

# **A return visit**

**The public and political narrative regarding Ghanaians in the Netherlands  
from 1990-2000**

**MA Thesis**

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## 1. Introduction

On the 4th of October in 1992 a plane crashed into two residential flats, the *Groeneveen* and *Kruitberg*, located in the Bijlmer, a neighbourhood in the south eastern part of Amsterdam. It was a disastrous event that put a strong mark on the identity of the Bijlmer and is till today remembered as the '*Bijlmerramp*' (Bijlmer disaster). Uncertainties around the exact numbers of casualties contributed to speculations on large numbers of 'illegal' migrants residing in Amsterdam. The Ghanaian community in particular became the focal point within this resurged debate on 'illegal' migrants. Ghanaian migration to the Netherlands largely took place from the 1980s onwards and was strongly related to developments surrounding immigration control in neighbouring European countries, as well as local economic and political developments in Ghana. Although initially the Ghanaian community in the Netherlands remained largely unknown to the wider Dutch public, the community gained increasing national attention in the early 1990s. Initial criminalisation of the community occurred due to an international drug trafficking case, which centralised Ghanaians in problematisations of 'illegal' migrants in the public discourse. The Bijlmer disaster strengthened this increased focus on the Ghanaian community in the public discourse on 'illegal' immigration.

This thesis is structured around the research question: What was the public and political discourse regarding Ghanaian migrants in the Netherlands in the period between 1990 and 2000 and how and why did it change over time? It will analyse how the public and political narrative regarding the Ghanaian migrant community developed within this focus period. By analysing newspaper articles and accounts from oral history research, I conduct an analysis of the public discourse and policy developments from a governance perspective, thus looking at the forces at play that shape immigration control policy beyond the traditional top-down level of government.

### *Theory*

In order to explain the dominant public and political narrative regarding Ghanaian migrants in the Netherlands in the period between 1990 and 2000 it is crucial to look at the different structural factors at play. Furthermore, I have applied a postmodernist approach which has allowed me to look beyond the structural factors and analyse the role of the media and claim makers. The different factors that possibly explain the dominant public and political narrative regarding Ghanaian migrants could be divided in the following categories: historical, geopolitical, economic and political. The section below explains these factors.

The arrival of Ghanaian migrants mainly occurred after the arrival of large groups of migrants from the former colonies and after the arrival of guest workers. In 1975, the year of Surinamese independence, 40,000 people migrated from Suriname to the Netherlands. In the early 1980s the

Netherlands was home to roughly 180,000 people from Suriname.<sup>1</sup> The number of people migrating from the Dutch Antilles was relatively low, however this quickly increased in the early 1980s. In the year of 1988 roughly 8,000 people migrated from the Dutch Antilles to the Netherlands.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, global conflicts occurring in different parts of the world led to the arrival of many refugees in the Netherlands. In 1992 about 25,000 people from the Balkan region sought political asylum in the Netherlands. Throughout the 1990s, the number of refugees from this region increased.<sup>3</sup> The large-scale refugee migration to the Netherlands in this period might have shaped the narrative surrounding immigration in the Netherlands. Ghanaians arrived in the Netherlands at a time when also large groups of other migrants arrived. It was a time period in which the earlier migrant categorisations became less clear. These earlier categorisations included (post-)colonial migrants, guest worker migrants, economic migrants and refugees.<sup>4</sup> The increasing number of economic migrants of whom some tried to gain legal residence status through the asylum system, led to the emergence of a new group of ‘illegal’ migrants. The majority of the Ghanaian migrants that arrived in the Netherlands in the 1980s and 1990s were classified as economic migrants.<sup>5</sup>

In terms of the economic context in this period, the Netherlands had just come out of an economic crisis.<sup>6</sup> The global economic crisis that started in the mid-1970s contributed to a lowering of the standard of living in many parts of the world, which drove large scale economic migration.<sup>7</sup> In this post crisis context, the arrival of larger numbers of economic migrants from low socioeconomic backgrounds in the Netherlands could be viewed as threatening to the Dutch economy, in which low skilled jobs became increasingly limited.

Moreover, the 1970s saw a rise of xenophobic and racist right wing political parties that pushed strong anti-immigration agendas.<sup>8</sup> These sentiments continued to exist in the Netherlands throughout the 1990s. The nativist turn in politics might have impacted the public and political narrative regarding Ghanaian migrants, while nativist and anti-immigration narratives have also possibly been strengthened by the arrival of larger numbers of Ghanaian migrants in the Netherlands.

Beyond these structural factors the media and the involvement of particular claim makers have contributed to the public and political narrative regarding the Ghanaian migrant community in the

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<sup>1</sup> Charlotte Laarman, *Oude Onbekenden: Het politieke en publieke debat rondom postkoloniale migranten 1945-2005* (Hilversum, 2013), 169.

<sup>2</sup> Laarman, *Oude onbekenden*, 206.

<sup>3</sup> T. Hessels, ‘Voormalig Joegoslaven in Nederland’, *Bevolkingstrends* (2005) 99.

<sup>4</sup> J.H. Brussaard, M.A. van Erp-Baart, H.A.M. Brants, K.F.A.M. Hulshof and M.R.H. Löwik, ‘Nutrition and Health among Migrants in the Netherlands’, *Public Health Nutrition* 4:2b (2001) 659.

<sup>5</sup> K. Nimako, ‘De Ghanese gemeenschap: van migranten tot etnische minderheid’, in: I. van Kessel & N. Tellegen (eds.) *Afrikanen in Nederland* (Leiden 2000), 121.

<sup>6</sup> A. Luedtke, ‘Migration Governance in Europe: A historical perspective’, in: A. Weinar, S. Bonjour and L. Zhyznomirska (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of the Politics of Migration in Europe* (London 2018) 16.

<sup>7</sup> K. Nimako, ‘Nieuwkomers in een “gevestigde” samenleving: een analyse van de Ghanese gemeenschap in Zuidoost’, *Amsterdam: Gemeente Amsterdam, Stadsdeel Zuidoost* (1993) 11.

<sup>8</sup> Laarman, *Oude Onbekenden*, 166. ; Luedtke, ‘Migration Governance’, 16.

Netherlands. By applying a postmodernist approach I have been able to include the role of the media and claim makers. As part of my research I have applied this approach to critically assess the dominant narrative regarding Ghanaian migrants in the Netherlands. This entailed looking at the subjective forces at play such as media discourses and the role of claim makers that have influenced the dominant narrative.<sup>9</sup> The media narrative can be regarded as part of the public narrative. The public narrative can be defined as the outcome of discussions held in the public spheres of society. Newspapers play a big role within the construction of this public debate and are a crucial medium in order to capture the public narrative.<sup>10</sup>

The link between the media and policy making is part of an ongoing academic debate. Within this debate there are three dominant views. Firstly, there are academics who claim that the media does play a significant role in policy making. They argue that this is particularly the case when political agendas are of a symbolic nature, when stark differences between the ruling parties or disagreement between ministries lead to uncertain policies. Secondly, there are academics who support the view that the media merely have some influence on policy making, depending on the context. They argue that the occurrence of dramatic events and the actions of lobby organisations could enlarge the influence of the media on policy making. Finally, some academics argue that the media does not influence policy making but rather has a more supportive function. This is particularly the case when the media narrative amplifies the dominant political narrative or when the dominant media narrative centres around issues that are high on the political agenda.<sup>11</sup>

In analysing the media narratives and political developments regarding Ghanaian migrants, I have taken account of ‘crimmigration’ theory. This theory is usually applied in the field of law, when referring to the conflating of criminal and immigration law. This increases the power of the authorities to exclude undocumented migrants from society.<sup>12</sup> This thesis will look beyond the legal perspective and apply crimmigration theory by looking at media narratives and personal stories. In this way I analyse how parts of immigration became regarded as criminal and how this reflected in Dutch immigration control policies.

Another theory that I’ve applied to this research question is the theory of migrants’ double engagement. This theory fits within the cluster of literature on migrants’ transnational engagement, which will be expanded on in the historiographic section. The engagement of Ghanaian migrants in both the Netherlands and Ghana is referred to as a form of double engagement.<sup>13</sup> The double

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<sup>9</sup> Griet Roets and Marijke Goedgeluck, ‘Daisies on the Road’, *Qualitative Inquiry* 13:1 (2007) 91.

<sup>10</sup> Saskia Bonjour and Marlou Schrover, ‘Public Debate and Policy-making on Family Migration in the Netherlands, 1960-1995’, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 41:9 (2015) 1476.

<sup>11</sup> Marlou Schrover and Tycho Walaardt, ‘The Influence of the Media on Policies in Practice: Hungarian Refugee Resettlement in the Netherlands in 1956’, *Journal of Migration History*, 3:1 (2017) 24, 25.

<sup>12</sup> Graham Hudson, ‘Does crimmigration theory rest on a mistake?’, *Int. J. Migration and Border Studies* 4:4 (2018) 304.

<sup>13</sup> Valentina Mazzucato, ‘The Double Engagement: Transnationalism and Integration. Ghanaian Migrants’ Lives Between Ghana and The Netherlands’, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 34:2 (2008) 206.

engagement of Ghanaian migrants could be an element to the problematisation of Ghanaian migrants in the Dutch public and political debate. Migrants' engagement in their country of origin is often problematised as an indicator of limited participation in the host society, particularly in debates on migrant integration. Within the case of the Ghanaian migrant community, large-scale investment in the country of origin Ghana could be framed as migrants economically benefiting from the Dutch system while investing elsewhere.

My hypothesis is that the combination of these structural factors and the postmodernist elements shaped the political and public narrative regarding Ghanaian migrants in the Netherlands. Within this view both the Bijlmer plane crash and drug trafficking cases such as Operation 'Goofy' contributed to problematisations of the Ghanaian migrant community in the Netherlands in the public and political discourse. As these two events can be considered dramatic events that sparked a nationwide debate on 'illegal' migration, my working hypothesis is that the Dutch media and claim makers from the Ghanaian community in this case had at least some influence on the policymaking process.

### *Historiography*

This historiography section discusses the academic literature that relates to the topic of Ghanaian migrants in the Netherlands, plus some of the literature on Ghanaians in the United Kingdom and Germany. Parallels between these countries exist. Within the literature on Ghanaian migrant communities in Europe there are several recurring themes. This includes literature on the topic of integration and transnationalism, referring to migrants' engagement and participation in their destination society as well as their country of origin. Another thematic area expands on the role of religion and religio-cultural organisation within this migrant community. Furthermore, there is an extensive body of literature from outside of our discipline dealing with health-related topics.<sup>14</sup>

Within the thematic area of integration and transnationalism a great amount of literature deals with the economic activities of Ghanaian migrants in the Netherlands and the role of remittances.<sup>15</sup> Valentina Mazzucato looked at the participation of Ghanaian migrants based in the Netherlands in both the destination country as well as their country of origin. Mazzucato argues that Ghanaian migrants' objectives and economic activities show engagement in both the Netherlands as well as their country of

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<sup>14</sup> J.W. Knipscheer, E.E.M. de Jong, R.J. Kleber and E. Lamptey, 'Ghanaian migrants in The Netherlands: General health, acculturative stress and utilization of mental health care', *Journal of Community Psychology* 28:4 (2000) 459-476. ; J.W. Knipscheer & R.J. Kleber, 'Acculturation and Mental Health Among Ghanaians in the Netherlands', *International Journal of Social Psychiatry* 53:4 (2007) 369-383. ; A.C.H. de Schutter, 'Ghanezen & Ziekte', (2008) 1-73. ; Sanne Siete Visser, Ajay Bailey & Louise Meijering, 'Food, faith and community: Social well-being of Ghanaian migrants in the Netherlands', *Gender, Place and Culture : A Journal of Feminist Geography* 22:5 (2015) 608-625.

<sup>15</sup> Mazzucato, 'The Double Engagement', 199-216. ; Robert C. Kloosterman, Katja Rusinovic and David Yeboah, 'Super-diverse migrants - similar trajectories?', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 42:6 (2016) 913-932. ; Mirjam Kabki, Valentina Mazzucato and Ernest Appiah, 'Wo benane a eye bebre': The economic impact of remittances of Netherlands-based Ghanaian migrants on rural Ashanti', *Population Space and Place* 10:2 (2004) 85-97.

origin Ghana, referring to this phenomenon as migrants' double engagement.<sup>16</sup> The theory of migrants' double engagement is referred to in the previous theoretic section.

In addition to studies analysing societal engagement and economic activities from a transnational perspective, there are studies analysing the role of transnational family constructions amongst this migrant group. These studies analyse both the role of migration policies in the establishment of these transnational family relations as well as the role of specific cultural and socioeconomic characteristics. Within this cluster Kim Caarls has studied family members living geographically separated from each other, a phenomenon referred to as 'living apart together'.<sup>17</sup>

Other studies have expanded on the role and functioning of these transnational family networks. These studies have looked at the influence of the socioeconomic positioning of male migrants and gender norms on transnational fathering.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, studies have expanded on the effects of transnational parenting, looking at elements such as health and general well-being of the affected family members.<sup>19</sup>

Although I do not study transnational family constructions in the Ghanaian community as part of this thesis, this topic is relevant for my research. Central to the problematisation of the Ghanaian migrant community in the Dutch public narrative in the early 1990s is the emphasis on perceived high numbers of 'illegal' Ghanaians. Transnational family relations and networks possibly play a role in the uncertainty surrounding the exact numbers of Ghanaians in the Netherlands. Ideas that many different family members frequently relocate to the Netherlands and live while undocumented in one household, have led to overestimates of the exact numbers of Ghanaians living in the Netherlands.

In terms of the role of religion within the Ghanaian migrant community in the Netherlands, Rijk van Dijk is one of the key authors. He discusses the role of Ghanaian migrant churches in light of the Dutch immigration control measures. Van Dijk refers to the late 1980s and early 1990s as a time when African migrants were viewed as largely responsible for tax avoidance in the Netherlands. During this time, population records showed clear gaps, with certain identities remaining unknown, leading to widespread public concerns surrounding 'illegality'. Since the late 1980s Ghanaians and Nigerians became central focal points in these public concerns.<sup>20</sup> Van Dijk refers to the Bijlmer plane crash in 1992 as further contributing to this public concern surrounding 'illegality'. Uncertainties about the exact

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<sup>16</sup> Mazzucato, 'The Double Engagement', 206.

<sup>17</sup> K. Caarls, 'Samenleven over grenzen: Ghanese paren in Nederland en het Verenigd Koninkrijk', *Demos (Voorburg, Netherlands)* 32:2 (2016) 5.

<sup>18</sup> Miranda Poeze, 'Beyond breadwinning: Ghanaian transnational fathering in the Netherlands', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 45:16 (2019) 3065-3084.

<sup>19</sup> B.B. Dito, V. Mazzucato and D. Schans, 'The effects of transnational parenting on the subjective health and well-being of Ghanaian migrants in The Netherlands', *Population Space and Place* 23:3 (2017).

<sup>20</sup> R. van Dijk, 'Ghanaian churches in the Netherlands: Religion mediating a tense relationship', in: W.M.J. van Kessel (ed.), *Merchants, missionaries and migrants: 300 years of Dutch-Ghanaian relations* (Amsterdam 2002) 91.

numbers of casualties led to increasing public speculations surrounding the size of the Ghanaian migrant community in the Netherlands.<sup>21</sup>

Finally, a great body of literature from outside of my discipline deals with health-related topics. This includes literature on topics such as mental health and access to health facilities, linking it to stress related to acculturative processes as well as legal status.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, others have looked at general health and well-being and experiences of Ghanaian migrants in Dutch healthcare facilities, often in light of cultural or traditional perceptions on health, as well as general challenges that dominate the experience of Ghanaian migrants in the Netherlands.<sup>23</sup>

This thesis looks at developments within the policy domain from a governance perspective. The governance of modern societies reflects the complex interplay of various societal and political forces and actors.<sup>24</sup> A governance perspective allows me to look beyond traditional top-down influence, while looking at the combination of structural factors, media framing and the various claim makers from the Ghanaian community that have possibly played a role in the developments surrounding the Dutch immigration control policies. In this way, this approach has allowed me to conduct a more complete analysis of the narrative surrounding migrant groups and immigration control within the public and political domains.

#### *Method and material*

This research makes use of newspapers in order to analyse the media narrative regarding Ghanaian migrants in the Netherlands. Digitised newspaper articles have been accessed through the online archives Delpher and Nexis Uni. The years between 1990 and 2000 have been selected as part of this archival research. Delpher has been used to access digitised newspaper articles up until 1995 and Nexis Uni has been used to also include the digitised articles published post 1995. A crucial distinction between the two archives is that Delpher includes scanned pages of the original newspaper articles, while Nexis Uni merely offers transcripts of the original articles. This means that pictures are excluded from the Nexis Uni archive. In this context images are relevant, as they are often used for effects of dramatisation. Moreover, Nexis Uni does not allow you to see the original positioning of the article in the newspaper. The positioning of a newspaper article plays a role in the framing of a particular media narrative.

In my search I have made use of the search term '*Ghanezen Nederland illegaal*' ('Ghanaians Netherlands illegal') in order to generate an overview of the Dutch newspaper articles that were published in this time period and dealt with the topic of Ghanaians residing in the Netherlands. For the

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<sup>21</sup> Van Dijk, 'Ghanaian churches in the Netherlands', 91,92.

<sup>22</sup> Knipscheer, Jong, Kleber and Lamptey, 'Ghanaian migrants in The Netherlands', 459-476. ; Knipscheer and Kleber, 'Acculturation and Mental Health', 369-383.

<sup>23</sup> Schutter, 'Ghanezen & Ziekte', 1-73. ; Visser, Bailey & Meijering, 'Food, faith and community', 608-625.

<sup>24</sup> J. Kooiman, 'Societal governance: Levels, models and orders of social-political interaction', in: Jon Pierre (ed.), *Debating Governance: Authority, Steering, and Democracy* (Oxford 2000) 142.



feasibility of this research, I have narrowed down my selection to the following Dutch newspapers: *De Volkskrant*, *NRC Handelsblad*, *Het Parool*, *De Telegraaf* and *Algemeen Dagblad*. All these newspapers are Dutch national newspapers, with the exception of newspaper *Het Parool*. *De Telegraaf* is considered highly sensational and can be positioned on the right side of the political spectrum. *De Volkskrant* and *NRC Handelsblad* are seen as high quality newspapers that are positioned politically on the centre-left. Newspaper *Algemeen Dagblad* could be positioned rather in the middle, as it is less sensational compared to *De Telegraaf*, yet still considered a popular newspaper.<sup>25</sup> Finally, *Het Parool* is a regional Dutch newspaper, mainly focused on Amsterdam and is positioned left on the political spectrum. By selecting these five newspapers I have been able to capture a diversity of national media perspectives. In each selected newspaper article I have analysed the problem that is defined, the generic frame, the dominant media scenario and the authoritative figures that are highlighted to support the claims made in the article.

Table 1. Newspaper articles based on search term ‘Ghanezen Nederland illegaal’.

	<i>NRC Handelsblad</i>	<i>Het Parool</i>	<i>De Volkskrant</i>	<i>De Telegraaf</i>	<i>Algemeen Dagblad</i>	
Nexis Uni	29	27	4	0	9	69
Delpher	22	16	24	3	12	77
Total	51	43	28	3	21	146

Within media narratives the problematisation of immigration occurs through the use of different scenarios. ‘Crisis’ and ‘drama’ scenarios are frequently used in problematisations of immigration and its related policies. Within the ‘crisis’ scenario immigration is framed as an uncontrollable sudden threat. As part of this scenario the ‘numbers game’ is frequently used to emphasise the estimated large numbers of immigrants either already present in the country or possibly arriving in the near future. Within this narrative individual and personified migrant stories are often excluded, while presenting a rather generalised account of groups as a whole.<sup>26</sup> The uncontrollable nature of immigration as part of this scenario, is frequently expressed by the use of so-called liquid or water metaphors.<sup>27</sup> The ‘drama’ scenario on the other hand presents highly personalised migrant stories, highlighting dramatised individual stories for example of women and children. This narrative frequently moves between the

<sup>25</sup> J. Uringa, ‘ALL NEWS ARE VIEWS: Onderzoek naar media bias in politieke berichtgeving door zes landelijke dagbladen’, Utrecht University (2008) 11.

<sup>26</sup> Bonjour and Schrover, ‘Public Debate and Policy-making’, 1477.

<sup>27</sup> Marlou Schrover and Willem Schinkel, ‘Introduction: the language of inclusion and exclusion in the context of immigration and integration’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 36:7 (2013) 1132.

personalised and general accounts, highlighting that the individual stories and experiences represent a larger group. This media narrative is often used by claim makers to support their agenda.<sup>28</sup>

In line with the use of these different media narratives, it is important to take account of different frames that are used in media coverage. Studies show that in coverage of immigration related topics in the media the following frames are most commonly used: the threat frame, human-interest frame, economic frame and managerialist frame. Within the threat frame immigration is framed negatively as forming a threat to the host society, as migrants could bring in new or different ideas.<sup>29</sup> This could spark tension or conflict between individuals, groups or institutions.<sup>30</sup> As part of the economic frame emphasis is put on economic losses and gains for the host society resulting from the arrival of immigrants. In these threat and economic frames immigrants are frequently framed as competing with the native residents for housing, employment and women. The human-interest frame on the other hand frequently frames immigrants as victims deserving of support from the receiving society.<sup>31</sup> In these frames narratives are largely personalised and dramatised in order to attract public sympathy.<sup>32</sup> Finally, the managerialist frame presents immigration as a depoliticised governance challenge, emphasising on how best to manage immigration.<sup>33</sup> As part of the newspaper analysis these different frames have been taken into account.

By paying attention to the authoritative figures highlighted in the newspapers I will be able to create an overview of the dominant voices pushing certain narratives within the Dutch media. Furthermore, I will focus on the development of the public narrative throughout my focus period, in order to form an understanding of when certain narratives were used and why it was used at that particular moment in time. By paying attention to the use of authoritative figures in the media, I will also be able to analyse whether throughout my time period changes occurred in the highlighted authoritative figures or claim makers within Dutch media narratives. As part of this analysis of the development of the public narrative it is crucial to take note of the way different societal issues and phenomena are presented as linked to this particular migrant group. Within problematisations of immigration and immigrant groups issue linking often occurs, in which narratives expand on the perceived problem related to a form of immigration or a particular immigrant group by linking various societal issues to this group or form of immigration.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Bonjour & Schrover, 'Public Debate and Policy-making', 1477.

<sup>29</sup> Rianne Dekker and Peter Scholten, 'Framing the Immigration Policy Agenda: A Qualitative Comparative Analysis of Media Effects on Dutch Immigration Policies', *The International Journal of Press/politics* 22:2 (2017) 205.

<sup>30</sup> Leen d'Haenens & Marielle de Lange, 'Framing of asylum seekers in Dutch regional newspapers', *Media, culture and society* 23 (2001) 850.

<sup>31</sup> Dekker and Scholten, 'Framing the Immigration Policy Agenda', 205.

<sup>32</sup> D'Haenens and De Lange, 'Framing of asylum seekers', 850.

<sup>33</sup> Dekker and Scholten, 'Framing the Immigration Policy Agenda', 205.

<sup>34</sup> Schrover and Schinkel, 'Introduction: The language of inclusion', 1129.

In addition to this newspaper analysis, interviews have been conducted in order to capture oral history accounts. All five selected respondents are first generation Ghanaian migrants, who lived in the Netherlands throughout the 1990s and are currently still residing in the Netherlands. In the selection of respondents I made use of my existing network as well as the network of my respondents and selected key figures who played a leading role within the Ghanaian community in the Netherlands. Three of the respondents were chosen based on their role in the more established community organisations, namely the Representative Council of Ghanaian Organisations in the Netherlands (Recogin) and the Sikaman Foundation, currently known as Akasanoma. Both Recogin and the Sikaman Foundation had an established presence throughout the 1990s. The two other selected respondents were not part of established community organisations, however also played a leading role within the community. One in a more informal manner, through different bottom up community initiatives, whilst the other had been active in the mental healthcare sector in Amsterdam Southeast throughout the 1990s. As part of this oral history research I was not able to include Ghanaian religious leaders. Based on my existing network I did not manage to get in touch with prominent religious leaders that fitted within the criteria for respondents.

The oral history accounts have been applied to include unique community perspectives that would provide further insights on the experienced effects of the Dutch dominant public narrative on the Ghanaian migrant community as well as the related political developments from a migrant point of view. Moreover, it highlights the role that the community has played within the development of the media and political narratives. In this way I have aimed to highlight the role of claim makers from the Ghanaian community within the development of Dutch immigration control policy.

*Table 2. Overview oral history participants.*

	Respondent 1	Respondent 2	Respondent 3	Respondent 4	Respondent 5
Community organisation (established organisation)	X	X		X	
Other (includes informal networks)			X		X

When applying the oral history method new social facts are added to the existing historical data. This method includes a level of subjectivity, as it allows interviewees space to express their own interpretation of past events.<sup>35</sup> By conducting oral history research I wish to include the voice of the

<sup>35</sup> Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy, 'Telling tales: Oral history and the construction of pre-Stonewall lesbian history', *Radical history review* 62 (1995) 59.

subjects of the public and political narratives; the Ghanaian migrants. By including perspectives from community leaders, I have been able to add new social facts to the existing records, which include the literary and archival sources. In this way I have been able to add a greater level of subjective interpretation of the historical events relevant to this research. This subjective interpretation could also be viewed as a limitation, as this method merely allows the researcher to capture a subjective vision on reality. This would always include some level of bias. However, in my research this level of subjectivity is not a limitation. In my interviews the personal stories and subjective realities and experiences were central, thus did not form a limitation to the research outcome.

