

**Amsterdam Journal;**  
**Plane Crash Exposes a Dutch Ghetto**

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**Byline:** By PAUL L. MONTGOMERY,

By PAUL L. MONTGOMERY, Special to The New York Times

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## **Body**

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All day, the curious make the 20-minute metro ride from the center of the city to the apartment building where an El Al cargo jet **crashed** on Sunday evening.

Many stand and watch as cranes continue to lower lines into the scorched gap the **plane** tore in the building, searching for bodies among the rubble.

The **crash**, which Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers called the worst disaster in the Netherlands since World War II, has focused attention on the daily tragedies in the lives of the residents of Bijlmermeer, the poorest quarter of the city. And the visitors making the trip to the **crash** site are discovering a part of the city some never knew existed.

### Center for Immigrants

Bijlmermeer is teeming with immigrants from Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. Some immigrants come to take advantage of one of the most generous welfare states in the world. Some of the new arrivals enter the country by legal means while others slip through the cracks illegally.

A retired **Dutch** woman who lives alone in Bijlmermeer was watching the passing throng at a shopping arcade the other day, surrounded by stores selling saris and tropical vegetables and other foreign goods.

"I like the color and variety of this place very much," she said in precise English. "I think you will find that the **Dutch** are a tolerant people, and certainly the last war taught us to hate racism. But then you see the junkies and the people who don't work and you wonder. This is my country and I am not afraid, but it cannot go on forever like this."

### Lab at Airport

The city authorities have tried to reassure the illegals who might have friends or family in the wreckage to come forward with reports of the missing.

"I promise you that you will not get into difficulties," said Ed van Thijn, **Amsterdam**'s Mayor.

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The city has set up a laboratory at Schiphol airport, 10 miles from Bijlmermeer, to identify the bodies and coordinate the reports of the missing.

[So far, 51 bodies have been found, and some Dutch officials are now projecting a death toll of around 120 people instead of the 250 estimated to have died shortly after the crash, Reuters reported. The authorities say that some victims may have been incinerated completely in the fire.]

There is none of the open hostility to immigrants that has made headlines in Germany, but some Dutch are puzzled about the situation.

Bijlmermeer, for example, is notorious for drugs. Young men in American athletic gear stand ready to deal in parking lots and shopping arcades, scanning the streets for the police. A municipal report two years ago estimated there were 1,500 addicts among Bijlmermeer's 75,000 people.

In March the police raided the area and arrested nearly 50 people, almost all from Ghana. At the time, the police said those arrested were dealers and couriers in a Europe-wide cocaine and heroin network.

### Majority From Dutch Colonies

Most of the immigrants in the area come from former Dutch colonies like Suriname and Indonesia, and are admitted to reunite families.

The 187,000 people of the overseas territories of Aruba and the Dutch Antilles (Curacao, Bonaire and St. Maarten) have residence rights and also make up a part of Bijlmermeer's population. Others, apparently the majority, get visas to come and work in largely menial jobs.

In 1990, when 82,000 non-Dutch immigrants to the Netherlands were approved, the Dutch spent 30 percent of their gross domestic product on social welfare, according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. This compared with an average of 20 percent in the other industrial countries.

Imram Mujoorie, from Pakistan, said he found that a shrinking economy and recent restrictions on welfare payments had reduced the desirability of the Netherlands for some would-be immigrants.

"Some of my friends are going back," he said. "There is very little work now."

### Work Force on Disability

He has a residence permit that allows him to work, he gets a rent subsidy from the city and spends most of his time tending the counter at a sex store in the red-light district.

The country is unique in having 14 percent of its work force receiving payments for physical or psychological disabilities. Payments can amount to 70 percent of a worker's last salary. Many of the recipients who are younger than 40 complain of bad backs or psychological problems.

But the crash has made many immigrants question life in Bijlmermeer. At the local sports center, which serves as a shelter for those left homeless by the crash, a weary-looking man stood in a corridor resting his forehead on the concrete wall.

"I don't know, I don't know," he said, over and over.

Evert H. Verdies, who came here from Suriname, wants to put distance between his family and the crash, which occurred about 200 feet from his apartment.

"I can't forget it, and my children can't either," said the 39-year-old construction worker. "It's better to go away."

## Graphic

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Photo: The neighborhood of Bijlmermeer in Amsterdam, the poorest quarter of the city, is notorious for drugs -- a municipal report two years ago estimated there were 1,500 addicts among the suburb's 75,000 people. A man prepared his daily fix of heroin at a commuter train station in Bijlmermeer. (Associated Press for The New York Times)

Map of Amsterdam showing location of Bijlmermeer.

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