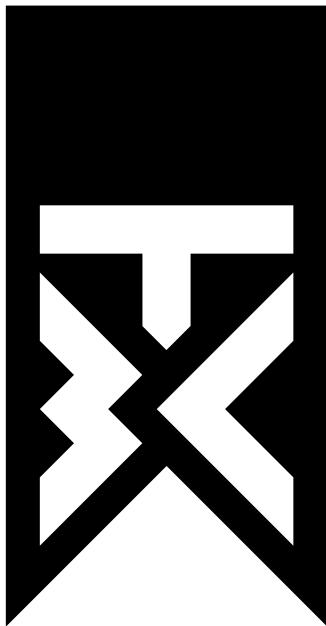


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100 YEARS VOS
ENGLISH - HANDOUT

SURINAMESE PEOPLE IN THE NETHERLANDS: 100 YEARS OF EMANCIPATION AND STRUGGLE

On January 18, 2019, Vereniging Ons Suriname (V.O.S.) celebrated its 100th anniversary. From December 13, 2019 to December 5th 2020 the exhibition “Vereniging Ons Suriname: 100 years of emancipation and struggle” can be seen. It is a compelling story that shows a history of struggle, resistance and emancipation.

1919-1939

THE BEGINNING OF SURINAMESE ASSOCIATIONS IN THE NETHERLANDS

Vereniging Ons Suriname (V.O.S.) is one of the oldest Surinamese organizations in the Netherlands, which has campaigned against racism and colonialism and for emancipation and independence. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Surinamese people united to achieve a better socio-economic position in the Netherlands. Because of colonialism and the limited possibilities in the colony, Surinamese people were looking for a better future in the Netherlands. However, this did not come without a struggle.

DE BOND VAN SURINAMERS (ASSOCIATION OF SURINAMESE PEOPLE)

In 1919 the first precursor of V.O.S. called the Bond van Surinamers was set up. After several meetings, the purpose of the association meetings was determined: to unite Surinamese people in the Netherlands within one organization. This allowed their interests to be represented and their rights to be protected. The aim was also to maintain a good relationship and exchange between Surinamese in Suriname and Surinamese people who lived in the Netherlands.

VEREENIGING SURINAUME (SURINAME SOCIETY/ASSOCIATION)

The number of Surinamese people in the Netherlands increased in the 1920s. The Bond van Surinamers (Association of Surinamese), mainly an elite who came to study and work in the Netherlands, decided in 1924 to change its name to "Vereeniging Suriname" (Suriname Association), with the intention of contributing to the social and economic flourishing of Suriname.

In addition to the elite, stowaways, hidden on ships, made the crossing from Suriname to the Netherlands. The general members of the Vereeniging Suriname (Suriname Society/Association) disapproved of the reception of these newcomers by the association.

They found that their association was not set up to help “stowaways” and unemployed shipping personnel. However, Chairman Gemmel had broader views. Nevertheless, he decided to assist stowaways and the less fortunate in finding shelter and work and in health conditions. He did that inside and outside of his board life.

Among the “stowaways” that came to the Netherlands there also were well-known Surinamese jazz musicians who had flourishing careers in the 1930s. The later known jazz musicians “Prins Kaya” (Frans Vroom) and Frits Blijd (or Freddy Blythe, Jimmy Blue or Rico Fernando) were visitors and active members of the “Vereniging Suriname”.

JAZZ

SURINAMESE JAZZSCENE BANNED DURING WWII

During the Second World War, German occupiers considered listening to jazz music a major evil. Shortly after the outbreak of the war, a prohibition on playing followed which was co-introduced by professor Dr. T. Goedewaagen: “It is well known that the n*gro lives out his jungle instincts mainly in dance music. The consequences of this have proved disastrous for the youth; Young people who are trapped by the sensual n*gro-rhythm are usually permanently disabled for receiving nobler musical feelings.”

Nevertheless, the jazz clubs remained open. The jazz musicians continued to play, because the playing ban was not strictly enforced. In 1943, the clubs in The Hague, Rotterdam, Scheveningen and Amsterdam, for example, were gradually closed.

1940-1945

SURINAME AND SURINAMESE DURING WWII

The Second World War marked a turning point in colonial history. The Netherlands was occupied by Nazi Germany, but at the same

time it occupied the colonies of Suriname and the Dutch Antilles. The war had a major impact on the Surinamese colony and its inhabitants, as well as on the Surinamese people in the Netherlands. The activities of the association stopped during the Second World War. There were, however, activities of individual members, for example in the resistance against the Nazis.

ROYAL DUTCH STEAMBOAT COMPANY

Since 1853, the Royal Dutch Steamboat Company [Koninklijke Nederlandse Stoomboot Maatschappij (KNSM)] has transported freight and passengers between Suriname, the Netherlands and the United States. During the Second World War, dozens of sailors from Suriname and the Netherlands Antilles worked for this shipping company. At this time, ships ran the risk of being torpedoed by German ships. Several Surinamese and Caribbean sailors were killed as a result. Chris Meijer, aka Pa Meijer, was one of the sailors who was torpedoed twice, but he survived:

“We would go to Russia. In the evening I was playing cards when news came: submarine on the port side. We started packing our papers together and at a quarter past eight we were hit by a torpedo in the oil tank. The officers went into a life raft. The barge was on fire. We have taken the shutters and made rafts ourselves. We left the ship wearing life jackets and drove around for hours in bitter cold until a warship saved us.”

