



Nuovi Autoritarismi e Democrazie:
Diritto, Istituzioni, Società

Hero-systems, military dictatorship, and the silencing of the academic community in Suriname

*Natascha Adama**

Abstract

This paper is concerned with academic silencing in Suriname and its links with the conflict that took place at the national level, which was given scant consideration in research. Emphasis will be given to the establishment of the hero-system in order to ensure peace and the connections between academic silencing, dictatorship and law and order.

Keywords: Academic Freedom – Silencing – Hero-System – Revolution – Suriname – Military Dictatorship – Dutch Canon – Dutch Black Lives Matter.

CONTENTS: 1. Introduction and Key Definitions. 2. Theoretical Framework. 3. Academic Freedom and Academic Silencing. 4. The Case of Suriname. 4.1 Academic Freedom in Suriname before 1980. 4.2 The Revolution and Iconization. 4.3 Academic Freedom after 1980. 4.4 Anton de Kom and Palimpsest. 4.5 Anton de Kom, the Symbol of Dutch Black Power. 5. Conclusions.

*Visiting Professor in Political Science at the Foundation of Interdisciplinary Research on the Dutch Caribbean, Duke University. This paper is dedicated to Dr. Gerard Leckie, Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences, who was executed by the military on 8 December 1982 in an attempt to silence him. The essay was peer-reviewed by the Editorial Board. Member of the Editorial Team who oversaw the essay: Laura Alessandra Nocera. English editing: Pietro Manzella.

1. *Introduction and Key Definition*

This is the first paper about academic silencing in Suriname and is intended to cast light on a conflict which was given little consideration at the international level.

The seriousness of this conflict can be still perceived nowadays, as academic silencing remains a major issue in Suriname. There are many aspects which deserve consideration – e.g., the way this conflict has profoundly changed Surinamese society – but limited research has been carried on this topic. For example, there is no official data available on the total number of victims. Little is also known about the people who were injured, killed, or went missing between 1980 and 1992, which marked the end of military dictatorship in this country. Data is also missing on the scholars who lost their lives or disappeared during the protests held in the same period.

The Hero-system

A hero-system is a specific type of intervention in societal structure, involving individual aggrandizement or iconization, e.g., people who at some point played a major role in history. In the context of this paper, the “hero-system” conception is based on Becker’s characterization, namely the «hopeful mystification or a determined lie»¹. This research considers the following characteristics to be relevant discursive tools: 1) hero-systems are constructed to scapegoat or victimize; 2) hero-systems are sociological phenomena, although deeply established in the psychological dimension; 3) hero-systems are political tools, as they are used to build “we-against-them” discourses; 4) hero-systems are fictional creations, developed to inspire, empower and amalgamate; and 5) hero-systems are tools to generate feelings of loyalty and allegiance to the nation.

Ethnification

Ethnification is a typology used to characterize societies in which: 1) ethnicity marks all aspects of social, political, and cultural life; 2) identity issues (race, heritage, the old country, color, kinship, culture) seek political support; and 3) identity issues are used as a tool for obtaining and maintaining power.

Verbroedering (Politics of Fraternization)

The term *verbroedering* or “politics of fraternization” refers to the inter-ethnic cooperation between the two largest ethnic groups in Suriname, Hindustani, and Creole, between 1958 and 1967. The term *verbroedering* is concerned with how the personal friendship between the Creole leader of the National Progressive Party (NPS) Johan Adolf Pengel, and the Hindustani leader of the Progressive Reform Party (VHP), Jagernath Lachmon, gave rise to political cooperation in the parliament. In reality, in that period Suriname was governed by a majoritarian government, because the Catholic Progressive Peoples Party (PSV) and the

¹ E. Becker, *The Denial of Death*, Free Press Paperbacks, published by Simon and Schuster, 1973.

Javanese *Kerukanan Tulodo Pranatan Inggil* (Party for National Unity and Solidarity or KTPI) joined the coalition.

2. *Theoretical Framework*

In his seminal work *On Democracy*², Robert Dahl does not speak of democracies. He instead uses the term “polyarchy” – which means “government by many” – to explain that democracy is a perpetual work in progress. What is the connection between polyarchy and the concept of “academic freedom”? The link between them originates from the fact that academic freedom is typically viewed as an attribute of democracy. Is academic freedom indeed the product of democracy? Or is this connection based on flawed notions grounded in Weberian paradigms?

The purpose of this essay is to examine academic silencing adopting an empirical perspective, as one cannot discuss academic silencing without knowing how academic freedom works in practice. Can one presume that academic freedom on the one hand, and academic silencing on the other hand, are two mutually exclusive concepts? And if so, how do they deviate? The other question that needs answering is: if academic freedom is linked to democratic freedom and liberalism, is academic silencing nothing but a derivative of authoritarianism?

To understand how both conceptions work in practice, the second part of this essay is organized around the examination of academic silencing in Suriname during the military regime, and the rise of Anton de Kom as the leader of the Revolution during that period (1980-1987). I will address several issues, focusing on the following questions:

- 1) What affected the construction of the presupposed hero-system?
- 2) Why was the “iconization” of Anton de Kom contentious?
- 3) What are the attributes of academic silencing in Suriname?

In the last part of this paper, it is argued that in the 1980s academic silencing developed. This phenomenon contributed to identifying Anton de Kom as a symbol of the Dutch resistance and Black Power after 2010.

By positioning the hero-system in the Netherlands as a contrasting variant, it is expected to look at the relevance of academic research when searching for the truth and on the impact of academic silencing on intellectual bias.

