



# REDEMPTION, AMBIVALENCE AND SELF-DECEIT

A Discourse Analysis of Surinamese Independence (1973-1977)

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## PREFACE

This text deals with Surinamese independence, officially proclaimed on 25 November 1975. This 'event' was on the one hand an impersonal administrative act, while on the other highly personal and emotional for Surinamese people. In a similar way, the creation of this text was both anonymous and personal. It is anonymous because, as Roland Barthes would argue, this text cannot really be 'my' property. Rather, it is a compilation, a complex set of syntaxes. A vast set of intellectual traditions, scientific, historical, journalistic and political voices are expressed and their interrelatedness constitute a basic coherence. It also has no clear boundaries, in terms of themes, dates, people, identities, and so on. The 'actual' meaning thus of this text always depends on its interpreters. At the same time, this thesis could not be more personal. The selections and choices regarding timeframe, respondents, data sources, themes, methods, were all mine. The boundaries were drawn by me, some statements and historical aspects were excluded while others were accentuated. Moreover, I do not present this text as a neutral one. Not only does inclusion and exclusion of voices and experiences have a political dimension, my selection for this topic can also be connected to the fact that parts of my own family migrated from Surinam to the Netherlands in the 1970s. Yet, I did not choose to study this topic because of the relation 'I simply have' with this background. Constantly balancing at this intersection of anonymity and singularity made producing this text a fascinating and enriching experience.

In this endeavour I was assisted, advised and supported in various ways by various people. I would like to express my gratitude to these people. First, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the kind people and respondents of the elderly houses *Majella* and *Ashiana* in Paramaribo, which I visited in September 2008. Their hospitality and openness was immense. Second, I would like to thank the people of the Royal Library in The Hague. The personnel of the Library assisted me in technical issues, which made the 'archive experience' even more interesting. Third, I would like to thank my supervisor and the second reader very much for their comments and feedback along the way. From the first conversation with Prof. Dr. Van Stipriaan about the fascinating country of Surinam, till the final inspiring and useful comments of Dr. K. Willemse, you were very helpful and supportive. And last, maybe first after all, I would like to thank my dear girlfriend (now wife) Anima, for she both inspired and 'kindly disciplined' me from the very beginning till the final version of this text.

Shivant Jhagroe

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*To Anima*

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"If we don't stand for something, we may fall for anything"

*Malcolm X*

## 1. INTRODUCING SURINAMESE INDEPENDENCE AS A PUZZLE

### 1.1 Introduction

Paramaribo, Surinam, 25 November 1975. A flag was brought down, another one was raised. This moment symbolised the official independence of the new Republic of Surinam. The Dutch Crown Princess and Prime Minister attended this historical event in their 'soon to be former colony'. The event, attended by thousands of Surinamese citizens, was accompanied with dancing and music. Even the queen herself danced. Imagine how an outsider might have experienced this moment: 'Finally, a new world, a new country, their own country. From now on, Surinamese people will take control. They do not depend on those Dutch colonisers any more. They can make their own policies, as one nation with its own independent political system. Surinam has its future in its own hands.'

However, this simplistic and romantic image would have been too good to be true. Surinamese history is much more complex, layered and ambiguous. In fact, if we take a closer look at independence of Surinam, as a phenomenon, it is not clear what it actually signified. Who's 'redemption' was taking place? What actually changed, and according to whom? Why would one be critical towards independence? And how did these different images of that 'historic moment' in modern Surinamese history relate?

One would expect that such questions were predominantly addressed at the political level. After all, 'becoming independent' can be expected to be political struggle, about the contestation over our 'own rights and freedoms', about self-determination and losing the chains of illegitimate masters and rulers. However, the question about independence also took place beyond the walls of parliament and diplomatic practices. While working, having dinner, or just talking on the street,

ordinary people (i.e. *non*-politicians, *non*-journalists, *non*-diplomats) would also have an (perhaps very strong) opinion about Surinamese independence. Even though these opinions were maybe not expressed in the formal political domain, they cannot be dismissed as irrelevant or insignificant. I would discern a formal and institutional *political* sphere and a more informal and everyday life *public* sphere in this context (cf. Habermas, 1989). Taking this into account, it is interesting to observe how people in these ‘spheres’ observed Surinamese independence, which voices were dominant and which ones marginal, and how attitudes towards independence differed. How, for example, did people ‘in the street’ and ‘in their kitchens’ relate to the political meaning of independence? If independence, as appropriated by ‘ordinary people’, was not understood as political per se, what role did it play for them at all? Surinamese independence, then, would become a complex and multi-layered historical phenomenon. With this in mind we are able to start formulating the objective of this study.

## 1.2 Towards a research question

This study has two objectives: (1) to *reconstruct* Surinamese political and public discourse on Surinamese independence; and (2) to *investigate* the relationship between these discourses. This two-tiered objective is relevant, as the dominant perspective of the independence mainly focuses on the formal political discourse or the national macro-level. Whenever stories and experiences of ‘ordinary Surinamese people’ are accentuated in the context of independence, they are often voiced by journalists, writers or individual politicians. It seems that a more complex understanding of Surinamese independence, in which both its formal institutional understandings and its everyday experiences (outside this institutional domain) are linked, requires more attention. This study, however, does not claim to provide a complete or comprehensive view on ‘actual independence’. Rather, it opens up space to understand Surinamese independence as a more complex historical notion, i.e. the interrelated aspects of its formal-institutional political expressions *and* ordinary beyond these type of institutions. The general research question that directed this study can be formulated as follows:

**In what way were the Surinamese political discourse and public discourse on the independence of Surinam (ca. 1973-1977) related?**

On the basis of this central question, these sub questions were formulated:

1. *How can we, in general terms, understand political and public discourse and their relationship?*
2. *How was Surinamese independence viewed in Surinamese political discourse from 1973 till 1977?*
3. *How was Surinamese independence viewed in Surinamese public discourse from 1973 till 1977?*
4. *How did these discourses relate, and how can this be understood?*



The main research question requires some clarification. First, why selecting the period 1973-1977? These years have been selected because I am particularly interested in how political and public discourse understood and valued ‘independence’ in relation to ‘official independence’. One can expect heated debates and strong opinions around the formal declarations of Surinamese independence (25 November 1975). This timeframe also allowed for a focus on the two years before and after this event of ‘becoming independent’. Selecting a time frame is always problematic, but including the 1980 and 1982 events in Surinam (coup and politically inspired killings) would imply a somewhat different research question and starting point. Selection 1973-1977 served as an *entry point* to further investigate how individuals and groups themselves understood independence as a ‘formal’ event that took place in 1975, a ‘great national victory’, or something else. Second, what do I mean by ‘independence of Surinam’? This was the very object of study. That is to say, I did not define the independence of Surinam as a legal act, a political event, or an issue of nationalism or anti-colonialism as such. I identified what the notion of the ‘independence of Surinam’ actually meant for different people and groups in political and public discourse. This brings me to the third concept in the research question, ‘discourse’? The notion of discourse is widely used in the humanities, social sciences and historical research, so how did I use this notion? The notion of discourse enables me to systematically analyse the ways in which the meaning of independence was interpreted and negotiated by various people. A discourse, for me, refers to a specific set of positions to think, speak, write and act. Discourses regulate speech and behaviour, they govern the rules of true and false statements, and normal and abnormal acts. This study particularly focussed on political and public discourse. This will be elaborated upon in paragraph 1.3. Fourth, what do I mean with ‘relates’? Since it was my intention to analyse and understand how the discourses related, I focused on their differences, similarities and most importantly on *intersections*. And again, what I mean by differences, similarities and intersections will be discussed later in this chapter.

### 1.3 Approach and methodological notes

Since this study tries to understand how different people constructed and viewed ‘Surinamese independence’ and how these understandings in political and public discourse were related, it is important to clarify how I understand and studied these discourses.

In her book *Discourse*, Mills cites one of Macdonnell’s ways to frame the notion ‘discourse’: “discourses differ with the kinds of institutions and social practices in which they take shape and with the positions of those who speak and those whom they address” (1986: 1). Mills extends on this idea: “Thus, a discourse is not a disembodied collection of statements, but groupings of utterances or sentences, statements which are enacted within a social context, which are determined by that social context and which contribute to the way that social context continues its existence.

Institutions and social context therefore play an important determining role in the development, maintenance and circulation of discourses” (Mills, 1997: 11). I quote Mills extensively here, because this fragment highlights the discursive characteristics that are important for this study. Another example of focussing on institutional settings and social context in discourse, comes from Michel Pecheux, as discussed by Macdonnell (1986: 1): “A discourse as a particular area of language use may be identified by the institutions to which it relates and by the positions from which it comes and which it marks out for the speaker. The position does not exist by itself, however. Indeed, it may be understood as a standpoint taken up by the discourse through its relation to another, ultimately an opposing discourse”. So, language, institutions and social contexts are crucial in order to grasp how discourses ‘work’.

In order to systematically reconstruct and analyse political and public discourse I mainly focussed on *themes and positions*, and the way they were related. Themes are relevant as they enabled me to examine exactly how independence was viewed in 1973/1977, i.e. as what type of issue it was framed (independence *as* an issue of economy, electoral politics, nationalism, ethnicity, legal aspects, etc.). Some themes can be dominant, while others can be marginal(ised). The same holds for positions. Positions refer to discursive positions that express normative or judgmental aspects vis-à-vis independence (e.g. independence as a ‘fantastic moment’, or ‘a unnecessary event’). Themes and positions are highly related, as a certain position or normative orientation always involves a certain substantial issue or theme. Yet, this distinction helped me to discern the what-question (theme) from the how-question (position). In the analysis (chapter 5), I present dominant and marginal themes and positions combined.

The focus on ‘political discourse’ and ‘public discourse’ requires more specificity. What do I actually mean by political and public discourse? How did I identify them and their linkages? What was my plan of work and what were my specific methodological choices?

#### *Political discourse*

Informed by Mills definition of discourse, I understand political discourse as knowledge embedded in and communicatively expressed through, political institutions (e.g. parliament, ministers) and the state apparatus (e.g. bureaucracy, legal procedures). This institutionalised forms of ‘political knowledge’ contains specific subject positions, certain types of political and policy themes and normative attitudes and opinions with regard to these themes. At the same time, political discourse also excludes certain forms of speech and thinking. For instance, if a Surinamese politician talks about the future of Surinam after independence, he, as a subject, speaks in and through political discourse. The politician’s words are regulated by his own expectations of what can and cannot be said. He/she cannot buy his votes or force people to vote for him/her, at least not in most democratic systems. It is relevant to refer to Jürgen Habermas’ understanding of public space as

distinct from public authorities and the sphere of bureaucracy and state administration (Habermas, 1989). The public sphere can be seen as the intermediate space between the individual sphere and public authority. For Habermas, the (bourgeois) public sphere, emerged in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and consists of debates about public issues in e.g. cafes and public squares.