INTERNMENT

The war also created movement within Surinamese society. After a speech by Queen Wilhelmina, in which she promised more autonomy for the colonies, the Suriname Union was established in Suriname. This group of mainly Surinamese people from the higher classes aimed for unity between the different population groups and autonomy for Suriname under the slogan “Baas in Eigen Huis” (Boss In Own House). Among the founders were Surinamese States member Wim Bos Verschuur and the later governor of Suriname, Johan Ferrier.

The then governor of Suriname, Johannes Kielstra, saw the sound of “Baas in Eigen Huis” as an “anti-Dutch vote” and a threat to the colonial order. He had dozens of Surinamese interned. Among

them was the most outspoken member of the Suriname Union: Wim Bos Verschuur.

Eddy Bruma, who was still a student at the time, felt inspired by Wim Bos Verschuur and the Boss In Own House movement. Eddy Bruma was imprisoned with other young people on suspicion of preparing a coup. Otto Huiswoud and George Gunther, who later both became active at V.O.S., were also imprisoned on the basis of suspicions of “communist sympathies.”

AUTONOMY?

THE PROMISE OF MORE AUTONOMY

The war put pressure on the Netherlands to change its relationship with the colonies. Although black people in the United States (US) did not have equal rights, the US promoted the freedom and self-determination of all peoples abroad. Under pressure from the US, Queen Wilhelmina signed the “Atlantic Charter” in 1941. This was a precursor to the United Nations, which stated that all peoples had the right to self-determination. On December 7, 1942, Queen Wilhelmina promised more autonomy to the colonies in a speech. This gave hope to the Surinamese who sought a more independent status.

LEO LASHLEY

Leo Lashley was active at the V.O.S. department in Rotterdam. He was born in 1903 in Nieuw Nickerie in Suriname. As a young man he emigrated to the Netherlands to study medicine. In 1930 he obtained his PhD in ophthalmology. Shortly thereafter he got married and then settled with his family in Rotterdam as an eye doctor.

During the war, Leo Lashley was chairman of the Rotterdam doctors association. From that position he protested in 1942 against the establishment of the Nazi Doctors' Room. He also participated in the resistance by helping people in hiding. Leo Lashley was a strict believer and went to church on Breeplein in Rotterdam every Sunday. This church offered hiding places to three Jewish families. When one of the women in hiding became pregnant, Leo Lashley was the only doctor willing to help. In 1944, by reading into midwifery, he helped with the secret birth of baby Emile. After

being arrested a few times, Leo Lashley went into hiding until the war ended.

After the war, Leo Lashley remained active in Surinamese club life and in the city of Rotterdam. However, he left the Netherlands because of racism and discrimination:

“Immediately after the liberation, he played a very prominent role in the construction of the municipal administration. As he is colored, he would have to some extent worked out of this position, which has greatly hurt him” can be read in reports from the Internal Security Service.

In 1947, Leo Lashley was a board member of the van Surinaamsche Vereenigingen (Federation of Surinamese Associations) on behalf of V.O.S.. A year later he left for Curaçao where he worked as an editor for the magazine El Dorado.

BAUXITE

THE STRATEGIC FUNCTION OF SURINAME

Suriname played an important role during the Second World War. More than 65% of the bauxite needed to manufacture American military aircraft came from Suriname. Bauxite is the raw material for aluminum and had been extracted by American and Dutch companies in Suriname since the beginning of the twentieth century. To protect the strategic supplies, the US stationed a military force in Suriname. Substantial investments were made to extract the raw material. The export of bauxite became an important pillar of the Surinamese economy.

AWARENESS AND STRUGGLE

After the Second World War a major transition took place within the association. This change took place within the context of internationally emerging decolonization movements, changing relationships between the Netherlands and Suriname and increasing migration from Surinamese to the Netherlands.

1946-1964

MERGERS AND SPLITS

NEW NAME: ‘VERENIGING ONS SURINAME’ (ASSOCIATION OUR SURINAME)

Vereeniging Suriname became active again after the Second World War. There was a growing need to breathe new life into Surinamese association life. Another association with the name “New Suriname” flourished in the same period. After a few conversations between the two associations, they came to the conclusion that the forces had to be combined. This happened in 1946: the work of both associations was continued under the new name “Vereniging Ons Suriname” (V.O.S.).

SOLIDARITY AND COOPERATION

An important branch of the association’s work was the Social Commission which was led by Sister Annie Gemmel after the war. Annie Gemmel was the sister of co-founder Julius Gemmel and was trained as a nurse in Amsterdam before the Second World War. After the war she left Suriname for the Netherlands and became active for the Social Commission of V.O.S. She assisted disadvantaged Surinamese in the Netherlands and continued the work of her brother.

Annie Gemmel raised money for various activities that were covered by social work. However, this caused great tensions within the association in the early 1950s. Some members thought that the association should focus on the original association goals that had once been set by Surinamese from the higher classes of society and that did not include social work. Gemmel therefore had to hand over her budget for social work to these members of V.O.S. Pa Meijer, who was also an active member at the time, said in a later interview about this: “Look, the ‘elite lords’ had turned up in the association. They did not like the fact that we were doing politics. We workers also didn’t have a chance to join the board.”

THE “STATUTE”: NEGOTIATIONS ON COLONIAL RELATIONS

Suriname was governed as a colony until 1949. Only 2% of the population had the right to vote for the “Colonial States” and a

governor appointed by the Dutch government had the most political power in the colonies.

Only in 1949 were the first elections with universal suffrage held in Suriname. The National Party Suriname (NPS), with a predominantly Afro-Surinamese constituency, and the United Hindustani Party (VHP), with a predominantly Hindustani constituency, became the most influential parties in Suriname. Politics was strongly divided along ethnic lines. The NPS became the largest party under the leadership of Johan Pengel.