In the Netherlands, the hero-system of de Kom is based on the black-white racial binary. Was the iconization of de Kom in the Netherlands part of a strategy to help bridge the social and cultural divide between the following dichotomies, namely white people and black people, traditional culture and urban-black culture, scholarship and Black Power radicalism?

² R.A. Dahl, *On Democracy*, Yale University Press, 1988.

3. *Academic Freedom and Academic Silencing*

In 2001, the Dutch Prince Willem Alexander referred to research by Michael Baud about the human rights violations committed by the Videla regime in Argentina as “just an opinion”. The Prince of the Netherlands, a high-ranking public figure, tried to silence Baud by degrading his academic work. The Dutch Prime Minister, Wim Kok, launched a warning sign, but the damage was done³. The discrediting of Prof. Baud is seen as a watershed moment for Dutch modern culture. It set the tone for the current fraught relationship between the public and academia in the Netherlands. The COVID-19 pandemic, for example, has taken this unsavory vernacular to new heights. Today, scientific evidence on the Sars-CoV-19 is put into question by laypeople: in some circles, proven facts about this lethal virus are called “just a case of flu”. Conspiracy theories voiced by social influencers and political conservatives undermine vaccination programs, threaten scientists in the USA, Belgium, and the Netherlands.

Hoepner writes that «Academic freedom, is contingent and subject to the players in the field»⁴. Who are the “players in the field”? Is Hoepner referring to those players *outside*⁵ the walls of the academia in her thesis? Are they politicians, or the *Vox Populi* who see Facebook and Twitter as credible sources of information? Or is she speaking about the players *inside* academia, e.g., administrators, academic supervisors, or heads of faculty with the power to gag and silence? Who determines who can write or examine what and when?

Using dead embryos to harvest stem cells to help cure cancer and multiple sclerosis is deemed unethical in many western societies. However, China and Russia consider the harvesting of stem cells as a medical and scientific advancement. Similarly, cloning humans and animals is not permitted in many western countries, while South-Korea sees no problems when it comes to the cloning of animals. Controversial psychological experiments such as the 1965 *Obedience to Authority Experiment* by Stanley Milgram would not be permitted today, despite the fact that Milgram’s situational study was conducted under strict conditions and was relevant for research into the Holocaust and ethnic conflicts such as Rwanda, Burundi, Kenia, and Bosnia⁶. There is also the issue of the continued ban of *Mein Kampf*. Many scholars see this ban as contentious because they say that it prevents us from learning about the trappings of political extremism and populism in the contemporary world.

³ J. Alberts, *Premier Kok roept prins tot de orde* [Prime-minister Kok Reprimands Prins], NRC Handelsblad, 7 maart 2001.

⁴ J.E. Hoepner, ‘*You need to shut up*’: *Research silencing and what it means for academic freedom*, Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the Australian National University by Jacqueline Elise Hoepner, Center for the Public Awareness of Science, College of Physical and Mathematical Science, July 2017, openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au.

⁵ Italics of the Author.

⁶ T. Blass, *The Milgram Paradigm After 35 Years: Some Things We Now Know About Obedience to Authority*, in *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, Vol. 29 No. 5, 1999, 955-978.

All these examples provided above illustrate that academic freedom is not an intrinsic product of liberal democracy.

Is academic freedom a constitutional right, similar to, for example, the freedom of expression and the right to self-determination? Based on the examples mentioned earlier, the contention is that academic freedom is in fact a negotiable right, a prerogative. To illustrate, one can mention: the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill “paper-classes” scandal in 2010, or the college admissions bribery scandal involving several Ivy League Universities in 2019⁷. These are two examples showing how donorship and endowment can compromise academic autonomy and therefore academic freedom⁸. In the Netherlands, a prominent faculty member from Tilburg University used his power and prestige to undermine, coerce, and silence students and researchers working under his tutelage⁹. Recently, the Dutch media published about other incidences of academic silencing at the Universities of Amsterdam, Leiden, and Tilburg. The alleged victims mentioned the toxic work environment, sexual abuse, coercion and menacing behavior by supervisors, and department heads.

Based on these considerations, one might assume that the concept of “academic freedom” needs to be repositioned in order to examine the actual trappings of academic freedom, based on the argumentation that academic freedom is not a key-feature of democracy. Academic freedom is a phenomenon in and out of itself, established in traditions, norms, and values that researchers have the right and plight to examine, explore and write objectively and, without obstruction from the state, donors, or the public.

There is this prevailing idea that the trappings of academic silencing are much easier to detect because academic silencing can be observed, seen and perceived. Academic silencing does not occur in an inconspicuous fashion, because it typically emerges in the public domain, outside academia. Is it plausible that what bystanders observe as academic silencing is indeed based on correct observations? Scholars at Risk (SAR), the network that claims to protect and defend academic freedom, for example, use a strict set of criteria to determine if a scholar is indeed at risk. SAR requires written documentation that proves beyond any reasonable doubt that a scholar is at risk before he/she becomes eligible for support. This strict definition of “threat” and “risk” is only effective in situations where conflict and war are ongoing. It is challenging to assess risk in situations where conflict is classified as having low intensity, or in situations where academic autonomy is under pressure because of autocratic tendencies, so risk assessment will be less accurate. In order to mitigate this challenge, SAR focuses on what it can witness, that is on present-

⁷ J.S. Berger, S.W. Zwickel, *Six Harvard alumni charged with nationwide admissions fraud Scandal*, in *The Harvard Crimson*, March 14, 2019.

