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How the Dutch Government stimulated the unwanted immigration from Suriname

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- analyse migration as part of broader global change
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Abstract

Increased population mobility has confronted the Western welfare states with various flows of immigrants varying from labour migrants to destitute refugees. A special category of migrants is formed by the immigrants from former colonies settling in their former mother countries. Welfare states have tried to keep control over immigration by implementing an increasingly refined set of laws regulating entry, residence and work of foreigners. The Netherlands have been no exception to this general trend. Moreover, immigration was a sensitive political issue in the Netherlands because the country was generally considered to be densely populated. In this context, the post-colonial migration from Suriname became an important theme in Dutch politics in the 1970s. The number of immigrants from Suriname was in fact small, but had increased from 13,000 in 1966 to 51,000 in 1972. The Surinamese immigration was a special case because the migration laws did not apply to Dutch citizens, and the Surinamese had been Dutch citizens since 1954. In 1973 Joop den Uyl, the leader of the Dutch labour party, became prime minister, and curbing the flow of Surinamese immigrants through independence was one of his top priorities. However, the results of his policy measures were contradictory. They caused a panic in Suriname and led to an unprecedented flow of immigrants. In 1975 the number of Surinamese in the Netherlands had already increased to 110,000. Den Uyl's policy proved to be based on a total misunderstanding of the nature and dynamics of this migration flow.

Keywords: post-colonial migration, migration control, the Netherlands, Suriname

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1 Introduction

In 1973 a new Dutch cabinet was formed with Joop den Uyl, leader of the Dutch labour party (PvdA) as prime minister. Although some Christian democrats also formed part of this cabinet the core of it was formed by the labour party and two smaller leftist parties. In the election programme of this leftist combination it was already stated that Suriname and the Dutch Antilles should become independent states before 1976. The government wanted to put an end to the *Statuut*.¹ There were several motives for this desire to change the political ties with the former colonies in the Dutch West Indies. However, the most important reason why the Netherlands wanted to put an end to the constitutional arrangements as laid down in the *Statuut* was the migration of Surinamese to the Netherlands.

In 1966, 13,000 Surinamese lived in the Netherlands. After that the migration flow increased and in 1972 their number had grown to 51,000.² This immigration was seen by prime minister Den Uyl as a serious threat to Dutch society (Jansen van Galen 2001: 73-4). Consequently, the new cabinet made curbing Surinamese immigration a matter of the highest priority. However, the results of this policy were the opposite to what was intended, as immigration from Suriname increased to unprecedented numbers. In 1975 there were 110,000 Surinamese in the Netherlands and in 1980 the number had risen to 145,000. This is a huge migration rate considering that the total population of Suriname was about 385,000 in the early 1970s.

In this paper I analyse the suppositions on which the policy of the Den Uyl government was based and why this policy was such a total failure. However, before analysing how these policies stimulated unwanted immigration from Suriname, the paper will first provide some basic information on Suriname for readers not familiar with the country.

2 Suriname

Suriname is a typical Caribbean country like its neighbours Guyana and Trinidad (Bakker et al. 1998; Helman 1982; Buddingh' 1995; Moerland 1984). European colonization was based on the plantation economy which produced sugar and other tropical crops for European markets. The original labour force consisted of slaves imported from Africa. During the eighteenth century the plantations flourished and the plantation owners, among them a substantial number of Sephardic Jews, made fortunes. In the Napoleonic era the British occupied the colony for a short time (1799–1814), but the Dutch returned. However, the plantation economy never regained its old glory. The trade routes to the European markets had developed in other directions; for example sugar went via Cuba and the East Indies. The number of plantations in Suriname steadily declined. The slave trade was abolished in 1814 in the Dutch colonies, but slavery itself was not finally abolished until 1863. Because there were hardly any European women in the colony it had become the custom to accept relations between European men and African women.³ These women were often liberated

¹ *Het Statuut voor het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden* ('Statute of the Kingdom of the Netherlands'). See next paragraph for further explanation.

² These numbers are based on estimations. The definition of Surinamese is not always the same in the various sources, but this is not an important point with regard to this paper (van Amersfoort 1987: 477–8).

³ The custom was known as *Het Surinaamse huwelijk* (the Surinamese marriage).

from slavery, and in many cases their children received a European education. In this way, a class of 'free coloured people' had come into existence, and these people were mostly living in Paramaribo, the only city in the country. In 1863, with the abolition of slavery there were still 32,000 slaves and 21,000 free coloured people living in the colony. Outside the reach of government, maroons (runaway slaves) had in the meantime created free tribal societies based on their African inheritance along the upper courses of the rivers.

