, due to American investments in the bauxite industry, including sending American troops to protect this crucial source of precious aluminum during the war. American soldiers in Paramaribo (who were mostly at loose ends, since Suriname was never under specific threat of attack) required food, housing, services, and entertainment. During this period, a wave of urbanization led to increased integration of Javanese and other rural populations into the fabric of urban Surinamese society—and also, among other effects, resulted in increased access to materials and tools for building gamelans, such as factory-quality iron-cutting tools and scrap metal. According to Djojowikromo, the period following World War II marked the "*topjaren*," the peak years, of Surinamese gamelan, corresponding with a general period of increased opportunity for Javanese people in Suriname (Djojowikromo 2011: 37).

But this period of growth for the Surinamese gamelan tradition, and for the lives and opportunities of Javanese people in Suriname in general, was also characterized by ongoing negotiations within Javanese communities and between Javanese people and other parts of Surinamese society—negotiations of power, political and social participation, and shifting relationships with Java and Suriname as dual, and sometimes competing, homelands. These questions at times divided communities and even families, through ideological as well as physical distance (due to urbanization, for example). Increased opportunities for political and social participation presented choices about how to approach living Javanese lives and

²⁹ *Cabaret*, a widely popular form of entertainment in Suriname, is associated with Javanese ethnicity and is a contemporaneous form of ludruk.

maintaining Javanese communities in Suriname, posing more and more acutely the question: was the goal to return to Java, or to improve life in Suriname?

Debates about the status and future of Javanese people in Suriname came both from the colonial administration and from within the community itself. For example, the governorship of J.C. Kielstra, from 1933 to 1944, marked a significant and controversial shift in the approach to governing various populations in Suriname, which paved the way for a paradigm of difference that would later manifest as "ethnic plurality." Kielstra's policies, which I detail further in Chapter 4, were motivated by the practical problem of maintaining a sustainable labor force in Suriname, and informed by his previous experiences as a civil servant in the Dutch East Indies and a professor of Indology and colonial theory in the Netherlands. Kielstra's proposed solution to the "problem of Suriname" was to transport entire villages from the Dutch East Indies—preserving even their social and spatial structures—with the goal of eventually bringing 100,000 individuals. This plan was accompanied by a series of policies that reversed the previous "assimilation" approach to governing difference in Suriname (such as compulsory Dutch-language education and marriage according to Christian tradition), and instead afforded Asian populations—particularly the Javanese—their own set of policies and laws that were meant to make a permanent life in Suriname more sustainable and appealing (see Hoefte 2014, Ramssoedh 1990, and Chapter 4).

Foiling Kielstra's plans for expansion, labor migration from the Dutch East Indies to Suriname ended with the outbreak of World War II, with the last ship of free migrants arriving in 1939. With the Dutch government in exile in London, Japanese occupation of Indonesia, and the subsequent Indonesian Revolution and independence, the little attention and resources that Suriname had benefited from were focused elsewhere, and plans for mass migration from Java at

an increasing scale were not resumed after the war ended; Kielstra was also voted out of the position of governor, in part due to his controversial anti-assimilation policies. Also as a result of the war and the loss of Indonesia, the Kingdom of the Netherlands was reorganized, with its colonies becoming "constituent countries" with increased autonomy over domestic affairs.

In anticipation of Suriname's first general parliamentary elections in 1949, political parties were established, most of them growing out of already existing sociocultural organizations that almost entirely followed ethnic or ethnic-religious lines. In addition to Creole-Protestant, Creole-Roman Catholic, and Hindustani parties, two of the first major political parties were Javanese: the PBIS (*Pergerakan Bangsa Indonesia Suriname*, Javanese: Movement of the Indonesian People in Suriname), which formed in 1947, and the KTPI (*Kaum Tani Persatuan Indonesia*, Javanese: Indonesian Farmers' Party), which formed in 1948 (Derveld 1982). The essential difference between these two parties was constituted by two different ideologies that diverged in conceptualization of the situation and goals of the Javanese in Suriname (and, relatedly, appealed to constituencies of different socioeconomic status). The PBIS was focused on improving the socioeconomic situation of Javanese people in Suriname through education, better opportunities, and a focus on financial strategy. The KTPI campaigned on a single-issue platform of organizing a mass return to Java.

The KTPI and the PBIS also diverged on the role of Javanese tradition, ritual, and forms of cultural expression in Javanese life in Suriname. The KTPI, which aimed to represent the interests of the "common" Javanese, promoted the maintenance of Javanese culture from the homeland; this ideology saw life in Suriname as continuous with life in Java, a mere detour which would end in return. The PBIS, which appealed to more educated Javanese and welcomed orthodox Muslims and Christians, not just adherents of traditional Javanese religion and culture,

argued that some traditions, such as raucous tayup parties featuring ledeks, were a financial drain for the Javanese, who would do better to save money with the goal of moving up in Surinamese society. Generally, maintaining Javanese village traditions was seen by PBIS supporters as incompatible with the goal of upward mobility and integration into Surinamese society.

In the first general election of 1949, the KTPI, with its appeal to the "common Javanese" and his presumed desire to maintain homeland religious and cultural practices and to return to Java, handily defeated the PBIS. Ironically, the leader of the defeated PBIS was the one to actually arrange a voyage that would take 1,000 Javanese Surinamers back to Indonesia, enacting the platform on which the opposing party had run and won. This voyage of repatriation, which occurred in 1954, was considered such a failure—among other factors, it brought the repatriants, instead of to Java, to a plot of almost uninhabitable land in the jungle of West Sumatra, which was also in the middle of a civil war—that it was, for many Javanese people in Suriname, the end of the dream of return (Kopijn & Mingoen 2008; Djasmadi et al. 2010; Hoeft 2015).

The divide between the two political parties could be understood as two different imaginings of the future for Javanese people in Suriname: was the goal to return to Java after a half-century interlude in Suriname, where the Javanese remained in many ways a foreign temporary workforce, or was the goal to form a sustainable, permanent Javanese existence in Suriname, maintaining and negotiating a form of Javaneseness that could both reference homeland traditions and integrate, in some fashion, into Surinamese society? These two ideologies can be heard, in a sense, in two Javanese-Surinamese musical traditions in Suriname. At Mariënborg, the original bronze gamelan shipped from Semarang was maintained, the individual instruments' wooden structures replaced over time as necessitated by the tropical climate. The timbre of bronze formed a sonic connection to Java, to continuous tradition from

the homeland, and to the possibility of return. Simultaneously, instruments made from iron scrap metal in the Surinamese style gave sound to a new Javanese existence and opportunity for advancement (for example, via employment in the Paramaribo and Moengo factories that provided access to the metal itself) in Suriname.



Figure 25: Gamelan players at Mariënburg during the Royal Visit, 1955, Willem van de Poll (Nationaal Archief).



Figure 26: Dance performance in Lelydorp during the Royal Visit, 1955, Willem van de Poll (Nationaal Archief).

The above two images were captured by a Dutch photographer, Willem van de Poll, who traveled to Suriname to document the historic visit of Dutch Queen Juliana and Prince Bernhard in 1955, the first time a sitting king or queen had visited the Dutch Caribbean in over a century. The Dutch royals were, in general, seen in a very positive light by Surinamers, with celebrity or even God-like status; they were seen as protectors of the Kingdom and as having ended slavery, as opposed to the Dutch-appointed colonial government, which was seen as the source of harmful policies and exploitation of the colony and its inhabitants. Thus, the rare royal visit was an occasion of enormous preparation and celebration, in Paramaribo as well as the smaller towns and districts. In their travels around the country, the queen and prince visited two Javanese places: Mariënborg, the site where Javanese history in Suriname began, and Lelydorp, a town south of Paramaribo where a number of Javanese ex-contract laborers resettled in the 1920s,

looking for work away from the plantations. The image from Mariënborg (Figure 25) shows bronze gamelan instruments from Central Java, most likely the original instruments from Semarang on new wooden frames. In front of a large crowd that lines the entrance to Mariënborg's sugar factory, this gamelan is used to accompany the processional entrance of the queen and prince and their small entourage, again fulfilling a royal purpose, for which the bronze instruments were initially constructed.

In Lelydorp (Figure 26), the gamelan instruments are built in the Surinamese style and are set up under a palm leaf-fringed *pendopo* (Javanese: pavilion). They are set up in front of a *wayang kulit* screen (likely just for show, as it is pushed to the back where no one would be able to see it), and accompany the single male dancer depicted here, and, later, a *jaran kepeng* performance documented in other photos and silent video. The queen and prince are spectators to these entertainments, and are later presented with a bouquet of flowers from the residents by representatives of the community, namely men dressed in bow ties and Western jackets, under which a *kris* (small Javanese sword) is tucked into the back of traditional batik sarongs.

While these two performances represented "Javaneseness" in Suriname to the Dutch queen and prince, they also convey differences within the group that constituted "the Javanese" in Suriname in 1955. In Lelydorp, far from the plantations, Javanese former laborers took advantage of the economic opportunities presented by the early twentieth-century search for gold in Suriname and the train line that, for this purpose, connected Paramaribo with the interior. Resulting from this modest prosperity were homemade sets of gamelan instruments and the opportunity to throw parties and host entertainments in a unique Javanese-Surinamese style. Meanwhile, in Mariënborg, the bronze gamelan instruments connected residents with Javanese tradition as well as their plantation past and continued agricultural life in Suriname. After the

failed attempt at repatriation to Indonesia in 1954, a return to Java became a less likely future—but a past, and a possible future, in Java could still be heard in the resonance of the large bronze gong.

2.5 Javanese Surinamers in the Netherlands, 1970s-Present



Figure 27: Still from *Javanen uit Suriname*, 1987 (dir. Fons Grasveld).

In this image from the 1987 documentary *Javanen uit Suriname* (Javanese from Suriname) by the Dutch filmmaker Fons Grasveld, the residents of a former cloister in Sint-Michielsgestel, a small town in the southern Netherlands near 's-Hertogenbosch, gather for a wayang kulit performance. The cloister, initially intended to be a temporary reception center for the influx of Surinamese migrants, has been converted to a group living facility for elderly Javanese Surinamers adjusting to Dutch life. The kitchen is the only place large enough to receive a full set of gamelan instruments and a wayang screen, which are placed on woven mats covering the kitchen floor. The residents bundle against the cold in thick Dutch wool sweaters

layered over traditional Javanese sarongs. Many of the men wear black *pecis* (hats associated with Islam). In other scenes of the film, residents attend basic Dutch lessons in the old cloister, striving to acquire a skill they never needed in heavily Javanese areas of rural Suriname. Some of these elderly Javanese Surinamers were born in Java and arrived in Suriname as young children; others were born in Suriname to migrant laborer parents. In the former cloister in a small town in the Netherlands, they speak Javanese with each other as they did in Suriname. The community of residents includes people who knew each other as neighbors or kin back on the other side of the ocean.

Twenty years after the failed repatriation attempt in 1954, Javanese Surinamers were again faced with an option to migrate, this time to the Netherlands. Suriname's independence from the Netherlands in 1975, a bloodless transfer of power, was preceded by rising nationalist sentiments particularly among the educated Creole class. It was followed several years later by a military coup that put Desi Bouterse, a member of the Creole-led National Democratic Party (and the current democratically-elected President of Suriname), in de facto rule from 1980 to 1988 (see Introduction). During this decade of ethnic tensions, political violence (often along ethnic lines), and economic instability, Surinamese people of all ethnic groups—but especially Hindustani and Javanese—moved to the Netherlands by the tens of thousands.

In the Netherlands, Surinamers relocated to places where family or acquaintances had already tested the waters, leading to ethnically homogeneous Surinamese communities that recreated many of the same ethnic-spatial logics of colonial Suriname. Javanese Surinamers mostly gathered in the northern Netherlands (Groningen, Delfzijl, and Hoogezand-Sappemeer), in the southern province of Noord-Brabant (Sint-Michielsgestel, Tilburg, and 's-Hertogenbosch), and in the large urban centers near the seacoast (Amsterdam, The Hague, Rotterdam, and

suburbs such as Zoetermeer and Almere). Many from the neighborhood of Blauwgrond in Suriname relocated to the town of Delfzijl in the northern Netherlands (where the only active *jaran kepong* group in the Netherlands is still located), while many residents of the Commewijne plantation Bakkie followed family members and neighbors to the town of Hoogezand (Grasveld & Breunissen 1990; Kopijn & Mingoen 2008).

At the wayang performance depicted above, the gamelan instruments are built in the Surinamese style. The shot is taken from the perspective of the person giving sound to the "colotomic structure" of the piece, a term coined by Jaap Kunst (1949) to describe the interlocking patterns of larger and smaller gongs that divide musical time into nested cycles (see also Spiller 2004; Brinner 2008). This image provides a clear view of the large gong (left), a single embossed bar suspended over a wooden resonating box with a round hole cut in the top; and the *kempul* (right), three slightly smaller bars suspended over a wooden resonating box with three round holes. These two simple instruments take the place of what would typically be, in a set of bronze instruments from Yogyakarta or Surakarta, a system of at least seven large suspended gongs of varying sizes and pitches, sometimes played by two people.

The instruments depicted here were made in Suriname and shipped to the Netherlands around the time of the first migratory wave. They were constructed by Pak Toiman Dijokromo, a well-known gamelan player who migrated from Moengo to The Hague and taught many members of the current generation of Javanese-Surinamese gamelan leaders what they know. At the time of the filming of this documentary, these instruments, along with a few experienced players, traveled around the Netherlands for Javanese holidays and events, making it possible to hear gamelan music in the Surinamese style in places like Sint-Michielsgestel.



Figure 28: Members of Bangun Tresna Budaya, 2019 (BTB Facebook).

These instruments now belong to Bangun Tresna Budaya, one of eight active Javanese-Surinamese gamelan groups in the Netherlands, who perform at the annual Bersih Desa celebrations in The Hague that I describe in the previous chapter. Bangun Tresna Budaya is one of the most active Javanese-Surinamese gamelan groups in the Netherlands, and they play exclusively Surinamese repertoire on Surinamese instruments, performing at community events and holiday celebrations like Bersih Desa. Pak Toiman, the maker of these instruments, was the mentor of Pak Orlando, who is now the musical leader of Bangun Tresna Budaya and is one of the few remaining people in the Netherlands with the knowledge to build Surinamese gamelan instruments himself. Over time, the wooden structures of the instruments have been restored or replaced, and the iron bars have received new coats of paint.

At present there are eight Javanese-Surinamese gamelan groups in the Netherlands: two each in Rotterdam, Amsterdam, and The Hague, and two in the north (Hoogezand and Delfzijl). Most of these groups are comprised of members from the first generation of Javanese Surinamers in the Netherlands, who are now reaching old age. Witing Kelapa in The Hague and Trisno Soeworo in Rotterdam hold weekly rehearsals and accept new members, and Witing Kelapa especially prides itself in having a number of young members, often the children of other members in the group. The two groups in The Hague, Bangun Tresna Budaya (who play only Surinamese repertoire on Surinamese instruments) and Witing Kelapa (who play both Surinamese and Indonesian repertoire, and usually rehearse on bronze instruments from Solo), share a number of players, and Witing Kelapa sometimes borrows Bangun Tresna Budaya's set of Surinamese instruments for performances.

During my time in the Netherlands, I joined Witing Kelapa's weekly rehearsals in The Hague and played in a few performances with the group. One of these occurred in the town of Arnhem, where Witing Kelapa was asked to perform at an event hosted by a local organization that promoted arts, crafts, and wellness practices "from Indonesian traditions" that emphasized Eastern spirituality and mysticism, through courses and trainings. The two groups had a mutual contact, and the leader of the organization in Arnhem, a Dutch man of Indo-European descent, thought it would be interesting to introduce his students to a little-known Indonesian tradition, the Javanese-Surinamese gamelan. Hermine Kromoredjo, who founded Witing Kelapa in 2004 along with her husband Wim, gave an introduction that briefly informed the attendees about the group and the very existence of a Javanese-Surinamese gamelan tradition (and of Javanese Surinamers themselves, which not every Dutch person knows). We performed a few Surinamese pieces on the Surinamese instruments borrowed from Bangun Tresna Budaya, and the leader of

the Arnhem organization led his students in a movement exercise to our music, which seemed loosely inspired by the embodied aesthetic of the Indonesian martial art tradition *pencak silat*. The attendees were enthusiastic participants, embracing the opportunity to see, hear, and move to a unique musical experience, and plans were made for further collaborations between the two groups in the future.

We then shared a lunch of Indonesian food, which, adapted for Dutch taste buds, was lacking the usual burn of complexly spicy Indonesian *sambal* (red pepper sauce). At our table, the Surinamers, accustomed to searingly spicy Surinamese *sambal* made with the mouth-numbing Caribbean Madame Jeanette pepper, quietly joked that they had to pour on the mild sauce in absurd quantities in order to get any taste out of the Dutchified Indonesian dishes. After lunch, I approached a conversation that was occurring between the Indo-Dutch leader of the Arnhem group and Wim Kromoredjo, one of the founders of Witing Kelapa, who was born in Lelydorp and migrated from Suriname to the Netherlands in 1987. The leader of the Arnhem organization was remarking that if he saw someone who looked Indonesian walking down the street in the Netherlands, he could immediately tell if they were from Suriname, from the way they dressed, walked, and (especially) talked. From my perspective, these visual and aural perceptions seemed inseparable from centuries of colonial history, leading to a Surinamese population in the Netherlands that was of generally lower socioeconomic status than the longstanding, well-integrated Indo-Dutch population, reflected in the way Javanese Surinamers are seen to dress, to carry themselves, and to sound in both the Javanese and Dutch languages.³⁰

³⁰ De Kleine (2002) recounts a history of the use of Dutch in Suriname (which, over time, was alternately enforced as a unifying and European-ifying colonial language, and restricted to elite groups) and its resulting differences from standard European Dutch. Particularly among older generations, Dutch is often a second or even third language of Surinamese people, acquired next to an ethnic group-specific language spoken at home (such as Javanese or Sarnami, the language

Pak Wim, laughing, agreed that Javanese Surinamers stuck out in their appearance, distinct from Indonesians or Indo-Dutch people. The Arnhem leader went on, now reflecting on history. He spoke briefly about on the challenges of his Indonesian and Indo ancestors and the colonial path that had led to his being born in the Netherlands. At least the Indonesians who migrated to Suriname had escaped the atrocities of the Dutch colonial regime in Java, Japanese internment camps, and the bloody Indonesian war for independence, he reflected. No one pointed out that Javanese life in Suriname was not exactly the Caribbean vacation his words seemed to imply. It was left unsaid that the ancestors of Pak Wim and the other Javanese Surinamers present had experienced their own colonial horrors, taking the place of slaves in a failing plantation system and building a life from nothing. Instead, we all meditated silently for a moment, each in our own way, on different colonial trajectories, which had circled back to meet

of Hindustani Surinamers) and Suriname's other lingua franca, Sranan (Surinamese Creole). Surinamese Dutch is "easily distinguishable from European Dutch" through its variations in semantics, phonology, and grammar (ibid.: 209). Many Surinamers in the Netherlands, especially younger generations who were born and formally educated there, can do a form of code switching not just between Dutch and Sranan, but also between European and Surinamese modes of Dutch, choosing to emphasize their Surinamese identity in particular situations through the use of Surinamese pronunciation, particular grammar "mistakes," or Surinamese Dutch phrases and expressions.