When conducting oral history research, it is crucial to be aware of your positionality as a researcher. It is important for researchers to take note of the perceived distance between them as researchers and the research subjects. When conducting interviews, this perceived distance could have an impact on the research outcome. It is therefore crucial to establish trust between the researcher and research participant, as well as remain aware of certain sensitivities albeit cultural or specific to the topic. As a second generation Ghanaian immigrant I was able to get in touch with research participants, by making use of my existing network within the community. Already having a network within the Ghanaian community in the Netherlands possibly helped in bridging some of the distance and aided my research process. Based on my experience the research participants were interested to participate and openly shared their stories, while emphasising on the urgency of this topic. Moreover, several participants expressed excitement and a sense of pride as the research was carried out by someone from the second generation.

Furthermore, it is also important to take note of the positionality of the research participant and how this might impact the research outcome. The key community figures I consulted might be conscious of their role and positioning within their community. As they are aware of their representative and leading role, the research participants could be conscious of the words they use and the information they share. Due to the nature of this topic I felt like my own positionality and the positionality of the research participants did not negatively impact the research outcome. The participants were unrestrained in sharing their personal stories and perspectives.

The next chapter will provide some background information on the Ghanaian migrant community in the Netherlands. Furthermore, chapters 3 to 6 will discuss the media and political narratives regarding Ghanaian migrants surrounding drug trafficking case Operation 'Goofy' and the Bijlmer plane crash. Moreover, chapter 7 looks at the political changes during the 1990s that increasingly targeted Ghanaian migrants. Chapter 8 discusses the resilience from the Ghanaian community during the 1990s and highlights attempts from the community to build a renewed positive image of Ghanaians in the Netherlands. Finally, this thesis will conclude by answering the research question in chapter 9.

## 2. Ghanaians in the Netherlands

Ghanaian migration to the Netherlands can be positioned within the context of a great increase of migration from Ghana to Europe and other parts of the world. This chapter describes the context that gave rise to Ghanaian migration to the Netherlands. It also provides background information to the lives and religio-cultural organisation of Ghanaian migrants in the Netherlands. Furthermore, it introduces the problematisation of the Ghanaian community in the early 1990s and related political developments. The topics raised in this chapter will be discussed more extensively in the next chapters.

The increasing migration from Ghana to different parts of the world from the 1970s onwards was linked to economic and political developments in Ghana. In the mid-1960s Ghana experienced a period of economic decline. Ghana's economy, which depended on the production and export of cocoa, was affected by the decreasing price of cocoa on the world market. This period of economic decline contributed to the country's political instability. Ghana, which gained independence in 1957, experienced a great number of rapid regime changes in its post-independence period. The worsening economic situation was seen as causing increasing political conflict.<sup>36</sup> Another factor contributing to the international migration was Ghana's Education Act in 1961, which included compulsory education for school-aged children. The introduction of this act led to a vast increase of the educational participation amongst Ghanaian youth. However, while literacy rates and educational participation increased amongst the Ghanaian population, employment opportunities remained limited. The rising unemployment rates in the 1970s can be viewed as one of the drivers of emigration.<sup>37</sup>

Ghanaian migration to different European countries from the 1970s onwards, particularly to Germany and the Netherlands, was driven largely by increasingly restrictive immigration control policies in the United Kingdom. During the 1960s and 1970s the UK imposed new visa restrictions in order to halt the immigration of migrants from the Commonwealth, particularly from countries in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean.<sup>38</sup>

While the UK's immigration control policies increasingly tightened, Germany's policies regarding immigration control were relatively open, leading to an increase of Ghanaian migration to Germany in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This resulted in an increase of Ghanaian migration to the Netherlands. Ghanaian migration to the Netherlands occurred in two phases. The first phase, from 1974 to 1983, saw large numbers of mainly male migrants who regarded the Netherlands as a temporary stopover. Many of these migrants settled in the Netherlands for the purpose of trade in second-hand goods. In the second phase, post 1983, the migration from Ghana to the Netherlands changed in nature, due to developments in Ghana. Firstly, the introduction of structural adjustment policies in Ghana in 1983 negatively affected the Ghanaians who had settled in the Netherlands and were active in the trade

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<sup>36</sup> K. Nimako, 'Nieuwkomers in een "gevestigde" samenleving', 12,13.

<sup>37</sup> Ibidem, 13.

<sup>38</sup> Ibidem, 14.

of second-hand goods. Although many initially viewed the Netherlands as a place of temporary settlement, these economic effects resulted in part of the migrants staying put in the Netherlands.<sup>39</sup>

Secondly, Ghana experienced a period of drought between 1981 and 1983, which led to Ghanaian migrants living in the Netherlands inviting their family members to join them. The family reunification in the early 1980s contributed to larger numbers of Ghanaian women migrating to the Netherlands. Finally, in 1983 nearly one million Ghanaian migrants were deported from Nigeria due to the economic crisis.<sup>40</sup> Large numbers of Ghanaians had migrated to Nigeria as a result of Nigeria's 'oil boom'.<sup>41</sup> Many of the Ghanaians who resettled in Ghana upon their deportation ended up migrating to other countries, including the Netherlands.<sup>42</sup>

During the 1980s, the number of Ghanaian migrants who gained a Dutch residence permit increased. In 1987 a number of 2,567 Ghanaians gained a residence permit, a large increase compared to the number of 352 Ghanaians in 1984. Post 1987 this number decreased due to more restrictive immigration control policies. In 1990, 5,214 Ghanaians were registered with a Dutch residence permit, of whom 60 percent lived in Amsterdam. The number of registered Ghanaians, which includes the second generation, quickly increased to 12,764 in 1998. The majority of the Ghanaian migrants in the Netherlands were considered economic and social migrants, with a relatively small number gaining political asylum in comparison to other African migrant groups.<sup>43</sup> A majority of the first generation Ghanaians arriving in the 1980s took on menial jobs for example in the cleaning, greenhouse and flower auction sectors, often as a result of foreign qualifications not being recognised by the Dutch state, as well as language barriers.<sup>44</sup> A rather limited number of Ghanaians settled in the Netherlands for educational purposes, in comparison to the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States.<sup>45</sup>

Amsterdam South East, in which the Bijlmer is located, became home to a large percentage of the Ghanaian migrant population in the Netherlands, as it till today hosts one of the largest concentrations of Ghanaians in the Netherlands.<sup>46</sup> The area Bijlmer has suffered under a bad public reputation. What initially started as a novel and rather progressive housing plan, tailored towards a new urban middle class, took a different turn due to limited governmental funds. The newly established high rise building blocks attracted large numbers of migrants from the former Dutch colony Suriname surrounding Surinamese independence, as they faced difficulties in obtaining housing in other parts of

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<sup>39</sup> Nimako, 'Nieuwkomers in een "gevestigde" samenleving', 14.

<sup>40</sup> Ibidem, 14, 15.

<sup>41</sup> Ibidem, 13.

<sup>42</sup> K. Nimako, 'De Ghanese gemeenschap: van migranten tot etnische minderheid', in: I. van Kessel & N. Tellegen (eds.), *Afrikanen in Nederland* (Leiden 2000) 120.

<sup>43</sup> Nimako, 'De Ghanese gemeenschap', 121.

<sup>44</sup> R. van Dijk, 'Afrikaanse gemeenschappen, religie en identiteit: Ghanese pinksterkerken in Den Haag', in: I. van Kessel & N. Tellegen (eds.), *Afrikanen in Nederland* (Leiden 2000) 205.

<sup>45</sup> Nimako, 'De Ghanese gemeenschap', 121.

<sup>46</sup> Nimako, 'Nieuwkomers in een "gevestigde" samenleving', 15.

the city of Amsterdam.<sup>47</sup> As a result of the colonial history and the role the Netherlands played in Ghana and Suriname, there are cultural and linguistic similarities between the Ghanaian and Afro-Surinamese communities. The arrival of Ghanaians in Amsterdam South East led to cultural interactions with black migrant communities, such as the Afro-Surinamese.<sup>48</sup> Ghanaian migrants partly inherited the negative stigma linked to the Afro-Surinamese community. Within the problematisation of the Afro-Surinamese community there had been a lot of emphasis on drug use and drug trafficking. The criminalisation of this community was particularly amplified in Dutch media narratives during the late 1960s and 1970s.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, the Ghanaian community was affected by the negative reputation of the Bijlmer neighbourhood. The Bijlmer had gained the public reputation of a neighbourhood with high levels of poverty, crime and high concentrations of non-white residents.<sup>50</sup> The large-scale settlement of the Ghanaian migrant community in this area impacted the framing of this community. This framing will be expanded on in the following chapters.

Ghanaian migration to the Netherlands initially occurred rather gradually and did not generate much societal response, remaining largely unacknowledged by the larger public. This might be due to the presence of other black migrant groups in the Netherlands. The presence of Ghanaians in urban areas in which large black communities resided, might have made it possible for Ghanaians to blend in and remain under the radar from the wider Dutch public. From the early 1990s the Ghanaian community in the Netherlands became the focal point within discussions surrounding ‘illegal’ migrants. Upon the arrest of several Ghanaians as part of a big drug trafficking case, a statement was made by the Amsterdam police, claiming that an estimated number of 10,000 illegal Ghanaians were living in Amsterdam. The Bijlmer plane crash in 1992 further generated attention towards the Ghanaian community.<sup>51</sup> In these times of increased problematisation of the Ghanaian community in the public and political debates, several laws were introduced in the Netherlands targeted at undocumented migrants.<sup>52</sup> These political changes are discussed more extensively in chapter 7.

In these times of increasing criminalisation of the Ghanaian migrant community and an expansion of restrictive governmental measures targeting immigration, Ghanaian Christian church networks, particularly of Pentecostal Christian nature, emerged in the Netherlands. These churches were able to grant members a sense of dignity and self-esteem, as these congregations were able to provide a form of moral authority.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Chris Quispel, ‘‘Toekomst te huur’ Migratie, etniciteit en stigmatisering: de Robert Taylor Homes in Chicago en de Bijlmermeer in Amsterdam’, *Tijdschrift voor sociale en economische geschiedenis* 7:1 (2010) 97, 98.

<sup>48</sup> R. van Dijk, ‘Ghanese pinkstergemeenten en kosmopolitische identiteiten in Nederland’, in: H. Dibbitts, I. Hoving and M. Schrover, *Cultuur en migratie in Nederland. Veranderingen van het alledaagse 1950-2000* (Den Haag 2005) 356.

<sup>49</sup> Laarman, *Oude onbekenden*, 179, 180.

<sup>50</sup> Chris Quispel, ‘‘Toekomst te huur’’, 88, 107.

<sup>51</sup> Nimako, ‘De Ghanese gemeenschap’, 122.

<sup>52</sup> Van Dijk, ‘Ghanaian churches in the Netherlands’, 91.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem*, 95.

Mid 1980s several community organisations were set up initially aimed at supporting Ghanaians in the Netherlands with the organisation of funerals. These organisations also supported Ghanaian migrants in organising trips to Ghana to attend funerals. Since 1986 different formal foundations were set up, which established ties with the Dutch local government, often fulfilling an advisory role.<sup>54</sup> The established organisations were not able to provide the same level of moral authority as the Pentecostal church congregations. Besides the church's moral authority and its role of strengthening community self-esteem and dignity on moral grounds, the religious institutions were able to provide Ghanaian migrants with support in the Dutch system, as it increasingly became characterised by stringent immigration control measures targeted at this migrant group. The churches were able to provide migrants with support in areas such as employment, housing, the obtaining of identification documents and relationships.<sup>55</sup>

For many migrant groups religious leaders are often regarded as representative of the community, thus frequently approached and engaged by the state's authorities. In the case of the Ghanaian community in the Netherlands, it appears that particularly in the early 1990s community organisations functioned as a bridge between the community and the state rather than Ghanaian religious institutions. This might be due to the rather separate nature of the Ghanaian Pentecostal church congregations. Interactions between the Ghanaian Pentecostal churches and local Dutch congregations were rather limited. Ghanaian Pentecostal churches oriented themselves rather internationally, keeping close ties with sister branches or partner organisations in other countries.<sup>56</sup> This rather closed and separate nature of the Ghanaian Pentecostal churches might have initially given more prominence to community organisations. Throughout the 1990s these community organisations actively engaged with local politics and aimed to influence the narrative surrounding Ghanaians, as well as uplift the position of Ghanaians in the Dutch society.

This chapter has provided background information to migration from Ghana to the Netherlands. The following chapters will delve more deeply into the Dutch public and political narratives regarding the Ghanaian migrant community throughout the 1990s, by analysing how and why the narrative changed.

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<sup>54</sup> Nimako, 'De Ghanese gemeenschap', 124, 125.

<sup>55</sup> Van Dijk, 'Ghanese pinkstergemeenten', 365.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibidem*.



### 3. Operation ‘Goofy’: drugs and ‘illegality’

The early 1990s can be marked as a period in which the Ghanaian community became the focal point in public and political debates on ‘illegal’ migrants in the Netherlands. Within this time period the term ‘illegal’ is used frequently in public and political debates to refer to persons living in the Netherlands without a valid residence permit. The debate surrounding ‘illegal’ migrants was referred to at the time as the *‘illegalendebat’* (‘illegals debate’). It is in this historical context that the term ‘illegals’ is used in this thesis, however I acknowledge the problematic and dehumanising nature of the term. The debate on ‘illegals’ in the Netherlands was further sparked by the arrest of several Ghanaian migrants in March 1992 as part of a drug trafficking case, known as Operation ‘Goofy’. The cartoon character ‘Goofy’ was used to refer to this case, as the first name of one of the drug traffickers involved was ‘Kofi’, a popular Akan name given to boys born on a Friday.<sup>57</sup> The use of this name might indicate how the Amsterdam police viewed the people involved in this case, as the cartoon character Goofy represents someone who is stupid or silly. The number of 10,000 ‘illegal’ Ghanaians, as speculated by the Amsterdam police, was soon picked up by the Dutch media, with several newspapers highlighting these statements made by the Amsterdam police. The police statement and the following media narrative contributed to the criminalisation of the Ghanaian migrant community within the Dutch public narrative, as the ‘illegal’ and the ‘criminal’ became intertwined.

Initially, newspapers focussed on these claims made by the police and presented a rather sensationalised narrative. On the 11th of March *De Volkskrant* published two articles on this drug trafficking case with one appearing on the front page titled ‘Police catches big Ghanaian drug gang’.<sup>58</sup> Both articles are based on the accounts of the Amsterdam police and highlight the estimated high numbers of ‘illegal’ Ghanaians living in the Netherlands. Emphasis is put on the claim that a large part of these undocumented Ghanaians makes use of the Dutch social benefit system and are provided with housing. Moreover, emphasis is put on the widespread use of false identification documents amongst this migrant group. Furthermore, fraudulent marriages are presented as common ways of acquiring identification documents. The second article which had the rather sensational title ‘During Operation ‘Goofy’ the doors flew out of the house front’ was published in the same edition of *De Volkskrant*. This article expands on the claims made in the first article, by referring to the trade in fake identity documents and the large-scale misuse of the Dutch social benefit system.<sup>59</sup>

In line with this sensationalised narrative right-wing newspaper *De Telegraaf* published several articles in the same period, contributing to the problematisation of Ghanaian migrants in the Netherlands. On the 12th of March 1992 it praised the Amsterdam police for rounding up the ‘Ghanaian drug syndicate’.<sup>60</sup> Yet it also expressed great concerns regarding the large number of undocumented

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<sup>57</sup> ‘Ghanezen willen het liefst allemaal „burger” worden’, *De Volkskrant* 12-03-1992, 6.

<sup>58</sup> ‘Politie rolt grote Ghanese drugsbende op’, *De Volkskrant* 11-03-1992, 1.

<sup>59</sup> ‘Bij Operatie Goofy Vlogen de deuren gewoon de gevel uit’, *De Volkskrant* 11-03-1992, 13.

<sup>60</sup> Original: ‘Ghanees drugssyndicaat’;

Ghanaian migrants in the Netherlands, by describing this group with the metaphor ‘foreign legion’<sup>61</sup>, referring to the French armed forces. The Netherlands is referred to as an ‘incredible garbage can’<sup>62</sup> and questions are raised on what to do with these large numbers of ‘illegal’ migrants. It questions whether we, the Netherlands, will give them social benefits or put them in asylum seeking centres. Thus, the article clearly makes the link between ‘illegal’ migrants and the misuse of social benefits.<sup>63</sup> A similar narrative is presented by *De Telegraaf* in the short column ‘Ten thousand’. This column which similarly bases its claims on the statements made by the Amsterdam police criminalises Ghanaians, emphasising on the use of fake identity documents. It refers to Ghanaians arriving in the Netherlands with a false passport in one hand and an empty piggy bank in the other hand, while making their way to the social support desk.<sup>64</sup>

Identity fraud is commonly associated with Ghanaian migrants and is a topic that is frequently highlighted in Dutch media narratives on this particular migrant group. On the 12th of March 1992 *De Volkskrant* published the article ‘Stranger/foreigner enters the Netherlands with a Schiphol card’, in which it presents the claim that many Ghanaians have found ways to ‘illegally’ enter the Netherlands through Schiphol Airport. The article, which is based on claims made by the Dutch national police and the Dutch immigration services, states that Ghanaians have been able to enter the Netherlands with the help of staff from cleaning services at the airport.<sup>65</sup> This narrative surrounding Ghanaians entering through Schiphol Airport amplifies the frame of uncontrollability and threat. The role of cleaning staff within this narrative indicates that there is a larger network of support within the community to smuggle people ‘illegally’ into the country. The issue of identification is strengthened by the emphasis in the Dutch media on Ghanaian migrants entering into sham marriages, which is presented as a widespread phenomenon amongst this migrant group. The article states:

Ghanaians are quite active in sham marriages. This trick can lead to further immigration of fellow countrymen through family reunification. This is how it continues. In this way Ghanaian communities came into existence in different parts of the Netherlands, with Amsterdam South East, the Bijlmer, being home to the biggest Ghanaian community.<sup>66</sup>

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‘Wat anderen ervan denken: Wat te doen met het illegaal vreemdelingenlegioen?’, *De Telegraaf* 12-03-1992, 6.

<sup>61</sup> Original: ‘vreemdelingenlegioen’

<sup>62</sup> Original: ‘ongelooflijk vuilnisvat’

<sup>63</sup> ‘Wat anderen ervan denken: Wat te doen met het illegaal vreemdelingenlegioen?’, *De Telegraaf* 12-03-1992, 6.

<sup>64</sup> ‘Tienduizend’, *De Telegraaf* 14-03-1992, 3.

<sup>65</sup> ‘Vreemdeling komt op Schiphol-pasje Nederland binnen’, *De Volkskrant* 12-03-1992, 1.

<sup>66</sup> ‘Vliegticket klaar voor vertrekkende illegalen’, *Algemeen Dagblad* 12-03-1992, 3. ;

Original: ‘Ghanezen zijn nogal actief met schijnhuwelijken. De truc kan weer leiden tot immigratie van landgenoten wegens gezinshereniging. Zo rolt het balletje voort. Hier en daar zijn op deze manier Ghanese gemeenschappen ontstaan, met Amsterdam-Zuidoost, de Bijlmer, als grootste’.

Although sham marriages were not exclusively undertaken by Ghanaians, the emphasis on this community might be explained as interracial marriages stood out more to the authorities as being possible sham marriages. Ethnicity played a role in the problematisation of fraudulent marriages in the Dutch public discourse. During the 1990s migrant men in particular were framed as ‘recruiting’ or ‘tricking’ native Dutch women into fraudulent marriages for the sole purpose of obtaining a residence permit.<sup>67</sup> In this context a native Dutch person entering a union with a migrant person that is racially ‘otherised’ could generate larger suspicion from the authorities.<sup>68</sup> This might also explain why sham marriages between Ghanaians and Afro-Surinamese people were often not as quickly recognised as fraudulent by the Dutch authorities.<sup>69</sup> Underlying the problematisation of fraudulent marriages were fears that it would lead to increasing immigration. It could open up opportunities for family members to migrate to the Netherlands, by making use of family reunification policies.<sup>70</sup>

These media narratives clearly make use of a threat frame. Within these media narratives and the related claims made by the local Amsterdam police, there is a clear emphasis on the ethnicity of those involved in the crime. The debate quickly centres the undocumented migrant, presenting the large number of undocumented Ghanaians in the Netherlands as the underlying problem to these forms of criminal activities. Undocumented Ghanaian migrants are framed as outsiders that pose a threat to the Dutch society. This is emphasised by the use of terms such as ‘foreign legion’.<sup>71</sup> This element of threat is strengthened by the emphasis on the large number, which initially was only based on a rather arbitrary estimation. The problematisation of this group based on its perceived large and growing size, links to ideas on the Netherlands being overcrowded.

Furthermore, this element of threat is strengthened by the different issues that are linked to this particular migrant group. Emphasis is put on the use and trade of false identification documents and the use of the Dutch social benefit system. This is a form of issue linkage, where different societal issues become interlinked or associated with a particular form of immigration or migrant group. The round-up of the drug trafficking gang led to discussions on high numbers of illegal Ghanaian migrants, which became interlinked with issues such as falsification of identity papers and the misuse of the Dutch social benefit system.

In line with this threat frame these media narratives fit within a crisis scenario. Several articles make use of the ‘numbers game’, as emphasis is put on the large estimated numbers, while individual migrant stories are frequently excluded. The narratives present rather generalised accounts of Ghanaian

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<sup>67</sup>B. de Hart and S. Bonjour, ‘A Proper Wife, a Proper Marriage. Constructions of “us” and “them” in Dutch Family Migration Policy’, *The European Journal of Women's Studies* 20:1 (2013) 65.

<sup>68</sup> B. de Hart and E. Besselsen, ‘“Everything Went According to the Rules’. Female Citizen Sponsors’ Legal Consciousness, Intimate Citizenship and Family Migration Law’, *Identities (Yverdon, Switzerland)* 28:1 (2021) 52.

<sup>69</sup> Van Dijk, ‘Ghanese pinkstergemeenten’, 357.

<sup>70</sup> ‘Vliegticket klaar voor vertrekkende illegalen’, *Algemeen Dagblad* 12-03-1992, 3.

<sup>71</sup> ‘Wat anderen ervan denken: Wat te doen met het illegaal vreemdelingenlegioen?’, *De Telegraaf* 12-03-1992, 6.

migrants within articles related to this case, while excluding the perspectives of the Ghanaian community. The emphasis on these numbers and its impact on perceived related issues, refers to the uncontrollable and threatening nature of this form of migration.

The elements of uncontrollability and threat are strengthened by background articles published in this time period that aim to give more context to Ghanaian migration to Europe. By sketching the economic and political hardship in Ghana that drives large-scale migration to Europe and by describing the large extent to which trade in false identity documents and visas takes place in Ghana, a narrative of threat and crisis is strengthened.<sup>72</sup> It presents a frame of Ghanaians as desperate to leave their country of origin, stressing their willingness to go to great lengths to get a legal residence status in Western countries. The article ‘Ghanaians all want to become a “burger”’ published in *De Volkskrant* on the 12th of March 1992, amplifies this narrative of Ghanaians en masse wanting to immigrate to the Netherlands.<sup>73</sup> It states:

The Ghanaian capital Accra is filled with fortune seekers. Thousands of young people are planning a trip to Europe, thousands of others have already been there and share how amazing it is. Particularly the Netherlands is popular. “There you can really live in freedom”, says a shoe seller who is yet to make his first trip.<sup>74</sup>

It describes that there are many young ‘fortune seekers’, who are ready to seek greener pastures abroad. By quoting a local shoe seller and framing him as ready to leave for the Netherlands, this article amplifies the narrative of people from lower socioeconomic classes migrating to the Netherlands to improve their livelihoods. The term ‘burger’ or ‘boga’ as mentioned in this article refers to Ghanaians who migrated to the West. This term was originally used to refer to those Ghanaians who migrated to Hamburg, Germany. As stated in this article, these are the people who inspire the so-called young Ghanaian ‘fortune seekers’ to migrate abroad. The article merely highlights stories of male Ghanaian migrants. It was published with an image that shows young Ghanaian men applying for a Dutch visa in Ghana.<sup>75</sup> In this way the article in combination with the image establishes a frame of large numbers of mostly male migrants from low socioeconomic classes migrating to the Netherlands based on economic motives.

