WHY RETURNEES GENERALLY DO NOT TURN OUT TO
BE "AGENTS OF CHANGE":
THE CASE OF SURINAME

The future looked rosy when Romeo Pengel (the name has been changed) left the Netherlands in 1972 to return to his native country of Suriname. Romeo, a boy from a middle-class Creole background, had been sent to the Netherlands three years earlier on a Surinamese scholarship for the police academy. He was now 26 years old and a police inspector; he was to serve on the police force in the country's capital, Paramaribo. There were very few police officers in Suriname with the inspector's diploma, and in addition to a high salary for Surinamese standards, his status was to be high as well. Pengel was specialized in dealing with the drug trade and the illegal possession of arms. "If they give me the chance to set up my own drugs department in Suriname, then you'll really see something!"

At our first interview, just before he left the Netherlands, there were some doubts in his mind. What would it be like to work in a less highly developed country with the police methods that he had learned in the Netherlands? Would his Dutch wife be able to adjust? In Suriname, people often say: "you can't compare Holland with Suriname", but still... There were a lot of things that made Suriname more attractive than Holland. "There is plenty of money in Holland, but it is not a good life. When I'm away at work all day, I don't want my wife to be shut up on the fourteenth storey of a pile of bricks taking tranquilizers. I don't want my children to have to play in a corner of the room and I don't want their Daddy to come

home in an evil mood from all those millions of cars all around him. I want to live life my way, not like in Holland.” During our interview his wife expressed her agreement and stated that she was willing to do her utmost to adjust to the Surinamese way of life. “I don’t want to behave like a colonial. You won’t find me in those all-white swimming pools.” And another point: “You should go back, our country would never amount to anything if we all just stayed in Holland.” Pengel resolutely said no to an attractive job offer at a large Dutch police department. “It will be all right in Suriname, there are a couple of boys on the police force there who studied at the academy, just like me.”

Our second interview took place a few months later, in Suriname now. The Pengel family was living in a roomy wooden house with a beautiful garden. The salary was more than enough to live on, and it was very pleasant to sit on their balcony, where a soft breeze blew in the tropical heat. The contact with Holland was still intact. They subscribed to Dutch newspapers, “otherwise you lose touch, with the culture too. A theatre or a concert, you don’t have that here.” Except for this one aspect, life seemed to be quite satisfactory.

But after a few months’ experience on the Paramaribo police force, things did not turn out to be as easy as Pengel had thought. The atmosphere among his colleagues was not good, and this was largely due to the faulty promotion policies. “I know that when there weren’t any inspectors on the force here who had been trained in Holland, they didn’t use to have much to choose from. But nowadays the people who are promoted are just promoted on the basis of seniority or because they have politicians behind them, and not on the basis of their capacities.” According to Pengel, the police force was dominated by an atmosphere of traditionalism. “We always did things this way, why should we suddenly do things differently just because of that new guy?” “And if you ask them for something like their patrol schedule, they just don’t know what you are talking about.” Another point was that he had to do without the equipment he was used to, “I didn’t get a desk for months, if you ask for a folder you don’t get it, because you just got two of them last week. There aren’t enough cars and there are hardly any walkie-talkies.”

In the following months, Pengel and I saw each other often and there was no end to his complaints. He sometimes stressed the humorous side. It was difficult to apply the Dutch kind of universalistic criteria in this small society (Suriname has a population of about 300,000), where so many people know each other and where everybody seems to know the members of the elite. "I was standing behind a tree trying to teach a policeman how to give somebody a traffic ticket. When he stopped somebody, the man opened the window and said 'Don't you know that I am Dr so-and-so?' So I growled from behind my tree, 'give the guy a ticket, even if he is the good lord himself, give it to him.' But I saw what a tricky situation that cop was in. People here are not used to treating everybody the same, no matter who they are." And there was also the corruption. "They have gradually realized that there are some young inspectors here who have come back from Holland and who aren't in for corruption. But the other day a restaurant-owner came to bring us some food, and that man was one of the people being questioned in a police investigation. We sent the food right back."