To realize the promise of autonomy, a few Round Table Conferences were organized. Here representatives of the Netherlands Antilles, Suriname and the Netherlands negotiated a Statute in which the constitutional relations within the kingdom would be established on the basis of equality. The Statute was adopted in 1954. The members of V.O.S., however, were fiercely opposed to the agreements laid down in the Statute, because they felt that it had changed far too little.

THE MANIFEST AGAINST THE STATUTE

Otto Huiswoud and the anti-colonial activists within V.O.S. strongly opposed the agreements laid down in the Statute. According to them, it was a continuation of the colonial relationships. Suriname was said to have self-government on domestic affairs according to the Statute, but foreign affairs and defense remained in Dutch hands. In addition, the Surinamese and Antillean governor were to be appointed by the queen and, if necessary, they could suspend the Constitution and deploy the Dutch army. V.O.S., cultural association Wie Eegie Sani, the Surinamese Student Association and the Suriname Committee jointly wrote a statement in which they rejected the Statute.

The critical noise from V.O.S. did not go unnoticed. Due to the anti-colonial activities and publications, V.O.S. was closely monitored by the National Security Service (BVD).

HERMINA AND OTTO HUISWOU'D AND THE POLITICIZATION OF V.O.S.

After the arrival of Otto and Hermina Huiswoud, V.O.S. Otto was born in 1893 in Suriname and Hermina in Guyana in 1905. At a young age they ended up in New York in the US. Otto was the only black co-founder of the US communist party, the CPUSA. The two met in New York during the Harlem Renaissance and became active as a couple in the international, black, communist movement.

The couple left for Amsterdam after the Second World War where they became active within V.O.S. Otto became a board member in 1948 and chairman in 1954. Under his leadership, V.O.S. became a breeding ground for anti-colonial activism among Surinamese in the Netherlands.

PUBLICATIONS (DRAWER)

THE COURIER

From October 1954 to October 1956, the working committee of V.O.S. published a monthly newspaper called the Courier ('De Koerier'). The influence of Otto Huiswoud is strongly reflected in the publication. In addition to critical articles about colonialism and imperialism in Suriname, many articles were published about the growing liberation movements in the rest of the world. For example, a series of articles about the Statute was published. There was also praise for liberation movements in countries such as Ghana and Algeria.

THE WEST INDIAN

From 1952 to 1954, the publication The West Indian ('De Westindier') appeared from the circles of WES and VOS. The editor-in-chief of the monthly newspaper was Eugene Th. Waaldijk. Waaldijk had come to the Netherlands as a student and was active within V.O.S and Wie Eegie Sani. Fellow board members Bruma, Gessel and Eersel regularly wrote articles about cultural and political developments in Suriname. Waaldijk's partner Hilly Axwijk assisted in editing the newspaper. The newspaper was funded by the Foundation for Cultural Cooperation with Suriname and the Netherlands Antilles (Sticusa).

CULTURAL SHOCK

The composition of the Surinamese migrants changed after the Second World War. In addition to people from the elite, more and more working-class men were crossing the ocean for work or study. Upon arrival in the Netherlands, many experienced a culture shock. In the colony they were taught that everything that was European was superior to their own language and cultural traditions. They had to be humble, this was called “sakafasi”. Sranan Tongo was labeled “N*gro-English” and the spiritual tradition Winti was prohibited by law through the “de-Africanization” process. In the Netherlands, however, the Surinamese noticed that this world view was incorrect.

SRANAN TONGO

AWARENESS OF “OUR OWN VALUE”

The members of Wie Eegie Sani (W.E.S.) became increasingly aware of the cultural influence of colonialism and the need to revalue their own language and culture. Language played an important role in cultural revolution. Language was seen not only as a means of communication, but as the engine of awareness and Surinamese nationalism. Eddy Bruma was inspired by Julius “Papa” Koenders who, before the war, fought through his newspaper Foetoeboei for the emancipation of Sranan Tongo.

CULTURAL (R)EVOLUTION

Members of Wie Eegi Sani met at V.O.S. The organizations regularly organized cultural activities together, such as Keti Koti celebrations, lectures and theater plays, including “The Birth of Boni”. Wie Eegi Sani held weekly “kon makandras”, meetings with discussions about Surinamese culture, history and political developments. Here only Sranan Tongo was spoken, the birth of cultural (r)evolution.

THE POLITICAL VALUE OF ART

During the meetings of Wie Eegie Sani, intellectuals, musicians, artists and workers met. One of the important places where these meetings took place was the home of the white artist Nola Hatterman. She rented out rooms to Surinamese, such as jazz musician Prins Kaya. She was also an active member of V.O.S. and she helped Wie Eegie Sani with making sets, illustrations and more.

Michael Slory joined Wie Eegi Sani and V.O.S. during this period; This had a major impact on his political consciousness. He grew to be one of the most important poets of Suriname. Sranan Tongo was previously called condescendingly “N*ger-english”. Partly due to the poetry of Slory and the cultural movement of W.E.S. and V.O.S. it became more accepted to speak the language.

KULTURU (DRAWER)

AWARENESS OF “OUR OWN THING”

The members of Wie Eegi Sani (Our Own Thing, W.E.S.) became increasingly aware of the cultural influence of colonialism and the need to reassess their own language and culture. Language played an important role in cultural reappraisal. Language was seen not only as a means of communication, but as the motor of awareness and Surinamese nationalism. Eddy Bruma was inspired by Julius “Papa” Koenders who, through his newspaper Foetoeboei, already stood up for the emancipation of Sranan Tongo (Surinamese language) before the war.