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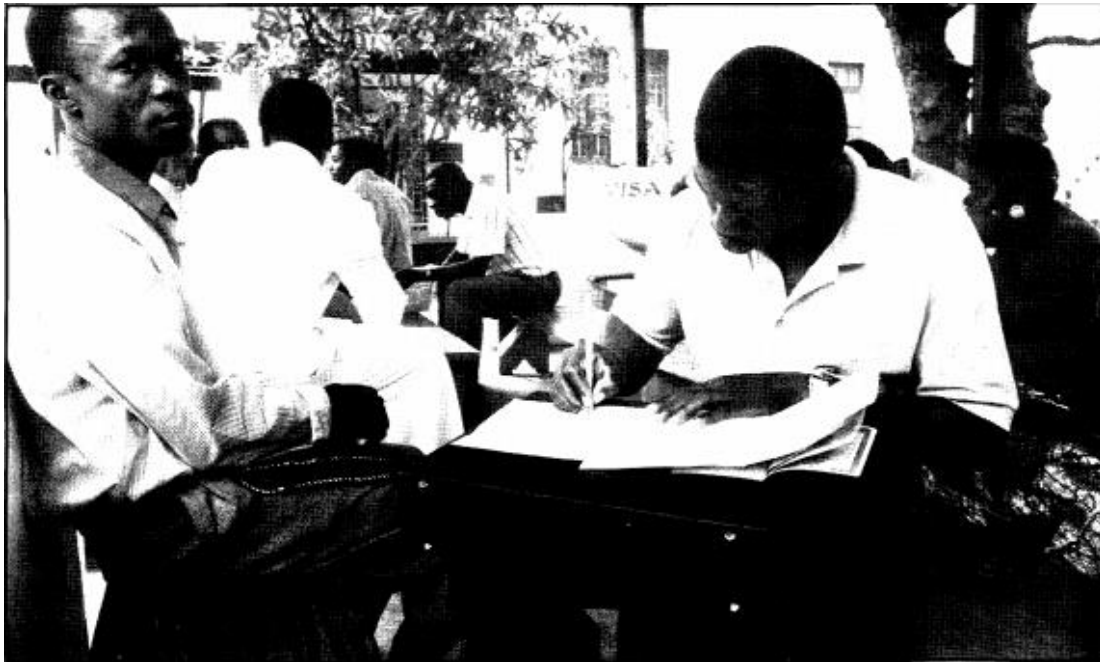
<sup>72</sup> ‘Ghanezen willen het liefst allemaal „burger” worden’, *De Volkskrant* 12-03-1992, 6. ; ‘Forum: Veel illegale Ghanezen willen niet hier blijven’, *De Volkskrant* 17-03-1992, 9. ; ‘Ghana is overslagpunt in drugshandel’, *NRC Handelsblad* 12-03-1992, 3.

<sup>73</sup> ‘Ghanezen willen het liefst allemaal „burger” worden’, *De Volkskrant* 12-03-1992, 6.

<sup>74</sup> Original: ‘De Ghanese hoofdstad Accra puilt uit van de gelukszoekers. Duizenden jonge mensen maken plannen voor een reis naar Europa, duizenden anderen zijn er al geweest en vertellen hoe fantastisch het er is. Vooral Nederland is populair. „Daar kun je echt in vrijheid leven”, weet een schoenverkoper die zijn eerste reis nog moet maken.’;

‘Ghanezen willen het liefst allemaal „burger” worden’, *De Volkskrant* 12-03-1992, 6.

<sup>75</sup> Ibidem.



*Ghanaians applying for a visa at the Dutch embassy in Accra, Ghana.*<sup>76</sup>

Economic migrants, often referred to negatively in the Dutch public debate as ‘fortune seekers’, are frequently problematised within public and political debates on immigration. Economic migrants are commonly framed as threatening the Dutch labour market and welfare system and are often, particularly in right-wing political circles, viewed as undeserving of legal citizenship status. Socioeconomic class is a crucial element to the problematisation of migrant groups in the public debate. Within the problematisation of Ghanaian migrants in the media narratives surrounding Operation ‘Goofy’, Ghanaians are framed as escaping the limited opportunities and widespread poverty in Ghana. Migration in this narrative is viewed as a strategy for Ghanaians to support themselves and their family members in their country of origin. Migrants from low socioeconomic classes, such as a significant part of the Ghanaian migrant population, are framed negatively as an economic burden to the receiving society. This narrative is also amplified in the *Algemeen Dagblad*, which in 1990 referred to undocumented migrants as ‘fortune seekers’<sup>77</sup> and ‘poverty migrants’<sup>78</sup> and described them as a pariah to society.<sup>79</sup> These migrants are frequently framed as economically misusing and benefiting from the Dutch social benefit system, by relying on social welfare. Such narratives overlook the large number of Ghanaians who are active in various forms of labour in the Dutch society. An element to this problematisation is also the orientation of Ghanaian migrants to their country of origin Ghana. The media narratives present a frame that this migrant group comes to the Netherlands to quickly fill their

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<sup>76</sup> Source image: ‘Ghanezen willen het liefst allemaal „burger” worden’, *De Volkskrant* 12-03-1992, 6.

<sup>77</sup> Original: ‘gelukszoekers’

<sup>78</sup> Original: ‘armoe-migranten’

<sup>79</sup> ‘ILLEGALEN: PARIAS VAN DE GROTE STAD’, *Algemeen Dagblad* 20-01-1990, 55.

pockets by all means, in order to economically benefit themselves and their communities back home. These narratives ignore the ways in which migrants from lower socioeconomic classes both documented and undocumented significantly contribute to the host country's economy, by playing a vital role in various labour sectors.

This analysis shows that initially these threat frames and related crisis scenarios were particularly presented by *De Telegraaf* and *De Volkskrant*. However, a shift can be observed in the media narrative. The Ghanaian community actively countering the negative media narratives as well as new evidence weakening the initial statements made by the Amsterdam police, caused a slight shift in the Dutch media narrative. This will be expanded on in the following chapter.

#### 4. Countering the narrative

Yeah, you know, Ghanaians, wherever we are, we are very hard working. We love to go to work. We like to be paid for our work. While you know (...) there's always a few people who will do something else, but then the authorities will involve the whole..like generalise the whole situation: "Yeah there are a lot of Ghanaian illegals, doing wrong things, spoiling the community". But that was not the case. So we had to fight, we had to organise ourselves and tell them..<sup>80</sup>

Shortly after the Amsterdam police came forward with their speculations regarding the number of undocumented Ghanaians residing in Amsterdam, various articles appeared in which their claims were questioned or challenged. These articles presented a rather nuanced perspective instead of amplifying the crisis narrative and relating threat frame.<sup>81</sup> These different perspectives and nuances to the debate were largely driven by actions from the Ghanaian community. Different Ghanaian community organisations in the Netherlands expressed disgust towards the negative and sensationalised media narratives pushed by certain Dutch newspapers, such as the right-wing newspaper *De Telegraaf*. Ghanaian community leaders actively responded to the criminalisation of their community, by reaching out to the local press and having meetings with the mayor of Amsterdam.

In the *NRC Handelsblad* on the 11th and 12th of March 1992, one of the leading community organisations the Sikaman Foundation responded to the statements made by the Amsterdam police.<sup>82</sup> In the article 'Criminalisation shocks Ghanaians', the Sikaman Foundation expressed their disgust regarding the negative media framing of the Ghanaian community. The article also presented the perspective of the local district council who refuted the claims made by the Amsterdam police on the large numbers of undocumented Ghanaians. Furthermore, it included the views of the Schiphol Airport authorities, who stated that it is impossible to illegally enter the Netherlands through the airport on a large scale, thereby refuting the earlier claims made by the national police and immigration control services.<sup>83</sup> The local housing association also expressed similar views. In the article 'Blame the Police: Bijlmer image demolished' in the *Algemeen Dagblad* on the 12th of March 1992, the director of housing association Nieuw Amsterdam argued that the statements made by the Amsterdam police are damaging to the housing association and the Ghanaian community. Moreover, he argued that it puts a negative

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<sup>80</sup> Nana Yaw Amoako, 19-03-2021 Amsterdam, Jamel Buhari, interview transcript in appendix.

<sup>81</sup> 'Criminalisering schokt Ghanezen', *NRC Handelsblad* 12-03-1992, 3.; 'Verwijt aan politie: Imago Bijlmer gesloopt', *Algemeen Dagblad* 12-03-1992, 3. ; 'Actie tegen Ghanezen roept vragen op', *NRC Handelsblad* 11-03-1992, 3. ; 'Ghanezen protesteren tegen uitlatingen politie', *De Volkskrant* 18-03-1992, 7.

<sup>82</sup> 'Criminalisering schokt Ghanezen', *NRC Handelsblad* 12-03-1992, 3.; 'Actie tegen Ghanezen roept vragen op', *NRC Handelsblad* 11-03-1992, 3.

<sup>83</sup> 'Criminalisering schokt Ghanezen', *NRC Handelsblad* 12-03-1992, 3.

mark on the image of the Bijlmer neighbourhood. A neighbourhood that had already been suffering from a negative public reputation.<sup>84</sup>

The Ghanaian community felt that the case was blown out of proportion and had a damaging effect on their community. Nana Yaw Amoako from community organisation Recogin stated:

Every negative description is not good for the people. You know, when you go to your workplace, and maybe your boss asks you: “Hey, I heard yesterday on TV, or I heard it on the news, Ghanaians are doing so many illegal things.” You feel like hey, from where, how? (...) and then they start to look down upon you because your people are not good. Maybe they could even change you from wherever you are to a place that's not pleasant for you just because of that. So yeah, (...) sometimes, those negative aspects, those negative comments affected a lot of people (...), especially with work. Because you go to your workplace, and then they start to look at you in a different way than they knew before, because of what they've heard on the news, whether it's true or not.<sup>85</sup>

In response to the claims made by the Amsterdam police and the negative media portrayal of Ghanaian migrants, the Sikaman Foundation demanded a meeting with the then mayor of Amsterdam Ed van Thijn from the Dutch Labour Party (*PvdA*). The community leaders wanted to organise a protest. The actions from the community generated a lot of media attention both local and international.<sup>86</sup> The article ‘Ghanaians protest against the police statements’ published in *De Volkskrant* on the 18th of March 1992, reported on the community leaders handing out a signed petition to the mayor of Amsterdam. The article also highlights the criticism from local councillors towards the statements made by the Amsterdam police. With local politicians wondering if the link between this case and ‘illegal’ migrants was made to push a certain agenda regarding immigration control.<sup>87</sup> After the community leaders had held a private meeting with mayor Ed van Thijn both the community leaders and the mayor had their press conferences. These actions clearly show the large role community organisations played in giving the community a voice and fighting the dominant narrative. Accounts from community leaders indicate that efforts were made to change the narrative by showing the authorities that Ghanaians are hardworking and good people, thus proving that the convicted criminals do not represent the larger Ghanaian migrant community.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> ‘Verwijt aan politie: Imago Bijlmer gesloopt’, *Algemeen Dagblad* 12-03-1992, 3.

<sup>85</sup> Nana Yaw Amoako, 19-03-2021 Amsterdam, Jamel Buhari, interview transcript in appendix.

<sup>86</sup> Kofi Baafi Owusu-Sekyere, 09-04-2021 Amsterdam, Jamel Buhari, interview transcript in appendix.

<sup>87</sup> ‘Ghanezen protesteren tegen uitlatingen politie’, *De Volkskrant* 18-03-1992, 7.

<sup>88</sup> Kofi Baafi Owusu-Sekyere, 09-04-2021 Amsterdam, Jamel Buhari, interview transcript in appendix.





*Ghanaian community representatives handing a petition to Mayor Ed van Thijn.*<sup>89</sup>

The Ghanaian community actively taking space in the Dutch media, clearly shows a move from the Ghanaian community out to the open. This move also seems to be strategic, as the role of voicing the needs and concerns of the community is taken on by community leaders. These representatives are generally highly educated and work in high skilled labour sectors. The actions of these community leaders contributed to greater visibility of the Ghanaian migrant community in the Netherlands. The increased societal stigmatisation resulting from the statements made by the Amsterdam police seems to have sparked new forms of community organisation. Community organisations such as the Sikaman Foundation started becoming more political in the early 1990s and adopted a strategy in which they spread Ghanaian representatives in different political parties in the local council. Political engagement was seen as a way to put the issues that the Ghanaian community was facing on the political agenda.<sup>90</sup>

In line with these actions to counter the narrative, the media started increasingly criticising the actions of the Amsterdam police surrounding Operation 'Goofy'. This includes newspaper *De Volkskrant*, which initially presented a threat frame and crisis scenario.<sup>91</sup> On the 14th of March 1992 it published the article 'Police blunder with report on Ghanaians'. In this article lawyer Nol Vermolen

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<sup>89</sup> Source image: 'Ghanezen protesteren tegen uitsluitingen politie', *De Volkskrant* 18-03-1992, 7.

<sup>90</sup> Kofi Baafi Owusu-Sekyere, 09-04-2021 Amsterdam, Jamel Buhari, interview transcript in appendix.

<sup>91</sup> 'Politie rolt grote Ghanese drugsbende op', *De Volkskrant* 11-03-1992, 1.; 'Bij Operatie Goofy Vlogen de deuren gewoon de gevel uit', *De Volkskrant* 11-03-1992, 13.; 'Vreemdeling komt op Schiphol-pasje Nederland binnen', *De Volkskrant* 12-03-1992, 1.

stated that the claims made by the police contribute to xenophobia in the Netherlands. He argued that the authorities should set an example to the Dutch society, by not reinforcing xenophobic sentiments.<sup>92</sup> On the 21st of March 1992 *De Volkskrant* also published an article in which it refuted most of the earlier claims made regarding the Ghanaian community. This article bases its arguments on claims made by lawyers involved in this case, housing association Nieuw Amsterdam and accounts from Ghanaian community leaders. It refers to the unrealistic number of 10,000 ‘illegal’ Ghanaians, stating: ‘The board of the district council nor the manager of the biggest shopping centre in the neighbourhood, witnesses the “Ghanaian invasion” in the level of facilities or the purchasing behaviour.’<sup>93</sup> This shows a shift in media narrative, as the criminalisation of the Ghanaian community is increasingly criticised in the Dutch media. It shows the influence of the actions of the Ghanaian community, who actively countered the dominant media narrative, as well as the institutions such as the housing association, the social services and the local council, who refuted the claims made by the Amsterdam police.

The negative media narrative surrounding Operation ‘Goofy’ thus brought about a strong counter narrative from the Ghanaian community. By taking up space in the Dutch media and engaging with political leaders they were able to give the community a voice and influence the Dutch public and political narrative.

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<sup>92</sup> ‘Politie blundert met bericht over Ghanezen’, *De Volkskrant* 14-03-1992, 17.

<sup>93</sup> Original: ‘Het bestuur van de stadsdeelraad noch de manager van het grootste winkelcentrum in de wijk, vindt de „Ghanezeninvasie” terug in het voorzieningenniveau of koopgedrag.’; ‘Twee weken na grootscheepse politie-actie tegen drugsbende worden bijna alle details door de betrokkenen genuanceerd „ophef over Bijlmer-Ghanezen wordt door politici uitgebuit”’, *De Volkskrant* 21-03-1992, 9.

## 5. Bijlmer disaster: out of anonymity

The *Bijlmeramp* in October 1992 intensified the attention towards the Ghanaian community in the Netherlands. In the context of the disastrous event of the Bijlmer plane crash, one might expect the Ghanaian community to receive sympathy from the Dutch public based on humanitarian grounds. In terms of the media narrative regarding Ghanaians in the Netherlands there seems to be a slight shift in the post *Bijlmeramp* period. In this period media narratives increasingly make use of the drama-scenario, while frequently highlighting the voices of victims. Despite this shift, there is still a large emphasis on the topic of ‘illegal’ migrants in the Dutch public narrative. Authorities stated that the large presence of undocumented migrants in the flats made it impossible to come up with a realistic estimate of the number of victims. During the process of registering victims Ghanaian community leaders played a significant role. Their vital role in this period led to Ghanaian community leaders becoming increasingly organised. New organisations came up, while those already in existence changed in function. It was in this period that community leaders strengthened their role as a bridge between the community and the local council.

The article ‘Fear for large numbers of dead Ghanaians’ which was published in the *NRC Handelsblad* on the 6th of October 1992, spoke of the possible large number of Ghanaian victims. The article bases its claims on accounts from the Sikaman Foundation and other community members who were active on the frontlines, supporting those in the Bijlmer Sports hall. This sports hall had been turned into a shelter for the *Bijlmeramp* victims. The article states that a total number of 32 Ghanaian families were officially registered in the Kruitberg and Groeneveen flats, while only 17 families reported themselves to the authorities. Ghanaian community members helped the authorities in identifying the victims in collaboration with Surinamese organisation Kwakoe. The distrust existing in the Ghanaian community towards the authorities had taken on new heights. The earlier criminalisation had put a negative mark on the relationship between the Ghanaian community and the authorities, with many people fearing the authorities. Efforts were made by the Ghanaian ambassador to the Netherlands to urge Ghanaians to register at the authorities even if they do not have a ‘legal’ residence status.<sup>94</sup> The article ‘Difficult registration of missing people’ published in the *NRC Handelsblad* on the 7th of October 1992 described the difficulties surrounding the registration of victims. According to Eric Nordholt, the Chief Officer of the Amsterdam police, the presence of ‘illegal’ victims complicated the registration process. Therefore, he emphasised that a person’s status would not be taken into account as part of their registration.<sup>95</sup>

Shortly after the plane crash, various newspaper articles appeared that referred to the earlier statements made by Chief Officer Nordholt in March surrounding Operation ‘Goofy’ as damaging to

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<sup>94</sup> ‘Angst voor groot aantal dode Ghanezen’, *NRC Handelsblad* 6-10-1992, 3.

<sup>95</sup> ‘Moeizame registratie vermisten’, *NRC Handelsblad* 07-10 1992, 1.

the relationship between the Ghanaian community and the authorities. On the 10th of October 1992 *Het Parool* referred to this distrust towards the authorities:

Up until the Jumbo drilled into the apartment building, Ghanaians had been able to relatively easily remain anonymous. But the disaster pushed them in the direction they want to avoid as much as possible: that of the authorities. Ever since the Amsterdam police characterised the Ghanaians from the Bijlmermeer as drug couriers, they have felt branded.<sup>96</sup>

The article presents the views of different community members, illustrating the effects of the earlier criminalisation of the community. People felt that they were framed by the authorities as criminals.<sup>97</sup> On the 9th of October 1992 *Het Parool* also referred to these large suspicions towards authorities. In an article titled 'Accusation of drug trafficking triggers anger' it was stated that the accusations made by the Amsterdam police in March 1992 led to Ghanaian victims not registering with the authorities. It described how Ghanaians are angry and wish to avoid any contact with the authorities.<sup>98</sup> A similar claim is made in the article 'Disaster in the Bijlmer 'Ghanaians going into hiding is Nordholt's fault'' which appeared in the same publication of *Het Parool*. This article also referred to a statement made by the mayor of Amsterdam in which he guaranteed that 'illegal' victims without a criminal record will not be deported. This was a response to the suspicions towards authorities, and the perceived unwillingness of victims to register amongst the Ghanaian community.<sup>99</sup>

The Ghanaian community seems to counter these claims that 'illegals' would not register themselves with the authorities. An article published in *De Volkskrant* on the 7th of October 1992 stated that the majority of Ghanaians in the Netherlands do not believe the claims made by the authorities on the difficulties of registering victims. Many community members thought that the presence of 'illegal' victims did not have to form a barrier in coming up with a realistic estimate of victims. While the authorities speak of victims that are 'missing', the community members active on the frontlines prefer to refer to these people as people who are yet to register. The article also stated that community leaders informed their community that 'illegal' victims do not have to worry about the authorities when registering themselves or their family members.<sup>100</sup> This shows a clear difference between the accounts from community members active on the frontlines in the registration process

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<sup>96</sup> Original: 'Tot het moment waarop de Jumbo zich in het flatgebouw boorde, hadden de Ghanezen zich betrekkelijk makkelijk in de anonimiteit verborgen weten te houden. Maar de ramp heeft ze in de richting gedreven die ze zoveel mogelijk willen mijden: die van de autoriteiten. Sinds de Amsterdamse politie de Ghanezen uit de Bijlmermeer typeerde als drugskoeriers, hebben ze zich gebrandmerkt gevoeld.'; 'Illegaal of niet, voor ons zijn het allemaal mensen', *Het Parool* 10-10-1992.

<sup>97</sup> 'Illegaal of niet, voor ons zijn het allemaal mensen', *Het Parool* 10-10-1992.

<sup>98</sup> 'Verwijt drugshandel wekte woede', *Het Parool* 09-10-1992.

<sup>99</sup> 'Ramp in de Bijlmer "Onderduiken Ghanezen is schuld van Nordholt"', *Het Parool* 9-10-1992, 3.

<sup>100</sup> 'Meeste Ghanezen in Bijlmermeer geloven niets van problemen bij registratie slachtoffers ramp "Niemand maakt hier nog onderscheid tussen legaal en illegaal"', *De Volkskrant* 07-10-1992, 3.

and the Dutch authorities. Amongst the Dutch authorities there seems to be the widespread perception that large numbers of ‘illegal’ victims are ‘missing’, due to the unwillingness of these victims to register. The stories of Ghanaian community members on the other hand indicate that in practice this is not the case.

The suspicions towards the authorities and their speculations on ‘missing’ victims was also fed by the initial insensitive approach towards generating information on the victims. Accounts from community leaders refer to these rather insensitive actions by authorities and media shortly after the plane crash, as they continuously emphasised on the distinction between ‘illegal’ and ‘legal’ victims. Kofi Owusu-Sekyere from Akasanoma, formerly known as the Sikaman foundation, responded to the insensitivities with which some of the journalists and authorities at the time approached this case:

That time even (...) during the plane crash, when we were actually grieving, people lost people, (...) killed, you know, Ghanaians were the most... about 14 out of 40 something that were Ghanaians and so Ghanaians had the maximum casualty. You see, and even then when journalists (said): “the police came to us, they want to have our list”. We told them: “Go away. What do you mean? You want our list for what?” They say: “Yeah, they want...” We told them (...) if they don't stop that thing... and we reported them to the mayor, that the police should be advised to keep off (...) our list, because we don't work for them. If they want any list, they should do it themselves. And (...) well, the insult was that even they come and they will be asking how many illegals are dead. And also the journalists, and actually, we told them our piece of mind. That's nonsense to even be asking how many illegals are dead? Are they not human beings? Ask how many people are dead? Is there a difference between a legal person and an illegal person dead? That's absolute nonsense. So we told them off time and time again and warned them not to come to, you know, ask any stupid questions.<sup>101</sup>

Such attempts from journalists and authorities at gathering data on the number of casualties were not well received by the Ghanaian community. An approach as such could be viewed as damaging to the relationship between the community and the authorities. The large problematisation of the Ghanaian migrant community in the public narrative, in which Ghanaian migrants were frequently linked to the issue of identity fraud, has possibly contributed to the sensitivity of the topic of residence status. A focus on this residence status in the context of a disastrous and traumatising event such as the *Bijlmerramp* can thus be viewed as rather inappropriate and insensitive. This focus seems to have sparked further scepticism and suspicions amongst the Ghanaian community towards the authorities and the media. Effa Bekoe from the Sikaman Foundation stated in the *NRC Handelsblad* in 1992:

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<sup>101</sup> Kofi Baafi Owusu-Sekyere, 09-04-2021 Amsterdam, Jamel Buhari, interview transcript in appendix.

“The attention we are getting now is not focused on us. The Dutch are focused on suppressing emotions and that is at odds with our culture.”<sup>102</sup>

In this period of growing scepticism and suspicion, the role of community organisations changed. The plane crash resulted in the formation of emergency committees. Each ethnic group had their own committee. Ghanaian community members supported in identifying the Ghanaian victims.<sup>103</sup> This changed the role of those already active as community leaders, yet also birthed new community leaders and organisations. Prior to the plane crash there were a number of Ghanaian organisations, but these were usually small in size and ethnically oriented. Many of these organisations were not particularly focused on the livelihoods of community members here in the Netherlands. The plane crash strengthened the need for community organisations that catered to community members in the Netherlands, while engaging with the local council. The Sikaman Foundation presents itself as one of the first community organisations that successfully catered to the needs of the Ghanaian community in the Netherlands. They were formed in 1988 out of a need for a common community organisation that responded directly to different challenges faced by Ghanaian migrants in the Dutch society. Although the Sikaman Foundation had engaged actively with the local council from the start, they became more political in the early 1990s, as they adopted their strategy of spreading in different political parties. This strategy allowed them to represent Ghanaians in the Netherlands and voice community needs and interests.<sup>104</sup> The role of community members after the plane crash also led to the formation of the Representative Council for Ghanaian Organisations in the Netherlands, which is referred to with the abbreviation Recogin. Alfred Kyei Mensah, Vice Chairman of Recogin stated:

“(...) a year later due to that we were able to help the local council, they decided to give us an office (...) so we got our own office in 1993 Hofgeest (...) and they gave us funding. So basically that is how Recogin came into existence, in trying to help the local council to identify the victims and because of the good work we did as an interim committee, they decided that it’s good we carried on, so that we would be able to help our people in our community from *Ghanese afkomst* (Ghanaian descent).<sup>105</sup>

The accounts from community leaders indicate that there was a clear need from the side of the Dutch local council for Ghanaian community organisations and representatives. Through the increasing collaboration with the local council, community leaders were able to form a bridge between the

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<sup>102</sup> Original: ‘De aandacht die we nu krijgen is niet op ons toegespitst. Nederlanders zijn gericht op het onderdrukken van emoties en dat staat haaks op onze cultuur.’;

‘Angst voor groot aantal dode Ghanezen’, *NRC Handelsblad* 6-10-1992, 3.

<sup>103</sup> Alfred Kyei Mensah, 19-03-2021 Amsterdam, Jamel Buhari, interview transcript in appendix.

<sup>104</sup> Kofi Baafi Owusu-Sekyere, 09-04-2021 Amsterdam, Jamel Buhari, interview transcript in appendix.

<sup>105</sup> Alfred Kyei Mensah, 19-03-2021 Amsterdam, Jamel Buhari, interview transcript in appendix.

community and the local councillors. One might argue that underlying this need was the wish to establish a good relationship between the Ghanaian community and the authorities, thus restoring a sense of trust in a somewhat damaged relationship. The increased community organisation in the post *Bijlmerramp* period is also visible in the media narratives. Different newspaper articles as highlighted above, include accounts of community leaders. This proves the success of the Ghanaian community leaders in actively engaging with the local Dutch media in order to counter the negative narratives.

