

# A theoretical framework to decolonize the educational system – the case of Suriname and Holland

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## Introduction

This paper deals with the experiences of a network of decolonial academics and activists in developing a theoretical framework in knowledge production based on the concept of Decolonizing The Mind (DTM).<sup>2</sup> I focus on the systematic effort to rewrite the history of Suriname, a former Dutch colony in South America, and the lesson I have drawn for the decolonizing of historiography and knowledge production.

The paper goes into the following topics:

1. A short history of Dutch colonialism in general and Suriname in particular.
2. A short overview of the historiography of Suriname.
3. The critique on the colonial framework for historiography.
4. The development of an alternative decolonial framework
5. The relationship between decolonial historiography and social movements.

## 1. History of Dutch colonialism

### *General History*

When Spanish invaders under the leadership of Columbus the Criminal<sup>3</sup> opened the gates of hell for the indigenous people of the Americas by ushering an era of genocide, the nation-states of the Netherlands and Belgium did not exist. In 1492 the Low Countries were a collection of more or less independent regions ruled by provincial governors who were engaged in a struggle with French and Spanish monarchs that tried to form European-wide nation-states. Eventually they came under the rule of the Spanish Crown.

In 1568 an 80-year struggle for independence began against the Spaniards that lasted until 1648. It formed the basis for the rise of the Dutch colonial empire. The struggle of the Dutch against the Spaniards was extended from mainland Europe to the Americas. By breaking the Spanish power outside of Europe the Dutch hoped to strengthen their position in Europe. They waged open warfare against the Spaniards and managed to conquer territories from them in the Americas. There they established slavery.

In 1618 they took Sint Maarten, in 1634 Curaçao and Bonaire, in 1637 Sint Eustatius and Aruba and in 1640 Saba. They occupied Indigenous land in 1615 in Castle Island near present day Albany (USA). In 1623 they further started colonizing the present-day New York, New Jersey, Delaware, and Connecticut and named it New Netherlands. A war with English competitors (1665-1667) ended with the Treaty of Breda that ceded the English

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<sup>2</sup> The network consists of a formal organization (Decoloniality Europe, [www.decolonialityeurope.com](http://www.decolonialityeurope.com)) en informal networks of academics and activists.

<sup>3</sup> Eurocentric historians have developed a system of attaching labels of admiration for white people who commit crimes against humanity. So Alexander the Horrible is Alexander the Great and Columbus the Criminal is Columbus the Discoverer. The different labels are examples of the differences in terminology between DTM and SC.

colony of Suriname to the Dutch and the Dutch colony of New Netherlands to the English in 1667. In South America the Dutch conquered a large part of Indigenous land in Northeast Brazil in 1630 from the Portuguese and named it New Holland. There they enslaved indigenous people and Africans they had bought from human traffickers in Africa. The Portuguese fought back and re-conquered the area in 1654. A more successful effort in establishing a slavery colony began in 1616 on the Essequibo River in Guyana. A slavery colony was on the rapid growing sugar industry in the colonies of Demerary, Berbice and Essequibo (now Guyana). The English contested the Dutch on several occasions. In 1814 the Dutch formally ceded these territories to the English. In neighboring Suriname the Dutch got this colony from the English in 1667. Suriname became the most important slave colony for the Dutch in the Caribbean until the abolition of slavery in 1863.

The Dutch competed with the Spanish-Portuguese empire in Asia. In 1602 they established trade relation with Ceylon. In 1640 they succeeded in getting control of the island at the expense of the Portuguese and indigenous people until 1796. From 1605 onwards they succeeded in getting control over de Coast of Coromandel in South East India including a large part of Bengal. In 1658 they chased the Portuguese out of the Malabar in the South West of India. In 1622 they went after the Chinese territories of Formas (Taiwan) that were under Portuguese control. They stayed there till 1662 when the Chinese succeeded in regaining their land from the Europeans.

The biggest colonization project was Indonesia. In 1605 the Dutch expelled the Portuguese out of the islands of Moluccan. In 1609 they invaded the islands of Banda killing thousands of civilians. In 1641 they captured the Malakka islands. In 1667 they conquered South Celebes and Java. In 1683 they invaded Bantam. Indonesia became their largest booty of colonial robbery.

In 1652 the Dutch established the Dutch Cape Colony in South Africa as an intermediate station for the colonization of Asia. The most important activity was the establishment of forts at the west coast of Africa to regulate and direct the trade of enslaved Africans from Africa to the Americas.

In 1840 the Belgians broke away from the Netherlands and formed their own state. Their most important colony was the Congo, where they committed one of the worst crimes against humanity.

In the twentieth century the most important colonies of the Dutch were Indonesia in Asia and Suriname and the Antilles in the Caribbean. Between 1945 and 1949 the Indonesian people fought a bloody war of liberation against the Dutch colonialist. In 1975 Suriname became politically independent from the Dutch. The Antilles are still Dutch colonies.

### *History of Suriname*

The colonial history of occupation and exploitation of Suriname began in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The Dutch were the main colonizers. The English occupied the colony for a short period. Between 1684 and 1940 the economy was based on plantation agriculture. The colonialist exported 167 billion euros worth of agricultural products, mainly sugar (56%), coffee (29%), cotton (5%) and cacao (5%).<sup>4</sup>

In World War II Suriname the economic base shifted to mining (bauxite exploited by American multinational Alcoa). Plantation agriculture was replaced by small scale farming (rice). In the sixties and seventies small scale farming was overruled by large scale mechanized farming. After independence in 1975 the oil industry (exploited by the government owned State Oil Company) became a new pillar of the economy.