⁸ P.R. Maricocchi, “*Analysis of the UNC Paper Classes Scandal*”, *Line by Line*, in *A Journal of Beginning Student Writing*, Vol. 3 No. 2, Article 3, 2017, ecommons.udayton.edu/lxl/vol3/iss2/3.

⁹ F. Boon, *Lieg niet, steel niet: offensief tegen wetenschappelijk bedrog* [Do not lie, do not steal: offensive against fraudulent behaviour in the Sciences], in *De Groene Amsterdammer*, November 14, 2012.

day conflicts in Syria, Turkey, and more recently, Afghanistan. On the SAR website, it is argued that resources should be allocated to help scholars, practitioners, civil society leaders and activists. But if SAR focuses on present conflicts, then what happens in situations where academics face violence and threat outside the scope of the TV-cameras? On August 23, 2020, the Economist headlined that *China is killing academic freedom in Hong Kong*. The same can be argued about the Uyghur academic community in Xinjiang, China, or the Mexican scholars writing about drugs criminality, or the Venezuelan scholars forced to exile by the Maduro regime.

Academic silencing is a difficult concept to qualify, an ambiguous conception that typically transpires outside the realm of the public domain, since:

- 1) Academic silencing is a personal attack, directed at the individual scholar or scientist, with far-reaching social and political consequences;
- 2) Academic silencing is a human rights violation.

Concrete examples of academic silencing are:

- 1) Gender and racial discrimination, verbal and sexual abuse, slander, and disrepute: loss of one's reputation and professional credibility;
- 2) Forced dismissals, stealing of bylines, ideas, work and/or scientific results: loss of income and livelihood;
- 3) Imprisonment: loss of personal freedom;
- 4) Execution/ murder: loss of life.

Some examples of academic silencing are closely connected to flaws in the academic system. For instance, the perpetual pressure to compete and to be competitive (publish or perish); the pressure to secure funding for research; the underfunding of certain departments that impedes the quality of research; problematic doctorate trajectories due to insufficient supervision; favoritism, discrimination, the tenure system that typically favors seniority.

I want to discuss two specific situations of academic silencing that are typically under-examined. The first is a form of academic silencing that materialized as a result of the geographical divide between the Global North and the Global South. Universities located in the Global North, set up sub-disciplines of sociology, such as non-western sociology, development studies and cultural anthropology to study the Global South, frequently from a hermeneutic perspective. The problem is that said positions in fact negatively impacted the quality of research, because of their tendency to exoticize deeply complex, social, and political phenomena. Scholars in the Global South typically lack financial resources and infrastructures to conduct well-rounded research, while visa-restrictions make it difficult to attend and participate in debates organized by universities in the Global North.

As a result, critical research on political and social issues in the Global South is based on anecdotal evidence, with this divide which contributed to establishing intellectual elitism and western epistemic dominance.

The second display of academic silencing is the lack of diversity in academia, e.g., gender disparities and the absence of cultural and ethnic diversity¹⁰. Universities in the Global North do not welcome people of color, those with different cultural backgrounds or with lower socio-economic status. Academia in both the Global North and South can become precarious for LGBTQ+ people. This specific type of silencing is much deeper because it attenuates the urgency of the problem. But the lack of diversity is connected to gaps in knowledgeability and prevents the advancement of scholarship and science on crucial issues such as climate change, social, economic, and political inequality, gender disparities and LGBTQX issues.

4. *The case of Suriname*¹¹

In 1950 Rudolf Van Lier, in his seminal work *Frontier Society*, typified Surinamese society as a colonial society, born out of the remnants of the plantation, slavery, indentured laborers from South-East Asia, immigrants from Europe and people of mixed descent (typically the miscegenation of Black, White, Jewish and Chinese people)¹². The plantation set the stage for an ethnically, deeply divided society, fraught with ethnic strife and racial tension. After the country gained autonomy from the Netherlands in 1950, political parties were organized along the lines of existing ethnic and racial divides. However, these divides also determined the transition from a colonial society to an autonomous region, which was part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The fact that the democratization process was in the hands of *Dutch Tweede Kamer* – the second Chamber of Parliament – aggravated existing racial tensions and infighting at the national level. Significantly, the Dutch Parliament refused to address crucial concerns voiced by members of Surinamese *Staten van Suriname* (the Surinamese Assembly). For instance, Surinamese MPs qualified the high rates of illiteracy and limited knowledge of Dutch, the official language, as critical for the widening of the suffrage. Between 1950 and 1969, elections were manipulated, causing the government to call new elections, and the same happened in 1965. During election time, political propagandists typically try to gain support, by beseeching or coercing voters to choose their party. In 2020, electoral fraud and vote rigging was proven by concerned citizens, who photographed and filmed actions of vote rigging and electoral fraud during and after elections¹³. Significantly, the Dutch parliament disregarded proposals by the Surinamese delegation to address the stagnant economy, and the problematic macroeconomic deficits. Macroeconomic imbalance and economic stagnation also became a fixture of the Surinamese economic

¹⁰ See for example: philarchive.org/archive/TANATL.

¹¹ For a demographic overview of Suriname, see: data.worldbank.org/indicator.

¹² R. Van Lier, *Frontier Society. A social analysis of the history of Surinam*, Martinus Nijhoof, 1971.

