

# Decolonizing social sciences in Suriname: a strategic view in favor of regionalism

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## ABSTRACT

*Social sciences research about Suriname is euro-centric. It is dominated by the Dutch and evolved in the context of academic colonialism. From the Surinamese point of view, this situation is undesired. Some lessons can be learned from others, e.g. South East Asian and New Zealand/Maori scientific communities. In order to decolonize research it is suggested that the Surinamese social scientists community is strengthened and that cooperation with institutions in the South-American and Caribbean region is intensified. To achieve sustainability in a regional context concerted action of social scientists and academic institutions is required. The focus in this article is on cooperation with Brazil, the Southern neighbor of Suriname and a leading nation in the region. Referring to common factors in history and current social developments in Suriname and Brazil, it is suggested that the cooperation that started in the last decades of the 20th century is intensified.*

**Keywords:** Suriname; Brazil; eurocentrism; academic colonialism; decolonization; regionalism.

## 1. Introduction

*This article addresses academic colonialism with focus on the Dutch dominated social sciences about Suriname. The principal question is how to decolonize social sciences in Suriname from a South American perspective and context. In our analysis the social sciences are conceptualized in a broad meaning by including history, in addition to the fragmented disciplinary division that distinguishes academic domains such as anthropology, sociology, psychology, political science and economy. Glenn Sankatsing (1989) argues convincingly that in the evolution of social sciences in the Caribbean, history as a separate discipline has been questionable. He points out that the resistance against the fragmentation of the social sciences in this part of the world was influenced by the publication 'Capitalism and Slavery' of the Trinidadian economist Eric*

was influenced by the publication 'Capitalism and Slavery' of the Trinidadian economist Eric Williams (1944), that cuts across the disciplinary fragmentation. Dogan (1996), in a response to disciplinary fragmentation, prefers the concept of hybridization rather than interdisciplinarity. Hybridization refers to borrowing and lending concepts, methods, theories, and praxes through establishing fruitful contact between sectors rather than across disciplinary boundaries (Ibid). However, Sankatsing (1989: 136) goes beyond hybridization by pointing to the necessity of an extra-disciplinary approach that integrates major problems in the society concerned, whereby the social reality itself will impose the integration of the various social science disciplines. This approach is closer to the view by Eric Williams and corresponds more to our wider reflection on a holistic integration of the social sciences, rather than the hybridization of scientific knowledge.

Academic colonialism has been addressed by various scholars, most of whom originate from the (previously) colonized world. (Cheng, 2010; Alatas 2000; Goonatilake 1984; Altbach, 1977; Fanon, 1961) In fact this type of colonialism is a subtheme of eurocentrism<sup>1</sup>. An important issue that will be dealt with is the euro-centric diffusion model of social science knowledge between the previous colonial empires and the periphery. It will be explained how within the colonial division of labor, the important paradigms are developed in the global center while minor issues are covered by the periphery (Goonatilake, 1984). Next, attention is paid to processes and mechanisms of colonization and decolonization of the social sciences. Focus is on understanding how euro-centric values and paradigms arise in the research process of (ex-) colonized societies and which issues need to be tackled to decolonize social sciences. Finally the decolonization and liberation of social research in Suriname will be addressed by taking advantage of experiences of other academic social science communities and by proposing cooperation with academic institutions in the South-American and Caribbean region. The article concludes by defining the research agenda of the social sciences from the perspective and context of the Surinamese reality, taking advantage from regional cooperation with academic communities dealing with similar problems.

## 2. Dutch domination of social sciences concerning Suriname

Most major and strategic social science research regarding Suriname has been initiated and sponsored by Dutch academic centers and carried out according to their research agenda. Consequently, the acquired knowledge, included in publications and institutions, became part of the Dutch academic and cultural heritage, rather than being intrinsically linked to and subsequently integrated in the Surinamese reality in a regional South American/ Caribbean context. Illustrative is the journal 'OSO, TijdschriftvoorSurinamistiek'. It is published in The Netherlands since 1982, focusing on linguistics, culture, social sciences, and the humanities in Suriname<sup>2</sup>. An analysis of the contributors in the period between 1982 and 2010 shows the dominance of native Dutch authors: 62% of the authors of articles on anthropology/ sociology, and 60 % of the authors of history articles were native Dutch. Only 7 % of the articles in both disciplines were written by Surinamese authors residing in Suriname (Table 1). Recent examples of the continuing Dutch efforts in this field are the publication of books by the Dutch historians RosemarijnHoefte (2014) and Peter Meel (2014) as well as a current project that started in 2011, comparing leprosy history of Suriname and the Dutch East Indies, carried out by the Dutch Universities of Utrecht and Leiden<sup>3</sup>.