The Dutch government tried to provide the remaining plantations with the necessary labour force by recruiting contract coolies in British India. Between 1873 and 1916, 34,000 men and women and accompanied by an unknown number of children came as contract labour to Suriname. They generally had contracts for five years and a right to return after the expiration of the contract. But most 'British Indians' preferred to change this right for a sum of money and to buy a piece of land in Suriname. In this way, the first generation of *Hindostanen* settled in Suriname as small farmers. The population of former slaves and free coloured people looked upon these newcomers as not genuinely Surinamese. They considered *themselves* as the true Surinamese, being born and bred in the country, and hence they are called 'Creolen', which literally means 'born in the country'.

Because the plantations continued to suffer from a shortage of labour, between 1894 and 1939 the Dutch repeatedly recruited small groups of workers from Java in the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia). About 32,000 Javanese were recruited in this way. To a greater extent than the *Hindostanen*, they wished to return after expiration of their contract. After the end of the Second World War, a small number of Javanese returned to Java. But the return was not always successful, and eventually about 24,000 Javanese decided to settle in Suriname on the same conditions as the *Hindostanen* had done.

After the Second World War and the painful decolonization of Indonesia, the Dutch government wanted to put an end to the colonial past and to develop a new relationship with the Dutch West Indies, which comprised of Suriname and the Dutch Antillean Islands. To make these small territories independent states seemed to be too big a step. It was thought that the development and maintenance of a modern state apparatus, including a foreign service and a military defence organization, would form too heavy a burden for those territories. After long negotiations in 1954 the *Statuut* was signed. In this new constellation of the kingdom, the countries in the West Indies acquired a high degree of autonomy. Only foreign affairs and defence would be directly governed by the central government in The Hague, wherein Suriname and the Antilles each had a minister, who functioned as guardians of their specific interests. Importantly, the *Statuut* stipulated that there was only one citizenship for the entire kingdom. This obviously implied that there were no restrictions on travelling between the parts of the kingdom. A second important point was the obligation of the central government to support the parts of the kingdom with their economic development and to keep their budget in order. When all minor issues were settled the *Statuut* was signed and acquired the status of constitutional law.

In 1971, on the eve of the developments leading up to independence, Suriname had 385,000 inhabitants, half of whom were under 15 years of age. This small population was divided along ethnic lines. The Creolen including the maroon population along the upland rivers formed 41 per cent, the *Hindostanen* 38 per cent and the Javanese 15 per cent of the population. Further there were small groups of Amerindians, Chinese, Lebanese, Europeans etc. The population was strongly concentrated in the city of Paramaribo. In 1970 half the population lived in Paramaribo and its direct surroundings (de Bruijne 1976). Although in a

strict geographical sense Suriname is not a small territory, in terms of the size and heterogeneity of its population it shares the characteristics of small territories in the Caribbean as described by Benedict (1966), Smith (1965) and Peach (1968). There is a constant danger of instability in the political sphere because political relations tend to be strongly based on personal relations, and the economies tend to be dependent on one sector which makes them inherently vulnerable.

3 Surinamese migration until 1973

Two factors have been crucial in the evolution of Surinamese migration to the Netherlands: colonial ties and the small scale of the Surinamese society. Over time, these factors have also determined the size and composition of the immigrant population. Colonial ties almost inevitably lead to population movements between the colony and the colonizing country. Even when we disregard the occasional seamen or domestic servants and concubines who accompanied retiring planters' families, already in the nineteenth century there were Surinamese living in the Netherlands. Although these early immigrants were obviously not numerous, they are still significant, because they illustrate the importance of the two factors mentioned above. In the colonial society the culture of the colonizing country was dominant and the educational system was a copy of the school system in the Netherlands. In these circumstances, the better educated part of the Surinamese population became strongly oriented to the Netherlands. This orientation was further strengthened by the small scale of the Surinamese society. The labour market showed little differentiation and offered young people from the higher classes little perspective. These circumstances explain why Creole and Sephardic elites sent their children to the Netherlands to complete their education. Many of these young people did not return to Suriname, which they tended to regard as narrow-minded and 'provincial' (van Lier 1972: 72–82, 186–95).

During the Second World War the migration flow was interrupted, but the Netherlands recovered remarkably fast from the devastations of the war, and labour demand increased rapidly after 1950. In these circumstances the Surinamese, who after 1954 had become full Dutch citizens, started to migrate to the Netherlands again. In particular, the Creole middle class was still very much oriented to the Netherlands. But the migration patterns were also changing and broadening to include increasingly larger sections of the Surinamese population. Travelling became relatively cheap and people started to acquire a wider horizon. A factor that further stimulated migration was the communication between immigrants and family members and friends back home. Once an immigrant population becomes settled it always generates a certain amount of chain migration. In this way, the whole Creole urban population gradually became involved in the migration to the Netherlands. The *Hindostanen* population also slowly adopted this migration pattern. The *Hindostanen* were no longer a relatively homogeneous population of small farmers and agricultural workers. A vanguard of intellectuals and businessmen had already left the rural districts. In 1957, a quarter of the *Hindostanen* already lived in the Surinamese capital of Paramaribo; and once in Paramaribo the wider world, and particularly the Netherlands, came into view (van Amersfoort 1968: 18–22). In 1970 the *Hindostanen* constituted about 10 per cent of the Surinamese population in the Netherlands (van Amersfoort 1970).