CULTURAL (R) EVOLUTION

Members of Wie Eegi Sani met at V.O.S. The organizations regularly organized cultural activities together, such as Keti Koti celebrations, lectures and plays, including “The Birth of Boni”. Wi Eegi Sani weekly “kon makandras”, meetings with discussions about Surinamese culture, history and political developments. They only spoke in Sranan Tongo, the epitome of cultural (r) evolution.

A NEW GENERATION AT THE HELM

From 1945 onwards many Surinamese youngsters made use of new opportunities to study in the Netherlands. Several of them became new, active members of V.O.S. Among them were men like Frits Moll, Henk Herrenberg, Waldo Heilbron, Frits Corsten, Louis Burleson, Henry Neijhorst, Andre Haakmat and Henk Chin A Sen.

KETI KOTI CELEBRATIONS

V.O.S. also organized many activities in the 1960s. Emancipation commemorations and parties were organized around Keti Koti. On June 30, 1962, the association organized a memorable emancipation celebration in Krasnapolsky in Amsterdam, attracting nearly a thousand visitors. At the emancipation festival the demand was made that Suriname should be free on July 1, 1963. In addition, the association published newspapers and stencils with critical articles about the political and social developments in Suriname and other “third world countries”.

FRITS MOLL

Frits Moll came to Amsterdam with a scholarship in 1948 at the age of sixteen to study sociology at the University of Amsterdam. Frits Moll became chairman of the Amsterdam section of the Surinamese Student Association (SSV) and became active at V.O.S. After the death of Otto Huiswoud in 1961, Frits Moll took over the presidency of V.O.S. at about the age of 29. He continued the line of Otto Huiswoud and saw the struggle of Surinamese as part of the “international liberation struggle of the Third World”. This eventually ensured that Frits Moll was not accepted as an employee of the Surinamese government after graduating in 1963 and was forced to stay in the Netherlands.

STUDENTS

DIVISION OF AMSTERDAM STUDENTS, SUPPORTED BY V.O.S.

Under the chairmanship of Frits Moll, the Amsterdam section of the SSV became increasingly political. In January 1961, a group of Surinamese students in Amsterdam argued in an article in the *Algemeen Dagblad* for independence for Suriname. This did not go unnoticed. The national board of the SSV quickly distanced itself with the statement that the Amsterdam students did not speak on behalf of the national association. This eventually led to V.O.S. to establish a new Amsterdam student association: the Association of Surinamese Students in Amsterdam (VSSA). The founding board of the VSSA consisted of Angelique van der Geld (chairman) and Waldo Heilbron (secretary) from V.O.S. and Humprey Lamur (treasurer). In addition to the focus on independent Suriname, the VSSA

increasingly focused on the fight against racism and other political developments in the Netherlands.

LOBBYING TOWARDS DUTCH POLITICIANS

A few months after taking office as chairman of V.O.S. student Frits Moll conducted together with other “young people” within V.O.S. lobbying with Dutch political youth organizations. During the “Suriname weekend” in Bergen, the V.O.S. representatives strongly argued for Surinamese independence.

1965-1972

“SURINAMESE PEOPLE UNITE!”

In 1965, V.O.S. organized the “Congress for Unity” together with other associations to connect students, workers and people with different ideologies. The line of anti-imperialism and solidarity with other international liberation movements was continued within the association.

HUGO OLIJFVELD

Hugo Olijfveld came to Amsterdam in 1949 as a contractor for the Amsterdamsche Droogdok Maatschappij (ADM) and became active in trade union work. He was also active at an association of Surinamese workers, called “Sranan Krioro”, which later merged with V.O.S. Within V.O.S. the passionate Hugo Olijfveld played a major role in connecting students and workers, among other things as chairman of the Congress for Unity.

CONGRESS FOR UNITY

To the three-day Congress for Unity, in Amsterdam organized by V.O.S. and other organizations, both local and national Surinamese associations in the Netherlands participated. The conference members put their heads together, under the slogan: “Surinamese people unite!”.

“In the Netherlands, the cooperation of Surinamese workers and students should be focused on

- (a) the Republic of Suriname;
- b) the political education of progressive Surinamese, aimed at returning with practical knowledge;
- c) the bundling of all progressive forces;
- d) the social situation of the Surinamese in the Netherlands"- Congress for Unity

Anti-racism was also explicitly advocated.

THE IMPACT OF SURINAMESE WORKERS

From the late 1940s, many Surinamese men (welders, blacksmiths, metalworkers) were recruited in Suriname to work on the “reconstruction” of the Netherlands. This is also the case in shipbuilding at ADM. Among them were Hugo Kooks, Hugo Olijfveld and Ferry Zwakke, all of whom played a major role within V.O.S. More women left Surinam from the 1950s, when the Netherlands suffered from a shortage of nurses after the Second World War. In addition to these nurses, students and women such as Hellen Felter, Josephine Wijnaldum and Jane Wijdenbosch, who (later) became politically and socially involved with V.O.S.

FRI

In 1965, the publication FRI first appeared at the Congress of Unity. V.O.S. published this publication annually from 1965. In total, five editions were published up to the 50th anniversary of V.O.S. in 1969. FRI appeared on Keti Koti (July 1) and contained articles, book reviews and poetry about the liberation of Suriname and “the third world.”