Table 1. Authors of articles in the Journal 'OSO. TijdschriftvoorSurinamistiek' 1982 - 2010

Origin of the author	Discipline			
	Sociology & anthropology		History	
Surinamese living in Suriname	7	7%	15	7%
Surinamese residing in Holland	30	30%	72	33%
Native Dutch and other Europeans in Europe	62	62%	129	60%
Other	1	1%		
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>216</b>	<b>100%</b>

To assess the colonial ideology, Sandew Hira (2009) analyzed the content of mainstream studies about the Surinamese society, carried out by Dutch social scientist. He concludes that these studies are 'a set of ideas that regards colonialism not as a historical phenomenon for scientific analysis, but as a historical legacy of the western civilization that somehow should be defended.' Another dimension of the Dutch domination regards the management and dissemination policies of knowledge about Suriname that remains in the hands of mainly Dutch institutions.

### 3. Academic colonialism

The phenomenon of Dutch academics carrying out social sciences research on Suriname, can generally be considered as academic colonialism. Academic colonialism refers to 'how states occupying the center where knowledge is produced, transmitted, and ordered, in an unfair academic division of labor at the global level, have successfully coerced scholars located in the peripheral states to accept their dominated relations in thoughts and ideas by standardizing, institutionalizing, and socializing academic disciplines'. (Cheng, 2010) In other words, it points to situations in which knowledge is extracted and produced or processed elsewhere, without benefits returning to those at the source in a sustainable way. Academic colonialism is also indicated as scientific colonialism or intellectual imperialism (Alatas, 2000), while the notions captive mind (Alatas, 1972), academic dependency (Altbach, 1977) and dependent knowledge (Goonatilake, 1984) are closely related to it.

A major feature of academic colonialism is claiming an unlimited right of access to data extracted from a (former) "colony". The result is an asymmetrical production and distribution of knowledge about the "colony", one that excludes people at the source from participating in the most creative and or rewarding aspects of research (Galtung, 1967). Another aspect is the export of data (or people) to one's own territory for processing into profitable products such as articles, books and PhD's: researchers typically not only claim property rights over the knowledge they produce, but also proprietary rights over the subject matter - the field of raw data - from which they extracted their knowledge. This conceptual paradigm continues to be imposed upon the world - as a type of vestigial colonialism - long after the decline of those imperial regimes that gave rise to it in the first place. (Ames, 2003)

Goonatilake (1984) and Alatas (2000) have defined the characteristics of Academic colonialism. It is a phenomenon analogous to political - economic imperialism. The diffusion model of social science knowledge between the global center (previous colonial empires) and the periphery, explains how the important paradigms are developed in the center, while minor issues are covered by the periphery (Goonatilake, 1984). This resembles the division of labor in the economic and political spheres. A second characteristic is the so-called xenophilia, that refers to the high degree of knowledge imitation and formal learning in terms of deriving or copying problems and issues from the Western global centers. A third characteristic is a weak local community of social scientists, while the productive academics are generally involved in minor issues that do not contribute to liberating knowledge. However, there are examples of creative and original knowledge developed in the periphery, such as the dependency theories that originated in Latin America and the Caribbean (Girvan, 1973). This knowledge, however, is transferred to and accepted by other regions of the periphery only after being legitimized by Western academic centers. This takes us to differences in the way knowledge is legitimized in the periphery and global center. In the latter legitimation of knowledge is achieved by intensive scientific debates and negotiating, while in the periphery this occurs by means of citing and referring to works produced in the global center. That is why in the global center at least a part of the knowledge is in principle liberating, as it originates from a creative and organic process. The dependent nature of social sciences in the periphery results into mimicked knowledge or knowledge that is legitimized by non-scientific criteria, often in a personal status seeking or political context. (Goonatilake, 1984)