The current population of Suriname is 530.000; some 350.000 Surinamese reside in Holland. The population is ethnically diverse. Between 1650 and 1863 350.000 Africans who were kidnapped in Africa, were enslaved and brought to Suriname. At the uncivilized

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<sup>4</sup> A. Zunder (2010), Statistical appendix. The value was converted to euro's of 2006.

abolition of slavery in 1863 90% had not survived slavery.<sup>5</sup> Their descendents are now 33% of the population. Between 1873 and 1916 34.000 Asians from India and 32.000 from Indonesia were brought to Suriname to replace the Africans in a new system of forced labor (indentured labor). The Indians are now 27% and the Indonesians 15% of the current population. The rest of the population is of mixed descent.<sup>6</sup>

Until World War II Suriname was governed by a Dutch administrator from Holland. After the war of liberation of Indonesia from the Dutch oppressors in 1947 Suriname was granted political autonomy in 1948. Political parties were formed based on ethnicity rather than ideology (African, Indian and Indonesian parties). A program of development aid was set up to examine the opportunities of exploiting new minerals. The state became an important economic actor.

In the fifties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a nationalist movement started that struggled for independence (mainly Africans). In the early seventies a socialist movement was developing. In 1980 a left wing military coup d'état ended the parliamentary system. It lasted 7 years. In 1987 the military returned to the barracks. The political system was transformed in a system in which ideology (for or against the leaders of the coup, for or against colonialism) became more prominent.

## **2. The historiography of Suriname**

Up until the World War II the colonial historical literature consisted of three types of accounts. The first were accounts from travelers who visited the colonies and registered their observations. The second are historical accounts produced by Europeans living in the colonies based on their observation and sources in the colonies. The third are historical accounts produced by Europeans who had never set foot in the colonies, but studied the colonies from archival reports or reports from the colonial administration.

Unlike the USA and the UK, where enslaved people have left written accounts of their suffering, there are no written accounts of enslaved people in Suriname. The experience of enslaved Africans and Indentured Asian servants was recorded in oral history, art and culture.

### **Anton de Kom**

In 1934 Anton de Kom (1898-1945) published an anti-colonial history of Suriname titled *We Slaves from Suriname*.<sup>7</sup> He discusses how the Dutch oppressed and exploited the people, how enslavement dehumanized the Africans and how the struggle against colonialism has inspired him and should set an example for the people of Suriname. After the legal abolition of enslavement of Africans the Dutch introduced another system of forced labour (indentured labour) under which people from India, Indonesia and China were brought to Suriname. De Kom argued for and worked towards uniting all the oppressed ethnic groups against the white colonizer. He demanded independence from the colonizer.

De Kom was born in Suriname. His father was born during slavery. In 1921 he settled in Holland and worked as a salesman. He became active in the Dutch anti-colonial and socialist movement. He kept in touch with anti-colonial activists in Suriname. In 1933 he returned to Suriname and was involved in an uprising that left two Surinamese dead and 30 wounded. He was banned from Suriname and returned to Holland. During the Nazi-occupation of Holland (the Dutch don't use the term "discovery" to characterize the Nazi-invasion as they do in the case of the Spanish invasion of the Americas) he was active in the resistance, was arrested by the Nazi's and died in 1945 in a concentration camp.

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<sup>5</sup> We will explain the concept of civilized and uncivilized abolition later on.

<sup>6</sup> Centrale Bank van Suriname (2014), p. 109.

<sup>7</sup> A. de Kom (1934).

De Kom's history of Suriname was part of the struggle to decolonize the mind of the Surinamese. He analyzed the history of colonialism as a history of oppression and exploitation. His work was connected to a social movement, not to the academia.

### **R.A.J. van Lier**

After World War II the Dutch universities began to conduct historical research in Suriname. Many historical studies (often dissertations) were published. The foundation for these studies was laid by the dissertation by R.A.J. van Lier, a Surinamese sociologist and historian. His study covers the period from 1640-1940.<sup>8</sup> Van Lier's study was the basis for the production of textbooks for the history education in Suriname from primary education up to the university. A new school of social scientists (historians, cultural anthropologists, sociologists, economists) produced a body of literature on the history of Suriname. Dutch and Surinamese academics followed in the footsteps of Van Lier.

They started by accepting the legitimacy of colonialism. Their studies were mainly descriptive. Van Lier discarded Anton de Kom as emotional literature and not as science. De Kom did not play any role in their studies and was forgotten. After all he was not an academic but an activist.

### **Anti-colonial thinking**

After World War II students from Suriname went to Holland to study at the universities.<sup>9</sup> In the fifties students in Holland started a nationalist movement based on the re-appreciation of African culture and of the struggle against slavery and colonialism. After returning to Suriname they founded a political party that strived for independence (which was achieved in 1975).

From the end of the sixties, in the wake of the rise of a new student movement in Europe, Marxism became an important narrative among Surinamese students in Holland. When they returned to Suriname they founded the socialist parties.

Among nationalists and socialists Anton De Kom was heralded as the model for writing anti-colonial history. New studies were undertaken by anti-colonial academics using Marxist frameworks such as class analysis and dependencia-theories.