Further, the form of Javanese spoken among Javanese Surinamers differs from the Javanese spoken in Java (Villerius 2018; Wolfowitz 2002). Javanese is characterized by different "levels" of language spoken in different social situations, based on the relative status of the speaker and the addressee. In Suriname, because the contract laborers who arrived from Java were all of the same, lower class status, only the lowest level of the language (Ngoko) survived. Over the course of the twentieth century, Javanese language in Suriname was influenced by interaction with other languages, while in Indonesia, Javanese also developed, influenced by the increasing prevalence of Bahasa Indonesia as a national language. As a result, if Javanese Surinamers who speak fluent, native Javanese travel to Indonesia or interact with Indonesians in the Netherlands, their language might be found old-fashioned, rude, or even unintelligible. More than one of my informants described traveling to Indonesia and being perceived as very rude because they could not use the appropriate register of language for interactions with strangers, and resorting to speaking English instead. All of these contexts informed the generalized impressions that were being referenced in this conversation about the differences between Indo-Dutch people and Javanese Surinamers in the Netherlands.

here in the former metropole, through the instruments, sounds, and mutual enjoyment of the Javanese gamelan.³¹

2.6 Javanese Culture in Suriname, Present

Today, Moengo, Commewijne, Blauwgrond, Lelydorp, and other places in Suriname are still Javanese—demographically, historically, and sensorially, through visual aesthetics, the organization of space, the presence of warungs serving Javanese food, and (though with decreasing frequency) through the performance of music, dance, and wayang kulit at Javanese holiday celebrations, family occasions, and community events. After the blossoming of the Surinamese gamelan tradition in the early twentieth century and the "peak years" of the mid-twentieth century, when almost every Javanese settlement had at least one set of gamelan instruments (Djojowikromo 2011: 32), the Surinamese gamelan tradition has been in decline. This is due to a number of factors, including the political events, urbanization, and mass migration of the second half of the twentieth century, which disrupted communities and gamelan groups. It is also due to the other, competing forms of activities and entertainment that draw the

³¹ This instance is congruent with a common sentiment of Javanese Surinamers in the Netherlands that they are an invisible minority, as I mention in the Introduction to this dissertation. For example, in an interview about her successful initiative to place a collection of Javanese-Surinamese photos, documents, and oral histories in The Hague's municipal archive, Hariëtte Mingoen said, "Javanese people often say: I'm not important. What I want people to realize is that Javanese Surinamers, though they may keep quiet, have an interesting story to tell. It's a part of Dutch history. The Netherlands is responsible for the arrival of our ancestors in Suriname starting in August 9, 1890, and later in the Netherlands. I wouldn't want this to become a forgotten page in history" (Kensenhuis 2018). Mingoen's words and the conversation I observed in Arnhem both point to the ways in which Javanese-Surinamese history is drowned out by the larger and louder chorus of voices telling Indonesian and Indo-Dutch history. The relatively small population of Javanese Surinamers in the Netherlands (around 32,000 according to Djasmadi & Mingoen 2008) purport to feel subsumed by the much larger and in many ways more visible population of Indo Dutch (around 300,000 migrated to the Netherlands from Indonesia after its independence, and at present, by some estimates, there are as many as 1.5 to 2 million people in the Netherlands—around 10% of the population—of partial Indonesian ancestry).

attention of younger generations of Javanese Surinamers in both Suriname and the Netherlands (in other words, some of the same reasons that the loss of "traditional culture" is lamented in many places in the world). At present, there are only five active gamelan ensembles in Suriname, plus a few that assemble upon request, such as Pak Soerat's ensemble in Moengo, which only rehearses in anticipation of a performance—and performances occur less and less frequently these days, especially with the economic crisis of the past few years. Some communities have instruments, but no players left, as elders pass away, often taking their knowledge with them.

Sometimes instruments disappear. In Moengo—down the street from the home of Soerat and Sandra Irodikromo where I had my own first experience playing a Surinamese gamelan on their instruments made from Suralco scrap metal—lived a well-known dhalang, Gimán Kromodikoro, who held popular gatherings including gamelan and wayang performances in the large courtyard space in his home until his passing several years ago. Born in 1937, Pak Gimán grew up on a plantation in Commewijne, where he apprenticed a dhalang who had migrated as a laborer from Java. At 21, Pak Gimán left for Moengo to work for Suralco, where he worked until 1986, when the town and company were evacuated due to the war (Kromodikoro 2009).

The instruments and wayang puppets of Pak Gimán comprise one of the mysteries of missing objects: after his passing, friends and relatives took some of his belongings off the hands of his wife, presumably for safekeeping, and now no one knows exactly where the set of iron and wood instruments and the many handmade leather puppets have ended up, in whose closet or shed they are being kept, likely unprotected against the tropical climate. What is clear is that these instruments no longer have a sounding life; after Pak Gimán's death they have not been played to anyone's knowledge, and are now not likely in playing condition, wherever they are. These are the multiple ways in which the history of the Surinamese gamelan is silenced in a

place like Moengo: elders pass away, knowledge dies with them, instruments disappear, there is not enough money to hire Pak Soerat's group to perform at birthday parties or community events, where new younger members might be attracted to the gamelan and compelled to learn. This is not only the case in Moengo. In Saramacca and Nickerie Districts, for example, there are settlements with Javanese names and Javanese histories (such as Kampong Baroe, Javanese for "New Village," in Saramacca District) that used to have their own performing gamelan groups but no longer do. People lament this loss, but no one seems to know exactly what happened, or where those instruments are.



Figure 29: Henny Kaseran with his gamelan instruments, Blauwgrond, 2019 (Photo: Hariëtte Mingoen).

As long as a few people remain with the knowledge, skills, and motivation, there is also the possibility of making new sets of Surinamese style gamelan instruments. Recently, Henny Kaseran, the leader of the gamelan group Bangun Wiromo, who accompanied the Bersih Desa

performance in Blauwgrond that I describe in the previous chapter, built a new set of instruments for his group to use. He used galvanized iron plates, which he shaped, tuned, and smoothed with a blacksmith hammer, and then suspended over carved wooden frames on metal legs. He painted the frames red with yellow details. This set of instruments can be used by the group for decades, the wooden structures being restored or replaced over time, the iron keys sporadically tuned.

At present, there are also a number of sets of bronze instruments in Central Javanese (Yogya and Solo) style in Suriname. The Indonesian Embassy in Paramaribo houses two sets of instruments shipped from Solo, one of them used in weekly lessons. At the Sana Budaya (the Javanese Cultural Center in Paramaribo), a set of instruments gifted by the Sultanate of Yogyakarta is also used in weekly rehearsals with a number of informal groups, taught by Lionel Mertosetiko, a Surinamer who has apprenticed local musicians and also traveled to Indonesia to study music there. In this sense, there are still two traditions of gamelan performance and Javanese-Surinamese ideology in Suriname. The bronze sets of instruments in Suriname are no longer directly connected with the past origins of Javaneseness in Mariënborg, but rather gesture towards a present and future in which Javanese Surinamers can be more directly connected with Indonesia, using Facebook and other technologies to keep up with events, friends, and family in Indonesia. Traveling there is much easier, and students and teachers cross the globe to keep Javanese Surinamers up to date with "authentic" culture straight from the source, Java.

On the other hand, Surinamese-style instruments in both Suriname and the Netherlands give sound to a distinct tradition and a unique colonial history. With increased exposure to styles and repertoire imported through the Indonesian Embassy and other forms of contact with Indonesia, there are anxieties over the "watering down" (*verwateren*) and loss of Surinamese tradition. At present, anxieties over losing forms of Javanese-Surinamese culture elicit much

discussion at cultural events and on Facebook groups, and motivate the preservation efforts that I discuss in the Chapter 4. In this context, Surinamese-style instruments not only represent the continuation of a tradition that began in the 1910s with the building of the first Surinamese gamelan sets, but also give sound to a particular history of Indonesian-Dutch colonial entanglement, labor migration to the Caribbean, and mobility in Surinamese society and, for some, eventually to the Netherlands. Through contemporary Javanese-Surinamese ears in Suriname and the Netherlands, the timbre, style, and repertoire of the Surinamese-style gamelan tell the story of a particular community with a unique history and existence in the world. With too much contemporary exposure to Indonesian traditions, this sonic manifestation of history and presence could be lost.

2.7 How to Listen to a Javanese-Surinamese Gamelan

Each set of gamelan instruments gives sound to a story. Many sets of instruments made from "borrowed" or found iron spread the sound of the gamelan from the center of Mariënborg to smaller Javanese outposts, in reclaimed and localized forms. The timbre of Suralco iron still resonates in Moengo a decade after the company closed down, taking the best opportunities for employment in the town with it and causing widespread precarity and many to leave for nearby French Guiana. Instruments forged in Suriname, which joined the mass migration to the Netherlands in the late twentieth century, are now used to give musical presence to a little-known colonial history in the former metropole. Bronze instruments that have more recently arrived in Suriname from Indonesia aurally signify new connections with the "homeland," which, depending on one's perspective, can either strengthen, or threaten to replace, over a century of Javanese tradition in Suriname.

Language about the music of the Surinamese gamelan reveals how these stories—and an overarching story of Javaneseness in Suriname—are perceived, not just symbolically, but sensorially in its repertoire, styles, and the timbre of its instruments. The Surinamese gamelan in the present is heard and described as "coarse" rather than "refined"; as a blend of styles and influences; and as "traditional" or "authentic," still close to its roots among an early twentieth century community of illiterate migrant laborers. These descriptors frame the Surinamese gamelan in opposition to Central Javanese court traditions, and reflect a colonial history that is constructed as distinct and different from other Dutch-Indonesian colonial entanglements.

Each of these discourses reflects aspects of Javanese-Surinamese history, bringing historical events into the sensory present. First, the Surinamese gamelan is "coarse" (Dutch: *grof*). In the wayang tradition and across Javanese art more broadly, there exists a familiar and pervasive binary between the "refined" (Javanese: *halus*) and the "coarse" (Javanese: *kasar*), which organizes all of the characters in the wayang world. For wayang puppets, the *halus* and the *kasar* are communicated through aesthetic features and elements of style that correspond with the familiar paradigmatic character types, such as princes (*halus*) and ogres (*kasar*).³² These physical characteristics correspond to ethical qualities—in a very broad sense, the "good" and the "bad" in the mythical world of the Hindu epics from which the wayang stories come—but the coarse is also associated with irreverent fun, like the singing, dancing, bawdily joking Semar and his sons. *Kasar* characters speak low Javanese (in Suriname, even Sranan), sing popular songs,

³² For example, Brandon (1970) describes Judistira, one of the mythical Pandawa brothers, as "one of the most alus [sic: halus] of wajang [sic: wayang] figures... His body build is delicate, his foot stance is narrow, his nose is thin and sharply pointed; his eyes are almondlike slits, and he looks modestly almost straight at the ground. These are all very alus features to the Javanese. On the other hand, the ogre king, Barandjana, whose body is fat and bulging and covered with mats of repulsive hair, whose foot stance is broad and aggressive, whose nose is bulbous (like the 'inside of a mango,' the Javanese say), whose eyes are large, round, and staring, and who haughtily looks straight out, is kasar in almost every possible way" (1970: 41).

resort to slapstick and bodily humor, and are generally more entertaining for contemporary audiences, even if their missions are often ethically questionable. Coarse characters can be the bad guys, but they can also just be more relatable—non-royals who share intelligible dialogue that fills in the details of the plot for the audience, often with some humorous commentary, physical humor, or entertaining song and dance worked in (Brandon 1970, Holt 1967).

"Coarse" (Dutch: *grof*) is the most common and usually first descriptor that arises in conversations about the Surinamese gamelan. It is a "street gamelan," people say, sometimes almost apologetically, but often with pride. The iron, which is cheap (or free in the case of found or "borrowed" scrap metal), brittle, light, soft, and rust-prone compared to bronze, has a distinct timbre, sometimes described as "*dof*" or "dull" (Hoefte 1990: 21). In addition, the repertoire and characteristic style of playing—small-form pieces played fast, dynamic, loud, syncopated, with the frequent punctuation of lively, high-pitched drum slaps—is the opposite of the "refined" aura that is embodied by the calm, slow changes of traditional, longer-form *gendhings* played by the court gamelan, one melodic cycle of which can stretch on and on, with the secondary instruments filling in elaborate patterns between the lingering notes of the melody. The latter is the type of gamelan that has been described as "time become sound" (Kunst 1973: 119) and "pure and mysterious like moonlight" (Leonard Huizinga quoted in Kunst 1973: 248). In contrast, the Surinamese style of gamelan playing pulses the passing of time dynamically, more likely to cause one's foot to tap than one to become lost in a meditative reverie.

These characteristics—instruments, style, and repertoire—comprise the aesthetic that is frequently described as "coarse," street, or village style in contrast with the refined style of a bronze court gamelan. The use of "coarse"—*grof* in Dutch, but corresponding to the Javanese word *kasar*—is not a coincidence. The *halus-kasar* dichotomy, pervasive in Javanese puppets

and other arts, organizes Javanese culture more broadly, including human characteristics and actions.³³ The Surinamese style, with its origins in a community of laborers, mostly urban itinerants and village dwellers, grew out of a rejection of the elitist, hierarchical, and set-apart nature of the court gamelan tradition that was controlled, in Suriname, by the Mariënborg plantation administration. The embrace of the "coarse" tells a different story—a story of Javanese-ness in Suriname, geographically, culturally, and socioeconomically on the other side of the world from the high-art, refined court tradition that has resonated through musical imaginaries of Indonesia in the East and West.

Describing the Surinamese gamelan as comprised of a mix of various influences also reflects Javanese-Surinamese history. The Surinamese style of gamelan playing does not come from somewhere; it comes from everywhere, an amalgamation of the various possibilities, and produces a style that can incorporate more influences in the future. This is only appropriate for a cultural group that was forced, by circumstance and later by policy, to form a homogeneous unit—"the Javanese"—out of difference. Bringing religious, cultural, and linguistic traditions from all over Java and as far as Madura, Sumatra, and Borneo, "the Javanese" formed new

³³ Ferzacca (2010) and Retsikas (2007, 2010) both elaborate ethnographically on Javanese aesthetic terms that cross domains of sensory experience and personhood, including the dichotomy of *halus* and *kasar*. Retsikas finds that these terms are used to describe "styles of dress, types of food, manners of eating, speech tonalities, bodily postures, and overall comportment," establishing all of these "as intimately related to modes of personhood" (2010: 142). The *halus-kasar* dichotomy is also discursively entangled with notions of ethnic, gender, and socioeconomic difference. Ferzacca found that East Javanese people are considered (including by themselves) to be generally "kasar" in contrast to Central Javanese modes of embodying and enacting the "halus." For people of mixed East and Central Javanese descent, negotiating inner qualities and tendencies of *kasar* and *halus* was a critical mode of negotiating a sense of self as a person of mixed identity (Ferzacca 2010). Relatedly, in my study, I have heard Javanese Surinamers specify that the Surinamese gamelan tradition bears the influence of East Javanese styles of playing. This could reflect both ties to particular contract laborers from East Java, as well as a more general desire to distinguish the Surinamese style from paradigmatic, courtly, *halus* Central Javanese traditions.

communities and kin relations as a small group isolated in the Caribbean. Similarly, elements of various musical (and wider cultural and religious) practices were amalgamated into one "Javanese" practice and, in the case of the gamelan, one "Javanese" sound. This sound can absorb new influences, making tradition malleable and resilient. A history of encounter with various people, places, and sounds is also reflected in wayang puppets who can speak Dutch and Sranan and sing Caribbean and North American popular songs, appealing to new, diverse audiences.

At the same time that the Javanese-Surinamese gamelan tradition is blended and adaptable, it is also "authentic," particularly in contrast to contemporary Indonesian practices depicted as "modernizing" music and culture by embracing fusion with Western instruments, modern dance choreography, and "world music" genres and losing its roots in traditional Javanese spirituality. Gamelan in Suriname is "authentic," "historical," "unchanged," "traditional," "genuine." This also has the connotation of a deeper and stronger connection to traditional spiritual uses, as opposed to an emptying-out of these meanings in order to embrace the status of "*podiumkunst*" (staged art or performance art) in a modern secular world. Not only in music, but also in language and other forms of connection to a traditional way of life, "Indonesia has modernized, while we just stayed the same."³⁴

This sentiment is voiced often; for example, in the context of the annual Indo Fair, a trade fair sponsored by the Indonesian Embassy in Suriname to promote the development of economic and business relationships between the two countries, which features a weeklong array of cultural performance by artists from Suriname and Indonesia. In 2018, the event featured a

³⁴ Compare to Villerius's (2019) work on the Javanese language in Suriname, which has undergone in some ways similar developments to Javanese music and culture; Villerius has described how many old-fashioned words and expression have been retained in Javanese spoken in Suriname, which sound outdated and strange to the ears of Javanese speakers from Indonesia.

fashion show of batik fabrics in modern designs and a number of dance performances choreographed in modern or fusion styles to gamelan music accompaniment. To many in the audience of Surinamers mostly of Javanese ethnicity, these displays exemplified the difference between Javanese life in Suriname and in Indonesia: they have modernized, while we just stayed the same.

The sensory discourses of the Javanese-Surinamese gamelan—namely, that it is coarse, traditional, unchanging, old, and comprised of an amalgamation of styles and influences—hold, reveal, and shape the space of intersection between aural encounter and perception, on the one hand, and a distinct colonial history that leads to a collective sense of self in the present. The instruments of the Surinamese gamelan—which have evolved, traveled, and multiplied since 1904 in Mariëburg, throughout Suriname and to the Netherlands—are heard to contain aspects of this history in the very timbre of their materials, which contrast with the timbres of the iconic bronze court-style gamelan that has long resonated through Indonesian and Western imaginations. There is nothing inherently lower class about the actual waveforms of sound produced by wood striking iron—yet the perception of the iron gamelan as being attached to a history of indentured labor, poverty, and suffering is also not the product of a separate sociocultural analysis conducted after the fact of hearing, or a metaphorical understanding of the music. Rather, through the instruments' evolution in tandem with this history, the iron timbre of the Surinamese gamelan—as well as its dynamic playing style and particular repertoire—have come to literally sound these experiences and values, engaging listeners in a "sensuous moment of knowing" that relates present aural experiences with over 125 years of historical narrative.

Aural discourse, sensory perception, and processes of meaning-making are all able to hold the contradictions that are contained—not sorted out, but allowed to coexist—within

history, memory, and knowledge (Porcello et al. 2010). The gamelan in Suriname is heard to be both continuous with Javanese traditions, and departing from them to constitute a distinct style. Its style, repertoire, and instruments are heard as both unique and distinct, incorporating influences from many villages and regions of Java and other islands of the Indonesian archipelago as well as new influences in the Caribbean; and at the same time, the tradition is seen as "not having changed" since the beginning of the twentieth century, representing authentic roots from which Indonesian innovations have departed. But these seeming contradictions do not occur merely in discourse; rather, they are the facts of lived history, of a labor migration that entailed encounter, difference, and change and, at the same time, a striving to live some form of continuity with a prior existence—in other words, a striving to figure out how to be Javanese in Suriname. The tradition of Surinamese gamelan, and Javanese-ness in Suriname, constitute, simultaneously, a state continuous with what was prior; a different kind of Javanese-ness; and something that exists both in relationship to and in distinction from its Caribbean Others, the other musical traditions and ethnic groups that comprise Suriname's "ethnically plural" society. Lived experience, the narratives and discourses that have come to describe and historicize it, and the aural perception of the Javanese-Surinamese gamelan and its meaning to the Javanese-Surinamese community and individual listeners can thus contain such "contradictions" comfortably.

Chapter 3: *De Zangvogelwedstrijd* (The Songbird Competition)

In November 2016, ten Surinamese songbirds were intercepted at Schiphol Airport in the Netherlands, taped into toilet paper rolls with air holes poked into the sides (Hermans 2016; *Waterkant* 2016). In December 2013, also at Schiphol, six Surinamese songbirds—specifically, two types of finches known as *twatwas* and *pikolets*—were found in luggage, wrapped in tiny rectangular boxes to look like holiday gifts, with shiny red paper and sparkly ribbons and bows (NVWANatuur 2013). In 2012, three residents of The Hague were arrested for attempting to smuggle over twenty birds in a checked bag (*Omroepwest* 2012). There were three incidents that made it into the news in 2011. In June, twenty-five songbirds stuffed in a weekender bag were intercepted at Schiphol and returned to Suriname. In October, a smuggler was stopped at the Johan Adolf Pengel airport before he even left Suriname, with thirty-eight birds of ten different breeds in clear plastic bags. (These birds were either returned to the wild or given to the Paramaribo Zoo, which is how the zoo came into possession of its single exemplar of the very rare vibrant orange Guianan cock-of-the-rock). In November, fifty songbirds of a type known as the *rowti* were found at Schiphol, stuffed into two small wooden cages packed inside a checked bag, thirty-seven of them already dead (*NoSpang* 2011).

These events, covered in mainstream Dutch and Surinamese media, attest to the (in these cases failed) travels of birds by commercial flight from Suriname to the Netherlands. Not in the news are the presumably many more attempts at bird smuggling that do succeed. In this chapter, I am concerned with a few types of songbirds native to Suriname that travel this route, connecting the former colony to the European metropole, where they are sold to pet shops and breeders at high prices (selling just a few of them can cover the cost of the round trip flight). Eventually, many of these birds come to share the homes of human owners who have also

migrated from Suriname to settle in the Netherlands. Together, bird-human companions in both Suriname and the Netherlands enter into the intensely time-consuming, collaborative interspecies project of training for songbird competitions, which are the subject of this chapter.



Figure 30: A twatwa (left), pikolet (center), and rowti (right). Images: Chiang 2008.