In this study, political discourse was reconstructed on the basis of how dominant or marginal certain *themes* and *positions* were. That is to say, political discourse on independence is not just 'independence in general', but refers to particular themes and aspects related to independence such as legality, international developments, cultural or economic aspects. Specific positions of individuals and groups vis-à-vis independence were also highlighted. Such discursive positions refer to which normative views on independence were present (or absent) in the political discourse, and especially which positions were dominant and marginal.

To reconstruct the political discourse on Surinamese independence, empirical data was derived from a Surinamese daily newspaper. An important reason for this was that newspapers often report on official announcements and statements of the Surinamese government and politicians, but they also relate these to news items and opinions voiced earlier or by other people. Not only politicians, but also civil society organisations and non-Surinamese people can be represented and given a voice in one and the same newspaper article. A second reason why I choose to focus on daily newspaper articles, was that the political discourse on Surinamese independence was well documented by this 'source'. The newspaper I selected was *De Ware Tijd*<sup>1</sup>. This newspaper served as an accessible and informative source that extensively covered developments and events revolving around the political discourse Surinamese on independence around 1973-1977. Actually, it is one of the few (if not the only) newspapers available in the Netherlands that expresses the political discourse in its broader context in that period. This newspaper did not reside 'outside' political discourse, as it reconstructed, printed and distributed political statements and events around the independence. *De Ware Tijd* therefore served as the main entry point to reconstruct the political discourse, i.e. how political institutions actually related to independence and the contexts in which certain claims, positions and argumentation came into being and developed over time.

*De Ware Tijd*, as a daily newspaper, was established in 1957. In the period from the 1950s till the 1970s, some of the written press shifted from being 'propagandist' to professional and neutral newspapers (cf. Breeveld, 2008). *De Ware Tijd* can be said to be one of the few newspapers that actually *pursued* to be neutral and independent (Breeveld, 2008: 127-128). However, *De Ware*

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<sup>1</sup> Initially, I intended to include two newspapers (*De Ware Tijd* en *De West*). However, due to reasons of logistic and communication with people in Suriname, unfortunately, I was unable to include both. However, the data of *De Ware Tijd* was very useful and rich, which still enabled me to get a nice overview of and insight in the political discourse.

*Tijd* indeed had editorial sections even though they were not in the articles themselves but presented separately. Newspaper articles I used were sometimes derived from international newsagents, sometimes from Dutch newspapers. However, they were published in the *De Ware Tijd*, which made them relevant for this study. The newspaper articles sometimes included editorial opinions, but again, always presented separately. It is significant to mention that the *De Ware Tijd* also covered world news, and non-Surinam news in general as well. In this sense, *De Ware Tijd* was covered a lot of political topics and debates, and put events in local, national and international contexts.

I focussed newspaper articles that explicitly referred to Surinamese independence, but excluded editorial comments. I selected all Saturday editions in the period (November 1973 - November 1977) because quantitatively Saturday editions contained most newspaper articles. Sometimes, when I found an interesting and relevant article from another day, by accident, I included it in the list of articles. I was able to find many newspaper articles of *De Ware Tijd* in the Royal Library in the Hague. In the months of March-June of 2011, I visited the newspaper archives, examining microforms<sup>2</sup>.

### *Public discourse*

As already mentioned, this study understands public discourse from a Habermasian viewpoint. That is to say, public discourse is an intermediate space between public authorities and individual life. It concerns communication beyond or outside formal political discourse, expressed at the level of the homes, gardens and the daily-life of Surinamese people (non-politicians, non-authorities). If, for example, a Surinamese farmer states that independence was totally irrelevant for his daily activities 'in the field', it should be understood as a part of public discourse as it may relate to state authorities somewhat remotely but does not articulate the position of these authorities. It is important to note that the very notion of 'public discourse' can be seen as somewhat problematic, since it suggests a consistent and structured discourse, making it distinct from political discourse. Off course political and public discourse are related (which I will elaborate upon in the next paragraph), but public discourse as such is hard to represent and reconstruct in its entirety.

I was not able to identify *all* stories, experiences and ideas of *all* Surinamese people in public discourse. Yet public discourse can indeed be reconstructed. I tried to contextualise viewpoints and positions of Surinamese individuals in public discourse in terms of *narratives*. Narratives are basically stories that people construct to make sense of their own life and position with regard to a specific themes, events and other people (in this case the particular focus was Surinamese independence). Such narratives are always embedded in a broader historical, political,

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<sup>2</sup> I did not visit the archives every day because of my full time job, but whenever I visited the archives I was there at least 4 or 5 hours.

cultural and economic context. Narratives are more specific and context-dependent than ‘public discourse in general’. The notion of narratives, then, enabled me to examine which experiences and stories expressed and constituted public discourse on Surinamese independence. Such storylines were also relevant to reconstruct public discourse, as they enabled me to connect individual and private experiences and aspects with public issues and debate. This is exactly what is at stake in public discourse, the intersection between individual private life and state-led space and public concerns. In political discourse, these private issues were irrelevant as the main interest of this study is how ordinary people outside political institutions experienced and viewed independence *in relation to* the political discourse on independence. This is also why I focussed on narratives in public discourse and position in political discourse. Whereas themes and positions in political discourse enabled me to systematically map political discourse, narratives connected specific themes, experiences, ideas and attitudes that were mentioned in interviews to in their specific historical context. This does not mean that public discourse was more complex or contextual than political discourse. Narratives in public discourse connected public issues revolving around independence to the specificity of experiences, viewpoints and representations of ordinary Surinamese people outside the political institutional sphere.

I discerned two dimensions in the interviews to systemically reconstruct narratives in public discourse; a biographic and a thematic dimension. The *biographic dimension* concerned the history of the specific individual person I interviewed. ‘Individual narratives’ do not exist as such, as they are always embedded in broader social relations. Therefore, the biographic part in the interviews highlighted how ‘an individual’ constructs his or her life story vis-à-vis government issues and state institutions in its historical context. This enabled me to grasp the ways in which these respondents negotiated their position in relation to public issues and developments that could be located at the level of political institutions in the years around official independence (1973-1977). From a Habermasian perspective, this biographic dimension accounts for how respondents constructed a narrative in terms of the space between the individual sphere and state activities. Whereas the biographic dimensions focused on a general positioning of respondents with regard to public institutions, the *thematic dimension* dealt with the substantive theme of Surinamese independence and related themes played a role in the lives of these respondents around 1973-1977. In line with the biographic comments of correspondents, this dimension emphasised on how people experienced, understood and valued independence at around 1975. It identified their attitude and specific opinion regarding what actually happened, as well as whether they observed it as (partly) good or bad, and for what reasons, and also what they did *not mention*, what remained absent in reconstructing their own opinion (compare ‘position’). These two dimensions enabled me to reconstruct dominant (and/or marginal) narratives in public discourse, as well as their specific situated and historical contexts. Narratives in public discourse, then, are not individual narratives,

but narratives in public discourse that express and constitute public discourse as such. Themes and positions in public discourse are highly related, as is also the case for political discourse. Therefore, in chapter 5, the connections between themes and positions in the public discourse (as well as in the political discourse) will be examined closely.

I interviewed 11 elderly people in Suriname. A large number of Surinamese people left the country around 1975. I have specifically selected people that did not leave Surinam, as it can be expected that they experienced Surinamese independence as well as its aftermath. This made people that stayed in Surinam 'more relevant' as 'respondents'. Interviews with Surinamese people that actually left Surinam (mostly moved to and started living in the Netherlands) would represent important opinions about independence, but their experiences and opinions would not express Surinamese public discourse on Surinamese independence as much as would be the case for people that stayed. Nevertheless, *as a context*, I also present a study that interviewed 409 persons that indeed left Surinam and started living in the Netherlands in chapter 4. Why did I select these specific 11 respondents? I avoided using a rigid set of selection criteria (e.g. about age, gender), because these criteria may turn out to be irrelevant or regulate the analysis too much. I also prevented selecting only 11 men or only women, or selecting 11 people with the same ethnic-cultural background. In practice, this meant that I indeed selected respondents from different ethnic-cultural backgrounds and both men and women. Not as a core feature of these respondents that structured the whole interview, but as potentially relevant aspects. In the end what counted, were the biographic and thematic aspects and the way their linkages were construed. Regarding age, I excluded people that were about 20 years of age in 1975, because they did not experience the 'pre-independent' period that well. This pre-independence phase is important as it allows me to adequately understand how biographic dimension relates to thematic dimension of narratives in public discourse. Therefore, I selected respondents that were grown up during the time of the official independence. For the interviews, I visited two elderly houses in Paramaribo (*Majella* and *Ashiana*) in September 2008. With the help of some nurses I was able to make some kind of selection (gender, ethnicity and to a lesser extent age). All respondents were between 39 and 61 years old in 1975. There were some pragmatic aspects in selecting these respondents as well. I visited the elderly houses, since this enabled me to interview quite some respondents in a short amount of time. Unfortunately, I could not stay in Surinam very long. Ideally, I would have selected a larger group of respondents to reconstruct public discourse. However, I was able to obtain quite some interesting and rich interviews. All interviews had the duration of approximately one hour. The interview structure and questions can be found in annex 1.

In chapter 4, I present these interviews. Since I used 'only' 11 interviews, all of the reconstructions of the interviews contain a biographic part, a thematic part as well as a brief reflection. This reflection puts each interview in a broader perspective. Proving a brief reflection

per interview enabled me to reconstruct different narratives and voices in public discourse more systematically.

#### *Relationship between political and public discourse*

It can be said that the distinction between political and public discourse is an analytical one. In reality it can be expected that both discourses partly intertwine, conflict, overlap or are connected in another way. The question, however, is where and how they exactly conflicted, resonated and intertwined in the period 1973-1977, and what this actually might mean for our understanding of Surinamese independence more generally. For instance, a Surinamese farmer that identified himself with a particular political party or politician that opposed independence, actually *related* to the political discourse. Even when a farmer himself believed that the independence was 'a farce', 'foolish' or 'way too soon', he positions himself in a specific way to the political discourse (negotiation).

