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Mobilization of ethnicity in Dutch politics

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The process of incorporation of Surinamese and Antilleans in Dutch society has been difficult. Most of the immigrants belong to the lower socio-economic strata. Their average training level, in particular that of the Surinamese, is low. They experience discrimination in many social fields. Consequently their future is far from rosy. Along with the economic decline, the tension in the relations between the majority of the population and these ethnic minorities has increased. As yet, immigration is too recent to say precisely how this situation will develop.

In his book *Ethnic America*, Sowell sketches the incorporation process of several immigrant groups in the USA (Sowell 1981; see also Bovenkerk 1983b). What matters most to Sowell is incorporation into the socio-economic structure. He says that the result of that process depends on several variables, including the colour of the ethnic group involved, the moment of their arrival, their 'human capital' (that is the skills and cultural peculiarities they bring with them), the spirit of the age, their training, their geographical distribution, and the attitude of the 'majority'. As each ethnic group had its own characteristics and migration history, we see that each went its own way to improve its situation. In the first instance one group concentrated on achieving *economic* success (which gave access to education; the Jews, for example), another wanted to attain its social ascent above all by *political* means (the Irish, for instance).

Let us now consider the Surinamese and Antilleans in the Netherlands. Some choose the economic way, creating their own jobs by establishing their own businesses. Thus they can acquire income and status independently, without the intervention of non-immigrants. To them, ethnic entrepreneurship is a channel for

attaining social ascent, often precisely because of their ethnic 'human capital', as Boissevain, Choenni, and Grotenbreg (1984) and Bovenkerk, Eijken, and Bovenkerk-Teerink (1983) demonstrate. Perhaps their stronger economic position is a good starting-point for insertion into other social sectors such as (Dutch) associations or politics. There are also Surinamese and Antilleans who choose the political way. They aim to influence the process of political decision-making that determines who gets which part of the social cake. Some have no specific, ethnically inspired goals, but many others – in fact most – try to bend government policy in a direction more favourable to ethnic minorities, in order to set in motion the social ascent of these groups. Which way will prove best for Surinamese and Antilleans – the economic way, the political way, or perhaps a combination of both – is not yet clear. Sowell thinks the economic strategy is the most fruitful one, at least in the USA. He even infers from this that all political involvement – in this case with the government – must be rejected. This view has been strongly criticized (Bovenkerk 1983b). Nevertheless there are several indications in the Netherlands that politics offers some prospects, though there is hardly any reason for grossly exaggerated optimism.

Mobilization of ethnicity

Ethnicity is remarkably important for the incorporation of Surinamese and Antilleans into the political structure. This is a new phenomenon in Dutch politics. Interest groups based on religion are quite familiar in the Netherlands. In fact these were the background to the so-called 'pillar system' which – until the 1960s – was the main organizing principle in politics and elsewhere (Lijphart 1968). Never before, however, had the Netherlands within its borders such large and ethno-culturally diverse groups.

Verneulen (1984) describes ethnicity as 'the subjective, symbolic or emblematic use that a group of people makes of any aspect of culture, with the aim to create internal cohesion and to differentiate themselves from other groups'. Regular contacts between members of ethnic groups are important in achieving a profile of their own. Barth (1969) stresses the relevance of such contacts. He places them in a context in which the process of gaining that profile is evidently productive, and in his view ethnicity has everything to do with the struggle for social and economic interests. Both Verneulen and Barth see ethnicity not as a static phenomenon, but as a process.

Barth assumes that to a large extent the direction in which this process develops is determined by élites operating as 'agents of change'. In so far as they do not opt for a course of assimilation, Barth thinks there are two possible directions to the development. First, that of isolation. To some extent the members of an ethnic group participate in the open structures of the greater society, but for the most part they live within the framework of their own group. On the other hand, the élite can accentuate its own ethnic identity and use it as a basis to recruit support for obtaining certain resources. Koot and Uniken Venema (1985) call this process the *mobilization of ethnicity*: an ethnic group comes to act as an interest group and as a group striving for emancipation. Glazer and Moynihan (1975) point out that such a phenomenon may occur particularly in societies where government intervention is of crucial importance, for instance in the modern Welfare State. The government as provider and distributor of means is assailed by countless interest groups. Thus mobilization of ethnicity may be a way to mobilize the rank and file in order to pressure the government more successfully. Koot and Uniken Venema (1985) mention five factors that in their view play a part in that process: (1) ethnic minority groups occupy a subordinate position in society; (2) the population's attitude towards immigrants is perceived as being negative; but (3) the attitude of political leaders and the government towards immigrant campaigns is one of tolerance; (4) immigrants have an ideology in which their own culture is heavily emphasized; and (5) there is a leadership which to some extent is integrated and able to mobilize the rank and file, expecting this to produce some return. According to Koot and Uniken Venema, all these factors are certainly found among Surinamese, while the process of mobilization of ethnicity is supposed to be most pronounced within the Creole subgroup.