Pengel did view it as a challenge to combat this kind of thing and introduce new techniques to the police force. They learned to conduct "directed" campaigns, the driving test was modernized, and a system of position evaluation was introduced for judging the personnel. It was not easy to challenge the authoritarian and traditionally organized police bureaucracy. "We do give each other support, and we visit each other at home, because the older officers don't understand us at all. When we talk about the profession, they often don't even know what we are talking about. The way we act with the people who are below us in the hierarchy is also much more relaxed. The patrolmen really look up to us, up till now all they ever got from their superiors was authoritarian behaviour, orders are given in the imperative and there are never any reasons given at all. The older men experience this as a threat and, quite honestly, we haven't been able to make many changes yet, our group is still too small."

I later interviewed his superior, the police commissioner of Paramaribo. He had returned to Suriname 11 years earlier, with the first group of graduates from the police academy in the Netherlands. He thought the younger men were in too much of a rush,

that they would be wiser to let the older officers be. 'I have learned that if you want to introduce changes, then you appoint a commission with one of the men of the old school as chairman. You make a young inspector the secretary, and you simply let him do everything. That way, they will accept it.' He stated that he had learned to make do with the old Surinamese system. During our interview, various of his inferiors came into the room and he spoke to them very cordially. But no one entered the room without first energetically clicking his heels, and when the commissioner picked up a cigar, they rushed up to light it for him. He was one of the few men left in the police force from that first group of Dutch police academy graduates. A number of his colleagues had switched to commercial jobs in the world of trade and industry, where they were much in demand because of their organizational capacities. In the period from 1969 to 1972, a second group of young inspectors had arrived (Pengel was one of them), and the temptation to abandon the daily frustrations on the police force for a better-paid job elsewhere was also very great for them.

Early in 1973, Suriname experienced the most violent civil tumults in its history. Rioters set fire to a school, and the Paramaribo tax office also went up in flames. For weeks, thousands of people demonstrated in the streets and the police was faced with the task of maintaining some semblance of law and order. Day and night, the police were forced to resort to violence to control the crowds, tear gas was regularly used. It was a political battle between the trade unions and the Surinamese government, and many weeks later there was still no prospect of any solution to the situation. To some of the young police officers, this was the straw that broke the camel's back. According to Pengel, the older men accepted the situation without objections. But the younger men who had returned from the Netherlands resented being used as if they were military troops against the population, while the government itself wouldn't even take the trouble to seek a political solution. What was one to do? There was also the commercial world of trade and industry, and there was a good chance of getting a job in the Netherlands. When the social conflict finally came to an end, Pengel left the police force.

This story of Pengel and the young police inspectors who had studied in the Netherlands is not the only one of its kind. Numerous educated returnees have been faced with similar frustration, and in general their main complaint is that they have so little opportunity to put the things they learned in the Netherlands into practice in Suriname, a country still in the process of developing. And Suriname, in turn, is not the only country of its kind. The literature about return migration (BOVENKERK, 1974: 33-38) is filled with examples of the problems facing citizens of a wide range of developing countries who have been educated abroad, problems in utilizing their knowledge and skills in behalf of modernization. LEVINE (1965: 198) wrote about university graduates returning to Ethiopia: "It must be said that the returnees as a whole have so far done little to modernize their country (...) they have been little more than misfits." BALDWIN (1963:276) seemed to agree with "the more thoughtful Iranian intellectuals" that "foreign study unfits the typical young Iranian for a useful career at home."

But it is striking how often the idea that returnees will be the driving force behind progress in the developing countries is propagated by such a wide range of authors and with such optimism. I shall cite a number of examples with respect to the Caribbean area. FRIEDLANDER (1965) believed that the large number of Puerto Ricans who had attended school in the United States and had been trained in the industrial labour processes, and then returned to their native country, would contribute to the development of Puerto Rico. GONZALEZ (1976) was of the opinion that the same applied to the women who returned to the Dominican Republic from the United States. In an official agreement with the Republic of Suriname, which had just become independent (1976), the progressive Dutch Minister of Foreign Development Aid stated that the Netherlands would support the returnees in their efforts to utilize their knowledge and skills for the modernization of Suriname.