The concept of academic colonialism is closely connected with Eurocentrism. This irrational process distinguishes between the "us" (the Europeans) and the "others". (Dussel, 2000) The "others" are the peoples of the "peripheral world", found in the current euro-centric social sciences research, that provide the foundation for reports about and representation of the "others". This is clearly stated by Denzin and Lincoln (2005): "In the colonial context research becomes an objective way of representing the dark-skinned other to the white world". Eurocentrism is in fact an uni-linear model that is imposed on and transplanted in (ex-) colonial societies. It is based on the idea of a central homogeneous culture and a central state in the tradition of European societies, and it is found in various colonial monocultural approaches, such as 'nation-building' in multi-ethnic (ex) colonial societies. We reject the concept of nation-building, as this is a uni-linear process and an intentional attempt by the colonizer to design a euro-centric project of the nation. Moreover, these models are based on the (colonial) concept of the nation-state and mistakenly assume a monoculture, without taking into account the cultural diversity as the material basis of the cultural and social evolution in multi-ethnic societies. We therefore argue that nation creation, as it originates from the domain of subaltern politics related to communitarian activities, is a fruitful response to the hegemonic nation building projects designed by the colonizer. (Menke, 2011)<sup>4</sup>.

Academic colonialism and Eurocentrism are denigrating systems that hamper the development of a genuine scientific tradition in the (former) colony. They are however not the only factors contributing to this disadvantage. In some countries, including Suriname, the lack of a critical number of social scientists based in the country itself is another factor.

#### 4. The challenge to decolonize social sciences

Since its independence in 1975, Suriname has been involved in a challenging process of unraveling the ties with the former colonizer, in search of its own identity. This is a process that involves many if not all aspects of society, including academic life. It should be clear from the foregoing, that we consider academic colonialism and Eurocentrism, systems that disregard non-European cultures, as negative for liberating the Surinamese social sciences and integration in the South

American/ Caribbean region. So these systems, interfering with nation creation and regional integration, are emphatically rejected.

*It is a strategic necessity that the Surinamese university, 40 years after the independence of the country, formulates a scientific policy and a research agenda to counteract the negative consequences of academic colonialism and Eurocentrism. The answer to the problem is that, although social sciences research is already carried out to a certain extent in Suriname by Surinamese researchers, it is essential that further decolonization is intentionally continued and reinforced. Decolonizing social sciences is however easier said than done. Fortunately, various scholars originating from the (previously) colonized world have pondered on this subject, so there is no need to reinvent the wheel.*

*Alatas (2003) points out that academic colonialism is a structural problem and the partial dismantling of this structure requires concerted action on the part of social scientists all over the world. In terms of policies he suggests to counter this phenomenon in the following way. First, social science communities in the Third World should consider attracting a critical mass of post-doctoral students and researchers with high qualifications such as PhD, so that they may carry out their research work there. Second, they should aim at a well-developed tertiary education sector. There should be serious efforts to rationalize and upgrade their universities in a number of areas including: (a) international benchmarking of research output and facilities; (b) competitive remuneration packages to stem the tide of the brain drain and to attract local scientists working abroad; (c) expansion of research facilities, especially libraries and scientific equipment.*

*As regards social sciences research, some lessons can be learned from the Maori studies. (Bishop, 2005) Studies of indigenous communities are illustrative to understand how euro-centric values and paradigms arise in the research process of (ex-) colonized societies. According to Bishop, neocolonial paradigms developed a 'social pathology' research approach, that has focused on the 'inability' of Maori culture to cope with human problems, and it has been proposed that Maori culture was inferior to that of the colonizers in human terms: 'Such practices have perpetuated an ideology of cultural superiority that precludes the development of power-sharing processes and the legitimation of diverse cultural epistemologies and cosmologies'. Bishop further claims that decolonizing research is strongly related to issues of power and values. His analysis related to Indigenous people is - in our view - also applicable to other colonized people. He distinguishes five issues (Table 2) related to power, from the point of view of the Kaupapa Maori in New Zealand, to promote self-determination of Indigenous research participation and liberation from neocolonial domination. The message from table 2 is, that in order to decolonize research, the (former) colonized people should take over from the (former) colonizer, the leadership regarding the five issues of power related to research. The research project should try to answer the scientific question, but it should also substantively be in accordance with relevant (e.g. cultural or social) needs of the people.*

