

# 11. *Decolonizing the mind - the case of the Netherlands*

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## Introduction

This article deals with the distinction between science and ideology in the field of the history of colonialism and its effects in the present day multicultural society of The Netherlands. I will argue that there is a dominant ideological current in Dutch universities that tries to portray colonialism as a normal form of social relations between human beings and goes against the idea of colonialism as a system of exploitation and oppression. I label this current **scientific colonialism** (SC) in comparison with the current of **scientific racism** that tries to justify racism with pseudo scientific arguments.

The central question in this discussion is: what was the nature of the colonialism and what was the nature of the European civilization that created colonialism? From a scientific point of view the challenge comes down to formulating a theoretical framework that helps us to understand the nature of both colonialism and the civilization that created it. Such a framework needs to be logical (consistent), and formulated as propositions that can be checked by factual information. From an ideological point of view the whole discussion is not about theories and facts, but about defending (or attacking) colonialism in disregard of theoretical constructs and facts. I will deal with three major exponents of the current of scientific colonialism in Holland: the late Professor R. van Lier, Professor P. Emmer and Professor G. Oostindie from the Leiden University.

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## The Plural and Frontier Society: a Critique of R.A.J. van Lier

My basic criticism of Emmer and Oostindie is that they lack a theoretical framework to understand colonialism. I will come back to this criticism. Van Lier however did try to formulate a theory. He wrote a major study titled *Frontier Society. A Social Analysis of the History of Suriname*. Van Lier explains that his study records

*“the social relations which were important in determining life in the Colony. These relations came about as a result of the joint striving of a group of people to attain certain objectives, and of their views testifying, in doing so, to a mentality which was connected with certain given situations.”*<sup>2</sup>

In order to explain the very existence of the colonial society Van Lier goes back to a classical concept in western sociology of explaining social relations as a result of a joint striving of groups of people. From a scientific point of view one needs to test a theory. So where is the evidence that the slaves from Africa and their masters from Europe jointly decided that they would enter into a social relation where the first group is enslaved by the latter? Where are the data that show that the slaves and their masters jointly agreed that the first group was to be branded with hot iron so that the latter was ensured that the slave was his property? Where is the proof that both slaves and masters agreed upon a judicial system – the slave laws – that specified how the first group should be controlled, degraded and punished by the latter?

If the central core of the argument of Van Lier is that the colonial society can be understood with the concept of ‘joint striving’ a scientific methodology requires that one provides the data to build his case. Van Lier has written a thick book, but did he provide any facts to confirm his central thesis. Of course, every student of slavery and the colonial society knows that there is no such evidence. But still the book is hailed by Professor Gert Oostindie as a ‘masterly’ piece of work, not because of its scientific value, but because of its ideological content.

In line with the concept of joint striving Van Lier develops another concept, that of the border-line situation. He explains this idea as follows:

*“Generally speaking, groups or individual persons may be said to live in a border-line situation when their environment has lost its trusted, familiar character, so they are placed in a situation in which they lack the feeling that they are making a satisfactory adjustment. Because both slaves and their owners had been uprooted and had to adjust to conditions which were new and unfamiliar to them,*

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2 R.A.J. van Lier: *Frontier society. A Social Analysis of the History of Suriname*. The Hague. Martinus Nijhoff, 1971, p. 2.

*both groups continuously lived in a border-line situation.*<sup>3</sup>

The concept of the border-line situation tries to explain tensions between social groups without using the concept of oppression and exploitation. Both groups are set on equal footing: they are both uprooted and both have to adjust to the new situation. So the actions of and interactions between these groups can be explained by their continuous adjustment to the border-line situation.

A scientific methodology requires theoretical consistency. In this case it requires that the historical development of the colonial society in Suriname should be explained in terms of these adjustments. So in order to elucidate the very foundation of the colonial society – which is slavery – Van Lier should have analyzed the mechanism that placed the different groups in comparable situations and make clear that indeed these situations are on equal footing. He does not do that at all and thus fails to meet the scientific requirement of theoretical consistency. And indeed, his concept of the border-line situation would have great difficulty in explaining the slave trade that led to the establishment of the slave society in Suriname. Of course, every student of slavery knows that the slaves and their masters did not arrive in Suriname independent of each other. There was no independent third force that brought these groups into the new situation. Their arrival was linked to each other. The masters forced their slaves into the new situation.

If the establishment of a border-line situation was a result of the actions of the master, it is no surprise that the continuation of that relationship was not a matter of independent actions of the different groups, but a situation whereby the groups were intrinsically linked to each other. The theory of Van Lier does not match the scientific standards of providing empirical evidence for one's proposition and maintaining theoretical consistency. That is no reason to disqualify his study as unscientific and ideological. The process of scientific research and development consists of continuously trying to develop consistent theories and supporting them with empirical evidence. Even a wrong theory is part of the scientific process. But when a (wrong) theory develops into a set of ideas that regulates one's conducts, it becomes ideology. Van Lier has not produced a work of science but a work of ideology. In his analysis of the social tensions in the thirties in Suriname he compares the uprisings in the West Indies with the struggle of the workers in Suriname in the same period. He writes:

*“In Surinam, however, the distress is not assuming as gloomy an aspect as on the overpopulated West Indian islands. As long as the volume of the aggressiveness*

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3 Idem, p.7.

*of the masses does not increase and is not triggered off by the fear of starvation outbursts such as those which occurred in the British territories in 1937 are not to be expected. Such outburst always continue to constitute a serious threat, however, even when the masses are not acting out of dire necessity, because when once these have been sparked off they may go beyond a certain point as a result of violence on the part of the police, at which the collective rage can no longer be suppressed and can only be checked at the cost of the loss of lives and damage to property. **Responsible leaders** will have to realize fully that with the **mental instability** of the masses such as it is they will have to allow themselves to be guided by strong feeling of responsibility when making political propaganda, and that too free a manipulation of the fury of the masses in order to gain **certain political ends** carries with it grave dangers for the whole of society, not least of all for the masses themselves. Political leaders will have to teach the people to direct their energies through **democratic channels**. They will have to teach them self-confidence and train them to develop their critical faculties in order to enable them to form independent judgments in political matters; they will at the same time have to instill a sense of order and responsibility into them.*<sup>4</sup>

There are three elements in this citation that gives us insight into the ideology of Van Lier. The first is the idea of mental instability. You must be out of your mind if you protest against colonialism. Van Lier has a clear assessment of the nature of the struggle against colonialism: it is a matter of mental instability. The second element is the norm he sets for responsible leadership. They have to instill in the masses a sense of order and responsibility towards the colonial power. A leader that mobilizes masses against colonialism is seen to be manipulating them for political end which he does not approve of. The third item is the false characterization of the political structure in the colony. Van Lier urges responsible leaders to use democratic channel to express their actions. But curiously enough he fails to mention that these channels were absent in the colonial period. Universal suffrage in Suriname was introduced in 1948. Before that year a few hundred people, mostly whites and colored people, could elect the colonial parliament. Freedom of the press and freedom of organization were restricted. Colonialism was characterized by the absence of democratic channels. By producing a false representation of the colonial reality, Van Lier goes from science to ideology.

Van Lier directed his criticism specifically to Anton de Kom. De Kom was the leader of the uprising in 1933 in Suriname of a large section of the society – immigrants and descendents from the slaves – against the colonial autho-

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4 Idem, p. 376. The bold in the text is provided by the author.

rities. He tried to organize these workers, but was arrested and banned to Holland. De Kom is now a national hero in Suriname. The university is named after him. Books, articles and events are organized in honor of him. He has written a classical book titled *We Slaves from Suriname* which is a passionate critique of colonialism. His perspective in writing the book is the struggle against oppression, exploitation and racism. The evaluation of De Kom by Van Lier shows once more how his work is more ideological than scientific. Here is what Van Lier has to say about De Kom:

*“The book *Wij Slaven van Suriname (We Slaves of Surinam)*, which he wrote after his return to the Netherlands in 1933, offers an excellent insight into De Kom’s mentality. Although it is generally assumed that the book owes its existence to a considerable degree to the collaboration of a Dutch man of letters who moved in the same leftist circles as De Kom, the influence of the mentality of the group which had produced De Kom is unmistakable. De Kom attempted to write a study of the history of Surinam in which the accent fell on the slaves and the lot of the lower classes. The result was a work the chief value of which is as a document which offers an insight into the mentality of the lower middle class Surinamese. The memory of the sufferings endured by the ancestors as slaves, which is still alive among the common people, can be detected in his words. But this memory became part of a pathetic sense of grievance and a rancor which, however much justified by the circumstances in which the lower classes found themselves, prejudice a proper insight into the past.”<sup>5</sup>*

Van Lier tries to discredit De Kom by suggesting that he was not the author of the book. But he does not offer any proof and relies on the assumption that a black man in the thirties could not have written such an anti colonial study. And proof is what scientists always ask for. Studying the handwritten manuscripts would have provided such a proof. Van Lier and others who have repeated the accusation never bothered to study these manuscripts. If they had done so, then the proof would be beyond doubt, that De Kom had written his book. The material is now accessible in the National Archives of Suriname and shows that De Kom was the author of the handwritten manuscripts.