With the demise of the socialist bloc in the nineties a new discourse of liberation began asserting itself in the progressive academia as an alternative for Marxism under different labels: Postcolonialism, Orientalism, anti-Eurocentrism, critical theories, subaltern studies etc.

Migration from Suriname in the seventies led to the rise of a Surinamese community in Holland. In the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century a second generation of Surinamese students went through the Dutch academia. They became active in the anti-racist movement and discovered the narratives of blacks in the Caribbean and USA (Garvey, Malcolm X, W.E.B. Du Bois etc). Historical studies began to appear that includes topic such as reparations. A National Institute for the Study of Dutch Slavery and its Legacy (NiNsee) was founded in 2002.<sup>10</sup> It set up an academic chair at the University of Amsterdam. Prof. Stephen Small of the University of California Berkeley became the head of the chair.

## **Decolonizing The Mind**

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<sup>8</sup> R.A.J. van Lier (1977). The book was first published in 1949 as a dissertation.

<sup>9</sup> The University of Suriname was founded in 1968. After the military coup of 1980 it was renamed Anton de Kom University in 1983.

<sup>10</sup> In 2012 the funding for NiNsee ended.

Until 2009 the historical narratives in the academia existed side by side with the anti-colonial narratives written by activists in the community. In June 2009, at an international conference in Amsterdam, I presented a paper on the Surinamese historiography *Decolonizing The Mind – a critique of the Dutch Tempo Dulu ideology*, in which I criticized Dutch and Suriname historians for being colonial in their analysis. In October 2009 Professor Gert Oostindie of the University of Leiden and the leading historian on Dutch colonial history regarding the Caribbean, challenged me for a public debate.<sup>11</sup> That debate ushered in a phase of intellectual and political confrontation on different terrains.

#### *Authority of knowledge*

The universities and its professors are regarded as the authority of knowledge in society. In DTM we argue that if you are a professor that does not mean that you are a scientist. You might be an ideologue of colonialism. It is not your position at a center for knowledge production that defines your authority, but the content of your argument. The difference between science and ideology is that science tries to gain insight into the social and natural reality and ideology tries to block this insight for political reasons (affirming the legitimacy of colonialism and its legacy).

We attack the authority of knowledge production on the basis of their inadequate scientific concepts and theories (see further). Thus we enter the terrain of epistemology: what is knowledge and what is truth? In this regard we use the phrase of Prof. Stephen Small of the University of California Berkeley: "We might not know what the truth is, but we certainly know what lies are."

We differentiate between the different schools in historiography by introducing the concepts of Decolonizing The Mind (DTM) and Scientific Colonialism (SC). A basic difference between the schools of thought is that SC operates from the premise of the legitimacy of colonialism while DTM attacks this legitimacy.

#### *Methodology of knowledge production*

The methodology of knowledge production in the academia is structured around data-collection and the construction of concepts and theories with methods like induction and deduction. The university trains academics to develop these concepts and theories. There reference points are other academics that produce knowledge.

In DTM we acknowledge that concepts about social reality including history have been developed by activists in the struggle against colonialism based on reflection of the experiences of the colonized people. So we take these concepts, evaluate them in the light of the academic discussion and integrate them into scientific theories of DTM. We contrast these activist concepts with the academic concepts and relate the differences to social struggle in decolonizing our minds.

#### *Infrastructure of knowledge production and knowledge dissemination*

The historians of SC are trained in the academia in Holland. Recently the Anton de Kom University of Suriname started a history department. The academic infrastructure of knowledge production consists of the educational system (BA, MA, PhD), conferences, research projects and publications.

Academics are used by the media to explain historical events. In 2011 the Dutch public television aired a five-part series on slavery based on the narratives of Scientific Colonialism. Apart from the media knowledge about history is also disseminated through exhibitions and lectures by SC historians in the community.

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<sup>11</sup> See S. Hira (2010) for an analysis of the debate.

In DTM we argue for opening up the academia for multiple views which include scholars from DTM. Both in Suriname and Holland the history departments are closed for DTM. So it will take social and political struggle to open the history departments for divergent views on history.

Part of that struggle is the development of an alternative infrastructure for knowledge production and dissemination. This infrastructure consists of:

- A network of historians and social scientists (mainly Surinamese) with an academic degree (MA, PhD) who are working outside the academia but do historical and social research in their own private time.
- A publishing house (Amrit) to publish books of these DTM researchers. Since 2010 Amrit has published 15 books written by these researchers.
- In 2010 we founded the International Institute for Scientific Research (IISR) as a organizational vehicle for organization and mobilization of decolonial networks in the Netherlands, Suriname and Curaçao. It has a website ([www.iisr.nl](http://www.iisr.nl)) and a monthly newsletter with discussion, debates and other educational articles in Dutch on DTM (circulation 2.000).
- The organization of debates, conferences, lectures, workshops, trainings and courses on DTM in the community in Holland, Suriname and Curaçao.

#### *International networks*

An important part of the infrastructure for knowledge production and dissemination that needs special attention is the development of international networks. Professor Ramon Grosfoguel from the University of California Berkeley was instrumental in forging links between activists and academics in Europe. Since 2012 he organizes annual network meetings under the name *Decoloniality Europe*. The network brings together organizations from different social movements in Europe. Grosfoguel also organizes a summer school in Granada (Spain) on *Critical Muslim Studies: Decolonial Struggles and Liberation Theologies* and one in Barcelona on *Decolonizing Knowledge and Power: Postcolonial Studies, Decolonial Horizons*. The Summer School is attended by academics (students and teachers) from different universities all over the world and by some activists. The result of his activities on our DTM work is threefold.