¹³ *Overnachten in NIS: held of oproerkraaier?* [Sleepover in NIS: hero or villain?], in parbode.com, September 3, 2020.

landscape. Donald Horowitz¹⁴, followed by Benjamin Reilly¹⁵, writes that centrifugal tendencies reinforce ethnic divides when societies are in the throes of democratic transition. As the example of Suriname demonstrates, in situations where politics is ruled by identity-issues, scapegoating and we-against-them antimonies reinforce centrifugal tendencies. Why did the Dutch Parliament focus on the organizing of elections, instead of on the strengthening of complementary arenas, that is the economy, civility, the judicial, and politics, to help strengthen democracy? It is plausible that the Dutch Parliament adopted Post-war paradigms on decolonization, autonomy, and sovereignty to strengthen their own position within the international community. It is also plausible that they saw universal suffrage and the organizing of national elections as crucial steps toward democratization. Empirical analyses teach that the low levels of political organization in rural areas, typically among lower educated Hindustani, Javanese, Volkscreolen, Indigenous Marrons were not addressed properly. In this sense, Reilly attributes the teething problems of the democratic transition to issues directly related to the colonial and the problematic demographic developments¹⁶. For example, the uneven dispersion of different ethnic categories in nine districts was a typical fixture of the plantation administration that lasted until the early twentieth century. One can argue that the colonial institutions contributed to the imbalance of the electoral system. Redistricting, as a tool for institutional reorganization, would have brought on a more proportionate electoral system, though coming with a price. To avoid additional costs, it was decided to design an electoral system in which extra weight was given to the votes cast in the center (Paramaribo). In 1987, the modification of the electoral system as a part of the third democratic transition did not help to repair the disproportionateness of the system, quite the contrary. The revised electoral system awards extra power to the sparsely populated districts of Sipaliwini (Central Suriname), Marowijne (East) and Brokopondo (Central Suriname). The new electoral configuration helped the *Nationale Democratische Partij* (NDP: National Democratic Party) led by the former *putschist* Desi Bouterse, to gain foothold in the political arena in 1987 because the NPD was the only political organization with access to war-torn districts, e.g., Sipaliwini and Marowijne. In 2000, the General Liberation and Development Party (ABOP), led by the former leader of the Jungle Commando, Ronny Brunswijk, gained one seat in Parliament as a result of the disproportionate voting system. In 2005, ABOP won two more seats, and joined the Het Front (Front coalition) in the government.

Between 1950 and 1980, identity politics and political populism determined the political landscape. During the military regime, class (elite/low class), and ideological (left/right) criteria became determining factors. The drastic reconfiguration of the cleavage structure – e.g., from ethnicity to class – illustrates

¹⁴ D.L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, University of California Press, 1985, Second Edition, The Regents of the University of California, 2000.

¹⁵ B. Reilly, *Political Engineering and Party Politics in Conflict-Prone Societies*, in *Democratization*, Vol. 13 No. 5, December 2006, 811–827.

¹⁶ B. Reilly, *Political Engineering and Party Politics in Conflict-Prone Societies*, cit., 811.

the fluidity of identity issues. Between 1963 and 1969, the Surinamese government used McCarthyism to instill fear against communism, to repress and silence the opposition, and to prevent the political left from gaining momentum. An example of this narrative is the international advertising campaign in the American *Ebony*, in which the Surinamese government presented itself as a beacon of racial harmony, and political stability (*verbroedering* in Dutch)¹⁷. Social scientists – e.g., Edward Dew¹⁸ and Gary Brana-Shutte¹⁹ – are members of a school of thought that views Surinamese society from a situational perspective, typically based on the narrative referred to above. This school of thought is rooted in the USA, and because the relevant material is written in English, it is considered to have a leading dimension. Surinamese intellectuals, exemplified by Hans Ramsoedh²⁰, Ruben Gowricharn²¹ and Jack Menke²², typically approach the Surinamese society from either a leftist perspective (Marxist or Gramscian) or, from an ethnocentric perspective (either Creole or Hindustani). On the contrary, Betty Sedoc-Dalhberg focuses on both the system and its complementary institutions, but typically avoids discussions on the weaknesses of the political system²³. Can one argue in favour of the existence of a Surinamese school of thought which approaches Suriname society from a holistic perspective, by building models explaining non-traditional issues connected to society and its system? Is it possible that these schools have filled their writings with cues and vernaculars typically connected to the colonial era? The idea that the colonial narrative is used as a paradigmatic model on which later writings are premised, emphasizes my earlier argumentation that universities in the Global North typically exoticized social and political phenomena connected to the Global South. Edward Dew argues that: «the years from 1958 to 1967 mark the longest period of political stability Suriname had under self- rule [...] the standard of living rose markedly, and government services improved»²⁴.

These considerations illustrate that during this historical period, the political arena was dominated by strong men, social unrest, mass immigration, brain-drain

¹⁷ A. Lijphart, *Democracies in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration*, Yale University Press, 1977, 202.

¹⁸ E. Dew, *The Difficult Flowering of Suriname: Ethnicity and Politics in a Plural Society*, Martinus Nijhoff, 1978.

¹⁹ G. Brana-Shutte, *Some Aspects of Youthful Identity Management in a Paramaribo Creole Neighborhood*, in *53ste Jaargang*, No. 1-2, September 1978, 1-20; Id., *Back to the Barracks? Five Years 'Revo' in Suriname*, in *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, Vol. 28 No. 1, Spring 1986, 93-121.

²⁰ See for example: H. Ramsoedh, *Surinaams Onbehegen; Een sociale en politieke geschiedenis van Suriname (1865-2015)* [Suriname's Discomfort: A Social and Political History], Hans Ramsoedh en Uitgeverij Verloren, 2018.

²¹ See for example: R. Gowricharn, *Creole Hegemony in Caribbean Societies: The Case of Suriname*, in *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, Vol. 15 No. 2, 2015.

