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# The Religion of the Urban Cool

*La Religion de l'Urban Cool*  
*La religión del "Urban cool"*

Francio Guadeloupe

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## Résumés



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In these perilous times of welfare reforms deprived youths of a working class background, those identified with the religion of the urban cool, "the get rich quick or die trying" culture, a category often intersecting with that of ethnic minority status, are at the centre of public attention. The ideal of youth work as enhancing the social mobility of these youths seems to loose ground against the new politically correct stance of youth work as contributing to the safety of upstanding citizens and their possessions against these youths.

In this article an alternative position is advocated. One in which we recognize these youths and their adherence to the religion of the urban cool as ciphers to decipher the societal-wide structural pathology whereby all ethnicities, classes, and generations, equate success and wellbeing with what and how one consumes. The religion of the urban cool heralds the religion of unbridled consumption.

## Entrées d'index



**Mots-clés** : Pays-Bas, jeunes rebelles, culture de la consommation, religion, hip-hop

**Keywords** : the Netherlands, renegade youths, consumer culture, religion, hip hop

**Palabras claves** : jóvenes renegados, cultura de consumo, religión, hip-hop, países bajos

## Plan



Afterthoughts

## Texte intégral



1 Prior to embarking on a career as an academic anthropologist, I earned my bread as a community development worker in the urban centres of the

1 See the website of fifty cent,

Netherlands. My speciality was working with renegade youths who did any and everything to acquire expensive commodities. Their God was money and their life motto, to quote one of their idols, the rapper 50 cent, was to "get rich quick or die trying." <sup>1</sup> My task was to motivate and guide these youths so that they would renounce a life of petty crime and would make something of themselves.

#### Dedicated devotees of the religion of the urban cool



It was the 1990s, a time of cutbacks in state sponsored welfare work. The days in which huge amounts of monies and governmental assent for youth work programs geared towards socialising these youths to become disciplined workers and citizens was coming to an end. Yet unaware of these historical shifts, the dominant methodology remained that of guiding renegade youths from adolescence into adulthood. An adulthood whereby they would be upstanding Dutch citizens obeying the law. In the terms of theoreticians specialized in historicising welfare practices in Western Europe, I was engaging in the post World War II hegemonic version of youth work : the achievement of "order and control through the inclusion of all citizens in a public realm of social interaction and discourse which was celebrated through a wealth of public facilities and access" (France and Wiles 1997, 69). Youths with a predilection towards the unsocial needed to understand the benefits of being a legitimate part of society. This was my work. I was a cog in the system. Yet I also rebelled mentally within the system.

- 2 Instead of solely appraising renegade youths as problem cases in an otherwise moral society, I saw in their behaviour unacknowledged truths about the Netherlands. My axiom is that our oldest and most enduring mirrors are other human beings. Through them we are able to see and transform ourselves. The reality of renegade youths needs to be understood as part of the ethic of rampant consumerism which is operative in all sections of Dutch society. The choice of the term renegade youths, instead of the common expressions "deprived youths" or "criminal youths," is part of this way of seeing. "Deprived youths" foregrounds the structural impediments faced by many working class youths, a category which often intersects with that of ethnic minority status. "Criminal youths" on the other hand focuses on the actions of these youths with little regard for structural constraints. The term renegade youths brings these two understandings together. It allows us to recognize structure and agency. Renegade youths reveal the hegemonic structures and understandings of the good life operative in Dutch society without downplaying or excusing the actions of wayward youths. And for the record with renegade youths I am not referring to hardcore criminals who youth workers are ill-equipped to reform.
- 3 This essay should be read as an elaboration on what renegade youths allow us to see about the relationship between rampant consumerism and hegemonic Dutch ideals of what constitutes the good life. The method employed is a combination of the elemental of grounded theory, in other words, that theory *ought* to emerge after working through ones empirical data, with the insights of Paulo Freire, in other words, that one reaches such new theoretical truths by including the truths of the so-called socially ignorant/socially deprived in the analytical process. These two modes of doing social science are made to

speak to Paul Gilroy's axiom that no serious theorizing of the *grounded* and *emancipatory* sort in today's Europe can simply choose to ignore the unruly forms of the urban multi-cultures emergent in the metropolises and culture industries exploitation thereof.