First, the confrontation between DTM activists and SC-academics in Holland, Suriname and Curaçao was brought on an international level because outside of Holland decolonial academics are to be found in many prestigious universities in the world. So our discourse also became a discourse between international academics that Grosfoguel has helped to bring in into the discussion in Holland.

Second, the narrative of the historiography of Suriname was now placed in a broader context of decolonizing science. Concepts that are used in historiography are derived from other disciplines. A critique of these concepts brings us to a more fundamental critique of the various disciplines. Grosfoguel helped us link our narrative to the bigger narratives in the different disciplines in science.

Third, decolonial knowledge has implications for the analysis and strategy of social movements in Europe that are fighting against such legacies of colonialism as racism and islamophobia. The *Decoloniality Europe* network created a space where intensive discussions could take place between activists. IISR in Holland, the Parti des Indigènes de la République in France and the Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC) in the UK have developed such relationships to a high degree. IHRC organizes DTM courses in the UK in which our experience with colonial historiography is linked to a broader narrative of decolonizing knowledge and power.

### **3. The critique on the colonial framework for historiography**

The most serious confrontation in the Surinamese historiography was on the level of the framework for knowledge production: scientific concepts, theory, description and analysis. We use the following definitions.

A scientific concept is an idea that explains certain aspects of the social or natural world.

A theory is a set of interrelated concepts that explains certain aspects of the social or natural world. A theory can entail one concept if it refers to one idea. It can also refer to a set of concepts, but then they should be related to one another.

A description is an account of a series of events.

An analysis is an explanation of how to understand a series of events.

The process of developing a decolonial framework for the historiography of Suriname began with a critique of concepts, theories, descriptions and analysis of the historiography of Suriname. The critique is not only about what is wrong with the colonial framework. The critique brings to the fore questions associated with an alternative framework. These questions need to be addressed.

Decolonial scholars on the historiography of Suriname have produced extensive critique on many aspects of the history of Suriname. We select three themes of critique and the associated problems of developing an alternative framework.

1. The use of sources for historiography.
2. The use of mathematics in historiography.
3. The role of moral values in scientific discourses.

The specific questions regarding an alternative framework are then related to general questions regarding decolonizing knowledge.

### *1. The use of historical sources in historiography*

Van Lier's history of Suriname started with the concept of the social contract. This concept was introduced by the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). In this concept social relations are the result of an agreement between different groups in society. Van Lier states that his study is about "*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>12</sup>

The DTM critique of this concept is that it is not corroborated by historical facts. Where is the evidence that the enslaved Africans and their enslavers 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 enslaved and their enslavers jointly agreed that the first group was to be branded with hot iron so that the latter was ensured that the enslaved was his property? Where is the proof that both enslaved and enslavers agreed upon a judicial system – the slave laws – that specified how the first group should be controlled, degraded and punished by the latter? There is no archival evidence. The concept is not based on historical facts but on fantasies.

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<sup>12</sup> Idem, p. 3.

This critique brings us to the following question regarding a decolonial framework. Are the archives not biased in its nature, because many historical records were kept by the colonizer? So if we ask for archival records as a source of factual validation, are we not falling into a Eurocentric trap that accepts biased archives as sources for writing history?

This is a valid point. You can not write decolonial history by accepting the colonial archives as unbiased sources of information.

So we start looking at sources about the history of Suriname in which the experience of oppression and exploitation is articulated by the colonized people. The enslaved Africans were forbidden to read or write. In Suriname there were no books published by (former) enslaved persons. In an effort to look like impartial scholars some SC historians have stated that they want to take the perspective of the colonized people into account, but they can't because the enslaved Africans have left no archival records. But this argument is hypocritical. In the English speaking colonies and the United States there is ample documentary information from (former) enslaved people: books, letters, recorded interviews. Why should an enslaved African in the US feel different about enslavement than an enslaved African in Suriname?

Besides documentary information there is non-documentary information that reflects the views of the colonized people: songs, poems, pictorial art, rituals, proverbs, architecture, handicraft and even archeological sources. A very important non-documentary source is the acts of resistance of the colonized people.

According to Dutch SC historian as P.C. Emmer and A. van Stipriaan the enslaved Africans liked slavery and did not object to working without pay for the white men and women. Emmer states that the enslaved Africans did want to abolish slavery: "*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.*"<sup>13</sup>

Alex van Stipriaan argues that in the nineteenth century Africans did not object to slavery: "*Most deserters did not want a final break with the plantation economy. They used desertion as a form of protest against certain changes on the plantation or just wished to visit their love ones of family for some time.*"<sup>14</sup>

In the DTM concept the view of the oppressed can be read from his of her acts. Why was it needed to shackle the African to enslaved him or her? Why was a system of brutal oppression needed if the African loved to work for free for the whites? The acts of resistance are a source of historical information in the DTM framework.

So in the DTM historiography we focus on unearthing the documentary and non-documentary information that reflects the view of the colonized people. And often the information is not in the official archives but in the community. An example is the handwritten five volume diary of Munshi Rahman Khan, an indentured laborer from India. His grandchildren kept the original volumes in their homes. Due to our active involvement of the community in rewriting history we were able to acquire and publish this diary.<sup>15</sup>

One might ask: what is the view of the colonized people? Are there not many individual views and how can you determine what the majority thinks and feels? Are there not some colonized people who collaborated with the colonizer?