The lack of a consistent theoretical framework that is corroborated by facts is the first major feature of scientific colonialism. The method of discrediting an author without offering proof is the second striking feature of scientific colonialism.

The second aspect of Van Lier’s judgement is that he describes the sharp criticism of slavery as a system of exploitation and oppression as a “*pathetic sense*

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5 Idem, p.370.

of grievance and a rancor which ..., prejudice a proper insight into the past". And that proper insight is that slavery was not a system of oppression and exploitation but a frontier society where "*relations came about as a result of the joint striving*". This is a third feature of scientific colonialism: the rejection of the notion of characterizing slavery and colonialism as a system of oppression and exploitation.

## Racist propositions by P. Emmer

The proposition of Emmer, which I will deal with now, echo's the racist view that was common in slavery and described by the renowned Jamaican planter Edward Long (1734-1813) who wrote a history of Jamaica in 1774. Long states that the African is somebody that is in a lower state of humanity and causes disgust in a human being who observes such an animalistic creature. Slavery saved them from the barbarism in Africa. He also states that slaves who were guided by the spirit of the freedom did not so, by logical and independent thinking or philosophizing, but they were ideologically ignited by the European fever of the French Revolution at the end of the 18th century in Europe. They lacked any concept of freedom as other human beings. He describes an African man who got some education as a parrot without a thinking mind of his own.<sup>6</sup>

Let us look at the 21st century version of these ideas as it is propagated by P. Emmer of the Leiden University. Emmer writes about the situation of the enslaved people as follows:

*"Although the new society they had entered very often knew harsher psychological conditions, in material terms they were better off than in Africa."*<sup>7</sup> So slavery saved the enslaved from worse material conditions in Africa. In fact they lives were improved by the transfer to the "New" World.

What are the scientific problems with this proposition? First there is the lack of a theoretical framework and the use of implicit assumptions about the nature of the slave system. The description of the slave system is disconnected from its major features:

- The enslaved people were never asked for their permission to go to another place where the material conditions might have been better. That is a matter

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6 See F. Dragtenstein: Alles voor de vrede. De brieven van Boston band tussen 1753 and 1767. Amrit/NiNsee, The Hague/Amsterdam 2009, p. 16.

7 P.C. Emmer: De Nederlandse slavenhandel 1500-1850. De Arbeiderspers. Amsterdam/Antwerpen 2003, p.250-251.

of fact, not of speculation. They were transported by force to another place where the material conditions might have been better.

- The enslaved people lived under oppression and exploitation; there is absolutely no relationship between the number of calories in the diet of the Americans and the fact that they lived in a system of exploitation and oppression. There is just no logic in assuming such a relationship.
- If the diet in the colonies were so great, how come that during the whole period of slavery in Suriname 350.000 Africans were brought into Surinam and at the end of slavery only 34.000 were alive. In a normal population with a healthy diet the size of the population only grows. If we leave out the systematic oppression that killed the enslaved Africans – as Emmer does – then there was something really bad in their diet. The whole method of reasoning is illogical.

But the proposition is not about logic and facts. Its intention is to present slavery not as a crime against humanity, but as a system that was better for the slave. This is ideology, not science.

Emmer repeats the statement by Edward Long that the slaves had no concept of freedom. If they did, they took it from the French Revolution. In a description of the slave revolt of 1795 in Curacao under the leadership of Tula he writes:

*“Tula referred to the liberation of the French slaves and to the fact that the Netherlands should also liberate its slaves as the country had been occupied by France. There is no doubt that the Curacao slave rising of 1795 had its roots in abolitionism in Europe and was not based on a separate abolitionist ideology originating in the Caribbean.”*<sup>8</sup> In another paper he states: *“There is no indication that either the insurgent slaves or the maroons ever had the intention to abolish slavery and to strive towards general slave emancipation.”*<sup>9</sup> He continues: *“The fact that the slaves did not strive to abolish slavery does not indicate that the slaves in the Dutch Caribbean were not interested in more freedom to manage their own time. They wanted time to tend their own gardens, to sell their produce at other plantations or at slave markets, to go fishing and hunting and to own guns, to visit relations at other plantations and to stay away from their plantation from time to time. And in many ways, the slaves had their way.”*<sup>10</sup> He dwells on the matter: *“It is becoming clear that the iron grip of the owners and managers of the slaves was far more limited than originally believed. The slaves were actually very successful*

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8 Idem, p. 16.

9 P.Emmer, idem, p. 15.

10 Idem, p. 18.

*in creating family life, in building social relationships (sometimes far beyond the boundaries of the plantation), in ensuring that their children would be given functions that carried some degree of prestige within the plantation, in following their own religious predilections, and in creating their own economic framework within which as consumers and producers they could make their own decisions.”<sup>11</sup>*

*“But, if the slaves did finally revolt, it was not to combat or put an end to the institution of slavery.”<sup>12</sup>*

Why would the slaves not be interested in their freedom? Emmer: *“The economic advantages of slavery allowed the slaves to have higher incomes in kind such as better food, clothing, housing and medical care. Without the free labor ideology from Western Europe and North America, the slave trade to the Dutch Caribbean as well as slavery would have lasted much longer than it actually did.”<sup>13</sup>*

Now we know: black people have missed a great opportunity with the abolition of slavery.

What are the scientific problems with these propositions? First, there is the problem of logic. If there were no written documents of enslaved people where they explain their concept of freedom, that does not mean that they did not have these concepts. It only proves that we don't have the documentation. It just illogical to assume that the concepts were absent, because Emmer has not found the documents.

Slavery was maintained by a harsh system of repression and intimidation. The facts are well known. Freedom is a human desire. The idea that black humans don't desire freedom is a racist idea. The idea that they consented with their kidnapping and voluntarily agreed with enslavement is a racist idea.

Now we do have these documents. In fact there is ample documentation of the concept of freedom by the enslaved people. In fact, the 1795 uprising is very well documented.<sup>14</sup> Indeed Tula did refer to the abolition of slavery in France. But he also referred to the successful revolution in Saint Domingue (Haiti) where the slaves liberated themselves by force. And most statements by Tula explicitly stated that they wanted nothing less than their freedom as human beings. Emmer could not have missed these statements, because they are all there in the documents he has consulted. But here we come across the third major feature of scientific colonialism: just ignore the available facts to make an ideological point.

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11 P.C. Emmer: *The Dutch slave trade 1500-1800*. Berghahn Books. New York, Oxford 2006, p. 6.

12 *Idem*, p. 93.

13 P.C. Emmer (2008), p. 19.

14 See A. Caine (ed.): *Tula. De slavenopstand van 1795 op Curaçao*. Amsterdam/Den Haag. NiNsee/Amrit, 2009.



The concept of the African as an animal is implicit in the following statement by Emmer about the branding of enslaved Africans. Branding took place twice, he writes: “*once when they boarded the European slave ship, and once at the end of the journey when they arrived at the plantation ... They saw it as proof that their new owners would care for them.*”<sup>15</sup>

The scientific problem with this assertion is that it is just not true. There is no factual proof that the 10-12 million human beings that were taken captive in Africa against their will and were forced to work without payment in the colonies saw branding “*as proof that their new owners would care for them*”. This is just ideology without facts, not science. Now by this time any civilized reader would get disgusted just from reading the racist lines of Emmer: black people lacking any concept of freedom, enslaved Africans who like slavery, women, men and children who saw branding as a proof of the love of their master. This is hard core racism at the Leiden University. But to be honest, I have no problem with the racism, but with the lack of any scientific basis for these assertions. As for its racist content I stand by defending the freedom of speech: everybody has the right to be a racist and an uncivilized bigot. If that is the highest level of civilized conduct that that particular individual or institution can attain, so be it.<sup>16</sup>

## **Gert Oostindie and the Discussion on the Williams thesis**

Slavery is now officially recognized by the United Nations as a crime against humanity, just as the Jewish Holocaust is recognized as a crime against humanity.

Who committed that crime? There is no doubt about who the perpetrators of the crime against the Jews are: thousands of books, films and documentaries have instilled the truth in the minds and hearts of the Europeans: the perpetrator was Nazi-Germany.

How about slavery? Here we see the fourth major feature of scientific colonialism: western civilization is not portrayed as the perpetrator of this crime against humanity. No, it is painted as the liberator in the hideous crime.