4 My insights in the link between the behaviour of renegade youths and that of the wider Dutch society was strengthened and conceived upon hearing of little Yasin's incarceration for burglary and attempted manslaughter. Yasin was one of the little boys who used to accompany his older cousins to the youth activities in the city of Eindhoven. <sup>2</sup> He used to be this cute but rude little boy who tried his best to imitate his older cousins. He walked like them, talked like them, and dreamt like them of being a professional soccer star and rapper. Yasin and his cousins wanted to be idols; modern day demigods like the Black Atlantic superstars they saw on HBO, MTV or ESPN. Will Smith, P. Diddy, Romario-larger than life figures, the select few who had succeeded in not having to die in order to earn the right to live in paradise.

<sup>2</sup> As is customary in anthropological practice, I am using pseudonyms. I do this to protect the inter(...)

5 If I be allowed a brief excursion into theory, these Black Atlantic superstars mark the post World War II transition of black culture and its black performers from the lowest rung of human cultural expressions to symbols of supra-humanity and ideal modes of commoditised being (see Gilroy, 2000, for a thorough analysis of this phenomenon without denying the continuing prevalence of virulent forms of anti-black racism). This re-signification was part of the rise of consumer culture and the importance of the commoditisation of leisure. Concretely it must be understood as a marketing campaign which began in post Holocaust Europe where the North American tradition of segregated music charts and art venues was simply not done. After the civil rights movement this mode of marketing was successfully implemented in the U.S. and other parts of the overdeveloped world. Today Black Atlantic superstars are icons emulated by youngsters and young adults of every hue (for discussions hereof see Androutsopolous and Scholz 2002 and Bennett 2001 for an analysis on how for instance Hip Hop and other Black Atlantic expressions have impacted European youths. See also again the work of Gilroy 2000: 239-278). They are at the forefront of lending respectability to the urban multi-cultures in European metropolitan centres such as Amsterdam, London, and Paris. This is especially the case for renegade youngsters who read in the Horacio Alger myth of these black stars their own ideal futures.

6 Without the least bit of exaggeration you could say that the *contemporary divine* for Yasin and his cousins were the Black Atlantic pop stars marketed by the Culture Industries. They were no exceptions, as the worship and imitation of these mega-stars was the new religion. I have dubbed this new faith, which Yasin and other renegade youths practice alongside the more traditional forms of worship, *the religion of the urban cool*.

7 Let me explain. I am using the term religion here to denote the practice of sacralising certain modes of being, idolising those who seem to ideally embody these modes of being, designating certain rituals pertinent to this mode of being, and therewith imagining a community of the faithful who practice these.

8 I am evoking a formalist conceptualisation of religion. To me this is useful for it allows religiosity to cross the seemingly secure boundaries of the divide between religion and non-religion. This divide is a highly functional fantasy that obfuscates the way processes of bonding and believing between individuals operate. For a belief and a bond to be able to withstand empirical counter-evidence it needs a religious, a sacred, dimension (see Emile Durkheim, 1965, who popularized this mode of understanding the universal phenomenon of religion).

9 Firstly, the mode of being that was sacralised by the renegade youths was that of having cars that were *pimped*, *cribs* way too big to live in, looking as though one was on the catwalk 24 hours a day, and being a *big dog* or a *diva* whose name everyone in the club knew. Secondly, the rhetoric one heard in most hit songs was a disavowal of society, as in, *ik heb schijt aan the maatschappij* (I don't give a fuck about society). <sup>3</sup> The *Maatschappij* wants worker ants that were vulnerable to unforeseen events and the political and economic decisions of the better off.

<sup>3</sup> See the music video of Appa and Sjaak <http://www.youtube.com>, that presents one with the comical yet(...)

10 On the other hand, *the religion of the urban cool* and its community of the faithful hailed renegade youths to get rich quick by any means necessary.

11 But there is a difference between the *Real* and the *Ideal*. The *Real*, society as

it is organized, eventually caught up with Yasin's older cousins who soon had to give up on their dreams. Demigods they were not to be. One cousin is unemployed while the other is a butcher. Yasin was doing his utmost best to outwit the *Real*. He was a part-time hustler, part-time secondary school student. Via selling drugs, contraband, and the occasional robbery, he was able to buy himself star status. He was steadfast in the faith. Yasin wore expensive threads, bought himself a second hand cabriolet, and was a dude in the discotheques. Even though it meant deceiving, cheating, and maiming his fellow human beings, Yasin was determined not to become another Moroccan-Dutchman begging for unemployment benefit or surviving on a hand-to-mouth salary. As Tupac Shakur puts it: "well hey I got to get paid."