The one thing which all these optimistic views have in common is that they are not backed by any thorough empirical research. FRIEDLANDER was interested in developing an economic model, GONZALEZ really did no more than sum up the difficulties, and the Dutch Minister of Foreign Development Aid appealed to the political aspirations of the Surinamese population in the Netherlands.

In reality, however, most of the researchers have come to the conclusion that returnees make no more than a negligible contribution to the modernization of their native countries in the Third World, and they have given a number of reasons why. These reasons all sought the cause of this "failure of the returnees" in the returning emigrants themselves or in shortcomings of this category as such. I shall mention a number of reasons that are often

cited. The people who returned were the “wrong” ones, they were a negative selection of the least enterprising and least successful emigrants. They came back for the “wrong” reasons: they either failed as emigrants or came back for their actual retirement or simply because they wanted to live the kind of life associated with retirement. The kind of education they had had was not really suitable for a developing country. Too many students had chosen majors which were not practical (e.g. law instead of agricultural technology), or had had an education which was too specialized to be applicable.

No matter how accurate these comments might be in a large number of cases of return migration, there is still one important element missing, without which it is impossible to comprehend the issue in its full dimensions. In this paper, I would like to devote attention to *the dynamics of the process of return migration itself*.

It seems plausible to me that in those cases where the “good” migrants returned, where returning migrants had had an adequate education and where they were willing to make certain sacrifices, it *still* turned out to be very difficult for them to exert the influence they had in mind on the modernization process. I would like to illustrate this with the example of the return migration to Suriname. Among the returnees, there was a definite contingent of such people who more or less fit the educational specifications given above. Why, then, have even they so often been excluded from playing a role in the social development of the country?

It struck me in Suriname how people tended to speak of “the returning migrants from Holland” in such generalizations. This tendency was sometimes also evident in descriptions of returnees to other countries. It seemed (in Suriname) as if people viewed them as a kind of new (ethnic) minority; there were a lot of stereotypes pertaining to the returnees, particularly about their arrogant conduct. In the following sections, I shall try to show that, in a certain way, the returnees to Suriname did, indeed, meet with the minimum requirements needed to classify a social category as a real minority. I want to show how difficult it has been for them to cope with the social prejudices, and how that obstructed the effectiveness of whatever they might have tried to do.

On the other hand, there is the fact that minorities, certainly

when they consist of well-educated people, can develop a certain strength of their own on the very basis of their minority position. It would be feasible for them to exploit their status as a minority, by means of their solidarity and the utilization of a certain monopoly position, to achieve their common goals. However, no such thing has taken place in Suriname. Numerous conditions can be cited which make this social category too heterogeneous to be able to act jointly as a group. *The tragedy of Surinamese return migration is that the returnees experience the disadvantages of the minority status without exploiting the advantages.*

Before further elaborating upon this proposition, it is necessary to make a few comments on the nature and the composition of the migration from Suriname to the Netherlands and of the subsequent return migration.

Characteristic features of the migration from Suriname to the Netherlands

The migration from Suriname to the Netherlands was of a somewhat different nature than the labour migration from other parts of the Caribbean area. West Indians in the United Kingdom and Puerto Ricans and Dominicans in the United States are generally to be found rather uniformly in the lowest ranks of the labour market. Holland does have a similar kind of immigration of migrant labourers, but they come from Turkey, Morocco and other Mediterranean countries. The migration from Suriname to the Netherlands, however, has been a migration of people to the colonial mother country. In principle, they came to Holland to get the kind of education that would enable them to return to Suriname and attain a prominent position there, preferably in the bureaucracy. At least, this has been the nature of Suriname-Holland migration ever since the beginning of the nineteenth century. The elite of colonial society sent their children to Holland to get a European and, more specifically, a Dutch education. In the mid-1960s, the Surinamese middle classes also began to participate in the migration, in the 1970s they were joined by the urban proletariat of Paramaribo, and in the years just before the country became politically independent (1975), tens of thousands of Hindustanis and Javanese also came to

Holland, sometimes straight from the countryside. Although it was very clear that most of the migrants were mainly interested in improving their material situation, it was striking how many migrants viewed the socially successful elite of the past as the example they were following. Various surveys conducted among people about to leave Suriname showed that "studying" was the main motivation for migrating (ZIELHUIS, 1973). Once again: this did not mean that all the migrants actually engaged in some kind of "studying"; in fact most of them looked for a job. But it did mean that people still measured the success of their migration according to the Dutch diplomas which they attained. The successful Surinamese migrant was the one who got a good education in the Netherlands and then returned home.