Emmer asks the question: “*Who abolished the slave trade and slavery?*” His answer is: “*The governments in Europe, and the USA, Cuba and Brazil. The*

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15 P.C. Emmer: *De Nederlandse slavenhandel 1500-1850. De Arbeiderspers.* Amsterdam/Antwerpen 2003, p. 252.

16 At his retirement Leiden University organized a farewell congress in honor of Emmer.

*abolition of slavery was a typical feature of Western civilization.*<sup>17</sup>

I ask the question: “*Who instituted the slave trade and slavery?*” My answer is: “*It is the government and private companies in the west who instituted slavery. The institution of slavery was a typical feature of Western civilization!*”

My next question is: “*Why did the western government and the private companies institute slavery? And what was their role in the abolition of slavery?*” Now what is the difference between science and ideology? It is in the way you pose the question. Scientific colonialism poses the question from an ideological angle, not from a scientific one. The ideological angle means that they ignore the link between why slavery was instituted and why it was abolished.

The question of why slavery was abolished is basically the question about the nature of European civilization: if slavery was abolished on humanitarian grounds, than this would indicate that European civilization has attained a high level of decency. On the other hand, if slavery was abolished for economic reasons, than the level of decency of the western civilization is astonishing low.

The discussion centers on the Williams thesis. Eric Williams has formulated the following conclusions about slavery and abolition in his study *Capitalism and Slavery*:

1. *The decisive forces in the period of history are the developing economic forces.*
2. *The various contending groups of dominant merchants, industrialists and politicians, while keenly aware of immediate interests, are for that very reason generally blind to the long range consequences of their various actions, proposals and policies.*
3. *The political and moral ideas of the age are to be examined in the very closest relation to the economic forces.*
4. *An outworn interest, whose bankruptcy smells to heaven in historical perspective, can exercise an obstructionist and disruptive effect which can only be explained by the powerful services it had previously rendered and the entrenchment previously gained.*
5. *The ideas built on these interests continue long after the interest have been destroyed and work their old mischief, which is all the more mischievous because the interests to which they correspond no longer exist.*<sup>18</sup>

From Williams perspective economics led to the institution of the system of slavery and economics led to its abolition. This is a devastating judgement about the nature of western civilization.

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17 Pieter Emmer; *Who abolished slavery? "Resistance and accommodation in the Dutch Caribbean"* Paramaribo may 11th-15th 2008, p. 1.

18 E. Williams [1944], pp. 209-213.

So the attacks of scientific colonialism center on criticizing the Williams thesis. The major critique of the Williams thesis has two arguments:

- If economics were the reason for abolishing slavery, then after abolition of slavery the economies of the colonies would have grown. If growth was absent, that the reason for abolishing slavery was not economic.
- There was a large movement of people in Britain who campaigned for the abolition of slavery. They were the expression of a high level of civilization because they put human decency above economics. Britain had committed economic suicide, or econocide as Seymour Drescher puts it.<sup>19</sup>

In The Netherlands the critique of the Williams thesis was repeated by Gert Oostindie. He edited a reader where different historians and economists describe how after the abolition of slavery the colonial economy declined.<sup>20</sup> He asks the question: Why was slavery abolished in the Dutch colonies. His answer is: “*It was due to an absolute indifference regarding slavery rather than economic arguments.*”<sup>21</sup>

What is the scientific problem with the economic critique of Williams? It is question of logic. A motive is independent of the outcome of a policy but linked to its intention. So even if the economy declined after abolition, this has nothing to do with the motive. The motive should be linked to the intention, not to the outcome of an act. So from a scientific point of view even if the colonial economies grew or declined after abolition it does not bear on the motives of the policy makers. A growing economy would not have been an indicator of the bad morals nor is a declining economy an indicator of good morals.

So we come back to the second argument against Williams: the impact of the abolitionist movement. Here we encounter what I call the abolitionist contradiction in the history of slavery. The contradiction bears on the concept of justice and civilized behavior. When a crime is committed – we are talking here about a major crime in human history – civilized conduct prescribes that the perpetrator is punished and the victim is compensated. What was the outcome of the policy of abolition? The slave owner got rewarded – they got the money – and the enslaved Africans were forced to work another period as bonded laborers, although not as slaves.

Now the abolitionist contradiction goes as follows: if slavery was abolished

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19 See Seymour Drescher: *Econocide: British Slavery in the Era of Abolition*. Pittsburgh, Univ of Pittsburgh Press 1977.

20 Gert Oostindie (ed.): *Fifty Years Later. Antislavery, Capitalism and Modernity on the Dutch Orbit*, 1995, KITLV Press.

21 Gert Oostindie: *De parels en de kroon. Het koningshuis en de koloniën*. KITL uitgeverij Leiden/ De Bezige Bij Amsterdam 1006, p.29-30.

by the abolitionist, then that would testify to the uncivilized nature of the abolitionist. They were racist who punish the black people for slavery and rewarded the perpetrator of the crime against humanity. If the abolitionist had high moral standards and would not accept such an outcome, than apparently their influence on policy making was not so big. So the critiques of the Williams thesis clearly have two problems: a methodological one – how to link a motive to the outcome of a deed instead of the intentions of the policy makers – and a logical one: the abolitionist contradiction.

The Dutch have an additional problem. Oostindie acknowledges that Holland lacked the broad abolitionist movement that was present in Britain. There was no significant abolitionist movement in Holland; just a few individuals with clearly no influence on policy makers. However, the outcome of the policy in Holland was exactly the same as in Britain: slavery was abolished along similar conditions.

If there are no economic reasons to abolish slavery – because of the perceived economic decline<sup>22</sup> - and there is no moral pressure on politicians, then why was slavery abolished in Holland? Oostindie answer is: absolute indifference regarding slavery. My answer is: absolute nonsense! Why?

It is just illogical to label indifference as a motive for an action, because indifference means that the policy maker does not care about the outcome of his action. If that is so, why did he not chose for the easiest way, namely maintain slavery and keep the economic gains? Why should indifference lead to such a drastic step not only of abolishing slavery, but of setting up an enormous system of importing 70.000 indentured laborers between 1853-1940 to replace 34.000 enslaved Africans who were “freed” in 1863? There is no logic that explains such actions from the motive of indifference.

Lately Oostindie has come up with another argument besides indifference, namely peer pressure. Peer pressure is the phenomenon where individuals in a group commit acts under pressure of peers. In the case of the abolition of slavery the Dutch, who fought four wars against the British, would have bowed under British moral pressure. Oostindie does not mention military or economic pressure.

My scientific critique is twofold. First, there is just no factual proof of peer pressure. Oostindie does not bother to produce any evidence of peer pressure. In fact, if we go to the source - as historians should do – than we find that there was a state commission that wrote a report in 1853 for the preparation of the

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22 I don't dwell on the nature of the economic decline after abolition. It suffices to say that indentured laborers were imported on a mass scale to save the plantations and in some major colonies it has!

abolition in 1863. The report clearly cites economic reasons for the abolition of slavery:

- The decline of the slave population (around 2% per year) would lead to a shrinking supply of labor.
- The proportion of unproductive slaves (children and elderly people) was rising.

The commission concluded that although the colony would yield less than in previous years, abolition would enable the colony to exist. The way would be cleared for the import of a more flexible form of labor supply: indentured laborer. The commission did not use any moral arguments regarding the enslaved Africans. In fact, they argued that the cost of the abolition – the rewards for the owners, the perpetrators of the crime – should be paid by the slaves! They admitted however that they could not think of ways to enforce such payments.<sup>23</sup>

## The Mechanisms of (De)Colonizing the Mind

Leading professors in the Dutch universities who write about slavery and colonialism are not scientists but ideologues of colonialism. They try to portrait colonialism and its legacy from an ideological point of view, not from a scientific one. The striking features of scientific colonialism are:

- The lack of a consistent theoretical framework that is corroborated by facts;
- Suggesting something without offering proof;
- The rejection of the notion of characterizing slavery and colonialism as a system of oppression and exploitation;
- Ignoring facts that contradict their position in order to make an ideological point;
- Portraying western civilization not as the perpetrator of a crime against humanity but as the liberator in the hideous crime.

Their approach however should be seen from a broader perspective of the colonization and decolonization of the mind. I will argue that colonialism has developed concepts and relating mechanisms by which the mind of the colonizer and the mind of the people that were colonized have been molded to accept and propagate colonial ideas. These ideas still exist and have an influence in universities in the west and sometimes in its counterparts in the former colonies.

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<sup>23</sup> See G.Willemsen: Dagen van gejuich en gejubel. Viering en herdenking van de afschaffing van de slavernij in Nederland, Suriname en de Nederlandse Antillen. Amrit/NiNsee, Den Haag/Amsterdam 2006, p. 78 e.v.