## 6. The *Kostolijst*: ‘legalisation’ for the undocumented victims

The emphasis on the topic of ‘illegal’ migrants within the context of the *Bijlmerramp* sparked the debate on the ‘legalisation’ of the undocumented *Bijlmerramp* victims. This debate in the Dutch media and in political circles moved between humanitarian arguments on one side arguing for the granting of residence permits to the undocumented victims, to narratives arguing that this disastrous event was not sufficient reason for legal changes. Central to the latter narrative were fears that people would misuse these provisions and that it would attract large groups of migrants pretending to be *Bijlmerramp* victims. Finally, the then Secretary of State Aad Kosto decided to grant victims a ‘legal’ residence status, leading to the so-called *Kostolijst*. This call for ‘legalisation’ of victims was largely driven by the lobbying of Ghanaian community leaders.

The demands from the Ghanaian community to grant residence permits to the *Bijlmerramp* victims were initially not well received by the Dutch authorities. On the 8th of October 1992 the *Algemeen Dagblad* referred to the disapproval from the side of Mayor Ed van Thijn in an article titled ‘Illegal residents from disaster flats demand guarantees; Van Thijn: This is a macabre misuse of the situation’. The article states that some Ghanaians refuse to register and remain in hiding unless they are given a residence permit. It describes how Mayor Van Thijn is against a ‘legalisation’ of the undocumented victims. He stated that although each victim will be given support and residence status will not be taken into account, it is not possible to change the laws as a result of the plane crash.<sup>106</sup> Kofi Owusu-Sekyere expressed in our communication over email that the Sikaman Foundation actively pushed for a ‘legalisation’ of the undocumented victims. The Sikaman Foundation capitalised on the initial negative portrayal of Ghanaians in the Dutch media and pushed Mayor Van Thijn to lobby at Secretary of State Aad Kosto to ‘legalise’ the undocumented victims of the Bijlmer plane crash. These Ghanaian community leaders based themselves on humanitarian arguments in their support of ‘legalisation’ of the undocumented victims. Stating that the immense losses, the psychological trauma as well as the humiliation in the Dutch media, was sufficient reason to demand ‘legalisation’ for the innocent victims. The Sikaman Foundation argued that the undocumented victims that had already faced a large amount of hardships deserved to be given a ‘legal’ status rather than to be thrown out on the streets again without documentation.<sup>107</sup> The community presents a human-interest frame, as the undocumented *Bijlmerramp* victims are framed as deserving of support from the Dutch state as more or less a compensation for their disastrous fate. The granting of a residence permit in this context is framed as the least the Dutch state could do to aid the undocumented victims, who had lost everything due to the plane crash.

As highlighted in the previous chapter, the growing suspicion and distrust towards authorities within the Ghanaian community in the Netherlands and the perceived unwillingness and fears to

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<sup>106</sup> ‘Illegalen uit rampflats eisen garanties; Van Thijn: Dit is macaber misbruik maken van situatie’, *Algemeen Dagblad* 08-10-1992, 6.

<sup>107</sup> Kofi Baafi Owusu-Sekyere, 09-04-2021 Amsterdam, Jamel Buhari, interview transcript in appendix.



register, led to a promise made by Chief Officer Nordholt and Mayor Van Thijn that the residence status of victims would not be taken into account when providing support. This however created a dilemma for the authorities, as in practice the granting of various forms of support to victims entailed registration. This could in turn lead to possible deportation of the undocumented victims. There were indeed a few cases where undocumented Ghanaian victims registered and faced eviction from the Netherlands. 12 undocumented Ghanaian victims were told by the Dutch immigration services to leave the Netherlands, after being sent to the immigration services by the social services upon their registration.<sup>108</sup> Such instances that proved the practical implementation challenges of the promises made by Mayor Van Thijn and Chief Officer Nordholt, forced Secretary of State Kosto to take legal action as described in the *NRC Handelsblad* on the 15th of October 1992. As expected, these cases of undocumented victims being deported upon registration for support had an impact on the credibility of the authorities. This was considered harmful to the relationship between the authorities and the Ghanaian community in the Netherlands. The authorities heavily depended on community members in the process of registering victims, as highlighted in the previous chapter. The article notes that this possibly led to the decision to ‘legalise’ the undocumented victims of the *Bijlmerramp*.<sup>109</sup> The active lobbying of the Ghanaian community pushed the authorities to take legal action and finally grant a ‘legal’ status to the undocumented victims.

Interesting to note is that in this period Chief Officer Nordholt clearly shifted his stance towards undocumented migrants. Whereas in March 1992 Nordholt publicly criminalised undocumented Ghanaian migrants, in this post *Bijlmerramp* period he stated that there are no links between ‘illegal’ migrants and criminal activities. He publicly declared that there had been no intention from the Amsterdam police to criminalise migrant groups and that any links that were made between ‘illegal’ Ghanaians and criminality were the result of a large misunderstanding. Nordholt actively pleaded for the ‘legalisation’ of the undocumented *Bijlmerramp* victims. On the 14th of October 1992 the *NRC Handelsblad* described how Nordholt criticised the Dutch national policies regarding undocumented migrants. Nordholt and Kosto had a meeting and press conference in which Nordholt argued for ‘legalisation’ of the undocumented victims based on humanitarian grounds. Kosto eventually stated that while the undocumented victims would not be deported, the plane crash was not sufficient grounds for legalisation. However, Kosto did state that undocumented victims could register voluntarily and might qualify for a residence permit, in case of proven continuous and durable employment and payment of taxes during their time in the Netherlands.<sup>110</sup>

Finally, the meeting and press conference were cut short due to a bomb threat claimed by activist group Revolutionary Anti-Racist Action, abbreviated as RaRa. This was a left-wing group

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<sup>108</sup> ‘Korpschef keert zich tegen Kosto; Kritiek Nordholt op beleid illegalen’, *NRC Handelsblad* 14-10-1992, 1.

<sup>109</sup> ‘Pleidooi korpschef dwingt Kosto tot reactie’, *NRC Handelsblad* 15-10-1992, 7.

<sup>110</sup> ‘Korpschef keert zich tegen Kosto; Kritiek Nordholt op beleid illegalen’, *NRC Handelsblad* 14-10-1992, 1.

whose actions were regarded as a form of violent activism.<sup>111</sup> Upon this meeting Kosto changed his stance and decided on the ‘legalisation’ of the undocumented *Bijlmerramp* victims. This decision led to the ‘*Kostolijst*’. In the *Algemeen Dagblad* Kosto was quoted, stating the following:

The Amsterdam city council has said that no one should either suffer or benefit as a result of the disaster. Well, you cannot assign a legal home to an illegal foreigner. Municipal councillor of Amsterdam Wildekamp will now draw up a list of people who have become homeless as a result of the plane crash and based on this, it will be assessed on a case-by-case basis whether a residence permit will be granted.<sup>112</sup>

The decision to grant residence permits to the undocumented *Bijlmerramp* victims led to big queues at the registration desk. In an article titled ‘Large turnout register illegals Amsterdam’ published in the *NRC Handelsblad* on the 20th of October 1992 it is stated that hundreds of undocumented migrants registered at the municipality as *Bijlmerramp* victims. The municipality assessed which persons were in fact residents of the *Bijlmerramp* flats and qualified for a Dutch residence permit.<sup>113</sup> Responding to this big turnout, *Het Parool* stated on the 24th of October 1992 that the *Bijlmerramp* revealed a problem which we already knew existed; the large number of ‘illegal’ migrants in the Netherlands. It states that this societal problem became visible due to the situation surrounding the *Kostolijst*, with thousands of people attempting to gain a Dutch residence permit.<sup>114</sup>

This narrative presents a crisis scenario. It makes use of the numbers game, by emphasising on the large numbers of undocumented migrants who showed up at the registration desk, while predicting the arrival of many more. The article criticises the legal decision to grant a ‘legal’ status to the undocumented victims, as it is viewed as the cause of the current situation. The decision to ‘legalise’ the undocumented victims is framed as a pull factor for larger numbers of ‘illegal’ migrants from different parts of the world. The article states that although the problem has become visible, politically it proves to be unmanageable. This idea of uncontrollability, which is a common frame in the problematisation of migration, is strengthened in this article by the use of water metaphors. It states: ‘This measure was unavoidable, even though people were undoubtedly already aware that it would open

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<sup>111</sup> ‘Pleidooi korpschef dwingt Kosto tot reactie’, *NRC Handelsblad* 15-10-1992, 7.

<sup>112</sup> Original: ‘Het Amsterdamse gemeentebestuur heeft gezegd dat niemand van de ramp meer of minder mag worden. Wel, je kunt aan een illegale buitenlander geen legale woning toewijzen. Wethouder Wildekamp van Amsterdam zal nu een lijst opstellen van mensen die dakloos zijn geworden door de vliegcrash en op basis daarvan zal per geval worden bekeken of er een verblijfsvergunning wordt verstrekt.’; ‘Legale status voor bij vliegcrash betrokken illegalen; Staatssecretaris Kosto overstag na overleg met hoofdcommissaris Nordholt’, *Algemeen Dagblad* 15-10-1992, 1.

<sup>113</sup> ‘Grote toeloop register illegalen Amsterdam’, *NRC Handelsblad* 20-10-1992, 10.

<sup>114</sup> ‘Illegalen aan het licht’, *Het Parool* 24-10-1992, 5.

up a sluice gate that would lead to a flood.’<sup>115</sup> These metaphors such as flood to describe the arrival of new migrants, while referring to Kosto’s legal action as the opening of a sluice gate strengthened this narrative of uncontrollability. The frame that is used here is the threat frame, as undocumented migrants are presented as threatening to the host society. Emphasis is put here on the big cities, that would be unable to manage large numbers of undocumented migrants. It sketches a possible future scenario in which the arrival of larger numbers of undocumented migrants contributes to increasing illegal employment and criminality.<sup>116</sup> In this way the article also makes use of issue linking, as it links different societal issues to the presence of large numbers of ‘illegal’ migrants.

Besides narratives as such heavily criticising the *Kostolijst* and presenting crisis scenarios, various newspaper articles in this time period presented drama scenarios.<sup>117</sup> Within these drama scenarios emphasis is often put on the challenging situation many of the victims find themselves in, while facing bureaucratic barriers in getting the help and support they need. Such bureaucratic barriers complicated the ‘legalisation’ process for undocumented victims, who were often receiving mixed information from the different Dutch institutions. The article ‘I have to leave, leave the Bijlmer’, published in *De Volkskrant*, sketches the severe impact of the plane crash on the livelihoods of the victims. It presents the personal stories of different Ghanaian victims, who, faced with psychological traumas, are desperate to leave the Bijlmer, however are often unable to make it onto the *Kostolijst*. Through these stories it highlights the challenges faced by both the victims and the aid workers.<sup>118</sup> Such personal and dramatised narratives add a human face to the experiences of the undocumented victims and could have sparked greater sympathy amongst the Dutch public towards the ‘illegal’ victims.

The article titled ‘Illegal in the Bijlmer, you better prove it’, published in the *Algemeen Dagblad* expanded on the challenges undocumented victims face in proving that they were in fact victims. It presents the stories of different Ghanaian migrants who lost everything as a result of the plane crash and were unable to indicate that they used to live in the destroyed flats. It also highlights that it is uncertain who exactly qualifies for ‘legalisation’, as some residents might have hosted visitors during the crash, who incidentally also became victims. Overall, it sketches a situation of chaos, in which different institutions seem to contradict each other, leading to a situation in which many undocumented victims are at a loss.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Original: ‘Die maatregel was onontkoombaar, ook al was men zich ongetwijfeld ervan bewust dat hiermee een sluis werd opengedraaid die een vloedgolf tot gevolg zou hebben.’; ‘Illegalen aan het licht’, *Het Parool* 24-10-1992, 5.

<sup>116</sup> ‘Illegalen aan het licht’, *Het Parool* 24-10-1992, 5.

<sup>117</sup> ‘Ik moet weg, weg van de Bijlmer. Nabestaanden zoeken nu een huis, een baan en soms nog wat troost’, *De Volkskrant* 31-10-1992, 59.; ‘Illegaal in de Bijlmer; Bewijs dat maar eens’, *Algemeen Dagblad* 24-10-1992.; ‘In deze nachtmerrie houden illegalen zich vast aan de fakkel van de hoop’, *De Volkskrant* 26-10-1992, 7.

<sup>118</sup> ‘Ik moet weg, weg van de Bijlmer. Nabestaanden zoeken nu een huis, een baan en soms nog wat troost’, *De Volkskrant* 31-10-1992, 59.

<sup>119</sup> ‘Illegaal in de Bijlmer; Bewijs dat maar eens’, *Algemeen Dagblad* 24-10-1992.

*De Volkskrant* highlighted in an article titled ‘In this nightmare illegal immigrants hold on to the torch of hope’ another personal migrant story. From the perspective of the migrant it presents the experiences of an undocumented Ghanaian migrant in the Netherlands. The person describes the challenges migrants face upon arrival in a new society. Stating how undocumented migrants are vulnerable to exploitations and criminal activities, when aiming to make ends meet in a new society. The writer argued that there are two kinds of ‘illegal’ migrants. There are those that solely migrate for economic purposes, wishing to return with large amounts of money and goods. The article states that these migrants would do anything for economic gains. And then there are those who migrate wishing to develop their individual capacities and fully become part of and contribute to their new society. This second group is argued by the author to be less vulnerable to exploitations. The writer indicates that many ‘illegal’ migrants fall within the first category, as he states that many ‘illegals’ are vulnerable to exploitative actions and practices. The writer suggests that the Netherlands should set up a screening programme based on these different migration motives and in that way effectively control ‘illegal’ immigration.<sup>120</sup>

Although the article centres a migrant narrative, it could result in sympathy for the second migrant category at the expense of the first group. The article creates a dichotomy between the migrant who migrates to financially support themselves and their family and the migrant who wishes to integrate into a new society. This contributes to the problematisation of ‘illegal’ migrants who are often already framed negatively as ‘fortune seekers’ in the Dutch public debate. Reality shows however that migration motives often overlap. Participation in the host society does not have to exclude engagement in the country of origin. This is also emphasised in Mazzucato’s research on Ghanaian migrants’ transnational orientation, which she refers to as the double engagement.<sup>121</sup>

While being heavily criticised for his immigration control policies, the lobbying of Mayor Van Thijn and Chief Officer Nordholt influenced Kosto to change his stance. As this chapter has shown this lobbying was largely driven by Ghanaian community leaders who fought for the rights of the undocumented victims. The legal decision taken by Kosto led to increasing criticism. As amplified by various media narratives, the *Kostolijst* was deemed as failed as it attracted large numbers of undocumented migrants posing as *Bijlmerramp* victims. It was criticised for not benefiting the actual victims. This reveals that Kosto was criticised from different sides; from those upholding crisis narratives, fearing for the increasing number of migrants and from those upholding humanitarian narratives, with great sympathy to the undocumented *Bijlmerramp* victims.

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<sup>120</sup> ‘In deze nachtmerrie houden illegalen zich vast aan de fakkel van de hoop’, *De Volkskrant* 26-10-1992, 7.

<sup>121</sup> Mazzucato, ‘The Double Engagement’, 206.

## 7. Political targeting of the ‘illegal’

As the previous chapters show, the year of 1992 marks a crucial moment in the debate in the Netherlands surrounding ‘illegal’ migrants. As stated by Chief Officer Nordholt shortly after the Bijlmer plane crash: ‘This year there have been two events that particularly put attention towards people residing in our country without a valid residence permit. Firstly, the discussion surrounding the illegal Ghanaians upon the roundup of a drug gang and secondly, the effects of the disaster in the Bijlmer.’<sup>122</sup> The initial criminalisation of the Ghanaian community was claimed by some to be used by political leaders to benefit their own political agenda. By amplifying a threat and crisis narrative political leaders pleaded for a tightening of immigration control measures. The Bijlmer plane crash led to increasing attention towards the ‘illegal’ migrant. Stated by some to have revealed a societal issue of a large scale, namely the presence of big numbers of ‘illegal’ migrants.

Shortly after the news broke out of the possible presence of 10,000 Ghanaian ‘illegals’ in Amsterdam, the Ministry of Justice and Foreign Affairs decided on the expansion of the role of the Dutch Royal Marechaussee in the verification of travel documents. The Royal Marechaussee would be tasked to check travel documents in Ghana and Nigeria of those attempting to travel to the Netherlands. The *NRC Handelsblad* described on the 11th of March 1992 the advising role that the Dutch Royal Marechaussee would take on in Ghana and Nigeria. These two countries were selected as these were stated as countries from which the Netherlands received a relatively large number of asylum seeking requests in which identity fraud was involved. This move from the Netherlands to expand the role of the Royal Marechaussee can be viewed as an attempt to control immigration at its source, by already verifying travel documents in the countries of origin.<sup>123</sup> Although this article did not specifically refer to Operation ‘Goofy’, it was positioned in the newspaper in close proximity to three articles related to this case. The positioning of this article in the newspaper could give readers the impression that the decision to expand the role of the Royal Marechaussee was linked to the outcome of Operation ‘Goofy’. This political move was perhaps pushed through due to Operation ‘Goofy’ and the related media narrative.

The topic of illegal immigration became a key issue on the political agenda. Nordholt referred to this increased focus on immigration in the public and political debate:

Furthermore, I’ve stated that the issue of migration will be the issue of the 1990s and I’ve expressed my expectation that it will be high on the political agenda. That it would appear (...)

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<sup>122</sup> ‘Men verwijt mij dat de realiteit niet anders is’, *Het Parool* 18-11-1992.;

Original: ‘Er zijn dit jaar twee gebeurtenissen geweest die vooral de aandacht hebben gericht op mensen die zonder een geldige verblijfstitel in ons land verblijven. Ten eerste de discussie rond de illegale Ghanezen na het oprollen van een drugsbende en ten tweede de gevolgen van de ramp in de Bijlmer.’

<sup>123</sup> ‘Controle reisdocumenten al in Ghana en Nigeria’, *NRC Handelsblad* 11-03-1992, 3.

this quickly in the top ten ... I also did not expect that. But I have ascertained that while I was staying abroad, the problem has been raised in all vigor. And that all parties took part.<sup>124</sup>

Dutch politician Frits Bolkestein, leader of the Dutch conservative-liberal political party *VVD*, argued for stricter immigration control policies that would target undocumented migrants. In an article published in the *NRC Handelsblad* on the 17th of March 1992 his statements were summarised as follows:

Civil servants from the population register should ask people for their residence permit, if they want to register themselves, people who bring illegals into the country must be punished, an identification requirement has to be introduced 'without delay' (The Netherlands should not become Europe's nutcase), and moreover according to Bolkestein immigrants who commit a crime forfeit their right to a residence permit. They should be evicted.<sup>125</sup>

This was a response to Operation 'Goofy'. Bolkestein specifically mentioned Ghanaians in the Netherlands, stating that they are known for their trade in fake Dutch passports.<sup>126</sup> In this way he amplified the narrative of the wide scale involvement of Ghanaians in the trade and use of false identification documents. Bolkestein pleaded for an identification requirement, a law that was finally passed in 1993.<sup>127</sup> The article describes how these statements made by Bolkestein fall in line with the Dutch policy regarding undocumented migrants. The then Dutch Minister of Justice from the Christian democratic party *CDA*, Ernst Hirsch Ballin, had also been pleading for an expansion of the role of civil servants as well as an identification requirement as a way to fight 'illegal' immigration. It describes how both the *VVD* leader and the minister of justice pleaded for ways to fight the misuse of social benefit facilities.<sup>128</sup> The push for registration of undocumented migrants, which would further criminalise the existence of 'illegal' migrants, was eventually formalised through the linkage act in 1997.<sup>129</sup> These new forms of legislation will be further elaborated on later in this chapter.

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<sup>124</sup> Original: 'Verder heb ik gezegd dat het migratievraagstuk het vraagstuk zal worden voor de jaren negentig en heb ik m'n verwachting uitgesproken dat het hoog op de politieke agenda zal komen te staan. Dat het zo snel, hoe zeg je dat, met stip in de top tien zou komen . . . dat had ik ook niet verwacht. Maar ik heb moeten constateren dat terwijl ik in het buitenland verbleef, het probleem in alle heftigheid aan de orde is gesteld. En dat alle partijen eraan hebben meegedaan.';

'Men verwijt mij dat de realiteit niet anders is', *Het Parool* 18-11-1992.

<sup>125</sup> Original: '...ambtenaren van het bevolkingsregister moeten mensen die zich willen inschrijven vragen naar hun verblijfstitel, mensen die illegalen het land binnenloodsen moeten strafbaar worden gesteld, een identificatieplicht moet 'zonder dralen' worden ingevoerd ('Nederland moet niet de dorpsgek van Europa worden!'), en bovendien verspelen allochtonen die een misdrijf plegen volgens Bolkestein het recht op een verblijfsvergunning. Zij dienen uitgezet te worden.';

'Bolkestein ondersteunt ongewild het kabinet', *NRC Handelsblad* 17-03-1992, 3.

<sup>126</sup> 'Bolkestein ondersteunt ongewild het kabinet', *NRC Handelsblad* 17-03-1992, 3.

<sup>127</sup> Van Dijk, 'Ghanaian churches in the Netherlands', 91.

<sup>128</sup> 'Bolkestein ondersteunt ongewild het kabinet', *NRC Handelsblad* 17-03-1992, 3.

<sup>129</sup> Van Dijk, 'Ghanaian churches in the Netherlands', 91.

Referring to the misuse of the social benefit system, Minister of Justice Hirsch Ballin stated that the government should take residence status into account when granting social benefits. He viewed this as a way of preventing ‘illegals’ from making use of Dutch social benefits.<sup>130</sup> As highlighted in the previous chapters Ghanaian migrants were problematised in the media narratives post Operation ‘Goofy’ as largely misusing the Dutch social benefits. A political push for an expansion in the registration of residence status thus fits within this media narrative.

The politicisation of Operation ‘Goofy’ as visible in these political narratives led to criticism. It was claimed that this drug trafficking case was used by politicians to drive their anti-immigration agenda. The article ‘Demonstration’ published in *De Volkskrant* on the 21st of March 1992 stated that the criminalisation of the Ghanaian community was used by politicians for their own political agenda. The article describes how Minister of Justice Hirsch Ballin used this case to further criminalise the existence of undocumented migrants, through the linking of different databases, in order to prevent undocumented migrants from committing fraud. Furthermore, it refers to the identification requirement and the expansion of power of the Dutch Royal Marechaussee as a result of this criminalisation. The article states that the criminalisation of undocumented migrants and refugees has become part of the Dutch immigration policy.<sup>131</sup> In this way the article clearly establishes the link between Operation ‘Goofy’, the criminalisation of the Ghanaian migrant community, and the introduction of new immigration control policies. This link is also made in an article published in *De Volkskrant* on the 21st of March 1992. This article mentions the following: ‘The case was immediately used by the minister and by politicians to plead for stricter measures against illegals. That makes it a political game.’<sup>132</sup> The article in this way clearly strengthened the narrative of the politicisation of Operation ‘Goofy’.

### *Threat to Dutch taxonomy*

The issue of the misuse of social benefits by migrants who found loopholes in the system, centralised African migrant groups from the late 1980s. In the early 1980s the Netherlands introduced the *Sofi* number, a code given to each Dutch citizen. This personalised code was introduced to prevent breaching of the Dutch social benefit system.<sup>133</sup> The Dutch state wished to fully ban ‘illegal’ immigration, as expressed in the article ‘Plane ticket ready for leaving illegals’ by Secretary of State Aad Kosto. He stated that ‘illegality’ has no place in a democratic state.<sup>134</sup> In practice, there were lots of statistical gaps, as large numbers of people disappeared from the system, while their identities were not fully

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<sup>130</sup> ‘Bolkestein ondersteunt ongewild het kabinet’, *NRC Handelsblad* 17-03-1992, 3.

<sup>131</sup> ‘Demonstratie’, *De Volkskrant* 21-03-1992, 21.

<sup>132</sup> Original: ‘De zaak is direct door de minister en door politici gebruikt om te pleiten voor strengere maatregelen tegen illegalen. Dat maakt het tot een politiek spelletje.’; ‘Twee weken na grootscheepse politie-actie tegen drugsbende worden bijna alle details door de betrokkenen genuanceerd „Ophef over Bijlmer-Ghanezen wordt door politici uitgebuit”’, *De Volkskrant* 21-03-1992, 9.

<sup>133</sup> Van Dijk, ‘Ghanaian churches in the Netherlands’, 91.

<sup>134</sup> ‘Vliegticket klaar voor vertrekkende illegalen’, *Algemeen Dagblad* 12-03-1992, 3.

registered.<sup>135</sup> The fact that this issue was put high on the political agenda was made visible by the publishing of the ‘Zeevalking’ report, shortly prior to the instalment of Secretary of State Aad Kosto. The outcome of this report pushed the Dutch government to find ways to further prevent the use of the state’s social facilities by ‘illegal’ migrants.<sup>136</sup> The Dutch state focused on ways to prevent ‘illegal’ immigrants’ access to the Dutch labour market. The *Algemeen Dagblad* describes: ‘If a foreigner applies for a social security number, the tax authorities now first inquire with the aliens police whether the person requesting is a legal resident here. This also happens when applying for social assistance benefits.’<sup>137</sup> The linking of the *Sofi* code to different databases was a strategy to prevent undocumented migrants from participating in the Dutch system.<sup>138</sup>

As the public debate concerning ‘illegal’ migrants took on new heights during the 1990s, increasingly sparked by the media narrative surrounding Operation ‘Goofy’ and the Bijlmer plane crash, new laws were introduced. These laws aimed at tackling ‘illegal’ immigration and were targeted at the key areas of public concern. The *Wet Schijnhuwelijken* (Sham Marriages Act), *Wet Identificatieplicht* (Identification Requirement Act) and *Koppelingswet* (Linkage Act) all together prevented migrants from finding loopholes and entering the Dutch system while staying under the radar. It prevented migrants from ‘illegally’ living, working and benefiting from social facilities in the Dutch society. Underlying these laws was also the supposed relationship between ‘illegality’ and criminality. A report of the Van Traa parliamentary commission, a parliamentary commission that analysed police methods regarding the roundup of criminal organisations in the Netherlands, focused in one of its chapters on the criminal activities of Ghanaians and Nigerians in the Netherlands. Emphasis was put on the use of and trade in false identity documents. This is an element that is central to the problematisation of these migrant groups in the Dutch media narratives as highlighted in the previous chapters. The report led to identity fraud being increasingly viewed as a serious criminal offence, as it posed a threat to the taxonomic nature of the Netherlands.<sup>139</sup> This shows how parts of immigration increasingly became criminalised. Different parts of life as an undocumented migrant became criminalised through these new laws, leading to further exclusion of undocumented migrants from society.