- 12 As time passed, Yasin stopped looking up to his cousins who were married to fat unattractive far cousins, wore three to four day beards, and walked around shabby. They, the great dreamers of old, the faithful, the men he had wanted to be like, had to come and ask him to borrow his car. They had become failed men who had traded in their dream of Hollywood style [im]mortality (in this life/the material world) for the promise of heavenly immortality (in the afterlife/the spiritual world) that the Imams spoke of. They switched from the new *religion of the urban cool* to the old faith of the urban despised. Yasin politely declined their blitzes.
- 13 Yasin was not an infidel. Besides practising *the religion of the urban cool*, he was still a Muslim but Islam represented tradition (that which one is handed down while half a sleep or bored). He was not one of those middle class or bookish working class Muslims who felt the need to frequently attend the Mosque or to study the fundamentals of the faith. Neither did he feel hailed to defend the faith against the pundits of the Dutch media and political establishment that deemed Islam a menace to society. No enraged or fundamentalist Imam spreading their views via the internet had a hold on him or could tell him how to practice his faith.
- 14 Yasin represented none of these very real caricatures that inhabit the imagination of many Dutch men and women who do not practice Islam. He was a different kind of Muslim; the old fashioned kind that liked it simple. The Quran said whatever he felt it should say, and that meant that he should be privileged above all women and homosexuals, and being a Muslim, that he should also be privileged above all non-Muslim men. It was as simple as that.
- 15 Nonetheless, being the contradictory animal that we all are, Yasin would also claim that those who were demigods like the R&B singer Akon and the soccer star Thierry Henry or those who imitated these pop icons were his equals. They did not have to convert to the Muslim faith. Dutch men who were practitioners of the faith of worshipping and imitating pop stars were his brothers. As far as the female species was concerned, they posed a serious theological quandary. Mmmh, they were his equals at times: the times that suited him. As a religious pragmatist, he remained true to capitalism's specific kind of diva driven Feminism-the kind promoted by superwomen such as Missy Misdemeanour Elliot and Queen Beyonce, whose independence rests upon their ownership of expensive goods. His sisters and nieces, on the other hand, had to remain in the fold of Islam's patriarchal tradition.
- 16 The problem, however, was finding ways to practice his new faith. He lacked both the soccer and vocal skills of those he worshipped, and the movie of rapper 50 cent was just that, a movie. Thus, he could only do what his adored rappers usually sing about. In other words, he had to take the goods from those who had it! To do so he had to be tougher than his competitors. In building up his rep, Yasin and his friends went one step too far. In a gang fight they had used knives and broken bottles to teach their rivals respect. Now he was in jail and the police was following up leads that would connect him and his posse to a series of robberies.
- 17 I have not spoken to Yasin since his incarceration. I have heard from one of his cousins who said that Yasin is suffering, as is the rest of the family. Yet no one seems able to reach Yasin. His cousin Ali told me that he had no idea what to do with Yasin or other Moroccan youngsters who had become renegades. Ali admitted that in his younger days he did his share of *kattakwaad*, street vandalism, but Yasin & Co had taken it a hundred steps further. It seemed as though they had gone mad and had lost themselves.
- 18 This was clearly not a case of being caught between two cultures (the Dutch and the Berber-Moroccan one). These boys *are* above those two cultures. In Morocco they are the talk of the town : the Dutch youths who have no respect for young or old. No one is really thrilled to have them as vacationers. In the

Netherlands too they are notorious, and known by the term *kut marokkanen*... those fucking Moroccans. In a sense the *Yasins* scattered around the Netherlands are *above* cultures, but this reading is like the nonsense of *sound bite* and *fast food analysis* of which we have too many these days. No one is ever completely above a culture or society. The *Yasins* are symbols of a radical truth about a culture that most people within it refuse to see or cannot see. In other words, the *Yasins* are mirrors.

