Transnational migrant politics in the Netherlands: historical structures and current events
Mügge, L.M.

Citation for published version (APA):

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: http://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.
5. **Suriname: From Student Activism to Transnational Party Politics, 1950s-2005**

This chapter asks how (post)colonial history has affected Surinamese transnational party politics since the 1950s. As we saw in the previous chapter, homeland-based actors are ambivalent towards influence from the former colonial metropole. We further saw that the transnational mobilisation potential of Surinamese migrant civil society is limited by its fragmentation and that most organisations do not exist for long. One of the main explanations for this, advanced in chapter 4, was that Suriname-based actors do not reach out to migrant organisations, with the result that ties remain uninstitutionalised from above. This chapter examines how ethnic diversity, short-term organisational structures and homeland-based actors’ ambivalence to invest in transnational ties have affected transnational party politics.

The factors outlined in chapter 2 that are analytically central in this chapter include: migrants’ length of stay, diplomatic relations, migrant civil society, migration motives, homeland political opportunity structures and political climate. To understand the influence of past and present diplomatic relations between Suriname and the Netherlands on transnational party politics, the next section describes its most relevant characteristics and sketches the evolution of Surinamese political parties and their attitudes towards the Netherlands. The following sections examine colonial migrant involvement in Surinamese politics in the decades before independence in 1975, and how political developments under military rule (1980-1987) affected transnational political involvement among exiles and settled migrants in the Netherlands as well as non-migrants and return migrants in Suriname. The final section investigates how transnational party politics and international party relations evolved under post-colonial democracy between 1987 and 2005.

**(Post) colonial political history**

*Towards independence, 1950s-1975*

Suriname was colonised by the Dutch in 1667. Advocating the end of colonialism – buoyed by Suriname’s economic prosperity during World War II from exporting bauxite to the US (Meel 1990: 265) – gained adherents among the Afro-Surinamese middle class in the 1940s. In 1954 Suriname obtained autonomous status within the Kingdom of the Netherlands (see Van Lier 1971: 379-421 for a detailed overview).

The light-skinned Afro-Surinamese elite defied Dutch colonialism during negotiations in The Hague. They viewed themselves as the legitimate successors of the Dutch – certainly not to be surpassed by any other ethnic group. In response, dark-skinned Afro-Surinamese, East Indians and Javanese advocated universal suffrage, which was introduced in Suriname in 1948. Many were elected to parliament in 1949,
reducing the power of the light-skinned Afro-Surinamese elite (Meel 1990: 265; see also Hassankhan 2003).

Political parties based primarily on ethnicity were formed in the run-up to the 1949 elections. Three parties have since played a leading role in Surinamese politics: the NPS, VHP and KTP, championing the interests of Afro-Surinamese, East Indians and Javanese respectively (see for a complete overview of ethnic political parties Dew 1996). Meel argues that:

Since the welfare of the racial group is the focal point of each party, nepotism, patronage and corruption have been widely practiced and frequently obstructed… balanced government policy. In Suriname most politicians believe national interests to be subservient to ethnic interests (Meel 1990: 265).

The lack of commitment to Surinamese nationhood began to irritate Afro-Surinamese students in the Netherlands. In 1958, progressive dark-skinned deputies, some of whom had been studying in the Netherlands, took over the NPS leadership. Surinamese independence now became an issue; in government and parliament NPS representatives pushed the boundaries of autonomy. In 1961 Surinamese nationalist students returning from the Netherlands founded the PNR, which became devoted to Surinamese independence. PNR supporters saw the building of an independent republic as the ultimate goal of every Surinamese; they therefore abhorred the emigration of Surinamese to the Netherlands. Those who left without intent to return were considered traitors ‘exposing themselves to the mercy of the colonial oppressor’ (Meel 1990: 265-268).

The PNR never enjoyed wide support and was hampered by its inability to create a multi-ethnic following; it mainly attracted well-educated Afro-Surinamese. It was able, however, to pave the road to independence – the Dutch handed over sovereignty to a NPS-PNR coalition government in 1975. After independence was achieved the PNR’s high days were over (Meel ‘90: 268-269). The new Surinamese government was immobilised by ethnic divisions, especially between the Afro-Surinamese NPS and the East Indian VHP (Dew 1990: 195). Despite these ethnic tensions, Surinamese post-colonial nationalism can be categorised as ‘territorial nationalism’ – the nationalism of an ethnically heterogeneous nation in a single state (Marshall 2003: 242-245).

The Surinamese exodus: emigration and return migration policies

Mass emigration to the Netherlands has had serious consequences for Suriname’s post-independence development. The exodus of Surinamese to the Netherlands, which began in 1973, has made Suriname an emigration society par excellence (Oostindie 1990: 231). After independence Suriname citizens lost their Dutch
nationality; the Dutch parliament, however, acknowledged the special tie that existed between Dutch and Surinamese.

Surinamese in the Netherlands were no ‘random foreigners’. At the same time the Dutch parliament stated that the Netherlands was not their home, that they would be better off in Suriname, and that their country couldn’t do without them (Jones 2007: 251-253). Surinamese Prime Minister Arron echoed the sentiment in a speech to a Surinamese audience in Amsterdam in the 1970s: ‘You don’t belong here’ (Oostindie & Klinkers 2001: 249).

The Dutch admission policy for Surinamese citizens remained flexible between 1975 and 1980, under the condition that the independent republic formulates a solid return migration policy (Jones 2007: 251-253). This resulted in the ‘return migration protocol’ of 1976 which stated that all people of Surinamese origin were ‘welcome in Suriname’ and that travel and moving expenses would be paid for by the Dutch government (Bakker, Dalhuisen, Donk, Hassankhan, Steegh & Egger 1998: 165). Between 1978 and 1993, roughly 7,500 migrants took advantage of this form of subsidised return migration (Schalkwijk 1994: 322). The return migration rate, however, was low – never more than 25 per cent of the total number of migrants in the 1950s (Bovenkerk 1982: 196). This further decreased over the years.

The National Military Council (NMR) installed a return desk after the 1980 coup (De Ware Tijd 1980; Solidariteitsbeweging Suriname 1980). A month later, around 400 persons had registered (De Echo 1980; Trouw 1980; Utrechts Nieuwsblad 1980). This politically motivated return migration desk, however, did not exist for long and we do not know how many people ultimately made use of it. In any case, the Surinamese government paid little attention to return migration in the 1980s (Schalkwijk 1994: 322). In 1981 it (unsuccessfully) urged the Dutch government to legalise illegal Surinamese living in the Netherlands, while the deteriorating political climate in Suriname meant political refugees were accepted in the Netherlands between 1982 and 1988 (Jones 2007: 255-256). Large-scale political emigration to the Netherlands in the 1980s, however, provoked bitterness among Surinamese who stayed behind: ‘they abandoned us when times got rough’ (Sedney 1997: 159). To this day this is one of the reasons why the resettlement process of return migrants is far from smooth (see also chapter 4).