We can conclude that the Surinamese migration to the Netherlands originated in the orientation of the Creole middle class towards the 'mother country'. After 1954 the migration pattern broadened and diversified to include all layers of the Creole population and gradually also the *Hindostanen* became involved in the migration process. Consequently, the Surinamese population in the Netherlands became more heterogeneous. This also meant that more low-skilled Surinamese started to migrate, including people who became dependent on the welfare state or sometimes engaged in criminal activities. However, Surinamese migrants did not form a significant social problem when the cabinet of Den Uyl came into office (Bovenkerk 1983; van Amersfoort 1987).⁴

4 The Dutch immigration phantom

After the Second World War, the Dutch regarded their country not at all as an immigration country. The decolonization of Indonesia had caused an influx of Europeans and Eurasians who were driven out of the new Indonesian republic. After some hesitation the Dutch government had accepted their settlement in the Netherlands. The Eurasian immigrants had also their misgivings about the way 'gentlemen in The Hague' had given way to the Indonesian nationalists by accepting Indonesian independence. But they realised that there was no way back to the colonial situation and that they had to find their way in the new situation. All reports on the 'repatriates' mention for instance their strong support for their children to help them succeed in the Dutch school system, because they realized that that would determine the position of future generations. Due to sensible government measures, the realistic appreciation of their situation by these immigrants, the importance they attached to schooling, and a favourable economic development, these immigrants integrated well (van Amersfoort 1982: 90–5, van Amersfoort and van Niekerk 2006: 325–9). But this case was seen as an exception and not as immigration but as repatriation.

In the 1950s and 1960s, ideas about population policy in the Netherlands were dominated by a Malthusian fear of overpopulation. It was taken for granted that there existed a fixed relation between the size of the population and prosperity; an increasing population would in the end fall victim to unemployment and poverty. Although these ideas may sound very naive today, they were generally accepted at the time, and they played an important role in guiding population studies and politics. In the post-war period, the Netherlands had a relatively high fertility rate and consequently experienced rather high natural population growth. This was seen as so threatening that the Dutch government launched a costly emigration policy and subsidized migration towards countries such as Canada and Australia. The existence of immigration to the Netherlands was of course in contradiction with these views and was therefore not even studied. It was supposed not to exist. In a 1977 report of the government commission on the population question, written by leading Dutch demographers, the phenomenon of (increasing) immigration was not even mentioned. This attitude and state-of-denial has been described as the 'ostrich factor' in Dutch demography (*Bevolking en Welzijn* 1977; van Amersfoort 1999).

It was of course indeed a bit strange that a country that subsidized emigration was at the same time increasingly becoming an immigration country. This reality was stubbornly

⁴ In Amsterdam, which housed at that time half the Surinamese immigrant population, there were in 1966 in the administration of the Municipal Social Office 169 dossiers of Surinamese who had had more than an incidental contact (van Amersfoort 1968: 55–60).

overlooked by politicians and the public opinion. To meet growing labour demands, particularly in industry and the mining sectors, the Dutch government concluded agreements with several Mediterranean countries to recruit workers. However, the government reassured the members of parliament that these labourers were not immigrants. The Government's White Paper *Buitenlandse Arbeiders* (Foreign Labourers) of 1970 stated twice that the Netherlands was not an immigration country and would not become one in the future. Even when particularly Turkish and Moroccan migrants started to bring over their families, the government kept neglecting this reality of immigration and increasingly permanent settlement. Because these labourers were officially supposed to return to their origin country one day, the children had to be educated in their own language and culture. To this end, special teachers were even recruited in the sending countries. It was only with the publication of the 1983 White Paper on ethnic minorities policies (the *Minderhedennota*) that the Dutch government hesitatingly started to adopt a different approach towards acknowledgement of permanent settlement. Just how difficult the Dutch found it to admit that the country was to a certain extent an immigration country is also reflected in the terminology. Though the word immigrant exists in Dutch, it was never used. The Eurasians were called 'repatriates', the Surinamese 'overseas citizens', and the Mediterranean labour migrants 'guest workers'. Later on Statistics Netherlands (CBS) introduced the strange word 'allochtonen' (people from elsewhere) that became a common label.