All things considered, the extent and the diversity of the migration from Suriname to Holland has been enormous. When Suriname became completely independent in a political sense (1975), the number of emigrants was estimated at 130,000, which was about a third of the total population of Suriname at that time. In that same year, the governments of Suriname and the Netherlands signed an agreement pertaining to the residence rights of both of their subjects in each other's countries. In its haste to be rid of this troublesome colony, the Netherlands accepted conditions regarding the emigration question set by the Surinamese government which meant, in fact, that virtually all the people of Suriname could still leave for the Netherlands. At the moment about 2000 people migrate every month and if it goes on at this rate, by the end of 1980 no less than about half the population of Suriname will have migrated (BOVENKERK, 1980).

I have already described how this began as an elite migration, and how the social level gradually declined. By 1972, the migration had "ripened" (Cf. for this term BÖHNING, 1972) to the point where a cross-section of the population was taking part in it. The migration not only became heterogeneous with respect to social class and sex, the ethnic background of the migrants now exhibited the same diversity as that of the entire Surinamese population. The migrants included Creoles, Hindustanis, Javanese, and small numbers of bush negroes, Chinese, whites and Indians.

Characteristic features of the return migration from the Netherlands to Suriname

Ever since the Second World War, return migration has been a prevalent topic of discussion among Surinamese people in the Netherlands. Before then, many intellectuals had returned to Suriname. However, with the decline in the social level of the migration, there was a rapid decrease in the number of people who returned. In the 1950s, I would estimate that about a quarter of the emigrants returned, in the 1960s this fell to about 10%, in the 1970s to less than 5%, and at the moment the number of Surinamese who return from the Netherlands is less than 2% a year. The number of Surinamese people who return to Suriname from the Netherlands is now less than a tenth of the number of people who emigrate there. The fact that so few people return to Suriname does *not* mean that the desire to return home is negligible. Various superficial opinion polls conducted among Surinamese people in the Netherlands by commercial research firms have all shown that about 2/3 of the people interviewed did plan to return to Suriname some day. However, this type of opinion poll can not be viewed as a reliable predictor of what people will actually do in the future. The results of these polls can be viewed as a reaction to what these people view as the regrettable decline in return migration. This phenomenon — the discrepancy between what people really do and what they say about it — has been referred to by VAN AMERSFOORT (1974) as “return ideology”, and I later (1976) interpreted this phenomenon in a similar fashion.

In a numerical sense, return migration to Suriname might be much less significant than the ideology around it, but even if only a relatively small number of people do return, this can definitely be of significance within the small population of Suriname (approx. 300,000). What is more important, however, is the qualitative effect. Within the group of returnees, there is a relatively high percentage of well-educated people (for instance people who have had the kind of specialized education which is not available in Suriname at all, thus giving them a kind of European monopoly), people who have come into contact with different kinds of political ideas, and people who are accustomed to the way of life in an industrialized, urban society.

I estimate that at the moment, there are between 20,000 and 30,000 people in Suriname who at one point in their lives lived in the Netherlands, and that is between 7% and 10% of the Surinamese population. But as I said before, their quality is the important point. Many of them would be capable of playing a very functional role in the Surinamese development process. It would not surprise me if Suriname had the highest percentage of intellectuals of all the developing countries.

In 1972 I began to conduct a longitudinal study among 75 returnees and their families (or other dependents), a total of 147 individuals who returned to Suriname from the Netherlands in that year. They were selected in such a way that they constituted a reasonably representative cross-section of the people who returned to Suriname that year.