Related to the topic of identity fraud, the Netherlands introduced in 1996 the *Problemlandencirculaire* (Problem country circulaire). This governmental ruling blacklisted countries that were known for fraud in identification documents. Ghana and Nigeria appeared at the top of this list, which is a clear indication of the emphasis on these two countries within the public narrative surrounding identity fraud. As part of this new government ruling, the Netherlands introduced a new

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<sup>135</sup> Van Dijk, ‘Ghanaian churches in the Netherlands’, 91.

<sup>136</sup> ‘Bolkestein ondersteunt ongewild het kabinet’, *NRC Handelsblad* 17-03-1992, 3.

<sup>137</sup> Original: ‘Als een vreemdeling een sofi-nummer aanvraagt, informeert de belastingdienst tegenwoordig eerst bij de vreemdelingenpolitie of de aanjager hier legaal verblijft. Hetzelfde gebeurt bij een aanvraag voor een bijstandsuitkering.’; ‘Vliegticket klaar voor vertrekkende illegalen’, *Algemeen Dagblad* 12-03-1992, 3.

<sup>138</sup> ‘Vliegticket klaar voor vertrekkende illegalen’, *Algemeen Dagblad* 12-03-1992, 3.

<sup>139</sup> Van Dijk, ‘Ghanaian churches in the Netherlands’, 91, 92.



procedure referred to as *Verificatie* (Verification). This allowed the Dutch government to further investigate the identities of Ghanaians applying for identification documents. This Verification procedure proved to be a lengthy and complex process, as it involved an investigation in the country of origin.<sup>140</sup> The introduction of these new restrictive policies that were amongst others targeted at Ghanaian migrants, had a large impact on the livelihoods of Ghanaian migrants in the Netherlands. It further criminalised the existence of Ghanaians residing in the Netherlands ‘illegally’. The new laws criminalised the act of taking part in the Dutch system while not being registered with valid documents. Kofi Owusu-Sekyere from Akasanoma stated:

They said oh they are using fake papers and all that. (...) I mean, what do you call fake papers? (...) I mean, we (...) work with our sweat to be paid. And so how we get a job.. I mean, for us, it is a way to survive. But if I.. (...) if people don't use fake papers to steal, but to work. Then why should it be so much and they blow it up as if (...) people are using fake papers to commit crime. But it wasn't so. Ghanaians were not doing that. They were only using... maybe other people's papers, just to work and the work was there. And mostly, you know, everybody knows that (...) the work the citizens want a foreigner can't get, it's only the work the citizens aren't interested (in) that foreigners can get. So that's what we were doing.<sup>141</sup>

He clearly criticises the then newly introduced Dutch policies targeted at undocumented migrants, as it led to identity fraud being considered a serious criminal offence. Mr. Owusu-Sekyere counters the narrative of the criminalisation of the ‘illegal’ migrant, by questioning whether it is a crime to use false documents to work and participate in the Dutch system. Also mentioning that there is clearly a demand from Dutch businesses for migrant labour.

Responding to this tightening of immigration control policies and the growing criminalisation of ‘illegal’ migrants, several newspaper articles also criticised the new Dutch policies. The article ‘Aliens police makes it difficult for Ghanaians’, published in *De Volkskrant* on December 3rd 1996, describes the difficulties Ghanaian migrants in the Netherlands face as a result of the new legislation. It mentions the effect of Ghana appearing on the ‘problem country circulaire’, as it refers to the complexities surrounding the verification process. The verification of names and conjugal unions proved to be a rather complex task, as the Dutch government did not take the different cultural context into account. It is for example in the Ghanaian context rather common for people to have both an English and a local name. One of the two might be officially registered, while the other one might be used more widely in daily life. This complicated the process of verification in Ghana and prevented Ghanaian migrants in the Netherlands from proving the validity of their identity documents. The hardships many

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<sup>140</sup> Van Dijk, ‘Ghanaian churches in the Netherlands’, 92.

<sup>141</sup> Kofi Baafi Owusu-Sekyere, 09-04-2021 Amsterdam, Jamel Buhari, interview transcript in appendix.

Ghanaian migrants faced as a result of this verification instrument, motivated Ghanaian organisation Recogin to lobby with the Dutch parliament.<sup>142</sup>

The 1997 Linkage Act also received criticism in the media. On February 3rd 1997 *Het Parool* published an article titled 'Linkage Act will marginalise illegals'. It describes how this new law pushes undocumented migrants to the fringes of society, as they are further prevented from participating or making use of any of the state's social facilities. It argues how this does not necessarily reduce the number of undocumented migrants, but merely worsens their conditions in the Netherlands.<sup>143</sup>

Despite the increased tightening of immigration control through the introduction of these new laws, locally undocumented migrants were not actively chased by the authorities. As stated by Kofi Owusu-Sekyere the regulated implementation of the new laws was largely the result of actions from the Ghanaian community. Community leaders spoke out against the increased targeting of Ghanaian migrants. Accounts from community leaders show that there were times when Ghanaian migrants were actively chased by the Dutch authorities. As stated by Mr. Owusu-Sekyere:

Because previously, even the police, the police will be walking around and then even at bus stops they see some black people they (would) stop and search (and start) talking to them to see if they speak Dutch. If you don't speak Dutch, then they'll ask okay: "Where do you come from? Where is your identity?" And then they arrest you and then process you for repatriation. But we fought for these things. We saw that as harassment.

And even with, well, examples of people who are not illegals, but constantly being stopped and questioned about who are you? Your identity and all that. We said, no, we find it discriminatory. Because why don't they stop white people too, because there also white illegals here. (...) So it's a targeting. And so if you are not stopping everybody, then (...) don't stop anybody.<sup>144</sup>

Nana Yaw Amoako from community organisation Recogin also referred to the times in which the Ghanaian community was increasingly targeted, stating:

There was a time when this police brutality, just bumping into people's house to chase out illegal migrants, (...) and not even once, about three times and people were jumping from the *balkons* (balconies). (...) So one time (...) we just had to come out, demonstrate on the streets. (...) It was about... I think like, 96 or 99, those dates... Yeah, because you would just be there and a policeman would just bang into your house. And just because people were not having staying permits and things, then they had to run for their lives, because they don't want to go

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<sup>142</sup> 'Vreemdelingenpolitie maakt het de Ghanezen lastig', *De Volkskrant* 03-12-1996, 7.

<sup>143</sup> 'Koppelingswet zal illegalen marginaliseren', *Het Parool* 03-02-1997.

<sup>144</sup> Kofi Baafi Owusu-Sekyere, 09-04-2021 Amsterdam, Jamel Buhari, interview transcript in appendix.

back to Africa. They don't want to go back to Ghana. And then it was becoming too much. So then we had to act.<sup>145</sup>

These accounts clearly show the discriminatory effect of these laws on Ghanaian migrants, as black migrants were particularly targeted by the authorities. Community leaders fought this increased targeting, wishing to put an end to these forms of harassment and discrimination. As stated by Nana Yaw Amoako a demonstration was organised which helped bring attention to the discrimination faced by many black migrants in the Netherlands. Mr. Owusu-Sekyere stated how they as community leaders were able to successfully influence the implementation and regulation of the laws. In Amsterdam this meant that migrants were no longer actively being stopped and chased on the streets, without a valid reason for further investigation. Local authorities prioritised focusing on people committing crimes.

This chapter has highlighted how Ghanaians were centralised in the debate on 'illegal' immigration in the Netherlands. The related political developments that increasingly targeted and marginalised Ghanaians in the Netherlands sparked protest from the Ghanaian community. Community leaders were able to influence the implementation of the new laws and pushed for reduced targeting of Ghanaian migrants.

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<sup>145</sup> Nana Yaw Amoako, 19-03-2021 Amsterdam, Jamel Buhari, interview transcript in appendix.

## 8. Community resilience: towards increased visibility

As highlighted in the previous chapters, the Bijlmer plane crash, Operation ‘Goofy’ and related media narratives severely impacted the public image of the Ghanaian community in the Netherlands. Moreover, these developments in the early 1990s caused further damage to the reputation of the Bijlmer neighbourhood. The negative public image of the neighbourhood and its residents had an impact on the framing of the Ghanaian community. This chapter shows how the Ghanaian community faced with traumatic hardships resulting from the Bijlmer plane crash and negative media portrayals, was able to shape their own narrative. Attempts were made to counter the negative public discourse and build a new positive image of Ghanaians in the Netherlands. In this construction of a new image, emphasis was put on the historical links between Ghana and the Netherlands.

The article ‘Blame the police: Bijlmer image demolished’ published in the *Algemeen Dagblad* referred to the statements by the Amsterdam police, that criminalised the entire Ghanaian community in Amsterdam. The way in which the case was blown out of proportion contributed to the negative public image of the Bijlmer neighbourhood. The Bijlmer plane crash further damaged the already torn public image of the Bijlmer.<sup>146</sup> The largely negative public perception of Ghanaian migrants, as the political and media narratives show during the 1990s, can also be partly attributed to their presence in the Bijlmer area. The presence of Ghanaians in an area with a large population of people of Afro-Surinamese descent affected the problematisation of Ghanaian migrants in the Dutch public narrative. When looking at Dutch media narratives, there are parallels between the problematisation of Ghanaians surrounding Operation ‘Goofy’ and the problematisation of the Afro-Surinamese community in the late 1960s and 1970s.<sup>147</sup> For both groups emphasis was put on widespread involvement in drug trafficking.

The perceived similarity between Ghanaian and other black migrant groups in the Netherlands is further expressed in Dutch media narratives with claims such as: ‘Moreover, there is a close cultural relationship between Ghanaians and the Surinamese and Antillean people. The Dutch slave trade is to blame for this. It is therefore no surprise that the Ghanaians in Amsterdam mix so easily with the Surinamese, Antilleans and Arubans living there.’<sup>148</sup> This indicates that publicly Ghanaian migrants were frequently perceived as similar to other black migrant groups in the Netherlands, as they were believed to be blending in with migrant communities such as the Afro-Surinamese and Antillean communities. In this way the negative public narrative surrounding Ghanaians, particularly in Amsterdam, has been influenced by the negative public reputation of the Bijlmer neighbourhood and the problematisations of other black migrant groups.

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<sup>146</sup> ‘Verwijt aan politie: Imago Bijlmer gesloopt’, *Algemeen Dagblad* 12-03-1992, 3.

<sup>147</sup> Laarman, *Oude onbekenden*, 179, 180.

<sup>148</sup> Original: ‘Bovendien is er een nauwe culturele verwantschap tussen Ghanezen en de Surinamers en Antillianen. De Nederlandse slavenhandel is daar debet aan. Het baart dan ook geen opzien dat de Ghanezen in Amsterdam zich zo gemakkelijk mengen met de daar wonende Surinamers, Antillianen en Arubanen.’; ‘Verwijt aan politie: Imago Bijlmer gesloopt’, *Algemeen Dagblad* 12-03-1992, 3.

There are undoubtedly cultural and linguistic similarities between Ghanaian, Afro-Surinamese and Antillean communities, due to the Dutch colonial history. Whether these similarities are embraced within the Ghanaian community, and whether Ghanaian migrants were in fact blending in in these communities remains questionable. Alfred Kyei Mensah from Recogin responded to the criminalisation of the Ghanaian community during the 1990s, stating that the high crime rates in the Bijlmer neighbourhood as well as the criminal activities of other black migrant groups contributed to the criminalisation of the Ghanaian community.

(...) being a long time resident here in Amsterdam Southeast or *Zuidoost*, you know our people, the Ghanaians, they are law abiding people, because people came here looking for greener pastures.. you know and they get work and they are doing the work tirelessly and they don't involve themselves in crime. Most of the crime that was happening here, those days in the 90s, I would say about 80 percent was coming from these Suriname/ Antillean people. Our African people are God fearing people and you know if you look at (...) Suriname and Antillean people, they see themselves more as Dutch and we see ourselves as immigrants, we came here to look for something. (...) I wouldn't say there are no criminals under our people, that would be a lie, but comparably if you compare to the other ethnic groups ours is on a very small scale.<sup>149</sup>

This account clearly shows a wish to distinguish the Ghanaian migrant from other black migrants in the Netherlands, as a way to fight the dominant negative framing of Ghanaians in the Netherlands. The negative public image of Ghanaian migrants as amplified in media and political discourses, encouraged Ghanaian community leaders to actively counter the dominant narratives. Efforts by Ghanaian community leaders throughout the 1990s show that attempts were made to actively change and shape the public perception of the Ghanaian community in the Netherlands. Historically there have been links between Ghana, the Netherlands and Suriname. However, this history had remained largely unknown to the wider Dutch public, as stated by Kofi Owusu-Sekyere. The negative media portrayals of Ghanaian migrants post Bijlmerramp inspired the Sikaman Foundation to set up a newsletter targeted at both non-Ghanaians and Ghanaians in the Netherlands.<sup>150</sup> This newsletter that was spread free of charge can be viewed as an attempt from the community to own their narrative, thus actively countering the largely negative public media narratives.

Another action aimed at positively shaping the narrative surrounding Ghanaians in the Netherlands was the organisation of an exhibition in 1993 called '*Ghanese Trots aan de Amstel*' ('Ghanaian pride on the Amstel'). This exhibition set up by the Sikaman Foundation aimed at

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<sup>149</sup> Alfred Kyei Mensah, 19-03-2021 Amsterdam, Jamel Buhari, interview transcript in appendix.

<sup>150</sup> Kofi Baafi Owusu-Sekyere, 09-04-2021 Amsterdam, Jamel Buhari, interview transcript in appendix.

highlighting and celebrating the contribution of Ghanaians in the Netherlands. The exhibition featured photographs of everyday Ghanaians in the Netherlands at their workplaces, in church or other activities Ghanaians were taking part in. The exhibition was well received and contributed to a positive image of the Ghanaian community as well as a growing general awareness in the Netherlands on the historical links with Ghana.<sup>151</sup>

Mr. Owusu-Sekyere referred to the widespread ignorance existing in the Netherlands regarding Ghanaians, stating:

But they didn't understand why Ghanaians were here and so in the beginning, they were, you know, categorising us as refugees. But we were not refugees, you see, and so the Dutch people could ask you: "but how come you're here? Why did you come here and what?" Right. And then we will tell them that, you know, you guys were at our place (...) 300 years ago. So we are paying a visit back. So you don't ask why we are here. We are paying a visit.. by return visit. (...) they'll say: "Oh, yeah, they didn't invite you." But we didn't need any invitation. You didn't come with invitation when you were coming to our place, so why do we need an invitation? We will come and then we'll find our way. So that's why (...) they were suspicious of Ghanaians, because they didn't understand how we could survive uninvited and (...) we could survive here. And before they knew, you know, we had multiplied. And they thought, you know, we were actually involved in some criminal activities to be able to survive, but actually, that wasn't it. We weren't actually involved in criminal activities, unless you want to say that to survive by (...) using someone's passport to go and sweat work to be paid, is criminal, oh, then that is it. But I don't see that as criminal , no!<sup>152</sup>

This quote shows the ignorance amongst the Dutch public regarding the Ghanaian community. Mr. Owusu-Sekyere describes this lack of awareness within the Dutch society as underlying the public problematisations of the Ghanaian community. People did not know where Ghanaians came from and the awareness on historical links was limited. This contributed to growing suspicions within the Dutch society towards the Ghanaian community, as stated by Mr. Owusu-Sekyere.<sup>153</sup> Building a sense of awareness within the Dutch society on the historical connections between the Netherlands and Ghana can thus be regarded as a strategy to create a positive image of the Ghanaian community in the Netherlands.

The problematisation of Ghanaian migrants surrounding Operation 'Goofy' and post Bijlmer plane crash pushed the Ghanaian community into the public arena. Despite the problematisation of Ghanaians in public and political narratives and the hardships faced as a result of the Bijlmer plane

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<sup>151</sup> Kofi Baafi Owusu-Sekyere, 09-04-2021 Amsterdam, Jamel Buhari, interview transcript in appendix.

<sup>152</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>153</sup> Ibidem.

crash, the community was able to survive, while taking ownership of the dominant narrative. In the words of Mr. Owusu-Sekyere; Ghanaians found their way to the Netherlands, were able to survive and quickly grew in numbers.<sup>154</sup> This shows a great sense of resilience.

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<sup>154</sup> Kofi Baafi Owusu-Sekyere, 09-04-2021 Amsterdam, Jamel Buhari, interview transcript in appendix.

## 9. Conclusion

This research has shown how Ghanaians were centralised in debates on ‘illegal’ immigrants in the Netherlands. The Bijlmer plane crash and Operation ‘Goofy’ increased the attention towards the Ghanaian community, as they were increasingly criminalised and problematised in public narratives. The year of 1992 can be viewed as a key turning point in the narrative surrounding the Ghanaian community. Operation ‘Goofy’ initially sparked larger criminalisation of the Ghanaian community, as increasing emphasis was put on drugs and criminality in media narratives on Ghanaian migrants. The criminalisation of the Ghanaian community was affected by the problematisation of the Afro-Surinamese community in the Netherlands and the negative stigma linked to the Bijlmer neighbourhood. Although one might expect a national disaster such as the *Bijlmerramp* to generate larger sympathy for the Ghanaian migrant community, the media narratives and political debates quickly centred around the topic of ‘illegal’ migrants. The large number of Ghanaian victims centralised Ghanaian migrants in this debate. It is in these times that the ‘illegal’ existence became increasingly problematised and criminalised. Issues of identity fraud and living without valid residence permits were increasingly regarded as serious crimes. In these times of heightened criminalisation and problematisation of Ghanaian migrants new laws were introduced aimed at further criminalising ‘illegal’ existence in the Dutch society. This shows that media narratives problematising Ghanaian migrants occurred in parallel to the formation of legislation targeted at undocumented Ghanaian migrants.

During these times of growing problematisation of Ghanaian migrants, Ghanaian community organisation increased. Initially the criminalisation of the community surrounding Operation ‘Goofy’ sparked protest from the community, inspiring community leaders to become politically active. Community organisation further increased post Bijlmer plane crash, as community organisations played a big role in supporting the Dutch authorities in documenting victims. Ghanaian community leaders actively engaged with the Dutch media, wishing to fight the often negative and generalising media framing. The increasing presence of Ghanaian voices in the Dutch media presenting counter narratives post Operation ‘Goofy’ and post Bijlmer plane crash is indicative of the active engagement of community leaders with the Dutch media. Moreover, the increased targeting of Ghanaians as a result of the new immigration control measures, activated leaders to lobby with local governance for a regulation of these measures. This regulation would lead to a more humane treatment of Ghanaians in the Netherlands, as it would curtail selective targeting of black migrants.

The growing role of the community in influencing the media and political narratives shows a form of emancipation of the Ghanaian community. Through increased organisation community leaders were able to actively claim space, fight public narratives and influence politics. This research has added to the existing literature on the Ghanaian migrant community in the Netherlands, by looking at developments surrounding the media and political narratives and including the role of Ghanaian community leaders. By bringing in a governance perspective, I have been able to analyse the role of



media narratives and claim makers from the Ghanaian community in shaping political developments. In this way I have shown how the Ghanaian community shaped the media narrative throughout the 1990s. Furthermore, I have shown how they were able to influence the political narrative, through active political engagement and lobbying. The decision to 'legalise' the undocumented *Bijlmerramp* victims, and the local regulation of the stringent and targeted immigration control measures, shows the success of the actions of the Ghanaian community leaders.

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## **Appendix**

### **Oral history interview transcripts**

#### **Interview 1:**

**Alfred Kyei Mensah - Recogin**

**19-03-2021 Amsterdam, the Netherlands**

**“When did you arrive in the Netherlands?”**

“Wow.. actually uhm I came to the Netherlands after school, you know I went to (...) school.. in my days it was a British system, I went to (...) school, that is 1 to 5, I went to Prempeh college, that is in Kumasi, one of the best schools in Ghana and after I had my sixth form, I did college in Labone, and from there I came to Denmark, (Because) in my days we could come to Denmark without visa, so in Denmark then I met my.. my first, let's say my girlfriend, she was Dutch, you know .. I met her in school and then we came over to the Netherlands, and then I was planning to go to Canada and then you know out of love then I came here. So when I came here I also took some course at the VU university and then also at the academy of counseling and coaching in Amsterdam, so when Recogin was formed before then I used to work as a logistics officer at Dirk van der Broek for a long time and then when Recogin was formed in 1993, then I came to Recogin.. you know. Recogin is an abbreviation for Representative council for Ghanaian organisations in the Netherlands.

**“So is it like an umbrella organisation”**

Yeah It's an umbrella organisation, with about let's say 60-65 self organizations and clubs and churches. And we came into existence uhm... you know there was a plane crash in the Bijlmer in October 1992 and when the city council or let's say the local council in Amsterdam Zuidoost, they were trying to identify the victims, you know where the plane hit those two buildings, Groeneveen and Kruitberg, there were a lot of Ghanaians living there, so in trying to identify the victims an emergency committee was formed within the community and we the Ghanaians we also had our committee, the Surinaamse, the Antilleans, everybody had their emergency committee to try to identify the victims. So in so doing we played a lot... a few leaders who got together and then a year later due to that we were able to help the local council they decided to give us an office.. you know.. so we got our own office in 1993 Hofgeest, which is this building behind me and they gave us funding, so basically that is how recogin came into existence, in trying to help the local council to identify the victims and because of the good work we did as an interim committee, they decided that it's good we carried on, so that we would be able to help our people in our community from Ghanese afkomst, .. so in a way in short we are a bridge between the stadsdeel and the Ghanaian community, you know, and we do basically social services, we render social services to the Ghanaian community of Amsterdam, apart from Ghanaians other Africans come here, but we give Dutch lessons, we give computer lessons, we do other social services, housing hmmm... maybe if you're looking for a doctor, maybe you are undocumented you know, we do a lot to the community, but we do basically social services, housing, education,

***On key challenges within community***

“Yeah basically not only undocumented people come here, people from all spheres of life, you know, we also do projects from the stadsdeel, sometimes we get assignments like *opdracht* based on a specific theme or topic, most of the time it’s about health, you know, when there is something about health, we get funds from the stadsdeel to educate our people, you know, and also we organise trips to disneyland in the summer, you know, to help families who are not able to go to Africa, we help them to go to Paris disneyland, we organise bus trips also to Dusseldorf, to Germany, to other places, to the UK, so be it summer or... we are always busy helping the community. that is basically what we do. and we have a television station and also a radio station, you know, and we operate on Sundays with the radio, Sundays and Wednesdays from 7PM to 11PM, so in case there is important information, we relate to the community through these two channels, the radio and television, as of now we are also organising a corona awareness campaign which we are doing with the stadsdeel. And since the beginning of the pandemic in March in collaboration with the Red Cross we are distributing food packages and we started this in April of last year we give food packages, every week we give food packages of 400 food packages to the people and that was from April till Ma..uhh July from last year, because there was enough food on the farms and these farmers didn’t know what to do with the food because the horeca, because of the lockdown, the horeca was closed, no restaurants, so there was enough food on the farms, so the Red Cross came up with the idea, because they heard we were looking for funds to help the vulnerable, the needy, the undocumented and they said oh that’s a good idea we want to join, so we are doing that with the red cross. So in July all the food was finished and then they came up with the food vouchers, cadeaubon, one card is 15 euros, so they give us 400 cards every week, and we give to 200 people but because one card is 15 euros you cannot shop enough, so we give every person two cards, which is 30 euros, like we give 200 this week, 200 different people, the following week we give 200 different people, you know..

So uhm basically, that is what we are also doing now, to help our community, since we are still doing it every Tuesday we get 400 cards and then we have a list of all the ... because the Red Cross now they said we have to help the undocumented, because those who were working who lost their jobs, they are getting WW, some are getting bijstand, at least they have something to eat, a roof, so this is.. we are targeting only the undocumented people so that is what we are doing so far.”

**“So if I understand correctly you have been very much collaborating with the local municipality from the start?”**

“Yeah yeah since the time of the plane crash, since we came into existence in 1993.”

**“So was this an initiative from the community, or was it from the Dutch municipality?”**

“You know, that’s why I said earlier on, because of the part we played in helping the authorities to identify the victims and also to help them and they saw the work we did and they said it doesn’t end only with the plane crash, we could play a very very important role for the Ghanaian community. So we have become a bridge between the *stad*.. the local community and our people and that’s and also we are also another bridge between the Ghana embassy and (our community), because when you attain the Dutch nationality we have something that we call hmm renunciation, you need to renounce your nationality, because now you can’t have two/dual nationalities. So you come here and we have been mandated to give a letter, with that letter you.. take your Ghana passport, you go to the Ghanaian embassy in the Hague and they check it and then they give you a letter you bring to the IND, so we also help with those things.”