- 19 Thinking about Yasin as an unacknowledged mirror of society led me to connect his antics with those of Abdul, a youngster in Rotterdam I used to coach in the late nineties. Abdul practiced the same faith as Yasin, *the religion of the urban cool*, and lived the same kind of reckless life. His mother, who was divorced, was a devout Muslim. I would often see her in her living room filled with Islamic texts, dressed with ritual clothing as she prayed that Abdul would change his ways. Abdul would simply smile the kind of smile that was a mixture of embarrassment, repentance, contempt, and the "I-don't-give-a-damn-attitude," as his mother spoke about Allah to him.
- 20 Abdul, who back then was just 16 years old, stole and harassed his neighbours. To make matters worse he would run away for days when he felt his mother was just too irritating. His father, who had mistreated Abdul's mother while she was carrying him, had picked up his life and moved to another city. Abdul did not want to have anything to do with him and his father felt that his former wife (punching bag) had spoiled his son.
- 21 In such a situation I functioned as a kind of absent father even though as a professional welfare worker cum social worker all I had to do was guide Abdul from nine to five. Abdul looked up to me because metaphorically speaking I seemed to be a high priest in the church of the urban cool. This was not my interpretation at that time. I just thought that Abdul had taken a liking to me as I had taken a liking to him. I still believe this to be a truth, but I have begun to complement it with other truths. I have come to see that Abdul liked me like Yasin did because my fashioning represented urban coolness. I now recognise how much these two boys, who lived hundred of kilometres from each other and to my knowledge did not know each other, would always compliment me about the car I drove, the clothes I wore, and according to them, my cool demeanour. In turn, I returned the compliment and spoke to them about the latest happenings in the world of the urban (new releases, new sneakers, sport events, and advices on sexual and love relationships).
- 22 Everything went smooth as long as I did not seek to speak to them about time and effort ; in other words, about the time and the hard work it would take for them to have the commodities I had. Whenever I mentioned these things, I was told that I was just like their mothers, school teachers, and other grown ups, whom they considered a drag. I was aware that I was threading dangerous grounds at those moments for I knew about the way they and other renegade youths treated those so-called drags who reminded them that the rainbow of luxurious commodities and the *Neverlands* of the Michael Jacksons lay behind the rocky mountains of effort and education. I had worked with youth workers who had nervous breakdowns because of violent threats by those they sought to educate and socialise. So, I didn't have to search deep to come up with examples that told me to be cautious.
- 23 As an aspiring youth worker in the Southern city of Helmond, I was confronted with a situation in which *jongeren van het kamp*, "gypsy" youths, systematically terrorized the new youth worker called Anneke. They felt, as indeed their parents and some of the volunteers did, that she was a "stuck up bitch" from Eindhoven who didn't like "gypsies." The fact of the matter was that Anneke was a feminist youth worker who felt that projects for girls should be awarded as much space in the weekly program as that of boys. She also tried to implement programs that were supposed to make young girls more interested in the technical sciences and vocations that are male dominated.
- 24 Anneke's ideas were noble, but she made some seemingly inexcusable mistakes: she demanded that the boys would take off their baseball hats and bandanas during activities and politely informed the girls that wearing skimpy clothes *a la* Madonna and Mariah Carey was not allowed in the youth centre. She did not know that she was committing blasphemy against *the religion of the urban cool*. Those clothes and paraphernalia gave these kids status because they were imitations of the style of their Black Atlantic heroes on TV and album covers. It was their second skin. How did Anneke dare demand them of to strip? Their response was to flatten her tires, scratch her car with knives, and destroy her windshield..."understandably" excessive responses on

their part. Not being able to handle the pressure, after two months, Anneke quit.

25 Aware of the experiences of Anneke are common, I knew that in engaging in a bit of hard talk with Yasin and Abdul was a matter of utmost concentration. I never fooled myself into thinking that somehow I had special abilities that other youth workers did not. So in speaking to them about the importance of time and hard work, and committing heresy against *the religion of the urban cool*, I had to talk tough while taking a different tack. I had to acknowledge that they thought that they were born with as much football talent as Moroccan-Dutch and Surinamese-Dutch footballer Driss Bousata and Clarence Seedorf. In fact Abdul felt he had more talent than most of the players in the Dutch soccer squad. All he needed was to be discovered. In the meantime like Yasin he got paid by illegal means.

26 I realised that I only gained Yasin and Abdul's trust and attention by informing them about the manner in which the Romarios and the R. Kellys of the past - Eusebio and Marvin Gaye - were robbed by those who had had the privilege of doing their best in school. They should not squander such opportunities. Talent without education, genius without hard work, was being a slave to the fat cats running the record industries and the soccer conglomerates. Then in between their protestations such as, *wat! mijn doekoe, ik maak hem kapot*, what! My money, I will kill him, they began to pay attention as to why it was important to minimally complete their secondary school. More importantly they began to think critically, something I believe to be a crucial starting point in any transformative process.