I will deal with ten concepts and relating mechanisms of colonizing and decolonizing the mind. These are:

1. The concept of inferiority of the non-western culture and the superiority of western culture linked to color.
2. The concept of self-humiliation of the colored people and self-glorification of the white people.
3. The concept of gratitude for colonialism.
4. The concept of mitigating the nature of colonial oppression and exploitation.
5. The concept of destroying the cultural identity of non whites.
6. The concept of divide and rule.
7. The concept of equal culprits in the crime against humanity
8. The concept of forbidden chambers.
9. The concept of applause instead of discussion.
10. The concept of the house Negro and the field Negro.

### ***1. The Concept of Inferiority of the Non-Western Culture and the Superiority of Western Culture Linked to Color***

Slavery and colonialism were justified with this concept: western culture and the white man were superior to non-western culture and non-white people. Slavery and colonialism were meant to uplift the non-whites from barbarism. This idea has permeated every sector of the colonial society and the western civilization. Decolonizing the mind means analyzing the mechanisms that have been used to imprint this concept in our mind and finding ways to remove them from our consciousness.

Let us look at a few examples:

- Language: in our language color is linked to norms and values. The color white is linked to good, pure and positive connotations. The color black is linked to bad, dirty and negative connotations. So when we talk about good and bad and link it to color, then the colonized mind would view black as bad and white as good.
- Culture: every year on the fifth of December the Dutch celebrate Sinterklaas – Santa Claus. During Sinterklaas children get presents from their parents and schoolmates. There is a whole culture of rites and rituals including songs that celebrate Sinterklaas. One remarkable aspect of this feast is the use of blacks – Pieterbaas – who run around with candy and dress like fools. Children sing songs with lyrics like: *“Even though I am black as coal, my intentions*

*are good.*” And nobody feels ashamed at the annual insults that creep out of children’s mouth during Sinterklaas. Generally speaking, in popular culture there is abundant material – from Tarzan movies to comic strips – that depicts black as backward and white as superior.

Decolonizing the mind means breaking this tangible link between color and the judgement about good and bad.

In present day culture the link is more and more made between religion and the judgement about good and bad. The Muslims are now the Negroes from the past.

## ***2. The Concept of Self-humiliation of the Colored People and Self-glorification of the White People***

The establishment of the link between color and judgement spills over into the next concept. Non-whites learn to talk and think of themselves in negative terms (self-humiliation) and of whites in positive terms (they are the best). Whites learn the opposite: they are taught that they are the best (self-glorification) and that there is always something inferior and wrong with the non-whites.

The most remarkable example of self-glorification of the white race can be found in the image of Jesus, a white man with blond hair and blue eyes. In 2001 the BBC broadcasted a documentary titled “Son of God”. Based on historical sources of what people looked like in the Middle East where Jesus was born, they made a computer animation of what God might look like. And not surprisingly he did not resemble a blond man with blue eyes. The blond guys did not live in Palestine around the year zero. The real picture of Jesus, who is teaching his followers to search for the truth, is far removed from the picture painted in western civilization: the blond man with blue eyes. Decolonizing the mind means saying good-bye to self-humiliation of non-whites and self-glorification of whites.

## ***3. The Concept of Gratitude for Colonialism***

Quite often one might hear the following phrase from immigrants in the western world: *“I am glad that the colonialist took my ancestors from Africa, because if they would not have done that, than today we would not live in the affluent society.”* The professors of scientific colonialism are propagating this idea. Professor Emmer wrote shortly after the earthquake in Haïti in a leading

daily: “If the slave uprising in 1804 had failed and Haiti had remained a colony of France, the country would now have been better off.”<sup>24</sup>

Apart from the disgusting lack of civilized conduct to write such an article during such an enormous disaster, his article shows the lack of logic in his proposition. His reasoning boils down to the argument that when event A is followed by event B, then there is automatically a causal connection between those two events: a consecutive order of events is equal to a causal relation between these events. So the popular notion in Dutch culture that storks cause pregnancy would have a scientific basis according to Emmer’s reasoning. The arrival of storks at spring is followed by a wave of pregnancies in the summer. So pregnancies are caused by storks, according to both popular culture and scientific colonialism.

If we apply this reasoning to the Holocaust, we would have to say that the Jews should erect a monument for Hitler to thank him for the holocaust, because without the holocaust the state of Israel would not have existed. There is no need to analyze the struggle of Zionists to establish the state of Israel. Nor is there any reason to document the motives of the Nazis to establish a state for the Jews and institute the holocaust as a means to further that cause. No scientific research is needed to ascertain the link: the consecutive order is sufficient to create the causal relation.

That is scientific colonialism. In proper science a scientist has to analyze cause and effect. Did Hitler have the intention of establishing a state for the Jews? Did the colonialists have the intention of providing welfare, color televisions included, for the blacks in Britain in 2010? And how were these intentions translated in actions? If that is the case, then there are reasons to attribute the effect to the cause. If not, then we are dealing with ideology not with science.

Decolonizing the mind means using scientific means to establish causal relations between events and not assuming that these relations exist because of the consecutive order of events.

#### ***4. The Concept of Mitigating the Nature of Colonial Oppression and Exploitation***

Scientific colonialists are vehemently opposed to the idea of slavery and colonialism as a crime against humanity, as a system of exploitation and oppression. Oostindie warns against using the phrase “*crime against humanity*”. He argues that it is an “anachronism” meaning that the term is inappropriately

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24 De Volkskrant, 15-01-2010.



used and out of its historical context. Oostindie writes that “*few people in the period felt that slavery was a crime against humanity*.” Oostindie only refers to how the perpetrators of the crime against humanity felt about their action. But what about the victims? Were they not also human beings? What were their feelings about their fate? Would they not view slavery as a crime against humanity? What were their feelings when they were captured against their will in Africa, transported to the Americas and forced to work for free for their oppressors? Scientific colonialism views slavery and colonialism from the perspective of the colonialist.

We have already exposed the way in which slavery is depicted not as a system of oppression and exploitation but as a plural society where these elements are absent.

We want to point out another element that is widespread in Dutch academic circles, namely that slavery was not that bad. This idea is expressed in a statistic. Dutch participation in the slave trade was only 5%, more or less 500,000. So the share of the Dutch in the crime against was not so big. So the blame on the Dutch should not be so strong.

Scientific colonialism uses the number of 10-12 million people as a statistical indicator for the impact and magnitude of slavery. This is the number of people that arrived in the Americas. Now this number is without doubt huge. Holland has a population of 16 million, Austria of 8 million. The holocaust has taken the life of 6 million Jews. So, 10-12 million is a huge number. But still it is a fraction of the number of people that were victims of the system of slavery in the Americas. A proper calculation of the number of victims should include:

1. The number of people who perished between the time they were captured and the time they arrived at the ports of disembarkation. There are ratios varying from 1-5: for every person who arrived at the port of disembarkation 1-5 persons died during the journey.
2. The number of people that died during the transport overseas.
3. The number of people who actually arrived in the Americas.
4. And most important and often forgotten: the number of people that were born and enslaved at birth. Every generation since the 10-12 million that arrived in the course of 300 years have given birth to children.

These are the calculations that we need in a proper scientific exercise to gauge the impact of slavery. We should also take into account the devastating effect that slavery had on Africa.<sup>25</sup> Decolonizing the mind means revealing the true nature of slavery and colonialism as a system of oppression and exploitation.

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25 See Walter Rodney: *How Europe underdeveloped Africa*. London Dar Es Salaam 1972.

## ***5. The Concept of the Destroying the Cultural Identity of Non-Whites***

Lord MaCaulay is said to have set out the policy of how to colonize India before the British parliament in 1835: *“I don’t think we would ever conquer this country, unless we break the very backbone of this nation that is their cultural heritage.”*<sup>26</sup>

One thing that slavery has tried to do continuously is to destroy the cultural identity of the Africans. Enslaved Africans got Christian names. African religions have been replaced by western religion (Christianity). African languages hardly exist anymore. The African heritage is there in music and art, but often it is not recognized as an African heritage. Decolonizing the mind means recognizing the identity that have been lost and the right of black people to regain it if they want to.

## ***6. The Concept of Divide and Rule***

Colonialism has taught the workers to pay more attention to what divides them than to what unites them. The color bar was used during slavery to divide the enslaved people according to the shades of their skin. And long time after slavery blacks and non-whites were taught to look down upon people with a darker color than their own skin. Africans were pitted against Asians. And this policy still exists to this day, where people from former colonies in the same socioeconomic positions – and indeed white workers in the same socioeconomic position as non-white – are taught that division is more important than their unity.

Decolonizing the mind means that recognizing and respecting one’s cultural identity can perfectly go along with striving for unity with other people who live in similar social and economic conditions.