The birds who compete are several types of finches native to the Guiana shield: the *rowti* (ruddy-breasted or chestnut-bellied seedeater), the *pikolet* (chestnut-bellied or lesser seed-finch), the *gelebek* (slate-colored seedeater), and the most prized of the bunch, the *twatwa* (large-billed seed-finch), known as the Rolls-Royce of Surinamese songbirds. These species are native to the swampy coastal region of Suriname as well as the savannas of the interior, and in the past could even be found in urban Paramaribo. Over the last several decades, the population of twatwas in particular has been depleted by excessive trapping for the caged-bird trade, and officially acquired endangered status in 2008. Catching twatwas in the wild is now illegal, and breeding songbirds has become more popular, with specialists breeding the various types of birds in both Suriname and the Netherlands. (For the other types of finches, trapping is currently still allowed

but restricted in number and season.) Nevertheless, trapping twatwas and other songbirds still occurs, as does smuggling them to the Netherlands.³⁵

The songbird competition is strictly and more or less exclusively a pastime of men.³⁶ The avian participants, as well, are exclusively male, since female birds do not sing competitively against one another; females of the types of birds involved in the competition sing "not at all, or badly" according to Chiang (2008: 24). Framing the human raising and training of birds as an exclusively male activity is in line with long held epistemologies that understand human culture as the domination of nature, and understand this to be the domain of the male (as outlined and critiqued, for example, by Sherry B. Ortner in her 1974 article "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?"). This epistemological schema can be traced back to representations of early explorations of the Americas, which depicted European men in a land of "virgin" nature ripe for conquest and feminized indigenous occupants unable to dominate and cultivate it themselves (Raffles 2002, Merchant 1990). Yet, as I explore in this chapter, if the raising and training of birds is understood as an ideologically masculine project of the human domination of nature, there are many moments—such as when a promising bird, for whatever unknowable reason, chooses to fall silent at the crucial moment of competition—when "nature" refuses to cooperate, exercising its subtle modes of resistance to domination. Such reminders of the agency,

³⁵ The Songbird Associations that organize the local competitions in the Netherlands officially discourage the smuggling of birds and other forms of illegal activity or mistreatment of animals, and promote the local breeding and ethical care of birds. (Once, however, when I asked where a particular bird in Amsterdam had come from, his owner replied, with a wink, "He flew here"; and in Suriname, when I mentioned a failed smuggling attempt in a conversation about transporting birds to the Netherlands, my interlocutor said, "They should have used my guy!")

³⁶ In Suriname, I observed one female participant who won a prize for a bird she brought to compete. (Her husband won an award for a different bird in the same competition cycle.) In the Netherlands, I have not seen nor heard about any female participants.

subjectivity, and unpredictableness of birds construct a relationship that is much more complex than merely the human (male) objectification and domination of nature.

In what follows, I locate the songbird competition within a broader history where notions both of Caribbean "nature" (such as birds) and sound (such as birdsong) were operative in sorting out modern hierarchies of the human and the nonhuman in Latin America and the Caribbean (Ochoa 2014). The bodies and sounds of birds have long been instrumental in processes of categorizing and understanding human life, in the colonial Caribbean and in modern Western science (Sobrevilla 2016, Mundy 2018). Today, in Suriname and the Netherlands, bird companionship helps men negotiate economic and other forms of precarity, the various demands of contemporary life, and the everyday challenges that face postcolonial "Others" living in Europe. In the analysis that follows, I explore discourses of sound, culture, and nature that arise in conversations about topics such as bird training, freedom, and life in Suriname and the Netherlands, and that are entangled with the male and masculine environment of bird raising, training, and competing. The Surinamese songbird competition is a social space for male Surinamese becoming, both avian and human, and, as I argue and explore below, through this interspecies, intersubjective becoming, particular images and discourses of Surinamese and Dutch nature and society emerge. At the songbird competitions, notions of the natural and the cultural are implicitly sorted out and reassembled into ideas and discourses of bird nature and human nature, such as in concepts of masculinity, freedom, and the wild that I scrutinize below.

In this chapter, I describe a number of histories and scenes of human-bird relations that build the multiple modes of entanglement entailed by the songbird competition and its constitutive interspecies practices of hearing, understanding, and acquiring birdsong. The songbird competition constitutes a form of interspecies companionship (Haraway 2003, 2008)

and creates a human-avian male social space that includes love, caretaking, and conviviality as well as strategy and contest. At the end of the chapter, I also include a scene where human femininity is negotiated and performed in another bird-related practice. This contrasting practice and my analysis of it highlight the ambiguities of interspecies relation and representation, suggesting ways of reframing intertwined conceptual dichotomies such as subject and object, male and female, human and nonhuman, and culture and nature.

Like the instruments of the Javanese-Surinamese gamelan, Surinamese birds who travel with human men within Suriname and to the Netherlands also encompass complex discourses and ambiguous histories embedded in their materialities (bodies) and timbres (songs). But there are also ways in which birds are not like musical instruments. Perhaps most significantly, while the gamelan instruments in Suriname are part of a "living" tradition that is also surrounded by anxious discourses expressing fear of its ailing or dying—and while individual instruments are sometimes left to decay and disappear—birds are *literally* alive, and die literal deaths (including as a byproduct of processes of trapping, smuggling, breeding, and other aspects of Surinamese songbird practice). While birds are paradigmatic objects of nature, they are also individual, living subjects with sonic lives imprinted by their experiences. This ambiguous status lends itself to the rethinking of the interrelated dichotomies of culture/nature, subject/object, and male/female more broadly.

3.1 The Songbird Competition in Suriname

In Paramaribo, the songbird competition takes place almost every Sunday morning, year round, on Independence Square, a grassy rectangle in front of the presidential palace in the center of town. Early in the morning, before the city at large begins to stir, cars and motorbikes line this central square, bringing men and birds. Each birdcage—a small, uniform rectangle,

handmade from wood—has its own wooden stake, which is hammered firmly into the soil; the cage, which has a built-in hook on top, is then hung on the stake, a few feet off the ground. Each stake is positioned a meter or two from its neighbors, giving each bird its own small domain. As men and birds arrive, a network of birdcages spreads across the landscape, and the chorus of intermittent birdsong builds into a polyphony of chirps and trills.

The official tournament occurs three times per year, in February, July, and October. The rounds of the tournament are spread over a few weekends, the brackets leading to the eventual declaration of a national champion, with elaborate bird-themed trophies handed out in multiple categories (such as best of species or most total points scored). Participants are on teams based on geographical location; teams come from nearby towns like Dijkveld and sometimes as far away as Nickerie. Following a schema of pre-determined brackets, pairs of birds of the same species sing against each other. Each bout eliminates one competitor and advances the other to the next round, which takes place the following week. In this knockout system, if a bird cracks under the pressure and falls silent at the crucial moment, he is out of the competition for the season, until the next tournament cycle.

The first bout begins promptly at seven a.m. Everyone gathers at a distance of at least four meters from the two competing birds, giving them space to focus on each other rather than the distractions of the gathered crowd. The owners of the birds hang their covered cages on stakes fifty centimeters apart and wait for the signal. When the timekeeper blows the whistle, the covers are removed and the singing begins. The birds' songs—called "*slagen*," or "hits"—are tallied by trained scorekeepers, one per bird, on small chalkboards on either side of the competing pair. For each song sung, a tally mark is struck with chalk for the whole audience to

see. After fifteen minutes, time is called, and the tallies are counted. The winner is announced, and the human owners of the competing birds shake hands.



Figure 31: A competition round in Paramaribo.

In between the cycles of the official, organized tournament, "training" takes place. On training Sundays, men and birds still gather, but no formal bouts occur; rather, the birds sing freely, spread over the square, while the men observe and socialize nearby. Every so often someone picks up the cage of one of their birds and, with the permission of its owner, approaches another bird's cage. He holds up his bird so the two cages are next to each other. Both owners are curious to see what happens: will one or both of the birds fall silent, intimidated, or will they sing aggressively, recognizing a competitor for mates and territory? If the former happens, the birds are not quite ready for competition, or perhaps lack a suitably aggressive personality and will never become competitive birds. If the birds do sing, they are potential competitors, ready to participate in the next tournament.

On tournament and training days alike, as the morning passes and the formal or informal bouts of the day have taken place, the attention turns from birds to human camaraderie. Men relax over Surinamese home cooking (on tournament days, a Javanese *warung* on wheels provides spicy, fragrant fried rice and noodles made to order) and shared liter bottles of the local lager, Parbo, poured into plastic cups. They catch up on bird news and human gossip, sharing jokes and laughs about everything from current political events to relationships and life philosophies, code switching frequently between Dutch and Sranan (Surinamese Creole), a second national *lingua franca* that is often found to be more conducive to casual, irreverent joking. On tournament days, winners are celebrated and losers gently teased. Some of these men have been pinning their hopes on a particularly promising bird for months, only to have the bird's debut fall short of his demonstrated potential. Sometimes a happy bird owner, pleased with a performance, brings out a bottle of Johnnie Walker Black Label, filling everyone's plastic cups with a more bracing round of scotch whiskey; those who have been disappointed by the day's results can drown their sorrows. Meanwhile, the surrounding city starts to wake up and tourists from the nearby strip of hotels pass by on their way to the waterfront, some stopping to take a gander at the happenings.

For most of the period I spent in Suriname in 2017 to 2018, the competition was temporarily relocated to the Cultuurtuin (Culture Garden), a more set-aside space near the zoo in North Paramaribo.³⁷ In the Cultuurtuin, where some locals go jogging in pairs or groups on weekend mornings, tourists only arrived at the songbird competition if they sought it out, traveling by taxi from Paramaribo's hotel strip. While the Cultuurtuin setting was less conducive

³⁷ This was officially due to grass replanting on the fenced-off Independence Square, though as the replanting dragged on and the square remained fenced, some speculated that it was actually closed in response to a large but peaceful demonstration against government corruption and increasing widespread poverty, which had taken place there in May 2017.

to being happened upon by non-participants, it provided a setting more conducive to leisurely socialization, with the participants sitting on a small set of bleachers, shielded from the sun, next to the large soccer field where the birdcages were hung on their stands. Especially after a tournament, the beer- and whiskey-drinking and camaraderie, accompanied by Javanese food from the portable *warung* or the occasional *roti* and *bara* (popular Hindustani fast foods) supplied by the competition organizers, would stretch out into the afternoon. On one such afternoon, as everyone sprawled across the bleachers finishing (and refilling) plastic cups of Black Label, one participant commented, "We're all going to leave here horizontal." For Surinamese men, these Sunday mornings provide a convivial space to take a break from life and relax with fellow bird-lovers, against the sonic backdrop of birds engaging and interacting in their own shared social space.



Figure 32: Birds and bleachers at the Cultuurtuin, Paramaribo.

3.2 Interspecies Male Companionship

"They say a bird is more important than a woman," a birdman tells my male friend and me at a Sunday morning training session.

"And do you experience it like that?" my friend asks. "Is it more complicated to be with a person than a bird?"

"A bird can't say anything back to you," he responds, after a thoughtful pause. "But a woman, she'll slap you, right?"

Birding, at large, is historically a male world.³⁸ Male perspectives and historical categories of gender and sexuality have shaped our human understandings of birds, in the popular imagination as well as in ornithology and other sciences (Mundy 2018). We have long understood male birds to be the producers of song as well as its perceiving listeners; only recently has bird science emphasized that female birds may have roles as listening (and, sometimes, sounding) agentive subjects as well (Prum 2017, Riebel et al. 2019, Holveck & Riebel 2014).

The masculine nature of the Surinamese caged-bird world is shaped in part through highly obvious sexual metaphors about bird behavior (Chiang 2008, Van der Grefte 2008). The competitive singing is framed in terms of sexual performance: the birds sing to compete with other males over territory and mates, and before a competition they are strategically aroused into

³⁸ This truism is perhaps best supported with evidence from the experiences of those who participate in this world from non-male or non-gender normative perspectives. For example, in her hawk-training memoir, the English author Helen Macdonald discusses the maleness of British falconry, and writes that by immersing herself in nineteenth-century falconry books, she entered "a world where English peregrines always outflew foreign hawks, whose landscapes were grouse moors and manor houses, where women didn't exist" (2014: 12). Recently, clubs in the U.S. such as the Feminist Bird Club, Queer Birders of North America, the Gay Birder's Club, and the Audubon Society's "Let's Go Birding Together (LGBT)!" series of queer-friendly bird walks all strive to combat the pervasive normative maleness of the prototypical birder and of the birding world.

fighting mode by brief exposure to a female bird, a process the trainers call "pricking." A powerful explosion of song after pre-competition arousal is likened to ejaculation, and a good performance is equated with sexual prowess of the bird and sometimes of its owner as well—altogether not dissimilar from the symbolic masculinity that Clifford Geertz found at the Balinese cockfight (Geertz 1973).

The songbird competition is a social space for human men, and a social space for birds, but it also brings together pairs of male-bird companions, many in deep interpersonal relationships built over years of everyday interaction and care. The training of birds occurs through a close relationship between males, human and avian, a years-long commitment during which bird owners are getting to know their birds through daily time spent together. The owner assesses the bird's personality and specifically whether it will be a good contender for competitions based on its proclivities, expressions, and desires. (A bird that sings a lot is not necessarily a good competitor; rather, birds who save their singing for competitive situations perform better than "aimless singers" who sing all day for no reason, and then clam up when another bird is present.) Around the second year of a bird's life, it accompanies its human companion everywhere, in order to be exposed to the outdoors, to the urban bustle, to animals and situations that would potentially cause stage fright. "*A fowru wani waka*," goes a saying in Sranan: "The bird wants to walk," meaning birds who accompany their male owners everywhere eventually perform better in competition (Chiang 2008: 24). Thus it is not uncommon to see birds in small rectangular cages accompanying men at work, on the sidelines of soccer games, traveling on motorbikes and boats, or just hanging out on the street, observing the urban bustle.

Other social rituals are observed. Men greet their birds each morning, by name if they have one (birds often earn their names through good performances, or by letting their individual

character be known through the training process), a mode of intersubjective, everyday "constant becoming" for both parties (see Haraway 2008: 26 on interspecies greetings). During training, new birds are introduced to each other with both owners' permission, to see how each will react to a stranger. Birds who are familiar with each other—for example, those raised by the same trainer—usually have no competitive reaction to one another. There are also interspecies communicative taboos. I have heard multiple times that birds are anxious and afraid in the presence of strangers, of women (even upon hearing the sound of a woman's voice), and of people with white skin. Thus Dutch tourists and other observers (including white American female ethnomusicologists) are sometimes warned to keep a certain distance from the birds, making the space immediately surrounding a bird's cage an intimate sphere for known and familiar-looking people. (In other cases, paradoxically, bird owners sometimes thrust cages into visitors' hands for a photo.)

Through daily time spent together, a bird becomes a friend and a member of the family, earning a name by performing well and letting his particular characteristics be known; the human man gains perspective into a bird point of view on the world, attempting to understand what will help the bird become a better singer and a better competitor. A champion bird is produced by an interspecies relationship that combines human and avian skills, desires, experiences, aesthetics, socialities, and perspectives. The result is a close interpersonal relationship between males. There are jokes and anecdotes about how birds are better friends than wives—for example, that given the chance to fly away, the bird, but not necessarily the wife, will always fly back home. There are also humorous stories told of birds ruining romantic and familial relationships by occupying all of a man's attention, time, and money; an extreme, but fictional, example of this occurs in the Surinamese author Don Walther Donner's tongue-in-cheek short story "De

Zangvogel" ("The Songbird"), in which a Caribbean migrant in Rotterdam murders his girlfriend in a rage after she sells his champion bird to buy food for their family. There are plenty of wives in Suriname and the Netherlands who vicariously come to cohabit with songbirds, to clean up after them, and to help with the caretaking. But discursively, ideologically, and socially, the world of the Surinamese songbird competition is consistently constructed as a world where women do not exist.

At the Balinese cockfight, Geertz found roosters to be, among other things, "surrogates for their owners' personalities" (and even, citing Bateson and Mead, "detachable, self-operating penises, ambulant genitals with a life of their own") playing out "a dramatization of status concerns" that reflects the role of prestige in Balinese society (1973: 436, 417). At the Surinamese songbird competition, the relations between men and their birds are ambiguous and multiple. There is certainly a joy in winning, and prestige in being awarded a bird-adorned trophy for one's efforts. But the sport also entails a much deeper sort of collaboration and companionship between individual men and their birds. While birds may, at some moments, temporarily take on the role of stand-in for human masculinity, they are also, perhaps primarily, individuals in loving, personal, everyday companionships with their men.



Figure 33: Trophies, Paramaribo.

3.3 History of the Songbird Competition

Songbird sport is not unique to Suriname. There are long traditions of songbird competitions in, for example, Turkey (with goldfinches and greenfinches), Belgium (chaffinches), the United States (canaries), Thailand (red-whiskered bulbuls), Singapore (zebra doves) and Indonesia (zebra doves, thrushes, and other species; there, alongside the cockfight, pigeons are also raced for speed). In neighboring Brazil, men also train and race chestnut-bellied seed finches, the birds known as pikolets in Suriname, which are called *curiós* in Brazil. Each of these forms of competition has its own history through which has evolved practices of training, competing, and judging, and standards for what types of birds, and what types of humans, are involved.

No one knows exactly how or where the Surinamese songbird competition originated. In his 2008 book, Surinamese bird breeder and trainer Fred Chiang suggests that keeping twatwas began in the city of Nickerie—Suriname's second city, located far to the west of the coastal strip,

where twatwas were once plentiful—and was popular as far back as the 1950s. Other evidence suggests that the practice of trapping and keeping songbirds was popular much earlier; ornithologists wrote as early as 1908 that the birds were treasured for their song, and, if caught, could be sold for a lot of money (Penard & Penard 1908, 1926; Haverschmidt 1968). The French-Surinamese Penard brothers poetically describe the various methods for trapping different types of Surinamese birds (using, for example, trap-cages, decoys, snares, birdlime, or straightforward nest robbing), including twatwas, in an article from 1926.³⁹ Additionally, I have seen archival home video from 1938 that briefly depicts a wealthy family's home aviary with twatwas.

According to Chiang, songbird owners began to come together informally at the market, pier, or cricket field to compare their birds, from which the formal singing competition emerged. "Twatwa rage" hit Paramaribo in the 1960s, with some men buying birds from Nickerie, others heading to the districts to trap their own themselves, and informal competitions sprouting up around the city, including on the central Independence Square. After airstrips were established in the vast interior district of Sipaliwini in the 1960s, birds caught in the jungle—even as far away as Poso Trio, Brazil—could be transported to Paramaribo via small planes. In the 1970s, the Zangvogelvereniging (Songbird Association) formed in Paramaribo to unite and organize birding activities in the city, formalizing the rules for an organized competition, which has been taking

³⁹ Thomas and Arthur Penard write, "The Twatwa is by far the best songster... [It] seems to be at its best when the wind blows and the leaves rustle. The bird must be quite tame before it will sing good [*sic*] in captivity. [...] Twatwas frequent fields, weedy pastures, and clearings, especially near the edges where they can take to the thickets. They are very shy and keep away from habitations. For that reason they are rare in the suburbs of Paramaribo, but at Liforno, in the Beneden Para district, they are common. In the Little Dry Season they appear to be more distributed than at other times" (1926: 559). The method that the Penards recommend for catching twatwas is a trap-cage, set early in the morning, baited with canary seed or native grass.

place ever since. (Nickerie still has its own local form of the competition, but has never formally organized an association to administrate it, and some Nickerians come to Paramaribo to compete.)

With mass migrations of Surinamers to the Netherlands in the 1970s and 1980s came, also, Surinamese birds. Formal songbird competitions with twatwas, pikolets, rowtis, and gelebeks have taken place in the Netherlands since the 1990s, though informal bird raising and competing may have occurred earlier. Competitions take place in cities with large Surinamese migrant populations: Rotterdam, Amsterdam, and The Hague. The chairman of the Amsterdam Songbird Association, Suniel Cheddie, estimates that there are 600 active members of songbird associations in Dutch cities, who have, on average, six birds each, and around 2,000 Surinamese birds owned by non-members. This puts the total population of Surinamese birds in the Netherlands, by this estimate, at around 5,600. The human members of the Songbird Associations are almost exclusively of Surinamese origin as well (*NoSpang* 2011).

In both Suriname and the Netherlands, there are people who keep birds without participating in competitions. In Dutch cities during the summer, groups of Surinamese men sit to enjoy the warm weather outside, often bringing one or two birds in rectangular cages; sometimes these are other types of songbirds imported from southern Europe or elsewhere, not eligible for competition. In Suriname, some people enjoy trapping small songbirds of any type, and many keep songbirds, parrots, and other kinds of birds in the home or garden for the pleasure of their song. (For several months during my stay in Suriname, I was awoken early each morning by the loud cries of a neighbor's caged parrots, prominently displayed outside their home as a visual and aural sign of socioeconomic status that permeated the neighborhood's soundspace.) In this sense, keeping birds in general is a common Surinamese practice, and a sign of

Surinameseness in the Netherlands. Raising particular birds for competition demands a greater investment of time and, especially, money. In the Netherlands, twatwas, pikolets, and rowtis can sell for 500 to 750 euros each, and birds who have proven their success as competitive singers can go for thousands.