The 1980 coup and its aftermath

The 1980 coup was staged by non-commissioned officers who had received their military training in the Netherlands. Around independence they returned with ‘a suitcase full of initiatives’ (Lotens 2004: 20) but were not taken seriously by their superiors. According to the leader of the junta, Lieutenant Colonel Desi Bouterse, the coup could not have been possible without the assistance of the Dutch military mission in Suriname. The National Military Council (NMR), under Bouterse’s
leadership, took charge in 1980. Political parties were banned, parliament suspended, the constitution adjourned and elections postponed (Sedoc-Dahlberg 1990b: 26).

The political influence of the Netherlands on Suriname remained palpable. Initially the Netherlands supported Suriname’s first government (installed by the NMR) with development aid, aiming to strengthen the power of Prime Minister Chin A Sen vis-à-vis the military. But the bilateral relationship cooled after the military forced Chin A Sen to abdicate in early 1982 (De Groot 2004). The NMR surrounded itself with intellectuals of different signatures, both returnees from the Netherlands and those who had never left Suriname (Lotens 2004: 24). Most were organised in two minor nationalist parties – the Revolutionary People’s Party (RVP) and the Union of Progressive Farmers and Labourers (PALU) – which grew out of the 1960s Marxist-Leninist Surinamese student movement in the Netherlands. RVP and PALU adopted anti-Dutch and anti-US policies, condemning neo-colonialism and favouring cooperation with other Third World regimes such as Nicaragua and Venezuela (Meel 1990: 270). In the 1970s their revolutionary ideas did not appeal to a broader constituency; by 1980 they appealed to the military leadership (Sedoc-Dahlberg 1990a: 175).

After the military regime killed fifteen of its opponents on 8 December 1982 – the ‘December murders’ – The Hague responded by suspending development aid. This political pressure – regarded as blackmail by the military and nationalists – was eventually successful (Meel 1990: 270). In December 1986 Desi Bouterse, pressed by the termination of Dutch aid and the depressed price of bauxite, announced elections for the following year (Hoogbergen & Kruijt 2005).

In the same year Maroon tribes declared war on the military government. For years the gaanmans (paramount chiefs) had expressed discontent with the policies of the central government in Paramaribo. Grievances swelled after atrocities were committed against several Maroon villages in the military’s hunt for a Ndyuka defector, Ronny Brunswijk. Brunswijk, Bouterse’s former bodyguard, became the leader of the Surinamese National Liberation Army or ‘Jungle Commando’, which carried out raids on military outposts and extended its control over the eastern and south-central part of the country. Guerrillas joined his army from the Netherlands and Paramaribo, including defectors from the National Army. Maroons in and around Paramaribo were harassed by Bouterse supporters or arrested by police (Dew 1990: 200). The NMR also targeted Maroon communities that indirectly supported the Jungle Commando, including an attack on the village of Moiwana in which many villagers lost their lives (Polimé and Van Velzen 1988: 7). Many Maroons thus fled to French Guyana and the Netherlands.

The Dutch government indirectly supported the Jungle Commando via the humanitarian aid of the Moravian Mission (ZZG) headquartered in Zeist. It also
tolerated meetings of the Jungle Commando on Dutch soil (Storms 1987: 15). The paramount chiefs nevertheless cried for help and criticised the Netherlands for ‘doing nothing’ – reminding it of its responsibility as the former coloniser (Polimé & Van Velzen 1988: 15).

Meanwhile, in the run up to the 1987 elections, the military transformed its political arm into the National Democratic Party (NDP) while the three veteran political leaders confederated the NPS, VHP and KTPI into the Front for Democracy and Development. The Front, organised along ethnic lines, won the elections easily. But the larger issues – the ‘December murders’, the continuing war between the NMR and the Jungle Commando, and Bouterse’s leadership of the army – remained unsolved after the 1987 election (Brana-Shute 1990: 222). The Jungle Commando continued its struggle in its belief that real democracy had not yet been achieved. While a cease fire agreement was signed between the Surinamese parliament and the Jungle Commando in July 1989 (Hold Translations 1989), peace did not come as Bouterse, still in charge of the army, did not accept the agreement (Buddingh’ 1995).

Postcolonial democracy, 1987-2005

With the installation of a civil government in 1988 Dutch development aid was restored, only to be suspended again after a second ‘soft’ coup in December 1990 (BIZA 1998). Bouterse’s NDP formed an interim government and announced elections for 1991 (Buddingh’ 1995). Much of the pre-election debate in Suriname centred on the proposal of Dutch Prime Minister Lubbers to create a Commonwealth, the main aim of which was to reduce the role of the army in Surinamese political life (IACHR 1992). The elections were won by the Front, then consisting of the SPA, NPS, VHP and KTPI. Under this government, democracy and definitive peace between the army and the Jungle Commando was established in 1992 (Hoogbergen & Krujit 2005: 231).

The Commonwealth was not to be. In 1992 a new agreement was signed promising more ‘business-like’ relations (also see Gortzak 2003). Tense relations, however, remained. In 2000 the Dutch minister of development aid and the Surinamese minister of planning and development aid decided to evaluate Dutch aid since 1975 and to draw lessons from the past (Krujit & Maks 2003). The publication of the report Een belaste relatie (‘a loaded relation’) was difficult, with the Dutch government criticising Surinamese obstructionism. Under pressure from the Dutch parliament, two reports finally appeared: the original version and an adapted version in which the most delicate passages were deleted. The Surinamese government nevertheless distanced itself from both reports (Ramsoedh & Hoogbergen 2006: 6-7): ‘When time and money is available’, the Surinamese president stated, ‘we will produce

---

our own Surinamese report’ (De Ware Tijd, 13 February 2004 cited in: Ramsoedh & Hoogbergen 2006: 7). The report evaluated the spending of Dutch development aid which, it stated, had been characterised by feelings of guilt and opportunism. The authors recommended more ‘business-like’ relations, a recommendation adopted by the Dutch government in its 2004 policy brief A Rijk Relation (‘Een Rijke Relatie’), which outlined its intention to stop structural development aid (BIZA 2004).

Recently there has been little interest in development cooperation on either side. For Suriname, relations within the Caribbean region have become more important. This I clearly observed during my fieldwork in 2005. For instance, DA’91 campaigned for monetary union with the Netherlands in 1991 and 1996; in 2005 the Netherlands was only mentioned in passing (DA’91 1996, 2000; A1 2005). To emphasise its independence, Bouterse’s NDP denounced Dutch attempts to interfere in Surinamese affairs117 while NPS leader Venetiaan emphasised the Netherlands’ exploitation of Suriname and its financial responsibility towards the former colony.118 None of the 2005 programmes mentioned Surinamese migrants in the Netherlands.