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<sup>13</sup> P. Emmer (2008), p. 18.

<sup>14</sup> A. van Stipriaan (1993), p. 418-419.

<sup>15</sup> M. Rahman Khan (2003).

An activist, not an academic, has come up with a concept to understand two types of enslaved people during slavery. Black nationalist leader Malcolm X presented the concept of the house negro and the field negro. Malcolm X: *"Back during slavery, when black people like me talked to the slaves, they did not kill him. They send some old house negro to go along behind him to undo what he said. You have to read the history of slavery to understand this. There were two kind of negroes. There was that old house negro and the field negro. And the house negro always looked after his master. When the field negroes stepped too much out of line he held them back in check. He put them back on the plantation. The house negro could afford to do that because he lived better than the field negro. He ate better, he dressed better and he lived in a better house. He lived right up next to his master, in the attic, or the basement. He ate the same food as his master ate, and wore his same clothes. And he could talk just like his master. "Master, good diction". And he loved his master more than his master loved himself. That's why he did want his master hurt. If the master got sick, he said, "What's the matter boss, we sick?". When the master's house caught fire he tried to put the fire out. He did not want his master house burned. He never wanted his master property threatened. And he was more defensive of it than the master was. That was the house negro.*

*But then you had some field negroes, who lived in huts, had nothing to loose. They wore the worst kind of clothes, they ate the worst food, and they caught hell. They felt the sting of the lash. They hated their masters. Oh yes, they did. If the master got sick, they prayed that the master died. If the master's house caught a fire, they preyed for a strong wind to come along. This was the difference between the two. And today you still have house negroes and field negroes. I am a field negro."<sup>16</sup>*

For academics the concept of the "house negro" and "field negro" is not acknowledge as a scientific concept. In DTM we acknowledge it as an accurate description and analysis of two types of enslaved people, one being a minority (the "house negro") and the other the majority (the "field negro").

The framework of DTM differs from the framework of SC regarding historical sources in the sense that our focus lies in collecting and analyzing information that reflect the experience and view of the oppressed people. Thus we use concepts that accurately describe and analyses this experience and acknowledge that these concept have been developed outside the academia by activists in the struggle against colonialism.

Our critique of the bias in colonial archives does not mean that DTM historians don't use these sources. On the contrary, we can easily recognize the bias in the colonial archives. But we have also learned that the colonial archives are stocked with sources that are very open and blunt about the naked reality of oppression and exploitation. SC historians have been trained to dismiss that information in order to paint a rosy picture that legitimizes colonialism. Many sources that deal with the administration of repression (the judiciary, the military and the political institutions) contain valuable information about the brutality of the oppression and exploitation by the colonialist. Where SC historians are trained to dismiss it, DTM historians should be trained to look for this information.

Take the case of "Columbus the discoverer". Columbus is portrayed in the history textbooks of scientific colonialism as a noble man with a scientific motivation to discover new worlds. If you read the original diaries of Columbus you come to different conclusions.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Speech Malcolm X available on <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=znQe9nUKzvQ>. Accessed 30 December 2014.

<sup>17</sup> See C. Columbus (1492).

1. He was not a noble man, but a thief and an imposter. And he is very open about his crimes. His diary mentions the case of the sailor Rodrigo de Triana. Columbus was on the Santa Maria, the largest of the three ships he took on his first trip. Rodrigo de Triana was on the Pinta, the smallest vessel. The Spanish crown had promised a reward of 10.000 golden coins for the person who first spotted land. He should shout "land!" and send a signal to the other ships. At Thursday evening on October 11<sup>nd</sup> 1492 Rodrigo de Triana did just that. But later Columbus wrote in his diary that he had seen lights at 22.00 hrs before De Triana had shouted "land!". Although Columbus did not shout "land!" and did not signals the other ships, he had called Pedro Gutiérrez, a servant of the King on the ship, to confirm that he had seen lights. It was clearly a scam. On Friday morning at 02.00 hrs everybody had seen land. Columbus requested and got the reward from the Crown. Rodrigo de Triana converted to Islam and moved to settle in Africa.<sup>18</sup>
2. Columbus never spoke in his diary about discovering new land, but about discovering old land described by Marco Polo. He was looking for the Khan, the ruler of the east because he thought he had landed in India. His whole diary shows that he was obsessed with gold and not with scientific discoveries. All through his diaries he was looking for signs that there is gold in abundance in the old land.
3. He was a criminal, a kidnapper. As soon as he met indigenous people, he successfully managed to kidnap seven Tainos to bring them as slaves to Spain. These crimes are documented in his diaries without any feeling of shame or guilt.

In a decolonial framework we focus on building archives that reflect the experience and views of the colonized people. Rather than dismissing colonial archives as irrelevant DTM historians are keen to go through the archives to reveal the information that is there about the oppression, exploitation and resistance of the colonized people. They should be trained in how to gather this information.

## *2. The use of mathematics in historiography*

The use of mathematics in social sciences has become a pointer of the "maturity" of social sciences. The rise of cliometrics (the use of mathematics in history) since the fifties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century made its impact on historiography.<sup>19</sup> SC historians began to use statistics derived from the archives as unquestionable indicators of the "truth" about slavery. For this reason some DTM historians argue against the cliometric approach as a colonial method in historiography.