Analysing and understanding the discourses and their relationship was done with a focus on *themes* and *positions*. Some questions one could ask regarding the relation between these discourses are: which themes and positions were dominant or marginal(ised) in both discourses? Which sub-discourses or even counter-discourses could be identified in public discourse, and which positions resonated in political discourse? Which themes were considered to be crucial (or absent) in both discourses? I used the following steps of analysis to systematically analyse the relationship between political and public discourse (relating to sub question 4):

1. I identified and analysed *similarities* and *overlap* in terms of themes and positions between the discourses;
2. I identified and analysed the *differences* and *contrasts* in terms of themes and positions between the discourses;
3. I identified and analysed *intersections* between the discourses.
4. I tried to give an *more general analytical account* of these similarities, differences and intersections.

#### *Source criticism and self-reflexive comments*

In historical research, sources should be understood in their context and approached critically. There are at least three questions that should be asked: (1) what is known about (the producers of) 'the source?'; (2) with what aim and for whom is the source produced?; and (3) what is the societal context in which the source emerged (cf. Syllabus Historisch Ambacht, Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2010)? For this study, this meant the following:

1. In the case of *De Ware Tijd*, its producers consisted of international news agencies, Dutch newspapers and journalists of *De Ware Tijd*. In the case of the respondents, what is known

about them was actually part of the biographic dimension of the interviews. By including this dimension in the interviews, I was able to see which positions (ethnicity, age, gender, nationalist, etc.) were dominant or remained silent.

2. The aim of the newspaper and the articles was to provide its readers with national and international news that *De Ware Tijd* deemed relevant and newsworthy for Surinam public. Since newspapers always interpret and select, they always provide their audience with a particular image of 'the news', often depending on editorial choices and preferences. The respondents, as 'sources', produced their 'data' in relation to me, perceived as e.g. a researcher, a male, a Hindustani with a Surinamese background, a Dutch student, or in another way. This is why I also reflected upon how I played a role in co-producing the 'interview data'. Not to nullify or 'filter out' my presence, but rather to explicate the co-constructing dynamic in interviews.
3. Regarding the newspaper, the societal context can be understood as part of the professionalisation of the written press in Surinam that period (Breeveld, 2008). At the same time, significant (interrelated) social and political incidents and phenomena occurred in the 1970s in Surinam, but also internationally. This meant that *De Ware Tijd* actually covered a lot of stories at that time, among which Surinamese independence. With regard to the narratives it is important to mention how respondents positioned themselves in the 1973-1977 public discourse in relation to e.g. their family, ethnicity, political parties, their youth, the economic status of themselves and Surinam.

An important comment should be made here regarding oral sources and individual stories (Mossink, 1988: 10). With regard to biographies, Mossink challenges a 'self-evident' understanding of 'a biography' or 'an oral source'. Do we analyse an individual, or a social or historical context, through the words of the individual? What is their relationship? And how do we understand this individual? What does an individual respondent represent; a generation, a socio-economic class, a nation? Such questions are highly relevant for his study. Willemse (2004: 10-13) poses the same type of questions, as she recognises the wider critique that individual narratives presuppose an autonomous ego. What language do we use to represent an individual narrative? Do we solely use academic language or the language of the oral source? This may make the epistemological aspect of analytical claims problematic. Various 'solutions' are formulated to tackle these important questions. Most of the solutions legitimise a specific choice and propose self-reflexivity.

I dealt with this by focussing on the ways in which subject positions were expressed and negotiated in relation to dominant or other subject positions (e.g. gender, ethnicity, age, political identity). To grasp this dynamic I thus reconstructed dominant, less dominant and alternative subject positions. Subject positions actually express how respondents position themselves in a



certain discourse, in terms of substantial focus, but especially regarding their acceptance of a dominant discourse, their resistance against it or negotiating different positions (e.g. being 'happy' that 'we' got 'our independence', but also being sceptical). It is equally important to focus on hidden voices, or positions that are or seem marginal or marginalised. What remains unsaid also structures the horizon of what can or should be said and remembered about independence. The relationship between silences and manifest voices is crucial to see to what extent subjects position themselves in a dominant discourse and how they deal with subaltern positions. So, focussing on how a subject positions *itself* in relation to a specific theme (i.e. independence), other subject positions and what positions remain unexpressed, tells us more about how an individual relates to its broader social, political and historical context. These issues will return in chapter 5 and 6.

A related concern was my starting position as a researcher in the interviews. Even more precise, there was no neutral position as there was always a selected point of reference (be it gender, nation, ethnicity or class). I did not have control over how respondents interpreted my presence whatsoever. Even when I would speak of 'Surinamese people', I already position these 'people' discursively as 'Surinamese'. I tried to be aware of this and I tried to impose as little 'identity' as possible during interviews, so as to be self-reflexive. I explicated my selections and choices in representations and analyses by reflecting on how respondents positioned themselves vis-à-vis my presence and the questions I asked them. By observing how respondents referred to me, to the words I used in my questions and other aspects, I was able to see if and how their subject position actually shifted, and its link with other subject positions.

Another important point of critique would be that oral sources are shaped by discourses between the moment of an interview and the topic under study (in my case Surinamese independence). This would make it quite hard to suggest that everything these sources say is exactly what they experienced during the period under investigation. The fact that especially aged interviewees can forget certain experiences is particularly relevant. First, I reconstructed what other and relevant discourses between 1977 and 2008 might have shaped their experience and positions of the respondents. I reflected upon specific explicit and implicit references of the respondents to the post-independence period (e.g. 'December murders of 1982', or 'today's economic situation'). To some extent, this cannot be avoided, as memory (in interviews particularly) is always a methodological concern in historical research. I tried to give the respondents time to reconstruct their experiences and opinions regarding Surinamese independence as adequate as possible. Sometimes this meant asking very specific questions. Another way I addressed this methodological challenge, was to explicate different positions (e.g. 'some said this, others said that') and ask respondents about their own particular viewpoint and experiences.

#### **1.4 Outline of this thesis**

The structure of the thesis is relatively straightforward and is based on the sub questions. In chapter two, I review some of the important literature on the Surinamese independence. This brief historiography serves as a background on the topic of Surinamese independence, as well as the context in which I position this study more specifically. Chapter three reconstructs the political discourse on Surinamese independence, mostly based on newspaper articles of *De Ware Tijd*. Chapter four presents public discourse on Surinamese independence based on narratives, derived from 11 in-depth interviews conducted in Surinam. Chapter five examines the political and public discourse and their relationships. Finally, chapter six formulates some concluding remarks on how one can understand relationships between the discourses on the independence, as well as some personal reflections.

## **2. A BRIEF HISTORIOGRAPHY OF SURINAMESE INDEPENDENCE**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter reviews some of the literature on Surinamese independence. This chapter first contextualises the topic of this study<sup>3</sup> and highlights what role independence plays in Surinamese history in the literature. Then, I will focus more specifically on how Surinamese independence has been studied and understood. Finally, this chapter positions how this study relates to other studies and how it might contribute to the literature.

### **2.2 Basic context of independence as a historical event**

To understand how Surinamese independence has been understood, it is fruitful to start with its political context. After WWII, political parties started emerging (cf. Buddingh' (1995). They were organised along ethnic and cultural lines. Before focussing on the political domain, it is important to briefly highlight the cultural and ethnic plurality in Surinam's modern history. Next to the indigenous Surinamese people, the majority of Surinamese inhabitants consisted of former indentured labourers imported from Asia (composed of Hindustani from India, Javanese from Indonesia as well as Chinese). Together with the so-called 'Creoles', (descendants of the formerly enslaved populations from Africa), these groups constituted (and still constitute) Surinamese population. These groups were brought to Surinam by the British and Dutch authorities from around 1600 till the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Together, their ethnic and cultural backgrounds slowly but surely formed the plurality of today's Surinamese population. The Surinamese cultural and ethnic composition around 1960 was as follows: 41% Creole, 37% Hindustani, 17% Javanese, and 4% Chinese, Europeans and other nationalities (Van Dusseldorp, 1971: 69). In 2004 this was: 31% Creoles 33 % Hindustani, 15 % Javanese, the rest Chinese, European and other nationalities<sup>4</sup>.

Focussing on the political domain more closely, in 1946, the Catholic PSV (Progressive Surinamese Peoples Party) and the NPS (National Party Surinam) emerged. Both parties, in practice, identified with the Surinamese Creoles (Buddingh', 1995: 278). In 1949, the VHP (United Hindustani Party which was labelled Progressive Reform Party in 1973) represented the Hindustani

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<sup>3</sup> As this study will focus on the independence of 1975, I have chosen to only very briefly sketch the most relevant information of the pre-1945 period. After 1945, serious initiatives and developments towards independence started to emerge, also more and more concrete at an institutional level. Furthermore, this brief historiography only serves as an illustration of how different scholars position understand Surinamese independence. For extensive studies on the history of Surinam and its independence see e.g. Willemsen, 1983; Buddingh, 1995; Hoefte & Meel, 2001.

<sup>4</sup> Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suriname#December\\_killings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suriname#December_killings).

inhabitants of Surinam. The most important political objective of these major political parties, according to Buddingh', was to realise voter rights. In 1949, the Javanese organised themselves politically as the KTPI (Indonesian Farmer Party), mainly with the aim to return to Indonesia, their 'home country' (Buddingh', 1995: 279; Boedhoe, 1983: 144). The dispersion of these people across different parts of Surinam actually strengthened the ethnic-based boundaries of the political parties (Boedhoe; 1983: 149). Even though social mobilisation grew due to economic development, other party lines did not really emerge (cf. Boedhoe, 1983: 143; Meel, 1990: 281). Scholars such as Boedhoe and Meel, consider independence to be an irrelevant issue for other groups (such as the Jews and Chinese), as they did not feel an urge to mobilise themselves politically, given their small population and relative lack of political ambitions. This ethnic-based political landscape more or less remained the same over the years.