TRINTA DI MEI

CURAÇAO UPRIISING

On May 30, 1969, a major uprising broke out in Willemstad, Curaçao. The rebellion is known as “Trinta di Mei”. The revolt was prompted by the unequal treatment and exploitation of workers who worked for Shell through the subcontractor WESCAR. WESCAR workers were paid less for the same work than the Shell workers. The conflict culminated in dissatisfaction with the economic and political situation on the island and led to a massive popular uprising. The white population had better facilities than

the black population. The Antillean government enlisted the help of the Dutch government who quickly sent Marines to intervene. Several people were shot during the uprising. A number of people were killed. A solidarity protest was organized in The Hague in which Surinamese students and members of V.O.S. were present. V.O.S. condemned the violence of the Dutch “occupation forces” in a telegram.

THE IMPACT OF TRINTA DI MEI

The uprising had a major impact. On the island, this led to political reforms. For example, for the first time a black prime minister and a black governor were appointed. Trade unions grew and Papia-mentu was increasingly accepted in official documents. At the Labor Party (PvdA) this caused a change in thinking about the relationship with the colonies. The military intervention by a former colonial motherland in an “autonomous Empire” caused the Dutch government reputation damage in international politics. The uprising in Curaçao unexpectedly accelerated the independence process of Suriname.

INTERNATIONALISM (DRAWER)

International solidarity was strong. Active members of V.O.S. saw themselves as part of an international liberation struggle in Third World countries. There was intensive contact with activists in other countries through international conferences, solidarity campaigns took place and ideas were exchanged through letters and literature. Within V.O.S. the books of Amílcar Cabral, leader of the struggle against Portuguese colonialism, Franz Fanon, leader of the struggle in Algeria, and Angela Davis who stood up for the freedom of black people in the US were read.

AN ADVERSE AGREEMENT

In 1959 the Surinamese government signed an agreement with the American company Alcoa to develop a factory in Suriname, so that the bauxite raw material could be processed locally. To meet the great need for electricity, Alcoa built a dam and a hydroelectric power station. In exchange, Alcoa received a concession to obtain bauxite for 75 years (until 2034) at low costs.

The Surinamese government cleared a large area where Saramakan Surinamese lived for this. Alcoa also received generous tax breaks. As a result, Suriname made relatively little money from bauxite mining, while the company made large profits. According to the Suriname Committee, the Surinamese government only received 2% of the selling price of the aluminum produced from Surinamese bauxite.

BAUXITE AND THE EXPLOITATION OF SURINAME

Bauxite is a raw material from which aluminum can be extracted. However, the aluminum companies benefited more from the value of this raw material than the Surinamese population and the environment.

“THE EXPLOITATION OF SURINAME”

The Surinamese economy was highly dependent on exports. In 1968, bauxite, alumina and aluminum accounted for around 87% of total Surinamese exports. Only 3% of bauxite in Suriname itself was processed into aluminum and 35% into alumina. A tonne of bauxite yielded Suriname around 40 guilders and a tonne of aluminum around 2000 guilders. The total bauxite production in Suriname was 5.5 million tonnes in 1968, of which 2 million tonnes were processed by Billiton and 2.5 million tonnes by Alcoa. In the Alcoa plant, 1.7 million tons of bauxite were melted to 860,000 tons of alumina. Approximately 100,000 tons of alumina were processed in Suriname into 50,000 tons of aluminum. In addition, much environmental damage has been caused.

THE SURINAME COMMITTEE: SOLIDARY FIGHT AGAINST NEO-COLONIALISM

In January 1970, V.O.S. organized the Aluminum Conference and started the Aluminum Committee, which developed into the Suriname Committee. The committee consisted of Surinamese and Dutch people who wanted to contribute to the liberation of Suriname by jointly fighting against neo-colonial and capitalist powers. They organized demonstrations and protests and published the Suriname Bulletin. From 1972 the Suriname Committee is located in the current exhibition space.

SURINAME COMMITTEE

The Suriname Committee intended to contribute to the fight against exploitation of Suriname and other colonies. The committee did this, among other things, by providing insight into how Dutch development aid mainly benefited Dutch and foreign companies such as Shell, Albert Heijn and Bruynzeel. Hetty and Betty Paerl, co-initiators of the Suriname Committee, contributed to the Suriname Bulletin monthly. Hetty Paerl drew sharp political prints. Nowadays she is involved with puppet theater. Betty Paerl published several books in which the exploitation of Suriname was explained as “Dutch Power in the Third World”. She then continued to fight against injustice, especially in the areas of transgender rights, intimacy and sexuality.

FIGHT THROUGH ART AND CULTURE

Culture played an important role in this period of struggle and activism. Social and political messages were transmitted through music, art, poetry and literature. V.O.S. organized weekly meetings with performances and issued the LP “Battle Songs from Suriname” by poet and activist Robin Ravales, aka Dobru. Dobru was active within the Nationalist Republic Party (PNR) of Eddy Bruma and strongly advocated independence. In 1971 he undertook an intervention during the “Decolonization Congress” because the congress was about decolonization and no Surinamese were invited to speak.

1973-1982

A NEW PLACE, A NEW BATTLE

The first fifty years of its existence, V.O.S. did not have a fixed location, but that changed in 1972. From that year on, V.O.S. established itself on the first floor of the current building on the Zeeburgerdijk in Amsterdam. During this period the work of V.O.S. was increasingly linked to anti-racism and the work of welfare foundations.

THE FIRST FLOOR ON THE ZEEBURGERDIJK

Hugo Olijfveld died in 1967. V.O.S. members who had worked with Hugo Olijfveld thought that if a building were to come, it would be

nice to name it after him. This happened with the floor that V.O.S. obtained in 1972: the first floor of the building on the Zeeburgerdijk was renamed the “Hugo Olijfveld House”. From that moment on cultural events, women’s groups, folk theater, homework guidance, July 1 celebrations, parties and other activities were organized here.