### ***On the Bijlmer plane crash***

“Yeah I was around because hmm my house, from my house to the place of the crash, it’s about let’s say.. three hundred meters, if I’m walking it’s about some three/four minute walk, yeah, and I was in front of my house you know when I saw the plane coming, so when it hit the place, the sound and everything, I was able to get there but only when we got there the police were around and they had sealed the place with.. how do you call it.. hmm...but also you couldn’t enter.. my.. I had family also .. family friends who were living.. who were living there.. you know.. so I was really a witness.”

**“You already mentioned being a support system as Recogin, were there any other support systems present at the time? Were there any other groups that were supporting the community upon the crash?”**

“Yeah there were groups, but from Suriname groups, you know the Bijlmer is full of different nationalities, different ethnic groups, so before Recogin all these Suriname people they had their organisations already, because the Suriname people are.. you know..they used to be a colony of the Dutch, so after independence till... and the Suriname people I think they are the biggest of all the ethnic groups in the Bijlmer. You know, if you take the Turkish and the Marokkaans, they were not part of the colonies, they are guestworkers, *gastarbeiders* you know, so if you put them aside I think the Suriname and the Antilleans they had their organizations before even we Ghanaians started to come here. So we used to have small small small groups, but basically a bigger thing like Recogin came into existence due to the plane crash.”

### ***On functioning of Recogin (catering to community in the NL/ collaboration other groups)***

“You know we have a council, Recogin council and all these organisations they have two representatives. And thanks to social media, now we have been able to communicate, before we used to communicate via emails and we used to.. we have meetings here because we have a big hall, so we meet two times in a year.. you know...we meet two times in a year and we have a way of sending information by mail and by whatsapp, cause we have the Recogin council as a platform, all the 65 organizations.. they have two representatives, so if there is anything we just put information and then we meet.. you know.. to assess the work we’ve been doing and also we the executive, we were all elected.. you know.. every five years elections are made.. you know.. then what we do as the executives.. we have a plan, we also go apart from meeting the councillors two times in a year we also have uhmm .. an agenda..a schedule that we go to visit the various clubs. Every 2 weeks we go, from January to December, we go.. we visit this club, we know where they have their meeting and at what time, we tell them this week we come to see how they’re doing their meetings and after the meetings we have meetings with the executive of that particular club to hear some of their.. we know a lot from their councillors, but sometimes we want to partake in the meetings, so that they know us, so that we can also see the normal people, how they conduct their meetings, if there are some questions they want to ask, you know, because sometimes we go on air, people can call in and we can answer, but sometimes when you meet them face to face.. it’s better..

And when we have big projects about health we rent a big hall so that we invite the whole community to come. You know, we organize a lot of projects, because sometimes we also ask for subsidy to organize a particular project based on a topic which we think is very important at that material moment.. you know.. yeah. Like during the aids, the time of the aids, you know, we (had a) program.. we used to educate a lot about aids and then we also organize projects about homosexuality, because



you know our culture the way we were brought up, we have been made to see homosexuality as an abomination.. you know, but then we don't encourage people to practice it, but then we encourage people how to live together side by side, you know because here they encourage people to live side by side, so we cannot take the law into our own hands and to be a bit hostile or aggressive towards people or to discriminate against people, because of their sexuality and you know..”

**“So you were also advising people to be more tolerant?”**

“Yes more tolerant, toleration of homosexuality, we.. this is something we always do once or twice in a year.”

**“Ok, so it's different topics that you address.”**

“Yeah.. yeah..”

**“So would you say that throughout, well let's say from the 90s onwards, have you been seeing different topics or challenges within the community?”**

“Yeah yeah... We also organize hmm workshops and talk about discrimination and also we try to encourage people to go back to Ghana to settle, especially those who are heading towards their pension, like some people they go on their pension and they don't have any ideas.. they stay here.. but we encourage people... we have workshops and we educate them as to how to resettle in Ghana and it's going well. We also work with the IOM, some people they stay here for so many years, they do black jobs, they don't have papers to stay and they get frustrated and they come they want to go home, but we don't have the money to buy tickets for them so we work with the IOM and they organize things. And almost every two/three months we are able to help people through the IOM, you know to go back.. yeah..”

### ***On plane crash and the media narrative***

“Yeah we saw that but being a long time resident here in Amsterdam Southeast or *Zuidoost*, you know our people the Ghanaians they are law abiding people, because people came here looking for greener pastures.. you know and they get work and they are doing the work tirelessly and they don't involve themselves in crime. Most of the crime that was happening here, those days in the 90s, I would say about 80 percent was coming from these Suriname/ Antillean people, our African people are God fearing people and you know if you look at... because Dutch.. hmm.. Suriname and Antillean people they see themselves more as Dutch and we see ourselves as immigrants, we came here to look for something. Some of us when we get.. when they get here they go back.. some prefer to stay here and make families. I wouldn't say there are no criminals under our people, that would be a lie, but comparably if you compare to the other ethnic groups ours is on a very small scale, you know there's discrimination everywhere..there is discrimination, if you go to Africa there is discrimination.. here there is discrimination but sometimes you don't see it, only maybe at the working places and in some small small places, you know the typical Dutch way of discrimination. Sometimes you don't see it, but you feel it.”

**So more invisible, but it exists. (follow up question problematization)**

“Yeah you see, it would be from my perception it would be totally wrong to judge a whole people based on their colour. A lot was happening here, because even those days the way the buildings were put up here encouraged people to do crime, because it wasn’t safe, you could go out in the night coming home, we have something that we call binnenplaats from the building, you have to walk through it before you got to your home, you see people hanging around these drug addicts, smoking, but now the buildings have been converted into safer .. I mean the environment is safer now. Because they changed the structures of most of these buildings and they thought about safety and about crime and all these things, so now it’s safer. But in the 90s there was a lot of crime, because the environment also helped in letting the rate of crime go up, but later they changed a lot of things in the surrounding environment, things have been better. But my people, I’m talking of the perspective of a Ghanaian, when it comes to crime I would even say the third (?) generation, those young people who have chance to go to school, some of them are also busy with this cyber crime and stuff like that you know, but when you talk about crime like crime that I used to know in the 90s, that was being done mostly by these Marokkaans and Suriname people, I’m not trying to.. you know .. to be.. like maybe trying to protect my people, but that’s how I saw it yeah. There was some crime, but comparably you know on the whole of South(east) it was maybe only 1 or 2 percent, you know. You cannot attribute that to ...”

**“So it was more like a generalization?”**

“Yeah yeah”

**“But do you feel like that affected the community, so the way that the Dutch media spoke about.. (the Ghanaian community)?”**

“Yeah it was.. those days it did have an impact on our community, because when you were going to look for work, you would be discriminated, because... say ahh... people wouldn’t trust you to... hmm let’s say to entrust something in your hands, like suppose you have a night shop or a snackbar and maybe the owner is a white guy, then maybe I’m looking for.. I really want to work, but because there is no trust, maybe you might feel like when you’re on holidays and maybe if there is trust, I can take over to look after the shop, or the snackbar but due to the happenings those days it was really difficult for people to be entrusted, so that was one of the negative impacts. And also people would go and look for work in the Uitzendbureaus and even if there is jobs they prefer to give it to white people, you know, it took time before they saw the difference between in the blacks who are serious to work and they saw that in the African, it’s still clear here, when you look at the black people working in this community about 60/70 percent are Africans who are working, in the *horeca*, cleaning companies”

***On community needs during these times***

“Yeah we educated our people a lot, especially our kids, because it got to a time you know in the later part of the 90s towards the early 2000s it got to a part, most of the kids, especially the kids who were brought from Ghana you know when they were maybe in their early teens, they come here and they went to school and after middelbaar they wanted to make quick money, so we have to educate them, give information, you know on the radio, the TV and at least it had impact and then they started to go to school to continue to school. And it reflects now, you know, the education of our youths is higher due to the effort we put in in those days, both the community leaders and also the parents.

Because especially in families where you only have single mothers it’s very very difficult to bring up a child. Challenge is maybe you have to go to work in the morning and then when they close you have

to go and do evening job and then you leave these children at home and they can do anything they want to do because there is no father there. So we also got involved as community leaders to encourage the children to be ok and now some are reaping the benefits.”

### ***Questions surrounding political changes***

“I remember there was a time you know, a lot of people, those who were not documented, those who are undocumented, who don’t have papers, some were doing black jobs and the government came out with a law, any factory or company that was found employing illegals they were given a fine. So what most of the people were doing.. they were working, they had to work to save to marry, because yeah it’s...it was not only within Ghanaians even the Polish people before they joined ( the EU), these Eastern Europeans were also doing. People would pay money to people with Dutch nationality or any of the EEC people, they pay and then some were able to succeed some also didnt succeed because when you finish you have to go to the IND, from the interrogation they were able to arrest some people they could see it was like a scam marriage, yeah... so some also profited, some also succeeded, succeeded in marrying, so basically to get legal and to work and to be able to look after their families back home. So it’s got its good sides, it’s got its bad sides, it’s really against the law to do that, when you’re caught you go to prison, but then people started to do it, because that was another way to get legal.”

### ***Effect on community***

“Yeah it affected, but the community always gets a way to go around, because I remember, you know it got to a point that now we have this inburgering system, even if you marry you have to go to Ghana and then come back, you have to do the exams. They keep on changing the law but always people find a way to go around. And one thing that also helped you know, I think during the time of queen Juliana, she gave an ultimatum that anybody who had children in Ghana, if they were Dutch, had Dutch nationality, they could bring their children. So it also helped people even could bring their sister’s children.”

**“When was that ?”**

“That was in the late 80s, towards the early 90s, when queen Juliana was the queen”

**“So like family reunification policies?”**

“Yeah yeah, so it helped a lot, it helped a lot.”

**“So would you say that during the 80s, maybe it was a bit easier to get documentation?”**

“Yeah in the 80s it was a bit flexible, and with time also towards the 90s, the price for paying somebody who is Dutch or somebody who is legal to marry it skyrocketed, you know, it went up. You know because the one having the Dutch nationality if the person is a woman or a lady will say oh when you marry you’re able to bring your.. your family, your children, because after... those days maybe after 3 years or 5 years you can also apply to be Dutch, so as soon as you’re Dutch you’re able to bring your family, and they saw in a way they look at the advantages then they increase the money (laughs). So it was a business which ... it was even favouring both sides, favouring the Dutch , you know, the one with the Dutch and also.. because some people would marry, and then after 5 years, they will marry again, they were making money. So it was not only gaining the immigrant, but also

the Dutch, the one with the Dutch (nationality) was also making some money. (laughs) And the police they knew it, the IND they knew it, they knew it. I remember there was a guy that was caught by the police in a working place and then he didn't have any paper and they took the person to the Ghana embassy in the Hague to try and get the travelling certificates to bring him back home and he said: "I don't come from Ghana" and the policeman said: "No, you are from Ghana" and he said no, they went to the embassy and the embassy official said: if he says he doesn't come from Ghana we can't give him.. you any travelling certificates. So they kept him for about 6 months and they said: "Ok, make sure that you find money and that you go and marry and next time we catch you we keep you for more than 6 months". So they knew what was going on."

**"So there were always ways to go around it."**

***Question on role recognin in times of changing political climate.***

"Yeah normally what, especially when these changes come they do affect us, like we're supposed to be here in the office helping people, but sometimes you get a telephone call from the IND, from the foreign police, we have arrested somebody, could you please go to the home and bring his clothes you know, because sometimes maybe the place he is sleeping, he won't give the right address, maybe there are other people living there who are also illegals or undocumented, so when they ask them: "Can you show us your house" then they will mention this office to them. So when they call then we will say we want to talk to the person, then we talk in our language, we ask: "what is the problem".. "Oh I went to work and then they came to control documents". Yeah, but I'll ask the name and then maybe when they say the name, then I'll tell the police, ok you give us time we will find out where he lives and bring his things, but then the police sometimes they want to force like "oh we want to come and then we go" and we say "no no no, we will bring the things". So we have a way within the system to be able to locate where he lives, and then we go and we take his things."

**"And then report to the IND."**

"Yeah yeah because if you give them the address it's possible they might arrest more people, you know, so.. and also it's like... in the 90s most of these people who also who came here the undocumented they came as refugees and you know there were a lot of wars happening, military governments in Africa. So somebody could even be a Ghanaian and say oh there's a war in Liberia, I come from Liberia, and then based on that will be able to get (documents), so people will always find ways to go around it."

***Question on political representation, opportunities to engage with local politics***

"Now we we really feel at home here, because we have been recognized after 27 years you know with the Recogin, you know we are talking about.. because we have about 20,000 Ghanaians living I think only in Amsterdam and we have been helping the development as recognized the job that we do for our people, and you know we have a lot of churches and pastors and now you don't see people on the streets doing drugs and all these things, because the church also is playing its part. There are many people going to church on Sundays and it's very quiet in the community, there's Christianity going on, so in a way.. so in a way it's helping the community and the government knows what's going on, so we have these police dialogues, which I forgot to tell you, every year we have.. we have a big hall at... and it's organized by the stadsdeel Zuidoost, the Ghanaian community and the police we meet and we discuss the problems you know facing us. And the police wants us to see them as more friendly you know. So we have problems we go to them and they organise, they give us money to

organise the dialogues and it's been going for more than 10 years now, every year we have it two times in June and then in August.

## **Interview 2:**

**Nana Yaw Amoako - Recogin**

**19-03-2021 Amsterdam, the Netherlands**

“Okay. My name is Nana Yaw Amoako. And I have lived here in Holland for, I don't know, maybe 36/37 years. And I work as a journalist and a radio presenter at Radio Recogin in Amsterdam, Recogin being an organisation of Ghanaian communities in the Netherlands, the representative organization, organization of the Ghanaian communities in Netherlands, and we have a radio station as to broadcast and educate the people ..”

**“So you're responsible for their radio?”**

“Yes, yes, yes. I am responsible for the radio and the workers of the radio.”

**“So you're directly in touch with the community through the radio station”**

“Exactly. Apart from the radio, I do DJ and MCs for various activities and occasions. Yes. I'm very, very much in touch with the.. with the people.”

**“Okay. Because how did you get into this role? Did you start by DJing? Or did you do other jobs? When, during your time in the Netherlands?”**

“Yes I've done so many jobs. In fact, the main job I can say is being a flight deck Engineer. Okay. That is to say I studied everything in a in a cockpit, just to make it look as it is for the pilots to. So I just had a certificate from University of the Luchtmacht, that's a university for aviation University. Just for a few months anyway. So I have a certificate for that. So I was working only in the cockpit. And DJ was just a part time thing. It's a hobby. I would say, yeah. So I took to DJ. And later on, I transformed myself into an MC. And, well, I can be proud of myself that in Europe, and even also in America, I'm one of the most respected MCs, for that you can ask everybody around here.”

**“So that's how you got into the radio?”**

“The radio was there. But it wasn't so so big. But during the plane crash, that was in 1992. We had to get information to the people. We had still community radio, which is still there, but has been transformed into something else, but it's still working. And a few ghanaians were also working on there. So I just give them my interest. that I would love to be part of the radio crew and immediately I chipped in in 1992.”

**“So that was shortly after the Bijlmerramp?”**

“Yes, yes. Yeah. And since then, I've been on this radio till now.”

**“Nice. Because I had some specific questions also focusing on the Bijlmerramp. Because in my research, I'm looking also at the media framing and the political changes. And what I've been seeing so far that from, like, 1991/ 1992, there was a lot of like, negative attention on the**

**Ghanaian community. As a result, also, from this crash and some other things that happened. So you were already around during the crash as you said? “**

“Yeah.”

**“And you’ve lived here in Amsterdam?”**

“Yeah. I've lived all.. since since I've been in Holland. Here in in this area. That's.. I've been here since 1985. 84/85 until now, I've just lived in neighbourhood.”

**“So do you know where you were during the plane crash?”**

“Hmm actually, during the plane crash itself on that day, I was in Ghana, and I was returning. I think... a day after the plane crash. So it happened when I was in Ghana. But I was here just two days after that. And that was this was fourth October. And I returned from Ghana. I think when it's 6th of October, yeah something like that in 1992. So yeah.”

**“So you heard about it when you were in Ghana?”**

“Because I was trying to get hold of friends and family. And every... every communication was shut down at that moment. Yeah. So it was difficult. But then, eventually, later, we got to know that... Yeah, but anyway, we lost some friends. But at that time, it happened close to where I was also living, but just it didn't hit my..my flat but the next one. So it just flew over where I was living, just to go into the next one. So yeah.”

**“So it really personally affected you?”**

“Yeah..Yeah. Yeah. Because I had so many friends there. And we lost friends in fact. Yeah, it was.. it was a very sad event. We are living now. We thank God.”

**“Yes, exactly. Yeah. Because in those times, like what were particularly challenges within the community?”**

“Those times, you know, living conditions... And because of, you know, it wasn't so free like now. Those..those times, though, it was okay, because we also came to meet people who have gone through difficult times before us. Those times in the 90s, early 90s was not easy also. So yeah, there was let me see migration papers. And then, yeah, living conditions... wasn't so easy. So, yeah, there were so many basic needs for The Ghanaian people. Yeah.”

**“And at that time, because Recogin kind of came up during that time, after the crash. Were there any other groups or organizations supporting the community?”**

“Yes, in fact there were... there was this.. few groups. Yes, but It wasn't that time Recogin. But it was a Ghanaian community, I would say, opinion leaders and smaller groups, Associations, small associations, you know, who were there to also give a helping hand, but you know, you, you couldn't do a lot. Because everything was in the hands of the government, it was in the hands of the police. So you couldn't get your own access as to how to help your own people who are affected.”

**“So it really depended on the local municipality?”**

“Yes, exactly. Exactly. So they wouldn't allow the Ghanaian community leaders to infiltrate into whatever they are doing, when I don't know nobody knows whether they were hiding something from us whether they didn't want us to know so much. But then everything you want to do, they will refer you to the Municipal Council. Yeah, either way, you go there, they give you the information you want, but they don't give you enough. So yeah, and then trying to find out how many of Ghanaian people were affected. They wouldn't give to you.”

**“How can you.. Because they were not sure about the exact numbers?”**

“Exactly, exactly, they were not sure about the numbers, and they wouldn't know anyway, but then you also try to kind of work with them to tell them that hey, you know, what, this space that is all gone, I knew maybe A, B or C who are living there. And at that moment, people, so many people were undocumented. So, it will also be difficult for them to accept that okay, you knew somebody but who is he? Who is she? When we go into our administration, the person you are mentioning is not there. So, yeah. How do we help such a person's family or how do we compensate such a person's people so.. it was...”

**“So at that time, there wasn't a lot of collaboration between the community and the government.”**

“Yes. It was difficult. Very, very difficult. Yeah. Oh, we did our best, but I think it wasn't so enough.”

**“Do you think that gradually over time that has changed?”**

“Yes, yes. Overtime that has changed. Things have changed very drastically. And for that, I can.. I can tell you because the formation of a few organizations such as recognin, there was also sikaman, which I don't think still..”

**“Yeah does it still exist? Because I've been reading a lot about them. Is it still in existence?”**

“Yeah... Sikaman is a bit.. but I think they have.. they still have a representation, which they are operating on another name Akasanoma. So Akasonama. So I think they exist, but they are not so.. as active as before. Yeah. Recognin has survived all those years. And now I think Recognin is in direct contact with the central government and doing a lot through them, to the people. Especially this pandemic, Recognin is doing a lot through the government, for the community, especially the undocumented. Yeah, so it's going well. And now there is something called the police dialogue, dialogue between the community and the police. Because... some time ago, you couldn't even approach the police about your problems, whether you are documented or undocumented. But now, the platform has been created so well, that whether you are documented or not, you can go to the police. And then tell them whatever is bothering you and they are ready to help”

**“So you would say that earlier people were afraid of going to the police?”**

For being maybe arrested.

**So that also affected both documented and undocumented**

Yeah, yes. Yes.

**Ok because another question I had throughout the.. or from the early 90s, in the media, and there was also a lot of like, criminalization of the community.**

Exactly.

**“There was a lot of focus on drugs or other criminal activities. “**

“Yeah, you know, Ghanaians, wherever we are, we are very hard working. We love to go to work. We like to be paid from our work. While You know, you might have a few people, there's always a few people who will do something else. Yeah. But then the authority will involve the whole..like, generalize, generalize the whole situation. Yeah, there are a lot of Ghanaian illegals, doing wrong things, spoiling the community and.. but that was not the case. So we had to fight, we had to organise ourselves and tell them..”

**“So how did you fight it, through organization?”**

Through organization, through writing letters, attacking the articles that they wrote, they wrote, trying to dispute whatever they saying about us, giving them examples of what ghanaians are doing. So eventually, they came to understand, you know..

**“So, for example, recognin was also very active in fighting that...,”**

very, very, very, very, very active.

**“Because how do you feel like this sort of negative media attention affected the community, Ghanaians in the Netherlands?”**

“Every negative description is not good for the people. You know, when you go to your workplace, and maybe your boss asks you, Hey, I heard yesterday on TV, or I heard it on the news, Ghanaians are doing so many illegal things. You feel like hey, from where, how? you know, and then they start to look down upon you because your people are not good. Maybe they could even change you from wherever you are to a place that's not pleasant for you. Just because of that. So yeah, yeah, sometimes, those negative aspects, those negative comments affected a lot of people.. affected a lot of people, especially with work, because you go to your workplace, and then they start to look at you in a different way than they knew before, because of what they've heard on news, whether it's true or not. Before, they know that's not the case, they have painted you in a different color already. So then all these organizations Recogin, together with other small organizations that comes together to form Recogin and under one big umbrella, had to fight... all these negative dispensations on Ghanaians.”

**“So how would you say it affected you personally?”**

“Me personally, you know, some of us have been in the community for a while, and I would say maybe at my workplace, the way I was with the people, they knew who I was, and they wouldn't even go to that extent of thinking about me being part of whatever, but then, when they tell you that we heard that your people you know, then it feels like.... You know, these people, they always think they will always have something, some doubt also about you, it will definitely affect you, in a way, maybe something in the pipeline for you, they will try to delay it, you know, they find every every ways and means to use whatever they've heard to bring you maybe down or to deny you of something that is rightfully yours.”



**“So you would say it mainly affected you in your work life?”**

“Not only in the work life, also normal life, man. Yeah. Even walking in the streets. Sometimes you meet, even.. even our own black people, these Suriname people will look down upon you because you're African and they've also been hearing things. So it affected us in diverse situations.”

**“Okay. Yeah, well, because in these times of like negative media attention, there was also some political changes throughout the 90s that targeted particularly West African migrant groups, So Nigerian/ Ghanaians. So for example, the *Identificatiewet* that was, I can't remember the exact year, but it was somewhere in the 90s. Or the *Wet Schijnhuwelijken*, so that one targeted, like scam marriages.”**

“Exactly.. exactly.. That is when they brought in those kind of verification of papers, go to your own country, let them verify it, bring it to the Netherlands embassy, let them see if it's genuine. And then after that, even if you're successful in your marriage, they will be just bumping into your house, just to see if it's a real marriage or, you know, they will invite you to the city council or the immigration office. You go there and immediately they say, let's go back to your home.”

**“So you felt like they were really targeting the community?”**

“Exactly. Yes, they did. they did. But all in all, these years, we had to fight it sometimes through the embassy, sometimes, through our own ways.”

**“So were there any other political changes you feel that really affected or targeted the community?”**

“Yeah, because sometimes, you know, especially trying to get our people to go into the political arena, trying to get our own people to go in there so that we vote for them. Yeah. And then, you know, they will use so many things to bring you down. I remember, I can't remember the name, but there was somebody who we all knew was going to make it to the political and then they had to write so many negative things about the person.”

**“Who was this person?”**

And that's what I remember.. something happened in the early late 90s and early 2000s. Yeah, we tried to put somebody.. and there were so many tabloids printing so many unnecessary things about.. who was it at all, I've forgotten, but maybe it will pop up.

**“So it was someone who was trying to get into the local (municipality)?”**

“Yes. So we had to fight it, fight it, but eventually then we started getting people in there. And then Okay, they accepted. accepted us that oh okay after all we know what you're doing. And that has gone on till now that we have one of the head of this Municipal Council is a Ghanaian. Yes. Yes. In the name of Mr. Eddie Adusei. And yeah, he's now, apart from the area burgemeester, I think he's the next, you know, which is a very big achievement for us. Because in the 90s, it would have been difficult....”

**“to get political representatives”**

Exactly, but during, after those 90s, coming to the early 2000s, middle 2000s, we managed to get about five Ghanaians to go into...

**“To get into local politics.”**

Yes, yes.

**“Okay, so you feel like, at a time, like during the 90s, the community wasn't really given space to engage?”**

No, not at all..

**“But now it has been..”**

“Now it has changed, it has changed. But yet, we are not represented so much. But at least one or two, sometimes here and there. Well. It gives you a good feeling that after all, we also have a representative. And then they can hear our voices too.”

**“So yeah, you already said that in these times that community organizations really try to fight against these negative (public/political narratives) or stereotypes.”**

“Yes, There was a time when this police brutality, just bumping into people's house to chase out illegal migrants when one Ghanaian... when one guy was chased. When these.. the police went into somebody's house, and not even once about three times and people were jumping from the *balkons*.”

**“Yeah, I read about that.”**

“Yeah.”

**“And that happened like five times?”**

“Yeah, yeah. So one time we had all...we just had to come out, demonstrate on the streets.”

**“So when was that, because that was the early 90s right?”**

“So that was... was it? Was it early? middle 90s. It was about I think, like, 96 or 99. Those dates...”