It is interesting to discover to what extent this process occurs in the participation of Surinamese and Antilleans in Dutch politics. They have every right to participate in politics since most Surinamese and certainly all Antilleans have Netherlands nationality and the concomitant right to vote and to be elected at every level.¹ In addition there are a number of organizations representing the interests of their Surinamese and Antillean rank and file. The ways in which Surinamese and Antilleans utilize the possibilities of influencing political decision-making in the Netherlands is central to this chapter.

Providing an insight into the political participation of Surinamese

and Antilleans in the Netherlands is seriously hampered by the dearth of research in this field. Neither the established parties' reactions to the influx of immigrants, nor the immigrants' political activities have attracted much scientific attention. At most, the change in the law by which foreign residents gained the vote for municipal council elections, stimulated some research. Sometimes the possible use of the vote was discussed (Entzinger 1984b; Rath 1983a; 1983b), but usually these publications dealt with more juridical or normative aspects of granting the vote. Scant mention was made of the political participation of Surinamese and Antilleans. After all, they already had the vote. Most research data on these groups are found in Boissevain, Choenni, and Grotenbreg (1984); Bovenkerk, Ruland, and Rath (1982); Entzinger (1984b); Pieters (1984); and Rath (1983a; 1983b; 1984a; 1984b; 1985). The lack of research material is in contrast to the wealth of data available in Britain, and unfortunately handicaps a thorough comparison.

The Dutch electoral system

Among the most important forums that take political decisions in the Netherlands are the representative bodies such as the Second Chamber (at the national level), the provincial states (at the regional level), and the municipal councils (at the local level). In the metropolises of Amsterdam and Rotterdam, neighbourhood councils were recently introduced. Every four years the composition of all these bodies is determined by elections. Voting for provincial states and Second Chamber requires Netherlands citizenship. Nowadays foreign residents have the vote for neighbourhood councils and municipal councils, and can also stand for office in these bodies (both the vote and standing for office do require at least five years' residence in the Netherlands in the case of the municipal councils).

The way in which the elections are organized influences the behaviour of politicians, voters, and interest groups greatly. In fact the current electoral system is one of the crucial differences between British and Dutch politics. Therefore some knowledge of the Dutch electoral system is essential. The Netherlands has a system of purely proportional representation. There is neither an electoral threshold nor a district system as in the UK. Parties enter the campaign with lists of candidates that are determined at party meetings or congresses. Under certain conditions those who have the vote may found a party of their own and thus compete for a council seat. In this way

they can avoid a sometimes laborious candidacy procedure within the existing parties. The voters, who need not register as such in advance but do have to be 18 or over, vote for one candidate on one of the lists. The total number of votes for the various candidates of one list determines the number of seats to which the party concerned is entitled. At the very least the party does have to attain the electoral quota, that is the total number of votes delivered (in a municipality in the case of local elections) divided by the number of seats available. The seats per party are distributed in the order in which the candidates are listed. The lower a candidate's position on the list, the lesser his or her chance is to be elected. In practice this means that more than 75 per cent of all candidates are ineligible. Only those who have a so-called successor's position may get a seat in the long run: if one of the councillors stands down, the first successor can take his or her place. The 'ineligible' candidates have no other chance of gaining a seat than by a certain number of 'preferential votes'. To be elected in this way, however, is highly exceptional. For although in a juridical sense the voters elect candidates, the campaign – particularly in the larger cities – involves political parties, not individual candidates. Most voters vote for the top candidate, the party figurehead and symbol.