27 My approach was to no avail to Yasin since I was not his youth worker, in fact we had only spoken a few times (and he is now in jail!). As far as Abdul was concerned it helped somewhat. At the end of my career as a youth worker he was placed under the guardianship of *Juegdzorg* (the Dutch national agency of youth based social work), which relocated him to one of their homes where he was offered intensive guidance.

28 I would like to tell you that besides these negative cases, the strategy of remaining within the dream world of the youngsters and seeking to lure them into critically interrogating their dreams and making it more realistic was a winning formula. I must admit that often times this formula did help. The projects I ran involving mentors from the professional fields and the talent shows where renowned Dutch artists such as Two Unlimited, Bart de Graaf, Sylvana Simons, and Def Rhymes, spoke about their careers and the importance of education made a lasting impact upon many renegade youths. The fact that the stars they looked up to agreed with what I was telling them helped (the peer pressure was less powerful if Def Rhymes said that besides the importance of living money, one must also love to study to stop one's accountants from robbing you of that money) <sup>4</sup>. Many are renegades no more.

4 To see Def Rhymz conveying his comic hedonism, watch, his <http://www.youtube.c>. In this music vide(...)

29 However while still employed as a youth worker I began to realise that I was just scratching the surface of a wider social problem and, what's more, I was contributing to the reform of a system that had produced *the religion of the urban cool* and its off-the-wall disciples. Again, I must reiterate that renegade youths and their new religion are not outside of society. Such is the unexamined foolishness that the reform ethics in youth work unwittingly promotes. I am specifically referring to the *doxa* that there is nothing wrong with Dutch society in general, it is the reckless elements, in this case the renegade youths, which need to be reformed.

30 The culture industry that produces this *bling bling* culture of young boys and girls relieving their existential angst through commodities and bravura remains unscathed. Once and a while a lonely voice will be heard criticising the media for spreading immorality and "the shop till you drop attitude," but this is quickly silenced by placing such voices in the *geltenwollen sokken* category/the category of those leftists still living in the roaring seventies. Talk of immoral capitalists running the media and other sections of the culture industry and its detrimental effects on human sociality is considered old fashioned : we have been there and we have done that critique of consumer culture!

31 This dismissal of any critical interrogation of the culture industry and capitalism as a mode of production and a mode of consumer inflected sociality was also the case among many youth workers and youth work agencies I have worked with. Those who had similar reservations as I did, they were not in positions of authority. We were simply referred to as overly intellectualized figures who were seeking to bring idealistic intellectual musings to the

5 There are many brilliant analyses in the field of youth work studies but few reaches the youth wor(...)

realities of the streets (and for the most part we were academics with a master degree in the social sciences who did youth work out of a passion to make Dutch society more just). A youth worker had to be practical and no scholarly article could contest what he or she had learnt experientially by engaging with youngsters. This was the dogma. What must also be mentioned is that most youth workers held a bachelor degree from a professional university and were not trained to read the academic writings on youth work that may have expanded their vision.<sup>5</sup> Neither were they encouraged by those in positions of authority to do so. Youth workers were left to their own devices as they spent odd hours engaging wayward youths. They engaged the young outlaws in the evenings and the weekends when the rest of the welfare workers simply retired to their friends and families. As long as the youth workers produced their reports at the end of the year, and the budgets were correct, there was little monitoring of what they did. If they did not seek to politicize youths into a force that would take policy makers to task for the structural wrongs that had produced their reality they had free play. Perhaps this was the reason why behind all their bravado many youth workers simply accepted the hegemonic common sense. I was told time and again by most of my colleagues that the issues that truly matter *today* are the curtailing of the threat of Islam, the furthering of the emancipation of young girls, the combating of lure of neo-fascism among white Dutch youths, the intensive guidance of Dutch Antillean youths to lead them away from a life of crime, and the overall integration of these and other youngsters into moral framework guiding Dutch society.

32 The questions I ephemerally posed back then, and pose more deliberately today, are what exactly is this moral framework into which we are supposedly to integrate renegade youngsters and how does *the religion of the urban cool* fit into it? I begin with the latter. It seems to me that *the religion of the urban cool* has to be seen as part of a new galaxy of religious manifestations that cuts across ethnicities, classes, and generations. Working with white-Dutch youngsters from established middle class families I have witnessed the troubles families had when these youngsters were not given the latest gadgets and wears that allowed them to participate in some kind of social identification, a process that for these teenagers can equal "feeling alive." One such youngster of fourteen who was attending pre-university education even sought to attack his mother with a hammer when she refused to allow him to buy the new Pokemon gadgets that he needed to belong to the cool tribe at his school. He complained that she did not want him to live and that she was messing up his social life.