**“Because I read in the archives, like those were initially like, mysterious deaths, people jumping from the balconies.”**

“Yeah, because you would just be there and a policeman would just bang into your house. And just because people were not having staying permits and things, then they had to run for their lives, because they don't want to go back to Africa. They don't want to go back to Ghana. And then it was becoming too much. So then we had to act.”

**“How did.. how did Recogin for example act, like what did you do to support the community?”**

“During..during that demonstration, I think then the police had to go through the organizations to tell the people to calm down. They're going to try to do something about it. And then because it was big news. Actually, there's one thing that I remember that was.. yeah, we all didn't want to do it, but we had to, for them to hear us. In fact, there was an ambulance carrying somebody who is dying, we

wouldn't allow it to pass. So it had to turn round and go through a very long.. you know, somebody is dying, but you're also killing our people. Yeah. So why should our people die, but then you also wouldn't, so we wouldn't allow the ambulance to go. We had to make it stay and then the police had to come in and then calm us down, and then direct the ambulance through different...you know, it wasn't good, but we had to, for them to hear, hear us. And since then, I think the chase was minimized. And I think since that time, when one pastor, pastor Koney, tried to bring the police and the community together. He started with this police dialogue. He tried to build a bridge between police and the ordinary Ghanaian. So he had to talk to the police commissioners, in the meantime, invite all Ghanaians to come in. Just come there. Nobody will do anything to you. Say whatever is on your mind. The police take note and then well, since then, I think things have been okay. Yeah.”

**“Okay so really, from the police dialogue? So when did those start?”**

“The police dialogue, I think started early 2000, early 2009 or 2009? No. Not early, early ,late. Getting into the 2010s. So I think 2009/ 2010 I think it started.”

**“So before that there wasn't really collaboration...”**

“No, no, no. So then, it was like every every two months, every three months, the people go meet the police, and then very big forum. And then we invite people from the municipal council, even from Central stad for them to come talk to them.”

**“So different community leaders?”**

“Yes. And everybody, everybody recognised. Everyone was invited. And that has had a very good impact. Very, very big impact that, yes, if there was more collaborative collaboration with the police, and then the police to stop the chase, and it has yielded good results.”

**“Because Would you say that these times of like, you're speaking of police chases..chasing people? How did that affect you yourself?”**

“Well, myself, you know, not me myself, per se. But friends, yes. Okay. If it affects a friend, it affects me. Yeah, some of my friends were brought back to Ghana, just because the papers were not right. Even some who were in the process, but with difficulties, some, even some had lawyers, but before the lawyers could be aware, they were gone already. They've been taken away. You know, so then you lose friends, you lose family, not to lose that they are dead, but were sent back. Some, some of them could even take their belongings. Yes, they were illegal, but they were working and they were buying things for themselves. They were achieving some properties. But then you go, we would just, one polythene bag, but then we had to struggle and get out whatever we can find, and then send it to write as it affected some of us. Because when this person is in Ghana, then this is the time you also have to show them that you care whether you have or not. You have to try and send something for them to survive, because down there, there's nothing for them to do.”

**“You had lots of your friends...”**

Families. Yeah, yeah.

**“Yeah, I think I went through most the questions. Thank you very much for your time. I don't know if you have more questions or anything to add?”**

“Actually, not much. But what I would say is, well, now the Ghanaian community has come far. And now we've established you know, Recogin represents Ghanaians in the Netherlands, but Recogin is not so broad outside. You see, so now we've established the Ghana union, which has now involved all the provinces in Holland, to come under one umbrella. Which Recogin is also part of. Recogin has managed to gather all the associations and groups, especially in Amsterdam or in North Holland, but then to reach far has been a bit tricky. So now Ghana Union, you know, has taken that mantle under the supervision of the embassy in The Hague.

**“So Ghana union right now is really the umbrella?”**

“Yes the biggest, though it has not fully taken control. Recogin is doing its own thing, and even with Ghana Union, you know, Recogin will still continue to do whatever it's doing. But it will be still be part of the Ghana Union. So that we will all work together.”

**“And unite that community...because how would you.. looking at that community? What would you say are the the key groups or organizations that are really supporting.. Because of course you can also think of religious leaders like pastor Koney..”**

Pastor Koney? Yeah, I think they have their Pentecostal Council, they have the Nananom, that's the chiefs and queens they have their own. Now Recogin and all the other associations. And yes, we also have these smaller fitness groups. Yeah. Which I'm also part of one. We have.. we call the friendly fitness club of Amsterdam. And there are other fitness, little fitness groups also. We gather every weekend, do sporting activities, play football. And then everybody chip in little contributions.

**“So there are lots of lots of different small organisations”**

Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Okay. So we're doing a lot.

**“It was really nice to hear all your insights and perspectives. So yeah, thank you very much.”**

You're welcome. And I hope every.. your your your study will be successful. And then yeah, you reach your.. your heights.

### **Interview 3:**

**Kofi Baafi Owusu-Sekyere - Akasanoma**

**09-04-2021 Amsterdam, the Netherlands**

“I'm Baafi Owusu Sekyere. Yeah, as I said, my roots are.. I come from Asante Mampong but I grew up mostly in Kumasi, schooled up to university in Kumasi before traveling. So hmm, I actually trained as electrical engineer in Ghana before traveling. So..”

**“And when did you arrive in the Netherlands?”**

Oh, the early 80s. Early 80s. Well, actually, I had a stopover in France in Paris. You know. I. Yeah, I was at the Sorbonne for some short study before, you know, moving to the Netherlands. Yep.

**“Okay. so first to France and then you arrived in the Netherlands?”**

“Yes. We can put it that way.”

**“And did you settle in Amsterdam?”**

“Yeah in Amsterdam, Where else?”

**“Well some go to... my dad went to Rotterdam”**

“Oh, yeah. They were.. those were afraid men. Amsterdam was too hot for those people. So they went to those places. Well, anyway, Rotterdam. I think those who were mostly in Rotterdam were, you know, sea men, because of the port. A lot of Ghanaians who settled first in Rotterdam were those sea people.”

**“Okay. Yeah. Because now you're based in Amsterdam southeast or?”**

No, no, I'm based in Amsterdam East, Oost

**“Okay.”**

“Oh, yeah. Wow. Well, we lived in South East before.. before moving to the east. We moved here in 1986, then we moved to the east.”

**“You said, what, what kind of jobs did you do when you arrived in the Netherlands? Because you said you were a trained engineer.”**

“Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Okay. Well, yeah. When I came here, first, you know, I was trying to find a job as an engineer, but yeah, it was hmm...well, they'll always, you know, just push you away, Oh, we don't know, your, your qualifications is not known and all that. And... well, then they always ask, okay, if (...) will, you know, evaluate it and all that a new feature. Okay. But well, we, we can just tell you what it is we don't give any paper for that. So even I was.. I tried to enroll in that time hogeschool Amsterdam, just to you know, get something. They also told me well you have this and well, it's a waste of time and space to come and repeat this thing. So, yeah. They felt it wasn't necessary. Anyway. I Incidentally, in my job search, there was this, this training came up. It was at that time that you know, automation was catching up here. And well, I joined it and... well trained in digital electronics. Actually, actually, it wasn't anything, I'll say that it was even. Yeah, lower than, you know, my level. But then well, with that, you know, I got a job at IBM. First, I was in hardware. And then I moved to software. Yeah. And yeah, becoming Yeah, as400 specialist in systems and network. I worked for some time and then was detached to the Amsterdam police, at that time Amsterdam police had, you know, bought, you know, some as400 systems of IBM. And they needed specialists, you know, for that system. And so, well, I went to work and then well, I was absorbed into it. Because of, you know, the level of my access to information. So I had to, I had to be sworn in and all that. Yeah. And then so I worked at Amsterdam police, you know, for some time, and then moved into consultancies. I worked with other consultancy organisations in.. Okay, yeah. Before I left Amsterdam, I got into Amsterdam, police, you know, as systems and network management. And then later, you know, I moved into information security. Where I also trained at the Netherlands police

Institute as an information security functionary, which is sort of a master's level, postmasters actually. And then yeah, worked for some time and then moved on into consultancy. Yeah, I worked at consultancies for some time as an information security professional and then... later also did IT audit and well got certified as IT certified IT audit of Caesar. That's from (...). Okay. So yeah, continued as a consultant in information security and IT audit and then became an independent consultant. That's what I've been doing, you know, for some time now a long time, but I'm actually now officially retired. So I'm not actively, you know, doing it but I mean, when gigs, come here and there you know, I pick them up I do them.. some consultancy work here. there. Yeah.”

**“Is that also how you got into your work in the community?”**

“Hmm work in the community was actually how do I say. It was a hobby that, you know, got out of hand. Because, well, in those days in the 80s Yeah, the community most of ghanians, you know, well.. here, we speak Dutch. And most ghanians didn't speak Dutch, we speak English. And even, yeah, a lot of them even had, you know, for a lot of them English wasn't even very, you know, easy, let alone Dutch. And so for those of us who, you know, could speak, read and write Dutch..it became an issue. Because when.. well.. someone gets to know that, oh, you can.. you can express yourself in Dutch you can read and write Dutch. Then they tell people and yeah, well, people will be calling you, coming to you, read my letters for me, reply my letters, you know, at home. And so, yeah, it wasn't so easy. So, some friends, and I, who were, I mean, in the same, you know, soup, decided that, well, why instead of people coming to us at home, and sometimes, you know, you don't have time for yourself, why don't we, you know, formalise it and form an organisation to be able to regulate it to support our people who you know, can't find their way out in the system. So, in 1988, we formed the Sikaman foundation. Well, before that, you know, there have been attempts, you know, to form a Ghanian organization, and they all failed. So, some people get started, you know, forming small organizations based on, you know, where they come from in Ghana and all that. But, I mean, those were just social oriented, and were not as targeted to, you know, our lives, you know, livelihoods over here.”

**“Those were smaller organizations?”**

“Yeah, so we found Sikaman foundation, *stichting* Sikaman, and then well.. started working, and then you know, interacting also with the...in the beginning with the local government. So, in the beginning, we didn't have an office. So, we started working with, we contacted another organisation, what was the... Ananse.. they had a *buurthuis* somewhere in Strandvliet. So we used to do consultations, and I think twice a week in the afternoons, while we used to run shifts. So when you're on duty, then you arrange that, you know, maybe you take a day off or half day off from your work, and you go and sit there to attend to people, their letters, you know, reading, translating, maybe replying, making phone calls for them and all that. Yeah, until let's say 19... Actually, we became more political in the early 1990s. Because in our lobbying, we realized that, you know, we should, you know, have, you know, get into politics to be able to, you know, make our issues bring our issues onto the political table. So we adopted a strategy of, yeah, just, you know, spreading ourselves into political parties. It wasn't actually... yeah... what the ideology you believe in, but it was strategic that you know, Each gets into a political party, so that you can... when there are issues, you can bring them onto that political parties, you know, discussions and agenda.”

**“That was from the early 90s. (...)Sorry, you said that was from the early 90s. onwards, or?”**

“Yeah, from the early 90s onwards. So well I, I was in Oh, well, I'll say still, I got into PVDA, Partij van de Arbeid. And, well, I got myself attached to a guy, Surinamese guy, Leo, who actually mentored me, I mean, in a whole lot of things, and then he could, you know, yeah. Link me to people when there are some issues and all that and, yeah, Chairman at that time, joined CDA. Some joined D66 and all that. Yep. And so, yeah, and that was it. And so, we pushed, so much so that we were able to get, you know, the first Ghanaian counselor, who, incidentally was one of the few ladies you know, active in the organisation, she was, she is now late. She was the wife of our chairman at that time. I introduced her to Partij van de Arbeid. And then.. she was also very dynamic. And we pushed, support her..supported her for her to get into the *stadsdeelraad* in Amsterdam Zuidoost. Yeah, so.. Mrs Nana Yaa Adu Ampoma...the first Ghanaian counselor.”

**“When was that exactly?”**

“When was that? The early 1990s.. Well, I'll have to do the research. Maybe I can check later on. Well, then, well, before.. well, in the course of the 80s and early 90s here, and there, you know, when there is any negative, you know, news about Africans and mostly Ghanaians you see, you know, the Dutch press, especially Telegraph picks it up and blows it, you know, so big. Yeah. And then the radio and televisions also pick it up and ..yeah..make it...you know, blow it out of proportion. But oh, well, we didn't in those days, we were not so strong. But it was in 90.. the spring of 1992. When, you know, some guys and ladies actually were arrested in connection with some drug issues and it was blown out of proportion. And the Amsterdam Police also used it as a big, you know, success. But actually it was a storm in the teacup. Because in the end, and while they say they have arrested the mafia, the Ghanaian mafia and all that. But in the end, I think it was only one.. only one person or maximum two people who were convicted.”

**“They really blew it out of proportion?”**

“They blew it out of proportion. And they said oh they've arrested so many... actually. they arrested people, a lot of people, but I mean, they didn't have any evidence. I think it was very shoddy. And they started I think they started their investigations and weren't getting anywhere. They were tapping, you know, phones until someone calls another and then calls another and then they link everybody and that sort of thing. Wow. So when that happened, while it became a big.. even on international news, it was on the front pages in the news of the newspapers, radio, television. I mean and they said the Ghanese mafia. Yeah, in Amsterdam and all that and yeah. So we felt you know, it was actually stigmatising. So we demanded to have a meeting with the then, Mayor, Burgemeester Ed van Thijn to register a protest, actually, because they linked it also, with illegal immigrants. They said there were 10,000 illegal immigrants in the Bijlmer alone. Which was actually, out of proportion.”

**“Yeah. The Amsterdam police said that right?”**

“Yeah. And later we, we, we realized that, you know, the police are being given a whole lot of money to combat crime, and they were not having anything to show for and they got this and they wanted to make it, you know, sort of how do they call it.. *'parade paardje'*. Yeah, we, we have booked some success and all that.”

**“Solved the case..So is that kind of like a turning point for your organization to really become politically active?”**

“Yeah, yeah, yeah. And so yeah, we got a meeting with that mayor. And so even, and then with press and even the international press were all there and wanted to know what the outcome will be. Because we had already expressed our disgust for that thing being blown out of proportion, because people were losing their jobs. Because of that, because the companies that didn't want any trouble they say: Oh you're Ghanaian. We don't know if you're legal or illegal. So yeah, don't come to work anymore. We don't want any problems. You see.”

**“So it really impacted the community.”**

“Yeah ... impacted the community. And so we met, we met the burgemeester, behind closed doors, and expressed, you know, disgust and all that. We had a very frank, you know, discussion with him. And then afterwards, well, he made his press conference, and we did ours. And it was from there that we, we proved to him that Ghanaians are hardworking, and not criminals. And so from there, that is where whenever you hear Oh, Ghanaians are hardworking. That is where it came from. And so it came from his mouth.”

**“And how did you prove that to him?”**

“Well, we proved that to him, at least with those of us who met him. Where we were working at that time, I was.. I was at IBM. And yeah, I mean, all the executives they had their own, you know, jobs. Yeah, so we proved to him. And we also proved to him that, you know, you can check from the bloemenveiling, the hotels, the schiphol how Ghanians are earning their living, you know, decently and not engaging in any criminal activities.”

**“Yeah.”**

“Yeah. So. So that is how, you know, we actually came out, you know, as an organisation politically, so people started and our institutions started, you know, contacting us and we contacted them and they knew us. And then in that same year, in October, the plane crashed into the two buildings, you know, at the joint of the two buildings, Kruitberg and Groeneveen. And we were the first organization to actually set up a table...a desk actually, at the Bijlmer sports center, where...which was the coordinating center for the victims. And, incidentally, actually, it happened on a Sunday, and we had an executive meeting in the Bijlmer, so after the meeting, when I was coming home in East. Well, on the(...), yeah, at some point I felt like some gush of wind, you know, pushing the car. For a while I didn't mind. I came home. And we were expecting some visitor from the Bijlmer. And my wife said, Oh, the lady has called that, you know, there's a plane has crashed in the Bijlmer. So the whole place is sealed off, so they can come, I said oh this lady, she can tell stories, how can a plane crash in the bijlmer, it's not so close to schiphol. And I thought I thought, well, maybe a sports plane, you know, flying over.. over there and then crashed. Then we were watching the television and then it was on. Then I got a call from my colleagues that Yeah, we have to assemble again, to see what we can do. So I had to drive again back to the bijlmer. And I couldn't even get in because the whole place was sealed off. I drove round round round and the closest place I could get to, to park is you know around the pony park near Diemen. So I parked somewhere there.”

**“So your office was located in the Bijlmer but you lived in East at the time?”**

“Yes. And so at that time, we decided to have the meeting at our treasurer's home. And he was living at Gerenhof. So I walked to that place, and we had a meeting and from there we went to the assembling, you know, places. And the last point was the Bijlmer sports center to see how many



people you know, are affected and all that. Well, incidentally, we used to live in that building Kruitberg, but we had left, you know, some years earlier. And one of our colleagues that within the organization, he was still living there, and he lost three, three children. So we hung around and to see how much we could do. And then we set up the next.. in the morning, we set up a table to receive the Ghanaian victims, registered them.. our own, and all that, those of us who had to... had to go to work. Well, I was at that time at Utrecht, IBM, Utrecht, actually, so I had to go to work and then take half day off, come back. So that's how we started and we registered so many victims. Some loss couldn't be found and all that and later, they found some they reported, then we strike out the names and all that. So that started. And then we later Kwaku had an office and later they gave us you know, a room to operate from. And then that started, you know, real office work, Kwaku we were there for I think for about a year before we moved to Kralenbeek .. what was it..24 for some time, and then we were able to get our own office at Kralenbeek 100R.”

**“So because you shared that in the early 90s there was a lot of negative media attention. How did this or did you see this sort of shifting maybe after the plane crash?”**

“Well, we worked, we worked actually hard towards that because that time even when.. during the plane crash, when we were actually grieving.. people lost people, you know, killed, you know, Ghanaians were the most... about 14 out of 40 something that were Ghanaians and so Ghanaians had the maximum casualty. You see, and even then when journalists (said): “the police came to us, they want to have our list”. We told them: “Go away. What do you mean? You want our list for what?” They say: “Yeah, they want..” We told them yes if they don't stop that thing... and we reported them to the mayor, that the police should be advised to keep off.. you know.. our list, because we don't work for them. If they want any list, they should do it themselves. And then.. well, the insult was that even they come and they will be asking how many illegals are dead. And also the journalists, and actually, we told them our piece of mind. That's nonsense to even be asking how many illegals are dead? Are they not human beings? Ask how many people are dead? Is there a difference between a legal person and an illegal person dead? That's absolute nonsense. So we told them off time and time again and warned them not to come to, you know, ask any stupid questions.”

**“Yeah so the media really focused on sort of the illegal legal aspect?”**

“Illegal, I mean, only the negative aspects of it. They were not interested in how many people are dead, but were interested in how many illegals are dead. And that was absolute nonsense, and even very insensitive. Well so from there, actually. Yeah, we, we were pushing and, you know, others out were also coming to us for you know, the right information to, to balance things, you know, as compared to what was you know, being churned out in the... especially in the rightest media, like Telegraph and the rest. Yeah, so that's how and then we pushed even those who.. Ghanaians who had lost their homes, and all that, were sleeping in the Bijlmer sport centre. They brought mattresses. And we said no that is inhumane. How can you expect people to be sleeping on mattresses in the sports hall, with people everybody's walking around. No. So we forced them to find hotels for them and Novotel... they rented Novotel for them and then in the evenings, they bring busses and bring them to Novotel to spend the night. And then in the mornings, they bring them back to the Sports Centre. Because that was where, you know, things were being coordinated. And then later, you know, we forced them to find temporary accommodations for them, those who lost their, you know, houses, apartments. And so and that was also what we did, yeah.”

**“So really active on the frontline. Were there other organizations at the time present? Like Ghanaian organisations.”**

“At that time, there was no Ghanaian organisation. I mean, there were only the small organizations, but they were not politically active and they were not actually cut out to do these things. Because even when we started, some of our own people were chastising us that we are too known too known, I don't know if you understand it, when the Ghanaians say you are too known. These people they are too known too known, they want to help everything... we we we don't want trouble. Yeah, we don't want these people to you know, send us away and these people are making too known too known and all that. But well we pushed forward.”

**“Yeah. Because I'm also wondering like...because I've been doing some archival research, I have been going into the old newspapers. So that's also where I've been seeing Sikaman mentioned quite frequently. But how exactly did you really sort of fight these negative narratives in the media or political narratives?”**

“Well, well, we found, you know, there were some.. Yeah.. Newspapers, which were, you know.. well, reasonable. I mean, once a while we got, yeah, interviews with Volkskrant and het Parool, where we could put our issues across how they were meant. And we also had our own newsletter, which we used to publish, you know, twice, twice. No, once in two months. I mean, that's a... that's a copy. Which we use to spread, you know, widely free of charge. You see, so if anybody subscribe to that, every month, we post it to you.”

**“Yeah. And what was the target audience? For the newsletter?”**

“The target audience, Ghanians and non Ghanians? alike? And also institutions? Yeah. We send them also to institutions. I mean, like the stadsdeel, the gemeente Amsterdam and all that we used to send them also copies of this? Yeah. And yeah, be after, you know, because of what happened in 1992, we decided to actually organise an exhibition to actually showcase what the contribution of Ghanaians in the Netherlands, you know, politically and economically. And, well, this is the brochure, actually. And we named it “Ghanese trots aan de Amstel”. It was a photo exhibition. And the photos were taken of Ghanians in their normal.. Yeah, life. I mean, like, at their workplace, working. in the Netherlands, at their workplaces, and well, in the church. And activities, actually, which ghanaians were organizing, and all that were in that photo exhibition. And a few years later, I think three years later, we organised another exhibition. And that is the brochure of it, and that is the *Wijde wereld is mijn web*. Actually, we were trying to link the historical.. make the historical links between the Netherlands, Suriname, Ghana and Indonesia. We wanted to do that. But I mean, that Indonesia bit was a bit expensive. So we took it out and made it you know, a triangular thing. You know, Netherlands, Ghana, Suriname, that historical link in an exhibition, so we used this, like the Ananse story. I hope you you know about it. Which is? Well, we call it Anansesem in Ghana. So..So We.. that's why we named it and Ghanaians and Surinamers have also come to meet again in the Netherlands. you see. The link was actually created by the Dutch. And we have come to meet, So, yeah, we organised a second, you know, exhibition.”

**“And how were these actions received by the Ghanaian community, but also the wider Dutch public?”**

“Oh, the wider Dutch. It was very positive. Because, as I said, the first.. the first exhibition actually even traveled, because well we, we opened it in Amsterdam Southeast. And then we later moved it to the Stadhuis Amstel 1. And it was also mounted in Amstelveen. And also I think hoorn... I think there was another.. another place that it was mounted. Yeah..”

**“So it was really well received.”**

“Yeah it was really well received because people even didn't know why Ghanians are here and all that. Because even in the beginning the Dutch, actually knew all, oh, well, Suriname, Antilles, Indonesia, they were their colonies. And so they are here due to the colonial past, and then the Moroccans and Turkish they were brought here to work. Okay, so they know them as guest workers. But they didn't understand why Ghanians were here and so in the beginning, they were, you know, categorising us as refugees. But we were not refugees. you see, and so the Dutch people could ask you, but how come you're here? Why did you come here and what? Right. And then we will tell them that, you know, you guys were at our place, you know, 300 years ago. So we are paying a visit back. So you don't ask why we are here. Yeah. We are paying a visit by return visit? Yeah, and wow, actually, well, they'll say, Oh, yeah, they didn't invite you. But we didn't need any invitation. You didn't come with invitation when you were coming to our place. So why do we need an invitation we will come and then we'll find our a way. So that's why they they were suspicious of ghanaians because they didn't understand how we could survive uninvited and you could we could survive here. And before they knew, you know, we had multiplied. Yeah. And they thought, you know, we were actually involved in some criminal activities to be able to survive, but actually, that wasn't it..we weren't actually involved in criminal activities, unless you want to say that to survive by, you know, using someone's passport to go and sweat work to be paid, is criminal Oh, then that is it. But I don't see that as criminal , no.”

**“There was a lot of ignorance on the Dutch side. Yes, knowing the history and having all these stereotypes maybe about the Ghanaian community?”**

“Yeah. They said oh they are using fake papers and all that? but ah yeah, what actually.. I mean, what do you call fake papers? Yeah. I mean, we we we work with our sweat to be paid. And so how we get a job.. I mean, for us, it is a way to survive. But if I.. if I don't, if people don't use fake papers to steal, but to work. Then why should it be so much and they blow it up as if.. you know.. people are using fake papers to commit crime. But it wasn't so. Ghanians were not doing that. They were only using... maybe other people's papers, just to work and the work was there. And mostly, you know, everybody knows that if the citizen.. the work the citizens want a foreigner can't get, it's only the work the citizens aren't interested that foreigners can get. So that's what we were doing.”