This study differed from the more common single interview of the returnees because I followed them during a long period of time. The longitudinal study is still being conducted, although I have already written several papers on the subject (e.g. BOVENKERK, 1976). In the course of the past eight years, I have come to know these people quite well (during 4 visits to Suriname), and what began as conversational interviewing has turned into something very close to participant observation. This type of research method makes it clear how much more complicated the migration process is than most studies show. It not only provides insight into the initial motivation for emigration, the reasons for returning and the process of re-integration into the original society. It also shows that some people leave Suriname for the Netherlands a second time, that some of them make a second attempt to re-migrate back to Suriname; it shows how people's motivations can alter in the course of time, how they can even change their versions of events that took place in their own past.

This study made it clear that the returnees came from a wide range of social backgrounds (as was also the case with the emigrants). The group I studied included Creoles and Hindustanis, Chinese and an Indian. There were older people (the oldest was 70) and younger people; people from the very highest circles (e.g. a former cabinet member) and people from the very poorest urban proletariat of Paramaribo; their occupations ranged from prostitutes and welders to journalists, teachers, economists and sociologists. They had lived all over the Netherlands.

If we look at the entire group as a whole, it can be said that about two-thirds of them belonged to the category of "unsuccessful emigrants". They were people who had predominantly come from the poorest classes; none of them had succeeded in finishing any kind of

education or training course in the Netherlands; many of them were unable to find work or were fired; some of them had returned to Suriname because of marriage problems; and a number of them returned to Suriname as a result of the pressure of psychological problems which were often directly due to their status as migrants. Most of them suffered a painful loss of face when they returned. There is hardly any point in asking how much potential this category of unsuccessful migrants will furnish for the modernization of Surinamese society. Most of them did not bring anything back but their frustrated emigration expectations.

However, about a third of the returnees (22 of the 75 in the sample) had completed their studies at Dutch universities or technical colleges and were clearly "successful". They included a number of very striking success stories: boys from a humble background who went to Holland and came back as important men with good degrees. A successful return is very closely associated with a good education. The type of migrant who earns a lot of money somewhere else and then comes back to set up a business of his own is virtually unknown in Suriname. But for the people with college or university degrees, the prospects in Suriname are excellent. It is very easy for them to find a job suited to their capacities, and although they usually do earn less than they would have in the Netherlands, the social status which they hope to attain in Suriname is much higher than would have been the case in the mass anonymity of the Netherlands.

With respect to this category of successful, well-educated migrants, the question as to whether they would be capable of acting as "agents of social change" was very relevant. The answer, however, was generally a negative one. With this general answer, I am expressing the opinion prevalent among the returnees themselves: their general complaint was that people in Suriname paid very little attention to their expert knowledge, nor did anyone seem to be especially interested in their opinions. This brings me back to the central issue of this paper: Why were these well-educated and successful returnees not capable of bringing about modernization? The first part of the answer is based on the fact that in Suriname they were viewed as a new minority and, as such, were confronted with social prejudice.

Returnees as a new minority

When migrants returned from the Netherlands 20 years ago, it was a special event, they could count on a cordial reception and a sharp rise in esteem. Ever since the 1960s, however, the “democratization” of the emigration process has taken the glamour out of return migration. It became a routine matter, and the fact that a person had lived in the Netherlands no longer automatically meant a rise in prestige. One of the returnees commented sadly: “Everybody used to admire you if you came back from Holland, it isn’t like that any more.”

A lot has changed, the general opinion of the returnees has changed for the worse.

Let us note what it said about them in *De West*, one of the most influential daily papers of Suriname. Returnees were repeatedly referred to in the editorials, where they were called “good-for-nothings”, who have been “spoiled by the easy life in Holland” and were often depicted as criminals. “In Suriname, the last thing we need is the return of thousands of *bums, pimps, drug dealers* and other *gangsters*. It would be a calamity for the country if these people were to return to Suriname”, was how *De West* put it on September 29, 1976. Another prevalent theme was that the returnees always thought they knew everything better: “The feelings of hostility which the returnees are faced with in Suriname are often caused by the arrogance of people who have spent some time in Holland and think they know everything better than the people who stayed here” (*De West*, March 24, 1977).