Table 2. Research issues related to power

Issues of power of the (ex-) colonizer	Objectives to be aspired by the (ex-)colonized society
1. Initiation: Whose concerns, interests, and methods of approach determine/define the outcomes?	Selected methods & respondents should meet cultural preferences of (ex-) colonized people
2. Benefits Who will directly gain from the research?	(Ex-) colonized people should benefit
3. Representation Whose research constitutes an adequate depiction of social reality?	Knowledge, and culture of (ex-) colonized people should be recognized and included
4. Legitimacy What authority we claim for our texts?	Recognizing capability of (ex-) colonized people to cope with problems
5. Accountability Who controls the initiation procedures, evaluations, text constructions, and distribution of newly defined knowledge?	Control over content and distribution of newly defined knowledge should be in the hands of (ex-) colonized people

Source: Bishop, 2005; this is a revised version of the original table

Another important issue for decolonizing social sciences is the cultural and ethical framework that is closely connected to the research methods. Methodology is conceived as a broad approach to scientific inquiry that includes method, but primarily involves conceptual considerations. The emphasis is on understanding the socio-political context, the philosophical assumptions, ethical principles, and issues of the enterprise of research, that uses methods and instruments. As in most ex-colonial societies, cultural values and wisdom of local groups have had little or no influence in formulating research agendas and research methodologies, alternative frameworks for research methodologies have been designed from a local (Indigenous) perspective. (Prior, 2007; Bishop, 2005; Smith, 2005) The process to decolonize research will change the focus from the objectives of the researcher from the colonizing or global centers, towards the agenda of the people. The agendas set by Indigenous academics contrasts with the current scientific approach. Prior (2007) distinguishes five ethical values from an indigenous perspective: 'reciprocity, respect, equality, survival and protection, and responsibility'. These values, underpinning the guidelines for research, reject a mono-cultural approach of the nation that assumes a cultural homogeneous rather than a diverse society with different cultures<sup>5</sup>. In other words, an ethical research relationship is recognized in terms of trust developed as 'a product of engagement between people'.

In order to decolonize social sciences in Suriname the messages presented above are quintessential. Furthermore, an additional key issue to counter academic colonialism and Eurocentrism and an important condition for liberating the Surinamese social sciences, is scientific integration in the South American/ Caribbean region. This does not mean that there should be no cooperation with Western institutions including those in the Netherlands, but the efforts should be

directed towards the development of a South–South scientific relation, more in particular a cooperation with countries in the geographical region of Suriname itself. A strong focus should be on cooperation with Brazil, which is in line with a structural academic cooperation development, that started in the eighties of the 20th century. Apart from historical links between Suriname and Brazil, the latter is the largest country in the region with the perspective of being a global economic, technological and scientific giant in the near future.

The process of decolonizing Surinamese history and other humanities has been initiated in the recent past. We point at the work of Sandew Hira (2009) and at a history conference held in Paramaribo in 2012. (Hassankhan et al 2013) As regards regionalism, more in particular the strengthening of relations with Brazil, recently two history books have been published, demonstrating the interrelationship and the cross-border interactions between the two countries. (Gomes de Oliveira and Jubithana-Fernand, 2014; Souza Cruz et al, 2014) To illustrate the importance of regionalism in the process to decolonize the social sciences, the next section addresses a concise and slightly different view of the Surinamese history, in which an anti-euro-centric approach is taken and some historical and social issues of mutual interest with Brazil are emphasized.

## 5. Regionalism; a historical perspective

To back up regional academic integration and to identify issues for a research agenda, a non-euro-centric view of the history of Suriname is relevant, a view that departs from Suriname as a country located in the South American/Caribbean historical and present social reality. Albert Helman<sup>6</sup> delineated the past of Suriname within the framework of the colonial history and geographical/ecological concept of the Guiana region (comprising Suriname, French Guiana, Guyana, and parts of Venezuela and Brazil). Helman was fully aware of the value of the idea of Surinamese historic regionalism. (Helman, 1995)<sup>7</sup> Analysis of the Surinamese society within the framework of regionalism, may contribute to create a non-euro-centric view on Suriname and to decolonize the social sciences.