GREAT MIGRATION TO THE NETHERLANDS

Due to high unemployment and economic uncertainty in Suriname, many people wanted to move to the Netherlands in the early 1970s. Especially when it became clear that Suriname would become independent in 1975 and that people were allowed to settle in the Netherlands until 1980 at the latest, many moved. Finally, between 1970 and 1980, around 140,000 people moved from Suriname to the Netherlands. That was almost half of the Surinamese population.

The Dutch government responded by making subsidies available for welfare work aimed at Surinamese. Subsidized welfare organizations then emerged throughout the Netherlands.

SPREADING POLICY

In 1974 the Dutch government started a national “spreading policy” in order to ward off and “spread” Surinamese (and other people with a migrant background). The Central Office for the Implementation of Country People’s Establishment Policy was established in The Hague, which was intended to spread people (“immigrants”) from Suriname as much as possible throughout the Netherlands. In the meantime, Amsterdam designated neighborhoods, streets and porches, where people from Suriname and “guest workers” from Turkey and Morocco were no longer welcome. No more than one family of an “ethnic minority” was allowed per portico. Surinamese people, their organizations and other migrant groups throughout the Netherlands soon opposed the spread policy.

GUEST HOUSES

Another thorn in the eye of Surinamese activist organizations were the so-called “guest houses”. Many Surinamese families

were “taken care of” in guest houses in the Netherlands. These were often crowded, unsanitary and flammable rooms in which too many people were placed in very small spaces. In 1973 the city council spoke of a “state of emergency” in Amsterdam around guest houses with Surinamese. Various protests took place in and around guest houses.

BIJLMER SQUATTING ACTION

There was a lot of vacancy in Amsterdam’s Bijlmer district. In 1974 a group of Surinamese home seekers (mostly from boarding houses) took matters into their own hands and squatted eighty vacant houses in the Gliphoeve apartment building in the Bijlmer: the “Bijlmer squat action”. The squatted flat became a national specter of “ghetto formation.” This was what could happen, said politicians and policymakers who advocated spreading policies, when Surinamese went to live together in large groups. However, the decline of the flats was largely caused by poor maintenance and management by the housing corporations and the municipality.

1975

SREFIDENSI

WELFARE

WELFARE FOUNDATION “BEST”

The number of Surinamese in the Netherlands increased and with it also social problems, such as discrimination and exclusion. In the hope of nevertheless gaining a place in society, various welfare foundations were set up to receive Surinamese. Within V.O.S. came the realization that more things were needed for political awareness, such as education, training, assistance and information. In 1968 a number of board members from V.O.S. took the assignment to found the foundation “Bouw Een Surinaams Tehuis” (BEST). With this, the representation of interests for Surinamese was tackled in a practical way in daily life.

ANTON DE KOM CENTER

In 1972, the year that V.O.S. moved to the first floor on the Zeeburgerdijk, the organizations V.O.S., BEST, SASA, Revolutionary People's Front, Real Sranan, Suracom, Surino, SSV Nijmegen and the Suriname Committee squatted an empty building on Zandstraat. They repurposed the building as a socio-cultural center for Surinamese people and called it the "Anton de Kom Center". Eventually, the municipality made a larger building available on Stadhouderskade, which became the new "Anton de Kom Center". Here, the BEST foundation organized lectures and various other activities in the field of art and culture. In addition, the foundation published a monthly magazine called "Anton de Kom", which addressed the situation of Surinamese in the Netherlands.

DISCRIMINATION BY POLICE

In the 1970s, V.O.S., SASA and the Suriname Committee spread a press release about discrimination by the police. "Every day we receive complaints from fellow-countrymen about abuse, threats, intimidation and provocation of the police apparatus, which they undergo on the street, at the police station as well as in custody." [...] "We have been busy for some time to register cases where there is clearly violence against fellow countrymen and hereby call on all Surinamese who have complaints and grievances regarding brutal police action to report to Center Anton de Kom". This would eventually result in a large black book on discrimination by the police.

INDEPENDENCE REACHED!

In 1972, the National Party Combination (NPK: Nationale Partijkombinatie), a coalition of parties that sought early independence, won the elections in Suriname. The PNR of Eddy Bruma was part of the coalition. There was considerable resistance from the Hindu population and the VHP; many feared "creole domination" and found Suriname not ready for independence. Nevertheless, independence was announced on February 14, 1974 and negotiations with the Netherlands started. Suriname became politically independent on November 25, 1975. The dream of many was realized after decades of struggle!

DUTCH AID FOR INDEPENDENCE

The struggle for independence continued in the Netherlands and in Suriname in the 1970s, also in politics. In 1973 a left-progressive cabinet under the leadership of Prime Minister Den Uyl (PvdA) came to power. Moved by the wave of decolonization, the reputation damage after the colonial war in Indonesia, and the uprising on May 30, 1969 in Curaçao, the cabinet decided to support an early independence from Suriname.

DISAPPOINTMENT AND FIGHT AGAINST OLD POLICY

The dream of the nationalists, a free and independent Suriname, became a reality in 1975. However, the euphoria quickly gave way to disappointment and tension towards Suriname. Due to corruption scandals, disappointing economic results and high unemployment, there was increasing opposition to the Surinamese government, also from V.O.S. "Down with the old politics" was on the front page of the V.O.S. monthly magazine Famiri.