Dutch politicians who were involved with Surinamese issues around the time of its independence have retired or passed away; there is, in contrast, much more continuity among Surinamese leaders. Contemporary Dutch politicians do not have the knowledge of colonial and postcolonial relations, many Surinamese politicians do; this is particularly obvious during their visits to the former colony. The former Surinamese minister of foreign affairs explained it to me: ‘The difference is that I know Dutch history, but Dutch politicians do not know Surinamese history and the Dutch part in it. I lived, studied, worked in the Netherlands. I was active in Dutch protest organisations… I know Dutch society in its soul’.119

Constraints for return migrants with political ambitions

Though many political leaders have spent at least some of their formative years in the Netherlands (see appendix E), this does not guarantee an open gate for returnees. Very few Surinamese have been approached by party leaders for political positions while still living in the Netherlands. During the military regime, Bouterse recruited one minister from the Netherlands, Haakmat. His ministerial career, however, was short-lived. After surviving an assassination attempt he fled to the Netherlands to begin a resistance organisation against military rule (Haakmat 1987).

After the return to democracy, former VHP chairman Lachmon was well aware that a large part of the Surinamese intelligentsia lived in the Netherlands (Elsevier). In 1991 he approached a Surinamese migrant to become Minister of Justice (Boerboom

118 Speech by Ronald Venetiaan on Nieuw Front election meeting, Brokopondo, 26 April 2005, reported by Anne Blanksma.
& Oranje 1992). But in the words of the present VHP chairman and vice president, looking for expertise in the Netherlands is no longer necessary: ‘We have a pool of graduates here, coming straight from our own university. Academics who studied in the Netherlands used to be received as heroes when they returned… Now they just go up in the mass’.120

Another obstacle for politically ambitious return migrants is their Dutch nationality. By forfeiting Dutch nationality, one loses Dutch social security rights should return migration fail. Politicians from three different parties took their chances in 2005 and obtained Surinamese nationality to become candidates for political office. But in one case citizenship became a serious issue. Just before the presidential elections, it turned out that the NDP candidate had not given up his Dutch nationality, which allowed the Nieuw Front to run television spots portraying the NDP as wanting to return Suriname to the Dutch.121

Ethnicity and nationalism in political mobilisation

Surinamese political parties traditionally mobilise support within a single ethnic group. But as chapter 1 outlined, many of the country’s ethnic groups are religiously heterogeneous. This ethnic-religious diversity is reflected in Suriname’s political parties. For example, five parties separately appealed to the small Javanese electorate in 2005 (see Kartokromo 2006). In the 2005 elections, 27 parties competed for 335,273 potential votes122 (in comparison, fifteen parties competed for roughly twelve million votes in the Netherlands in 2002).123 These figures highlight the narrow support base of many Surinamese political parties. Twenty-three out of 27 parties thus entered the 2005 elections within alliances (Blanksma 2006a: 33).

Electoral alliances confederating ethnic parties have become a historical pattern. The Afro-Surinamese NPS and East Indian VHP formed coalition governments between 1958 and 1967 known as verbroederingspolitiek (‘fraternisation politics’). The inclusion of the two largest ethnic groups in government guaranteed peaceful relations between all groups as well as the maintenance of their cultures (Azimuth 1986; Dew 1996). In the 1960s the VHP and NPS were challenged by new political parties from within their own ethnic groups blaming them for making too many concessions in the verbroederingspolitiek. The NPS also came under increasing pressure from new nationalist parties emphasising nationalism instead of ethnicity (Dew 1996: 99-138). Nationalism was emphasised under military rule as well; its leaders saw the established parties’ use of ethnic mobilisation as a tool to keep the Surinamese people divided (Blanksma 2006a: 27).

120 Interview with vice-president and VHP chairman, Paramaribo, 27 August 2005.
121 Fieldnotes, Paramaribo/Nickerie, 22 July-1 August 2005.
Ethnicity was again central in the 1987 elections, with ethnically exclusive meetings held in separate locations. There was no pretension to merge the identities of the different groups into one national culture. ‘The goal was unity in diversity and the US motto “united we stand, divided we fall” was widely used...’ (Brana-Shute 1990: 220-221). Even though the military was dominated by Afro-Surinamese, the NDP presented itself as a multi-ethnic party. The cabinet assembled in 1988 carefully balanced Afro-Surinamese, East Indian and Javanese interests. Ethnic mobilisation still plays an important role during election campaigns and in the distribution of government positions. Ethnic mobilisation, however, has a highly individual character, channeled through the personally-oriented networks of politicians who generally work for their own ethnic group, the party and themselves (Ramsoedh 2001: 91-92). Since the 1980s, alliances and large political parties increasingly present themselves as national parties or blocs representing the whole Surinamese nation in its diversity (see Blanksma 2006a, b).

This (post)colonial political history has clearly had consequences for the development of transnational politics. Surinamese nationalism on the one hand was greatly influenced by individuals who had studied in the Netherlands; on the other hand, nationalist parties – and the broader public, especially when times were tough under military rule – often saw migrants as ‘traitors’. The government and political parties thus did little to stimulate return migration or to accommodate those who returned. The relationship between the Netherlands and the independent republic further deteriorated after the ‘December murders’, leading both parties to explore possibilities for a more ‘business-like’ relationship. The following sections examine how this turbulent history has influenced Surinamese transnational party politics.

**Student transplanted immigrant politics, 1950-1975**

In the 25 years preceding Surinamese independence in 1975, Surinamese students in the Netherlands became the first transnational actors trying to influence politics in the colony. Until World War II, Surinamese students in the Netherlands mainly belonged to the Creole upper class; they generally shied away from politics and ‘tried to live well according to Dutch norms’ (Sedoc-Dahlberg 1971: 115). This changed in the 1950s when scholarships became available for middle class Surinamese youths to study in the Netherlands. The colony needed well-educated citizens: students were supposed to return after their studies to contribute to society. But return migration frequently failed as graduates had difficulties finding suitable jobs (ibid.1971: 1). Nor could return migrants easily fit into the existing political parties. They were better educated than the political elite and were seen as a threat; returnees were young, ambitious and wanted change, something older politicians rarely appreciated. 124 Thus return student leaders sooner or later founded their own political parties (Nell forthcoming).

---

124 Interview with former student leader in Leiden, Paramaribo, 18 August 2005.
Students who had been active in organisations in the Netherlands used their acquired skills to form political parties and movements upon their return. Their efforts, however, were deeply fragmented, both in the Netherlands and in Suriname; divisions mainly reflected phases of emigration and ideology but also city of settlement and ethnicity. The student groups were small, limited to an active cadre of five to ten persons – usually a charismatic leader supported by fellow students. This reflected the importance of ethnicity rather than ideology in Surinamese politics.