It was striking how greatly this daily paper indulged in generalizations. It was not an isolated case, public opinion did the same. For example, the distinction was rarely made between permanent emigrants to the Netherlands, Surinamese people who have only come back for a short vacation, and permanent returnees. All kinds of unflattering comments about the people who turned their back upon Suriname were often heard, and people liked to confirm their unfavourable impression by focusing their contemptuous attention on especially arrogant tourists. The returnees were then said to be “high and mighty” and they “liked to show off”. A group of people back in Suriname on vacation who promenaded about in the centre of the city in fur coats were even referred to on the opinion page of another daily paper. The returnees were thought to act phony and put on a strange Dutch intonation, they showed off with their expensive clothes and they were thought to have replaced consideration for other people with cool and calculating behaviour.

All this indicated that we are dealing with a category that had been attributed the status of a minority. I want to take the term minority to mean a relatively small number of people who: (1) are generally viewed within a society as belonging to one and the same group on the grounds of certain socially relevant features, (2) who themselves also experience these features which they have in common as

a binding principle and (3) who bear a relation to society as a whole or to certain parts of it in which more or less fixed patterns of conduct have developed pertaining to the treatment of the group by society and vice versa.

From what has been said above, it is clear that the first condition has been met with. Was there also an internal recognition of this minority status? This condition has also been fulfilled, be it much less clearly. It could be ascertained that there was indeed some form of personal interaction on the grounds of common experiences in Holland. In particular the returnees from the higher classes regularly sought each other's company, they met each other in certain bars, restaurants and clubs, which were sometimes given a Dutch nickname. There was relatively little evidence of mutual ties and solidarity. There was nothing among the Surinamese returnees to compare with the exuberant and organized way that Japanese academics who studied in the United States regularly meet each other (BENNETT et al., 1958:72) or the very marked way that Middle Eastern students who have returned from studying in Germany still persist in hanging out at the local Goethe Institutes (FRÖHLICH & SCHADE, 1966:283).

The third condition, however, was very clearly met with: a wide range of more or less fixed patterns of behaviour have developed between Surinamese who have never been away and returnees. The latter are the target of ridicule (''He is so Dutch he took along his radiator.''), the subject of numerous stereotypes (spoiled, arrogant, conceited) and certainly also the victims of discrimination. I systematically questioned employers about their willingness to hire returnees. If there was no one else available, they were willing to hire returnees with the necessary qualifications, but for the rest they had a marked preference for people who had never been away. The opinions were widespread that the returnees would expect to earn too much, that they would have become estranged from the Surinamese way of doing things, that they would make their colleagues jealous by constantly bragging about how wonderful everything was in Europe, that they would be arrogant (''They act like they aren't Surinamese any more, as if they are better than you and they look down on you as if you were a piece of dirt.'')

No matter how determinedly some returnees resolved not to take

any notice of this kind of discrimination, they too were tempted to react now and then. They couldn't keep a remark about "you people" or "this country" from slipping out, they complained about the slow work rate, the rigidity of the bureaucracy, the authoritarian interpersonal relations within the various organizations and about the lack of a sense of responsibility. One returnee, a teacher, was so tormented by the backwardness of the Surinamese educational system that he said to his colleagues: "If a man from the Middle Ages were transported to Suriname, he would wonder what it was all about. But at the school he would say: I know all about that, that is a school." The irritation was also sometimes expressed when people publicly took it upon themselves to perform a pedagogic task: "In Holland we do it like this!" Or: "They speak such bad Dutch here and when I hear it I sometimes make some little corrections. But they don't appreciate that one bit, they say you suddenly think you know everything if you come back from Holland. They just don't want to hear the truth here."

A strategy often used in an attempt to combat the antipathy towards returnees consisted of putting forward the claim that one had left the Dutch fleshpot to bravely return to Suriname "to build up the country". This phrase might be very suitable for propaganda purposes, but anyone who used it in daily conversation was looking for trouble. The response would be furious: "These people come back and they think they can say anything here." Or: "That might be very well and good in Holland, but we are in Suriname here," or "If it is so wonderful in Holland, why didn't you stay there?" Another classic comment was "If it is good for Holland, that doesn't necessarily mean it is good for Suriname."