Government and the promotion of ethnic interests

In the Netherlands there is an extraordinary degree of government involvement in daily life. Therefore immigrants, like everyone else, often encounter the government – directly or indirectly. This applies *a fortiori* since the government has been pursuing a more coherent ethnic minorities policy. This used to be different. In the past, specific government policy with regard to immigrants – if there was any – focused on well-being and much less on the more hard-core sectors such as employment and housing (van Amelsfoort 1982a; Entzinger 1985). It was based on the assumption that the immigrants would not stay very long, and that it would suffice to relieve their most urgent needs in terms of well-being. Practice has since given the lie to this point of departure, and government and political parties have revised it. Nevertheless it resulted in a vast network of ethnic agencies in the field of social welfare, generously subsidized by the government. Their main task was to provide non-material support to Surinamese and Antilleans, such as individual assistance and socio-cultural work. At first, members of the original population

found employment in these organizations, but after a while personnel was increasingly recruited from Surinamese and Antillean circles. The availability of ethnic personnel is caused by several factors, among them the fact that the immigration stream from the West Indies also consisted of persons from the élite (Bovenkerk 1979). Without exaggerating their numbers, it could be said that, partly due to their high level of training, a limited proportion of Surinamese and Antilleans have found their way up the social ladder. In many cases they have lived in the Netherlands some years, know their way around, and are reasonably integrated. A substantial number hold leadership positions in their own organizations.

Koot and Uniken Venema (1985) link the ethnic mobilization of personnel of Surinamese organizations in particular, to the stimulation of ethnic awareness and to a shift in task. Increasingly these immigrants stress the cultural uniqueness of their ethnic subgroups and their social deprivation. They point out to the government, the political parties, and other private organizations their responsibility towards ethnic minorities. They continually remind these bodies of the historic and inalienable rights of ethnic minorities and demand that means be put at their disposal. This process of mobilization of ethnicity is fostered partly by a tolerant attitude of the government which to some extent is susceptible to the demands of these ethnic advocates.

In recent years the government has grown more concerned with the position of ethnic minorities. Towards the end of the 1970s, in conformity with the spirit of the Welfare State, it took the initiative to improve that position. In its *Minderhedennota* ('statement of policy regarding minorities') the government indicated that the social and economic deprivation of ethnic minorities had to be addressed and how their participation in Dutch institutions was to be improved (Minderhedennota 1983). For that purpose it developed a range of initiatives in the fields of education, housing, employment, well-being, and also in politics. One of the aims of this policy was to reinforce the influence of minority groups. Thus under certain conditions the right to vote at the local level has been granted to immigrants who have not yet acquired Netherlands citizenship. On a limited scale the government has also offered facilities to immigrant organizations promoting their own interests – as it had been doing for some time. In addition, advisory boards, in which members of minority groups participate, have been established in several municipalities. Finally, for different ethnic groups, a series of such bodies

has been introduced recently at the national level. In these bodies, Surinamese and Antilleans are represented by deputies from a few nation-wide 'umbrella' organizations, in which a large number of local and regional Surinamese and Antillean associations have joined forces. At present there are one Antillean and two Surinamese nation-wide organizations – one for Hindustani and one for Creole Surinamese. An organization for Javanese Surinamese is now being formed. These organizations have already demonstrated their involvement in government policy, for instance by commenting extensively on the *Ontwerp-minderhedennota* ('draft – statement of policy regarding minorities') of the Ministry of the Interior (Urbanus 1983).

It is remarkable that on the one hand the government encourages the social influence of Surinamese and Antilleans, while on the other it sometimes seems reluctant to give way to that participation and its consequences. This is most evident when it comes to the question of how the ethnic minorities might best be incorporated into Dutch society (Entzinger 1985; Urbanus 1983). In recent years the government tends towards an integrationist course, that is to say it strives for the greatest possible degree of participation of ethnic minorities in existing Dutch institutions. In contrast, the Surinamese and Antillean organizations strongly prefer a pluralist course, in which their own identity plays an important part. They try to persuade the government to grant proportionally entitlement to jobs, housing, socio-cultural resources, and so on, if need be by introducing separate structures for this purpose, so that a 'collective emancipation' can take place (Koot and Uniken Venema 1985). The introduction, initially against the wishes of the Minister of the Interior, of the separate nation-wide consultative bodies mentioned before – which may be seen as a pluralist solution – shows that mobilization of ethnicity may bear fruit. The decisive argument was that the cultural uniqueness of the separate ethnic groups could be shown to full advantage. The ethnic organizations succeeded in convincing the political parties of this, which in turn put the minister under pressure – with the result mentioned.