The songbird competition has, over time, been adapted into some of the dominant discourses that organize Surinamese society. This includes two prevalent, sometimes conflicting discourses—namely those of a unifying nationalism and of "plural" ethnic difference. In 1990, the songbird competition was the subject of a short documentary produced and broadcast by the government-owned television channel STVS. *Pikin Fowru: Zangvogels in Suriname (Small Birds: Songbirds in Suriname)* shows footage of men gathering with their birds on Independence Square to practice this "beloved, typically Surinamese sport" (Breeveld 1990). The video zooms in on the faces of various bird owners, showing participants who visually represent Suriname's various *bevolkingsgroepen* (ethnic groups) with the voiceover explaining that the birders come from "all levels of society," thus conflating ethnicity and class without explicitly naming either one. The message of this short government-sponsored documentary—that the songbird sport unites all types of (male) Surinamers in an inclusive national practice—is in line with the politics of the time. In 1990, Suriname was struggling to regain unity after a military coup (1980-88), political assassinations (the December Murders of 1982), and an ongoing civil war (1986-1992). A message of unity was an uplifting and necessary myth for the young nation struggling to move forward.

However, despite the discourse of the Surinamese songbird sport as a nation-unifying, egalitarian pastime and as the rare activity that unites Surinamers of all types, there are ways in which the sport has also adapted to discourses of ethnic difference that shape basically all

domains of life in Suriname. The different types of birds involved in the competitions, which have accrued different economic and social value, are associated with different groups of Surinamers based on ethnicity and the (often stereotypical) respective socioeconomic status of each ethnic group. The majority of participants—especially in the Netherlands—are Hindustani Surinamers, an ethnic group associated with economic success in business and entrepreneurship, who have the capital to invest in twatwas, the most expensive birds.⁴⁰ Chinese Surinamers, similarly associated with success in business, might also have twatwas. Pikolets, a somewhat less expensive and less valued type of bird, are associated with Javanese participants.⁴¹ Rowtis and other types of less expensive birds are more associated with Afro-Surinamers. Of course, these alignments between types of birds and human ethnic groups are constantly negated in actual practice; birders who specialize in a particular type often say they are drawn to that type of bird's particular sound, and this often crosses the particular ethnic alignments outlined above. But these stereotypical associations demonstrate the entanglements of ethnicity, class, and social status, and the ways in which these human categories permeate even a domain of Surinamese life that is purported to be equalizing and unifying.

Thus, taxonomies based on human histories of difference come to organize the domain of birds through notions of the nation, ethnicity, and socioeconomic class. In the next section, in contrast, I visit other taxonomies—modes of understanding song and sound that entangle, necessarily, human and avian forms of voicing, listening, and sonically interpreting difference.

⁴⁰ Perhaps for this reason, the songbird competition as a whole is sometimes seen as an ethnically Hindustani pastime; for example, a special songbird competition was held as a component of cultural activities to celebrate the 135th anniversary of Hindustani migration to Suriname in 2008, marking the practice as, despite its portrayal as "typically Surinamese," also falling under the specific domain of Hindustani culture.

⁴¹ It is also seen as "very Javanese" to have lots of non-competition songbirds of any type, especially hung in cages in a colorful, flowering garden; this is common to see in established Javanese neighborhoods like Blauwgrond or in Commewijne District.

3.4 Taxonomies of Birdsong

The label of the "Wild Coast"—the Atlantic coastal region of northeastern South America between the Orinoco and Amazon River deltas, including the three Guianas as well as parts of Venezuela and Brazil—dates back to at least the late sixteenth century. Early European explorers inscribed their perceptions of a profoundly different landscape of sparse occupants, thick jungle, and tropical diseases, appearing undominatable and brutally uncivilized. Maps and descriptions from early explorations of the region reflect European perceptions of its wildness, through actual experience and observation and through legends and imaginings. In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, English, Irish, Dutch, French, Portuguese, and Spanish powers attempted to establish footholds in the region and claims to its abundant natural resources, which promised wealth but simultaneously made it difficult to dominate or "tame" (Raffles 2002: 76, 101). Sir Walter Raleigh's 1596 *The Discoverie of the Large, Rich, and Bewtiful Empire of Guiana* described green coastline, interior indigenous settlements, and an abundance of "unsettling yet alluring" nature (Raffles 2002: 77). A French map from 1654 labeled "Guiana, or the Wild Coast" (Figure 34) shows, beyond carefully drawn and labeled coastal river deltas, the mythical El Dorado located at the edge of (also mythical) Lake Parime (Harcourt [1613] 1926; Raffles 2002: 75). Maps and travelogues from the time also depict figures between the human and nonhuman that convey the sensorily overwhelming potentials of Amazonian nature, such as the "ewaipanoma," the no-headed man whose face is instead located on his upper chest, alongside the figure of the indigenous cannibal, two characters who seemed equally possible in the sixteenth-century European imagination (Raffles 2002: 100).

modest, melodious songbirds (Warren 1667; Sloane 1707-25; Buffon 1770; Stedman [1790] 1988). Iris Montero Sobrevilla recounts a related eighteenth-century debate about the alleged "torpor" (prolonged state of hibernation) of hummingbirds—a type of bird found all over (but only in) the Americas—which European scientists used as evidence of the "lethargic animals and sluggish civilization" (Gerbi 1972) that they claimed characterized the New World (Sobrevilla 2016). (In response, *criollo* scholars pointed out that not only do European animals hibernate as well, but also that hummingbird torpor actually did not exist in the first place and was rather a handed-down myth based on the mistaken observations of sixteenth-century explorers.) In short, perceptions and evaluations of the sounds, bodies, and behaviors of birds and other animals were used by colonial scientists to make claims about the respective humanity of various groups of humans in the Americas and in the world.

In recent years, there have been a number of scientific studies that explicitly ask whether birdsong qualifies as music.⁴² Alongside various modes of analysis and speculation about the form and function of birdsong, these debates raise implicit questions about how to pinpoint and objectify the fuzzy boundary between music and sound—in other words, between human culture and animal nature. Understood in the context of this historical "zoopolitics of the voice" that played out in the Caribbean and Latin America, asking whether birds have music raises longstanding, unresolved, and politically and ideologically charged questions about what constitutes "music" and who has historically been understood to "have" it. This history has involved contested and racialized distinctions among cultivated, learned, "natural," and mimetic

⁴² See, for example, Hollis Taylor, *Is Birdsong Music? Outback Encounters with an Australian Songbird* (2007); Marcelo Araya-Salas, "Is Birdsong Music? Evaluating Harmonic Intervals in the Songs of a Neotropical Songbird" (2012); Patricia Gray, Bernie Krause, et al., "The Music of Nature and the Nature of Music" (2001) and Donald Kroodsma's response (Kroodsma 2005); and Henkjan Honing, *The Evolving Animal Orchestra: In Search of What Makes Us Musical* (2019).

vocalizations; definitions of clear and measurable pitch; and notions of language, communication, and "proper" elocution (Ochoa 2014).

These themes are entangled in the question of how humans hear, make sense of, and represent the utterances of birds.⁴³ In 1926, Thomas and Arthur Penard described the vocalizations of the twatwa: "Its song varies, but may be expressed roughly as *cheep cheep cheepee cheeah cheeah chopee cheeah cheeah*. [...] Its call note is *chee*, or *tshok*, or a sound like a kiss. From the call it passes to the song with a sharp note or a short *tee tee chewee*" (Penard & Penard 1926: 559). In Fred Chiang's bird-raising manual, he similarly transcribes the call (a single, sharp species-specific sonic signifier) of the different types of birds thusly: a twatwa calls "*wiet wiet*," a pikolet calls "*plieuw*," a rowti "*tjiep*," and a gelebek "*tjekek*" (2008: 24-26). In these cases, the conventions of human language makes bird sounds audible, and thus able to be categorized into taxonomies of sound and song.

At the songbird competition, a call does not earn any points; the rules state that a bird must produce a song, which is constituted by a combination of tones followed by a short pause. In contrast to many local traditions of songbird sport around the world, the Surinamese competition does not take into account the beauty of a bird's song; the winner is simply the bird who sings the most times in the allotted period. Surinamese participants pride themselves in their

⁴³ Early works on birdsong, such as Charles Wittchell's *The Evolution of Bird-Song* (1896) and F. Schuyler Mathews's *Field Book of Wild Birds and their Music* (1904), used Western musical notation to isolate, objectify, and inscribe the songs of birds in order to analyze and compare different types of songs from different birds in different places. Methodologies of transcription were subsequently debated in the *The Auk* journal of the American Ornithological Society: were phonetic syllables, musical notation, or other forms of graphic notation most appropriate for objectively documenting and scientifically studying the sounds of birds? (see articles by Saunders 1915; Allen 1923; and Brand 1932, 1935). These discussions intensified around the development of new sound recording technologies in the twentieth century, which in some cases, like the spectrograph, did not require a human listener to interpret and transcribe (Bruyninckx 2018, 2011; Mundy 2018; Marler 2004).

unique ability to achieve an explosive and plentiful output, developing techniques and strategies to get their birds to rapidly produce many short songs in the crucial moment of competition.

This is where the idea of a learned or "cultivated" (*gecultiveerde*) song comes into play. In addition to the distinct calls transcribed above, each species has a prototypical "bush song" or song they sing in the wild. In competition, the birds can use either cultivated or bush songs. While bush songs are often found to be beautiful (and can even identify a bird as coming from a particular region of the country; for example, a "sipa song" identifies a twatwa from Sipaliwini District), cultivated songs are strategic for the competition. Trainers aim to teach their birds short, clear songs, with a little introductory flourish that distinctly marks a new iteration (and thus scores a point).

For the twatwas, pikolets, rowtis, and gelebeks who are bred and raised to participate in the competition, the acquisition of a cultivated song begins at a young age. As early as four months, before the gender of the bird is clear, it is taken out of the breeding cage, and once in its own cage begins to let its voice be heard. To learn a particular song, the young bird is at this point exposed exclusively to an adult male selected as a teacher, or to a recording of an appropriate learned song for its species. After a month, if it has not taken up the song, it is likely either a female or a less readily teachable male; if the latter, more attempts can be made. By the end of the first year most birds will have taken on the song of their teacher, and by two years old its song is stable, so it no longer has to be protected from exposure to "bad" singers. The most important factor in teaching a bird to sing, though, is the bird's proclivities and personality: the bird must have a predisposition to sing a particular song, and some birds will stubbornly continue to sing their own song, no matter how long they are taught, even by a good bird teacher with other successful students. This is emphasized in Chiang's bird-raising manual and came up in

countless conversations I had with birders in Suriname and the Netherlands: ultimately, the biggest factor in a bird's performance is its own personality, whims, and desires.

The cultivated song of the twatwa is perhaps the most discussed and theorized element of Surinamese bird training. The practice has developed over the years, and involves various classifications of songs and strategies. A type of song known as the "ring song" capitalizes on the element of the twatwa's natural song that "rolls" or trills; in a cultivated ring song, twatwas are taught to sing a short series of repeating rolling tones. More recently, over the last couple decades, the "kiaauw song" developed. "Kiaauw" onomatopoeically describes a single, distinct tone that starts high in pitch and then descends. The kiaauw song is comprised of two to three iterations of this distinct, descending note—"kiaauw, kiaauw"—usually followed by a few trills. This characteristic onomatopoeic introduction makes the kiaauw song easy to recognize and to score, and multiple iterations can be produced in quick succession. The kiaauw song, which comes out a little differently depending on the trainer and the bird, is also thought to be quite aesthetically pleasing. The "kiaauw" sound is not produced by twatwas in the wild; I once heard that this idea came about by teaching twatwas to imitate the song of another species of bird (though this is not documented and the exact origins remain murky).

Teaching songs to twatwas is a much-discussed art. Videos of nicely singing twatwas circulate widely via WhatsApp, Facebook, and Youtube. Browsing this genre on Youtube, it is quickly apparent that the results can vary widely, and are sometimes contested; commenters, sometimes quite heatedly, question whether the poster of a video really knows what a "kiaauw song" should sound like, sometimes claiming that a bird's song may *sound like* a kiaauw, but is actually a sipa song or something else. The bush songs of the other types of finches are generally thought to be less beautiful than that of the twatwa, though again, it depends on the listener, and

some men are drawn to a particular type of bird because they find its song to be especially striking. The pikolet's natural song is comprised of whistling tones that Chiang transcribes, "*fliu fliu fliu*," and its cultivated song goes "*pijee pijee pijee*." Pikolets from Coronie District are valued because they are thought to be more naturally adept at learning this song. The rowti sings a bright "*wieeet wieeet wieeet*." The gelebek produces a sharp, penetrating "*sjie sjie sjio sjie*," which, depending on the individual bird, can be sung fast, or can come out a slow "*swaai swaai swaai*." The slow version of the gelebek's song is considered beautiful and has drawn some into specializing in this generally less popular species (Chiang 2008: 24-26).

While there are distinctions drawn between "cultivated" and "bush" song, these realms are not as strictly divided or opposed as they may first appear. Both are considered aesthetically pleasing and desirable for different purposes and according to different human tastes (and different bird tastes, as a bird might have a proclivity to draw more from one or the other in its individual song). Ultimately, a bird raised in captivity is influenced by the birdsong he hears in infancy, and typically retains some elements of its bush song as well. The product of training each individual bird is an individual song, understood to be influenced by all sorts of external stimuli and internal proclivities. These tiny, individual degrees of variation are something that systematic, taxonomic ways of listening (to birdsong, and to other forms of sonic difference) fail to account for.

3.5 The Songbird Competition in Amsterdam

In the Netherlands, outdoor training sessions are limited to summer weekends between May and September, on those Sundays when it is warm and dry enough for the birds to be outside. Each summer, one tournament cycle narrows down the competing birds to an annual national champion over the course of several weeks in July and August. The local Songbird

Associations of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and The Hague each organize their own activities, with over fifty members each in Amsterdam and Rotterdam (the community in The Hague is a bit smaller); towards the end of the summer the local tournaments take turns hosting each other, pitting champion birds from each city against each other to declare a national champion.

While smuggling occurs, rumor has it that Dutch-bred birds sing more bountifully and score more points than Surinamese ones anyway, though no one knows exactly why. It could be because they get to rest all winter and are only put to the test for three to four months of the year, some speculate. I have also heard the theory that Dutch birds do not know the dangers of life in the wild in Suriname, such as snakes and birds of prey, so they sing bountifully with a naïve innocence, impervious to the predators that their sounds could, in theory, draw out from jungle surroundings. (However, I have seen a whole field of Dutch-bred twatwas and pikolets fall simultaneously silent as a European bird of prey passed overhead, so it seems that certain "wild" instincts do still exist.)

In Suriname, the songbird competition takes place in the central square of Paramaribo, where passersby, both residents and tourists, can stop to take a look; the Association has recently been promoting the activity to tourists through flyers distributed at nearby hotels and travel agencies. (Even President Bouterse is said to be a fan, though his public appearances are limited these days.) In Amsterdam, on the other hand, the Sunday morning gatherings take place near the Bijlmermeer (or Bijlmer), a neighborhood on the outskirts of the city that was built in the 1960s, intended to be a Le Corbusian "city of the future" that ended up an isolated high-rise ghetto for Surinamese and other migrants who moved into the unsold apartments starting in the 1970s. The participants congregate in an overgrown parking lot they rent annually from the municipality, coming from all over the Amsterdam area, including the immediate urban surroundings that

house many working-class migrants, as well as from wealthy suburbs of Amsterdam such as Almere. The competitions in Rotterdam and The Hague likewise take place in grassy fields on the outskirts of those cities.



Figure 35: A training bout in the Bijlmer, Amsterdam.

While the songbird competition in "ethnically plural" Suriname has been framed as a cross-ethnic, nationally unifying sport as I discuss above, the paradigm of "multiculturalism" that is currently widely used to explain and understand human difference in the postcolonial contemporary Netherlands frames the Surinamese songbird sport as a migrant "cultural" practice, a manifestation of a minority Surinamese identity in a white Dutch world, and a curiosity for outsiders.⁴⁴ To its practitioners, it is not a "cultural" activity performed for an audience, but a hobby, an everyday domestic activity and an excuse to relax with friends on a warm summer morning. When a few joggers enter the field from a nearby running path, they are viewed with

⁴⁴ For critiques of Dutch multiculturalism and the construction of ethnic minorities in the Netherlands, see Essed 1986; Essed & Hoving 2014; Wekker 2016; Weiner & Báez 2018.

suspicion, briefly disrupting the happenings until it is clear that they will maintain their distance. This gathering is not a display for others.

Like in Paramaribo, homemade Surinamese food is sold; here, it is typical Surinamese sandwiches filled with curried chicken or a salty and spicy dried fish called *bakkeljauw*, topped with homemade pickles and *sambel* (hot sauce). One of the participants sells these out of a cooler in his car; on busier tournament days, the food is prepared and sold by a couple from a local Surinamese eatery. Another participant supplies eye-wateringly spicy homemade ginger beer. The birds eat special grasses and seeds imported from Suriname if they have performed well. On this side of the field are the twatwas, on that side the pikolets, in between are the human participants, and all around are the sounds of the chattering of birds and men, the latter in a mix of Dutch and Surinamese Creole. On an unusually warm summer day, this out-of-the-way field in the Bijlmer feels like a little outpost of Suriname in the Netherlands (though a version of Suriname where no women are present).

Sometimes, in the masculine social space of the songbird competition in Amsterdam, conversation turns to life in the Netherlands and memories of Suriname. These conversations reveal a kind of nostalgia invested in a particular concept of freedom, a word that often recurs in casual reminiscing about Suriname. Compared to Suriname, everyone says, in the Netherlands "*alles is geregeld*" ("everything is arranged/regulated"): you get fined for fishing without a permit, for urinating in public, for littering—"Well, I suppose you could better put your trash in a garbage can," one man tells me, but still, in Suriname there are no hundred-euro fines should you fail to do so. In Suriname there is less time spent working regular hours at an office, social engagements are spontaneous rather than scheduled, and if city life becomes too stressful, there is always the option of escaping for a fishing trip into the rural districts or the jungle. This sort of

freedom is what male migrants in the Netherlands miss, and are reminded of at the songbird competitions. In the out-of-the-way park in the Bijlmer, drinking beer and whiskey among Surinamese friends and the chorus of the birds, a man feels a certain freedom that contrasts with the general image of thoroughly regulated life in the Netherlands.

There is a contrasting discourse among women in Suriname, I have noticed. Women tend to talk more about the effects of the recent economic crisis such as increasing poverty and crime, reminiscing less about freedom than about when they used to feel safe driving in Suriname alone at night. The lack of regulations and enforcement in Suriname, tied to government corruption, overspending, and failure to plan ahead for drops in the global market for bauxite, oil, and gold, when filtered through the lens of female experience, do not seem to result in the same feelings of freedom that pervade casual conversation at the songbird competitions; they certainly do not produce the same discourses. Rather, for women, safety is a form of freedom, a form that is increasingly lacking as Suriname faces greater inflation and deeper economic depression.

The idea of freedom is linked to bird training in other realms—for example, in the training of American singer canaries, "freedom" refers to the desire or predisposition to sing which results in a plentifully-singing bird, the first element in judging the quality of song in canary competitions in the United States. The American singer breed of canary, first developed in the 1930s as an ideal pet for the home, has been bred over the course of decades to increase "freedom," variety, and melodiousness of song (American Singer Canary 2019; Chin 1998). And, of course, birds have the freedom that flight allows, for which they have long been symbols of the value of freedom in nation-state iconography, corporate logos, and tattoos. The wings of Surinamese songbirds, incidentally, are never clipped, so in theory the birds could return to a life in the wild.

The politics and aesthetics of "freedom" echo through the Caribbean, including sonically, for example as Paul Gilroy describes regarding Bob Marley's double afterlife as the memory of an actual person involved in radical politics around a specific political struggle and as a commodified figure for international consumption, his music received as a neutralized, universalized aesthetic of freedom that blurs the politically free with the Caribbean carefree (Gilroy 2005). In Suriname, the Netherlands, and elsewhere, freedom is a very real concern of politics, power, and daily life, entering into discourses that range from the politically radical to the nationalistic to the mundane, and affecting everyday life at levels that range from the abstractly ideological to the very practical negotiation of safety and mobility (where the ability to move freely intersects with gender, economic resources, local and national infrastructure, and other forms of social positionality). Simultaneously, freedom is a form of aesthetics, sensory affect, and organization of time and space: Bob Marley's music, the songs of birds, and other elements of Caribbean life resonate with senses of the free, the relaxed, the sublimely beautiful, the never-ending present. The perspective of a bird in the world symbolizes and encapsulates the possibility of being present, living in the moment, and enjoying the freedom of a Sunday morning with friends, an afternoon away from mundane worries stretching out ahead.