## ***7. The Concept of Equal Culprits in the Crime Against Humanity***

One particular argument in the debate on slavery that keeps propping up is the role of the Africans in the establishing of slavery in the Americas. The argument goes as follow: Africans helped in establishing slavery and thus Africa has an equal moral responsibility in institutionalizing this system in the Americas and is also a culprit in the crime against humanity.

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<sup>26</sup> Cited in Speech by Sri Vayalar Ravi, Minister of Overseas Indian Affairs at the International Symposium to commemorate the 135th anniversary of the migration of the Surinamese Indian community in Suriname. The Hague June 5, 2008.

What is the problem in this argument? Any major system of oppression must rely on the cooperation of segments of the group that is oppressed and exploited. It is just not possible to establish large systems of exploitation without such cooperation. The Nazis had their collaborators – that is how they are called – in the Dutch society and even among the Jews. These people formed an important part in the process of establishing Nazi domination. No Dutch historians would dare to transfer the responsibility of the actions of the collaborators to the Dutch people as a whole. In fact they are separated in the history books and described as traitors. The Dutch people as a whole are considered to be the victims of Nazis.

How different is the approach in the field of slavery. Here the actions of the collaborators bear on the shoulders of the victims! Slavery in the Americas did not lead to the industry of ship building in Africa, nor to the rise of the sugar and candy industry in Ghana. The fruits of slavery were not picked in Africa, but in Europe. But still the collaborators are not depicted as traitors by scientific colonialism, but their actions are used to impose the role of accomplice on Africa in stead of the role of the victim.

Sharing the blame for instituting the system of slavery has nothing to do with science, but with ideology. Facts are not interpreted from the framework of collaboration but of sharing the blame. Decolonizing the mind means knowing how to distinguish between collaboration and sharing the blame.

### **8. The Concept of Forbidden Chambers**

Scientific colonialism made three subjects taboo in the study of slavery and colonialism:

1. The comparison of slavery with the Holocaust.
2. The question of reparations.
3. The effect of the racist ideology that has developed during slavery and colonialism in modern western societies.

Oostindie calls the term black holocaust “*a conscious provocation. The terminology is an insult to the victims of the holocaust.*”<sup>27</sup> In his judgement 300 years of black holocaust (slavery) is not as bad as five years of Jewish holocaust. Oostindie thinks that these two crimes of humanity should not be compared and analyzed, because they are different. But the essence of science – not of scientific colonialism – is the use of comparisons to understand differences and similarities. A scientist should be interested in these differences and similarities.

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27 G. Oostindie: Slavernij, canon en trauma. Universiteit Leiden, Leiden 2007, p. 7-8.

ties. An ideologue does not want the comparison, because the similarities might produce frightening conclusions about the nature of slavery.

The question of reparations has two dimensions: one is the acknowledgment of slavery as a crime against humanity and the need for western governments to apologize for this crime. The second one is the economic dimension: the need to pay for 300 years of oppression and exploitation. There is a link between the discussion on reparations and the Williams thesis.

We find it hard to believe that western civilization committed econocide – economic suicide - and put their moral values above their economic interest. That is our position in the debate on the Williams thesis. Now there is chance for honest scientists in the debate on the Williams thesis to show their morality: they should be in the forefront in the reparations movement and defend the argument that indeed western civilization should repeat the trick of the 19th century: put moral values above economic interest.

On reparations Oostindie states: “*Those who apologize accept responsibility and may not be safe for claims.*”<sup>28</sup> He pleads for putting economic interests above moral values.

Many western countries pride themselves that they have got rid of racism. The idea that racism still is very much alive in all segments of society is abhorred. Research that links slavery and colonialism to present day racism is prohibited in scientific colonialism.

Decolonizing the mind means opening the chambers of taboo in the study on slavery and colonialism and its effects on contemporary societies.

## ***9. The Concept of Applause Instead of Discussion***

Scientific colonialism has its own rituals. They are not accustomed to fundamental critique. They have developed a culture in which there is no place for fundamental critique and discussion. In their publications you won't find scientific discussions where fundamental differences are debated. They fear the public debate. The reason is obvious: any scientific scrutiny would reveal the ideological nature of their argument. And ideologues are not accustomed to debate and discussion. They only like applause.

Decolonizing the mind means challenging everyone to engage in fundamental critique of each other. That is the very nature of science: scientists discuss their differences, especially if they have fundamental disagreements.

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28 Idem.

## ***10. The Concept of the House Negro and the Field Negro***

An essential part of scientific colonialism is the role of black intellectuals who play a part as the house Negro that is so eloquently analyzed in the speech of Malcolm X.<sup>29</sup>

Van Lier is such a house Negro. Anton de Kom is a field Negro. The house Negro is the stronghold of scientific colonialism in the black communities. Decolonizing the mind means moving towards a level where intellectuals from the former colonies are invited to make their choice. Scientist on slavery has to make up their minds. Where do you want to belong in decolonizing the mind? With the house Negroes or the field Negroes?

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29 See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=znQe9nUKzvQ>.

# 12. An alternative framework for the study of slavery and the colonial society in Suriname

Sandew Hira

## Introduction

A fundamental critique of scientific colonialism is its lack of a well founded theory on the nature of the colonial society of Suriname. Many studies are descriptive and lack a firm theoretical basis. The theory of the plural society can be viewed as a theoretical framework of scientific colonialism (SC). R. van Lier, the architect of the theory for Suriname, describes “*the social relations which were important in determining life in the Colony. These relations came about as a result of the joint striving of a group of people to attain certain objectives, and of their views testifying, in doing so, to a mentality which was connected with certain given situations.*”<sup>1</sup> I have dealt with the factual, logical and conceptual faults in this theory in my article in this reader on decolonizing the mind (DTM).

In this contribution we will focus on an alternative framework for the analysis of slavery and the colonial society. This framework can be used to guide the study of colonialism from the perspective of DTM.

I outline four directions for the study of colonial history in Suriname from the perspective of DTM as opposed to the perspective of SC. These steps are nothing new in scientific research, but they are new in the way historical research is being conducted. Up to now the emphasis by academics of SC is on description and an effort to find facts that illustrates that colonialism was not that bad, even though there might have been excesses in human rights abuses.

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1 R.A.J. van Lier: *Frontier Society. A Social Analysis of the History of Surinam*. The Hague. 1971, p. 2.

### ***Direction 1: Shift the Focus from Descriptive Questions to Theoretical Questions***

The central question in descriptive historical research is: what happened?

The central question in theoretical historical research is: why did it happen?

The majority of historical research on Suriname is based on the first question. We have countless studies on the history of Suriname describing what happened: The indigenous people living in the coastal areas before the European arrived; the Europeans arriving first in small groups then later from Barbados the first effort to set up a settlement by the British; the conquest by the Dutch in 1667 that brought the British colony into the hands of the Dutch; the import of enslaved African human beings; the production of agricultural products, the structure of the society of enslaved people, the different social layers, the development in the different years, etc.; the struggle of the enslaved Africans; the rise of maroon communities; the abolition of slavery: who did what? The influx of indentured laborers; the rise of the small peasantry; the social unrest in the era after abolition of slavery; the policy of the governors; etc, etc.

Almost none of these studies pose the “why” question from a theoretical perspective. There are often “why” answers inserted in an implicit way in the description:

- Why did the Europeans came to the Caribbean? The implicit answer is: adventurism. A theoretical answer would have to explain the rise of adventurism in Europe. Why was there adventurism on such a large scale?
- Why were African humans being brought to the America's? The implicit answer is: the colony needed labor. A theoretical answer would have to explain why labor was taken from Africa and not from Europe or Asia, and why Africans were enslaved against their will and why this system could last for so long?
- Why did the Europeans manage to enslave Africans in the colony for so long? The implicit answer is: the Africans wanted to do the hard labor. The theoretical answer would have to explain the existence of slave laws and the cruel method of instilling fear in the hearts and minds of the Africans?

By bringing the “Why” question to the fore it immediately becomes clear what is hidden in the descriptive studies: that there was a crime against humanity being committed by the Europeans in the Americas because of economic reasons. Armand Zunder has collected the facts from the history of Suriname that show that Suriname was a creation of private enterprises from Europe whose main motive was to make profit. The motive was there, irrespective of the fact

that these profits did materialize in all periods of their history.<sup>2</sup>

Evading the “Why” question is therefore the best strategy to ensure that this crime is hidden from the consciousness of a people.

The answer to the “Why” question presumes that there is a model that explains the nature of social development. The model provides us with an answer to one of the most important questions in our field: “What is the nature of the colonial society?” It should explain the mechanisms of how the colonial society arose and functioned and what the driving forces were behind its development.

We don’t need to start from scratch, because many theories have already been developed to answer these questions but they have seldom been applied to the case of Suriname.