But even if immigration was regarded as a most unwelcome phenomenon, it happened to be there (van Amersfoort and Surie 1987). Immigration wandered around as a phantom through society and the Surinamese seemed to be the embodiment of this phantom. Although the Surinamese were a heterogeneous social population the image that the general public had of these fellow Dutch citizens was completely different. A Surinamese person was generally imagined as an uneducated black man who did not integrate into society and was engaged in the drugs trade and prostitution. To understand this selective and stereotypical image we have to realize that the number of Surinamese had indeed increased in recent years but was still very small in relation to the total Dutch population, and there were hardly any Surinamese living outside the big cities. So, the negative stereotypes about the Surinamese largely arose in a void. It was a common experience among Surinamese who did not conform to these stereotypes that they were thought not to be Surinamese but to have come from Indonesia. The ideas that not only the general public but also the politicians had about the Surinamese were in fact based on what the media reported on these immigrants, and as ever, media attention is not given to the 'normal' or the 'average'. Although the popular, negative image of the Surinamese was not based on direct experience it was effective in feeding the general fear of immigration.

In this way, the immigration of Surinamese was made into an urgent political problem already, before the Den Uyl government was formed. The main instrument to regulate migration was the law on foreigners (*Vreemdelingenwet*). However, this instrument did of course not apply to Dutch citizens, including the Surinamese. The pressure from the Netherlands on the smaller partners in the kingdom to find a way of regulating migration inside the kingdom resulted in the formation of a special commission to study the migration of Surinamese and Antilleans to the Netherlands.⁵ Dutch newspapers covered the news of

⁵ 'Adviescommissie inzake Migratie van Suriname en de Antillen'.

the formation of this commission in a way that reflected the dominant mood in the Netherlands. For instance, on 11 April 1972, *De Volkskrant*, a major left-wing daily, stated in a headline that: 'Flow from the West will be dammed'.

On this occasion, the responsible Minister, Piet Engels, declared to a parliamentary commission that the implementation of a visa regulation for citizens from Suriname and the Antillean islands was a matter of the highest priority. However, upon protests by the minister of Suriname in the government, Engels was forced to withdraw his statement and admitted that it was first the task of the commission to report on the matter. Notwithstanding the high initial expectations, the final report of the commission stated that it was constitutionally impossible to deny citizens access to the Netherlands. On 31 October 1972, editorials of leading newspapers such as *De Volkskrant* and the *NRC* voiced strong disappointment in this conclusion. But the Dutch government did not immediately give up. The minister of Justice, Van Agt, stated in an interview with the daily *Het Parool* (20 December 1972) that the Constitution would be changed so that it would become possible to prohibit Surinamese from migrating towards the Netherlands. However, the government never undertook concrete steps to start the complicated proceedings to change the Constitution. The statement by the minister was apparently more driven by the need to make a populist statement rather than to solve what was widely seen as a governmental problem.

5 An uneasy partnership

The 1954 'Statute of the Kingdom' was meant to put an end to colonial relations. The three parts of the kingdom were meant to cooperate as equal partners. This idea soon proved to be too idealistic, since partners of such unequal size and power cannot possibly share rights and obligations equally. The Dutch politicians soon realized that the new constitutional arrangement implied open-ended obligations which could lead to unforeseen consequences. Suriname was strongly dependent on financial aid to keep the budget in order, and the more conservative Dutch political parties thought such an unspecified obligation unacceptable. But the labour party was prepared to offer Suriname substantial help and supported the generously financed development plans such as the Ten Year Plan (1955–1965) for economic development for Suriname. However, the implementation of this development plan led once again to irritation (Moerland 1984: 70–6). A great part of the aid budget was used to create pseudo jobs for the clientele of Surinamese prime minister Pengel. Pengel was the populist leader of the Creole party N.P.S. He was a charming man with an unmistakable rhetorical talent and a feeling for politics. However, he was also known to be corrupt and used his position to enlarge his clientele (Jansen van Galen 2001: 50, 55; Helman 1982: 205–7).

The dissatisfaction with regard to the open-ended obligations and the irritation around the implementation of the development plan had shifted the general mood against the *Statuut* and given rise to a wish for it to come to an end. The wish to close the border to Surinamese immigrants was not the only motive of the Dutch government for terminating the *Statuut*. However, it was clearly the most concrete and pressing issue that played a role in the political process. Moreover, the worries about the obligations implied in the *Statuut* had increased as a result of the serious riots that took place in Willemstad on Curacao in May 1969. The Dutch government had to send over Dutch mariners to restore order and

was unhappy to have been drawn into the internal political conflicts on the island (Jansen van Galen 2001: 51–3). The Dutch government was also afraid that they might become involved in international conflicts via their ties with Suriname and/or the Antilleans. However, these worries about the *Statuut* and its implications were not as pressing as the wish to put an end to migration to The Netherlands. According research by Buddingh' (1995: 295–9), who had access to the minutes of the cabinet discussions, immigration was the only point that played a part in cabinet discussions in the crucial phase of the negotiations with the Surinamese government.