Apparently the government and the political parties too regard these Surinamese and Antillean organizations as partners in the discussion. Although it is uncertain whether these organizations represent a broad rank and file, we do see an important bridging here of the gap between politics and the Surinamese and Antilleans. It is typical that the claim on government resources for the well-being of

Surinamese and Antilleans is made by ethnic leaders who, in most cases, can be considered as rather well integrated into Dutch society. Several of these leaders do not limit their activities to their own ethnic group, but join a Dutch political party, in order to compete as party politicians too.² Increasingly they call upon their fellow country people to follow their example. In itself this may be considered remarkable, for the promotion of interest through ethnic organizations is essentially different from that through Dutch political parties. The former presupposes a pluralist and more collectivistic way of incorporation, the second, an integrationist and more individualistic way. Yet, so far, these two ways of incorporation into the political structure in the Netherlands do not seem to evoke serious tensions. On the contrary, for some, joining Dutch parties is precisely part of their strategy of mobilizing ethnicity. They think that within the existing parties the plea for ethnic interests can be made all the stronger and more effective.

The attitude of political parties

With the exception of the *Centrumpartij*, which tries to win votes by the politicization of xenophobia, none of the established parties is fundamentally against incorporation of those immigrants already in the Netherlands. Their conditions for incorporation, however, differ widely. Generally speaking the more conservative the party, the more assimilationist its course, and the more progressive the party, the more pluralist its course. Thus the radical right-wing Calvinist splinter parties expect the immigrants to become as Dutch as possible, preferably adopting those parties' religions. They consider the non-Christian religions of certain groups of immigrants (such as Muslims and Hindustanis) a threat to the Dutch cultural heritage. They also reject the idea of granting the vote to foreign residents; in order to obtain that right, these people should acquire Netherlands citizenship. At the other end of the political spectrum we find radical left-wing splinter parties. One of the top items on their lists is preservation of the immigrants' cultural identities. They are strongly in favour of special measures for immigrants. They consider positive action a pre-eminent means to incorporate immigrants into existing institutions – at least in so far as the immigrants themselves wish to do so. These parties think additional measures are required to promote emancipation for immigrants to become organized as much as possible, and then to support the ensuing organizations. Besides

extending the vote for foreign residents to all levels, they plead for the introduction of more special advisory boards for immigrants.

The influence of these splinter parties is limited not only because of their size, but also because they are usually in the opposition. The biggest and most important parties are the social-democratic *Partij van de Arbeid* (PvdA), the Christian-democratic *Christen-Democratisch Appel* (CDA), and the right-wing liberal *Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie* (VVD). In the socio-economic field it is the VVD that is the most conservative of the three, but on the other issues – in particular abortion and euthanasia, the emancipation of women, and homosexuals – it is the CDA. With regard to immigrants the VVD is the most assimilationist. In its view, special measures should be avoided as much as possible. Most in favour of such measures is the PvdA, at least in so far as it concerns the promotion of immigrants' upward social mobility. In its overall policy the PvdA stresses the socio-economic interests of ethnic minorities. This attitude does not stand apart from the obligation the PvdA feels towards non-immigrants in similar positions of deprivation, for that is where it finds its electorate. In this respect the CDA takes an intermediate position. In religious matters it is the most pluralistic of the three. Because of its Christian-democratic tradition, the CDA is the only party that firmly advocates granting facilities, including financial ones, for instance to Islamic associations. This is something to which PvdA and VVD are very much opposed because of the separation of Church and State. Incidentally this issue is a source of tension within the CDA itself. Many of its members, in particular the more orthodox ones, feel that this view does not agree with the CDA's foundation in the Gospel. Eventually all three parties supported the local vote for foreign residents, although CDA and VVD were rather slow to come to this decision. The VVD did not agree whole-heartedly; nearly half of its supporters remain opposed to this measure. At this moment the PvdA is still the only one of these three parties in favour of extending the vote for foreign residents to Second Chamber elections, a policy that also involves the expectation that this party will benefit most from it.

Of course, the parties' political views influence their attractiveness for immigrants. There are few contacts between organizations of immigrants and the small right-wing parties. The VVD also has only limited contacts with immigrants, which is not surprising as the latter do not have much confidence in that party. The CDA has more ties with immigrants, not least with leaders of Islamic and Hindu interest

groups. The PvdA and the small left-wing parties have most ties with immigrants. The latter are very responsive to the demands of immigrants, but because of its size – it is the second biggest party in the Netherlands (comprising more than 30 per cent of the vote) – the PvdA carries more weight.