Let us look into the question of slavery in Suriname. The longest period of colonialism in Suriname was the period of slavery, from 1650 till 1863. So for this period the question would be: what was the nature of the slave society in colonial times?”

There are basically two perspectives in the study of slavery. One perspective is that of the comparison of slave societies in the world.

*“For almost 4.000 years, men and women with power have figured out ways to get people to work for them,”* writes H. Klein. *“The exploited have been slaves, serfs, helots, tenants, peons, bonded laborers, and forced laborers, among others. They have built pyramids and temples, have dug canals, and have mined the earth for its minerals. They have built the palaces and mansions in which the powerful have lived, have been their servants, and have fed and clothed them. They have also produced commodities for markets and provided profits for their masters. Slavery is one of the most common forms of exploitation and one of the most profitable.”*<sup>3</sup>

The comparison brings to the fore the question: how does a slave society arise? In his study of slavery in classical Greece and Rome M. Finley argues that there are three preconditions for the creation of a slave society:<sup>4</sup>

- Private ownership of land.
- Commodity production and the existence of markets in which surplus could be sold.
- The lack of adequate supplies of labor at home.

Finley goes on to describe the different ways in which a person could be

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2 A. Zunder: *Herstelbetalingen. De ‘Wiedergutmachung’ voor de schade die Suriname en haar bevolking hebben geleden onder het Nederlands kolonialisme.* Amrit. Den Haag 2010.

3 M. Klein: *Historical dictionary of slavery and abolition*, The Scarecrow Press 2002, p. 1.

4 M.I. Finley: *Classical slavery*. London, 1987, p. 9.



enslaved. In Ancient Greece and in the Roman Empire a person was enslaved through war. The person of the vanquished belonged to the victor. Finley:

*“Enslavement could be imposed on fighters taken prisoner during a battle in the open country or after a city had been captured; on the whole population or only on the civilians (with the execution of the fighters); or even, less frequently, on the stock of slaves who in this case simply changed masters.”<sup>5</sup>*

Slave breeding was a second source. The existence of slavery for centuries in Ancient Europe suggests that war could not be the only source for these societies to sustain. Slave breeding and extensive natural reproduction was the foundation for the continuous supply of labor in Rome and Greece.

Debt slavery was another way to enslave a person. The enslaved person became the possession of the creditor and had to pay his debt by working for his master. In most cases, debt slavery was reversible. If the debt was repaid, the debtor could be freed. A variant of debt slavery is pawn slavery. The debtor gives another person – often a relative – as a slave to his creditor. Athens was a slave society in the fifth century BC where debt slavery was a common feature.

If we apply Finley’s theory on the rise of slavery in the classical era to the rise of slavery in the so called New World it is clear from the start that the biggest problem is defining the concept of **home**. For the slave owners, **home** was Europe, not the Americas. The explanation of the rise of slavery in the Americas must answer the following question: why did Europeans leave Europe to settle in a place where there was no slavery, rooted out the Indigenous people and engaged in setting up the gigantic and barbaric system of the transatlantic trade in human beings?

Finley’s model of the three preconditions for a slave society did not take this phenomenon into account. It shows the cardinal difference between slavery during colonialism and slavery in ancient Rome and Greece. Slave breeding and debt slavery did not exist in Suriname. So his model of explaining slavery in Suriname is not adequate.

Another stream of thought explains the rise of slavery as evolution of social formations. In the classical Marxist theory of social evolution there is the concept of an unilinear development of social orders. S. Dunn describes this concept:

*“The social order is a form of society through which all ... of humanity ... has passed, or is now passing, or will pass. Each social order has ‘laws of motion’ - forms and mechanisms of change and development - peculiar to itself. Generally speaking, each contains both the remnants of previous orders and the undeveloped*

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5 M.I. Finley: idem.

*seeds of future ones. ... Each social order, in turn, contains two major classes of phenomena: the 'base', consisting of all means and methods - material, intellectual, and organizational by which people exploit the environment and obtain the means of subsistence from it, and the 'superstructure', consisting of the political and juridical relationships, philosophical and religious ideas, artistic methods, and the like, prevalent at a particular stage of social development. Broadly speaking, the character of the base determines that of the superstructure, but there is a feedback, the effect of which is particularly marked at advanced stages of social development. The relationships between people which arise in the course of the production of material goods, and which prevail at any particular time, and place, are collectively known as a 'mode of production'. For antagonistic social orders - those characterized by the presence of classes whose economic interests are directly opposed to each other and whose interrelations are marked by exploitation ... - the mode of production includes such factors as the system of rules governing ownership of the means of production, and the means by which the surplus product is taken from the immediate producers for the benefit of the ruling class.<sup>6</sup>*

In the classical Marxist theory there are four pre-capitalist modes of production:

1. Primitive-communal. Societies where primitive gathering, fishing and hunting form the base of the economy. The production is so meager that they must be shared equally in order to avoid death by starvation.
2. Asiatic mode of production: the communal groups living in villages ruled by chieftains, clans, priest-kings, who perform trading, military or irrigation-directing functions for the whole. They extract a surplus from the communes through taxes. So there is a social differentiation in the community.
3. Ancient, classical or slave mode of production. The work is done by slaves. They themselves are the property of slave owners.
4. Feudal. The ultimate producer is a serf, part of whose time must be given to work for his lord and part remains to him to till his own soil.

In an unilinear model of evolution of modes of production two modes of production are not possible at the same time in the same place. One mode of production carries within its system the seed for the next one. Its downfall is at the same time the start for the development of the next mode of production. The Marxist studies on the mode of production did produce a definition of slavery as a mode of production. B. Hindess and P. Hirst define slavery as

*"a mode of production characterized by a social division of labor into non-*

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6 S. Dunn: *The fall and rise of the Asiatic mode of production* 1982, London, Boston, Melbourne and Henley, pp. p.4-6

*laborers and laborers and by private property relations. The laborers (direct producers) are the legal property of the non-laborers. As chattels they have no legal or social existence independent of their master and they are dependent on him for their maintenance.*<sup>7</sup>

This schematic – and simplistic – approach has been criticized by various (Marxist) scholars. Andre Gunder Frank argues that

*“the world political economic system long predated the rise of capitalism in Europe and its hegemony in the world. The rise of Europe represented a hegemonic shift from East to West within a pre-existing system. If there was any transition then, it was this hegemonic shift within the system rather than the formation of a new system.*

*We are again in one of the alternating periods of hegemony and rivalry in the world system now, which portends a renewed westward shift of hegemony across the Pacific. To identify the system with its dominant mode of production is a mistake. There was no transition from feudalism to capitalism as such. Nor was there (to be) an analogous transition from capitalism to socialism. If these analytical categories of “modes of production” prevent us from seeing the real world political economic system, it would be better to abandon them altogether. These categories of “transition” and “modes” are not essential or even useful tools, but rather obstacles to the scientific study of the underlying continuity and essential properties of the world system in the past. They also shackle our political struggle and ability to confront and manage the development of this same system in the present and future.”<sup>8</sup>*

Frank comes close to the World System Analysis. The key concepts in this analysis are:<sup>9</sup>

1. Social systems exist beyond the boundaries of individual societies.
2. Social divisions of labor integrate and shape the economies of multiple societies.
3. The division of labor exists across a variety of modes of production.
4. Surplus value is extracted from some parts of the system and concentrates in other parts of the system.
5. Populations move and are moved around world systems.

The idea of a shift within an existing World System suggests that the same

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7 B. Hindess and P. Hirst: Pre-capitalist modes of production, London and Boston 1972, p. 132.

8 A.G. Frank: Transitional ideological modes. feudalism, capitalism, socialism, Critique of Anthropology, June 1991 11: 171-188.

9 T.K. Hopkins and I. Wallerstein: World system analysis. Theory and methodology. Volume 1. Beverly Hills/London/New Dehli 1982, 11-13 and B. Lyman: Indian Ocean Diaspora in World Systems Perspective, in: <http://lrrc3.sas.upenn.edu/indianocean/group1/lyman.html> 2002.

kind of processes occurs in the world system but the hegemonic power moves to another part of the system. The five concepts of the World System theory give an accurate description of the major characteristics of colonialism. So to a large extent we might explain why the colony was created (to extract surplus value from one part of the world and moving it to another part), how it functioned (the organization of the supply of labor from one part of the world to another part in order to set up enterprises that create surplus value) and what its driving forces are (material gains).

A big weakness in the World System Theory is to explain the particular nature of the transatlantic trade in African human beings. This trade in human beings is unique in human history, both in its quality and the way it has transformed the world economy. The triangular trade and the linkage of all major parts of the world into a global economic, social and political system of colonialism are not in any way comparable to the different empires that existed in Asia or even in the era of the Islam. In the Americas the existing Indigenous population was almost extinguished and new societies literally have been created and populated with people from different part of the world. Their social and economic systems in the colony were created and not the result of an autonomous development influenced by outside forces and integrated in the system of those forces.