The study of Fogel and Engerman<sup>20</sup> about slavery in the USA was an important example to be emulated by SC historians outside the US, Suriname included. The truth about slavery was in the figures. The conclusion was that contrary to the common view slavery in the USA was not an exceptional system and the brutality was exaggerated.

Fogel and Engerman found one archival source of an enslaver (the diary of Bennet Barrow) who kept records of the whipping of enslaved Africans on his labour camp. These records show that in a period of two years an enslaved African on that labour camp was whipped at an average of 0.7 times in a year. They concluded: *"There was nothing exceptional about the use of whipping, to enforce discipline among slaves until the beginning of the nineteenth century. It must be remembered that through the centuries whipping was considered a fully acceptable form of punishment, not merely for criminals*

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<sup>18</sup> Columbus (1991), pp. 58-60.

<sup>19</sup> See S. Lions, L. Cain, and S. Williamson (2008) on the rise of cliometrics.

<sup>20</sup> See Fogel, R. and Engerman, S. (1974).

*but also for honest men or women who in some way shirked their duties. Whipping for wives, for example, was even sanctified in some version of the Scripture."*<sup>21</sup>

How do you criticize this statement from a DTM point of view?

You could look at the archival records and see whether the data are correct and the scholars did not miss relevant data in the source. Gutman and Sutch did the check and found that the labour camp had 200 enslaved Africans, of which 120 worked in the field. The records were kept over a period of 23 months in which 160 whippings were administered. The calculation was based on the number of whippings divided by the number of field workers per year (160/2)/120. So the data have not been misrepresented.<sup>22</sup>

You could pose the question whether the administration of the whipping was correct. Did Bennet Barrow witness all the whippings? Let us assume he has.

You could question whether one single source over the course of two years represents the reality of slavery in the USA over 300 years? Although this is hard to accept let us assume, it does.

You could question the math as Gutman and Sutch did. The math should not be about the average number of whippings per year per enslaved person in the field but about how often the work force was confronted with whipping. The calculation is  $160/(2 \times 52) = 1.5$  per week. So every week the workforce was confronted with actual whipping. That paints a totally different picture than 0.7 whippings per person per year.

You could question whether the nature of the variable is correct. Gutman and Sutch: *"The frequency with which a punishment is administered is a poor measure of its effectiveness in curbing errant behavior. Presumably, it is the fear of eventual punishment, not the ex post administration of punishment, which motivates or deters behavior."*<sup>23</sup>

Ultimately these options don't fundamentally challenge the method of Fogel and Engerman to characterize the nature of slavery. The challenge comes from the enslaved Africans. Ottobah Cugoano was an African abolitionist from Ghana who lived in England in the latter half of the eighteenth century and wrote a book on slavery.<sup>24</sup> He provided the counterargument for Fogel and Engerman two centuries earlier: *"Bad as it is, the poorest in England would not change their situation for that of slaves. And there may be some masters, under various circumstances, worse of than their servants, they would not change their own situation for theirs: Nor as little would a rich man wish to change his situation of affluence, for that of a beggar: and so, likewise, no freemen, however poor and distressing his situation may be, would resign his liberty for that of a slave, in the situation of a horse or a dog. The case of the poor, whatever their hardships may be, in free countries, is widely different from that of the West India slaves. For the slaves, like animals, are bought and sold, and dealt with as their capricious owners may think fit, even in torturing and tearing them to pieces, and wearing them out with hard labor, hunger and oppression.. But where can the situation of any freemen be so bad as that of a slave, or, could such be found, or even worse, as he would have it, what would the comparison amount to? Would it plead for his craft of slavery and oppression? Or, rather, would it not cry aloud for some redress, and what every well regulated society of men ought to hear and consider, that none should suffer want or be oppressed among them?"*<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Fogel, R. and Engerman, S. (1974), p. 145-146.

<sup>22</sup> Gutman, H. en Sutch, R. (1976), p. 57-58.

<sup>23</sup> Idem.

<sup>24</sup> Cugoano, O. (1787).

<sup>25</sup> Idem, p. 99.

Slavery is not about whipping, but about freedom and forced labour. The framing of the statistics is what matters. Fogel and Engerman are using the wrong variables to characterize the nature of slavery in the USA. If you want to characterize the color of an animal, you don't do that by measuring its size. That is the reason we call their work ideology (how to lie with statistics) rather than science. Cugoano provide a more accurate statement of the character of trans-Atlantic slavery.

We have criticized scores of such quasi-scientific cliometric concepts in Suriname.<sup>26</sup> The Dutch historian Henk den Heijer has collected data on the mortality of the slave ship that crossed the Atlantic from Africa to the Americas. He found that the mortality rate of the white sailors on the ship were higher than the mortality rate of the enslaved Africans.<sup>27</sup> The figures are presented as a matter of fact, but the implicit concept is that the black Africans were treated better on the ships than the white sailors. For Den Heijer the mortality rate is the important indicator for the treatment on the ship.

How do we criticize this concept from a DTM perspective? We look again at the framing. The Africans were prisoners on the ship who were chained in the below deck and were destined to be sold in the Americas. The sailors were their guardians. At the end of the trip the sailors would get their wage and could return to their family or make another trip. That are the vital characteristics of their position on the ship.

Let us look at how the mortality rate would influence their positions. If the death rate of the Africans was 100%, then the ship would return to Africa and the enslavers would buy another load of human beings. However, if the death rate of the white Europeans was 100%, the Africans would perish in the below deck because there would be no personnel to feed them and the ship would wander around in the ocean. So the mortality rate is not a correct indicator of their positions. This is indeed again a case of characterizing the color of an animal by measuring its size.