The standard Surinamese historiography is written mainly by the Dutch - who colonized Suriname in 1667 - and hence it is euro-centric by nature. Ironically the historic reality is that the Dutch excelled in their inability to be present in the country. They did not settle permanently in Suriname, as the Spanish and Portuguese did in their colonies in Latin America and the Caribbean. The Dutch obviously considered the land they had occupied as nothing else than an economically exploitable territory.

The arrival of Sephardic Jews and their African slaves from Pernambuco (North-East Brazil) in Suriname in the mid-17th century, a few decades before the Dutch occupied the territory, is an important connection between the two countries. (OudschansDentz, 1927)<sup>8</sup> The new colonizers settled on the Suriname River and established the village of New Jerusalem and various sugar plantations<sup>9</sup>. The Jews (later on Northern European Jews, so called Ashkenazim, joined the Sephardim) and the Africans were demographically and economically relatively large and visible groups in Suriname throughout the colonial period. In 1694, the Jews owned 40 sugar plantations with a total of 9,000 slaves. (Van Lier, 1971) By 1760, they possessed 115 of a total of 400 plantations in Suriname. At the end of the eighteenth century, the free population in Suriname comprised 35% Jews (mulatto Jews included) and 51% non-Jewish whites. (Nassy, 1791) In the capital Paramaribo, Jews comprised more than half of the approximately 2000 white people, with exclusion of military personnel. In addition to their economic contribution, the Jews had considerable political influence from the 17th to the 19th century. Their power in the government is reflected by their representation in the Colonial Assembly. Between 1866 and 1891 they constituted the majority (53%) of the elected members, while the Dutch and others had 18% and

29%, respectively. (Schalkwijk, 1994) They had been transformed from a rural plantation elite in the 17th and 18th century to an urban merchant – professional elite in the 19th century.

Another interesting issue regarding the link between Brazil and Suriname is related to rice cultivation. By the late eighteenth century, the North - Eastern part of Brazil had become an important center of slave-grown rice for export. The presence of rice among the native African plants in the first century of colonization, suggests the role of African slaves in establishing their agricultural heritage in the Americas. Rice cultivation reflects the black Atlantic link from the Upper Guinea Coast to Brazil and South Carolina, where it was a subsistence food crop prior to its cultivation in the plantation system. (Carney, 2004) The link between Brazil and Suriname may have been historically one of the corridors for the establishment of rice cultivation in seventeenth-century Suriname, that is related with the expulsion of Dutch -Jewish planters from Brazil in 1644. Rice cultivation in Suriname may have followed the subsistence preferences previously established in the plantation system in North - Eastern Brazil. (Carney, 2005) These interesting ideas need to be further explored and buttressed.

In the past decade a new connection developed between Brazil and Suriname, a process that is still going on. We point at the influx into Suriname of *garimpeiros* from Brazil, and in their wake, the arrival of other Brazilians. De Theije and Heemskerk (2009) point to the fact that Suriname, in terms of geography, is just as much a part of Amazonia as Brazil is. The same Amazon rainforest that dominates the landscape of northern Brazil covers southern Suriname. Geological formations rich in minerals such as the Guiana Shield, where most of Suriname's gold deposits are found, do not end at the frontiers that have been drawn by nation states. For Brazilian *garimpeiros*, the perceived differences between the two countries are very few in terms of nature and natural resources. Many Brazilians migrated with their families from southern and North -Eastern Brazil to the newly opened agricultural areas in the Amazon region in the 1960s and 1970s. They now move on to Guyana and French Guiana, or to Suriname, because of perceived opportunities to work in a familiar environment. According to informants, the first *garimpeiros* - their number was estimated at 20000 in 2006 - crossed the border of the Brazilian state Amapá with French Guiana, and migrated further to Suriname by crossing the Marowijne river. (Oliveira, 2011) Since that period most legal and illegal mining activities in Suriname are concentrated in the Eastern regions, where Brazilian *garimpeiros* are the majority. (Ibid) According to official sources (General Bureau of Statistics in Suriname), 5,027 Brazilians lived in Suriname in the year 2012, but it is generally assumed that most Brazilians were not counted during the census in 2012, because of their illegal status. Unofficial estimates are that the Brazilians constitute as high as approximately 50,000 people, which is almost 10% of the Surinamese population. They live in the interior and urban area, the majority not being registered. (Menke and Pérez, 2012) This recent migration of Brazilians to Suriname has demographic and social - economic, but also health implications, for example transmission of diseases like leprosy and leishmaniasis across borders. (Menke et al, 2011; Hu et al, 2012) This is another important issue for a decolonizing research agenda.