At the national level, the PvdA has had a special working group since 1977, the Commission for Ethnic Groups (previously the Commission for Cultural Minorities), consisting of Members of Parliament, members from the Party Bureau, and many party members of immigrant origin. They advise the Party Executive on minority matters. Since 1983 the CDA has had a comparable advisory group: the Intercultural Consultation Group. Within the *Communistische Partij Nederland* (CPN) the 'Black Communists' have organized themselves recently. At the national level the other parties have no special commissions of any importance. At the local level such commissions operate rather erratically. Often the problem is a lack of party leaders who are willing to organize such activities.

Until recently not one party actively recruited members among immigrants in a more systematic way, though they do involve themselves intensively with the problem of ethnic minorities and also have to take political decisions on this matter. Most parties showed themselves to be extremely passive in this respect: all they did was to consider themselves 'open' to immigrants. Nevertheless there does seem to be some development now. Now that the vote for foreigners has been introduced and a sizeable voting potential has entered the political market, the parties have woken up. Typically the CPN did not lift the ban on membership of foreigners until December 1982. More than two years later it was the first to elect two immigrants (a Surinamese woman and a Moroccan) to its party executive. Now we see immigrants being elected to local and regional executives, or to certain functional commissions, such as the commission that draws up the election programme. How unique such an event still is may be illustrated by the *Weekkrant Suriname* (a weekly newspaper) that regarded as news the election of a Surinamese as chair of a PvdA branch (12 January 1985). Since the spring of 1984 the PvdA has been carefully recruiting immigrants. Thus the social democrats organized a few special meetings for immigrants with which they hoped to reduce the latter's reluctance to join. For this purpose they even appointed a special staff member at the party bureau.

The attitude of the original Dutch population towards the political

participation of Surinamese and Antilleans has never been investigated properly. The voting rights of these immigrants have never been challenged, and apparently everyone agrees that they should have them.³ At most, some acknowledge that this democratic right by no means guarantees a proper functioning in society (de Jongh, van der Laan, and Rath 1984). This favourable attitude, however, does not mean that objections will not be raised when Surinamese and Antilleans actually enter the political arena.

Party membership of Surinamese and Antilleans

It is hard to say to what extent the slightly increased activities of political parties are successful in getting Surinamese and Antilleans to join. Reliable statistics on the degree of organization of the latter are not available. On principle, the party administrators do not register their members according to nationality or country of birth. The only data at our disposal are the results of a 1982 survey among Surinamese, which show that only 1 per cent of the (180,000) Surinamese are members of a political party, compared with 8 per cent of all Dutch (Reubsaet, Kropman, and van Mulier 1982). This survey also shows that one-half of these Surinamese members have joined Dutch parties, while the other half has chosen Surinamese parties. Unfortunately the report does not mention the parties concerned. According to party executives immigrants seem to show an increasing interest in politics, and more immigrants join the PvdA in particular. Nevertheless it is all too clear that the number of Surinamese and Antillean members is still very small, and that they are poorly represented – especially in executive positions.

There is little information about what Surinamese and Antilleans think of participation in political life. The positive attitude of Surinamese and Antillean leaders has already been mentioned. In addition, Pieter's modest study (1984) mentions that three-quarters of the Antilleans in the southern province of North Brabant say they consider the right to vote to be important.

Turn-out at elections

An important yardstick for the incorporation of Surinamese and Antilleans into the Dutch political structure is their turn-out at elections. Though it varies considerably from one town to another, and from election to election, on average it stays behind that of the

population as a whole. Bovenkerk, Ruland, and Rath (1982) show that this applies in the case of the 1982 municipal council elections in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and Utrecht. On that occasion The Hague was an interesting exception. In some neighbourhoods the turn-out of Surinamese and Antilleans even reached 75 per cent, whereas that of the native Dutch in those neighbourhoods did not exceed 30 to 36 per cent. To an important extent this is a result of the election campaign that Surinamese and Antilleans themselves conducted on the initiative of their leaders. Nevertheless it is probable that at most elections their turn-out is smaller. Indeed Pieters's findings (1984) indicate this: in the south of the country the Antillean turn-out was relatively smaller, not only at local elections, but also at provincial and national elections.⁴ It strikes Pieters that many of the younger Antilleans in particular stayed away, a phenomenon that Bovenkerk, Ruland, and Rath (1982) also encountered among the Surinamese and Antilleans in the large cities. Another striking finding of Pieters is that turn-out increases considerably with the duration of stay. The turn-out of those whose stay in the Netherlands exceeded nine years was at least equal to that of the native population. Finally, at the 1984 neighbourhood council elections in Rotterdam the turn-out of Antilleans and Surinamese lagged far behind that of the native Dutch, which was already poor (26 and 47 per cent respectively) (Rath 1985).