In the 1950s and 1960s conflicting perspectives started to emerge among different parties concerning the autonomy and self-determination of Surinam. On the one hand, Creoles (as the largest group in Surinam) with nationalist ambitions organised themselves in the PNR (Party National Republic), which emerged from a cultural movement '*Wi egi sani*' (which literally means: our own thing). Many of such nationalist movements were advocated and supported by Creoles and primarily inspired by anti-colonial developments in Africa and Surinamese symbols, such as an authentic language (*sranang tongo*) and the 'proto-Surinamese' Anton de Kom (who represented anti-colonial awareness and consciousness). On the other hand, fear of a 'negro president' and a 'Creole takeover' was growing in the Hindustani community, since the nationalist movement mostly had Creole roots<sup>5</sup>. The Creoles also outnumbered the Hindustani. What is more, in the first half of the 1960s, it was clear that most Asians in Surinam (Javanese and Hindustani) were not in favour of independence at all (Boedhoe, 1983: 142). These opposite standpoints were reinforced as the Creoles' perceived position was weakened by the increasing number of Hindustani with important societal professions and functions within the educational system, their urbanisation and the introduction of national holidays that were primarily meant for Hindus and Muslims. The death of Pengel (leader of the NPS) also played an important role in the decrease of the Creoles' political dominance (e.g. Buddingh, 1995, Ramsoedh, 2001). At the political level, these tensions were expressed in conflicting approaches on independence, articulated by the NPS and the VHP.

The elections of 1973 were a tipping point, as the new NPS leader Arron led a Creole dominating majority (of large and small political parties), without the VNP, into the government. Arron advocated 'an independent Surinam', which officially took place on 25 December 1975. Ramsoedh (2001: 100-1) adds that independence was relatively surprising for most people, as the political parties never mentioned it in the political rhetoric towards the 1973 elections. Due to the

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<sup>5</sup> These words expressed the general fear among Hindustani of Creoles taking power *politically*.

political uncertainty and unrest, over one hundred thousand Surinamese fled the country and headed for the Netherlands. Almost one third of Surinam had left the country around the independence, mostly migrating to the Netherlands (Leistra, 1995). This had a major impact in Surinamese society. People saw their friends, families, neighbours and others leave the country. Politically, people that left Surinam basically ‘voted with their feet’ by leaving the country, exactly when it was ‘finally’ became independent. Even though a large portion of these ‘migrants’ were not actively involved in the political process around independence, their ‘move’ can be read as a political statement. It also indicated the level of uncertainty and fear that existed among Surinam people for e.g. ‘a Creole takeover’ and ‘an unprepared nation’ (cf. Bovenkerk, 1983: 152-181).

Westerloo (1983: 219) states that the independence can be understood as ‘cross-eyed’. Surinam had one eye towards its own future, in which all Surinamese would build on their own independent Republic, but the other eye was looking for a one-way-ticket to the Netherlands with the hope of building a safe, more certain and prosperous future across the Atlantic. To grasp the complex nature of independence, it should not only be understood as a mere national issue. Rather, the Dutch government interfered quite extensively. Against the background of a global trend of decolonisation around the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the social-democratic Dutch government could not keep on justifying a colony. Dutch society in the 1960 was also becoming more and more critical towards their own ‘colonial legacy’ (Ramsodh, 2001). These factors played an important role in the way independence emerged.

After November 1975, the political system was very unstable. The relationship between government and opposition was based on mistrust. While oppositional fractions blamed the government for undemocratic behaviour, the government accused the opposition of obstruction (Ramsodh, 2001: 101). After social rumour and unrest about this situation, elections were promised in 1980, but they were never held. The independent government of Surinam now had to use more and more military means to ‘keep things together’. This culminated in the military coup of February 1980, led by Bouterse. This coup was not totally opposed by the Surinamese people, as it was a symbolic break with the ‘old regime’ (Buddingh’, 1995: 320). However, this military dictatorship tragically resulted in the execution of 15 ‘dissidents’ in December 1982.

### **2.3 Studying independence**

This should be seen as the historical context within which various scholars have located and understood Surinamese independence. But how did various scholars actually understand independence itself? It is fruitful to use Peter Meel’s review of research on Surinamese independence, to introduce and review the scholarly work on independence.

Meel (2002) identified four perspectives to understand Surinamese independence. The first perspective is the focus on *political leadership and nationalism* in a way Breeveld (2000) and Jansen van

Galen (2000) do. We might add Marshall's study on the evolution of the Surinamese nationalism (2003). These scholars either highlight the role and experience of political leaders in the context of the independence, or Surinamese nationalism. Marshall discerns four dimensions of nationalism; cultural nationalism, economic nationalism, political nationalism and nation building. The second perspective centres *regionalisation and globalisation*, for instance Trommelen (2000). This perspective compares different countries in the Surinamese region regarding independence and anti-colonialism. A third perspective revolves around *migration and transnationalism* (cf. Kessel & Van der Vlist, 2001). From this viewpoint, independence is mainly understood by the flows of migration in the period around 1975. A fourth perspective focuses on *decolonisation* (e.g. Leistra, 1995; Jansen van Galen, 2001; Oostindie & Klinkers, 2001). From this perspective, independence mainly concerns the politics between coloniser and colonised and often from the perspective of the Dutch government and political parties.

If one reflects on these four perspectives put forward by Meel, it becomes clear that they all seem to have a macro focus, on e.g. 'the political system', 'flows of migrants', the 'national level' or 'institutional structures'. The same holds for other studies on Surinamese independence. For instance, Dew (1978) wrote a chapter on the 'struggle for independence (1973-1975)'. This chapter, again, emphasises the macro-level, e.g. the government, politics of migration, economic autonomy, Surinamese and Dutch party politics (Dew, 1978: 176-190). Also Chin and Buddingh's 'first study in the English language of Surinam's politics, economics and society' (1987: v) is mostly about 'systems', 'structures' and 'regimes'. A Marxist inspired perspective underlies these structuralist categories, as expressed by the chapter titles: e.g. 'Social Structure', 'Political System', 'The Economy of Surinam'. Boedhoe's discussion of 'nationalism and ethnicity' (1983), Bovenkerk's focus on migrants in the 1970s (1983) and Gowricharn's conceptual and somewhat Marxist view on the Surinamese state all represent the same (macro) level of analysis (1983). A focus on 'cultural nationalism' seems to highlight the national level (Marshall, 2003).

When we try to explain this focus on societal structures and the political system, it becomes clear that most of the sources that used are derived from governments, mass-media and politicians (e.g. Dew, 1978: 176-190; Chin & Buddingh', 1987: 183-186). When the bibliographies of these studies are scrutinised, it cannot be denied that most sources refer to political, economic, cultural and historical accounts and debates that rarely centre-stage individual stories (of non-politicians). In other words, Surinamese independence is often understood at the level of 'the nation', 'national economy' or the 'state system'. And even though Meel gives an overview of different perspectives on independence, and 'celebrates' the diversity of perspectives, he also accepts and understands these perspectives *as* macro-perspectives.

The question that still remains open, then, is how did ordinary Surinamese people experience and view independence? How did they make sense of what was going on? Was

independence relevant at all in their eyes? And if so, in what way? And how did their experiences relate to debates in media and parliament, and developments in 'the political system', 'institutional structures' and 'flows of migration'? It seems that the literature on the Surinamese independence pays very little attention to this 'informal', 'micro' and seemingly 'a-political' dimension of independence.

Now, it would be naïve to argue that there is no literature on Surinamese independence seen from the perspective of ordinary Surinamese at all. For instance, Jansen van Galen has a journalistic and essayistic style in which his personal experience is often dominant<sup>6</sup>. The experience and viewpoints of individuals are also taken into account in his books. However, whenever individuals are approached in the context of independence, they very often turn out to be politicians (e.g. Jansen van Galen, 2000). This is also expressed by Breeveld's study on Pengel (2000). It is worth mentioning Gloria Wekker's book *Ik ben een gouden munt* (1994) here. In this book Wekker presents how Creole women understand themselves in terms of their subjectivity in general and sexuality more specifically. She shows that such ideas and related practices are connected to African Surinamese culture informed by West African sources and narratives. Even though Wekker, as a clear example of a scholar that focuses on individual identity formations and links this to more general historical and cultural contexts, a particular focus on Surinamese independence remains absent, especially a more comprehensive approach in which Creole and non-Creole women and men are included.

*A symbol of ordinary life and beyond: Anil Ramdas*

Another example of individual stories, as opposed to accounts of 'Surinamese society', the 'political system', can be found in the work of Anil Ramdas (1959-2012). Ramdas wrote (auto)biographies on 'the Surinamese experience'. For example, his book *Paramaribo. De Vrolijkste Stad in the Jungle* (translated: The Happiest City in the Jungle), is about his own experience of the city Paramaribo from November 2006 till the end of 2007. There are no (real academic or source) references in his book. However, his work is essayistic, biographic and somewhat poetically written, one can say similar to most of Jansen van Galen's work on the modern history of Surinamese. Even though Ramdas' work revealed his experiences and views vis-à-vis Surinam, one could argue that they still do not fully grasp individual experiences that express how people (other than himself) lived at – and experienced – the intersection of independence and their daily life<sup>7</sup>. Nevertheless, Ramdas indeed had some interesting and relevant observations that should be mentioned here.

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<sup>6</sup> Listen for instance to this nice coverage by him, broadcasted on 27 June 2010 on the Dutch Radio 1: <http://www.radio1.nl/contents/17040-ongehoord-frederiksdorp-in-suriname?autostart=24226>.

<sup>7</sup> Some examples of his (auto) biographical work are *Paramaribo. De Vrolijkste Stad in the Jungle* (2009), and, *De Strijd van de Dansers: Biografische Vertellingen uit Curaçao* (1988).

Ramdas was a Hindustani intellectual that expressed his own experiences between different worlds (Surinam, the Netherlands, being an academic, writer, and so on) in his books and essays (also cf. Van Kempen, 1993: 179). The theme of independence is not a topic he has written about extensively. Nevertheless, he was against independence around 1975, just like many other Hindustani at that time. Ramdas: “We detested Surinam, that looked like Africa more and more with the presence of so many negro’s, we were prepared to burn the city in order to stop the upcoming independence. We remembered British-Guyana, in which – after independence - Hindustani were subordinated by Creoles forever” (Ramdas, 1992: 27). Furthermore, Ramdas criticised a Western understanding that there was unity among the ‘Surinamese people’ during independence. Socialisation and civilisation occurs ‘through their own families and clan’. There is ‘no such thing as a national unity’ (Ramdas, 1992: 86, 95). He also stated that ‘even though *we* were proud and proud for a moment during the independence (...) after that Surinam became vain, weak and banal’ [italics SJJ](1992: 109). This expresses his cynical and critical take on independence. In an interview with Wim Brands in *VPRO Boeken*<sup>8</sup>, Ramdas stated that he remembered Surinam as ‘non-revolutionary’, being ‘over-civilised’, and compared it to the Dutch ‘nice and tranquil city of Haarlem’. Surinam lacks ambitions for the future; they do not have the capacity to innovative and connect to the modern world. He explained this by stating that Surinam is ‘guilty for 40% and the Netherlands for 60%’ for the situation Surinam is in right now. The Netherlands were busy with the colonial legacy of Indonesia and letting nationalists take power. Literature and progress stopped in 1975. A noteworthy in this particular interview is that Ramdas argued that Surinam was quite paradoxical: on the one hand a governmental and formal (almost) solemnity in politics and the administration, and on the other hand an informal and near violent sphere on the streets. He exemplified this informal but violent sphere by mentioning how Creoles sometimes bullied and robbed him in his youth (VPRO interview with Brands, 22 February 2009).