²² See for example: J. K. Menke, H. E. Menke, *Decolonizing social sciences in Suriname: a strategic view in favor of regionalism*, in *Sustentabilidade em Debate*, Vol. 6 No. 2, 2015, 260-275.

²³ B. Sedoc-Dalhberg, *Refugees from Suriname*, in *Canada's Journal of Refugees*, No. 132, 1983, refuge.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/refuge/article/download/21454/20129/.

²⁴ E. Dew, *The Difficult Flowering of Suriname*, cit., 122.

and corruption. A further analysis of the political system showed that the idea of political representation was originally based on the Creole/ Hindustani dichotomy. The fact that, during *verbroedering*, the government was an ethno-specific affair, excluded other ethnic categories whose parties were not members of the government, i.e., the Indigenous, Marrons, Chinese and other minorities. The centrifugal characteristic of Surinamese ethnic political cooperation was based on how politicians used the vote to obtain and keep the power. They did so by seeking key political positions which were necessary for the economic and political advancement of their own ethnic category²⁵.

The intricateness of the Surinamese social and political situation asks for a proactive approach to tackle complex issues that continue to be under-researched. Examples include the influence of colonialism after enslavement on the demographic development and ethnic identity, and the historical significance of the independence of 1975, a period marked by political inchoateness, systemic weakness, and institutional decay²⁶. Between 1981 and 1983, Suriname tried to experiment with socialist style, direct democracy without success. After transitioning back to democracy in 1987, western-style institutionalization and representative democracy became the norm again.

4.1 Academic freedom in Suriname before 1980

The *Universiteit van Suriname* (UvS) was established in 1966, as a teaching university. It consisted of four academic departments (*faculteiten* in Dutch): the Medical Institute, the Faculty of Law, the Faculty of Social Sciences, and the Faculty of Technology. The UvS was part of the ethnified, political and social landscape referred to before. In ethnified societies like Suriname, virtually all aspects of society have an ethnic outcome. The university system was also involved in this state of play: academic positions, tenure, lectureships, and access to funding were all subject to ethnic headcount, deployed to favor or strengthen the political and economic position of a specific ethnic category. It is logical that in such an ethnified milieu, academics avoided discussions about the system or society, because the party could put their loyalties into question. The availability examples on the effect/affect correlation between academic silencing in ethnified societies are typically limited, but one of the most compelling examples of academic silencing prior to 1980 is the *Abendanon Rapport*, which contained the results of an investigation carried out by a specially appointed commission of five prominent academics²⁷. This commission was mandated by the parliament to examine the

²⁵ K. Chandra, *Why Ethnic Parties Succeed: Patronage and Ethnic Headcounts in India*, Cambridge University Press, 2004, digitally printed paperback version 2007; Z. Bulutgil, N. Prasad, *Inequality and Voting among Deprived Ethnic Groups: Evidence from India*, in *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, 2019, tandfonline.com.

²⁶ B. Sedoc-Dalhberg (Ed.), *The Dutch Caribbean: Prospects for Democracy*, OPA Amsterdam, 1990.

²⁷ Rapport van het Nederlands Juristen Comité voor de Mensenrechten (N.J.C.M.).

ongoing crisis in the army. The conclusion was that the government lacked experience and oversight to deal with a crisis of that magnitude. Furthermore, because of the crisis in the army, the situation in the country was “precarious” and “volatile”. The commission urged the government to act immediately, but the Prime Minister, Henck Arron, ignored the findings of the commission: «Het rapport verdween in een lade. En er werd niet meer over gepraat»²⁸.

The second example of academic silencing before 1980 came as a footnote in *Tropische Tribaden* by the sociologist Rudolf van Lier. He argues that he was forced to terminate his field work in Suriname – about female-female sexual relationships – after being threatened²⁹.

These two examples suggest that academic silencing was present in Suriname before 1980, the year of the military coup. If this is true, what is the difference between academic silencing before 1980 and after 1980, the year when the military took over government? Is there a correlation between academic silencing, existing social and cultural norms, values, and attitudes? In 1968, Arendt Lijphart, in his seminal work *The Politics of Accommodation* argued that in societies with autocratic tendencies, people are more likely to defer and submit themselves because they are taught not to question authorities or challenge their decisions³⁰. The conjecture here is that autocratic tendencies are grounded in colonialism and enslavement, though in Suriname the political system encouraged these tendencies. Within a monolithic system, there is little room for debate or oppositional voices.

4.2 *The Revolution and Iconization*

In January 1980, the government headed by Henck Arron lost its parliamentary majority and called new elections on 25 March 1980. But in the early morning of 25 February 1980, a group of sixteen commissioned officers staged an overthrow. This overthrow, which represented the culmination of five years of political crises and institutional breakdowns, ushered in a new government that claimed to bring back law and order, and look after the interests of the people.

Political parties and other civil organizations from the ideological Left and left-leaning bodies rushed to offer their services, to assist the new military leaders in their endeavor to put people center stage. The new regime chose three radical left-wing parties – *Volkspartij, Revolutionaire Volkspartij* (RVP) and the *Progressieve Landbouwers Unie* (PALU) – to help to set up the new government under the

²⁸ Translation Dutch-English: «He [The Prime- Minister] put the *Abendanon Rapport* in a drawer and (they, the government) never discussed its contents». Between 2004 and 2006 N. Adama interviewed 28 politicians, policymakers, and civil servants about the political system in Suriname, the military dictatorship, and the ongoing economic crisis for her PhD thesis. The results of these interviews were blogged in natascha23.blogspot.com.