This lagging participation is connected to several factors. Pieters (1984) concludes that Antilleans stay at home because of lack of interest and confidence in, and understanding of, politics. I suggest a connection to the low socio-economic position evident from, among other things, the high rate of unemployment among Surinamese and Antilleans. It is a familiar sociological phenomenon that among population groups in such a deprived position, involvement in politics is only slight. Nevertheless it is striking that the turn-out of unemployed immigrants (Surinamese, Antilleans, and all foreigners) as a group at the neighbourhood council elections in Rotterdam was relatively higher than that of unemployed native Dutch (Buijs 1986). A possible explanation is that immigrants were stimulated to vote by the participation of the xenophobic *Centrumpartij*. This was so in the case of Turks and Moroccans (Rath 1985). Furthermore turn-out is linked to the degree to which immigrants have become attached to their new home country. This could indicate that the lagging turn-out is a temporary phenomenon connected to the status of immigrant. Only when an immigrant feels sufficiently at home will he or

she become involved in the politics of the host country. Obviously the parties were unable to increase the immigrants' involvement in Dutch politics at short notice. Those who seemed capable of involvement were apparently the more 'integrated' members of immigrant communities who by their very brand of political activity were able to involve an important part of the ethnic electorate in the electoral contest. This was the case in The Hague, for instance. There they conducted a 'personality' campaign focusing on immigrant candidates, while matters of a more programmatic nature, raised during the campaign, typically concerned ethnic issues.

Party preference

The few research results on this subject show that the social-democratic PvdA polls by far the most Surinamese and Antillean votes. At the 1982 municipal council elections Bovenkerk, Ruland, and Rath (1982) found that on average 60 per cent of the Surinamese and Antillean voters in the large cities preferred the PvdA. At the 1984 Rotterdam neighbourhood council elections their preference proved considerably larger; almost 90 per cent voted PvdA. For the sake of completeness it must be added that on principle the small radical left-wing parties did not participate in these elections and that the PvdA therefore had no competition from the Left. Moreover, in 1984 the PvdA scored well in the opinion polls. Nevertheless this party's popularity among Surinamese and Antilleans is generally recognized. Many of them regard the PvdA as the 'workers' party'. In this connection we must not forget that most Surinamese and Antilleans belong to the working class. They live mainly in the big-city workers' neighbourhoods that were often 'red' ramparts already. Even so, the attraction of the PvdA is striking. Boissevain, Choenni, and Grottenberg (1984), who did research among Surinamese entrepreneurs in Amsterdam, discovered that these shopkeepers fervently voted PvdA. This is all the more remarkable because non-immigrant shopkeepers often have a rather conservative voting pattern. The fact that these Surinamese and Antilleans kept supporting the PvdA, contrary to their class interest, indicates that more factors are involved. Many Surinamese and Antilleans believe the PvdA takes better care of immigrants' interests and opposes discrimination and the *Centrumpartij* more effectively than other parties. The popularity of the then national party leader, Joop den Uyl, also contributed to the party's success. Besides, many think that, in

keeping with its big-party status, the PvdA has a lot of political power. Furthermore it is up until now one of the few parties that to some extent has taken immigrants into account in its campaigns. Finally, the fact that the PvdA has most immigrant candidates in comparison with other parties also plays an important part. Not only does this influence an electoral campaign, but also it affects the feelings of ethnic voters towards that party. A candidate of 'their own' has an important symbolic function and appeals to ethnic loyalty.

Immigrants are relatively uninterested in other parties, and to the extent that they know them, they often do not regard them as real alternatives. This by no means implies that a priori these parties do not stand a chance. Immigrant candidates on other party lists turn out to be a means to break up the PvdA following to some extent – in particular if the candidate gets the chance to conduct his or her own campaign (Bovenkerk, Rutland, and Rath 1982). Nevertheless success is not guaranteed automatically. In 1982 in Utrecht, more Surinamese and Antilleans than usual voted CDA, which had had a Surinamese on the Council for four years. Nevertheless the PvdA remained number one there too. Incidentally, immigrant candidates are seldom found on non-PvdA lists.