In addition, and significant to note, he often wrote critically about Hindustani, because, for Ramdas, Hindustani have never really been Surinamese (1992: 34). His own experiences as ‘a Hindustani’ shaped most of his perspectives and anecdotes, mentioning independence itself sporadically. Whenever he mentioned it, Ramdas was quite critical about Surinam ‘after independence’, its lack of ambitions and connecting to modernity. In other words, Ramdas’ attitude towards independence exemplary for his understanding of ‘Hindustani identity’, Surinam and Surinamese history more generally. In this sense, Ramdas talked about the political discourse of Surinamese and informal stories, but mainly from his own position as an intellectual, and as a reflexive man of Surinamese descent.

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<sup>8</sup> The interview was broadcasted on 22 February 2009, see:

<http://boeken.vpro.nl/programmas/24214180/aflleveringen/41069883/>.



And again, one should bear in mind that this is a personal account of Ramdas, with a specific background: a male, a Hindustani, very well educated (as an anthropologist), probably with a good income and possibly has a network full of writers, intellectuals, scholars and politicians. Such aspects very much shape the ways in which Ramdas experienced and developed his thoughts and (critical) attitude about Surinamese independence.

The methodology and (sometimes journalistic) style of writers such as Ramdas, Van Galen and Wekker makes it a little hard to specify exactly how they view Surinamese independence itself (Ramdas, Van Galen). What is more, it seems that whenever ordinary people are centre-staged, there is no particular focus on Surinamese independence (Wekker). And when there is indeed an emphasis on independence, these 'ordinary individuals' turn out to be either politicians, influential people or journalists and writers themselves.

## **2.4 Revealing new voices?**

Many studies have focused on Surinamese independence. Different perspectives and themes have been emphasised. Nevertheless, it has become clear that the dominant level of analysis remains to be macro (e.g. 'ethnic groups', 'political system'). Whenever stories of individual and ordinary people are centred, they are either based on the experience of writers and journalists themselves, or politicians, still linking them directly to the political system. Therefore, I believe, it is important to also accentuate the perspectives, experiences and attitudes vis-à-vis the independence of 'ordinary people', of 'everyday' Surinamese men and women. Again, some important questions that can be raised are: was independence relevant in the ordinary lives of Surinamese people? Did they engage with it in the same way politicians did? How did the vocabulary of the political debate on the independence relate to the vocabulary and experiences of everyday life in Surinam around 1975?

This study reconstructs and examines the political and public discourse on independence of Surinam, as well as their linkages. Doing so, this study tries to inject some marginal or marginalised and novel voices into the debate on Surinamese independence. It tried to understand Surinamese independence from two angles *at the same time* (formal political and public informal ordinary life). By focussing on differences, similarities and intersections between the discourses, their narrative emphases and voices (see paragraph 1.3), this study aims to shed new light on the meaning(s) of Surinamese independence. I do not claim this would gain new or ground-breaking insights on modern Surinamese history. However, connecting the ways in which ordinary people (creatively) dealt with independence, and how this was connected to debates in political institutions, can indeed be fruitful in adding some sensitivity and nuances to the literature on this topic.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

This chapter reviewed literature on Surinamese independence. It presented the historical context in which Surinamese independence can be understood, as well as particular perspectives used by scholars to understand independence. We have seen that studies on independence tend to accentuate the political system, the national level and other ‘macro-categories’. This is not problematic in itself, however, we have seen that it raises questions about alternative perspectives, voices and experiences vis-à-vis Surinamese independence. More specific, there seems to be a lack of understanding in how ordinary life of Surinamese people (e.g. non-politicians) related to the ways in which the independence is understood in the political system, at least regarding studies that have been published in the Netherlands. Even though there are some personal accounts and experiences of some authors (e.g. Jansen van Galen, Ramdas, Wekker), it seems they still lack a thorough and systematic understanding of how political and public discourse related.

### 3. RECONSTRUCTING POLITICAL DISCOURSE: FORMAL INSTITUTIONS AND SYMBOLS

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter reconstructs the political discourse on Surinamese independence from November 1973 till November 1977. It provides an answer to the third research sub question. I selected 138 newspaper articles of *De Ware Tijd*. I refer to the articles in *De Ware Tijd* as follows: *DWT*, date of newspaper article: page number. Since I found a great amount of newspaper articles, I presented the most important themes, issues, viewpoints and arguments that were discussed by various people in the political discourse per year, starting with November 1973. Chapter 5 examines this political discourse more closely .

#### 3.2 November 1973 - October 1974<sup>10</sup>

*Questions that revolve around migration and Surinamese and Dutch nationality and citizenship*

First, citizenship was seen as a ‘membership-pass’ that offered specific privileges. For instance, in 1973 there was a debate about whether the Netherlands had the ‘moral responsibility’ to provide Surinamese people with the option to choose a Dutch passport (*DWT*, 23 February 1974: 2). Second, double citizenship was also framed as the search for legal certainty and the potential of returning to less hostile environments (*DWT*, 3 August 1974: 1; *DWT* 10 August 1974: 2). Third, citizenship was also considered to contain a moral aspect and was about loyalty towards ‘your own people’. For instance, ‘Surinamese nationalists’ opposed the idea and possibility of having a double nationality (*DWT*, 12 August 1974: 2). According to these voices a double loyalty suggests dishonesty and not being a true Surinamese. Lachmon (front man of the VHP), in a similar way, argued against the possibility that Surinamese people could flee to the Netherlands with better legal rights and economic prosperity and leave their own people behind to let them build the country themselves (*DWT*, 31 August 1974: 2). Loyalty has also been politicised by the Surinamese minister of Development Olten van Genderen in 1973 through his expectation of re-migrating Surinamese people to help with the country (*DWT*, 5 October 1974: 2). In the negotiations on independence, the issues of citizenship and migration were framed in legal and administrative terms, even though it was highly political (*DWT*, 12 October 1974: 1). Fourth, it was unclear what migration actually meant politically, and also what would happen to the Surinamese nation in general. All in all,

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<sup>9</sup> The appendix presents a full overview of all the 138 newspaper articles.

<sup>10</sup> The reconstruction of this period is based on 38 out of the 138 newspaper articles (27,5 %).

various legal, political and cultural aspects of nationality and national citizenship were discussed quite extensively in this period (*DWT*, 12 October 1974: 5).

*Specific causes and consequences of migrating Surinamese people*

First, an important cause for Surinamese to leave the country was the majority of Creoles in the political system after the NPS had become the biggest political party. Mostly the Hindustani community expected negative consequences. Managing a possible 'Surinamese invasion' was discussed by Dutch government, but there was no intend to control this flow of people (*DWT*, 20 July 1974: 2). The high number of 'migrants' in 1974 was also the result of the fear of the possible restrictive migration policy of the Netherlands right after the independence in 1975 (*DWT*, 30 September 1974: 2). Second, the increasing numbers of Surinamese people in the Netherlands have also led to the advocacy of proper employment and housing by various groups proper (*DWT*, 20 July 1974: 7). Third, and directly related, the Surinamese groups in the Netherlands were targeted as 'unemployed' and 'uneducated', making employment in their new country a somewhat sensible result (*DWT*, 27 July 1974: 2).

*The status and meaning of the official Statute that regulated the relationship between the Netherlands and Suriname*

First, the Statute (formed in 1954) was considered as the core document that was be able to formally de-legitimise the official dependency of Surinam to the Netherlands. The Dutch government and political parties argued against the obligations that the Statute demands from the Netherlands. Surinamese political parties had different standpoints on this issue. The NPS was a proponent of official independence, the VHP was against it (*DWT*, 2 March 1974: 2). Second, the Statute was an object of political struggle and meaning. For instance, there were also voices arguing that political independence should go hand in hand with economic independence. Therefore, an official declaration of independence was worth little without economic strength (*DWT*, 2 March 1974: 2). Lachmon argued that the Netherlands wanted to get rid of the Statute, because it would be in the self-interest of the Dutch (*DWT*, 40 March 1974: 7). In this context the political meaning of the official date of independence should be mentioned. Lachmon expressed his worries regarding a 'rush' into an independent status. Even though he did not oppose independence in principal, he proposed an 'unprepared independence' (*DWT*, 8 April 1974: 1). The Dutch cabinet (represented by Den Uyl of the labour party) was a proponent of an independence Surinam, the sooner the better, preferably in July 1975 (*DWT*, 6 September 1974: 4). Third, there were stories about the potential legal and political implications of a chaotic and uncertain transition from 'dependence to independence'. This did not only refer to the implications for Surinam (*DWT*, 13 April 1974: p. 10), but also to various safeguards in treaties and international relations (*DWT*, 6 July 1974: 8; *DWT*, 14 September 1974: 4).

#### *Needs and financial donations from the Netherlands after the official declaration of independence*

The fact that Surinam officially became independent did not mean that the Netherlands would stop having relations with Surinam. In fact, there were fierce debates between the Dutch government (especially minister Pronk) and the Surinamese government about how much financial means Surinam should receive from the Netherlands (*DWT*, 1 June 1974: 1). Pronk argued that even though the Netherlands had a 'special responsibility' towards Surinam, the country would receive less than other 'developing countries'. The Dutch rationale was that Surinam was quite small and not as poor as 'real' developing countries (*DWT*, 22 June 1974: 2).