Birds are simultaneously domesticated friends and wild animals, whom human men can adopt into their homes but not fully dominate, who can be taught but who may choose not to listen, who are in some ways comparable to humans as they use vision and sound to navigate their worlds—but in other ways are not fully comprehensible by human modes of thought and perception. By training and spending time with birds, by in some ways limiting their freedom, keeping them in cages and attempting to teach them how and when to sing, the original, fundamental freedom that is attached to a human idea of birdness is highlighted. And in turn, by

drawing out human-like aspects of the birds—by spending time with them and attempting to know their personalities and name them appropriately—their male owners find something birdlike and free within themselves, even while navigating their responsibilities and modes of survival in economically depressed Suriname, or their thoroughly regulated lives in the Netherlands. They are able to see the world from a bird's perspective.

3.6 The Wild

The notion of Suriname as a "wild coast" lingers into the present, perpetuated by notions of "pure" nature (an asset both for Suriname's international tourist industry and for extraction) and corrupt politics (for which Suriname has also gained an international reputation). In the Netherlands, white Dutch people have typically only encountered the country through the developing ecotourism industry that takes primarily Dutch-speaking tourists to Maroon and indigenous settlements in the jungle, or through news articles about how its current president, Bouterse, has been convicted of drug smuggling in international courts and has yet to be tried for political assassinations that took place during the military coup he led in the 1980s. In media and in direct encounter, Suriname is portrayed as a place of lawlessness, rampant corruption, economic downward spiraling, a "failed state" according to Dutch Foreign Minister Stef Blok whose words were leaked to the press last year (Van Ast 2018; *Telegraaf* 2018); and, on the other hand, dense, pure, impenetrable jungle nature. Imaginaries of the "wild coast" also persist in popular literary representation: for example, a recent travelogue by the British travel writer John Gimlette (2011), called *Wild Coast: Travels on South America's Untamed Edge*, emphasizes the untroddenness of Gimlette's path through the three Guianas as well as the "ancient, African lives" of the Afrodescendant inhabitants of Suriname's interior. Gimlette's book is one of the only recent widely circulating English-language popular monographs on the region.

Some of the best competition birds come from this "wild," trapped close to the border with Brazil despite dwindling populations and increased governmental protections and sold privately or through pet shops in the city, some of them then illegally smuggled on commercial flights to the Netherlands. These birds use their native "bush songs" in competition, which some owners find more aesthetically pleasing. This aesthetic appeal seems to be constituted, in part, by a bird's very resistance to learning, its inseparability from its own wild nature.

On a Saturday in March 2017, during the off-season between rounds of the official songbird competition, my friend and I spent the afternoon at the home of Humphrey, a longtime bird breeder who often served as a competition timekeeper. To say that Humphrey's home was full of birds would be an understatement. Humphrey's garage held large aviaries of female and young birds that were not being groomed for competition. The male birds, each in their own uniform cage, lined the walls and ceilings of his hallways and kitchen, hung at an angle with a small plank of wood between each pair of birds to separate them, the cages crammed as closely together as possible. Another small room, behind the kitchen, contained only birds, the floor covered in sawdust and birdseed. There were hooks for birdcages (unoccupied, but there if necessary) in the bathroom. Humphrey's spacious backyard housed, in addition to more individual birdcages (and one tied-up dog), a number of large walk-in breeding aviaries, which held a few nests with eggs. Humphrey knew exactly how many days old each egg was, as well as the age of each young bird, whether it had yet emitted a peep, if it was likely male or female, and how much time it had before training would begin. Some of them already seemed to have good competitive instincts.

On the driveway in front of his open garage, surrounded by birds and birdsong, we enjoyed a leisurely afternoon sitting with Humphrey and two other prominent Paramaribo

birders, Sjaam and Ruben. Among the three of them, over the years, many bird-adorned trophies had been accumulated. Sharing Coca-Colas, Parbo beers, and whiskey and eventually picking up chicken roti from a nearby take-out spot, the afternoon was spent chitchatting and reminiscing about birds, and sometimes just listening to them. A couple of Humphrey's best birds were hung nearby, from hooks on the front of the house, to get some extra outdoor air and sunlight, and every so often one of them would emit a bold, impressive song, momentarily demanding everyone's attention.

After some prompting, Ruben told the story of Diesel, a champion bird he owned quite a few years ago, a twatwa whose name is known widely among birders in both Suriname and the Netherlands. Diesel reigned as recurring champion of the twatwas for a streak in the 1990s. He was known for using his bush song, so his sonic presence was inseparable from the fact that he was born and raised in the wild. His style of starting slow and nonchalant, and then revving up to an almost unbelievable pace of song production, like a diesel engine, earned him his name. In a legendary bout, Diesel achieved his career high, racking up 197 hits in fifteen minutes. Diesel's owner, Ruben, was offered incredible sums of Dutch guilders for the sale of Diesel, but he always turned the offers down. Diesel was a real man of a bird: caged but not tamed, he retained the roughness of the wild, refused to learn a given song, but performed ferociously, pulling out all the stops to defeat opponent after opponent with his displays of masculine prowess.

Diesel may well have had symbolic and economic value, but Diesel was also an individual, a companion, a friend, a being from Suriname's wild jungle, caged and brought into a human world, his wildness perhaps, in a sense, harnessed but never erased. Surinamese birds are trapped, smuggled, bought and sold, but, ultimately, are named, lived with, and loved. To be in an everyday caretaking, social, familial, sounding relationship with an actual bird puts a human

self in relation with the messy ways in which notions of nature, the animal, and the human are relationally formed. And actual birds, unlike symbols within established networks of conventional meaning, are unpredictable. A good performance at the songbird competition is hoped for, but never expected; the best a bird trainer can do is to set up the conditions of its possibility by understanding a bird's needs, desires, and preferences, knowing also that one can invest in the most expensive bird, but if some aspect of the collaborative training relationship fails, the bird may fall silent at the crucial moment of competition.

Because the birds in question are not mere symbols, but actual, living birds, encounters can yield ambiguous meanings. Diesel met his poetically ironic end when, still in the prime of his career, he was pecked to death by a female twatwa in a breeding attempt gone awry. The laughter with which the birders, including Diesel's owner himself, recount this tragic and expensive loss, offers evidence of the element of humility required of men who endeavor to domesticate nature, who attempt to train living birds to adhere to the will of humans—a task that can never be accomplished completely.

3.7 The Peacock Dance

The *tari merak*, or Sundanese⁴⁵ "peacock dance," is, in contrast to the Surinamese songbird sport, a thoroughly culturalized and feminized dance that performs the embodied aesthetics of Javanese femininity through the stylized movements of a peacock. According to Henry Spiller, *tari merak* is a modern invention from the 1950s in the style of the traditional courtly genre of *bedaya* dance, in which a group of exclusively female performers dance in

⁴⁵ Sundanese designates a cultural/ethnic designation of a group of people native to West Java; though they share an island with Javanese people, they speak a different language and practice a number of distinct cultural traditions, including musical. People who migrated from the Dutch East Indies to Suriname, though known as "Javanese," also included a significant number of Sundanese people from West Java, and elements of Sundanese aesthetic practices have been incorporated into Javanese-Surinamese musical and cultural traditions, such as the gamelan.

unison. It quickly became canonized as a new tradition during a post-independence period when regional forms of dance in Indonesia were being isolated from ritual and ceremonial practice and brought to the national stage of the young country (Spiller 2010: 199; Hughes-Freeland 2008). Spiller contrasts the highly disciplined bodily control performed in tari merak and other forms of female dance to male genres of dance in West Java such as *jaipongan*, in which bursts of unrestrained, improvisatory movement take place within the rules of the dance, embodying and staging male freedom, an essential component in the expression and negotiation of Sundanese masculinity.⁴⁶ Felicia Hughes-Freeland, describing courtly female dance traditions in Central Java, similarly writes that the only sense in which female performers are allowed to "lose themselves" is to escape individual identity and social rank in favor of tightly choreographed collective action (Hughes-Freeland 2008: 188-189). According to both Spiller and Hughes-Freeland, control is central to the aesthetic of refined female dance. Feminine ideals based on figures from Javanese history and mythology inform the Javanese female bodily aesthetic: refined, polite, quiet, sweet, and dedicated to the social roles of wife and mother. Refined court-style dance trains Javanese women to embody these ideals, both on and off the stage (Hughes-Freeland 2008; Sunardi 2015).

⁴⁶ "In the company of other men," men dance to "explore the limits of their own freedom and the boundaries of conformity" (Spiller 2010: 197). Spiller writes, "A sense of freedom for men to dance from the heart and the enjoyment of watching men express their illusory freedom within the powerful constraints of drumming form the essence of Sundanese dance. Contexts that enable this sort of dancing are always participatory, and they always involve a reference to a third party—a *ronggeng* [female dancer]—who acts as an object of desire to enable the illusion. In a nutshell, the erotic triangle of Sundanese dance is composed of men who are empowered to dance by the presence of inspiring drumming and a female object of desire" (ibid.: 207).

I saw the Sundanese peacock dance performed by a group of young Javanese women at a large, public celebration of Chinese New Year in Paramaribo in 2018.⁴⁷ After a performance by a Hindustani group—an all-female Bollywood-style dance choreographed to a recent hit from a popular Hindustani-Surinamese artist—the Javanese dancers, from the local sociocultural organization Indra Maju, took the stage. Alongside a small repertoire of other female group dances and one male solo dance performed by the Indra Maju dance teacher, the *tari merak* is performed with an accompaniment of recorded gamelan music from West Java. The three dancers perform a stylized mimesis of the courtship rituals of a strutting peacock. Dressed in shiny metallic aqua-green and gold dresses and shimmering gold jewelry, the women extend their arms holding the tips of their *karembong* (scarves) so that they spread and flow like wings, "peck" their heads from side to side, and strut daintily in their turquoise-and-gold costumes across the stage, their legs restrained by the tightly-wrapped skirts of their *kebayas*. As is typical of refined Javanese court-style dance in the feminine mode, the movements are in unison and highly controlled, from the tilt of the head to the positions of the fingertips and the direction of the gaze.

⁴⁷ This festival brought together local Chinese cultural organizations, visiting artists from China (performing, for example, solo *erhu* music, Sichuan opera, *tai chi*, and acrobatics), and an array of "Performances of Various Ethnic Groups" of Suriname, as the program stated. The latter was comprised of performances by one Afro-Surinamese sociocultural organization, one indigenous organization, one Javanese organization, and one Hindustani dance school. These groups performed in counterpoint with the Chinese and Chinese-Surinamese groups and artists, as a form of cultural ambassadorship and the promotion of a shared cultural sphere, where a cultural event necessarily becomes a multicultural event, a collective celebration of Surinamese ethnic plurality. This also constructs ethnic performance as always existing in relation to otherness; Chineseness in Suriname is given its meaning not only by the performance of what is Chinese, but also by the performance of what is other-than-Chinese—in line with my analysis of ethnic performance in Suriname in the other chapters of this dissertation.



Figure 36: *Tari merak* peacock dance, Temple Fair, Paramaribo.

The *tari merak* presented at the Temple Fair is a culturalized and feminized object: framed by a stage, bookended by the performances of other ethnic traditions, these dancers perform their ethnic identity through the stylized movements of the ideal, refined, sensual but not sexualized female Javanese body. They perform, simultaneously, a mimesis of the aesthetic beauty of the peacock as well as a mimesis of cultural tradition that evokes a sense of an "ancient" Java inherited through the lines of ethnicity. Spiller analyzes this dance and related genres of tightly choreographed and controlled group female dance as a form of "objectification" of Javanese female bodies; in *tari merak* (and other dances that represent animals, such as the *tari kupu-kupu* or butterfly dance), according to Spiller, the objectification of women is "masked... only slightly by casting them as animals" (Spiller 2010: 200).

But, I argue, Spiller's analysis—that the embodied performance of gender in West Javanese dance produces males as subjects with freedom and women as controlled objects—aligns suspiciously with other epistemological dichotomies that separate culture (as the domain of human subjectivity) and nature (as object of human control). While ethnic performance in

Suriname might be seen as a mode of objectifying both female bodies and culture/ethnic identity, I argue that the performance of Javanese peacocks by Javanese women in Suriname is also, simultaneously, a form of intersubjective interspecies relation, one that involves negotiating the dancer's individual self with the point of view of a bird. In this sense, rather than seeing tari merak as doubly objectifying (objectifying the peacock through representation; objectifying the female bodies through discipline and control) and male trance dances like *jaran kepong* as the opposite (animal spirits are subjects who occupy and control the bodies of human men; dancers perform the out-of-body, explosive improvisatory freedom that male subjects are bestowed), I posit that these two forms of dance both constitute practices where different groups of humans similarly negotiate the simultaneous processes of representing animals and embodying their own human subjective viewpoints.

Tari merak might also be seen, then, as a parallel practice to men raising, owning, or even *listening* to Surinamese birds in Suriname and the Netherlands. While the peacock dance has been framed as feminine and cultural and the labor of trapping and training birds is discursively constructed as a masculine engagement with nature, both of these forms of interactions with birds are engagements that theorize the human self and, simultaneously, the boundary of the human and the nonhuman. These practices both construct a notion of what sort of beings humans are, and what sort of humans these particular selves—Javanese women in Suriname, Surinamese men in the Netherlands—are.

Further, both of these practices theorize not only the boundary between the human and the nonhuman, but also the entanglements of aesthetics, gender, ethnicity, and other forms of difference that are similarly enacted and theorized through human practice at the boundary of what is understood as culture and what is understood as nature. Avian beauty, visual and aural, is

disciplined through young women learning the movements of an inherited cultural tradition of dance and through men teaching their birds particular songs. In one case, the sweet songs of tiny birds are equated with the sexual prowess of human males; in the other, the beauty of a peacock's feathers is represented as a feminine ideal, despite the fact that, of course, the actual peacocks that are mimicked, the ones with the beautiful plumage, are males. These seeming contradictions are demonstrative of the ambiguities at the division between nature and culture and the ways that actual human engagements with animals freely permeate such epistemological boundaries. Ambiguity yields the grounds for the construction of seemingly firm epistemological categories, such as "nature" and "culture," but simultaneously provides the grounds for dismantling these categories by imagining another way of understanding the self and its relations in the world. For both the dancers of the tari merak and for men who train birds, these activities help participants shape and become their individual selves that circulate in the world beyond the stage or the competition ring.

Other objects that are not living animals—including seemingly paradigmatic objects of "culture," like the instruments of the gamelan—contain similar ambiguities. The distinct timbre of a Surinamese gamelan, like the song of a bird, contains the tensions of multiple histories, collective and individual, often ambiguous and sometimes contradictory. As materiality intertwines with discourse, things *are*, but are not always what their properties suggest. In both the Surinamese songbird sport and the Javanese-Surinamese gamelan tradition, instances arise of sounds that sound like *this*, but are actually *that*: what sounds like a "kiaauw" song is actually a "sipa" song; what sounds Javanese actually belongs to a more complex history of labor migration; what sounds "authentic" is born of recent innovation. The categories that link materiality, sound, hearing, and knowledge are not always clear cut; the sounds that participants

and knowers of tradition describe and systematize are not necessarily as strict as they are represented in words. In both cases, I am less interested in the "truth" of tradition—the strict taxonomy of bush songs versus cultivated songs or the systematic classification of differences between Surinamese plantation and Central Javanese court styles of gamelan—than in the discourses of doing and knowing that constitute meaning for participants and experts in these realms of sonic practice. As Caribbean songbirds and iron gamelan instruments travel, they pass through worlds of social meaning that accumulate, containing seeming contradictions and tensions comfortably or uncomfortably, some of which fall away over time and some which never resolve.

Chapter 4: Policy, Preservation, and the Plantation

The notion of intangible cultural heritage (*immaterieel cultureel erfgoed*) increasingly occupied the attention of Javanese-Surinamese cultural organizations in both Suriname and the Netherlands during my fieldwork in 2017 to 2019. In 2017, Suriname's parliament ratified UNESCO's 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage. Through funding contributed by the Netherlands through UNESCO and earmarked for the purpose, the Surinamese Directorate of Culture held a series of workshops and trainings for its staff to better understand how Suriname might engage with the convention's protocols, such as community-based inventorying and the creation of safeguarding plans. Shortly thereafter, a transnational collaboration between Javanese-Surinamese organizations in Suriname and the Netherlands initiated a project to collect elements of intangible cultural heritage to submit to their respective governments, with the hope of putting forth a few elements of Javanese-Surinamese culture to adopt as official Surinamese, Dutch, and, ideally, global patrimony.

A "roundtable consultation" took place at the Javanese Cultural Center in Paramaribo in November 2017, hosted by the Association for the Commemoration of Javanese Immigration (Vereniging Herdenking Javaanse Immigratie, or VHJI), a Paramaribo-based Javanese-Surinamese sociocultural organization with Netherlands connections. With a series of speakers who ranged from members of the Surinamese Directorate of Culture to Netherlands-educated anthropologists, the idea of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) was introduced to Javanese Surinamers, many of them representatives from district communities who are engaged in traditional cultural and religious activities. Equipped with power point presentations, these speakers explained the concept and goals of ICH and why it would benefit Javanese Surinamers to submit their cultural forms to an official ICH list for "safeguarding." Cheryl Moentari, the

leader of the VHJI's ICH workgroup, explained that since many forms of Javanese culture in Suriname have already disappeared over the years and others are seen as threatened, it would be particularly meaningful for Javanese-Surinamese culture to achieve official ICH status, since it would entail an obligation to support and preserve these forms on a community as well as a national level. Also, while some forms of Javanese culture had already found a place on the national ICH list of Indonesia, it was important to acknowledge Suriname's own forms of executing the same expressive genres, such as its distinct traditions of gamelan music, wayang shadow puppetry, and *slametan* (ritual feast). Rita Tjen Fooh, the director of Suriname's National Archive, emphasized the importance of ICH for Suriname as a whole, since its national identity is anchored in the diversity and richness of the different cultural groups that arrived in Suriname due to colonialism, slavery, and immigration. She related that Afro-Surinamers, under the leadership of the sociocultural organization NAKS, had already submitted the *kotomisi*, a traditional form of female Creole dress, to the national ICH list.

The overarching question of the presentations, touched on by each speaker, was: What *is* intangible cultural heritage? It is "what you do," "what you can't see," a form of knowledge that you somehow acquire, but cannot merely learn. It is that which makes a Javanese person in Suriname Javanese. At the roundtable, it was often defined by example: musical instruments are tangible heritage, but musical tuning is ICH. Learning dance is a cultural practice, but *knowledge* of dance is ICH. Examples of ICH included *jaran kepang*, Javanese weddings, the building of a traditional house, the *slametan* ritual meal, shadow puppetry, pounding rice, the history of certain Javanese places, fried noodles and fried rice, the Javanese-Surinamese language.

ICH could also be embodied in a person. The conversation often circled back to 77-year-old Pak Supto Sopawiro, who had come from his home in the village of Domburg to attend the

meeting. Pak Sapto, widely known as the "last *dhalang* [puppet master] in Suriname," introduced himself to the crowd even though everyone present already knew who he was. "*Ik ben een cultuurman*," he said: "I am a practitioner of culture [literally: I am a culture man]." During the three-hour conversation, Pak Sapto himself was held up as an example of intangible cultural heritage, or at least a living repository of it. Elwin Atmodimedjo, the VHJI chairman, who owned a successful business in Suriname after spending decades in the Netherlands, pointed to Pak Sapto as "the center of my cultural identity." No one needed to explicitly state that Pak Sapto, already in old age and with no clear inheritors of all of his cultural knowledge, would not live forever. But this fact, and Pak Sapto's presence and clear importance as a conduit of intangible cultural heritage, certainly contributed to the tone of urgency with which Javanese-Surinamese ICH was discussed at this event.



Figure 37: Pak Sapto speaks at the ICH Roundtable Consultation.

Eventually, the conversation turned to the audience. Having been informed what ICH *was*, including through copious examples, the audience—which included specially invited practitioners of culture from various locations in the rural districts from Nickerie to

Commewijne—was now asked to provide examples of their own, elements of ICH that could be "fixed" (*vastgelegd*) on a list to submit to the government. What could they isolate from their everyday and ritual practices as Javanese Surinamers to add to this list of culture? The conversation opened up to the audience, and quickly took a different course towards various critiques, including by the cultural practitioners from the districts, who had their own concerns. Some of these concerns were practical, such as the lack of resources to maintain the wooden structures and tuning of the existing gamelan instruments in the tropical climate (exemplified by the out-of-tune bronze Indonesian instruments and unplayable, termite-eaten iron Surinamese instruments that sat behind the speakers on the cultural center's stage).