The question arises of course why the Netherlands, if it had so many reservations and objections against the *Statuut*, did not take the initiative to simply terminate the treaty. Several members of parliament indeed proposed this. But for prime minister Den Uyl, this step was ideologically impossible. The labour party and the political left in general were in those days under the strong influence of the international anti-colonialist rhetoric. Surinamese students and young intellectuals living in Amsterdam became involved in the anti-colonial movement and became ardent nationalists. The Dutch media willingly offered them a stage to present themselves as representatives of the Surinamese community in the Netherlands and as an important political movement in Suriname. They denounced the *Statuut voor het Koninkrijk* as a neo-colonial construction aimed at exploitation and repression. The political left in the Netherlands supported them wholeheartedly and weeklies such as *De Groene Amsterdammer* (7 February 1973) and *De Haagse Post* (7 July 1973) published articles in which Suriname was rhetorically described as *wingewest*, a difficult to translate term, which means something like 'exploited region'. In fact, this was quite inappropriate terminology with which to characterize the heavily subsidized Suriname.

In reality these nationalists were not taken very seriously outside the circle of students and youngsters, and only a few students continued pursuing independence after finishing their studies. However, there were a few exceptions. The well-known nationalist Eddy Bruma went back to Suriname and founded the Partij Nationalistische Republiek (PNR; Party Nationalistic Republic). But apart from the demand for immediate independence this party had no political programme and remained marginal in Surinamese politics. However, inside the Dutch labour party Surinamese nationalism was not seen as a marginal phenomenon but as part of the international anti-colonialist movement, for which there was great sympathy. Within this perspective, a unilateral termination of the *Statuut* by the Netherlands would be perceived as an act of paternalistic tutelage. The idea was that Suriname should take the matter into its own hands and free itself from the colonial yoke. By taking this view, the Dutch labour party had manoeuvred itself into a passive position. The party was determined to realize the independence of Suriname, but had made itself ideologically dependent upon the Surinamese to take the first step. This attitude, full of contradictions, has been characterized as the Suriname syndrome of the labour party (Jansen van Galen 2001).

6 Arron comes to the rescue

In 1973 there were elections in Suriname. Prime Minister Pengel had died in 1970 and Henck Arron had become leader of the NPS, the main Creole political party. Arron forged a coalition of all Creole parties (the Nationale Partij-kombinatie). The election campaign was emotional and rather chaotic. Although in small societies personal relations and alliances

always tend to play an important role, in this period the divisions between ethnic groups and, hence, between Paramaribo and the rural districts were particularly accentuated (Dew 1978: 142–96). In the election Arron's coalition, including the nationalistic, pro-independence PNR party founded by Eddy Bruma, won a minimal majority. As a consequence, a cabinet was formed with Arron as premier.

In February 1974, prime minister Arron suddenly announced that Suriname wanted to become independent before the end of 1975. This announcement came as a surprise because within Arron's own party there was no majority in favour of such rapid independence. In fact, the NPS had carefully kept silent about the issue of independence in the election campaign, in order to avoid internal controversies about this topic. There were several reasons why independence was so unpopular among the population. Many feared that the question of independence would increase ethnic tensions and could lead even to conflicts and violence, as had already happened in neighbouring Guyana. The *Hindustanen* and Javanese populations were concentrated in the rural districts and feared that independence would even strengthen the already dominant position of Paramaribo and its Creole elite. But also many Creoles, for instance the members of the trade unions, were afraid that independence would lead to the creation of 'prestigious institutions' such as a foreign service, an airline corporation, an army etc., at cost to the common man. In fact they feared a development that has been described by Lipton (1977) as the urban bias in developing countries. However, for Bruma's PNR party independence was the only issue on their programme, and Bruma's support was necessary for the survival of Arron's government. This pushed Arron to make this concession to his small coalition partner.

For Dutch prime minister Den Uyl, Arron's announcement came as a gift from heaven. Within a week after Arron's announcement he arrived in Paramaribo to discuss how Surinamese migration to the Netherlands could be curbed in the light of the new political developments. The Surinamese immigration had become such a personal obsession for Den Uyl that he proposed to restrict migration even before the termination of the *Statuut* (Jansen van Galen 2001: 72–4). But Arron was not in a hurry. The Surinamese government did nothing to prepare for the constitutional change. There were no steps taken to draft a Constitution for the new republic, and there was no strategy elaborated for the complicated issue of the separation of Dutch and Surinamese nationalities. When I visited Suriname in 1974, I asked former study friends, trade union members, members of parliament and a minister how the problem of the nationality separation would be handled. However, there were no concrete ideas on this issue. Some of my respondents even thought that this would not be a problem and that all Surinamese would simply get two citizenships.