#### *The capacities of Surinam to cope with a truly independent status on its own*

A lot of debates in this year revolved around the question whether Surinam was able to be independent at all. First, the general capacities were a topic in the political debate. For instance, prime-minister Arron stated that there were no problems or barriers, but only specific practical issues regarding the independence. In fact, he also argued that independence could be a means to foster social cohesion (*DWT*, 25 February 1974: 1). Interestingly, a Dutch minister (Fortman) also 'believed' in the capacities of Surinam to be self-sustaining. Despite cultural and ethnic differences, Surinam could become independent, something that all Surinamese people should bear in mind (*DWT*, 25 May 1974: 3). Second the commitment of the Surinamese people were an issue of capacity. Dr. Essed (minister of Development/Construction) stated that 'a true Surinamese' would help with the development of Suriname (*DWT*, 24 November 1973: 9). In this context, Arron also stated that the Surinamese government would do anything let Surinamese people return to 'their home country' (*DWT*, 25 February 1974: 1). There were also 'experts' that argued that Surinam could indeed become independent, but it would had to be independent both politically and economically. This was actually feasible, they argued, as long as Surinam did not look to the Netherlands, and would introduce radical transformations (*DWT*, 13 April 1974: 2).

#### *Issues of national interest*

There are some issues of national importance that were discussed. First, there was a link between independence and the defence apparatus. The minister of Justice and Police (Eddy Hoost) was, among other things, assigned to reform the defence system in such a way that it was able to be recruited for development projects and confront issues revolving around the forest (*DWT*, 17 August 1974: 1). Second, the 'nationality of Surinamese ships and airplanes' had been a topic of national interest. It was argued that, opposed to cultural nationality and issues of citizenship, sufficient measures had been taken to 'nationalise' airplanes and other forms of transportation (*DWT*, 17 August 1974: 10). Third, the certainty about the territorial borders of Surinam was a

political theme. There should be clarity whether the 'New River' would count as the Eastern border of Surinam, before Surinam could become independent at all (*DWT*, 17 August 1974: 10).

### 3.3 November 1974 - October 1975<sup>11</sup>

*Issues that revolved around the process and progress of formal negotiations of the independence.*

As the date of formal independence approached (25 November 1975), substantive and procedural issues of 'working schemes', a national flag, defence, agreements (on e.g. aviation) were discussed (see e.g. *DWT*, 23 November 1974: 1; *DWT*, 1 February 1975: 1; *DWT*, 3 February: 2; *DWT*, 22 February: 1; *DWT*, 15 March 1975: 1; *DWT*, 29 March 1975: 1; *DWT*, 10 May 1975: 1; *DWT*, 17 May 1975: 1; *DWT*, 31 May 1975: 2). A good example of the procedure was a range of constitutional adaptations required for official independence (*DWT*, 23 August 1975: 7). Some examples of the themes that were part of the negotiations were re-migration (*DWT*, 14 August 1975: 1) and nationality and marital status (*DWT*, 19 April 1975: 7). These issues were not only being discussed by diplomats, authorities and lawyers, but also by Surinamese organisations that responded to the negotiations (*DWT*, 5 April 1975: 1).

*Political parties advocating for and against the independence*

A wide range of political judgements can be identified ranging from highly critical to full endorsement. The KTPI (Javanese party), for instance, was in favour of the independence. An important rationale for the KTPI was the sense of self-respect that the independence would yield (*DWT*, 3 February 1975: 1). Willy Soemita, the KTPI leader got the full support of his constituency for claiming that independence would safeguard the rights of all Surinamese people and, in particular, the Javanese. The Hindustani party, the VHP, was much more sceptical. The party leader was not principally against independence (*DWT*, 6 June 1975: 5), however he foresaw legal chaos (*DWT*, 23 August 1975: 4), criticized the constitution text (*DWT*, 29 March 1975: 7; *DWT*, 3 October 1975: 1) and the late participation of the Hindustani interest in the political process of negotiating independence (*DWT*, 7 June 1975: 2). Also other actors politically opposed the date when Surinam would become independent; it would simply be too hasty. Some NPS people (Creole party) feared that it would e.g. harm the negotiation position of Surinam vis-à-vis the Netherlands, it would stir national unrest, and socio-economically even damage the county (*DWT*, 6 September 1975: 2).

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<sup>11</sup> The reconstruction of this period is based on 51 out of the 138 news paper articles (37,0 %).

### *The road to the independence*

A great number of people was still engaged and judgmental vis-à-vis the preparation of independence. First, this was evidenced by the attitude of the Dutch. For instance, the Dutch prime-minister Den Uyl tried to remind everyone that the date of independence should not be delayed, and that every Surinam person should really make an effort adhere to this date (*DWT*, 25 August 1975: 1; *DWT*, 30 Augustus 1975: 2). This focus on the urgency of ‘the date’ was also evidenced by van Uyl’s worries about the progress of independence (*DWT*, 11 October 1975: 2) and his comments that it would be ‘absurd’ if the Surinam government and opposition did not agree on the new constitution (*DWT*, 4 October 1975: 1; *DWT*, 4 October 1975: 8). He would also emphasise the good cooperation (*DWT*, 25 October 1975: 3) and that it would be a pity if Surinam would one-sidedly declare independence (*DWT*, 20 September 1975: 1). Second, within the country there was also a debate about the position of Surinam regarding the approaching independence. As we have seen earlier, the VHP was not a great proponent of independence, also exemplified by Lachmon’s comment that Surinam was ‘wandering’ towards independence (*DWT*, 20 October 1975: 1). Also, specific challenges were addressed that Surinam would face right after independence. An example of such a challenge was economic independence that was associated with formal political independence, given the difficult economic situation of Surinam (*DWT*, 24 May 1975: 3).

### *Surinamese people and organisations in the Netherlands*

Quite some Surinamese people and groups that were physically located in the Netherlands in this period have been part of the political debate on independence. These people raised attention for all kinds of issues. For instance, a group of Hindustani (called *Trideva*) advocated that Hindustani in the Netherlands have particular interests, ‘cultural traditions and lifestyles’ (*DWT*, 16 November 1975: 2). This organisation tried to help Hindustani adapting to and integrating into the Netherlands. Furthermore, an organisation that represents all Surinam welfare organisations in the Netherlands, opposed the Dutch policy of dispersing Surinamese people (*DWT*, 21 December 1975: 1). Another organisation (called *Solidarity Movement Surinam*) publicly conveyed their worries about the de-colonisation of Surinam, in particular regarding transparency and development aid. They did this in a letter they addressed to the Dutch government and parliament (*DWT*, 14 June 1975: 1). A Javanese organisation in the Netherlands also entered the political debate on independence. They advised their fellow-Javanese in Surinam not to join them in migrating to the Netherlands, mainly because of the bad weather (it was too cold for old people), poor circumstances and the formal attitude of the Dutch (*DWT*, 23 August 1975: 1). A final example was that four Surinamese organisations supported the Surinamese government in its ambition to be independent (*DWT*, 1 September 1975: 2).

### *Questions and issues about the symbolic identity of Surinam*

Next to the political and legal issues, there were quite some themes that referred to the symbolic position of Surinam around independence. A good example was the issue of the new Surinamese national flag and its symbols. There were a lot of comments about the previous symbol (a boat). Arron stated that part of flag would have Indians, the 'first Surinam people' (*DWT*, 1 February 1975: 1). However, this would downplay the fact that also non-Indians have paid their dues and suffered (*DWT*, 1 February 1975: 2). So, there was absolutely no consensus among the Surinam people about what should actually be on the flag. Another example is the cooperation between the Dutch (KLM) and Surinam airlines (SLM) (*DWT*, 2 August 1975: 1). The decision that was to be taken mainly revolved around the type of airplane that the SLM could rent. Next to the legal and economic aspects of this relationship, it also denoted the symbolic role of Surinam - as an independent country - with 'its own' professional airplane.

### *Future of Suriname after the official independence*

A final issue was the set of expectations of Surinam, as a country, and as a people, about the period right after the official independence. There were a lot of different expectations; about Creoles trampling the Hindustani, about how the future President would be elected, about the rights of minorities and about the defence apparatus (*DWT*, 21 June 1975: 8). How diverse would the future Surinamese people be? Which group would be dominant in the 'new Surinam'? Furthermore, it was still unclear whether Surinamese people that moved to the Netherlands would be living happy lives in 'their new country' (*DWT*, 13 August 1975: 5). This was an important question, as evidenced by official commissions that were installed in Surinam and in the Netherlands, assigned to examine the legal options for migration and re-migration.

## **3.4 November 1975 - October 1976<sup>12</sup>**

### *Issues around (re-)migration and integration*

This period also centred around the flows of migration and remigration. First, it was about the motives and numbers of migrants that wanted to move to the Netherlands or Surinam. Surinamese people that moved to the Netherlands saw that independence was not a fiasco and a bloody transition. They wanted to return to Surinam (*DWT*, 20 March 1976: 6). However, there was also a significant number of Surinamese people that wanted to stay in the Netherlands (*DWT*, 10 July 1976: 2). They decided that their 'home country' would become the Netherlands. Second, it was also about political and legal concerns related to this (re)migration and integration. The Dutch and

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<sup>12</sup> The reconstruction of this period is based on 43 out of the 138 news paper articles (31,2 %).



Surinamese government did not want migrants to lose their 'roots' or be 'nomadic' (*DWT*, 15 May 1976: 2; *DWT*, 24 May 1975: 4). Both governments wanted them to be able to settle. Rotterdam authorities sustained affirmative action for housing of Surinamese people (*DWT*, 30 October 1976: 1). Surinamese, in the Netherlands, were supported financially and with regard to housing. Less problems were raised and addressed in public (*DWT*, 24 July 1976: 3). However, the Surinam prime-minister Arron argued that Surinam was not yet ready and capable to welcome large amounts of Surinam people to re-migrate (*DWT*, 29 May 1976: 1). On the other hand, and more politically, there were groups in Surinam that tried to convince the 'Dutch Surinamese' to return. Lachmon (VHP) of the political opposition, asked fellow-Surinam people to return to 'their country' on a Dutch TV show (*DWT*, 3 January 1975: 2). He argued that there was a stable political and legal situation. Also, Surinam people in the Netherlands were being attracted by the Surinamese 'Communist Democratic People's Front', via agricultural projects. This would foster employment as agriculture constituted the backbone of economic growth of Surinam (*DWT*, 31 July 1976: 2).

