Well, there’s a legal context and a social context. I think, legally, of course, they (Antilleans) are just internal migrants, but socially they are seen as outsiders. Even someone from Limburg who moves to Friesland (within the Netherlands) will probably be seen as an outsider. But the fact that we come from 8000 kilometers away, by definition makes us outsiders, even though we have the same passport and the same citizen rights.¹

There is a legal and societal context in which postcolonial Dutch Antilleans find themselves situated in the Netherlands. Shared legal citizenship implies a ‘region of legal equality’ (Brubaker, 1992:21) and ‘full community membership’ (Marshall, 1992:45) that should facilitate immigrant political incorporation. As integral parts of the Dutch Kingdom, the peoples of the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba are the only recent immigrant group that arrive in the Netherlands born and raised as Dutch citizens. They are also linguistic, social, and cultural outsiders as well as officially categorized ethnic minorities. Oostindie (2011) speaks of the advantages of postcolonial ties to the Netherlands, that is, Dutch citizenship and permanent right of abode, as a ‘postcolonial bonus’ for first generation postcolonial migrants (44–47).

As in the French Antillean case (Beriss, 2004), Dutch Antilleans become Antilleans in the Netherlands and are lumped together with other immigrants and seen as part of the ‘immigrant problem’ in Dutch society (20–21). If political incorporation is difficult for Antilleans, advantaged with legal citizenship and some degree of familiarity with Dutch systems, it should be even more trying for others. Their experiences can signal the opportunities and limits to political space and inclusion for immigrants and ethnic minorities. This chapter addresses the political incorporation of Antilleans in the Netherlands.

In contrast to Japan, the Netherlands is widely regarded as a paragon of liberal democracy with traditions of tolerance, compromise, accommodation of
religious and ideological difference, immigration, and a more recent embrace of multiculturalism. Despite their ‘postcolonial bonus’ of Dutch citizenship, Antilleans in the Netherlands have been found to have the lowest levels of both formal and informal political incorporation of any foreign origin group (Buijs, 1986; Buijs and Rath, 1986; Rath, 1990; Fennema and Tillie, 2001; Jacobs and Tillie, 2004; Tillie, 2004). In contrast to the case in the French republic, most Dutch Antilleans residing on their home islands cannot vote in Dutch national elections from their home countries but they use the same electoral system as the Netherlands. The Netherlands has a proportional representation party list electoral system, which is generally associated with multiple party representation, higher voter turnout, and better inclusion of women and minorities (Lijphart, 1984; 1994; 1999). Considering long-held assumptions about the consensual and accommodating political culture in Dutch liberal democracy, one would assume that shared legal citizenship would lead to easier political incorporation when compared to other ethnic minority groups.

Many postcolonial immigrants retain the formal citizenship of the colonial host society as a consequence of the extension of citizenship ‘as a form of ideological integration’ (Castles and Davidson, 2000:55). Grosfoguel (2003) refers to formerly ‘colonial’ extensions of metropoles, for example, Puerto Rico and the Dutch Antilles, as ‘modern colonies’ because of the shared qualities of post-First World War formation, metropolitan citizenship, free mobility to the metropole, and access to rights and welfare from the metropolitan state (178,180). There are a number of studies that suggest that many postcolonial legal citizen immigrant groups are reluctant to participate politically in their host societies (Memmi, 1965; Fanon, 1968; Falcón, 1983; Miller, 1989; Crowley, 1996; Fennema and Tillie, 2001; Tillie, 2004). Crowley’s (1996) comparative analysis of British and French immigration policies argues that ‘formal rights are not sufficient to ensure the integration they grant immigrants’(8). Miller (1989) finds postcolonial citizens and non-citizens of immigrant origin participate disproportionately less in European political systems because ‘they apparently do not feel sufficiently part of the political system to participate in it’ (132). Fanon (1968), Memmi (1965), Essed (1991) Mielants (2009), and others note the debilitating impact of colonial oppression and racism. Others maintain that an ‘adversarial subculture’ or ‘oppositional frame of reference’ is produced that deters participation (Gans, 1992; Portes and Zhou, 1993). Beriss (2004) discusses how experiences with racism in France helped to spark French Antillean activism and demands for recognition and political representation (66).

The literature cites several reasons for the low political incorporation of Dutch Caribbeans ranging from class, unemployment, low socio-economic status, ‘not feeling at home’ and racism to a lack of ‘civic community’ due to a political culture engendered by the legacies of colonialism and slavery. A fairly common sentiment among some Antilleans (Curaçaoans) is wij zijn

wij zijn

wij zijn

wij zijn

wij zijn

wij zijn

wij zijn