We have just discussed some historical and current links between Suriname and Brazil. Suriname is historically also linked to other neighboring countries including Caribbean Island states, for instance in terms of migratory movements in recent and colonial times. However, there is a common link across this ostensible regional dualism, which stems from the historical and socio-economic characteristics of the plantation system that ranged from the deep South in the United States of America, across the Caribbean sea to the North East of Brazil. In this view the Caribbean, by definition, comprises all islands in the Caribbean sea and mainland nations and regions in nations in the Americas, where a plantation system based on slave labor preceded the present societies. (Girvan, 2001) Thus, the Caribbean is characterized by the historical production of staple products such as coffee, sugar, and cotton, and by various socio-cultural charac-



teristics (among others health and disease, ethnicity, religion, language and music). According to these criteria, most countries and regions in the North-East and Northern part of continental South America are part of the Caribbean. This also includes Suriname and its neighbors Guyana, French Guiana, and North-Eastern Brazil, the latter including among others the states of Amapá, Pará, and Maranhão. This broad conceptualization of the Caribbean is considered relevant and fruitful for developing historiography and other areas of the social sciences that takes account of the regional historical and social realities.

The mainstream history writing of Suriname is biased towards the coastal zone, in particular the urban area and its links with imperial colonial powers (The Netherlands, England, etc. and their territories in the Caribbean), while neglecting the hinterland. However, the 18th century shows the existence of commercial networks with the Southern Guiana shield region, in which colonial settlers, Maroons and Indigenous people played a significant role. (Hulsman, 2013) Unfortunately, the historic relations of the countries of the Guiana shield region, so far remained largely unknown. This is partly due to the separation (linguistically and institutionally) between national archives in these countries, that resulted until today in a historiography with a non-regional focus. Hulsman points to the important commercial networks from the French and English insular Caribbean with the Guiana's. Anglophone Caribbean people (indentured workers from Guyana, Barbados and St. Lucia) moved to Suriname. (Lamur et al, 2014) Surinamese people moved to the Dutch Antillean islands Curacao and Aruba to work in the petroleum industry. (Lutchman, 1986; Thio, 2014) We can add to this the migration of the Maroons between Suriname and French Guiana (Price, 2002) and finally of course the fact that the Indigenous people moved around in the region, even long before Europeans established artificial political borders between the territories that they had occupied. The regional migrations, depicted in figure 1 have so far only been subject of limited social research.

Figure 1. Historical links of Suriname with continental South America & the Caribbean



## 6. Academic links with Brazil

Individual initiatives of scientific cooperation with Brazil go back to the mid-20th century. The Surinamese medical doctor Salomon John Bueno de Mesquita (1902-1982) was trained in 1949 in Rio de Janeiro to become a leprologist<sup>10</sup>. The basis for a more structural scientific cooperation was laid in the cultural agreement of 1976 between Suriname and Brazil. An interesting academic cooperation evolved between 1984 – 1997, when Surinamese students went to Brazil for higher education. The cooperation was rewarding, as of the 132 students enrolled, 117 (89%) completed their studies. Most of them graduated in technology, social sciences and mathematics (Table 3).

Table 3. Graduated Surinamese Students in Brazil by Discipline 1984 – 1997

Discipline	number	Percentage
Social Sciences	20	17.1
Technology	53	45.3
Agriculture, Aquaculture, Zootechnology, Forestry	7	6.0
Mathematics, Computer Sciences, Statistics	12	10.3
Literature & Art	7	6.0
Medicine, Dentists, Biology, Paramedics	8	6.8
Veterinary Medicine	7	6.0
Unknown	3	2.6
Total	117	100.0

Source: SuriBraz Academic Network<sup>11</sup>

Of the 117 students who graduated in Brazil more than 80% returned to Suriname. This is a very high rate when compared with scholarship programs of Surinamese in the Netherlands and the USA.