Nevertheless, Surinamese students in the Netherlands shared with each other the experience of their time abroad. Leaving Suriname with the idea that they were Dutch, they soon realised they were different: ‘As a rule the Dutch did not approach Surinamese as fellow-countrymen. Instead they were regarded as foreigners and expected to have a culture of their own’ (Meel 1990: 266). This induced Surinamese in the Netherlands to search for their own identity and to make political and cultural sense out of their alienation. At the same time, international decolonisation movements and socialist ideology inspired them to criticise Suriname’s relations with the coloniser. Returning to Suriname with their new ideas, the former students were met with suspicion.

Between 1960 and 1970 three return student leaders entered Surinamese politics. The first was Eddy Bruma, founder of the Afro-Surinamese nationalist movement Wí Eogi Sani (WES – Our Own Cause) in Amsterdam around 1950 (Jansen van Jansen van Galen 2000). Inspired by anti-imperialist ideology, the WES campaigned for Surinamese independence and Sranantongo as the lingua franca. Upon Bruma’s return, established Surinamese politicians saw him as a ‘communist threat’; he did not join an existing party but established the Nationalist Party of the Surinamese Republic (PNR) in 1961. When the PNR recruited a representative in the Netherlands, it became the first Surinamese political party founded by a return migrant with a branch in the Netherlands. Ideologically as well as in personnel, the PNR had its roots in the WES student movement; WES activists received positions in the party in Suriname and the branch in the Netherlands. In Suriname the party slowly gained ground in parliament until Jules Sedney, a former WES activist, became prime minister in 1969.

Four years after the foundation of the PNR, a new group of returnees from Leiden created their own political party in Suriname. Former chairman of the Leiden Surinamese Student Association (SSV) Ronald Venetiaan together with the organisation’s secretary Hans Prade launched the National Peoples Party (NVP) in 1965. Prade later reflected: ‘People expected us to join the NPS, but we had invited ministers of governing parties to the SSV and posed critical questions, a capital sin in those days. Our reputation had been destroyed’.125 The NVP never gained ground as a party. The two board members found their way into existing parties and eventually

---

125 Interview with former secretary of SSV Leiden, Rotterdam, 6 May 2005.
attained high positions. Twenty-five years after their return, in 1991, the two return students ran for president. Venetiaan won, as he did again in 2000 and 2005.

The third group of transnational actors in the 1960s, a small group of nationalist East Indian Surinamese students, aimed to establish an East Indian counterpart to the Afro-Surinamese WES based on religion and language (Gobardhan-Ramböcous 1993; Ramsoedh 2003). They did not establish a new party in Suriname but instead formed a party branch of the United Hindustan Party (VHP)126 in the Netherlands127 (for support for a split of the VHP, see Van Amersfoort 1970; Van der Veer & Van der Burg 1984). Instead of criticising the colonial tie with the Netherlands, the Dutch branch aimed to stimulate a sense of responsibility towards Suriname among migrants.128 Contact with the mother party initially meant regular visits and financial and moral support during elections. This support, however, went politically unrewarded when one of the founders of the branch returned to Suriname in 1971. Though not an ideological threat, the party kept him at a distance. He explained: ‘I did a suspicious study [political sciences, LN] in a suspicious city [Amsterdam, LN]’.129 Having been politicised in Amsterdam – considered by the Surinamese government the heart of Dutch communism – prevented his full inclusion in the VHP.

Surinamese student organisations in Amsterdam and Leiden had so far worked on their own. After their leaders returned to Suriname, their successors tried to unite the Surinamese Student Organisations (SSVs) in the Netherlands and to organise the movement nationally. But divisions between cities remained; each SSV continued to plan for the founding of its own political party when members returned. As had been the case with returnees in the 1960s, they could not rely on support from existing political parties. SSV Leiden for example was preparing the launch of the Peoples Party (VP) upon the chairman’s return in 1973; positions within the party-to-be mirrored the administrative board of the student organisation. But the foundation of the VP angered the communist Democratic Peoples Front (DVF) led by non-returnees. The DVF considered the VP a threat and tried to tarnish its reputation by claiming its leader was neither a real communist nor a real Surinamese, but a Dutch intellectual (KPS/ML 1975).

To aid the party both financially and morally, the VP used its former contacts in the student movement to establish a branch in the Netherlands. The chairman’s aim was to train cadres who could quickly return to Suriname. 30 years later, the VP chairman Lie Paw Sam saw support in the Netherlands as ‘a family process’. Looking back, he deplored that members in the Netherlands were not driven by ideology but

---

129 Interview with VHP representative in the Netherlands in the 1960s, Rotterdam, 13 April 2005.

130
by having friends and family in the organisation. Newly arrived students moreover remained politically untutored by the VP leader who now lived in Suriname. While he visited the organisation in the Netherlands every six months, relations with emigrants remained difficult: ‘If I arrived they shook their heads. They came with new ideas. It is not that I didn’t like it, but I needed practical solutions’. 130 The VP needed students to return but very few did.

Lie Paw Sam found his main opponent in Krolis, a charismatic student leader of SSV Wageningen. Krolis also lectured on the political line students should follow once they returned. While Krolis was in the Netherlands, SSV Wageningen supported an existing Marxist-Leninist organisation in Suriname. Nevertheless, once back in Suriname, the Surinamese organisation mistrusted the returnees: ‘we returned with extra intellectual baggage… “You should not think that you can take from us what we have built,” was their stance’.131 This motivated Krolis in 1977 to found the Progressive Workers and Peasants Union (PALU) in Suriname, with a branch in the Netherlands. The latter supported the mother party financially and morally during election campaigns but was dissolved when the last chairman returned to Suriname in 1999. The branch, however, had already lost its influence among students in the Netherlands; as students returned, other Surinamese parties tried to influence the PALU ‘bastion’ in Wageningen.

After the return of the communist student leaders Lie Paw Sam and Krolis, former SSV groups created the National Organisation of Surinamese in the Netherlands (LOSON) in 1973. LOSON aimed to stimulate return migration. But in contrast to earlier student organisations, LOSON also sought to improve the position of Surinamese in the Netherlands. Just before independence LOSON became a member of the communist DVF in Suriname and, alongside the VP and PALU, fundraised in the Netherlands (LOSON 1976). But after three years LOSON left the DVF, complaining that the party excluded it from decision-making (Solidariteitsbeweging Suriname 1979).

The political ‘come-back’ of individuals who had gone to the Netherlands to study was more difficult than expected. Their time in the Netherlands clearly had negative consequences for their political careers in Suriname. Instead of cooperating with other returnees or with existing political parties, returnee student leaders often founded their own parties. But this transplantation of immigrant politics angered members of existing Surinamese parties. Most returnees who had supported Surinamese parties while living in the Netherlands eventually left them after returning. However, some earlier return students eventually did achieve high political office. They were less radically ‘left’ than the new arrivals and simply being earlier, were in time to fill the openings (see also Bovenkerk 1982).