#### *Issues that revolved around the celebration of the independence*

Since the day of independence was a great happening for Surinam (in political discourse), there were all kinds of celebrations and festivals. Surinamese people invited Dutch people to celebrate the independence in Utrecht, the Netherlands (*DWT*, 15 November 1975: 1). There were also all kinds of 'independence-parties' in other Dutch cities, such as the Hague and Amsterdam (*DWT*, 27 November 1975: 2). The Surinam people in the Netherlands were clearly excited by the official transition of Surinam from a Dutch colony to an independent Republic. Also, Dutch parliament offered Surinam a gift in celebration of independence (*DWT*, 27 November 1975: 7). There were Surinamese politicians that welcomed independence and its historical significance. The VHP urged its constituency to participate in the celebrities, but also to reflect upon the future of Surinam (*DWT*, 21 November 1975: 1). Arron, as the prime-minister, addressed the Surinamese people on the 25<sup>th</sup> of November. He underlined the importance of the independence for the country, the unity of the people and the 'road ahead'. He also spoke about his vision on cooperation, responsibility and freedom in the new Republic. (*DWT*, 27 November 1975: 3; *DWT*, 27 November 1975: 4). About a month later, around new-year, President Ferrier also gave a speech in which he reflected upon the 'new Surinam'. He highlighted how Surinam was 'writing history'. Furthermore, he (just like Arron) spoke about 'responsibilities', 'unity of the people', 'hope' and 'the role of the family' in the new country. In addition, he explicated some policy themes and governmental programmes that would provide the fundamentals of the development in the (new) Republic (*DWT*, 2 January 1976: 3; *DWT*, 2 January 1976: 2). Finally, there were also some symbolic 'celebrations'. For instance, the statue of the Dutch Queen Wilhelmina was removed (*DWT*, 22 November 1975: 2). Since the new Surinam was independence, a residual symbol of

‘Surinam’s dependency’ would not be proper anymore. Furthermore, a ‘Surinamese press centre’ was opened, which gave rise to the democratic and professional character of the autonomous Republic. The final design and colours of the national flag were also made public. What is interesting is the fact that around the 25<sup>th</sup> of November, there were all kinds of ‘independence-discounts’ as tools for marketing (*DWT*, 8 November 1975: 1). They ‘celebrated’ independence via discounts (e.g. ‘the price drops to the ground’).

#### *Reactions and relations of ‘others’ vis-à-vis the independence and the new country*

Independence triggered the reaction of other countries and organisations. New relationships were born out of independence. For instance, the Netherlands considered Surinam (as an independent country) to be more special than other countries regarding development aid (*DWT*, 3 May 1976: 2). A wide range of Dutch newspapers commented on independence (*DWT*, 28 November 1975: 5). In the newspaper there were congratulations to Surinam and its people, but on the other hand also a little scepticism on how this young and new nation would develop. Sweden and Israel officially acknowledged Surinam as a country (*DWT*, 6 December 1975: 2). Relationships with Brazil and France were established (*DWT*, 2 February 1976: 3). They worked on new projects that enabled Surinam to develop as a country. What is more, Cuba committed itself as a new partner of Surinam (*DWT*, 13 December 1975: 2). Osvaldo Cárdenas, member of the Cuban Communist Party, stated that Cuba would prevent ‘imperialists attempts’ to control the new Surinam. Cuba was to be a protector of Surinam against all kinds of threats. The neighbouring country Guyana also contacted Surinam right after the official announcement of independence. The economic situation of these two countries were considered as comparable. These countries talked about starting economic and political cooperation (*DWT*, 27 November 1975: 1). A final example of the new international relations that emerged was Surinam’s United Nations membership (*DWT*, 28 November 1975: 2), prime-minister Arron also went to New York to formally request UN membership. When Surinam officially became a member, the Surinamese flag was raised at the UN (*DWT*, 6 December 1975: 4).

#### *State-related issues that would change as of 25<sup>th</sup> of November 1975*

A wide range of formal, legal and state-related issues were addressed. For example, an autonomous Surinamese defence apparatus was installed in the new Republic (*DWT*, 8 November 1975: 2). Also, the new constitution of Surinam was drafted after quite some preparations, (*DWT*, 17 November 1975: 1). This was not only a formal and important legal concern, it was also symbolic for the transition of Surinam. Furthermore, Surinam also officially announced its independence as a Republic (*DWT*, 27 November 1975: 11). Johan Ferrier was sworn in as the first official president of the Republic. Ferrier also addressed ‘his people’ and conveyed what he expected from them.

### *Reflective views on the independence*

Next to all the excitement of independence, there was some reflection on independence, about 'the road' to independence. Independence would have really started to make progress with the commitment of prime-minister Arron on 15<sup>th</sup> February 1974. The political and legal agreements and concerns were included. For instance, the somewhat sceptical role of the VHP, and the issues of development aid and national borders (*DWT*, 24 November 1975: 1; *DWT*, 24 November 1975: 9). The same kind of reflection occurred half a year later. Here, the approach was not 'the road towards independence' but started with independence and reflected upon Surinam's independence half a year later. Professor van Dam, member of a (combined Dutch-Surinamese) commission that evaluated development projects in Surinam, stated that Surinam should invest in large industrial companies no more; the country 'should invest more in its natural sources'. Colonial structures still prevented this more productive approach. Regarding the migration, Breddels (local Dutch director of the housing policy) stated that less than 6% was willing to return to Surinam, even though they were 'needed' in Surinam, to 'help and build up the country' (*DWT*, 24 May 1976: 1). Dutch officials used established and formal indicators to evaluate the (economic) development of Surinam (*DWT*, 24 May 1976: 4). Things were going well, but some projects were not yet implemented. The biggest problem was considered to be the facilitation and education of Surinam people in the Netherlands. Breddels stated that Surinam people are 'behind' in education, and it was also unclear if one should educate 'them' for a future in Surinam or in the Netherlands. Nevertheless, the 'national spirit' improved in this period (*DWT*, 24 May 1976: 5). There were good relationships between different groups in Surinam and political parties were preparing for the next elections. The VHP leader Lachmon argued that there should be much more emphasis on employment and education.

### **3.5 November 1976 - October 1977**

In this period there were significantly less debates that directly revolved around the independence. However, some relatively relevant themes were addressed in the political discourse. This periodisation consists of 6 out of the 138 news paper articles (4,3 %).

### *Surinamese people in the Netherlands*

Surinamese people were discriminated in the Netherlands. In local neighbourhoods, tensions emerged where Surinamese people were involved (*DWT*, 22 November 1976: 2). The organisation *Lalla Rookh* organised two days that focussed on integration, re-migration, and the cultural position of Hindustani and Muslim people in the Netherlands. Governmental officials were also involved and stated that discrimination was mainly due to the lack of information of these immigrants among the Dutch.

### *One year after the independence*

The 25<sup>th</sup> of November 1976 marked the anniversary of independence. At one of the sites where this independence anniversary was celebrated, a priest stressed how ‘fantastic’ the country was (*DWT*, 22 November 1976: 3). Prime-minister Arron, at the same celebration, stated that this annual celebration of independence should be continued as a tradition. Even though the celebrations were organised as a happy event, there was some critique on the lack of professionalism (*DWT*, 26 November 1976: 3). And, as was the case in the previous year, in the Netherlands, there were also celebrations on the anniversary. This was also expressed by the ‘open house’ of the Surinamese embassy in the Netherlands (*DWT*, 26 November 1976: 3). Arron gave an official speech about the one-year anniversary of Surinam. He stated that Surinam had all opportunities and potentiality to grow and become a better country. This meant that Surinam should also be more integrated as a whole, as a nation, but also less isolated as a country internationally. Surinamese people should ‘work for ourselves, for our family and our country’.

### *Issues on (re-)migration and integration in the Netherlands*

Surinamese people in the Netherlands struggled with ‘their home’ and ‘their identity’. Even though Surinam tried to seduce ‘migrants’ to re-migrate, the Surinamese government was more ambivalent to welcome ‘doubting migrants that returned’ (*DWT*, 21 May 1977: 5). They were almost seen as being ‘disloyal’ and ‘traitor’, since they had the opportunity to visit and stay in the Netherlands, yet still did not know where to go. A different but related issue is the flights between Surinam and the Netherlands. It seems that the fit between ‘supply’ and ‘demand’ of flights has become better and better (*DWT*, 12 March 1977: 1). The Surinam government stated that the cooperation between the airlines of both countries had become even better, which smoothened the flows of people.

## **3.6 What does the literature say about the political discourse on Surinamese independence?**

It is fruitful to briefly return to the literature on Surinamese independence. This establishes a link between the political discourse as reconstructed in this chapter and the ways in which the literature predominantly understands the political discourse on independence (possible overlaps and differences). When we go back to the literature on the independence, as discussed in chapter two, we can observe the following<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> It should be noted that writers and poets engaged in political themes, in particular about Surinamese nationalism and independence, in the 1960s and 1970s (e.g. Dobru, 1965). Also fiction about the Surinamese independence has turned out to be a form to understand Surinamese history (e.g. Amatmoekrim, 2006;

Virtually all scholars and studies show a large overlap with the findings in the newspaper articles in terms of themes and positions within the formal political discourse. This is no surprise, as already argued, given the data sources and level of analysis. Legal issues, party-politics, cultural and economic nationalism, migration and citizenship, anti-colonialism, relationship with the Dutch government and Surinamese people in Netherlands, all of these themes seem to fit in the existing analyses of and frameworks about independence in the literature. And again, I do not criticise the literature for this, as I have identified these themes myself. However, it is striking that the political discourse, to a large extent, resembles the literature on independence. This is exactly the kind of critique one could have on many of the existing literature. In other words, the large overlap of our findings and the focus of the literature on Surinamese independence underscores the need to investigate how such formal political discourses relate to experiences of ordinary people.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

This chapter reconstructed the political discourse on independence of Surinam in the period 1973-1977. Chapter 5 examines this discourse more elaborately, but some general remarks should be made.

We have seen that the political discourse consisted of a wide variety of themes, positions and argumentations. From legal and procedural politics concerning migration and the army, to cultural aspects referring to the national flag. From strong proponents of independence and pragmatists, to radical opponents. These themes and positions were not fixed, they did not remain present and prominent all the time. Yet, over the years, migration and citizenship was always an important issue. This is no surprise, given the large number of people that actually left Surinam in these years. There were legal and administrative aspects to it, given the formal nature of citizenship for the state apparatus. Migration was also highly political, symbolic and even economic. A large number of people, mainly Hindustani, feared a Creole-takeover. Others simply expected to have more economic prosperity in the Netherlands. Population (or migrants), for others, also meant the potential for economic development (as labour force). All of this made migration and citizenship a top priority, it grasped the very core of what was (perceived to be) at stake. Migration and citizenship implied (a lack of) political and national loyalty, choosing your own interest, the potential for (re-)building 'you own' country, individual certainty and wellbeing, and so on. We have also observed that in the 'year(s) before the official announcement of independence, a wide range of political and ideological aspects emerged concerning the feasibility and desirability of

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McLeod, 1987, 1998, 2005). Even though it is very interesting, the domain of 'political art and poetry' is not part of this study, therefore I have excluded it entirely.

independence. The closer the date of independence, the more specific the political and nationalist emotions became. The same can be said about the relevance of details of legal and administrative aspects of independence. This is indicated by the Statute, the constitution, the national flag and development aid. All these issues became more and more detailed in the political discourse, issues over which there was no clear consensus.