It is also interesting and revealing to explain the passivity of the NPS party. My informants told me that Arron himself was not enthusiastic about the coming independence but that he was dependent on the support of Bruma. They thought that Arron had the faint hope that by neglecting the preparations for independence, the Dutch would postpone the whole affair. When the Dutch argued that the Constitutional change had to be thoroughly prepared, Arron would have had an excuse to give Bruma to postpone independence until the complicated preparations had been completed. Arron knew he could count on understanding within his own party and among the Surinamese voters in general. If it is true that Arron expected the Dutch government to use the lack of preparations from the Surinamese side as a reason not to press for independence in the short term, he completely misjudged the political mood in The Hague. Nothing could stop the Den Uyl government

from holding on to the opportunity Arron had offered them with his call for independence. On the other hand, the priority that the Den Uyl government gave to Surinamese independence brought Arron into a strategic position to negotiate favourable conditions with regards to financial aid and migration. In the final negotiations for independence, Arron ensured an enormous sum of aid money would be used for the economic development of the new republic. Also on the migration issue, the Dutch government had to make the concession that only in 1980 would a visa regulation come into force for Surinamese wanting to travel to the Netherlands (van Westerloo 1983: 223; Jansen van Galen 2001: 72–6). This meant that, between 1975 and 1980, Surinamese could still travel freely to the Netherlands.

7 The Surinamese immigration after 1973

Unintentionally, the policy of the Den Uyl government with regard to the immigration of Surinamese resulted in an enormous growth in the number of immigrants. Another consequence was that the character of the migration changed substantially. To a certain extent, the post-1973 immigration can be seen as a continuation and acceleration of the existing pattern of migration to the Netherlands. However, the fear that it would become impossible to go to the Netherlands in the near future following independence made many Surinamese decide to migrate as quickly as possible. Such a reaction to expected future policy change also occurred in the British West Indies when migration from the former colonies became restricted. This phenomenon has been described as the ‘beat the ban rush’ (Peach 1968; Bovenkerk 1983: 170). This is however only part of the story. The increased migration flow from Suriname was also caused by the hasty flight of *Hindostanen* and Javanese from the rural areas of Suriname. Fear of political domination by the Creole urban population and of ethnic conflicts compelled people to flee to the Netherlands – people who would in normal circumstances not have taken part in this migration. The great influx changed the composition of the Surinamese migrant population. People with little education or previous contact with Dutch culture, and sometimes already of an advanced age, had become for the first time involved in the migration process.

On top of that, this great influx took place in a period when the economic situation in the Netherlands was already deteriorating under the impact of the Oil Crisis. In other words, Den Uyl’s alarming immigration scenario had become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Problems that had never occurred before now became a reality. Under the influence of the sudden influx of tens of thousands of Surinamese immigrants, an urgent housing problem emerged. This compelled the Dutch government to develop a settlement programme whereby several municipalities were obliged to take in a number of Surinamese families. In a newly constructed district of Amsterdam, the Bijlmermeer, a number of futuristic high-rise flats had just been constructed. Mostly consisting of social housing, these high-rise buildings were intended to house the Dutch working classes, but the Dutch public found them too futuristic and most of the flats stayed empty. Subsequently, they were let to anybody prepared to take them. The combination of a sudden pre-independence surge in Surinamese immigration and the availability of affordable social housing in the newly constructed Amsterdam district led to the rapid formation of an enclave of newly arrived Surinamese.

Partly due to the economic recession, the situation regarding the labour market was problematic, certainly for newcomers. For several years, unemployment rates remained disproportionately high among the Surinamese (Langbroek and Muus 1991). Nevertheless, the Surinamese have become a relatively fast-integrating immigrant population. Particularly among the second generation, educational achievement is remarkably high (van Heelsum 1997). The development of their residential pattern after 1980 also indicates an ongoing integration in Dutch society. For instance, the Surinamese in the region of Amsterdam take part in the general process of suburbanization, leading to less concentration in districts such as the Bijlmer (van Amersfoort and Cortie 2009).

Dutch public opinion on the increasing number of Surinamese immigrants was characterized by disbelief. The Netherlands was not an immigration country. The newcomers would soon realize their mistake and go home again. Just as was the case with the supposedly temporary labour migration of 'guest workers' from the Mediterranean region, the Dutch political scene simply refused to face reality. The return migration ideology was not only dominant among the general public and politicians – Dutch demographers also stubbornly let this ideology influence their forecasts. In 1976, Netherlands Statistics forecasted that between 25 and 50 per cent of Surinamese immigrants would return home in the short to medium term. In fact, this forecast revealed a staggering level of incompetence and ignorance of existing empirical evidence. Academic studies on the Surinamese migration had already shown that the return rate of the Surinamese had never been higher than 3 per cent and that a substantial segment of the returnees had re-migrated to the Netherlands again (Bovenkerk 1973, 1983; Bovenkerk and Verschoor 1983; van Amersfoort and Surie 1987). See Figures 1 and 2 for details on migration from Suriname to the Netherlands and from the Netherlands to Suriname.