But the critique is not sufficient in addressing the problem. We still need a credible explanation for the difference in mortality rate. It is not difficult. The conditions on a slave ship were unhealthy. Sailors did not made just one trip like the Africans. So they were exposed multiple times to these unhealthy conditions. Therefore they had a bigger chance to get sick and die.

Because of the way SC historians use mathematics to lie with statistics some DTM historians argue against the use of mathematics in a decolonial framework. But in my view mathematics can be a great tool in exposing the crimes of colonialism.

Take the example of reparations for colonialism. What amount should the colonizing nations pay for reparations to the colonized nations? I constructed a mathematical model to calculate the amount based on the following assumptions:<sup>28</sup>

1. The colonizer should have paid rent for land it exploited but which was not theirs.
2. The colonizer should pay for the goods it has stolen during colonization.
3. The colonizer should pay wages for unpaid or underpaid labour.
4. The colonizer should pay compensation for human suffering it has caused.
5. The colonizer should pay interest for the debt it has accumulated.

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<sup>26</sup> They are in Dutch on the website [www.iisr.nl](http://www.iisr.nl).

<sup>27</sup> H. den Heijer 2001.

<sup>28</sup> S. Hira (2014), p. 76-79

These assumptions have been translated in variables such as: the duration of colonialism, the surface of land, the rent per square km in different years, the size of the working population in different years, the quantity and prices of stolen goods, the wage rate in specific years, a sum for the compensation of human suffering in different years and an interest rate. The variables are structured in a mathematical model. On the basis of minimal values for the different variables a computer simulation calculates the amount that the colonizer should pay for reparations at US\$ 321 trillion in 2013. One trillion is US\$ 1,000,000,000,000,000. In 2013 the total GDP of the colonizers countries (Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, United Kingdom and USA) was US\$ 30 trillion.

The calculation shows the magnitude of the wealth that colonialism had stolen and the damage it has caused in the colonies. It also enables us to assess the impact of changes in the assumptions (wage rate, price of goods etc) on the total amount for reparations.

In 2013 the countries of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) have announced that reparations will be part of their development strategy. This model can be used in their political strategies.

So although mathematics have been misused in the historiography of SC it can become an important tool in developing the decolonial discourse of the history of colonialism.

### *3. The role of moral values in scientific discourse*

Many studies on the history of colonialism have moral values underlying the concepts of their narrative. These values are then presented as scientific discourses. In our critique we identify the moral assumptions and question the morality itself. A good example is the historical debate on the abolition of slavery. This debate is often presented as a debate on facts and figures, while in essence it is a debate about the morality of European civilization.

In British historiography the abolition of slavery is presented as an achievement of the abolitionist movement in Britain and an example of the high morals of the British people. SC historian Seymour Drescher talks about a "*gallant band of Saints led by their English hero [Wilberforce].*" He states: "*By 1833 British legislators had come to the point of treating the end of slavery in the colonies as an unprecedented experiment in human development.*"<sup>29</sup>

In 1938 C.L.R. James challenged this narrative.<sup>30</sup> Up to 1783 the British bourgeoisie had taken the slave-trade for granted. The American revolution (1765-1783) changed the situation. The British found that by the abolition of the mercantile system with America, they gained instead of losing. The British experimented with sugar in Bengal and the first shipments arrived in 1791. James: "*The rising industrial bourgeoisie, feeling its way to free trade and a greater exploitation of India, began to abuse the West Indies, called them "sterile rocks," and asked if the interest and independence of the nation should be sacrificed to 72,000 masters and 400,000 slaves.*"

Eric Williams further developed this idea in a thesis now known as the Williams thesis that states that Caribbean sugar labour camps funded British industrialization that, in turn, made slavery an outdated mode of production.

SC historians have produced studies to argue that slavery was abolished for moral reasons rather than economic motives. And therefore Britain and Europeans in general should be proud of such "*an unprecedented experiment in human development*". Descendent of enslaved people should be grateful and thank the British for this achievement.

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<sup>29</sup> S. Drescher (2002), p. 7.

<sup>30</sup> C.L.R. James (1989), p. 51-54.

In the DTM framework we have a totally different view on the abolition of slavery. We use a concept that Malcolm X had explained: "If you stick a knife in my back, if you put it in nine inches and pull it out six inches, you haven't done me any favor. If you pull it all the way out, you haven't done me any favor."<sup>31</sup>

It is like asking the victim of rape to tell the rapist: "Thank you for not raping me anymore."

So the difference between DTM and SC regarding the abolition of slavery is a difference in morals. We have conceptualized these differences in distinguishing between two types of abolition of slavery: civilized and uncivilized abolition.

The differences between the civilized and uncivilized legal abolition of slavery are:

- The civilized form would acknowledge that slavery was a crime. The uncivilized form argues that it was not a crime, but a tragic set of circumstances.
- The civilized form would punish the criminal. The uncivilized form punishes the victim by keeping him oppressed and exploited in a new system of colonialism.
- The civilized form would offer humble apologies and ask the victims for forgiveness. The uncivilized form regards the returning of what was stolen from the other person as an act of generosity and asks that person to show gratitude.
- The civilized form would offer reparations to the victims. The uncivilized form compensates the criminal for loss of property as was done by the British, French and Dutch at the uncivilized abolition of slavery.