Surinamese and Antillean candidates

One of the most salient aspects of the participation of Surinamese and Antilleans in elections is the appearance of candidates from these groups during recent years. In the provincial and national elections of 1982 a few Surinamese and Antilleans participated as candidates, albeit in 'ineligible' positions way down on the list. In that same year's municipal council elections we counted a total of thirty-three Surinamese and Antillean candidates, which is about 5 per cent of what could be expected on the basis of their share in the electorate. Only six of these had eligible positions. At the neighbourhood council level it is seldom any better. In 1980 and 1984 in Rotterdam there was just one Surinamese candidate. At the Amsterdam neighbourhood council elections in 1981 and 1985 this ratio was slightly more favourable. At the municipal council elections of 1986 the number of Surinamese and Antillean candidates was much larger, so that there does seem to be an upward trend.⁵ This increase has to do with, among other things, the fact that this was the first time that foreign residents could vote. Immigrants and those who

represented their interests pressured political parties to nominate immigrant candidates (Buijs and Rath 1986). Nevertheless Surinamese and Antilleans were still poorly represented in the candidate corps. Their modest position here is stressed by the fact that many of them participated on a list of their own (particularly in 1982). In so far as candidates for established parties are concerned, party memberships proved to conform to voters' preferences. Therefore we found most Surinamese and Antillean candidates on the PvdA lists, and fewer on those of the CDA or small left-wing parties. Mostly, however, they had ineligible positions.

Incidentally the emergence of non-affiliated parties, standing apart from the existing national political parties, is a normal phenomenon, particularly in local politics. Remarkably the Dutch and their established parties fear strongly that immigrants will found their own parties. Alarmed MPs pointed out that possibility during the parliamentary debate on the changes in law that granted the vote to non-Dutch residents. A Communist member was afraid that the fascist Turkish *Grey Wolves* would participate as a political party. Another member, for a small Calvinist party, expected the Muslims to start their own party – something he disapproved of. A research project among union members showed that many did not mind foreigners getting the vote in itself, provided they did not form their own little parties that could make their own policies (de Jongh, van der Laan, and Rath 1984). In fact immigrants have founded parties of their own, quite often with the aid of members of the indigenous population. Sometimes already existing organizations entered the political arena. Usually these were local *ad hoc* initiatives that rarely outlasted the election campaign. So far Surinamese, particularly the Creoles, have been most active in this respect. As a rule leaders of immigrant parties stressed that the founding of their party should be seen as an act of protest against what they saw as the rather inactive attitude of the regular parties with regard to ethnic minorities. These small parties claimed to enter the political arena on behalf of the entire ethnic population. Their names indicated their aim of promoting the interests of all ethnic minorities: *Party of the Minorities*, *Migrants' Union Party*, *Progressive Minorities Party*, *Solidarity*, and *Immigrants' Alliance '86*. A few parties aim at a specific ethnic group, the Turkish Muslim party *Hak Yol*, for instance, but also the Surinamese *Hindostani Janta Congres*, whose political aims lie in Surinam. These immigrant parties appealed to the ethnic feelings of the ethnic communities and sometimes succeeded in gathering

ethnic votes. They never get enough votes for a seat. Presumably they underestimate the relatively strong attraction of the existing parties. At least as important is the fact that immigrants form an extremely heterogeneous population. If gaining influence was of major importance, this could be achieved only within their own communities.

One may ask whether the minimal number of Surinamese and Antillean candidates results from fear of a xenophobic reaction of the white electorate. First of all, the chance of losing seats as a result of such a 'white backlash' is theoretically smaller in the Netherlands than in Britain; after all, the lists of candidates in the Netherlands are collections of factional interests personified in the various candidates. A voter may express preference for a party without having to vote for a Surinamese or an Antillean, who may be elected anyway, provided he or she has an 'eligible' position. I seldom found any sign of fear of a 'white backlash'; at the most this is taken into account in the campaign. Only the CDA clearly shows reserve when Hindustani or Islamic candidates are involved. It fears that orthodox Christian voters might interpret such a candidacy as undermining the party's Christian identity. Though the national party executive has opposed this opinion, it certainly contributes to determining a candidate's position on the list.