I deliberately only gave examples of the reciprocal interaction between the people who had never left and the returnees which bore witness to the form and not the contents of the conflict. A great deal of the antipathy towards returnees was based on their status as members of a minority. It was not the modernization proposals in themselves which gave rise to antipathy, it was also important who thought them up and who put them into words. The returnees were told again and again that they were no better for their Dutch experience.

There were two main reasons for this hostile attitude towards the

returnees. In the first place, in various ways the returnees did present a real threat. They were competition on the labour market and on the housing market. In the tiny country of Suriname, some occupations only had perhaps a few people practicing them, so that one more colleague could be a direct material threat, especially when it was someone who had just finished a vocational training course and was familiar with the most modern techniques and methods of the occupation. In the second place, this antipathy was also the result of a certain degree of resentment towards people who had once turned their back on Suriname. They made it clear that they didn't think their own country was good enough to build up a life there. The returnees — no matter how much enthusiasm there might be about their new preference for Suriname — now had to pay for their transgression in the past. So the antipathy towards returnees had a material as well as a moral motivation.

Returnees as a divided social category

We have seen that the minority status of returnees was defined within Surinamese society as a whole, and that a more or less fixed pattern of personal interaction had developed between the returnees and the rest of Surinamese society. In addition, there was very little evidence of a sense of belonging together, and even less evidence of mutual solidarity. Internally, the "minority" of returnees did not really have much in common with what we usually think of as a minority, it was an extremely heterogeneous collection of people. The following three main factors were responsible for this phenomenon: 1. as a result of the complexity of the composition of the stream of migrants, there was no real common basis for common conduct; 2. in the course of time, various generations of returnees had come into being with conflicting interests; 3. there was an attractive alternative: re-emigration to Holland.

1. — We already noted that all the various social classes of Suriname participated in the emigration to the Netherlands. The same was true of the return migration, though here the two extremes of the social stratification system were over-represented. A disproportionate number of returnees were the highly educated

people who filled the country's leading positions, and the "failures" who mainly returned to the lowest social ranks. This was not a good basis for organization and joint action.

Moreover, there was the issue of ethnic segmentation. Suriname is one of the most heterogeneous multi-racial societies in the world. All the various ethnic groups were represented in the emigrants, and the same held true for the returnees. The various church associations, political parties and other organizations, each representing a specific ethnic group, formed their own social frameworks for a compartmentalized re-integration.

According to public opinion, the returnees might all exhibit the same attitude of conceit and arrogance, but in reality a wide range of re-adjustment patterns could be distinguished. There were certainly returnees (and even more so, people on vacation!) who behaved arrogantly. However, there were also many who returned with very little show of self-confidence, or who did their best not to attract any attention at all. There were also people who were willing to go to a lot of trouble to show that they were "still Surinamese", they did their very best to not act like a *blaka bakra* (white Dutchman). This was also not conducive to the development of mutual solidarity.

Practically all the returnees came back individually (with their immediate families or other dependents); I do not know of any cases of a group of any substantial size returning together in an organized manner.

2. — Return migration is a phenomenon that has been in existence for a very long time. Among the intellectuals, various generations of returnees could be distinguished. There was a generation of people who had returned before or immediately after the Second World War, and who were generally quite conservative. They had played an important role in the colonial and neo-colonial system, but had now ceased to do so. A second generation had returned to Suriname in the fifties and sixties, and it was in their ranks that Suriname nationalism was born. They now held the most important positions and belonged to the established elite in the young republic. The generation of more recent returnees sometimes had nationalistic ideas, but they were also often politically quite left-

wing. One of the main reasons for the antipathy which the most recent returnees were faced with was the very fact that the previous group of well-educated returnees had already filled the key social positions. This subsequent return of new generations did not provide a basis for solidarity; instead, it was a source of inter-generational conflicts.