The theoretical questions about the nature of the colonial society lead to other questions such as:

- What forces led to the creation of the colony?
- What was the nature of the social, economic and cultural systems in the colony?
- How should we explain the specific nature of the social, economic and cultural systems?

We will not go into all possible theoretical questions in the historical research of Suriname. The above mentioned sketches in theoretical exercises are aimed to show that the direction of historical research – descriptive research – has limited our capacity to understand the nature and development of the colonial society. We need a different direction: the development of theoretical models that answers the “why” questions.

### ***Direction 2: Search for Both Changes and Continuity and the Need for Comparative Research***

Slavery is generally (with the exception of the students from the Scientific Colonialism-school) acknowledged as a crime against humanity. The

SC-school tends to draw a big dividing line between slavery and what followed thereafter. Oostindie writes: *“The colonial history in the West is almost equated with a history of slave trade and slavery. That is not true, especially for Suriname. Over half of all Surinamese stems not from slaves from Africa, but indentured laborers from Asia. Why the silence on the past? This is quite another story.”*<sup>10</sup>

The suggestion is that after slavery a complete new society was born in Suriname. It is only a suggestion as is often the case with authors of SC, and not a well founded proposition. Now there is lively debate on the difference between slavery and indentured labor. In the Surinamese descriptive tradition this debate is reflected neither in the studies on slavery nor indentured labor. A recent exception is the study by Radjinder Bhagwanbali. He has drawn a list of differences and similarities between slavery and indentured labor.<sup>11</sup>

The differences are: The use of violence in the recruitment (kidnapping in slavery versus deception in indentured labor). The duration of the existence of the system (300 years versus 50 years). The legal position (human being as a property of the master versus the sale of labor for a fixed period (5 years)). The motive in the recruitment (employment versus earnings from slave trade). The possibility of return (not present versus present). The status of the family (family members could be sold separately versus family members could not be taken apart). The payment for labor (not payment but food distribution versus underpayment). The system of punishment in the penal system (the master punishes versus the government punishes). The indictment of the master in the penal system (possible versus impossible). The method of controlling labor (flogging and imprisonment versus imprisonment and contract extension). Individual rights (no rights versus rights in a contract). Free days (no free days versus a limited number of free days). Language and culture (destroying language and culture versus indifference regarding language and culture). Position of children (could be used as laborers by the master at any time versus the use as laborers from 10 years onwards).

Verene Shepherd has also made a comparison between slavery and indentured labor that contains some elements from Bhagwanbali's list.<sup>12</sup> She also has the following points not mentioned by Bhagwanbali:

1. The number of deaths on the ships. (many times higher versus less high).

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10 G. Oostindie: *Slavernij, canon en trauma*. Universiteit Leiden, Leiden, p. 12.

11 R. Bhagwanbali: *De nieuwe avatar van slavernij* Hindoestaanse migranten onder het indentured labor systeem naar Suriname, 1873 – 1916. NSHI/SIN/IISR reeks. Den Haag 2010.

12 V. Shepherd (red.): *Working slavery, pricing freedom. Perspectives from the Caribbean, Africa and the African Diaspora*. New York, Palgrave 2001, pp. 344-345.

2. Treatment during the voyage (high degree of coercion and control versus mild degree of coercion and control).
3. The questions of inheritance of the labor status (children of an enslaved person were automatically enslaved versus non-inheritance of the labor contract).

The differences show the changes in the system of colonialism. The similarities however show the continuation of the system. Bhagwanbali has drawn a list of similarities: Goal of the system (maximum profit at the lowest cost of labor). Ideological justification (racism). The use of bounty hunters (to kidnap Africans or to mislead Indians). The ability to escape from the system (was limited). Preparation of the body before the person is presented for work (the use of massage oil and the time for recuperation). The attitude of the master (superiority). Housing (same barracks). Medical care (focusing on work performance). Task work (the organization of labor based on tasks and not based on hours of work). Organization of work (in gangs). Daily schedule (same daily routine). Justice system (class justice). Discipline (different forms of discipline for the same purpose: supervision of labor). Prisons (same institutions). Resistance (individually and collectively, including passive resistance and conformity).

Once more Verene Shepherd also drew a list of similarities that has some of these items, but added some others that Bhagwanbali did not have:

1. The method of recruitment (deception was also part of the recruitment of enslaved Africans).
2. The sexual exploitation of women.
3. The control of the movement of individuals (the use of a pass system).

The changes and continuity not only give a more accurate description of the different phases of development of the colonial society, but it provides us with an explanation of why the transformation from one phase to another one occurred. In our earlier contribution in this reader we dealt with the discussion on the abolition of slavery and the Williams thesis. The analysis of both phases shows that there was no notable difference in the moral attitude of the European colonialist. The essence of the system was the exploitation of workers for the benefit of private enterprises (production for European markets).

If we were only looking at the similarities we would lose sight of the nature of the change from one phase of colonialism into another one. George Beckford makes this mistake in his theory of the plantation economy. He defines the plantation system as *“the totality of institutional arrangements surrounding the production and marketing of plantation crops.”*<sup>13</sup> The plantation is a settlement

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13 G. Beckford: Persistent poverty Underdevelopment in plantation economies of the third world, Oxford Univer-

institution that patterns the relationship of people to the land and largely determines how people shall live on the land and with one another. Beckford:

*“As a settlement institution the plantation was the means of bringing together enterprise, capital and labor from various parts of the world into a new location where land was available to be combined with these for the production of a particular staple. In the nature of the case a system of authority and control was vested in the institution.”*<sup>14</sup>

Using the sociological concept of “total institution” he goes on to describe the plantation as “a bureaucratically organized system in which whole blocks of people are treated as units and are marched through a set of regimentation under the surveillance of the small supervisory staff.”<sup>15</sup>

There are two dimensions to the plantation. One is the internal dimension in which the plantation is a social system in the territory where it is located. The plantation has a monopoly on the means of living of the people in its territory. The external dimension has two aspects: its export orientation and its foreign ownership. The latter aspect is specifically related to plantation economies in post colonial societies.

Plantations are part of a much wider economic system consisting of a set of relations which meet at a metropolitan and industrial center far removed from the plantation. Beckford does not limit the plantation-concept to the colonial period.

*“Plantation economy”, so he continues, “is the term we apply to those countries of the world where the internal and external dimensions of the plantation system dominate the country’s economic, social and political structure and its relation with the rest of the world. We have argued ... that the plantation is all-embracing in its effects on the lives of those within its territory and community. It follows that where several plantations have come to engross most of the arable farm land in a particular country which is predominantly agricultural, that country can be described as a plantation economy or society and its social and economic structure and external relations will be similar to those described for the plantation system.”*<sup>16</sup>

The plantation was an instrument of colonization. All colonies were regarded as a source of wealth for the colonizing power. The wealth was provided by access to precious metals, the supply of agricultural products and trade. Beck-

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city Press 1972, p.8.

14 Idem, p. 8-9.

15 Beckford uses the description of R.T. Smith who analyzed social stratification in West Indian societies.

16 Idem, p. 12.



ford:

*“The pattern of colonization depended essentially on three general sets of conditions: the basis for the transfer of wealth, the resources of the new territory, and the resources and state of development of the colonizing power. If the basis for the transfer of wealth was the acquisition of precious metals in a territory with a well-settled and organized population, military and administrative organization was all that was required. The same applied to the colonies that were strategically located along trading routes and which therefore were a source of wealth through access to trade. However, where wealth was to be provided by the supply of agricultural produce much more was usually required of the colonizing country. In addition to military and administrative organization, an institutional framework for the bringing together of land, labor, capital, management, and technology had to be provided. The plantation provided such a framework.”<sup>17</sup>*

From the perspective of the plantation economy there is not much difference between slavery and indentured labor. *“After the abolition of slavery the social structure of the New World plantation colonies was somewhat adjusted,”* concludes Beckford. But basically the plantation system itself remained the same according to the protagonists of the plantation economy.

The preoccupation of the plantation economy school with the economic structure have led them to lose sight of the social, political and ideological dimensions of the colonial society that influences these same economic structures. Their contribution is important for understanding the continuity of the system.

Comparative research is not well developed in the Surinamese historiography and is one of its greatest weaknesses. If comparative research is done, then it is limited by the ideological constraints of SC. Take for example the comparison between slavery and the holocaust. Surinamese historians have been ideologically trained not to touch on this matter. Oostindie, the leading scholar of SC in The Netherlands, writes about this comparison: *“Thus the Atlantic slave system is sometimes qualified as ‘genocide’, ‘(black) holocaust’ and ‘crime against humanity’. Those are words that have their significance in the sense that they force us to face past events in a serious way. But the question remains whether they help us to get a better understanding of the past.”<sup>18</sup>* Oostindie explicitly warns against the use of the term Black Holocaust. He calls it a *“deliberate act of provocation”* and writes: *“The terminology does not demonstrate great respect for the victims of*

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17 Idem, pp.30-31.