In the early years of the 21st century a new generation of students took the initiative to go to Brazil for university education, including offspring of the 20th century alumni who studied over there. To continue the academic cooperation with Brazil a structural initiative has been taken in Suriname by founding the “SuriBraz Academic network” in 2014. This initiative of Surinamese alumni who studied in Brazil, aims to promote and implement academic exchange programs with Brazilian universities.

Furthermore, regional cooperation started with participation of Surinamese and Brazilian academics in joint activities. The areas of interest between the two countries stem from the common assets in terms of natural resources, biodiversity and cultural diversity, and new challenges that arose out of recent natural resource exploitation and migratory movements. This necessitates establishing a viable joint regional perspective, and finding solutions that are of mutual benefit. A few major issues derived from these areas of mutual interest will be exemplified next. (Van Els, 2014)

The decay of the colonial plantation system in Suriname and Brazil was followed by a large-scale exploitation of natural resources that recently caused new forms of eco- and social stress. Suriname was the first country in this region where a large-scale hydropower plant was constructed (in the Brokopondo district) in 1964, followed by plants in Brazil (Pará-Brazil 1975; Amapá-Brazil 1975; Amazonas 1980), Venezuela (Guri 1978) and French Guiana (1994). At that time it was not common that environmental studies were required for the execution of such projects. The energy sector was considered a necessary main driving force for developing electro intensive extractive and transforming industries in these countries. However, the construction of the hydropower plants and the large lakes that were created had a negative impact on the environment as well as social implications for displaced Indigenous and Maroon communities. Thus, the original projects of the new generation of hydropower plants that are in construction in the Amazon since the first decade of the 21st century had to be adjusted, including the reduction of lake size and storage capacity, to accommodate environmental and social demands, and take into account compensations for the displacement of indigenous communities. The mining sector (primarily gold) is another area of tension, caused by the influx of small scale gold miners. The interior of Suriname has to be analyzed within the context of the gold rush of garimpeiros that earlier devastated the “Serra Pelada” in the Amazon region of Brazil in the 1980s, as well as the impact of small gold mining by Surinamese porkknockers.

Suriname has a relatively small academic community, and in addition few high – qualified professionals. Illustrative is the low share of 15% PhD graduates in the teaching and research staff at the University of Suriname. To stimulate the process of making a viable local community of social scientists in Suriname, cooperation with Brazil through the creation of joint Surinamese – Brazilian networks is a serious option. This may contribute to liberating knowledge rather than being involved in copying or mimicking Western issues. The small academic community in Suriname can benefit from the large number of Brazilian academic centers and its research regarding a wide diversity of problems and issues, many of which resemble the Surinamese social reality. As several alternative non- euro-centric theories originated in Latin America and the Caribbean (Sankatsing 1989), the transfer, dialogue and legitimization of this knowledge based on scientific criteria, may be enhanced in a creative and organic process that matches with both the Surinamese and Brazilian social realities. To decolonize the social sciences in Suriname, academic cooperation with Brazil should be enhanced with a research agenda that addresses issues of mutual interest, but also emphasizes the role Brazilian and Surinamese people have played in the production and distribution of knowledge, an issue that has been neglected by the (colonial) Euro-centric academic tradition, with its bias towards a metropolitan focus. Last but not least, in contributing to the decolonization of the social sciences in its broadest meaning, the research agenda should give attention to colonial and actual migratory movements and diasporic communities in Suriname and Brazil.

Suriname’s involvement in the South American integration movement has been growing during the past ten years. In 2011 this country became member of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) of which the Constitutive Treaty was signed in 2008. The Surinamese process of nation creation, could add a new dimension to the South American integration movement, as this project could also be applied at the regional and international level, as the historical exam-

ple of trans ethnic Malayo-Indonesian civilization of interethnic cooperation has learnt. (Hefner, 2001) Unlike the historically deeply embedded colonial formula of 'divide and rule', nation-creation is a collective force in the decolonisation of history that utilizes cross-boundary mechanisms and efforts to create an inclusive community and guarantees the recognition and equal rights of the different cultures. (Menke, 2011)

## 7. Conclusion

To decolonize social sciences in Suriname advantage should be taken from a regional South American perspective and regional cooperation with countries dealing with similar problems. This article emphasizes that to decolonize social sciences, South-South cooperation is highly relevant. It makes a plea to focus on the academic relations between Suriname and Brazil. However, South-South academic cooperation is not a guarantee for breaking out of the euro-centric mindset with regard to social science studies. When embedded in the traditional social sciences it can even be harmful. Therefore we opt for a type of cooperation that may facilitate liberation of the social sciences, rather than just strengthening academic cooperation. In so far Eurocentrism and colonial science has been staying intact in Brazil, this will necessitate for decolonizing the South-South cooperation, which is considered a requirement for emancipating social sciences in Suriname from a South American perspective.