²⁹ R. van Lier, *Tropische Tribaden: Een verhandeling over homoseksualiteit en homoseksuele vrouwen in Suriname (Caribbean series)* [Tropical Tribes: A discourse on homosexuality and homosexual females in Suriname], KITLV, 1986.

³⁰ A. Lijphart, *The Politics of Accommodation: Pluralism and Democracy in the Netherlands*, University of California Press, 1968.

leadership of the moderate leftist cardiologist Henk Chin A. Sen. At first, people were happy with the new regime: the younger generations, because they were looking for jobs and opportunities; the older generations, because they expected the restoration of law and order. The military, at first, delivered on their promises: some of the commissioned officers inspired by the struggle of the Sandinistas, the Cuban revolution, Che Guevara, and Fidel Castro started to engage young people, by organizing them into people's committees (*volkscommittees* in Dutch). On national TV, the new regime demonstrated how law and order was restored. Footage of soldiers beating alleged criminals or manhandling disobedient citizens who violated the curfew helped to win the hearts of the older generation. Jules Sedney argued that the readiness with which the people accepted human rights violations was perplexing³¹. The acceptance of violence during the military regime further supports the argumentation that autocratic tendencies were already embedded in society.

In her essay *Social Revolutions and Mass Military Mobilization*, Skocpol maintains that the construction of the revolution occurs along the lines of an established pattern, beginning with the establishment of a new intellectual order, to help to legitimize the overthrow of the government, and, henceforth, reconsolidate state power³². The revolution in Suriname developed along a similar pattern, whereby the new revolutionary order tried to construct a revolution through the pursuit of 1) loyal and obedient "soldiers" to help mobilize the people and articulate the message that the revolution was on its way 2) obedient and diligent workers to help build the new nation.

The ambitious agenda to radically overhaul the Surinamese social and political system could only come to fruition with the help of an extensive propaganda machinery, similar to the Cuban one, or the *Belle Lettres* by the Bolsheviks in Moscow. The Surinamese revolution wanted to inspire, so the new order presented as a credible alternative, but there were no *Belle Lettres*, namely: no credible cultural policy that could either emancipate or modernize. Early in the revolution, they tried to aggrandize Louis Doedel, the first trade union leader and the number one enemy of the colonial regime, who had spent most of his life locked up in a mental hospital on the outskirts of Paramaribo. Nevertheless, the "iconization" of Mr. Doedel failed to catch on, despite massive efforts on the part of the revolutionaries. People did not know about the colonial atrocities and failed to understand the historical meaning of Louis Doedel as a freedom fighter and political activist³³.

The second attempt to create a hero-system came from the military regime. Slagveer writes that the "De Jongens" ("the Boys", a colloquial term to denote the

³¹J. Sedney, *De toekomst van ons verleden, democratie, ethniciteit en politieke machtsvorming in Suriname* [The future of Our Past, democratization, ethnicity, and political power in Suriname], Vaco NV., Uitgeversmaatschappij, 1997.

³² T. Skocpol, *Social Revolutions and Mass Military Mobilization*, in *World Politics*, Vol. 40 No. 2, 1988.

³³ E. Klinkers, *Groniek*, 2011, jdbsc.rug.nl

new regime), drew inspiration for the overthrow from three Marron freedom fighters, *Baron, Boni* and *Joli Coeur*³⁴. The problem is that Josef Slagveer's *De Nacht van de Revolutie* is not a reliable rendition of that specific historical period. His work is an attempt to praise the new military regime, positioning it as saviors.

The Surinamese Spring was short. By September 1980, the situation took a turn for the worst after two failed countercoup attempts and infighting within the ranks of the military, which concerned some ideological strategies. Street protests organized by university and high-school students. *Het Bureau Volksmobilisatie*, a special communication unit, was established to deflect, and to mobilize and organize the people with the help of art and music. However, the political communication that consisted of slogans, songs, and propaganda, and that typically disseminated via state-owned media outlets, failed to set in.

The messages did not become mainstream because of the McCarty-style propaganda. The words *hoedt u voor het rode gevaar*³⁵ uttered by the Prime Minister Pengel in the 1960s became relevant again during the military regime, that is when people were confronted with Cuban presence in the capital through word of mouth (*Mofo-koranti* in Dutch). In 1980, the Cuban government opened an embassy in Suriname. The new ambassador, Osvaldo Cardenas, and his staff actively participated in local cultural and political life. In 1983, the *New York Times* wrote that American diplomats argued against a possible “Cuban Game Plan”, a plan to use Suriname as a steppingstone to a revolution in the rest of the South American continent³⁶. The fact that the Cuban Communist party sent one of its highest-ranking officials, Mr. Cardenas, as its ambassador, strengthens the belief that there was a “Cuban Game plan”.

4.3 Academic Freedom after 1980

There is no evidence to support the claims that the “Cuban game plan” also involved the transformation of the Surinamese university into a *ontwikkelingsuniversiteit* (“development university”). There is significant evidence to substantiate claims that the plans to transform the UvS were put forward by a group of Dutch-Surinamese and Surinamese intellectuals³⁷. Strategies to review academic provision through the incorporation of Marxist and Neo-Marxist teachings were set in motion in the early days of the revolution, despite the fact that Desi Bouterse, and Roy Horb, two prominent putschists, in 1981, staunchly rejected the idea of a Cuban-style revolution. In the fall of 1981, Glenn Sankatsing, a lecturer at the UvS, presented a project to turn the university into a “development

³⁴ J. Slagveer, *De Nacht van de Revolutie: De staatsgreep in Suriname op 25 februari 1980* [De Night of the Revolution: The Military Overthrow of 25 February 1980], C. Kersten & Co. N.V., 1980. Josef Slagveer was executed in December 1982 by the military regime.

