



© Charl Landvreugd

Paramaribo, February 2009, Waka Waka Waka # 1

First published in: Wakaman Drawing Lines-Connecting Dots: contemporary art, Suriname, Auth. R. Jungerman. Ed. A. Bijl. Amsterdam: Idea Books

*“Rhythm is both the song's manical and it's demonic charge.  
It is the original breath, it is the whisper of unremitting demand.  
What do you still want to be said of the singer?  
What do you think you can still draw from my lips?  
Exact presence that no fantasy can represent.  
Purveyor of the old secret, alive with the blood that boils again,  
and is pulsing where the rhythm is torn apart.  
How your singer's blood is incensed at the depth of sound.  
Lacerations echo in the mouth's open erotic sky where dance together,  
the lost trenches of rhythm and an imploring immobility...”*  
(Jones The Rhythm, Grace Jones, 1985)

After a 27 year absence from Suriname, touching the soil again and physically connecting to ideas of Surinamese nationality mark the beginning of a new bond between the country and myself that goes beyond the relation with an imaginary location of a magical distant land of origin. Coming to the Caribbean draws theoretical knowledge into a practical space where acquired concepts such as Negritude and Créolite are tested. Moreover, a constant evaluation of my motives unearths hidden neo-colonial attitudes, fear of claiming the land and an openness to the possibility of a change in the psychological self-image. Suriname was elsewhere, a third-world holiday destination. Claiming to be Surinamese was like calling myself Chinese, Jewish or Dutch. Consequently declaring origin had always been a contested troubled concept due to ethnicity and socialised space. In this balancing act, self-naming had become almost impossible.

Like a dancer in Limbo, I Wakaman can touch neither stick nor fall. A Wakaman has to keep on moving forward to the rhythm between Limbo and Life. Travelling the World, gathering knowledge and on the way claiming landmarks as part of my own history, I am centred and decentred at the same time, located in the space outlined by Rhizomatic lines of flight which I name Alakondre (i.e. Surinamese for ‘all lands’).

A fragmented whole like a broken mirror with many pieces reflecting Alakondre back into space. The reflection is in all different directions except for the one where one would expect to take root. For taking root in *one* place is ending the route.

In Suriname, I saw how ethnic histories had come together and slowly but surely formed a new root in a new land. This ethnically complicated destination of my ancestry now found its home in Alakondre. Suriname itself has become the physical tracing of a fragment. By embracing Suriname's diversity as my own, its presence challenges my attitudes and takes away my fears of legitimate claims. If anything Suriname has become part of my language and visual vocabulary just like The Netherlands, New York, Cairo, London and all the other places I have visited.

As a consequence, I've done away with ideas of nationality that reflect a seemingly singular image. Instead, As a second generation Caribbean-European, neither exclusively Dutch nor exclusively Surinamese but rather Alakondre, I challenge the impossibility of taking root in the fragments, taking root in the lines of flight, taking root in the route and proclaim myself Wakaman.

“The Unity is Submarine” (E.K. Brathwaite, Contradictory Omens, 1974)