Others were confused about how tangible and intangible cultural heritage could be separated, and how cultural practice could be sorted out from religious practice. Someone else pointed out that separately compiled lists of ethnically specific heritage—Javanese versus Creole, for example—seemed to reinforce an already existing problem, namely that only Javanese people had knowledge of Javanese traditions and Afrodescendants of Afro-Surinamese traditions. Shouldn't a national effort at cultural preservation aim for cultural practices and knowledge to become appreciated by all, across ethnic boundaries? And, perhaps most importantly, once the list was created and submitted, what was the government actually going to *do*? Were elements being gathered for the ICH list in order to catalyze their being valued as cultural heritage in somehow concrete ways (such as the preservation of decaying objects needed to carry out ICH practices)? Or was the idea to collect elements that were *already* valued, in order to preserve them on this list of important culture? In the latter case, where was the evidence of value for these threatened, possibly dying traditions that received no centralized monetary

support and drew fewer and fewer interested participants with each generation? Would an official list somehow make a difference?

As the leaders of the roundtable tried to steer the conversation back to the intended task of creating a list of ICH elements, a particular vocabulary emerged, comprised of recurring words that had evidently developed through UNESCO workshops and trainings: "inventorying," "valuing," "safeguarding," "preservation." VHJI, positioning themselves as facilitators of a community process that was being carried out "together," repeatedly refocused the conversation on the deliverable, the list that would be presented to Suriname's government. This would somehow, in not yet specified ways, lead to the valuing, safeguarding, and increased awareness and appreciation for threatened, "dying" Javanese-Surinamese culture and tradition. The notions of "safeguarding" and "preserving," vocabulary given by UNESCO initiatives and trainings, bestowed these activities with importance and formality while also—despite the efforts of both the speakers and the audience to communicate and understand—keeping opaque what would actually happen, what the initiative would actually *do*.

Haidy Geismar describes heritage as "a tangle of ideology and expectation" (2015: 72). The notion joins official recognition of cultural identity and cultural practice on a national and international level, through the isolation, fixing, and (often) commodification of cultural objects as resources of representation, recognition, and potential monetization through cultural industries. But the scene I describe above is not an isolated discussion, specific to Suriname, UNESCO, or the contemporary moment. In this chapter, I argue that this mode of understanding heritage has a long history, starting with early European exploration and the colonial plantation, which entangles notions and discourses of culture with histories of resource extraction. Particular notions of human labor, human practice, and interaction with the nonhuman world have mutually

formed the separated realms of culture and nature as extractable worlds containing a diversity of resources to be managed by different institutions and different groups of humans. Thinking from the plantation (as advised by Moore 2019, Davis et al. 2019, Tsing 2015, Escobar 1999, and others) highlights the history of entangled logics that have separated and organized human and nonhuman worlds in ways that influence how we conceive of them, talk about them, and attempt to reconcile problems with them today, on a global scale.

In this chapter, I scrutinize historical trajectories and contemporary language—such as preservation and conservation, (bio)diversity, value, and sustainability—that blur the boundary between the cultural and the natural while simultaneously reinscribing and reinforcing the epistemological divide between these two domains. In such discourses, the domains of culture and nature both offer resources to be quantified, extracted, preserved and conserved, and, further, commodified and monetized for the potential benefit of disappearing traditions, unstable national economies, and precarious lives. At the same time, these processes, with terms dictated by national and international initiatives and infrastructure, can lead to devastating effects for people whose everyday lives are entangled with landscapes and entities that have been assigned to the epistemologically separated domains of culture and nature, on terms of relation that these notions do not account for.

In Suriname, historical and contemporary processes of extraction, and their unequal effects, are deeply entangled with plantation histories, colonial racial hierarchies, and the ideological separation of culture and nature that these unequal histories have entailed. Scholars of the Caribbean and of environmental geography more broadly have argued that indigenous genocide in the Americas, the mass enslavement of Africans to provide plantation labor, the subsequent system of indentureship of Asian laborers, and twentieth and twenty-first century

forms of environmental extraction and devastation are not separate (or even separate-but-related) events, but "must be understood as differentiated moments of a singular world-historical process... [as] dialectically interconnected processes that together were integral to the emergence of the capitalist world-system, and to the way in which it (re)produced itself through the reorganization of human and extra-human natures on a global scale" (Campbell & Niblett 2016: 4; see also Davis et al. 2019; Pulido 2018; Moore 2019). In short, all of these events have been made possible through racial ideologies that undervalue some human lives while overvaluing others (Pulido 2018); and they have all had effects that reinforce and reinscribe the same racial hierarchies and devaluations of certain groups of humans.

In what follows, I investigate the histories that have mutually formed notions of cultural and natural "resources" in Suriname as well as the connections of such discourses of nature and culture to historical hierarchies of human difference. I first trace a history of thinking and theorizing "culture" that links contemporary discussions (such as UNESCO initiatives as well as performative manifestations of Suriname's "ethnic plurality") to colonial scholarship in the Dutch East Indies (under the rubric of the study of "adat") and labor policies in Suriname (particularly those mid-twentieth-century policies that governed Javanese and other Asian groups of laborers differently from formerly enslaved Afrodescendants). I then trace an epistemologically separated, but actually intertwined, history of understanding "nature" through a series of projects of extraction, starting with the colonial plantation economy that produced notions of exploitable, interchangeable human labor and extractable monoculture crops. Through these linked histories, I scrutinize notions and discourses of cultural diversity and biodiversity, rights, property, sustainability, and (natural) conservation and (cultural) preservation. Finally, I investigate an unequal distribution of humanness across different population groups that emerges from this

history, and draw connections to a zoopolitics of the voice that helped sonically to establish the boundary between human and nonhuman, or "cultural" and "natural," realms (Ochoa 2014). This historical zoopolitics now resonates in the unequal effects of contemporary ecotourism, resource extraction, and discourses and ideologies of preservation, conservation, and (bio)diversity in present-day Suriname, which have all particularly affected Suriname's interior-dwelling populations of Amerindians and Afrodescendant Maroons.

Discourses of culture (such as the notion of "intangible cultural heritage") and discourses of nature (around its exploitation and its conservation) shape understandings of the human and nonhuman domains as affording various kinds of resources, to be "valued" through recognition, extraction, or preservation. In what follows, I connect such discourses, their purifying ideologies, and their unequal effects to colonial plantation history. At the same time, the plantation, given historical, empirical, and multisensory consideration in the present, can also suggest ways of thinking culture and nature, their entanglement, and the unequal effects of their historical separation. Following the Caribbeanist Malcom Ferdinand (quoted in Moore 2019), I suggest thinking "not from wilderness, but the plantation" in order to reframe entangled histories and challenge longstanding discourses of human and nonhuman worlds in Suriname.

4.1 Culture as a Resource: Colonial Law and Contemporary "Ethnic Plurality"

One of the primary venues for the public performance of ethnicity and culture in contemporary Suriname is the annual calendar of national ethnic holidays. The anniversary of the abolition of slavery in Suriname, which was made official on July 1, 1863, became a national holiday in 1960 (Dag der Vrijheden [Dutch: Freedom Day]), but was not widely celebrated until 1993, when it was reclaimed and renamed *Keti Koti Dey*, meaning "Day of Broken Shackles" in Sranan. Since 1993, *Keti Koti* has been considered a holiday primarily of interest to Creole

Surinamers, whose ancestors gained their freedom with this event; at present it is observed with big celebrations in Paramaribo and Amsterdam, attended by many Afro-Surinamers attired in traditional clothing such as the *kotomisi*, a full-skirted, colorfully printed dress worn by Creole women along with an *angisa* headwrap.

In response, other ethnic groups in Suriname quickly proposed their own days of celebration and recognition (some of which have become official national holidays, while others have remained unofficial but widely recognized). The Day of Hindustani Immigration, celebrating the arrival of the first indentured labor migrants from British India on June 5, 1873, has become an official holiday celebrated with Hindustani cultural events and performances. August 9 is the Day of Javanese Arrival, commemorating the events of 1890. The Commemoration of Chinese Immigration occurs on October 20. While, in some sense, celebrating the commencement of indentured servitude for these groups may seem odd, the Surinamese cultural historian Paul Tjon Sie Fat analyses these holidays, taken together, as a celebration of Suriname's national narrative of "stable multiculturalism" from each ethnic group's respective point of view—a collective self recognition of each group's essential role in creating Suriname's plural society (Tjon Sie Fat 2009: 247).⁴⁸ At these holidays, music and dance are used to voice the presence of the various ethnic groups in Suriname; more or less separated from specific histories of labor, these holidays are not political statements about the past, but celebrations of what each group has to offer to the interesting diversity of the plural nation in the present.

⁴⁸ Other groups—such as Suriname's Maroons and Amerindians—have only achieved their respective days in more recent years and with much more of a struggle, as I discuss further below.

In 2015, I attended celebrations associated with the 125th anniversary of Javanese Arrival in Paramaribo, Mariënborg, and Lelydorp. Since it was a "big year" (i.e. multiple of five years) anniversary, the occasion was observed with more and longer festivities than in other years, with over a week of celebrations in Paramaribo that included exhibits and lectures about Javanese-Surinamese history at Sana Budaya (the Javanese Cultural Center), Anton de Kom University, and the National Archive. An elaborate night market was set up on the grounds of Sana Budaya, with local restaurants and caterers providing an overwhelming array of Javanese-Surinamese and Indonesian food, and arts and crafts such as carved wooden furniture and batik clothing imported from Indonesia. Against this backdrop was a nightly program of music and dance performed by students from Sana Budaya's Volksacademie (Folk Academy) and groups from other local Javanese organizations, plus other entertainments such as *cabaret* (a type of improvised comedy associated with Javanese Surinamers but enjoyed widely) and an array of local Pop Jawa bands performing Javanese-language pop music. While the crowd was primarily Javanese, other city dwellers of various ethnic affiliations also attended the festivities, drawn to the Javanese food and entertainments for a family-friendly evening out.

Outside of the city, in Javanese historical and cultural centers such as Mariënborg and Lelydorp, there were also celebrations of the holiday, attended more or less exclusively by a Javanese audience. In Lelydorp, gamelan and dance groups from the districts, performing on iron instruments in the Surinamese style, drew an audience at a temporary performance space erected on a sports field in the center of town for a few nights of music, dance, food, and *jaran kepang* trance dancing, the latter drawing the biggest crowd. One evening featured a wayang kulit performance accompanied by Lelydorp's own local gamelan group. On August 9 itself, on the grounds of the former sugar factory at Mariënborg, I attended a day-long festival-cum-political-

rally sponsored by the Javanese political party Pertjajah Luhur, with red and white "PL" flags planted all over the celebrations. The main event of the day was a jaran kepang performance in the afternoon, which drew at least a hundred people to a small grassy area in between the old plantation buildings. This jaran kepang was the most intense I had ever seen, and included the trancing dancers, inhabited by the spirit of some predatory animal, catching and killing a live chicken with their bare hands.



Figure 38: A trancing jaran kepang dancer, Marienburg.



Figure 39: Acrobatics during the jaran kepang.

Through these various celebrations and performances of Javanese-ness in established Javanese spaces in the capital and the districts, the Javanese Day of Arrival is used to claim, perform, and recognize "the Javanese" as an essential component of Suriname's "ethnic plurality." In Tjon Sie Fat's analysis, the array of ethnic holidays put forth a homogeneous, agreed-upon vision of what it means to be Javanese, Hindustani, Creole, and so on that rests heavily on the donning of traditional clothing, the performance of cultural art forms such as music and dance, and the consumption of ethnic cuisine. These holidays remind Suriname society at large of the arrival and continued presence of its various "population groups" as well as their contributions to the nation's unique formulation of celebrated diversity (Tjon Sie Fat 2009). Here, cultural performance and "culture" at large are a resource—and, one could argue, a requirement (Scher 2014)—for participating and claiming space in the nation.

When all of Suriname's cultures are added together, the cultural diversity that they produce also constitutes a resource for Suriname's participation as a nation in the broader Caribbean region and on international stages. This is illustrated, for example, at the Caribbean Festival of Arts (Carifesta), a regional event that occurs every few years where representatives from Caribbean countries gather in one host country to perform their local/national music and dance traditions with the aim of stimulating and garnering awareness of Caribbean culture. At Carifesta, regional identity and solidarity are established by celebrating what all Caribbean nations have in common: namely, difference. Different national formulations of regionally characteristic diverse, multicultural societies are shared and celebrated. In this setting, the presence of a Javanese ethnic group makes Suriname unique, and is often prominently featured. Carifesta is also a stimulus for smaller diasporic groups that do not have established, continuous performative cultural traditions to invent them; Tjon Sie Fat (2009) describes groups such as the small community of Lebanese Surinamers scrambling to develop a repertoire of traditional clothing, music, and dance for Carifesta 2003, which was hosted by Suriname. At Carifesta, culture becomes a resource both at the national and international level.

Looking back into Suriname's history, I argue that, prior to UNESCO initiatives, ethnic holidays, and international cultural festivals, there is a much longer legacy of culture serving as a resource for the recognition and governance of different populations in Suriname, particularly one informed by the Netherlands' deeper involvement of colonial domination and knowledge production in the Dutch East Indies. While the term "culture" (*cultuur*) was initially only used in Suriname in reference to agriculture and the domestication of wild nature for managed growth and harvesting—such as "cultures" of coffee, tobacco, and tropical fruits and plants that were subject to cultivation experiments in colonial Cultuurtuinen (Culture Gardens) in Suriname and

Java—late nineteenth and early twentieth century investigations into the habits, mores, and collective activities of humans in the Dutch empire were conducted employing the Indonesian term "*adat*." Adat was a Dutch theory of how collective human behavior worked (specifically among non-Western, primarily Asian, groups of people) based on ethnographic research in the Dutch East Indies. Adat is often translated as "tradition" or "custom" and was first studied by Dutch scholars under the purview of law. The various local systems of custom and ritual of different groups of people in Indonesia, which were observed and inscribed by Dutch adat scholars, were thought to govern and dictate their collective behavior, mores, taboos, and structures of power in ways that could be systematized and studied as a natural, inheritable sort of legal code (Gouda 1995). The term adat was used causally; when different groups of Indonesian people did something following a particular convention—from playing gamelan on a certain occasion to greeting each other in a specific way to eating or not eating particular foods—it was "because" of their adat.

At a broader level, adat scholarship was also concerned with theorizing a hierarchy of cultural complexity and civilization connected to human "character" as influenced by the natural environment. Prominent Dutch scholars of adat such as Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (1893-4), Cornelis van Vollenhoven (1918-31, 1925, 1928), and Barend ter Haar (1924) posited a number of related adat "rings" (*kringen*) that explained human difference across the archipelago. This theory proposed that different natural environments influenced or determined human development and activity, so different adat systems flourished in different geographic landscapes, resulting in comparatively different levels of cultural complexity and civilization in different areas (further enforcing Java's privileged position in the colony as a site of civilization and cultural authenticity), and in varied character traits inheritable across generations (further

informing the notion of an inheritable Javanese "character"). In this respect of linking collective human behavior, varied natural landscapes, and a hierarchy of complexity, adat scholarship is comparable to later theories of cultural ecology and environmental determinism that were developed by U.S. anthropologists in South America such as Julian Steward (1972) and Betty Meggers (1954).

Adat scholarship was also concerned with "authentic" pre-Islamic customs and often positioned Islam as a foreign element inimical to local systems (see, for example, the work of Snouck Hurgronje in Aceh, a conservative Islamic region of Northern Sumatra). Van Vollenhoven, Snouck Hurgronje, and other scholars of adat were employed at Leiden University's burgeoning department of Indology, where early twentieth century Dutch civil servants were trained in East Indies geography, history, religion, languages, and law before being posted to the colony. Many scholars of adat also consulted for the colonial government in official positions. Entangling ethnographic scholarship, colonial theory, and administrative policy,⁴⁹ the notions of adat and its geographic variations informed Dutch understandings of difference in Indonesia long after its institutionalization in the first decades of the twentieth century (see

⁴⁹ Frances Gouda writes, "Dutch colonial civil servants exulted in their ethnographic knowledge of native peoples. The distinct configuration of *adat* among each ethnic group—referring to the particular patterns of social and spiritual bonds grounded in custom and convention, in form and feeling, and in unique definitions of prestige and deference—they insisted, should both be cultivated and protected. By learning as much as possible about the cultural practices, cosmology, and local languages of the many different ethnic groups of the archipelago, most Dutch civil servants hoped to carry out their philanthropic agenda and act out their 'ethical' convictions. In doing so, many among them approached their task of colonial governance as conscientious parents who were intimately familiar with the quaint habits and peculiar psychology of their native offspring, thus assuring Indonesia would stay under Dutch tutelage for centuries to come" (Gouda 1995: 41).

Gouda 1995, Koentjaraningrat 1975, Buskens & Kommers 2007, and Vermeulen & Kommers 2002 for more on this intellectual history).⁵⁰

With the arrival of groups of Asian laborers at the end of the nineteenth century, the notion and language of adat also began to shape conversations about human difference, labor, and colonial governance in Suriname.⁵¹ In the 1909 Van Vleuten Report on the conditions of indentured laborers on Surinamese plantations, Herman Van Vleuten, who had been a civil servant in the East Indies before his Suriname assignment, refers explicitly to the "adat" of the Javanese to explain the role and necessity of cultural activities and expressions in their lives. Van Vleuten uses the language of adat to explain the obligation of Javanese to their customs, even when relocated to the other side of the world. This influences Van Vleuten's practical recommendations that Javanese laborers be given the means to hold gamelan and wayang

⁵⁰ Anna Tsing (2009) explains how the notion and language of adat was revived in the 1980s and 1990s in order to connect local concerns in Indonesia to a burgeoning international indigenous rights movement. In this context, "*masyarakat adat*" (Indonesian: "people of adat") is understood as equivalent in meaning to "indigenous people" (2009: 40). See also Tsing (1993) and Margaret Steedly (1993) on Indonesian communities' own use and understanding of adat as local or indigenous tradition.

⁵¹ For example, in an article from 1895 in a Dutch weekly newspaper that covered the colonial export industry, an anonymous reporter briefly discusses the caste system, which he calls "the adat of the Hindu." In an argument for contracting indentured laborers from Indonesia, he explains that, among workers from British India, members of the higher castes are not accustomed to doing heavy labor. He continues, "Naturally, the planter cannot take into account the caste of the immigrant; he contracted laborers, and the immigrant must work" ("Javanen" 1895: 209). In contrast to the then widely accepted argument that white Europeans were physically unable to labor in the tropics—in other words, as a matter of the *nature* of European bodies—the inability of upper caste British Indians to do hard labor was seen as a problem of adat, or *culture*, and thus not a legitimate excuse. At the same time, adat was used to legitimize notions of what female minds and bodies were or were not capable of; for example, British Indian "adat" allegedly determined that Hindustani women in Suriname should not be educated (Woisky 1920); and Indonesian "adat" was used to justify indigenous women's nocturnal labor in factories in the East Indies as "natural" (Gouda 1995: 178).

performances and to more easily conduct elements of lifecycle rituals such as *slametan* ritual feasts (Hoefte 1990: 93).⁵²

A few decades later, in the most significant and controversial shift in Suriname's colonial policy (which I discuss in Chapter 2), Governor J.C. Kielstra—a former Dutch East Indies civil servant and a former university professor of Indology—also employed the notion and language of *adat* to argue for non-assimilation approaches to the governance of the West Indies colony. Kielstra argued, essentially, that rather than govern the "exploitation colony" of Suriname according to the existing assimilation policies that required its free residents to learn Dutch and practice Christianity, it should be governed more like the East Indies, where difference between different indigenous populations was studied, documented, and allowed to exist (and, at times, even instrumentalized for colonial domination). The presence of the Javanese and other Asian groups, who were thought to *have* *adat* (unlike the thinking towards Afrodescendant and Amerindian groups in the early twentieth century, who, prior to the work of Melville Herskovits [1936, 1941] were not thought to have their own cultural histories), argued for a colonial policy that recognized and utilized knowledge of their *adat* in its practical approach to retaining them as a labor force for Suriname's plantations. This stance influenced Kielstra's policy changes (which he mostly forced through a parliament that would have preferred to adhere to the longstanding approach of assimilation) that granted Javanese and Hindustani populations the ability to be educated in their own languages, to legally marry according to their own Muslim and Hindu

⁵² Van Vleuten writes that since the contract workers have few opportunities for amusement in their accustomed ways such as dancing or shadow puppetry, "If such [opportunities] do arise because a compatriot [*rasgenoot*] gives a party, which he is obliged to do by *adat*... then the happy tidings spread very quickly in all directions, even to the plantations on the other side of the river, and the Javanese stream to the party grounds on that evening" (Hoefte 1990: 93).

customs, and even (for the Javanese) to live in isolated, ethnically homogeneous, self-governed villages with traditional organizations of space and power (Ramsoedh 1990, Hoefte 2011).