³⁵ In English: «Beware of the Communists».

³⁶ [nytimes.com/1983/01/28/world/in-suriname-they-make-you-full-of-holes-man.html](https://www.nytimes.com/1983/01/28/world/in-suriname-they-make-you-full-of-holes-man.html).

³⁷ G. Sankatsing, A. Ten Berge, *Movimientos populares y partidos políticos en Suriname*, in *Revista Mexicana de Sociología*, Vol. 43 No.2, Apr.- June, 1981, 679-690.

university”. The *Vereniging van Wetenschappelijk Personeel Universiteit* (VWPU) chaired by dr. Gerard Leckie, a sociologist, and the dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences, supported by student organizations, protested against the politicization of the university. The situation escalated after the minister of education, Harold Rusland, sided with what Leckie called the “splinter group”, led Glenn Sankatsing and Arthur ten Berge. In March 1982, Dr. Baan Oemrawsingh, a professor of Medicine at the UvS was found dead. His death is not connected to the protests taking place at the university. Mr Oemrawsingh’ murder is associated with the failed coup attempted in March 1982, though his death fueled the feelings of unrest in the academic community. Throughout 1982, the VWPU, together with students and civil organizations, among others *Organizatie voor Gerechtigheid en Vrede* (“Organization for Peace and Justice”) protested against the military regime in general and its infiltration in academia in particular. In November 1982, the VWPU, together with other civil organizations and the trade union De Moederbond, issued a letter in which they demanded that the military return back to the barracks, and allow the organizing of free and fair elections. On December 8, 1982, Gerard Leckie and other leaders of the civil movement were executed by the military regime. Surgrim Oemrawsing, a mathematician and a lecturer at the UvS was also executed on December 8, 1982. There is no information available to link Mr. Oemrawsingh’s execution to the protests at the UvS.

4.4 Anton de Kom as a Palimpsest

In December 1982, the University of Suriname closed its doors permanently, and in October 1983, a new university was built. Plans for a *Development University* in name of Anton de Kom came to fruition, and all “subversive elements”, “CIA-agents”, and “exponents of colonialism” were removed from office. The opening of the university, came with the construction of a hero-system, to underpin the revolution that started on 10 October 1983, with the proclamation of the *Stanvastebeweging* (“Allegiant Movement”). The Revolution was short-lived – a blimp in Suriname’s tumultuous history – and was abruptly terminated when the Americans invaded Grenada on 25 October 1983. The official conclusion of the revolution did not affect the plans to construct a hero-system based on Anton de Kom.

Hans Ramssoedh and Peter Sanches regard the act of the regime to turn Anton de Kom into the symbol of the revolution as an “act of recognition”³⁸. As the leader of the revolution, Desi Bouterse spoke in favor of «a politicized institute of higher learning rooted in the streets to help and assist the people»³⁹.

The fact that Desi Bouterse in 1983 embraced the idea of a socialist revolution and communism – after he had staunchly rejected it in 1980 – concerns the

³⁸ H. Ramssoedh, P. Sanches, *Vijfenzeventig jaar Wij slaven van Suriname; De turbulente biografie van een boek* [Seventy-Five Years We Slaves of Suriname; The Turbulent Biography of a Book], in *Oso, Tijdschrift voor de Surinamistiek*, Vol. 29 No 1, April 2010, 14.

³⁹ *Ibidem*.

geopolitical position of Suriname after the December massacres in 1982. The decision to join Cuba and Grenada as the South American allies of Moscow came after Suriname was given “pariah” status by the western powers following the December events. Therefore, the iconization of Anton de Kom was grounded on pragmatism and opportunism.

The iconization process was part of a hero-system that also involved the mobilization and organization of the people, the emancipation of women, and the inclusion of those who were previously marginalized. An example of these emancipation efforts was the literacy program called “Alfa 84”, an ambitious initiative to alphabetize the people having clear Marxist implications. The Organization of American States in their second report on the human rights situation wrote: «In 1984 the Government commenced a literacy program for children and adults called Alfa 84. Considerable criticism has been leveled at this effort on the ground that the content of the program is highly ideological»⁴⁰.

Despite the ideological reorientation which followed the invasion of Grenada, the iconization of Anton de Kom continued through the same anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist perspective. Mr. de Kom became the symbol of scholarship and science, the figurehead of the “*Stanvastebeweging*” in 1984, and in 1986 his image featured the new Surinamese currency, introduced preemptively to control the monetary supplies with the rebels in the east of the country and as method to finance raging inflation⁴¹. Despite the omnipresence of Mr. de Kom in social and political life, the iconization process was not successful. All efforts to position Anton de Kom as a hero and a freedom fighter backfired. People typically associated Anton de Kom with human rights violations, brutality, and violence, rampant inflation, and decline. In 2010, Desi Bouterse became president of Suriname and tried again to reposition Anton de Kom as a national icon, and a figurehead of his nationalistic and anti- Dutch political platform. This attempt also backfired because advocates of Anton de Kom refused to cooperate.

The Surinamese revolution was a short-lived, but impactful, socio-political experiment: after the invasion of Grenada in 1983, the military leadership positioned Suriname internationally as a non-aligned nation. Despite ideological reorientation, the iconization process of Anton de Kom continued.