Figure 1: Migration from Suriname to The Netherlands, 1966–1985, compared to forecasts by the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP) and Statistics Netherlands (CBS)

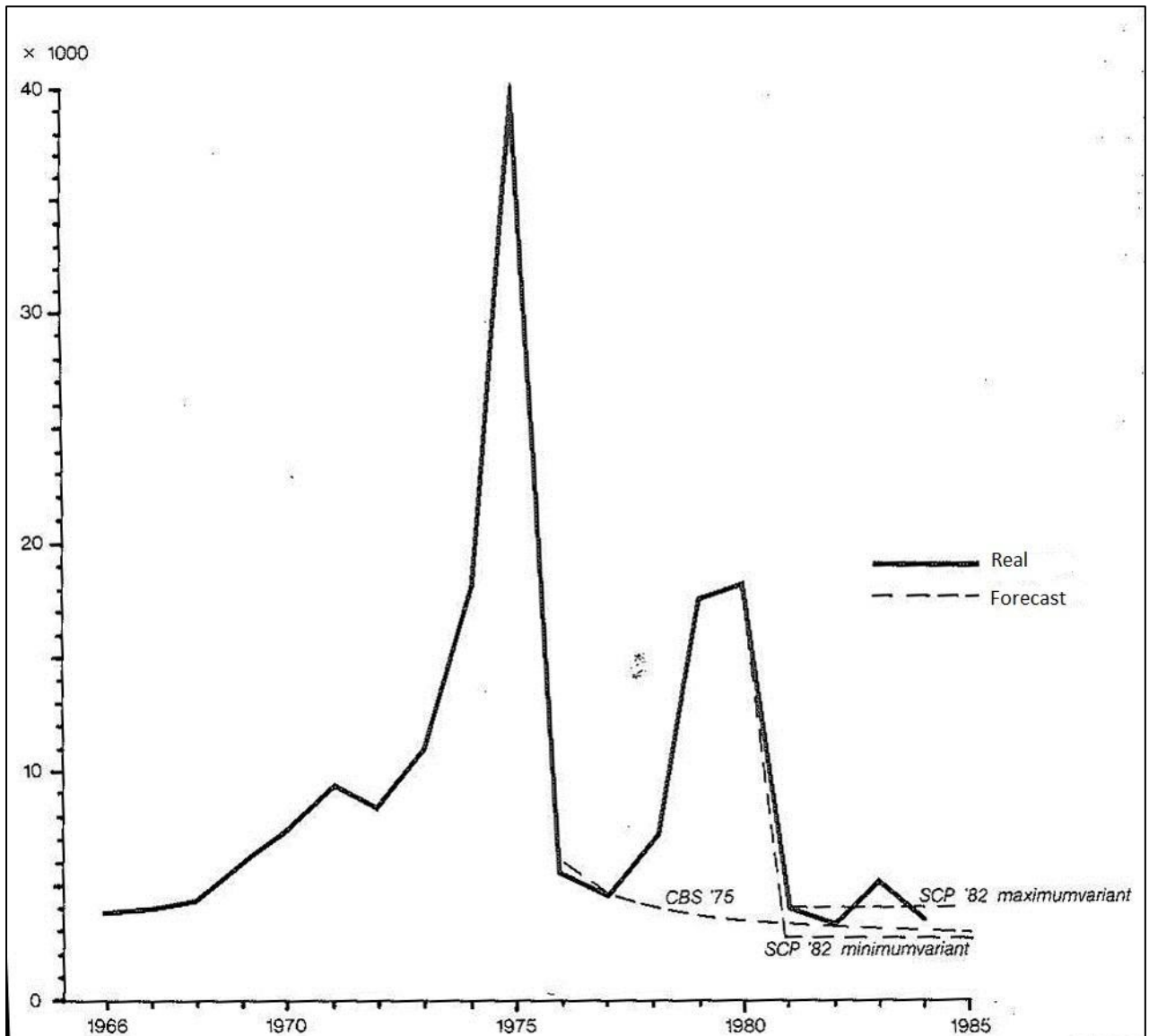
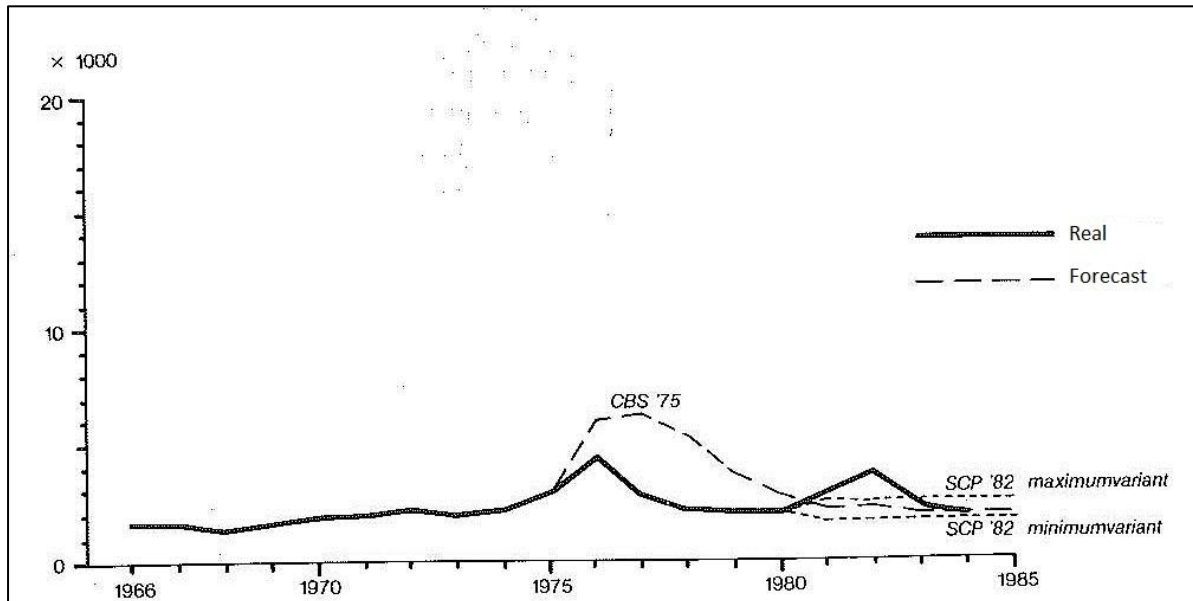