**“Yeah. And looking at that, because I am also looking at sort of the political changes in the 90s. And there were some changes that really targeted West African groups. So, for example, the *Wet Schijnhuwelijken* or the *identificatiewet*. How would you say that these political changes affected the community?”**

“Well, I mean, well, it became and it made things you know, more difficult. But I mean they made this schijnhuwelijk as if you know, it was created by Africans. The Dutch do it in the US, in Canada, everywhere they go they want to have, you know, permanent stay. I mean, they do schijnhuwelijk. I mean, in in America to get green..green.. green card. So, I mean, what, what is the alternative? You

have come here, and you want to get yourself regularised, were they prepared to accept you that, hey, I'm here. I want to work. I mean, give me a stay to work. No, the only way you could legalise yourself over here was either you come here as a refugee, and they investigate. And they see that you are actually a political refugee, and they give you that status, then you can stay else they would just you know, repatriate you. Yeah. Or you marry a Dutch national. So, so in effect, Ghana hasn't been a country where it was very easy to call yourself a refugee. No, So the only way.. the only way left for a Ghanaian or a Nigerian to get himself or herself regularised was to marry. Yeah, okay. And yeah, if you have to marry a Dutch citizen and let's say you are already married. you are not in I mean, in the mood or interested in marrying anybody else or even you want to you want someone to marry, but you haven't gotten the right person to marry? What do you do to regularise yourself, you can ask someone to help you. And it's done all over the world. That's what people use to get, you know, regularise themselves. So, so it's nothing so specific. It's done everywhere. everybody does it. So the *schijnhuwelijk* and all that you know, I see it as just nonsense actually. It's nothing new. And it's not peculiar.”

**Because I think that probably the Dutch.. the Dutch politics they probably really targeted specific groups**

“Yes, well, they.. they targeted I mean, they always hide behind your.. you know, our country is so small, we are overpopulated, we can't have too many people and all that. I mean, that's absolute nonsense. I mean, are people, you know, walking over each other's head? You call this place overpopulated, it's actually absolute nonsense.”

**Unknown Speaker 49:48**

**So how did you as Yeah, how did you as a community organisation, respond to this increased tightening of immigration control, this political targeting of Ghanaian..**

“Well, we always try to put things into perspective. Yes. Because while we, we, we can't tell the politicians that that politician is not to make laws for this country. But we put things into perspective that if some laws are actually made to target, you know, our group, then we would, you know, speak out that, I mean, it should be well, you know, formulated. And also, the implementation should be regulated. Because that's why in Amsterdam, we.. we are.. we were able to actually get it on the political agenda, though I mean, they made these laws, but Amsterdam, I mean, we made Amsterdam municipality say that: Well we will, you know, maintain the laws, but we have priorities. We are not going to send policemen to go after illegals, because there are people committing crimes, which we have to solve. So that's a priority. So they were.. Amsterdam made it clear that they were not going to send policemen out to go and chase illegals. But if.. if you are an illegal, and you commit crimes, and you get.. yeah the police gets you in connection with crimes, then they won't release you. Yeah, then that's another issue.”

**“So locally you were really able to influence the ...”**

“Yeah. Yes. Yes. Because previously, even the police.. the police will be walking around and then even at bus stops they see some black people they (would) stop and search (and start) talking to them to see if they speak Dutch. If you don't speak Dutch, then they'll ask okay: “Where do you come from? Where is your identity?” And then they arrest you and then process you for repatriation. But we fought for these things. We saw that as harassment.”

**“Okay, because that was just through like lobbying with the local municipality that you were able to...”**

“Yes. And even with, well, examples of people who are not illegals, but constantly being stopped and questioned about who are you? Your identity and all that. We said, no, we find it discriminatory. Because why don't they stop white people too, because there also white illegals here. So why don't they...so it's a targeting. And so if you are not stopping everybody, then don't stop anybody. You should have a reason to question someone about their papers. And that reason, reasonable reason should be that, you know, a crime is committed. And so you want to know who that person is and well, that's reasonable reason. But not someone standing somewhere or just minding his own business walking somewhere, and then you see him you go: “Hey, stop.” No.”

**“Yeah. Okay. So in that way, you were really able to engage locally with the municipality. Were there...so that was throughout the 1990s. Or was it shortly after the Bijlmer disaster?”**

“After the Bijlmer crash, I mean, we carried on, you know, trying to influence, you know, laws that could be abused, to discriminate against us. Well we can say that, you know, well, if you see schijnhuwelijk, we can't say that don't take action. Well, that's the law. But then you don't actually actively go after people that if they are going to marry you are going to question them, you are going to investigate them and all that. No, you should have a reasonable reason to question, or to investigate?”

**“I think we've covered a lot of the questions that I had. So yeah, thank you so much for participating. I don't know if you have any...”**

“Even we have taken that thing even further, in Amsterdam. Well, in this time in cooperation with Pastor Koney, we reached out to organising this dialogue for African community and police dialogue. And we have been able to convince Amsterdam, the Amsterdam police, that even if someone is illegal, and that person is being cheated, or is being a victim of crime, that person should be able to walk into a police station to report and get out without being questioned. The person can say, yeah, I don't have papers. But that shouldn't be an issue. So that, you know, those who don't have papers can't always be victims of crimes. So in Amsterdam, you can, if you're... an illegal can walk into a police station, and report a crime and go out...”

**“Without having to fear...”**

“Without having to fear ..yeah, I mean, the person can say: Well, I don't have papers and this is a crime committed against me, or I saw...”

**“Yeah. And that was the result of your work, basically?”**

“Yeah. Yeah, they were trying to see if they could replicate it in I think Utrecht and Den Haag and Rotterdam. I don't know how far they've gone.”

**“Yeah, because I'm wondering if.. if this was mainly in Amsterdam, indeed. Of course, there's also a community in the Hague, Rotterdam, and yeah, maybe a bit smaller. But what it was or what it is currently like there (in other cities). But yeah. Is there any.. anything else you'd like to share?”**

“Well, that.. I mean, I mean, there are.. there are a lot of things, you know, like, let’s see I had a few things. Yeah. I mean, like.. like.. this.. this book, *Kofi een koningskind*. And we, we advised, actually, this came out of our first or second exhibition, we had wanted to mount it at the KIT, Tropenmuseum. But then they said they, you know, listened and everything. They said Oh, they only mount their own exhibitions. They don't allow, you know, others to mount exhibition. So that gave them the idea and they were at our exhibition, and then they decided to make a children's, you know, exhibition about the Asante kingdom.

**“That was a really long time ago, right?”**

“That was, is it 2000 I think”

**“I remember, I vaguely remember as a kid, I think me and my sister went there.”**

“You went there, okay. So we advised and, well, that is the book. So they gave me, you know, with compliments about, you know, yeah, this exhibition. So, on that..we advised on that. And then there is this book Tandoori. It was published by Amsterdam, gemeente Amsterdam. It's a story book, actually, a collection of stories in 2004. And yeah, I contributed.”

**“And what kind of stories are in that book?”**

“Well, stories I mean, it's for children actually, it was meant for schools, stories from all over the world actually by, you can say that communities that are represented in Amsterdam. So you have stories from Suriname, Turkey and Morocco, Indonesia and all that. So you have a Ghanaian story in there. I actually gave three stories, but there wasn't enough space so they published only one Ghanaian story. Well, I mean, these are some of the things you know, we have been doing actually to project the community in the system.”

**“Yeah. Yeah. So, so also creating awareness about the Ghanaian community living in the Netherlands and the history, or the historical links between the Netherlands and Ghana.”**

“Yeah. And another thing we.. we also organized in 2002, the 300 years Dutch-Ghana relationship where the Otumfuo, the Asantehene came, we organized that too. Actually, the 300 years, is actually Dutch-Asante relationship. It's not Dutch-Ghana because at that time, you know, Ghana didn't actually exist. And the Dutch had already been at the coast for almost 100 years. Until the formation of Asante when Asante became, you know, so powerful and conquered and all that. Then the Dutch being business people, saw that, they'll need to, you know, yeah, have a good relationship with the Asante for the trade to go on. And so that's.. they sent an emissary or you can call it an ambassador to Kumasi, as an.. yeah, what was the name? Van Nijendaal or something. So he was the first, maybe the first Dutch Ambassador outside the...outside Europe. Yeah. And in exchange of that, you know, the Asantehene sent two princes to the Netherlands, one son and one nephew. And well, they came, they studied and ...”

**“I think I also read that book about it.”**

“Yeah, yeah. Arthur Japin, yeah he wrote the book. Yeah. So. So yeah, those are some of the things you know, we have been doing, you know, to, yeah, project, the community and put the community in the positive light.”

## **Interview 4**

### **Samuel Ekow Lamptey**

#### **23-04-2021 Amsterdam, the Netherlands**

“My full name, that is stated in my passport that is Samuel Ekow Lamptey. But I'm popularly called Ekow Lamptey. So that's how people call me here. Hmm I came for the first time to Holland in 1980 through an exchange program. Because whilst I was in Ghana, I was a volunteer, a member of an organisation called voluntary work camp association of Ghana. I became a member when I was in secondary school, I started teaching in primary schools. So on holidays, I used to go work camping. We were building schools and hospitals in villages in Ghana. That's how I came in contact with a lot of Europeans, born from Holland, England, Germany, America and Denmark and France. We had this network of European participants in the voluntary work camp association who joined us from Europe to...”

**“Who came to Ghana to help with... So that's how you also made your way to...”**

“So then my first experience in Europe was exchange program, which was a work camp here in the Netherlands and I did it in Amsterdam, I was invited by SIW, Stichting werkkamp internationaal....Stichting international werkkamp, their headquarters is in Utrecht. So I was invited to do the werkkamp here in Amsterdam. We were all gathering tables and books for a school in Tanzania. That time there was this issue of apartheid. So people from South Africa were in Tanzania, so we organised this work camp to gather things, we payed for them school.. school materials, chairs, tables, books, pencils. So we did everything for four weeks, packaged them in a container to be shipped to Tanzania. After that I did some rounds in Holland to see the country and stay with students. And also members of the SIW, they showed me around or so. After three months, I went back to Ghana.”

**“That was in 1980?”**

“That is in 1980. But before I came I met my current wife in Ghana. She was also doing workcamp in Ghana. So since then we have been together. When I came the second time that was in 1983 and from 1983 I decided to stay in Holland.”

**“And what kind of.. so 1983 you decided to stay in Holland? And did you continue with this work you were doing?”**

“Deciding to stay in Holland means that you have to find a means to be sustainable, and to be independent. So the first thing I did is to study the language. I went to language school in Amsterdam.”

**“So you settled here in Amsterdam?”**

“Yeah, yeah, I was staying with my current wife, she was a student, so I decided to go to school myself. So I did a one year course, *stichting taalschool* Amsterdam. After that, I could get the basis of

the language a little bit. I went to the University of Amsterdam, registered. There I also did three months intensive language course. After that I wanted to enter the university but they told me I had to learn German, because of the course that I wanted to do, education.”

“I had to because I could speak English. For the course I wanted to do I was informed that I have to do the German language too, but my wife was a student. I didn't have a source of income. So I saw an advertisement about psychiatry. I went to do psychiatric nursing. That was in 1984 I registered with Valerius kliniek. That is where I was doing the course, so you work and study. So that was the basis of my integration in Holland. Because it was not an easy ordeal. It was quite tough. Because in this job, you know, you need the language. So well, luckily I didn't give up.”

**“So that was the first half of the 80s?”**

“Yeah 84. Yeah So I didnt give up I continued to the end, it took me five years because of the language problem. Actually it took four years, but the first year I had to leave to polish the language. And I came back again, I did it for three years. I got my diploma as a psychiatric nurse, I worked there for two years, Valerius kliniek, then I went to Africa to work for three years to work as a psychiatrist, so I went back to Ghana together with my wife. And then we came back in 1994, just after the plane crash.”

**“Okay, so you left... you weren't here during the crash?”**

“No but I was getting information.”

**“So that means you left the late 80s till like 94?”**

“Yeah, left, when 19 in 1990. So in 1990 I went back home to work for three years. And I came back in 19....”

**“Because what was it like for you, being back in Ghana and then hearing the news about the plane crash?”**

“I would say we had friends, so we had a lot of... So people were coming around visitors.. they were bringing more newspapers and they were giving information to Dutch friends who were traveling to visit us. We would get daily papers from the Volkskrant and other papers which were posted to us and so we could follow the story about the crash. But I was not here but I was quite informed about the crash.”

**“And were you then....”**

“just about that time was also HIV AIDS. Just about that time. And so you see, we're dealing with HIV AIDS and we're dealing with the crash. And there were some traditional healers in Ghana who were claiming that they could... treat HIV AIDS, which means some journalists, also, from Holland, coming to look for these men, in Ghana to find... hey we have heard this and that and that...”

**“Because what... would you say that during your time in the Netherlands, especially the, like during the 80s, were you very active within a Ghanaian community?”**

“Actually, not really, because I was busy with myself with my study .Yeah, it was quite intensive. So you had to make choices. So in that case, life became less social, because even my Dutch and



European friends, I was not looking for them because you have to work hard. If you want to come to the end of your study so you see that to give more attention to my study, my social life was quite limited. So you see I had some core friends, Some Dutch core friends with whom I had good contacts, and some couple of Ghanaian friends I had contact and I had contact with SIW. Because through them, I came the first time and I had the network within them. So these were the people I was interacting with during the first years, but up to my course and when I got my diploma. Then I started looking at some Ghanaian friends. So just about the time I'm married, I found some of my friends I knew from home, so going to their parties and contacting new people. That was somewhere in the 1990s. Prior to that I was also working, so I was also looking for... I had some good friend who relocated to Ghana. He was here, Somebody I knew him before.. I even knew him from my hometown before, he was here. So I was with him most of the time. And through him I got to know other Ghanaians, but he's back home now. So when I finished the course I thought I want to see if I can go back home, but after three years I saw it was quite complex so I said no.., For my wife also it wasn't so easy before. Because the facilities we have compared to Holland at that point in time, she said no I miss some you know movie homes, a lot of recreational things you can do. Which you can't get in Ghana, that was one of the motivations to say okay, to go back and the children were there and we said it's actually better to educate the children here. Because of the possibilities, yeah.”

**“And how was that for you to now be back in...that was 94 right? And of course, well the plane crash happened. A lot of things happened in the early 90s. Did you see any differences within the community here?”**

“Yeah, when I came back we were having two children. So I had to look for a job, we had two children and luckily some friends were able to organise a house for us. So I started looking for a job I did some courses when I came you know because you have left the system for three years. So you have to catch up. So I did a course and finally I ended up with Riach Zuidoost, community psychiatric nursing, okay, so you visit patients in the house and so from there, I did another course. Now I became the spv, *sociaal psychiatrisch verpleegkundige*, Hogeschool van Amsterdam.”

**“And then you worked in Zuidoost, so that means that through your, your work, you were probably.. in touch with the community, people from the Ghanaian community?”**

“Yeah patients from the community. That's where there were also Ghana organisations like Alpha pak that was also dealing with HIV Aids. I joined them and there was Sikaman that was also a community organisation that's been given some support to the Ghanaian community. Recogin...”

**“Because what would you say were the key challenges or needs within that many community here at the time or what were...”**

“Actually when I came back there was this political movement like that issue of this plane crash. The challenges went up. Yeah, people through the plane crash have to get a staying permit. So these organisations like Sikaman. Actually, it was first Sikaman who was the organisation behind all this... you know trying to bring up the image of Ghanaians and recognising that they are here in the.. in the city.. in the country. And from that point, Recogin also started coming up, coordinating organisations for all Ghanaians. Then we have all this culture group and the different groups in Ghana; the Ga's, the Ashanti, the Fante forming their groups also, besides Recogin and Sikaman. And that is where it became very defined.. because of the plane crash. You know, the Fante's were looking for their

people who were involved in a crash and the Ashanti's are looking for their people, the Ga's were looking for their people, so that they could identify them and see how they coordinate... so those who were illegals will get their papers."

**"So is that after the plane crash? Was there more? Was that a moment when the organisation's like Sikaman became more like an umbrella?"**

"Sikaman has never been an umbrella. It's a foundation that support Ghanaians and also promotes Ghanaians in Holland."

**"Yeah, but it's not based on ethnic groups right?"**

"No, it's for everybody. It was Recogin who were claiming that they were the umbrella organisation for all Ghanaians. So that's the difference, Recogin was an organisation which claiming that all Ghanaian organisations should register under them but Sikaman said no, we don't register people..we collaborate with everybody as a foundation."

**"So that's the difference"**

"That's the difference, because we collaborate with all the organizations, but Sikaman never claimed that it's an umbrella for all... but we collaborate with them. Yeah, we do things with them, with the churches and everything you know. That is the difference between Sikaman and Recogin."

**"Okay, because also in the early 90s, after the crash but also earlier, there was a lot of negative media attention towards the Ghanaian community, there was a lot of criminalisation in the media, focusing on for example, drug cases..."**

"Yeah I feel that the Dutch concept, you know, is it still is... before we came it was the Surinamers, from the Surinamers it went to the Antilleans and then it came to Ghanaians and they were actually associating Ghanaians dealing with drugs. And now we went to the Moroccans. You see... it's a... I don't know how to label it, but that is the journalism at that time. So they were trying to categorise. And I think the Dutch community, they were also surprised to see that Ghanaians were creating churches. They were having their shops. So they were asking themselves, where are these people coming from? Because there's no governmental relation with Holland. All we knew was that the Dutch people went there to catch slaves to the Americas, both North and South. But in the late 70s, 80s, they started... started coming in. But the trick was that time they discovered oil in Libya, and Nigeria, most Ghanaians went there to work. And what was happening that the Shell company were saving the money from the Ghanaians working with them in Holland. So when these people were traveling, back home, they have to pass through Holland, to use their money to buy things like secondhand cars, trucks. So that's the beginning of when the influx of Ghanaians started."

**So 1970s or 80s right...**

"80s..Because there was this issue in Nigeria, and Nigerians asked Ghanaians to leave Nigeria."

**"That was the Ghana must go."**

“Yes the Ghana must go. And from that point, those who are working in Libya or Nigeria, for Shell, when they come here, they don't go back again. Because they can't go to Nigeria, can't go to Libya. So they started dropping here gradually, first it was the men, were coming you know. And they were being supported by the Surinamers to find a house, find some jobs to do. And yeah, so they started settling, so when they started settling, mostly illegal and they get married, whether legal or lawful marriages took place. So some of them started getting their stability, and started inviting also their families and Ghanaian ladies are forceful. So they started joining them. That is when the Dutch people said hey we got a new group here. They wanted to find out, hey how do they come here?”

**“And then the Amsterdam police said in 1992, they estimated that there were 10,000 people. But it wasn't.. eventually it wasn't true...”**

“It's quite difficult ... later when you go into the archives, you see those who have registered. Hypothesis was that if 10,000 Ghanaians registered in the municipality, you have to add another one Ghanaian. So if there was 5,000 registered, so then if there is one illegal person in one house... that's the analysis and that is why they came to..”

**“And that was really sort of blown up by the media.”**

“Yeah.. they say 10,000 but that time the...*Centraal bureau voor statistiek*, said Hey, you know, 5,000 have been registered. So then, you know, these Ghanaians find their influx, through many ways to come. So that's how they came to those numbers.”

**“Because would you say that, for example, from...were there from the community a lot of actions to really fight this narrative, or to change the media narrative?”**

“Yeah, yeah.. there was a lot of discussion, because with Operation Goofy. The Sikaman fought it, they went to see with the burgemeester... Van Thijn.. to discuss it. Yeah. And they started... at that time Ghanaians also started joining political parties like D66, PvdA, Groenlinks.”

**“So would you say that ... did that start already early in the 90s or after the crash?”**

“After the crash, people saw we have to have influence. Within the party you can discuss issues. You know, the Ghanaian question you see.. So a lot of... even demonstrations took place to fight...”

**“Would you say that that had an effect on some of the policies or....”**

“They saw Ghanaians as a force that participated, because they are now registered in the system, they can vote for parties. You see because numbers in parties always count. So they also have some points.. have something to say in the formation of political life in Amsterdam, most of them joined *Partij van de Arbeid*..”

**“So it was mainly after the crash that people started going more politically active?”**

“You know because they were known, because that was when they know now they are here because of this disaster. You have to make them legal. Yeah. So people use that opportunity to, you know, to become legal citizen of the state.”

**“Because was that really the result of lobbying from these organizations? Because there was...”**

“After this crash there was this *Kostolijst*, it was terrible. So, people, through Recogin and Sikaman they registered and said that they were also victims of the disaster, so we had to fight it ...some people we had to fight it through the legal means. And that time I also got some issues related to health... in terms of health situation, what they call the post traumatic syndrome. Because of my job, people came with those things and we had to use it as an argument to fight for their status.”

**“Because how did you deal with that, because I can imagine there were a lot of victims with post traumatic stress...”**

“Yes you have to be referred by a doctor, by a general practitioner because we are in the second line of healthcare. So if you are referred, sometimes also some legal practitioner, the lawyers they use that to refer people to the second line caretakers to use that as... But in actual fact there were some people with post traumatic stress syndrome, needed to be taken care of to take care of them... But in any situation whether white or black you get people who misuse the situation for their own benefits, it's international, not only in Amsterdam, so yeah.”

**“because I think that was for at least what I read in the papers that.. that with the Kostolijst there were a lot of people who were trying to get legal documents but maybe didn't live in the...”**

“It's normal, it's normal. (...) The captains and matrozen also legally stealing black people to sell, so it's human nature (laugh). You see that they are all making money. Yeah, you wait for the boss. Meanwhile, you also do your private jobs.”

### ***On political changes***

“Yeah, you see it's.. it's a question of survival for immigrants. Every human being want to be saved, so any loopholes that there are.. people will to try to make use of it. So there are these Dutch people also who are also after money, they get money and you can marry them after that you divorce then you stay...meanwhile it's the law. So if you ..if you can use it to stay, they use it and then they stay. And you know they were making political upheavals about that but since it's a law no matter how the politicians shout they have got their papers and they were trying to (..) them out. But you can't do. But still it was the Surinamers and the Dutch people were doing it in the beginning. That's the initial stages for Ghanaians to get their stay. But later on the Ghanaians themselves also... most of them got their status so they could support each other.”

**“And for example also the Identificatiewet, I think that made it more difficult for employers to hire people without papers.”**

“You know, that's just as I said, all these people, the business men they knew, they misused.. made use of people in the work and they knew that the people were not registered and they employed them you see. And there are serious cases where when it comes to the end of the month to pay them they will call the police and the people will run away, they won't come back and so for them it's... And a lot of people made money out of it, because they are not registered, they work for you. There is no afdrage for sociale zekerheid, no insurance.. no health insurance. But meanwhile they are working for

the Dutch institutions, uitzendbureaus everything they knew that, but the system has got a lot of money out of it.”

**“So how did like community organizations respond to this changing political climate or that sort of tightening of...”**

“The only issue is that you have to make sure that you get legalised in the system. It gets your Sofi number or BSN number. Then you don't have any problem with anybody anymore. Then the system knows you. Then from that..from that point. You get your Digiday, get your insurance and everything. But the way to it is not quite easy for some people.. it's not as easy. For some people it was okay, in my case it was so smoothly because I was studying and I was that.. working in the hospital doesn't mean you can't work in a hospital illegally no. Oh, you have to be legal before you get to work there. So you have to get a work permit, you know. Because I went to institution, and that institution doesn't work with illegal people. Right, but when it comes to the bars and the restaurants, they were the ones that were misusing the people without papers and cleaning companies, it's the same thing.”

**“So would you say it wasn't really enforced some of these laws.. that these days weren't really enforced because it was still happening. People found loopholes and...”**

“How can you enforce it because the system is there. If you are caught, you're caught If you're illegal you are not supposed to work. You have to make sure that you become legal citizen. So it were some of the employers in the system who were misusing the illegal people. So the question that you as an individual that is not having the right papers is to find out how do you make it?”

**“And yeah, you already mentioned that some Ghanaians started joining political parties. Did you feel like there was a lot of or enough, sufficient political representation during the 90s from the Ghanaian community? Or was it something that gradually...”**

“Actually those who were at the forefront of the political parties, those so called people who learned the language. Educated...they went in and started fighting for recognition of Ghanaians. And they would already, you know what I just said...politics is a game of numbers. So through them you had to also mobilize other Ghanaians when it comes to voting to vote. And I think the political party was also using them because of numbers. So if you, let's say, okay, they know you, like me, still you vote for this person... And for the parties they used that to get their numbers to get their seats.”

**“So would you say...because it's one thing to be visible, but were they really able to change certain things or really have an influence, in changing the position of Ghanians?”**

“Some Ghanaians came out like Amma Asante went there and there are also some other names. In Amsterdam, some Ghanaian people came into the political scene. But I think nationally, it's only one... Amma Asante who we know who went into parliament. But in Amsterdam. Yeah, Ghanaians had some influence. They joined some representatives and some political gatherings in the municipal council. On the national level, I think it would take time to get someone on top of the list with a Ghanaian background, but when you look now, the second generation Ghanaians a lot of people, nurses, doctors. It's a gradual process and when you see that the influx of Ghanaians it started in 1980. It was a handful of people who came in the 70s, it was in 1980. Then Ghanaians came in their numbers. So looking at it now you can say okay, Echelon jobs like medicine law, the Ghanaians are

there now, the second generation most of them are lawyers, dentists, some of them are doctors, journalists. Business ideas, some of them are priests they have got their churches. They know them in Rotterdam, they know them in Amsterdam, if you look at... That's why if you look into the papers in the 80s they will say Operation Goofy, and it's all about Ghanaians, from nowhere they started recognizing them. And you know, literatures they write their names. More people are writing books and now when you go to the market you hear the Ghanaian word *kalabule, wo ho te sen*, it's a sign that they know they are here."

**"So more visible."**

More visible and now people are making research because now people are like, oh Ghana people, they are from the Gold Coast. Formerly they were pretending they didn't know Ghana because the Dutch people didn't want to talk about their history.

**"I think people are now becoming more aware of the history between the Netherlands and Ghana..."**

"So now the king has gone to Ghana, we have 400 years of relations. So now the Dutch people know that yes 400 years ago we were there. And their soldiers who fought for Holland in Indonesia all those things? Yeah. You know, and the African cloth they're talking about it's not African it comes from Holland."