One may also wonder whether the number of Surinamese and Antillean candidates is so small because party members would oppose the penetration of immigrants into the lists of candidates for xenophobic reasons. As yet, the opposite seems to be the case. Surinamese and Antilleans are nominated as candidates with relative ease. The fact that there are still so few politically active immigrants plays into their hands. To many political parties it does not matter whether they are dealing with Surinamese, Antilleans, or others, as long as someone belongs to the ethnic minorities. Most parties, in particular those of the Left, wish to demonstrate by such a 'token' that they mean well by 'ethnic minorities'. The Surinamese and Antillean candidates are meant to be proof of their solidarity with these oppressed groups. In addition, parties fear spokespersons of immigrant organizations who might accuse them of not considering the interests of ethnic minorities or who could even accuse them of racism (the 'black backlash'). This fear applies all the more now that parties strive to establish firm ties with ethnic minorities (or at least so they say). In some cases it looks as if, after years of playing a waiting game, parties suddenly want to jump on the bandwagon. Finally,

electoral interest is an important factor. Ethnic votes are desirable and ethnic candidates are expected to attract them. This expectation is not unfounded, but it is often unrealistically high - fostered by the fact that Surinamese and Antillean politicians are all too often wrongly regarded as representatives of their groups. The fact that many Surinamese and Antillean party members have bonds with organizations in their ethnic communities plays into the hands of these parties, for it is precisely through these organizations that contacts with ethnic minorities are cultivated.

It is the more progressive parties in particular that have this open attitude, and especially the small left-wing parties that sometimes 'reserve' special seats for immigrants. In nearly all parties the requirements for future Surinamese and Antillean candidates are somewhat relaxed in order to give these ethnic minorities more of a chance; this is *de facto* positive action. In addition, the PvdA and the small left-wing parties (the CDA and the VVD to a lesser extent) want to give Surinamese and Antillean candidates a chance to conduct a personality campaign. This is related to the idea that Surinamese and Antillean voting preference is believed to be influenced strongly by the charisma of specific candidates, and by expectations of the services these candidates could offer.

Conclusions

With the relatively open attitude of parties towards immigrant candidates this chapter comes full circle. It seems likely that political parties and Surinamese and Antillean organizations are now in a state of symbiosis. Surinamese and Antillean organizations need these parties for a more fruitful mobilization of ethnicity; the political parties need the Surinamese and Antillean organizations to effect the integration of ethnic minorities in politics. This situation offers Surinamese and Antillean politicians the opportunity to express their specifically ethnic desires, translated into political demands by making use of Dutch political parties. As immigrant politicians they consider themselves 'experts on minorities', or are regarded as such by others. Some experience this latter reputation as restricting but for others emphasizing their exclusive background is the only way to achieve position within the party. By referring to their ethnicity (either implicitly or explicitly) they can enhance their chances of a higher position on the list of candidates. If that does not succeed satisfactorily, there is still the possibility of organizing a

personality campaign for preferential votes. The growing importance of the personality campaign illustrates this. Increasingly immigrants use such non-Dutch ways of conducting their campaigns to avoid nomination procedures within the parties. It is understandable that candidates in ineligible positions especially grab at this method. The parties seem to tolerate this, for they consider it a respected expression of the candidate's own cultural background.

The question remains whether the relative success of this ethnic mobilization within political parties will produce anything substantial in the long run, in the sense that it contributes to the political emancipation of ethnic minorities. Though there has not been any further research into this matter, most political parties seem prepared to respond to demands for an ethnic dimension to their policies and practices. This does not imply, however, that every immigrant with political ambition can be assured of success.

Notes

1. Almost 10,000 Surinamese in the Netherlands hold Surinamese nationality. They belong to those groups that came to the Netherlands after Surinam gained its independence in 1975. Members of these groups may obtain Netherlands citizenship by means of an accelerated procedure and, to date, most have done so.
2. This phenomenon is also interesting because it expresses a shift in orientation towards Dutch society. As late as 1970, in an article on Hindustani Surinamese, van Amersfoort wrote that the leaders often had close ties with political parties in their country of origin (van Amersfoort 1970). To what extent this shift in orientation has to do with political developments in Surinam, where the military leader has dissolved the political parties of the *ancien régime*, is hard to say.
3. In this connection it is interesting that the majority of the population supports granting the local vote to non-Dutch residents. In Rath (1985) I offer a survey of many research projects into public opinion on this issue.
4. For that matter, Pieters (1984) establishes that these Antilleans often didn't bother to vote in elections in their country of origin either.
5. The total number of immigrant candidates at the municipal council elections of March 1986 was about 150 of whom three dozen were of Surinamese or Antillean origin. The PvdA alone had some forty immigrant candidates, half of whom had eligible positions. For the first time, this party also put a Moluccan in an eligible position and a Surinamese in a 'successor's position' for the Second Chamber elections held in May 1986.

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