4.5 Anton de Kom, the Symbol of Dutch Black Power

The iconization of Anton de Kom in the Netherlands is multidimensional and transcend cultural boundaries. The multidimensional character of this process explains the development of Anton de Kom as an icon from different angles. The iconization first happened at the elite level, with attempts by the advocates of Anton de Kom to clear Anton de Kom’s reputation in the Netherlands. After his brief stay

⁴⁰ OEA/Ser.L/V/II.66 doc.21 rev. 12 October 1985, in cidh.org/countryrep/Suriname85eng/chap.8.htm.

⁴¹ The *Stanvastebeweging* [Allegiant Movement]) replaced the *Volksmilitie* [Peoples Militia], as vehicle for mobilization and organization of the people. In 1987, the *Stanvastebeweging* went on in the National Democratic Party, led by the commander-in-chief, Desi Bouterse.

in Suriname, he was branded as a communist and an agitator. The lobby efforts by his family coincided with plans by the Bouterse regime in 2010, to reposition Mr. de Kom as a national hero. The *Commissie Herijking Nederlandse Canon* (Committee for the Re-evaluation of the Dutch Canon) led by Professor James Kennedy in 2016 concluded that the historical evidence needed for the rehabilitation of Mr. de Kom was substantial and that he is the first Black Dutch symbol of Freedom and Resistance. Mr. de Kom became the symbol of the grassroots Dutch-Afro-Caribbean community, because they needed a symbol, a source of inspiration, rooted in the Dutch-African identity. The historical evidence of Anton de Kom's activities as a liberator and emancipator is based on activities during a very brief stay (one month) in Suriname in 1932, and on a brief stint as a member of the Dutch resistance (1945). The question is whether this historical evidence is enough to position Mr. de Kom as an icon and a historical figure.

Is Anton de Kom a freedom fighter comparable to for example Malcolm X, the founder of Black Power? In her *Surinam's Cultural Memory: Of Crown and Knife* written in 1980, Hilda van Neck Yoder sheds some light on the importance of Anton de Kom, for both Suriname and for Dutch Black Power in the Netherlands⁴². Van Neck Yoder regards Anton de Kom as an important Surinamese writer and thinker, but not as a freedom fighter. She compares de Kom's work to other volumes written during the same period. Van Neck Yoder looks at his contribution to the empowerment of the Afro-Surinamese, and to the country's socio-economic advancement. I want to mention Carl P. Rier (1863-1917), because, as Van Neck Yoder writes «[Rier is] one of the most influential initiators of 'National- Negro-consciousness [...] [because] he was one of the few writers before 1950 to insist proudly on the African heritage of Black Suriname'»⁴³. She refers to *Wij Slaven van Suriname*, as an important, albeit not groundbreaking, contribution to the empowerment and emancipation of the Afro-Surinamese ethnic category.

5. Conclusion

Wij Slaven van Suriname is a «recognizable model of critical scholarship in history, literature, and anthropology»⁴⁴. Its ubiquity and interdisciplinary character quality stems from the way the writer used his penmanship to engage his audience, and the manner in which he expressed himself to convey his message. *Wij Slaven van Suriname* is written as a pamphlet that decries without accusing, that speaks to both the oppressed and the oppressors. Its bellicose tone is accusatory, but at the same time appeasing, because the writer wants to soothe the consciousness of this audience, the white Dutch man. And herein lies the conundrum: both the radical left in Suriname in 1980, and the proponents of the Dutch Black Power movement

⁴² H. van Neck Yoder, *Surinam's Cultural Memory: Of Crown and Knife*, in *CLA Journal*, Vol. 24 No. 2, December 1980, 173-181.

⁴³ *Idem*, 175.

⁴⁴ G. Prakash, *Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism*, in *American Historical Review*, 1994, 1476, jan.ucc.nau.edu/sj6/prakashpostcolonialAHA.pdf.

today, refuse to accept the fact that de Kom's proposed strategy to end colonialism is premised on Eurocentric conceptions. In 1982, the Surinamese academics who voiced their concerns over the politicization of the university were brutally silenced. Today, questions on the role of Anton de Kom in Suriname are still not addressed properly, because scholars are still prevented from addressing concerns relating to the narrative on which the iconization is premised. The extent of academic silencing during the military regime was even more visible in the contemporary period. It is presumed that between 1980 and 1992, a significant number of lecturers went into exile, and more than 10,000 students left the country between 1982 and 2000. The problem was that the Dutch government typically refused to grant Surinamese refugees so-called "A-status". In 1983, Sedoc-Dalhberg argued that «It is important to note that 65% of those who tried to escape to Holland after the massacre were unable to do so because the Dutch embassy refused to deliver them a visa. Moreover, only 45 (0.03%) who successfully obtained a visa received a permit to stay in Holland»⁴⁵.

The controversy surrounding the iconization of Anton de Kom summarized how academic silencing in Suriname worked then and now. Today, academic silencing continues to frame the Surinamese academic landscape. Since its inauguration, the new university has been affected by political machinations and infighting. Professorships and Doctorates are typically honorary degrees, that is currencies for political loyalty.

The disruption resulting from academic silencing is profound: loss of lives, knowledge, and credibility.

Empirical evidence indicates that Desi Bouterse in August 1980 rejected the idea of a socialist Revolution and communism. Arguably, the decision to join Cuba and Grenada as the South-American allies of Moscow came after being ostracized by the western world following the December 1982-massacres. The military regime resorted to violence, to scapegoat, and create "we-against-them" contrapositions, in an effort to justify human rights violations.

⁴⁵ B. Sedoc-Dalhberg, *Refugees from Suriname*, in *Canada's Journal of Refugees*, cit.