130 Interview with former SSV Leiden chairman and VP founder, Paramaribo, 16 June 2005.
131 Interview with former SSV Wageningen chairman and PALU founder, Paramaribo, 13 June 2005.
I ideological, ethnic and geographical divisions between student organisations were transplanted from the Netherlands, just as this fragmentation had earlier been imported from Suriname. After their return, students’ contacts with the organisations they left behind in the Netherlands quickly weakened, and along with them, the connections needed to support their parties. Organised transnational activity among students declined after independence in 1975 – the main goal had been achieved. This radically altered the position of Surinamese students in the Netherlands. The growing Surinamese migrant community was changing as well: Surinamese now officially became ‘migrants’ while their political life came to focus on residence in the Netherlands rather than return to Suriname.

**Effects of home country political change during military rule, 1980-1987**

A coup d’état in Suriname in 1980 dramatically changed the direction of transnational politics. Some return students in Suriname supported the coup and held advisory positions until 1982. Generally speaking, Surinamese immigrant organisations that considered themselves ‘left’ sympathised with the so-called revolution while supporters of the old ruling parties opposed it. It is important to underline that the central actors in this episode – both opponents and prononents of the military regime – were small in number. *Homeland directed* politics further became *transplanted homeland* politics when the revolutionary leaders killed fifteen opponents of the regime in 1982. Political refugees in the Netherlands now schemed to overthrow the regime.

Surinamese immigrant groups in the Netherlands responded differently to the coup. Sympathisers of the traditional political parties naturally opposed it. Some were active in Dutch political parties of different signatures and tried, unsuccessfully, to influence their parties’ policies regarding Suriname.132 Other migrant organisations were more sympathetic and tried to mobilise support for the ‘revolution’ (Solidariteitsbeweging Suriname 1980). The coup’s proponents united in a national umbrella organisation in 1981, the Revolutionary Movement of Surinamese Supporting Organisations (REBOSON). REBOSON maintained close contact with the NMR and included organisations and branches of parties that advised the NMR in Suriname such as PALU (PALU 1982); REBOSON’s main goal was to increase return migration and to lobby for the resumption of frozen Dutch development aid (REBOSON 1983). Influencing Dutch foreign policy now became a key objective for transnational actors in both the Netherlands and Suriname.

In early 1983 exiles founded the Council for the Liberation of Suriname (RBS) in the Netherlands. Most RBS members had enjoyed high political office in Suriname (even the presidency). RBS held the Dutch government responsible for the coup; it claimed the Dutch military mission had murdered Surinamese democracy and had encouraged the sergeants (RBS 1986: 8). In their activities RBS appealed to the

---

132 Interview with member of the Dutch PvdA and the Surinamese NPS, Amstelveen, 4 April 2005.
responsibility of the Netherlands to help reinstall democracy; it also strengthened contacts with representatives of Dutch parties and fostered links with Cuban exile organisations in the US. As its main goal was to return to Suriname, RBS did not cooperate with Surinamese immigrant organisations focused on improving the position of migrants in the Netherlands.

In addition to RBS’ ‘elite’ exiles, student leaders who had organised demonstrations against the NMR’s university reforms before fleeing to the Netherlands became transnationally active (Ramlakhan probably 1983). Exile students grouped together and tried to mobilise non-exile Surinamese students; broad student resistance, however, was not to be. Just as ‘senior’ immigrant organisations were unwilling to work with ‘senior’ exiles in resistance organisations, immigrant students were unwilling to join the resistance organisations of students in exile. While still supportive of a democratic Suriname, exile students’ activities came to resemble those of a ‘foreign student’ society rather than one of ‘militant exiles’ (see WJ jongerenorganisatie - CNV 1984). ‘A student movement cannot develop resistance activities from here’, they argued. ‘After your study you return and resist over there’. 133

In other words, transplanted homeland politics was pointless – one needed to return to Suriname to make effective change.

On the ‘pro-revolutionary’ side relations with key persons in Suriname improved after 8 December 1982. To oppose the RBS and promote the Surinamese ruling order, proponents launched the League of Surinamese Patriots (LSP) in the Netherlands. In fact this was a continuation of REBOSON.134 For the ‘left migrant organisations’, the decision to continue actions was largely based on whether relatives, friends or political leaders supported by the organisation had been among the victims of the murders (see De Waarheid 1983). These leftist migrant organisations did not create an umbrella organisation like the LSP or RBS, of which they were critical; the RBS, consisting of the former political elite, was considered a continuation of the ‘old’ politics (Kollektief Jumpa Rajguru 1984). Logically, those who opposed the dictatorship also rejected the LSP.

Activities of the resistance movement in the Netherlands triggered the Surinamese ruling order to take reprisals against RBS and their relatives in Suriname. In both countries – or on holidays – people watched their steps.135 According to a former resistance leader, this led to social isolation within the Dutch Surinamese community: ‘People were terrified to be associated with us’.136 This fear increased after a group of musicians were killed in a room where the RBS was scheduled to meet in 1985. The perpetrators were never found.

133 ‘Discussiegroep’ notes of a meeting held 29 June 1985 in Bijlmermeer, personal archive of former member of the Jungle Commando, received in Paramaribo, August 2005.
134 Interview with LSP founder, Paramaribo, 19 May 2005.
135 Interview with the son of former resistance leader, Paramaribo, 3 August 2005.
136 Interview with former board member of the Pendawa Lima, Paramaribo, 30 July 2005.
Transnational political activism became more diverse after 8 December 1982. The murder of the 'expected' opponents of military rule on Dutch territory was a clear example of transplanted homeland politics. Activities of Surinamese in the Netherlands also had consequences for their relatives in Suriname (IACHR 1985) – one reason why most migrants did not participate in resistance activities even if they rejected the revolution. On the other hand, supporters of the regime became more home country directed, maintaining strong ties with the ruling order though their positions remained informal. Exiles had few (secret) transnational contacts in this period; they tried to achieve their goals via the Dutch government and relations with third country governments and political parties.

New prospects for the resistance movement in the Netherlands appeared when Ronny Brunswijk, former sergeant and bodyguard of Bouterse, began his revolt against the army in 1986. Soon Brunswijk was the most wanted criminal in Suriname. He sought asylum in the Netherlands, where two resistance leaders encouraged him to begin guerrilla warfare:137 … we agreed to overturn the military regime and to reinstall democracy. That is not possible without military violence. I was to start the resistance here and people in the Netherlands would support me.138 In Suriname Brunswijk formed the Surinamese National Liberation Army (SNLA) – known as the ‘Jungle Commando’ – consisting mainly of Maroons from eastern Suriname.139 Both in the Netherlands and Suriname, Maroons from eastern Suriname identified with Brunswijk’s struggle – the conflict thus gained a new dimension: the emancipation of impoverished Maroons. From this moment the RBS took a supporting rather than a leading role in the resistance against Bouterse140 – once active on Surinamese territory, exiles were wanted ‘terrorists’ (Herrenberg 1986). The conflict ended in the 1986-1992 ‘civil war’ between the SNLA and the National Army, when the SNLA controlled one-third of the country (see De Vries 2005).