One byproduct of these new arrangements was the incidental preservation of cultural objects and practices, especially those associated with Javanese and Hindustani marriage traditions. Kielstra, with his long career of studying and working in the Dutch East Indies, was known as an appreciator of Javanese culture who could communicate fluently in the Javanese language with the heads of his "desas" in Suriname. In retrospect, Kielstra has been credited with the persistence of Javanese culture in Suriname as though it were done intentionally and for its own sake; Pamela Allen, for example, writes that under Kielstra, "the Surinamese government actively promoted the survival of Javanese culture" (Allen 2011: 208). I make the crucial distinction that his policies in Suriname were, in intention, practical policies of labor force retention and colonial efficiency, and were cultural policies only by accident. Kielstra's ruralization and anti-assimilation policies were cultural policies in the sense that they implicitly theorized culture and nature in relation to human difference in different ways than had been theorized under longstanding policies of assimilation; and, further, they were cultural policies in the sense that they had lasting effects on the practice of Javanese culture in everyday life and on the way that cultural performance and cultural difference would be theorized in Suriname from Kielstra's time through the present. But these effects of Kielstra's theories and policies were byproducts of his main goal: colonial efficiency. His policies were informed by the primary economic concern of stabilizing Suriname as a profitable agricultural export colony, not his personal appreciation of Javanese culture.

Nevertheless, while more accurately seen as byproducts of economy-centered efforts, Kielstra's reign did have consequences for Javanese migration, Javanese lives, and the Javanese

gamelan in Suriname. Ethnically homogeneous villages of Javanese migrants and their Suriname-born descendants, speaking Javanese and living Javanese lives in rural Suriname, facilitated the continued practice and evolution of Javanese cultural and religious traditions. Spatial, political, and religious structures of everyday Javanese life were maintained within the physical and cultural space of official Surinamese "desas" (Javanese villages). The legalization of Javanese Islamic marriage rites promoted the continued performance of associated genres of religious tradition (such as the slametan) and cultural performance, such as dance, wayang, and other genres accompanied by the music of the gamelan. Cultural knowledge continued to be maintained through active use and passed down to others, and gamelan music and wayang are still (though less and less frequently) performed at Javanese marriages in Suriname today.

Kielstra's anti-assimilation policies facilitated not only the preservation of culture, but also the preservation of difference—or rather, the particular notion of human difference that these policies presumed to exist and continued to reinforce. With the acceptance of Asian labor migrant groups as a permanent presence in the colony, difference was seen as a neutral fact of human nature; at the same time, creating policies and rules that varied across Suriname's population groups created a sense that there were different types of difference within society. The acceptance of ethnic difference as natural, self-evident, and inevitable paved the way for the system of ethnopolitics that developed in the late 1940s and 50s (in fact, a number of ethnic and ethnic-religious organizations that grew into Suriname's early political parties were founded to promote specific ethnic group interests in direct response to Kielstra's policies), and for the paradigm of "ethnic plurality" that has governed difference in the independent nation of Suriname through the present. The idea that various ethnic groups are different in different ways

shapes the unequal role that different groups actually have in participating in politics and society, as I discuss in the following section.

Suriname's particular politics of recognition and representation—while in many ways similar to other "ethnically plural" Caribbean nations such as Guyana and Trinidad (Gowricharn 2006)—thus has a particular colonial history, incorporating notions of human practice and human difference grown in the Dutch East Indies, that traveled to the Caribbean along with indentured laborers from Java (Hoeft 2011). A concept of culture that came from the Dutch East Indies to Suriname, reinforced in policies and governance of its various "population groups," is traceable to present-day paradigms of difference, such as "ethnic plurality," and to the performance of difference and cultural practice on national and international stages. The present status of "culture" as a community resource in a national politics of recognition and a national resource in an identity of celebratory diversity has deep roots in colonial scholarship, labor policies, and notions of human difference.

Culture is a resource that, while a primary means for collective representation and participation in Surinamese society through performance at ethnic holidays, is not structurally supported by Suriname's government institutions. The national Department of Culture Studies, which staffs one expert per major ethnic group and maintains small archives of recordings and publications (also separated by ethnic group), is underfunded, as are many government departments and initiatives since the Netherlands' withdrawal of aid in 2012.⁵³ Many non-profit arts and culture initiatives in Suriname are still funded by the Dutch, via NGOs or private donations.

⁵³ This occurred over the Surinamese government's (under President Desi Bouterse) contentious granting of immunity to the suspects of the 1982 political assassinations known as the December Murders, in which Bouterse himself was a primary suspect.

Pak Sapto, the "last dhalang" in Suriname, became a dhalang when he was already almost 60 and retired from his career as a miner. When he began to study the art, by apprenticing a visiting artist from Indonesia, there were still around six other dhalangs in Suriname, but they were all very old. Pak Sapto's father had been a dhalang, though for Sapto himself culture had always been a peripheral interest. After studying intensively for around six years, Sapto knew enough to perform wayang kulit puppet shows, to accompany others on gamelan instruments, and to consult in *kejawen* (Javanese spirituality) rituals and ceremonies. Pak Sapto has also traveled to Indonesia and the Netherlands (on money largely raised through donations from the Javanese-Surinamese community in Suriname and the Netherlands) to increase his knowledge and skills about Javanese cultural and religious tradition, and to perform shadow puppet theater for Javanese and Dutch audiences.

Now Pak Sapto is 77, with no clear successor to his important role in the community. Unlike in Indonesia, being a dhalang is not a profession. There is no government support for such activities, and the small community of Javanese Surinamers, who hire Pak Sapto for circumcisions, weddings, and other holidays, does not provide enough income for these types of services to constitute a primary job. Performing Javanese culture in Suriname can be nothing more than a serious hobby, especially in economically precarious times. The community, and Pak Sapto himself, lament this and do their best to garner interest in cultural activities. (The UNESCO list of intangible cultural heritage, for example, has been the most recent focus of efforts, with the hope that achieving official recognition will bring more interest and necessary financial support to elements of Javanese-Surinamese culture such as the gamelan.) But without any sort of government support at all, it is hard to incentivize spending the time it takes to become a real dhalang with the skills and knowledge of someone like Pak Sapto. The younger

generations might take a class in Javanese music, dance, or martial arts after school, but when they get busy with sports, friends, or employment, this extracurricular interest is often forgotten.



Figure 40: Pak Sapto at home in Domburg with his collection of wayang puppets.



Figure 41: Pak Sapto's personal library of texts on Javanese culture and religion.

Thus, performing culture is a necessary form of participation and recognition in Surinamese society, on public stages such as at ethnic holidays and international events such as Carifesta. Culture has been formed into a resource for individuals and ethnic communities to perform their contributions to society; and the sum of these various forms of ethnic performance is Suriname's celebrated paradigm of a nation that unites in diversity and values the forms of difference it contains. Forms of cultural performance—in courses at the Sana Budaya, on stage at festivals, and in everyday life in Suriname's rural districts—form a basis for ethnic identity. In Suriname's history, the official recognition of culture by colonial administrators achieved special status and particular policies for certain groups—policies that, in turn, have allowed culture to flourish and perpetuate. At the same time, at present, there is no institutional support for cultural activities, and the resources of individuals and communities largely go towards maintaining normal life under precarious economic conditions. Culture is valued by the community and required by the nation; yet it is the burden of individuals to spend time and money acquiring the skills and knowledge that cultural practice entails. In discussions about Javanese-Surinamese intangible cultural heritage, it is not surprising that there are questions about value and valuing; the skewed relationship between effort and incentive, and the slow disappearance of the gamelan despite its importance to the community, present paradoxes to which UNESCO does not seem to hold all the answers.

4.2 Nature as a Resource: Extraction, Conservation, Dispossession

Like culture, contemporary discourses that conceptualize elements of the nonhuman or natural world as a resource are also tied to long colonial histories of governance, knowledge, and inequality. Since the earliest encounters of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European explorers with what they perceived as the pristine and uninhabited natural landscapes of the

Guiana coast, processes of conquering, claiming, and taking shaped a separate, nonhuman realm of "nature" as an extractable resource (Raffles 2001: 108).

Such dispossession of colonial landscapes has taken a series of linked forms over centuries. Suriname's "exploitation" plantation economy, which reached its zenith in the late eighteenth century, was founded on logics of European domination of tropical people and tropical nature, with the mass cultivation of crops for export made possible with the labor of enslaved Africans imported to the region. Plantation society was based on monoculture crops produced for export—often from plants and seeds transported from one colony to another for domestication and mass production—as a mode of turning nature into wealth for European empires. In the twentieth century, after the definitive failure of the system of large-scale plantation agriculture, Suriname's government turned to the extraction of natural resources such as gold and bauxite, often selling the opportunity for extraction (such as to the American bauxite company Alcoa) rather than the materials themselves. The government also granted concessions for the building of hydroelectric dams to support these activities in the interior. In recent decades, in addition to mined substances, massive amounts of raw timber are being sold overseas by the Surinamese government, particularly to Asia.

In recent decades, new industries have contributed to Suriname's national economy by constructing and extracting new types of resources from the natural landscape. One form is a burgeoning ecotourism industry that caters to Dutch travelers as well as to domestic tourists. Former plantations on the coastal district have been revamped as tourist resorts that offer tropical nature and a taste of colonial history; boat trips down the Suriname River expose travelers to the vast jungle of the interior, often including visits to Maroon villages in addition to bird- and caiman-spotting tours, guided hikes, and swimming in waterfalls. At Galibi, in the northeastern

corner of the country, an indigenous village serves as the basecamp for night trips by boat to spot endangered sea turtles laying eggs on one of Suriname's small and hard to access coastal beaches.

An international turn towards conservation also provides the infrastructure for monetizing natural resources in a different way, including the jungle itself. The Central Suriname Nature Reserve was inscribed as the country's first UNESCO World Heritage site in 2000, and draws international visitors to its 1.6 million hectares of "pristine" rainforest, valued as both a "massive carbon store and refuge for threatened animals" (World Heritage Datasheet 2000). The Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) program, a United Nations initiative launched in 2008 and still in a preparations phase, is another form of incentivized conservation, allowing national governments that oversee forests and biodiversity to transform them into a resource that can be monetized by *not* destroying them, and instead using them as the grounds to sell carbon offsets to wealthier industrialized nations (Brightman 2019; Bulkan 2016).

All of these modes of natural resource extraction, from the plantation to the continued-existence-of-forest-as-carbon-offset, entail the domination, quantification, and management of nature in ways that have led to the dispossession and deterritorialization of Suriname's human inhabitants along racial or ethnic lines. As Lisa Lowe (2015) and others have argued, the same logics that enabled indigenous genocide, slavery, and indentured servitude in the Americas—logics of overvaluing certain human lives while devaluing others—also enable the continued exploitation of natural resources and their unequal devastating effects (see also Pulido 2018; Davis et al. 2018; Campbell & Niblett 2016). Since the beginning of European exploration and colonization of the Americas, processes of ideologically creating human and nonhuman worlds as separate worlds of extraction (e.g. in systems of plantation production) and establishing

hierarchies of differential humanness across different groups of humans (e.g. in systems of plantation labor) have been intertwined. These logics have been inherited by contemporary projects of mass extraction of natural resources; and they have also been inherited by contemporary projects of preservation and conservation of natural resources.

In recent decades, the racial nature of natural resource management has been evidenced by the displacement of Amerindian and Maroon groups in Suriname's interior for national and international projects of both natural resource extraction and natural resource conservation. In 1997, a group of Saramaka Maroons filed a court case against the Surinamese government with the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. The lawsuit argued that the creation of the Brokopondo Reservoir, a hydroelectric dam that was built to provide electricity supporting bauxite mining activities by the American company Alcoa, destroyed half of the territory of Saramaka Maroons, destroying 27 villages and displacing 6,000 people. Those who were displaced were uncompensated since they had no official government documents proving ownership of the land. (A second project in the 1970s, intended to produce a hydroelectric dam, would have flooded an area twice the size of Brokopondo. It was dropped when bauxite prices dropped in the 1980s, but not before the destruction of some Amerindian lands around the city of Apoera had already taken place [Kambel 2007].) *Saramaka People v Suriname* was determined in favor of the Saramaka and ruled that the Surinamese government must take several actions including delimiting and granting collective title over their lands to the Saramaka people and paying them compensation through a community development fund. None of these actions, however, were subsequently fulfilled by the government (Kambel 2007; MacKay 2018; Price 2012).

Projects and discourses of environmental conservation, while ostensibly serving different goals from profit-driven extractivism, have had similar effects. Fergus MacKay and Ricardo Pané describe in detail the effects that the creation of the Central Suriname Nature Reserve—intended to protect a vast swathe of jungle with particularly high biodiversity from mining and logging activities—had on the Kwinti and Saramaka Maroon communities whose lands were partly appropriated in its creation. There were no provisions for them to continue their modes of life in the jungle that entail activities, such as hunting and fishing, that are ostensibly counter to the mandate of "protection" of "untouched" lands according to which the reserve was created (MacKay & Pané 2004). Similarly, while the REDD+ is still in a preparation phase, Marc Brightman (2019) and Janette Bulkan (2016) have pointed out a number of problems with the developments that have already occurred with the program in Suriname and Guyana, respectively. Brightman terms REDD+'s modes of quantifying, commoditizing, and monetizing biodiversity and the offsetting of carbon emissions a new form of extraction that, while not involving the physical extraction of resources from the landscape, entails "an act of appropriation through the imposition of different categories of knowledge and ownership: a cross-cultural extraction of wealth" (2019: 209) that imposes new forms of national and international value and management on landscapes that have been the dwelling places of Amerindian and Maroon communities for centuries. Under this program in Guyana, planned concessions that have already been granted to Norway by the government include areas that abut and overlap with Amerindian lands (Bulkan 2016). In Suriname, the program has not yet reached this point, but since the national government does not acknowledge indigenous or Maroon claims to land ownership, this will undoubtedly happen (Brightman 2019).

Ellen-Rose Kambel writes, "the allocation of resource rights has always been linked to ethnicity in Suriname" (Kambel 2007: 74), as has the inhabiting of different landscapes. While Paramaribo has historically been the domain of Creole Surinamers, in the coastal districts, developed for plantation agriculture, plots of land were granted to many Asian indentured laborers at the end of their contracts. Since these plots were inheritable but not saleable, many Javanese and Hindustani Surinamers occupy the very same plots that their ancestors received, many still making a living through agriculture. In the twentieth century, urban Creoles constituted the majority of the workers who were hired to work in gold mines and timber and rubber fields (Hoefte 2014). At present, opportunities to use or purchase land often occur through an ethnicity-based political system, with land offered as a perk through a system of political clientelism based on each party's advocacy for a particular ethnic group (Kambel 2007: 74).

Meanwhile, the vast, jungle interior, which occupies 90% of Suriname's total area, is widely seen as the domain of Amerindians and Maroons, and also, somewhat paradoxically, as the domain of pure, pristine nature. Ideologies and discourses that separate and purify domains of the human or cultural, on one side, and the nonhuman or natural, on the other, leave Suriname's interior-dwelling populations in an ambiguous position, as people who dwell in the domain of nature. Suriname is the only country in the Americas that has not legally recognized the rights of its indigenous and tribal peoples to the lands they have occupied for centuries, instead claiming that the state owns all land and natural resources (Kambel 2007: 69; Kambel & MacKay 1999). Such policies are accepted and, in effect, supported by widespread views in urban and coastal Surinamese society that Amerindian and Maroons are unable to develop and exploit natural lands and natural resources in modern ways. In her study of Suriname's land rights policy, Kambel writes that she encountered the frequent sentiment: "Amerindians don't do anything with the

forest, so why should we give them land rights?"—a view that has become enshrined in law, which in turn justifies and legitimizes it (Kambel 2007: 75). Similarly, Brightman found that "[m]embers of the majority urban, coastal population, if they express an opinion about the forest at all, tend to say there is too much of it, and their attitude towards people who live there tends to be of fear, contempt, or a mixture of both" (2019: 196). (My own findings, which were slightly different, were that the urban- and coastal-dwelling Surinamers I encountered were either unfamiliar with the interior or curious tourists of it. I once joined a group of mostly Hindustani and Javanese Surinamers on a several-night touristic boat trip down the Suriname River, where we hiked, swam, and slept outdoors in hammocks; we also observed, from a distance, Saramaka Maroons carrying out the activities of their daily lives in a village near our campground, and on a hike through the jungle many of my fellow travelers collected clippings of jungle plants and flowers to attempt to replant in their gardens back home.)

I also link this sense of profound and incommensurable difference to music and sound. In the realm of ethnic performance as a cultural resource for being heard—literally and metaphorically—in society, Maroons and Amerindians have only recently been granted their own national holidays parallel to those of Suriname's other ethnic groups, which provide the opportunity for staged cultural performance in the national public sphere. In 2006, international Indigenous Peoples' Day was officially made a Surinamese national holiday (falling on August 9, coincidentally the same day as the Javanese Day of Arrival). In 2011, Suriname officially acknowledged Maroon Day on October 10, the date of the signing of a peace treaty between the Dutch plantation owners and escaped slaves in 1760. However, while Creoles, Hindustanis, Javanese, and Chinese each have their own cultural centers in Paramaribo (such as the Javanese Sana Budaya), Maroons and Amerindians lack a comparable public space in the city where they

can practice, study, and perform music, dance, and other expressive arts. Instead, rehearsal and performance spaces, as well as musical instruments, archival materials, and other cultural resources, must be housed at the homes of individuals or in temporary and conditional spaces (Campbell 2012: 215). Consequently, Indigenous Peoples' Day has been celebrated in Paramaribo's Palm Garden as a sort of general arts and crafts fair with Amerindian groups performing music and dance in the evening, and the first Maroon Day was celebrated not in the city, but in a Maroon settlement an hour away.

Music and sound are not relevant only in the domain of cultural performance, but also in a deeper history of listening. Related to what Ana María Ochoa identifies as a historical "zoopolitics of the voice" (Ochoa 2014: 9; Ochoa 2015), I posit that the dispossession of Suriname's interior-dwelling populations and their ambiguous status at the boundary of the epistemological domains of culture and nature is also tied to longstanding notions of what human practice and nonhuman landscapes sound like, and to which landscape—cultural or natural—certain types of sounds belong. On ecotourism trips that cater primarily to tourists from the Netherlands, a stay at a resort in the jungle is often enlivened by a performance of Maroon music from a local group of performers, giving a taste of cultural performance within life in the realm of nature. Drum-driven music, inseparable from song, dance, ritual, and everyday practice (such as pounding sugar cane), maps ambiguously onto historical ideological distinctions between cultural music (based on recognizable and measurable pitches and harmonies) and natural sound (such as the howls of animals and calls of birds; see Ochoa 2014). In contrast to Javanese music that has long been established, primarily through Dutch scholarship in the East Indies, as "cultural" tradition, and to Creole music that is known as incorporating the influence of various Western instruments and genres, the drum- and vocal-centered musical traditions of Suriname's

Maroons—and, similarly, the traditions of Amerindian groups, who sing songs and perform dances that mimic animals and evoke relations with the nonhuman world (Smith 2001)—seem to confirm a widely held view of both groups as primitive jungle dwellers in contrast to the city-dwelling Asian "migrant" groups and the city's "modern" Afrodescendants.⁵⁴ Listening to Maroon music, then, at Maroon Day or on a touristic trip to the jungle, has the potential to confirm the outsider listener's ideological assumptions about Maroons' status as non-modern people of nature, even as they perform their cultural practices.