3. — In his paper about return migration to Jamaica, TAILOR (1973) noted that returnees consciously or unconsciously tended to constantly evaluate their position against the background of the “foreign” frame of reference. Returnees had had one more experience, life abroad was a real alternative to them. We have seen how different the reactions of individual returnees were: from the very beginning, some of them were very unassuming and unobtrusive and simply accepted their new situation. Others were initially recalcitrant and rebellious when their attempts to introduce changes met with failure, but later did manage to find some kind of *modus vivendi*. However, there was also a category of returnees who had met with so much opposition and antipathy and frustration that they had no choice but to re-emigrate to the Netherlands. And this was a sizeable group: of the 75 returnees (and their families and dependents) in my 1972 sample group, no less than 45 have re-emigrated to the Netherlands by now (1980).

A recent development: the coup d'état on February 25, 1980

I have shown how difficult it was for returnees to cope with their minority status, and how they were too segmentalized to be able to utilize this minority position for purposes of joint action. That was the situation up until very recently.

On the night of 24-25 February, 1980 a group of young non-commissioned officers in the Surinamese army (SKM) succeeded in carrying out a coup d'état. It is still too early to evaluate this “intervention”, as the officers euphemistically referred to it. The newspapers did their best. One reporter viewed it as a move against inefficiency and corruption, another saw it as an attempt to alter the course of the economic development model, and a third

thought that the whole point was to eliminate the ethnic conflicts within the country. All the commentaries expressed the hope that Suriname's great problems would now be solved.

However, up till now there has been very little evidence of this solution. The "boys" (as the new men at the top are referred to) did not have a blueprint for a new social system. They summoned representatives of the various political groups and had them explain how they thought things ought to be organized in the future. The sergeants even put up a suggestion box at the gate to the army base, so that anyone who had a good proposal could drop it in. A civil council was appointed to take over the management of the administration, but it was not exactly a group of people from whom a fundamentally different political line could be expected. It looks as if the sergeants have been taken by surprise by their own victory.

It is interesting to note what the immediate cause was that led to the coup d'état. It was a conflict between the non-commissioned officers and the people in command of the army, who were supported by the Surinamese government. The disputed issues involved legal rights, salaries and promotion policies in the army. The commanding officers reacted in all the pertaining demands to these issues in an extremely condescending manner. The Surinamese government viewed it as insubordination and took legal action, which was to result in disciplinary punishment. Just before a new court judgement was to be passed, the non-commissioned officers seized power.

In an article written by a Dutch journalist, a remark was made that seemed much more to the point than all the essays in depth about the true background of the coup d'état. JANSEN VAN GALEN (*Haagse Post*, March 1980) remarked that it was a rebellion of returnees from the Netherlands. And it was true: all the new men in power had had their military training in the Netherlands. There they had come into contact with the Dutch way of doing things in the army, with the existence of a real trade union of soldiers (unique in the world) and with a military organization within which the privates and non-commissioned officers had a say regarding their own rights. This Dutch system was one of the attainments of the democratization of Dutch society in the sixties, and was very far removed from the way superiors treated their inferiors in

Suriname. A say in the matter? A fair discussion? It was all very alien to the kind of centralized and authoritarian type of social organization that Suriname had, a social organization that still exhibited numerous aspects of colonialism.

How can we explain the fact that these sergeants did succeed in gaining control of the country, whereas previous generations of returnees had always failed? Of course a very important element was the simple fact that soldiers have arms and know how to use them. But that was and is also true of policemen, and the example presented at the beginning of this paper showed that the policemen failed in their efforts.

It is still very difficult to analyse this question, but it does look as if a number of the conditions stated above were indeed met with in the case of the sergeants. In the first place, the antipathy which the non-commissioned officers were confronted with as a minority within the army was very pronounced. The attitude of the higher officers who had *not* had their military training in the Netherlands was very arrogant; one of the things they made the young non-commissioned officers do was polish the buttons of their uniforms. The younger men viewed their superiors as the exponents of a colonial, obsolete era.

In the second place, these sergeants exhibited a greater degree of social homogeneity than had ever been the case with other categories of returnees. All nine of them (that was all there were!) were young and the great majority was from the Creole proletariat. They all returned in one and the same year (1975), they all studied at the very same Dutch military academy and they knew each other quite well. The question remains as to whether these sergeants really will introduce progressive changes, or at least make it possible for them to be introduced. This isn't really the kind of thing we have come to expect from military men. But who knows?

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