Figure 2: Return migration from the Netherlands to Suriname, 1966–1985, compared to forecasts by the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP) and Statistics Netherlands (CBS)



8 Conclusions

For several reasons, the policy of the Den Uyl government with regard to the Surinamese migration resulted in a complete failure. The government lacked insight into the size, character and dynamics of the Surinamese immigration. The few thousand immigrants a year, most of whom spoke fluent Dutch and were largely schooled in a Dutch educational system, were incorrectly perceived as an acute threat to the Dutch welfare state. This fed into popular stereotypes of Surinamese in Dutch society. In the view of many people within government and the general public, the Surinamese immigrant population mainly consisted of lazy unemployed drug dealers and other criminals and, curiously enough, nationalistic intellectuals. Premier Den Uyl and most members of his cabinet had obviously never met a Surinamese secretary, teacher or nurse. This selective, negative image of the Surinamese living in the Netherlands was disseminated by the media which concentrated on the special or remarkable. Today, this negative image of the Surinamese has more or less vanished. Negative attitudes with regard to immigration and immigrants are now primarily directed towards Muslim immigrants and Moroccans in particular.

It was to fit in with this general mood and prejudice that leading politicians felt compelled to make statements in which they announced the ‘damming’ of the migration from the West. The Dutch ministers obviously did not realize that their statements made the *impression* and fuelled the idea that the civil rights of coloured people ought not to be taken seriously. A distressing example of this attitude was the proposal of the Dutch representative in the Commission that was preparing the arrangement with regards to citizenship after Surinamese independence. The Dutch proposed to take away the Dutch citizenship of all people with a Surinamese father, or if the father was unknown, those with a Surinamese mother, even when they had already resided in the Netherlands for a long

time or were born there. If this proposal was not racist it came anyway pretty near it. The Surinamese and Antilleans reacted furiously and the proposal was hastily withdrawn. Even disregarding the insulting overtone in the proposal it was also unrealistic, as it would for instance create unsolvable problems in mixed families. It would mean for instance that in the case of a Surinamese man married to a Dutch wife that he and his children would lose Dutch nationality and the concomitant civic rights, whereas she remained Dutch. In the end, it was agreed that people would keep the nationality of the country where they were settled in 1975 and could opt for the nationality of their country of birth if they had migrated and were not living in the country where they were born (van Amersfoort 1987: 485). On top of that it was accorded that until 1980 there would not be a restriction on the travelling of Surinamese citizens to the Netherlands. So, the earlier proposals and announcements to severely curtail access to Dutch nationality have remained empty words as they did not result in concrete measures. However, the *consequences* of such political rhetoric were real, because they contributed to a sharp increase in the flow of immigrants.

We can therefore conclude that a complete lack of knowledge of the character and dynamics of this specific migration flow guided the politics of the Den Uyl government with regard to the Surinamese immigration and Surinamese independence. The policy was characterized by populist rhetoric that merely led to panicky reactions in Suriname and contributed to an increase in the migration flow.

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