Another form of sound that is pervasive in the realm of Suriname's overabundant nature is birdsong. In addition to the caged birds that accompany men around town and hang on porches and in gardens, the songs of non-caged birds provides a sonic landscape to life in the city, the rural districts, and the jungle alike; far from the city, the soundscape of birdsong can be almost overwhelming to the ears. At least since the publishing of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962, birdsong is seen to serve as a sonic index for the health of an ecosystem. The densely polyphonic soundscapes of birdsong in Suriname aurally attest to a place of aliveness. Various policies protect the bird biodiversity for which Suriname is known. In 1954, both the Nature Protection Act and the Game Act (Jachtwet) were passed; the former established protected nature areas for

⁵⁴ Kenneth Bilby's scholarship on Afro-Surinamese popular music genres explores the sharp distinctions perceived and described between the in actuality more historically blurred and overlapping genres of Creole *kaseko* and *kawina* and Maroon *aleke* (Bilby 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001). There is also overlap in Maroon and Creole spiritual practices, such as the music-accompanied trance ritual *winti* (Campbell 2012: 50). Despite shared historical origins and overlapping or related musical and other cultural practices, the sharp distinction between the Creole and Maroon ethnicities in Suriname—including in the discursive and ideological separation of their respective musical genres and performance styles—is in line with Shona N. Jackson's (2012) analysis of the dynamics and logics of Afrodescendant ethnic groups in the Caribbean. Jackson argues that the status of Surinamese Maroons as Afrodescendants who are treated as indigenous people—in other words, displaced and disempowered as primitive jungle-dwellers—has been instrumental in producing Creole subjects and citizens as "modern" Afrodescendants who can comprise the political and social leaders of a modern postcolonial nation (Jackson 2012: 16).

the first time, and the latter created a list of species that were protected outside of the new sanctuaries. This act was amended in 2002 and 2009, the latter amendment placing the twatwa (large-billed seed finch) on the list after excessive trapping had led to the bird's disappearance from the coastal region and scarcity in the interior.

The abundance of bird diversity that Suriname boasts—at present, over 700 known species—draws tourists to birdwatching trips close to Paramaribo and farther afield. The Central Suriname Nature Reserve contains over half of those species, including many rare birds such as the harpy eagle, various macaws, the great tinamou, and the Guianan cock of the rock; a 2003 expedition revealed the presence of six species of birds that were not previously known to exist in Suriname (NIBA 2005). International bird-watchers travel to Suriname hoping to see bird species that they may never encounter elsewhere; in fact, most of the non-Dutch international tourists I encountered in Suriname were in the country to try their luck at spotting rare birds, mostly through tours led by experienced bird-watching guides. Birds are identified by both sight and sound, with their particular songs and calls often making their presence known in the dense foliage of the jungle.

Like birds, types of humans in Suriname are recognized by their collective voices. This can take the form of musical and other kinds of cultural performance at ethnic holidays and other public stages. It also takes form in a political sense, by participating in political parties that more or less function along ethnic lines and according to ethnic interests. Political rallies typically involve ethnic music, such as gamelan and jaran kepong at a rally for the Javanese party *Pertjajah Luhur*, or Maroon drumming at a rally for the Maroon party, ABOP. On some occasions (though relatively rarely in Suriname, as far as I have seen), a collective voice can be expressed through protest. For example, in 1976, when the government granted the use of lands

long occupied by the Kaliña and Lokono to international companies, members of these groups staged a four-day march from Albina, in eastern Suriname, to the capital, holding placards that read "We have a right to our land" and "Indians won't wait any longer." While one retrospective account describes the event as a successful opportunity for "the Caribs and Arawaks [to make] their voices heard" (Sint Nicolaas 2018: 239), the march did not result in any policy change whatsoever, suggesting that those listening to the "voices" of Amerindians in Suriname have not heard in them the power to make real demands. Similar events, such as the Great Gathering (Gran Krutu) of Maroon and Amerindian leaders that occurred in 1995 after the government sold three million hectares of forest to Asian logging companies, had the same results: the claims to land and international indigenous human rights law that were professed at this gathering fell on the deaf ears of the Surinamese government.

If protest fails, there is also the possibility of legal action. Similar to the *Saramaka v. Suriname* lawsuit, in 2015, eight communities of Kaliña and Lokono peoples filed a case against the Surinamese government in the Inter-American Court of Human Rights for recognition of land claims and reparations for previous violations. The events in question included dispossession of land for environmental protection (the creation of nature reserves, which prohibited hunting and fishing without exceptions for indigenous peoples), extraction (mining concessions with adverse consequences on hunting and fishing stocks), and private development (the building of vacation homes, a casino, a gas station, and a mall). The court determined that the juridical personhood of the Kaliña and Lokono and of indigenous peoples more widely should be recognized by the state (Lixinski 2017; MacKay 2018). However, as with the verdict of the *Saramaka* case, the Suriname government failed to take actions to effect change in its stance towards its interior-dwelling populations.

Thus, Maroon and Amerindian claims to social, political, and juridical personhood in the form of "having a voice" via performance, political participation, protest, or international court cases still fail to achieve full recognition of their status as human persons with rights to their land and livelihoods, and the unequal policies of the government are passively accepted by Surinamese society at large. Rather, a longstanding zoopolitics—reinscribed, in its sonic dimensions, by acts of listening in the present—determines the limits of personhood for these "people of nature," including regarding relations with the very landscapes of nature in which they dwell. Viewing (and hearing) culture and nature (including depoliticized, dehistoricized instances of cultural performance and natural soundscapes) as resources with different types of value in the present dictate how, and by whom, they will be managed.

4.3 Rights, (Bio)diversity, and Sustainability in Human and Nonhuman Worlds

In recent decades, international institutions like UNESCO have had influential roles in shaping discourses and ideologies of both culture and nature as resources, using language that blurs how these two types of objects are understood to behave, while also reinscribing their separateness in different realms. UNESCO's World Heritage Program began with the adoption, in 1972, of the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World's Cultural and Natural Heritage, since ratified by 193 states. The program consists of a list of World Heritage Sites, currently totaling 1,121. Of these, 869 are cultural, 213 are natural, and 39 are mixed (such as Colombia's Chiribiquete National Park, which contains notable biodiversity of flora and fauna as well as rock paintings made by "uncontacted peoples" from 20,000 BCE to the present [UNESCO 2019]). Suriname contains two UNESCO World Heritage Sites: in addition to the Central Suriname Nature Reserve (a "natural" site), the Historic Inner City of Paramaribo (a "cultural" site) has also been designated, entailing the preservation of the many colonial-style

wooden houses in the capital's downtown area (which has entailed its own issues of ownership and maintenance; see van Maanen and Ashworth 2013).

The 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage added a new category of heritage to tangible "cultural" and "natural" sites. The 2003 convention defines ICH as "the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills—as well as the instruments, objects, and cultural spaces associated therewith—that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity." ICH elements may include: "(a) oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage; (b) performing arts; (c) social practices, rituals and festive events; (d) knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; (e) traditional craftsmanship" (UNESCO 2003). In addition to a world list of ICH, many nations who have ratified the convention maintain their own lists of national ICH elements.

Shaped by institutions like UNESCO, the language of heritage is often linked with the language of human rights (as in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948) and cultural rights (as in the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, adopted in 1966). The concept of rights, in turn, is linked with individual and collective property—the right *to* whatever is considered inalienable from people and communities (Kapchan 2014). Theorists of heritage such as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1995), Haidy Geismar (2015), Deborah Kapchan (2014) and others have pointed out the problematic nature of defining the limits of these agentive entities. Defining the rights of

communities and individuals is predicated on the problematic ideological project of defining the boundaries and limits of a particular community and of an individual human self. These definitions often draw from notions of property-owning collective or individual subjects, revolving around the "political fiction" of "inalienable rights" (Pateman 2002, quoted in Kapchan 2014).

While heritage is often posed as the property of individuals and communities and linked to their "rights" to possess and practice it, another term that often arises in heritage discourses implicitly configures a different relationship between heritage and property. This term is diversity, configured as "cultural diversity" or as natural "biodiversity." Diversity discourses imply that difference is inherently good, from institutional representation (e.g. racial and ethnic diversity among university faculty and students) to the cultural and culinary offerings of a society (a depoliticized way of understanding the contributions of migrant groups in postcolonial nations) to the flora and fauna of the world (typically expressed through the lamenting of the disappearance through extinction of various species of plants and animals). What is lost in the assumption of inherent goodness that "diversity" implies is the question: good for whom? Marilyn Strathern writes, "Those late twentieth-century people who can afford it live in an infinitude of other people's variations, with the rider that many can be sampled, consumed, partaken of: bread done in the style of Vienna, of Poland, of Turkey" (1992: 36). Ghassan Hage more specifically identifies this group as white people of European descent who still comprise the dominant populations of "multicultural" postcolonial Europe, Australia, and the United States. Hage also makes a distinction between the kind of diversity that yields "cultural satisfaction" (such as "the Thai-ness of food") and "productive diversity" which makes cultural difference a resource for exploitation rather than mere consumption, yielding instead financial

capital (2000: 129). National lists of ICH capture this flattened, depoliticized collective difference, listing different types of elements from different origins next to each other; for example, the Netherlands' ICH list includes objects of recognizably white Dutch culture (clog-making, cheese-making, and windmills) as well as immigrant culture (specific foods, genres of music, and events like the Antilleanse Zomercarnaval).

Diversity, when linked to the world's cultural and natural heritage, is a discourse that turns difference itself into a resource and erases from it aspects of inequalities and divergent histories. Rather, the sum of cultural and natural difference becomes universal property. For the benefit of a more interesting and healthy world, diversity discourses imply, people who engage in unique cultural practices and steward nature in particular (sustainable) ways should continue to do so, rather than using that time to pursue the opportunities and other types of resources that modernity and capitalism afford. Furthermore, if tropical countries and other regions of the "Global South" maintain their biodiversity (for example, through programs of incentivized conservation such as REDD+), then these countries can offset the capitalist and consumerist modes of life that characterize the "Global North."

Is there, then, a right *not* to be "cultural"? Do individuals in the Global South have the right *not* to conserve natural resources, protect the forest, or practice traditional ways of life? What about the rights to consume, extract, and pollute that individuals and collectivities (such as corporations) exercise in other places in the world? What about the right to travel by plane and to import foreign products and media in order to experience the interesting diversity of culture and nature that the world has to offer? Discourses of human and cultural rights inscribe the duties of, and limits to, certain notions of personhood afforded to different groups and types of humans in the world. Javanese people have the "right," according to UNESCO and related discourses, to

maintain their unique musical traditions; Suriname's forest-dwelling populations have the "right" to steward forest ecosystems, showing the rest of the world the human "value" of the nonhuman world, in the form of traditional medicinal knowledge, biodiversity, and other forms of human and ecosystem health.⁵⁵

Yet both of these, on different scales, are disappearing. Javanese Surinamers mourn younger generations' lack of interest in playing gamelan and learning other forms of cultural tradition; Javanese-Surinamese teenagers in Suriname and the Netherlands are busy playing soccer, listening to pop music and hip-hop, and hanging out with friends, like teenagers everywhere. Even while Suriname's jungle is measured and quantified by teams of Dutch and American consultants for the REDD+ conservation program, mining continues and raw timber is exported en masse. Discourses of cultural preservation, natural conservation, and sustainability of both culture and nature all point to a conundrum: how can we actively prolong the existence of traditional practices and natural landscapes—or even mourn their slow and inevitable-seeming disappearance—while living and participating equally in a world that is structurally set up to slowly (or, in some cases, not so slowly) destroy them? It is no surprise that "traditional" culture and "pristine" nature are disappearing in a world of endless "development," based on the isolation, extraction, monetization, and consumption of objects of nature and culture (Acosta 2013, Gudynas 2015, Svampa 2019). At different scales, the Javanese-Surinamese gamelan and the flora and fauna of the Amazon are both disappearing. What would it mean, rather than isolating objects of nature and culture—like particular musical traditions, animal species, or

⁵⁵ In both types of cases, such discourses of "rights" have recently been buttressed by the language of "sustainability." In ethnomusicology, edited collections on music and cultural rights (such as Weintraub & Yung 2009) have given way to collections on sustainable music practices and "cultural sustainabilities" (Schippers & Grant 2016; Cooley 2019).

medicinal knowledge—and attempting to make them individually sustainable (often through the burden of individual responsibility), to instead live in sustainable and equitable ways?

Idelber Avelar suggests thinking in terms of "non-human rights" alongside, or instead of, typical ways of thinking human rights. The notion of non-human rights asserts that existing ideas and discourses of "rights" are anthropocentric and based on assumptions of infinite resources and endless possibilities for exploiting nonhumans and nature for human benefit (Avelar 2013: 16). Notions of property that inform "human rights" and "cultural rights" discourses are based on understanding the natural and nonhuman world as "an object in a relationship of ownership in which humans are always subjects" (ibid.: 17). Non-human rights suggests granting not just animals but also rivers, mountains, and other aspects of nature the status of subjects with the types of rights that we have thus far afforded exclusively to humans (and not even equally to all humans). Attempting to do this would demand rethinking the practicalities of living in a world that balances many different subjectivities that all have equal rights to make demands based on their equal treatment and desire to be "sustainable," not to be exploited and sacrificed for the benefit of others.

There is no simple answer to the question of how to live in an equitable or truly sustainable world, but the first step, following Avelar and others (such as Wagner 1975; Latour 1993; Escobar 1999; Haraway 2016; Tsing 2015; Viveiros de Castro 2014; Acosta 2016; Parreñas 2018; Ochoa 2014, 2016) seems to be to gain a better understanding of how we got here. These authors and others point to a fundamental separation in the ways that we understand the human and nonhuman world, or the realms of culture and nature, with the latter assumed to be subject to the whims of the former. Turning back to colonial history—including centuries of interaction between different groups of humans and different types of nature in the Caribbean—

is one important element, which also reveals how different groups of humans have been established, sorted out, and hierarchized in interconnected processes (Weheliye 2014). To rethink human-nonhuman relations, rather than evoking the nostalgic and fictional trope of pure, pristine forest wilderness—or even the actual Amazon, disconnected from its specific histories to serve as a burning symbol of hopeless and inevitable-feeling environmental devastation⁵⁶—it may be helpful to turn to the plantation, another site for thinking the entangled history of culture and nature that, in Suriname, also re-entangles a number of ethnic/cultural histories, rather than relegating them to separate, unconnected domains or to flattened and ahistorical notions of present-day difference.

⁵⁶ Although recent scholarship from indigenous South America, including the Amazon, has shown that attending ethnographically to *specific* historical and present-day relations between humans and nonhumans might point to other ways of inhabiting the world; see De la Cadena 2015; Viveiros de Castro 2014; Kohn 2013; Stolze Lima 1999; Ochoa 2014.

Conclusion: Longing for a Past that Never Existed

I intend to conclude this dissertation in a way that leaves connections partial, pointing to the inevitable incompleteness and openness in any schema or system of understanding human and nonhuman worlds as separate realms. Instead, in what follows, I trace a theme that briefly appears in each of the preceding chapters: nostalgia. Different forms of nostalgia characterize different subject positions that look back over the various histories I describe, longing for various pasts that may have never actually existed.

In Chapter 1, colonial Dutch ears hear the gamelan in Suriname as expressing an alleged inherent Javanese characteristic of homesickness that becomes entangled with centuries of Dutch presence in Java and with the aesthetics of Javanese music. I have argued that this mode of listening reflects, in part, a sense of "imperialist nostalgia" that others have identified in Dutch metropolitan culture, such as a plethora of still-popular colonial literature and the common practice of collecting colonial objects such as batik cloth and wayang puppets to decorate Dutch homes (De Mul 2010, Drieënhuizen 2014, Gouda 1995). This form of nostalgia harkens back to a "good old days" (*tempo doeloe*) of imperialism in a "world of lush tropical abundance, populated by the most gentle and pliable people on earth" that is still sometimes remembered as a "*Paradise Lost* from which the Dutch were banished" by the Indonesian Revolution (Gouda 1995: 14, 237). Gouda writes,

Even though 'shame and regret' also saturate the remembrance of the colonial era, a deep-seated sense of yearning is the most prominent fixture in the hearts and minds of a large number of Dutch people. While living productive and well-adjusted lives in the wet, frosty climate of the contemporary Netherlands, many Dutch folk still pine for the luxuriant colonial culture in Indonesia's tropical warmth that they were forced to leave behind. The fact that 'Our Indies' now belong to the colonial other, to Indonesians, lingers on as a 'collective trauma.' (1995: 237)

Imperialist nostalgia also penetrates Dutch public spaces; in Amsterdam, where a significant portion of the population is ethnically Indonesian or Indo-Dutch, tourists and locals can enjoy a coffee or beer at the VOC Café, prominently located across from Central Station in a restored fifteenth-century tower from which Dutch women allegedly waved to their husbands as the men set sail for the East Indies. Only in 2019, under public pressure, did the owners of the café change its name to Café de Schreierstoren (the Crying Tower Café), and the building remains branded with the logo of the VOC (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie, or Dutch East India Company), a trading megacorporation responsible for the Netherlands' often violent imperial expansion in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Similarly, in Suriname, a tourism industry catering mainly to Dutch travelers has led to the restoration of some of its plantations as tourist sites. On the old coffee and cacao plantation Frederiksdorp in Commewijne District, tourists can enjoy a cocktail by the pool before retreating into their sleeping quarters, which occupy the former homes of the plantation director, police chief, commandant, and doctor, all restored to look on the outside exactly like they did two centuries ago.

In both Chapters 1 and 2, from a Javanese point of view, expressive culture plays a role in negotiating notions of identity, place, history, and collective and individual memory that form a sense of Javanese-ness in Suriname. Music tells stories of family origins in a distant and past Java, prior to the modern Indonesia that some Javanese Surinamers now visit as tourists. Participatory musical events also tell stories of the "peak years" of Javanese culture in Suriname in the 1960s and 70s. During these decades, newfound prosperity in Suriname's post-plantation industries such as bauxite mining temporarily increased the quality of life for many Surinamers before a shift to a postcolonial period characterized in part by economic and political instability, ethnic violence, and mass migration to the Netherlands. Javanese-Surinamese elders now reflect

back to a time when culture, and life, seemed vibrant and stable. In comparison, newer generations of Javanese Surinamers in Suriname and the Netherlands seem to be less interested in traditional ways of life and, as a result, forms of expressive culture are disappearing, dying out with a generation of knowledge bearers.

In Chapter 3, men in the Netherlands feel nostalgia for the freedom of life in Suriname and for a particular relationship with Caribbean nature. At the songbird competition, the unpredictable whims of birds often overpower the expectations and intense training practices and rituals of their human companions. At the same time, surrounded by a familiar soundscape and a comfortable sociality, men in the metropole imagine, at a distance, a Surinamese wilderness that invites exploration and human domination in the form of fishing or bird trapping excursions. The Surinamese landscape, indexed in the Netherlands by the songs of birds, is recollected as a contrast to urban Dutch life that affords a different sense of relations between time, place, and self.

Finally, in Chapter 4, I critique broader notions of culture and nature that, in part, produce a longing for what used to be, which manifests in the form of projects of cultural preservation and natural conservation. I posit that modern Western relations with human and nonhuman landscapes—constructed separately as authentic traditional culture and wild, pure nature—constitute another form of "imperialist nostalgia," or as Renato Rosaldo puts it, "mourning for what one has destroyed," or, in the case of the environment, what one is still actively destroying (Rosaldo 1989: 107). Most recently, carbon offset initiatives like REDD+ in Suriname promise the possibility of sustainability without sacrifice—in other words, the stable perpetuation of the world as we know it—while, in effect, reinscribing a colonial zoopolitics that

shapes unjust and unsustainable relations between different groups of humans, and between humans and the nonhuman world.

In all of these contexts, nostalgia entails a view from a precarious present back towards a past time of perceived stability, control, or ease of life. Nostalgia tells stories about past forms of relations with cultural practices and the natural world that could have, potentially, lasted forever. Imperialist nostalgia conjures narratives of the benevolent domination of human and nonhuman others without resistance. Svetlana Boym writes that nostalgia "is a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed" (2001: xiii). From the precarious present, the imaginary of stable categories of nature and culture and relations of easy control feels like a home in which we used to safely and comfortably dwell, making sense of the world around us and dominating it through that knowledge.

"We have never been modern," writes Bruno Latour (1993), and Donna Haraway echoes, "we have never been human" (2008). That is to say, the separate worlds of nature and culture and the seemingly stable relations between them never existed outside of our constructions of them. The past, stable world that we long for nostalgically in projects of preservation, conservation, and sustainability was always progressing towards an unsustainable end. Despite the rosy lens that nostalgia colors, separate worlds of culture and nature that emerged from plantation colonial ideologies and practices have always been fictions. We have never had the control over the world that we collectively miss.

The goal of this dissertation is to contribute to such a critique through historical-ethnographic case studies of two objects that seem to fit comfortably within the epistemological realms of culture and nature, but serve to blur and challenge the boundaries of these realms in their actual circulations and interactions with human practices, discourses, and senses. It is an

attempt to look back at history to understand how we got to where we are. This is not to say that the present world and the future it portends are inevitable. Rather, if, instead of looking back nostalgically and attempting through piecemeal efforts to recover a past that never existed, we can focus efforts on radically reimagining relations between different groups of humans and with the nonhuman world, then different futures may still be possible.

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