In the end, the support of resistance organisations in the Netherlands was ineffective. According to Brunswijk, it was characterised by ‘promises’ (Van der Beek 1987). The resistance movement – consisting of RBS and some other organisations in the Netherlands and the SNLA in Suriname – was divided.141 The close contact of the RBS with Dutch political parties, however, was partially behind the Dutch government’s indirect financial support of the SNLA under the banner of humanitarian aid to Maroon communities (Storms 1987). After the installation of a

137 Ibid.
138 Interview with the former leader of the Jungle Commando, Paramaribo, 29 August 2005.
139 Descendants of run-away slaves, members of the group themselves often speak of ‘bush negroes’ or use the specific name of the tribe. Scholars usually use the term ‘Maroon’. Thomas Polimé and Thoden Van Velzen, Vluchtelingen, Opstandelingen en andere Haarungs van Oost-Suriname, 1986-1988 (Utrecht: Instituut voor Culturele Antropologie, 1988).
140 Notes of students’ meeting with Chin A Sen, 27 October 1986. Received from former Jungle Commando member in Paramaribo, August 2005.
civilian government in 1987, resistance groups in the Netherlands officially ended their activities (Bakker et al. 1998). But the SNLA continued its struggle, arguing that real democracy – with a subordinate army – had not been achieved.

Military rule from 1980 to 1987 had a great impact on transnational politics and revealed the many divisions among its actors, both in Suriname and in the Netherlands. The divisions reflected political cleavages in the homeland, first imported into the immigrant society by students and later transnationalised in ties between settled migrants in the Netherlands and return and non-migrants in Suriname. This fragmentation weakened the capacity to mobilise and influence political change; while military rule politicised the immigrant community, transnational actors had little impact with their small-scale actions in support of specific groups. While some return migrants (of whom the former revolutionary leader Bouterse is the most striking example) made their mark on Surinamese politics, their transnational ties mattered little once in power. While transnational ties were vital to the creation of the SNLA, actors in the Netherlands had little influence over its subsequent actions.

Transnational party politics in a postcolonial democracy since 1987

The aims and activities of transnational actors changed when Suriname entered its period of ‘postcolonial democracy’. Influencing diplomatic relations between the Netherlands and Suriname became less important. Some exiles did not return right away – some never did – but began seeing themselves as migrants in the Netherlands. Transplanted homeland politics (i.e. the import of homeland conflicts) faded away while formal transnational party politics – ties between political parties in Suriname and their sympathisers in the Netherlands – mainly channelled home country directed transnational politics. The political fate of returnees in the 1990s was strikingly similar to those who returned before independence. They clashed with the ruling political elite and with Surinamese political culture and created new marginal parties instead of or after joining existing parties. Returnee political entrepreneurs had to create niches for themselves.

Transnational party politics, 1987-2005

When political parties re-entered the political arena in the run-up to the 1987 elections, their Dutch branches were (re)created and formalised. This was frequently in response to requests for money or expertise. The actors involved often had kinship relations with party leaders in Suriname; such family ties are traceable up to the 2005 elections. It should be emphasised that most party branches in the Netherlands consist of very small groups with personal ties to party cadres in Suriname. Figure 5.1 shows all national and transnational ties of Surinamese parties and their branches in the Netherlands.
The star of ties on the lower left portrays parliamentary cooperation between the *Nieuw Front* (consisting of the predominantly Afro-Surinamese parties NPS and SPA, the East Indian VHP and the Javanese PL) and the alliance *A-Combinatie* (uniting the Maroon parties BEP, ABOP and Seeka). This star is partly reflected in the Netherlands as each of the *Nieuw Front* parties has its own branch there. While the branches in the Netherlands organise activities as an alliance during election campaigns, cooperation with the Maroon organisations does not show in the figure; at the time of research, *A-Combinatie* was still exploring opportunities to establish a branch in the Netherlands. BEP, however, maintains ties with some Maroon organisations in the Netherlands. A similar reflection of the party alliance VVV (consisting of the ethnically mixed party DNP, the East Indian BVD and the Javanese KTP) can be seen in the upper right of the figure.

Generally speaking, Dutch party branches exist to support their parties financially. Since Surinamese political parties do not receive financial support from the government (see also Krishnadath 2000), support from branches in money or kind is very welcome. Political support is the other main contribution, with branches organising meetings for Dutch members and Surinamese party leaders – physically or via live phone connections. This is regardless of the fact that Surinamese in the Netherlands cannot vote. The leaders of the multi-ethnic People's Alliance for Progress (VVV) and the predominantly East Indian Union of Progressive Surinamese (UPS) campaigned in the Netherlands in 2005. Both believed that a Dutch campaign would influence voting behaviour in Suriname through family ties. They believed people in Suriname would look up to their relatives in the Netherlands who had studied, earned good salaries and had ‘made it’ in Dutch society; their voting advice would be taken seriously. The NDP had a further motive to campaign in the Netherlands: to gain members among first generation Surinamese students who may one day return.

Sympathisers of all Surinamese political parties, organised in Dutch party branches, travelled to Suriname to offer their support in person. This was not organised by the parties; those able to leave their jobs and afford to go did so. In most cases, this meant between three and ten people per party. During their stay they were often present at board meetings; public appearances were rare. Members of the Dutch branches assisted with logistics and campaigning, performed administrative tasks and acted as observers at voting stations. But when it came to concrete policy proposals, advice from the Dutch branches was generally ignored, even though individual party members in the Netherlands routinely advise individual politicians in Suriname. While

---

142 Only Surinamese with Surinamese nationality are allowed to vote. Voting takes place exclusively on Surinamese territory.
143 Interview with leader of DNP 2000, Amsterdam, 3 August 2004; interview with former chairman of HPP and UPS, Nickerie, 22 July 2005.
144 Interview with chairman of the NDP branch in the Netherlands, Amsterdam, 11 April 2005.
such advice is requested often and taken seriously, it is usually channelled through ties between relatives or old friends. Party branches based on friendships and family have higher chances of success: their transnational ties are strong and foster frequent communication. Practically all political parties and their branches in the Netherlands are connected through such ties.

Institutionalised family ties seem omnipresent, certainly on the level of boards. Thus the institutionalised ties between branches and the mother party in figure 5.1 are often also based on kinship. This particularly concerns male ties between brothers, sons and fathers, uncles and nephews, and sons and fathers-in-law. The following examples are instructive.