In addition to develop a fruitful South-South cooperation, concerted action on the part of social scientists and academic institutions in Suriname is required, to dismantle the structure of academic colonialism. To counter this structural problem and liberate the social sciences a few preconditions in Suriname are considered important to ensure sustainability at the institutional level, the quality of cooperation, and the dissemination and application of academic results. A first precondition is to strengthen the academic social science community of Suriname at the university level and provide it with highly qualified academics to enhance the research capacity. A second precondition is to provide appropriate institutional, social and remuneration conditions to increase the quantity and quality of Ph.D. graduates. At the same time the necessary institutional facilities should be put in place, such as documentation, publishing and dissemination facilities. Last but not least, academic policies and agendas should significantly reduce fragmentation of research and focus on problem-oriented studies rather than discipline oriented research. This may also contribute to establish a distinct identity of liberated social sciences with a regional, problem-focused and integrated perspective.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Dussel (2000) describes eurocentrism as an irrational process with a mythical negative content that distinguishes between the “us” (the Europeans) and the “others” (peoples of the “peripheral world”). He considers this myth in terms of an assumed superior, developed civilization that makes the rescue of the non-civilized people among others in the (ex) colonial societies, a moral obligation.

<sup>2</sup> This journal is published (bi-)annually; the name reads in English: “OSO, journal for Surinamese studies”. Information about this journal can be found on the internet site: [www.osojournal.nl/oso/](http://www.osojournal.nl/oso/).

<sup>3</sup> The title of this project reads: “leprosy and empire. The shaping of public health regimes in multicultural contexts: Suriname and the Dutch East Indies, 1800-1950. For further information we refer to the internet site: [www.nwo.nl](http://www.nwo.nl).

<sup>4</sup> Nation-building is linked to two lines of thought. The first relates to conceptualizations based on ethnicization, rooted in colonial ‘divide and rule’ practices. The second line of thought relates to the modernization theory in the decolonisation process after the Second World War. Unlike nation-building, that is initiated by the colonial state, nation-creation refers to the collective efforts initiated by (cultural) groups to develop a nation that is inclusive and trans-ethnic, based on solidarity, mutual respect and a harmonic interaction between (ethnic) groups and their cultures. (Menke, 2011)

<sup>5</sup> The Guidelines we refer to are the Guidelines for ethical conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research, developed by the National Aboriginal and Islander Health Organization

(NAIHO) with the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) in Australia. (Prior, 2007)

<sup>6</sup> Albert Helman is the pseudonym of Lou Lichtveld, born in Paramaribo (1903) and died in Amsterdam (1999).

<sup>7</sup> Albert Helman (1995) explains in his impressive historical, but also visionary analysis of Suriname, viewed from the perspective of the indigenous people, that the country is originally part of one large continental region that has been called Guiana. The European empires, acquisitive for gold, artificially divided Guiana into 5 parts: the Eastern part of Venezuela, the former British Guiana (now Guyana), Suriname, French Guiana and Brazilian Guiana (now including a number of Brazilian states). But the indigenous people, so called American Indians, did not care for borders drawn by Europeans.

<sup>8</sup> Many of these Portuguese (Sephardic) Jews had migrated from Portugal to Amsterdam and from Amsterdam to Brazil.

<sup>9</sup> New Jerusalem is now a "lieu de memoire" called "Joden savanna" ("Jews savannah"), located on the right bank of the Suriname river, about 50 km South of Paramaribo.

<sup>10</sup> Information received in January 2015 from his son, Wim Bueno de Mesquita, who lives in Paramaribo, Suriname.

<sup>11</sup> SuriBraz Academic Network is a foundation, established on September 26, 2014 in Paramaribo by academics who studied in or have academic links with Brazil.