33 The words *life* and *alive*, the sacralisation of these terms, are key to understanding *the religion of the urban cool*. The culture industry from which this religion materially emanates, as more expansively, capitalism in general should not be juxtaposed with religion. Before elaborating on what I mean by this, let me insert an important aside. Employing the term capitalism in the singular may cause the theoretically and progressively hip to squirm. Nowadays as every concept is pluralized and/or contextualized-e.g. African modernities, Asian enlightenments, and multiple identities - it only seems fit, according to many progressive voices, that capitalism too be thought as plural and contextual. Instead of going down that route, I deem it wise that the pluralising and contextual tendency be historicised. From whence cometh the stressing of cultural difference? Why do we consider it so important to do so at this time, and what do we gain and lose by doing so? I won't embark on such an endeavour here, but suffice it to say that for all its theoretical sophistication, and payback in granting us profound knowledge of cultural diversity, such a tendency in academia is quite congenial to a historical conjuncture characterized by the hegemonic talk of clash of human civilizations: cultures can't meet, and, if they meet, must fight because they are fundamentally different. Interestingly, in the field of youth work, we encounter an implicit acceptance of this idea too in the practice of for instance assigning youth workers of Moroccan extraction to Moroccan problem youth in an effort of avoiding unnecessary cultural conflict. Though progressive voices may retort that their pluralizing work (as theirs seeks to right the Eurocentric wrongs in the social sciences and youth work) should not be likened to that of conservatives with their civilisation talk (Eurocentric to the bone), they too nonetheless run the risk of being enraptured by the work of foregrounding contextual and cultural difference that they lose all sight of or downplay the perpetually changing trans-contextual and trans-cultural similarities. The similarities that thinkers and social activists such as Paulo Freire, Aime Cesaire, Hannah Arendt, and Albert Camus, for all their shortcomings, explicitly never lost sight of even as they recognized cultural and contextual

<sup>6</sup> See Meyer (1999), for a sophisticated analysis of how the religiosity of consumer capitalism meets(...)

differences in their practical quest for panhuman emancipation. This is the route that informs my thought. The singularity of capitalism may be conceptualised as plural when looked at with an eye for the details of interacting polities, modes of production, and capitalist blocks, but we must remain imagining capitalism as singular in its mode of connecting world populations in their adoration and worship of capitalist goods (hegemonically driven by the hidden hand of multinational corporations and captains of industry). We are all equal in the sense that these goods are offered to all without regard for ethnic, creedal, or class differences (once you can buy, capitalists will sell). This equality over and above difference is capitalism's religious impulse. It too offers a new *life*, a renewed sense of feeling *alive*, and *community life*. Often this commodity driven religious impulse competes and interacts with more traditional forms of religiosity. While resisted it is hardly if ever rejected. <sup>6</sup>

- 34 The newest mode of capitalism should thus be understood as promoting alternative forms of religiosity ; alternative forms of the sacred ; alternative forms of sacralising life by de-sacralising the given of being alive, namely having and being a body. With capitalism in its consumption format, having and being a body which capitalist ad agencies entice us to consider an imperfect given, does not make one a full-fledged person. Living, enjoying being and having a body, has to be mediated by what one buys. *The religion of the urban cool* is a specific manifestation of capitalism's religious impulse (see Chidester, 2005, for a thorough study on the religiosity of capitalism).
- 35 Most Dutchmen and women feel more alive when they are able to decorate their homes and their skins with the commodities of capital. Their moods and senses of self may come and go and even undergo traumatic implosions, but their *commodity self* is far more stable. A stability I must add that has to be constantly revitalised. Every Saturday the IKEAs and other such large department stores become pilgrimage sites as men and women of all ages dream about a house which resembles the showroom. More gender specific one need not be an anthropologists to observe that many women dress up and wear their hair as the models or TV stars in the glossies do, and many men nowadays seek to purchase a car that the sport and artistic studs they look up to drive. Older folks in turn, those who have a handsome pension, are hailed and want to be hailed as consumers whose age should not matter. A whole new industry has been built to cater to those experiencing a second adolescence after fifty (Madonna is a crude example of when becoming old is deemed somewhat unacceptable).
- 36 With the old and the not so old completely caught up in the rapture of consumer capitalism, why do we misrecognise the commonalities between these new sacralisations and *the religion of the urban cool*. The latter is also an expression of capitalism in its consumption format. It may seem to differ only because in a superficial sense the means renegade Dutch youths employ to get the goods may differ ? However on a deeper analytical level we must recognise that the legality of our getting of the goods is based upon the robbery of the earth and our indirect collusion with the systematic exploitation of the global poor. If we truly see in the renegade youths and their behaviours mirrors of ourselves, we may begin the process of the overall transformation of Dutch society and the struggle to exorcize consumer capitalism's hold on our souls.