18 G.Oostindie, idem, p.7-8.



*the Holocaust*.<sup>19</sup> He apparently holds the view that the Jewish Holocaust is the greatest crime against humanity despite the fact that the Black Holocaust lasted 70 times longer than the Jewish Holocaust and involved a greater number of victims.

A book such as Aime Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism* from 1955 should have been classic material for students of colonialism in Suriname, but is hardly known and used by Surinamese scholars. Césaire compares the way Europeans deal with colonialism and the way they deal with the holocaust. He points out the hypocritical nature of the discourse on the holocaust.

A new direction for comparative research in the Surinamese historiography should open the chambers of taboo that have been closed by SC. The comparison of the Black and Jewish Holocaust is one of these chambers. Another one is the question of reparations and the role of racism (see direction 5).

### ***Direction 3: Look for Inter Linkage between Economy, Social Relations, Culture and the Role of Europe***

The study of slavery and colonialism in the Surinamese historiography has taken an almost folkloristic approach. Many studies are limited in their view of colonialism because they lose sight of the inter linkage between four important dimensions of the colonial society: economy, social structure, culture and the role of Europe.

- The economics of colonialism determine to a large extent the nature and structure of the colonial society. The few economic studies of colonialism tend to analyze the economic structure as a self contained system. Zunder has shown how this system was closely linked to the Amsterdam Bourse. Without the merchant-bankers in Holland who financed the plantations and bought the sugar, coffee and cocoa there was no reason for the existence of the Surinamese economy. If an analysis is made of the Surinamese economy without this linkage one will never understand its dynamics.
- The social structure of the colonial society of Suriname is often studied in isolation of the social structure in the country of the colonizer. The planter's class and the political elite in the colony are seen as social classes in a different country, not as a social group that is intimately related to social groups in Holland. The close relationship between the social groups becomes apparent in the colonial reports on Suriname. We are currently digitizing these reports.<sup>20</sup>

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19 Idem.

20 The colonial reports and the analysis of its data will be published in 2012 in a forty volume encyclopedia on

The reports show the followings:

- The political system in the colony was an extension of the political system in The Netherlands. The Governor of the colony was the most important political power. He reported directly to the Ministry of Colonial Affairs. At some point in time the governor might have other ideas than the Ministry, but at the end of the day the political decision making in the colony could always be overruled by the political powers in the Netherlands. The colonial reports reflect the almost obsessive interest of the colonial government in Suriname and in The Netherlands in how the white population was doing in the colony. This population not only consisted of planters and directors of the plantation, but also of the military personnel, priests and ministers of the Christian churches. The white population was seen as the instrument of white control of the colonial society in a different part of the empire, not as a separate country that is dominated by a foreign country.
- The cultural system in the colony was based on racism: the dominant ideology stated that whites were superior to non-whites and should rule the life of non-whites. Non-whites were obliged to perform labor in order to satisfy the needs of whites. Non-white culture was inferior to white culture: the language, music and religion of whites were superior to that of non-whites.

The linkage between politics, economics, social structure and Europe lies in the concept of exploitation of non-white labor by white entrepreneurs from Europe and their agents in the colony and the oppression that is needed to maintain this exploitation.

Zunder is one of the few authors that has explored this type of inter linkage for Suriname. He lists the names of the merchant-bankers in Holland and shows their connection to the political class in The Netherlands. He analyses the changes in the political structures in Holland and its influence on the colony.

The study of these linkages reveals a phenomenon that SC does not want to reveal, namely how exploitation and oppression were functionally related to European domination of the colonies.

From the perspective of DTM new research in the coming years will have to analyze these inter linkages.

#### ***Direction 4: Link History with Current Questions***

The current studies of colonialism from the perspective of SC have an almost

folkloristic dimension: history is something of the past with no relevance for the presence of the future. It is nice to know how things went in the past. We now have to look to the future and the past has no relevance for the future.

The perspective of DTM is radically different. The present is a result of the past. We have an inheritance from the past that still haunts us. We have to deal with it in order to carve out a future based on the needs of the population that was once colonized. We will deal with a few realities that can have an enormous influence on the future.

First is the question of mental colonialism that links the present and the future to the past. From the perspective of DTM colonialism was not only a social, economic, political and military system. It had a mental dimension. In this mental dimension the concept of exploitation and oppression of the colonized by the colonizer is absent. The acceptance of the superiority of the colonizer in all aspects of life (morally, intellectually, culturally, etc.) and the inferiority of the colonized is part of this state of mind.

SC does not recognize the concept of mental colonialism. So there are no studies from SC in how mental slavery arose and how it has developed up to now.

If now we recognize that there is a valid case for studying mental colonialism, then this will bear immediately on how to view the current historical research on colonialism. Is the educational system in both Europe and the former colonies still infected with mental colonialism? If so, how is this expressed in the current educational system and in popular culture? These types of research questions are not posed in SC, but very much so in DTM. So the direction of linking the past to the present has immediate consequences for the current educational system.

Second is the question of the roots of racism in colonialism and the way it is expressed in the current world. The question of skin color and class has now more or less been resolved in the former colony. During colonialism skin color was used as a means to promote social divisions in society. Light skinned individuals would get better opportunities in life than dark skinned persons. This system was maintained by a political and military establishment that was linked to the colonial power. The rise of political leaders rooted in the black communities enabled the emancipation of people of all color. Ethnic politics could work two ways: as a division of the people who were formerly colonized or as an instrument of emancipation of the specific ethnic groups whose members got better opportunities (jobs, education, businesses, etc.)

In the land of the former colonizer new multicultural societies are develo-

ping where members of the former colony have established large and important communities. Their children notice that the old ideas of white supremacy and western superiority versus cultural backwardness of non-western civilization are very much alive. In the case of Holland they have become part of main stream politics.

The relevance of the colonial past is being expressed in cultural and political currents that question the nature of racism and western superiority and the need to decolonize western culture and institutions. Historical research that explains the roots of mental colonialism links the current concept of western superiority and non-western backwardness to the history of colonialism. This approach is different from the current ideology in academic institutions in Holland that promote the idea of post colonialism: the idea that the era of colonialism is now closed and has no relevance for the future.

A third link is the question of reparations. For SC this is a non-issue. The question of reparations has two dimensions for the future. One is the issue of apologies for a crime against humanity and the recognition of slavery as crime. Oostindie argues against such an apology and reparations. *“Anyone who apologizes accepts responsibility and may not be safe for damage claims.”*<sup>21</sup>

The moral argument Oostindie has used in his argument on the value of abolitionism has now completely disappeared. Economics is now his main argument against reparations.

Despite the argument of Oostindie the Dutch government has offered its apology for slavery and the transatlantic trade of enslaved African human beings. On July 1<sup>th</sup> 2009 Ank Bijleveld-Schouten, the state secretary for Interior and Kingdom Relations, spoke on behalf of the Dutch government at the annual celebration of the abolition of slavery in Amsterdam. She said:

*“The Dutch government expresses deep regret for what has happened with regard to slavery and the slave trade. On July 1<sup>st</sup> 1863 slavery was abolished in Suriname and the Antilles... finally. And even then the former slaves had to continue to work for ten years on the plantations. Furthermore, not the former slaves, but the former slave owners received a compensation of 300 Dutch guilders for each freed slave. That is only 146 years ago.”*<sup>22</sup>

This apology was not followed by an offer to pay for reparations, but at least the first step was taken.

The second dimension of reparations is the actual process of getting the

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21 G. Oostindie, idem, p. 8.

22 Nieuwsbrief van het NiNsee, jaargang 3, no 3, juli 2009, p. 1.

former colonizer to pay for the crime he committed in the past. There are judicial and political aspects to this process. But there is also a historical component. An answer has to be formulated to the question: what is the amount that should be paid for reparations. This is not only an exercise in the economic history of Suriname (getting the data to perform the calculation), but it also has deeper implications as regards the method of calculation and the assessment of the damage that colonialism has caused to the people of Suriname.

So from the perspective of DTM historical research is a vital part of current day politics and culture.

## **Conclusion**

Suriname with a population of half a million has one university: the Anton de Kom University. Until now there was no masters program for historical studies. In 2011 a new masters program will start as part of the faculty of humanities. The policy makers will have to answer the following question: will the future generation of Surinamese scholars be trained in the perspective of scientific colonialism or has the time come for Decolonizing The Mind?