THE PEOPLE'S PARTY

As soon as it became clear that Suriname would become independent, Surinamese activists and students from Suriname and the Netherlands founded the People's Party in 1974 under the leadership of Lie Pauw Sam. Former members of V.O.S. such as René Rodrigues and Alfons Levens, also joined. The party tried to develop a political party in Suriname on the basis of socialist ideas. From the People's Party, mass meetings and people's committees were organized in various neighborhoods in Suriname. The weekly newspaper Pipel was also published. The Department of the People's Party in the Netherlands was made and managed by members of V.O.S.

ORGANIZATION FOR SURINAMESE WOMEN

V.O.S. also supported the Organization of Surinamese Women (OSV) in Suriname. OSV set itself the goal of improving the position of women in Suriname. As a student, Polly Levens became the representative of OSV and the Help to Women in Need (HAVIN) foundation.

THE COUP

THE COUP

The early eighties was characterized by unrest and dissatisfaction within Surinamese society. There was also dissatisfaction among the military; for example, about the prohibition of establishing a military union. On February 25, 1980, sixteen sergeants led a coup led by sergeant Desi Bouterse.

The archives about possible Dutch involvement are still largely closed and secret. The coup was initially supported by some, also within V.O.S. Hugo Kooks, president of V.O.S., was never an advocate:

“I have been opposed to it from the very beginning, because the coup carries the risk that lethal violence would be introduced into politics. That is what happened.”

The military called the coup a “Revolution.” However, the military also disabled the Constitution and human rights were violated. For example, people were arrested without legal trial or punished with violence for accusations. Where there was support for the military among certain sections of the population, it quickly turned into criticism, distrust and division within the Surinamese community and thus also within V.O.S.

THE DECEMBER MURDERS

On December 8, 1982, fifteen critics of the military regime were tortured and executed in Fort Zeelandia in Paramaribo. The “December murders” led to deep division within the Surinamese community and are still a very sensitive subject to this day. Desi Bouterse was re-elected president of Suriname in 2015. In December 2020 he was sentenced to 20 years in jail because of his involvement in the December murders.

The December murders caused a change of course within V.O.S. A split occurred within V.O.S., as some supported the People’s Party. The members who supported the soldiers split off and formed the Revolutionary People’s Party (RVP). V.O.S. did not support the military and active support from the People’s Party in Suriname came to an end.

CHANGING PERSPECTIVE

After the fierce political developments, the focus of V.O.S. shifted. After 1982, the association focused more on the needs of Surinamese people in the Netherlands and social developments in Suriname. They hoped to be able to bridge the sharp political differences within the community through art and cultural activities and thus raise social issues.

1983-1994

FROM A FUTURE IN SURINAME TO A HOME IN THE NETHERLANDS

A SOCIO-CULTURAL COURSE

Ever since the 1970s, socio-cultural activities such as dance, sports, lectures, courses and homework support have been organized within V.O.S. Various people came together for socializing, social involvement, affection and relationships. This line was continued in the 1980s. In 1984, the BEST foundation was dissolved due to bankruptcy, so that the welfare activities of V.O.S. fell away. The focus shifted more to socio-cultural activities; with arts as a means for cultural expression, but also for education and information. Based on music, poetry, theater and cabaret, the audience engaged themselves with politically charged issues on stage and sometimes in a light-hearted way with humor by the REVO cabaret group.

OPO OSO

As part of the 70th anniversary of the Opo Oso association in 1989, an exhibition was made with work by artists Letitia Brunst, Paul Moedig and others. After the closure of the Srefidensi Gallery of Welsuria, there was little room for Surinamese artists.

Despite the subsidy stop, the association continued to organize social and cultural activities on its own. "Opo Oso" activities were organized on a weekly basis, during which current topics were discussed. In addition, children and young people received homework

counseling and adults were offered information in various areas.

A SURINAMESE HOME AT ZEEBURGERDIJK

With the rise of racism and fascism in the Netherlands, the need for a place where black and Surinamese organizations could feel at home grew. The Hugo Olijfveldhuis became one of these places.

In the 1980s, the Hugo Olijfveldhuis became a meeting place for organizations such as Surinamese Homo's (SUHO), Set dance group and Sport Doet Leven (SDL). Every Friday evening V.O.S. organized "Opo Oso" (open house) activities where it was intended that Srananmans (Surinamese) and like-minded people could meet each other in a relaxed atmosphere. To date, Mofina, an association for the "hard-working, simple, Surinamese woman with not much money", faithfully uses the property. The members of Mofina are nowadays the oldest, active members in the building of V.O.S.

REMEMBERING THOSE WHO STRUGGLED BEFORE US

VOLUNTARY WOMEN AID CORPS IN SURINAME

In 1989, Polly Levens organized reunions on behalf of the women's committee together with the veterans of the Voluntary Women's Aid Corps in Suriname. It resulted in a television production of the NOS with the title "Strijders voor Wilhelmina". After 44 years the veterans met again for the first time.

OTTO HUISWOU'D REMEMBERED: "A FIGHTING SURINAMESE"

In 1988, the Surinamese action group National Fighting Organization for Surinamese (LOSON) organized a commemoration in honor of the 90th birthday of Otto Huiswoud. A new generation of activist Surinamese rediscovered the ideas and the special story of Otto Huiswoud. In an article in Famiri he was called "a great source of inspiration for young Surinamese".

ANTON DE KOM: HIS STRUGGLE AND IDEAS

In 1988 the LOSON organized the Anton de Kom year. In collaboration with V.O.S. "Anton de Kom: his struggle and ideas" was published. At the launch of the book, former resistance heroes who had known Anton de Kom gave speeches.