In 1987 trade union leader Fred Derby founded the Surinamese Labour Party (SPA). Around the same time his son was asked to establish a SPA branch in the Netherlands. The son became SPA chairman in the Netherlands in 1989, mirroring the position of his father in Suriname.145 In 1987 the NPS branch was formalised by a party member sent to the Netherlands for this purpose. A key contact was his father-in-law who had founded the Dutch NPS branch in exile. The NPS member arrived in the Netherlands to set up Frambo, the financial organ of the NPS, and to examine possibilities for Dutch support.146 This individual became the official contact person in Suriname while his father-in-law became chairman in the Netherlands. When the SPA leader in Suriname and the chairman of the NPS branch in the Netherlands died, the institutionalised family ties between board members disappeared. Family ties on other levels, however, continued to be politically important. NPS leadership in the Netherlands passed on to a party member who had been chairman of the NPS youth branch in Suriname and whose father had been minister of education and secretary of the party council.147

NPS and SPA leaders in Suriname and the Netherlands stay in regular touch by phone, email, and during work and family visits. The NPS official responsible for contact with the Netherlands branch admitted his function was unnecessary as party members are connected through family and friendship ties: ‘We are so close with each other, people contact each other straight away’.148 This was confirmed by the NPS minister of foreign affairs: ‘I talk to the people in the Netherlands on the phone weekly when I need information, or when they have advice’.149 The SPA leadership in both countries confirmed regular contact by phone and email; physical distance does not imply estrangement: ‘When we are in Suriname, we participate directly in meetings with the administrative board, nobody will ask why you are there, they expect it’.150

---

145 Interview with chairman of the SPA branch in the Netherlands, Amsterdam, 19 December 2005.
146 Interview with member of the state council, secretary of Frambo, Paramaribo, 26 August 2005.
147 Interview with former chairman of the NPS branch in the Netherlands, Paramaribo, 6 June 2005.
148 Interview with member of the state council, secretary of Frambo, Paramaribo, 26 August 2005.
150 Interview with chairman of the SPA branch in the Netherlands, Amsterdam, 19 December 2005.
Finally, most leaders of Surinamese parties have relatives or close friends in the Netherlands who support the party leadership and are frequently consulted. This may include writing speeches or parts of the party programme, or advising candidates during election campaigns. While such individual support has no visible effect on the respective political parties, it does affect Surinamese politics.

The chairmen of Surinamese party branches in the Netherlands generally belong to the elite within Dutch Surinamese civil society (see figure 5.1). While they may be opponents in Surinamese politics, in the Netherlands they work together (see figure 4.1). For instance, the chairman of the VHP branch and the board members of the UPS branch are active in several East Indian organisations in The Hague as well as within national umbrella organisations; together they represent the interests of East Indians in the Netherlands. When they travelled to Suriname to support their parties in 2005, they stayed in the same hotel. Though they competed in the campaigns, after the mass meetings Surinamese elites from the Netherlands – representing different political parties – could be seen fraternising on the terraces of Paramaribo’s bars. Figure 5.1 also shows the ties of the VHP, NPS and SPA branches with the development organisations SIOSD and CSO. In fact they have been the driving forces behind several conferences on dual citizenship and broadening political opportunities for Dutch Surinamese, as described in the previous chapter.

Yet involvement in Dutch branches of Surinamese parties is no guarantee for success in Suriname. The former chairman of the Dutch branch of the Javanese Party for National Unity and Solidarity (KTPI) was asked by the party leader to return to become the minister of social affairs in 1996. But party members reacted negatively to his special position and his Dutch working methods; eventually he left the KTPI to found his own party, Democrats of the 21st Century. 151 As in the 1970s, return migrants in the 1990s often established their own parties. At least two such parties competed in elections for the first time in 2005. But as was the case with returnees’ parties in the 1970s, they received few votes. What was new was the exclusive focus on the mobilisation of the rank and file in Suriname.

The above case shows how migrants’ national and transnational activities in both Surinamese civil society and Dutch politics reinforce one another. In fact, it is the same people – the elite within Surinamese civil society – who are active in both. Transnational political activities seem to succeed only when actors in the Netherlands support established political actors in Suriname. Many return migrants found that involvement in a branch of a Surinamese party in the Netherlands was no guarantee for a long-term position in Surinamese politics.

---

151 Interview with founder of D 21, Paramaribo, 12 August 2005.
**Ties between Dutch and Surinamese political parties and the role of Dutch politicians of Surinamese origin**

Surinamese and Dutch political parties have cooperated or sympathised with each other since the 1950s, while Surinamese migrants have historically been represented within Dutch parties. In the past, simultaneous memberships within Surinamese and Dutch parties often reflected close ties between them. But as previously noted, politicians of Surinamese origin who have grown up in the Netherlands find it frustrating that the new generation of Dutch politicians know little about Suriname. How does this affect the diplomatic relationship between political parties?

Though formal ties never existed, the NPS traditionally saw the PvdA as its ideological equivalent, the rank and file of both parties consisting of urban labourers and civil servants (Jansen van Galen 2001: 46-48). Elite members of the NPS in Suriname – including Ferrier who would become the first president of the Surinamese Republic – were PvdA members when students in the Netherlands (Jansen van Galen 2005). Return migrants who had been active in the PvdA further attempted to remodel the NPS along the lines of the PvdA (Jansen van Galen 2001: 47). Surinamese students in the Netherlands who had been members of the Progressive Surinamese Peoples Party (PSV) in Suriname automatically joined the Catholic Peoples Party (KVP, later CDA) in the Netherlands. The PSV in Suriname, founded by a Dutch priest on the model of the KVP, maintained close ties with its Dutch counterpart.152

Contacts between Dutch parties and Surinamese migrants and exiles served various ends during military rule. Especially exiles used their contacts to try to influence Dutch policy towards Suriname, while Dutch parties kept contact with the branches of pro-revolutionary parties such as PALU153 to stay informed about political developments in Suriname. A similar strategy employing transnational ties was used to try to improve frozen diplomatic relations during Surinamese democracy’s recovery period. Ironically it was Bouterse – the former leader of the ‘revolution’ and now chairman of the NDP – who first attempted to influence Dutch policy by inviting the PvdA politician of Surinamese origin Chas Warning to observe the 1987 elections (De Nieuwe Bijlmer 1987a). The initiative, however, did not have the desired impact – either on the relations between the Netherlands and Suriname or on the PvdA’s stance towards Bouterse. The episode only provoked criticism within the Dutch Surinamese community (De Nieuwe Bijlmer 1987b).

After the second coup in 1990, Bouterse, who still had considerable power within the army, wanted a new relationship with the Netherlands (De West 1991b) – though not in the form of the Commonwealth proposed by Prime Minister Lubbers.