## Afterthoughts

- 37 ...Yet the last sentence with which I sought to end this paper means very little. They are the words of the anthropologist who is content describing and theorizing while leaving the actual praxis to others. I do not want to be such an anthropologist, especially given my background as a community development worker specialized in youth work. Let me thus try my hand and formulating some ways of going about the work of exorcizing capitalism's hold on our souls. I will be specifically addressing the issue of youth work, my former specialty.
- 38 Youth work based upon the analysis of this paper ought to be about helping renegade youths to re-establish their connections with their bodies and their psyches *in a different way*. To do so youth workers need to take them out of their well-trodden environments and the cities. Much of the survivals and camping trips used to take youths on an outing are a starting point from which they can build new methods and modes predicated on being in the world and embracing it without the mediation of name brand commodities. In

my opinion, youth work should help renegade youngsters realise that commodities do not make Man, and that there is more to life than just the concrete jungles and the trinkets and gadgets we use to beautify these. Being in the wilderness can remind them that life is more than having the latest ipods.

- 39 By focusing specifically on these types of gadgets that renegade youth crave, youth workers can create tailor made programs that teach them about the way capitalism exploits the world majority for the benefit of the world's minority. This could bring back a sense of responsibility coupled to the realisation of the finitude of things and themselves that is now completely lacking. The overall goal is encouraging renegade youths to accept themselves without capitalism's trinkets and without accepting the skewed morality of the wider Dutch society. In fact from problem cases they must become problem solvers concientizing their peers, the rest of Dutch society, and their counterparts abroad. More emphasis on international youth exchanges with the Global South is necessary for renegade youths in the Netherlands to see behind the veil of *the religion of the urban cool*.
- 40 All this could be part of the reformulation and reinvention of youth work as an ethical-political project striving for a world where justice and the taming of capitalism are the highest ideals. They (renegade youths such as Yasin) and we (grown ups that care for the Yasins in the Netherlands) can then look youngsters in the Global South in the eyes and recognise them as our human mirrors... but this begs the question as to whether or not these youngsters have escaped *the religion of the urban cool* !

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## Notes



1 See the website of fifty cent, <http://www.50cent.com/>, to grasp the anti-bourgeois yet capitalist friendly political aesthetics that he conveys.

2 As is customary in anthropological practice, I am using pseudonyms. I do this to protect the interlocutors who have to read this piece and to uphold the agreement with those who did that I would not divulge their real names.

3 See the music video of Appa and Sjaak <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ONkMTXBKAWI>, that presents one with the comical yet radical anti-sociality conveyed in the religion of the urban cool. See also <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=boXl5fu-F6c> of the Jeugd Van Tegenwoordig.

4 To see Def Rhymz conveying his comic hedonism, watch, his <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r1o7-ZIJ7ek>. In this music video he makes it

clear to youngsters that it is a lie that money can buy you love and happiness. For a profile on the rapper see, <http://www.last.fm/music/Def+Rhymz>

5 There are many brilliant analyses in the field of youth work studies but few reaches the youth workers involved in the streets. In their studies they are not confronted with this material. Mar Dekker a lecturer at the professional university in-Holland in Amsterdam told me that most of the welfare and social workers were trained to be practically oriented and academic writings were not part of their curricula. There are however changes underway as the in-Holland and other professional universities are busy seeking to train their students to learn to read, analyze, and form an opinion about the paradigms in the field of youth work. A paper specifically charting this would be worthwhile. Unfortunately it escapes the scope of this paper as well as my expertise.

6 See Meyer (1999), for a sophisticated analysis of how the religiosity of consumer capitalism meets more traditional forms of worship.

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## Pour citer cet article



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