‘FAMIRI’ (DRAWER)

“Famiri” was a monthly magazine for Surinamese people in the Netherlands, which on the one hand paid attention to politics, art and culture and social messages from Suriname and on the other hand to developments within the Netherlands. In the period between 1977 and 1980, the magazine was edited by V.O.S. members and employees, including Hugo Kooks, Frits Moll and Polly Levens. According to the editors, the aim of the newspaper was to give a clear picture of Surinamese and their place in Dutch and Surinamese society through their cultural expressions, economic and political situation.

1995-2019 A CENTER FOR ART, CULTURE AND HERITAGE

Until the nineties, V.O.S. was located just the first floor of the current building on the Zeeburgerdijk in Amsterdam. V.O.S. had wanted to have a complete property available for some time and in 1995 this dream came true. The Hugo Olijfveldhuis grew into a center of Surinamese, Caribbean and black art, culture and heritage.

MUSEUMS

1990: SURINAMESE HISTORICAL MUSEUM

Various museums have already been established in the building on the Zeeburgerdijk. In 1990, Thomas Swanenberg, who was a long-time member of the V.O.S., opened the Surinamese Historical Museum on the ground floor of the building. Swanenberg hoped that Surinamese could recall memories of the past in his museum and that the younger generation would come “to get to know the culture that they had hardly trusted.” Unfortunately, the museum had to close its doors again after just four years due to a lack of finances.

1995: MUSEUM SURINAME

Museum Suriname opened in 1995 on the ground floor of the building. Waldo Heilbron and Diana Fräser were two of the initi-

ators of this initiative. By means of exhibitions and educational and cultural activities, the museum wanted to bring the history of Suriname and Surinamese to life and strengthen the self-image of Surinamese. Among other things, they organized exhibitions about Surinamese who fought during the Second World War and about gold mining in Suriname. They also organized a photo exhibition made by young people from Amsterdam.

In the 1999 newspaper, Waldo Heilbron and Diana Fräser said: "The general public here is still ignorant about certain historical passages and essential pages from history have not even been written. We consider it our task to bring such forgotten stories to their attention."

NOLA HATTERMAN GALLERY

Art and culture played an increasingly central role within V.O.S. In 1997 the association opened the Nola Hatterman gallery. This gallery was named after the Dutch artist who had been active at V.O.S. and had played an important role within the Surinamese arts. The gallery was opened with the exhibition "Alpha & Omega" by painter Frank Creton. In July 1998 the exhibition "Family Affairs" / "Famiri Man Tori" by artist Armand Baag opened.

With Henry Strijk as director of the association and Myra Winter as gallery owner, V.O.S. an important place where high-quality Surinamese and Caribbean art by artists such as Marcel Pinas, Ilene Themen and Glenn Kalasingh were exhibited. In addition to exhibitions, V.O.S. together with Nola Hatterman Gallery organized an annual book festival and book presentations. They also organized debates on Surinamese and Caribbean literature and current issues, partly led by Jan Ramkisoen, because Surinamese art and literature was underexposed in the Netherlands.

NOLA HATTERMAN (DRAWER)

In a period when the association did not have its own building, meetings often took place at members' homes. One of the places where Surinamese people often met was the house of Nola Hatterman (1899 - 1984). Hatterman was a Dutch painter and actress who came from a middle class family. She often used Surinamese people as a model for her paintings and became increasingly fasci-

nated about their background and “the black ideal of beauty”. Nola also became involved in socialist movements, in the 1930s she met Anton de Kom and Otto Huiswoud at the meeting of the International League against Imperialism.

After the Second World War, Nola became an active member of V.O.S. She made drawings and designs for publications and theater pieces of Wie Eegie Sani (W.E.S.) such as the piece ‘The Birth of Boni’. Nola immortalized members of Wie Eegie Sani and V.O.S. in the artwork “Na Fesi”. In 1953 Nola left for Suriname, where she played an important role in the further development of the arts. In 1997 V.O.S. opened the Nola Hattermangalerie in honor of the passionate artist.

A NEW WAVE OF EMANCIPATION AND RESISTANCE

After the violent arrest of Quinsy Gario and Jerry Afriyie during the Sinterklaas entry in Dordrecht in 2011, a new movement arose against Zwarte Piet and racism. With the emergence of The Black Archives in 2016, V.O.S. led by Vincent Soekra, Delano Veira and Ninan Esajas became, once again, one of the central places where critical debates are organized on current, social and political issues. Delano has been active within V.O.S. since the 1980s. and is the board member with the most experience. The association’s archive shows that today’s activism and social debates fit within a longer tradition of resistance and emancipation.

FAWAKA?

Fifty years ago it was still taboo to speak in Sranan Tongo. Today, words such as “pata”, “tori”, “fawaka”, “skeer” and “Damsko” are part of the “street language” and youth culture. Artists and artists create art inspired by cultural traditions that were previously forbidden. Can we talk about a cultural (r)evolution?

AND WHERE ARE WE TODAY?

The 100th anniversary of the V.O.S. is an unprecedented milestone. V.O.S. is one of the few organizations of Surinamese and migrants in the Netherlands that has survived so many generations.

Like the waves on the Atlantic Ocean, the emancipation movements of Surinamese and black migrant groups in Amsterdam and the Netherlands have developed with ups and downs. There have been periods of intense struggle and mobilization and periods of relative peace and quiet.

Frantz Fanon wrote: “Every generation must develop, fulfill or betray its own mission.” In the 100th anniversary of V.O.S. we see that different issues played a role in every generation. Every generation has a different mission.

V.O.S. has played an important role with every generation at the forefront of Surinamese and black emancipation movements in the Netherlands. One generation builds on the work of previous generations and the other draws inspiration from the struggles of its predecessors.

What lessons do you learn from the 100-year history of Vereniging Ons Suriname?

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