---

152 Interview with PSV chairman, Paramaribo, 7 July 7 2005.
153 Interview with former Redi Doti board member, former editor of Pale-Informatie and member of PALU, Paramaribo, 15 June 2005.
Instead, Bouterse aimed to improve communication between the two countries through Dutch politicians of Surinamese origin (Trouw 1991b). He thus contacted local politicians representing various Dutch parties and cities to exchange thoughts on the future of Suriname after the 1991 elections (De West 1991a). In several interviews the delegation members explicitly stated they were politicians in the Netherlands. Their aim was not to ‘tell them in Paramaribo what to do’ (Trouw 1991a) but ‘to influence their Dutch parties’ standpoint regarding Suriname’ (Weekkrant Suriname 1991). In this way they became transnational actors.

Bouterse’s opponents who had led the resistance movement in exile backed the Commonwealth idea. The former exiles, aiming to advise both Dutch and Surinamese political parties, now began to act as Surinamese migrants in the Netherlands, cooperating with immigrant elites to smooth relations between the Netherlands and Suriname. While some Dutch politicians of Surinamese origin individually tried to influence relations between their parties and the Surinamese government, little was achieved.

Over time, relations that had existed between Dutch and Surinamese political parties weakened and finally dissolved. This was in large part due to key figures in the Netherlands leaving their positions. After the reinstitution of Surinamese parties in 1987, many attempted to formalise ties with parties in the Netherlands. PALU, through the mediation of its Dutch branch, maintained ties with the Dutch liberal party VVD; they exchanged ideas about liberal movements between 1990 and 2002. This, however, ended when the VVD contact person left the party.154 The East Indian party HPP in Suriname likewise maintained ties with the Dutch Green Left party through the mediation of its Dutch branch and East Indian parliamentarian Tara Singh Varma. This contact was especially fruitful when the HPP was represented in the Surinamese assembly between 1996 and 2000.155 But after Singh Varma left politics, the contact ended.156 A similar pattern was apparent for the formerly close PSV and KVP; when the KVP merged into the CDA, the international ‘sister’ relation ended. Traditionally strong contacts between the NPS and the PvdA also dissolved. In the 1980s the NPS had argued its members should exclusively join the PvdA; today NPS members in the Netherlands are active in all parties.157 What matters is having the same view on Surinamese politics.

Dutch politicians of Surinamese origin in Amsterdam have been united in an organisation since 1994. Since 2003 they also cooperate at the national level through the National Platform of Surinamese Politicians (LPSP). In 2005 the LPSP counted

---

154 Interview with PALU founder, Paramaribo, 13 June 2005.
155 Interview with former chairman of the Dutch branch of the HPP and present chairman of the Dutch UPS branch, Paramaribo, 18 May 2005.
156 Interview with former HPP and UPS chairman, Nickerie, 22 July 2005.
157 Interview with NPS and PvdA member, Amstelveen, 4 April 2005.
168 national and local politicians, local administrators and party board members.\footnote{158 Interview with LPSP chairman, Diemen, 27 April 2005.} Some politicians did not join the network, fearing their parties would disapprove of membership in a Surinamese network while being representatives of a Dutch electorate. The LPSP, however, mainly focuses on immigrant activities and on increasing Surinamese representation in the Netherlands. In the run-up to the 2002 national elections, it sent a manifesto to all Dutch political parties arguing more Surinamese should be placed in strategic political positions (Het Parool 2001). When President Venetiaan visited the Netherlands, he was received by the LPSP – representing Dutch politicians with a special interest in Suriname rather than as Surinamese politicians in Holland (De Volkskrant 2004).

These developments and the fact that Suriname is now a democracy gives Dutch politicians of Surinamese origin little reason to influence Dutch foreign policy on Suriname. In contrast, there are good reasons why they should focus on their work as Dutch politicians. First, contacts between Dutch and Surinamese parties are still loaded with post-colonial tensions. Second, the lack of ‘formal contact persons’ means contacts dissolve once the responsible individuals leave their positions. Third, the focus of both Dutch and Surinamese parties has been shifting towards their respective regions.

All this reveals the transient nature of international party relations. Neither shared ideology nor the mediation of Dutch politicians of Surinamese origin assure their survival. Dutch politicians of Surinamese origin are once again focused on the country of settlement; their lack of will to operate transnationally is reinforced by their professional role – to represent the interests of the Dutch electorate. Personal contacts between politicians in the two countries have in any case been fading since independence. These developments are the result of changing priorities among both Dutch and Surinamese politicians – the latter today represent a postcolonial democracy no longer isolated in its own region.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed transnational politics over 50 years of Suriname’s history – as a colony nearing independence, under the military regime, and as a postcolonial democratic republic. We saw that homeland directed political activity among migrants was successful only when it supported an existing party’s position and leadership. Ambitious return migrants who wanted to change the Surinamese political landscape were never tolerated by non-migrants and long-term return migrants. Newly arrived return migrants were thus excluded – or excluded themselves – from the circle of political power.

This dynamic clearly has its roots in post-colonial history. Surinamese political leaders have been consistently allergic to actors in the Netherlands telling them what
to do. By constraining transplanted immigrant politics, Suriname-based actors have successfully undermined its impact. While post-independence nationalism in Suriname can be characterised as ‘territorial’, this nationalism still contains ‘anti-colonial’ elements towards its former citizens abroad. This explains why the Surinamese state and political parties rarely reach out to former citizens except for financial or material support.

Settled return migrants, however, remain visible in contemporary Surinamese politics, with over half of present party leaders having spent at least some of their formative years in the Netherlands. Though a new generation of politicians educated in Suriname and waning interest in the Netherlands are weakening the transnational component of Surinamese politics, strong ties between friends and relatives make it unlikely to disappear. Its impact should not be underestimated; individuals in the Netherlands can have great influence on the political decisions of individual Surinamese politicians. Reflecting Surinamese politics, such influence will become more individualised and informal.

The individual character of transnational party politics reflects the ethnically and religiously fragmented organisation of Surinamese politics and Surinamese civil society in the Netherlands. As is the case with migrant organisations, Surinamese political parties and their branches in the Netherlands are unable to mobilise large groups, even from within their own ethnic groups. Charismatic leaders are central within Surinamese parties, branches and migrant organisations. If they leave, the organisation or party generally falls apart.

The Surinamese case shows how political circumstances in the (post)colonial home country influenced emigration and return migration motives, and thereby the direction of transnational politics and who was involved. Since the 1950s, organised politics in Suriname has not welcomed transnational involvement while the transnational ties that lasted reflected Surinamese political organisation. Thus success or failure of home country directed politics depends on the responsiveness of actors in the home country. This underlines the importance of including non-migrants and long-term returnees in studies of transnationalism.