This puts the whole debate on the abolition of slavery in a totally different perspective.

#### **4. The development of an alternative decolonial framework**

We have selected only three themes of critique of SC and discussed a decolonial view. There are many more.

In the critique we develop alternative concepts. But how do we move from critique of individual concepts to a comprehensive theoretical framework for DTM that can guide new research and analysis? We are doing that in three steps.

First we try to understand what is common to all the concepts of SC. The more we look at our critique, the more we see that the common characteristic of SC concepts is the function they have in legitimizing colonialism and its continuous legacy.

Once we acknowledge that, we then have to develop new concepts that question that legitimacy. Such decolonial concepts have been developed already in the first actions and reflections of the leaders of the resistance against colonialism. As Stephen Small puts it: for every act of oppression, there was an act of resistance. So we study the analysis in word and deed of the resistance against colonialism, take up the concepts that were used to understand the nature of colonial oppression and exploitation and develop it into decolonial theories.

The decolonial concepts come with new a new terminology. So we don't use the term *slave*, because *slave* is not an attribute of a human being, but a condition. The term *enslaved* more accurately describes the condition. We don't use the term "plantation" because it does not reflect what was going on in these enterprises, but we use the term *labour camp* in the period of slavery and indentured labour because this term is associated with forced labour. We don't use the term *abolition* without the qualification

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<sup>31</sup> Malcolm X (n.d.), p. 77.

*civilized* or *uncivilized*. In a similar way we don't use the term *Enlightenment* without the qualification *White* in order to show that European Enlightenment was a racist movement that developed racist ideas with "scientific" methods.

A decolonial framework needs an appropriate terminology that reflects the decolonial concepts and questions the legitimacy of colonialism and its heritage.

Second, we understand that the concepts used in historiography are derived from other disciplines of science: philosophy, economics, sociology, anthropology, psychology etc. So we look at what has been developed already in decolonial thinking in other disciplines as a theoretical framework and apply that to historiography.

A telling example in this regard is the sociological theory of racism that Ramon Grosfoguel has introduced and I have tried to expand. In this theory<sup>32</sup> the concept of racism as a body of thought that links superiority/inferiority to Europeans/non Europeans is connected with the authority of knowledge. Before White Enlightenment the authority of knowledge was based on theology and thus this relationship was defined in theological terms in which non-Christians were equated with inferior creatures. The rise of White Enlightenment coincided with the rise of colonialism. The inferiority of the other was now argued with the authority of science. Scientific racism was the application of concepts of the natural sciences to race relations that lead to arguments about backward physical traits of human beings. With the rise of the social sciences the argument was transferred to backward social structures. In each of these concepts the superiority of the West was proclaimed as the norm of human civilization. Racism was codified in western sciences. This theory has become part of the DTM framework to explain how knowledge production –including historiography - was influenced by colonialism.

Similar exercises are currently taking place in other disciplines of science and to which many scholars all over the world are making important contributions.

Third, we have developed a theoretical model for a DTM framework to integrate the theoretical contributions from the different disciplines. In this framework colonialism is analyzed as a system of oppression and exploitation that started five hundred years ago and was set up and developed in five interrelated dimensions:

1. *Geographical dimension*: the rise of a global system in which people, nations and states have been relocated, destroyed or redesigned and world wide migration of people have been set in motion. The global world was divided in one geographical part that served the enrichment of another geographical part.
2. *Economic dimension*: the rise of a capitalist world economy with new international industries based on a combination of "free" wage labor and forced labor in different forms, the creation of new economic systems and the integration of existing economic systems in one global colonial world system.
3. *Social dimension*: the organization of social relations in different societies based on race, skin color and ethnicity in which the white European culture socially dominated and still dominates the other cultures. An essential part of these relations are the development and maintenance of a social layer of collaborators among the colonized people with the white colonial power.
4. *Political dimension*: the creation and maintenance of political, military and judicial structures and institutions to control, repress and break any resistance against colonial domination.

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<sup>32</sup> R. Grosfoguel (2013) and S. Hira (2105).

5. *Cultural dimension*: the creation of mechanisms of colonizing the mind (mental colonialism) and structures and institutions that provides legitimacy to colonial relations. Important institutions are the institutions of knowledge production (academia) and knowledge distribution (educational system, media, cultural institutions). We have listed 21 mechanisms of colonizing the mind.

This framework together with theoretical contributions from other disciplines and new concepts and terminology will help us in setting up new research programmes for decolonizing historiography, and in more general terms decolonizing science.

### **5. The relationship between decolonial historiography and social movements**

In Holland and Suriname DTM is not institutionalized in the history departments of the universities. Other countries are more developed and have professors and institutions dedicated to developing decolonial thinking. Malaysia is probably one of the most developed countries in this regard as it is part of the government policy to decolonize the university system.

In Holland and Suriname DTM is a responsibility of social movements. They produce the scholars that do research and publish their results. But for social movements it is not merely a matter of knowledge production. It is part of the strategy for liberation. It has direct consequences in formulating aims and objectives of social struggle. The infrastructure for knowledge production and knowledge dissemination is the same infrastructure for developing cadres of the social movements.

It is a challenge to link the social movements to the decolonial academy so that resources of the academia can become relevant for the social movement, both in terms of setting of research programmes and producing new and relevant knowledge as in terms of projects that translates this knowledge in policy for change.

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