Against the background of the tens of thousands of fleeing Surinamese, it is noteworthy that in the weeks before and after the official independence date, there seems to be a celebratory mind-set which was shared by virtually all Surinamese (or so it seemed in the political discourse). In other words, the political discourse seemed to be occupied with only one issue (the event, or day, of 'becoming independence'), which made conflicts and contestation temporarily irrelevant. The idea of 'being-Surinamese' and having a shared history and future seemed to mobilise a certain experience of 'harmony' and 'oneness' in the political discourse. This, however, did not mean that there were no conflicts and issues to discuss. In fact, there were many issues and concerns over which people struggled (e.g. migration, development aid, and so on). It might also be the case that such 'dissonant voices' were excluded by media organisations (such as *De Ware Tijd*). Such organisations, as well as politicians, might want to act upon the historical moment for Surinamese people and framed the event as an harmonious one. Right after the formal declaration of independence, the political discourse focused on the 'issues ahead', such as economic prosperity and international relations. And, again, the issue the (im)migration still remained present in the period right after the independence.

It is also important to note that the political discourse on independence 'as such' died out relatively fast. That is to say, even though there were a wide range of issues and opinions directly related to independence (e.g. anniversary of and reflection upon the independence), explicit references to the independence itself became marginal. One might say, the political discourse shifted from independence-led themes to the themes as such, as substantive political issues. This is also indicated by the small number of newspaper articles referring to the independence since the second half of 1976.

## 4. RECONSTRUCTING PUBLIC DISCOURSE: PRIVATE VOICES AND PUBLIC NARRATIVES

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents 11 interviews in relation to Surinamese independence (connected to the third research sub question). Chapter 5 examines these interviews more closely, thereby reconstructing public narratives on Surinamese independence. Since each interview had its own particularities and characteristics, they are presented separately in this chapter. The interviews are represented in a condensed form and some formulations are paraphrased or cited. In this way, the wordings and vocabulary of the respondents are represented as much as possible while still construing a analytically relevant level of abstraction to reconstruct the public narratives. As discussed in paragraph 1.3, each interview consists of three sections, the biographic, the thematic and a brief analytical part. Some interviews consisted of large parts of ‘irrelevant data’, other interviews were very relevant almost the whole interview. This also means that some interview reconstructions are longer than others<sup>14</sup>.

Some additional introductory comments should be made here. Even though this study is about Surinamese independence, specifically the period 1973-1977, it turned out to be quite difficult to get ‘data’ that ‘fitted’ this scope during the interviews. Instead of ‘forcing’ the data into the categories, vocabularies and timeframe that I intended, I think it is more fruitful to let the respondents speak ‘for themselves’ and try to analyse them in their own context. This, however, does not mean that I did not ask the respondents about independence and the specific period 1973-1977. On the contrary, most of my questions, especially on the thematic part, were about these issues. Nevertheless, when respondents talked about their experience and views of ca. 35 years ago, it turned out that they did not necessarily speak within the ‘research parameters’. This explains why there are little references to the exact period of 1973-1977. It also might explain why independence as such is often secondary and the primary issue that shaped their lives around independence. This is not the case with the political discourse, as the newspapers articles, interviews and speeches that referred to independence had specific dates and themes. In chapter 5 and 6 this will be contextualised and elaborated upon more explicitly.

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<sup>14</sup> It is significant to note that some of the respondents talked about personal and emotional aspects of their lives a lot, which made the core theme of the interview (i.e. independence) sometimes secondary. However, I tried to deal with this by listening to their stories, pick up ‘hints’ and smoothly frame the conversation (back again) in terms of the independence.

## 4.2 Interview one: An ambivalent position

### *Biographical aspects*

The first respondent was a Creole woman of 78 years old. She had six children and has been a widow for 29 years. After she finished the 'ULO'<sup>15</sup>, she started working as a 17 year old nurse in Paramaribo. She was expected to get married, which she did when she became 20 years old. Her aunt gave her a piece of land on which she built a home for her husband (who was an accountant-assistant) and herself. They both moved to Curacao because he found a job there and he wanted some 'change'. Around the official independence of Surinam (1975), she was about 45 years old. In this period she still lived in Curacao with her husband. She did read Surinamese newspapers (*De West* and *De Ware Tijd*) and listened to Surinamese radio. Interestingly, she and her husband wanted to move to Surinam again. They liked it better than Curaçao, because she 'could go to the market as early as 6 am'.

### *Thematic aspects*

Regarding independence, she initially was in favour. She approved of prime-minister Pengel, Lachmon and Ferrier. But Venetiaan and Bouterse 'did bad things'<sup>16</sup>. It changed her opinion about independence. It turned out 'they did not keep their promise' and 'things did not change'. She went back to Surinam around 1989. When I asked what she did in the period of independence, she said she did all kinds of things such as taking musical lessons and engaging in handcraft. She joined the elderly house in 1999. In the elderly house she sometimes borrows a newspaper (*De Ware Tijd*) from her neighbour and read it.

### *Reflection*

Some points should be explicated here. First, this respondent referred to a wide range of politicians from the 1960s till 2005, even though the interview was specifically about independence. The respondent evaluated the politicians and independence in terms how things 'really' changed. This implies that what the independence actually meant for her, depended on the years after independence. Second, she left out certain politicians (e.g. Arron, Bruma), so her account of the

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<sup>15</sup> This can be considered as 'secondary school'.

<sup>16</sup> Pengel (NPS) was prime-minister of Surinam (1963-1969) and had various ministerial posts after 1969. Lachmon was the leader of the VHP, the political party that won the 1973 elections. Ferrier was governor of Surinam till 1975, after the independence he became the first official Surinamese president. Venetiaan (NPS) became minister of Education in 1973, he was also president from 1991 till 2005. Bouterse was responsible for leading the 1980 military coup, and is the current (2011) president of the Republic of Surinam.



independence leaves out a certain 'part' of history. This doesn't necessarily mean that she deliberately or strategically downplays another historical account. It can very well be the case she 'experienced independence' and its meaning by means of referring to certain politicians (that reminded her of the lack of actual change).

### **4.3 Interview two: Everybody fled, but real change...?**

#### *Biographical aspects*

This respondent was a 87 years old Hindustani woman. She was born in Commewijne (Surinam) and became half orphan (her father died). After her father died, a church father brought her to 'Rajpur' (a Roman Catholic boarding-school). At that time, she was about four years old. She stayed at Rajpur till she was 14, then she got married. The nurses took care of the children at the boarding school. The dominant way of thinking was that boys got their own home when they grew up, while girls were 'made ready to serve the men'. That was the reason why she married at such a young age. She and her husband worked at the plantation, which was a big shift in her life. They stayed in one house, together with her family-in-law. Their marriage did not work out, because they did not know each other 'well enough'. She found another man to marry and she gave birth to 11 children. She worked very hard (also during WWII). There was no money, 'we ate whatever we grew'. Her new husband later started working at Billiton [a well-known company in Surinam that excavates bauxite, SJ].

#### *Thematic aspects*

She was informed by the developments around the independence through newspapers and conversations with other people. The dominant image she had was that 'everybody fled'. But she did not think about fleeing whatsoever. Especially people that lived in the city fled. Those people did not have a good life anymore. This was the case for Hindustani people, but also for others. When I asked her about her opinion on independence at that time, she was somewhat indifferent. She had to work as hard as before independence, nothing changed in her daily life. They [she and her husband, SJ] were settled, they had a nice 'orange tree'. She had heard that everything would be better after independence, but nothing really changed. They still had to work very hard and a lot of things were not even available or became more expensive. It was still: 'we ate what we grew'. After independence (which she dates back to '1975') some people left. But she thought it would be unfortunate to leave, she did not experience problems. She stayed in a rural area, far from the city, far away from 'that bombaris'<sup>17</sup>. She was still identifying with the VHP, even when things turned

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<sup>17</sup> With 'bombaris', she meant something like 'problems', 'uproar'. This referred to the politics around the 1980 coup, and perhaps the political victims (deaths) of 1982.

bad for the Hindustani community. She was not really into politics, even though her husband 'talked like a mayor'. He would talk with friends about politics. He was not really angry, 'he still worked so things were ok'. However, her husband died in 1971, so he did not experience the official part of independence. Two of her daughters went to the Netherlands to study, but her sons stayed in Surinam. In retrospect, she did not really care for independence as such because things were fine (mainly with her children, and financially). She still 'listens to the radio' (preferably news, Dutch news but also Hindustani). This interest for news is relatively new, she did not have time for it when she was younger.

#### *Reflection*

This respondent did not identify with the tens of thousands Surinamese people that left the country around independence. Instead, she stayed in Surinam as she did not experience or expect any problems. She also did not really experience any change due to independence. This is indicated by her comment that after independence they still ate whatever they grew. She additionally confirmed this by stating that her daily routines and practices did not really change because of independence (in 1975). This seems to fit in the way she accepted the 'tradition' male/female roles and her young marriage. She was not really engaged with the issue of political and public issues, her life-world mainly centred around the household.

### **4.4 Interview three: First socio-economic survival, then independence**

#### *Biographical aspects*

The third respondent was a female, from Dutch and French descent. She was born in 1921 (87 years). She grew up in Paramaribo and went to a Catholic school as a child. She did not go to a high school and was mostly occupied with work in the household. She got married after she was 20 years old. Her husband (half Chinese and half Creole) went to Curaçao for work, where he 'worked for Shell'. 'In 1960 we came back to Surinam, because he wanted to go back to his country', she said. She still received financial support from his work (pension). She had five children, three of them live in the Netherlands, one stayed in Surinam and one went to the United States. Basically, they either moved or stayed because of work. Even though she wanted to go to the Netherlands as well, her husband wanted to stay. Therefore, she stayed in Surinam.

#### *Thematic aspects*

Before the independence, there were some problems but 'we had something to eat, so it was ok'. Independence itself was not that bad in her eyes. According to her, some people said it was indeed bad, but 'I could eat, so...'. She did not bother with the problems of Surinam, 'if I just get my little plate with food than it is ok', she stated. She did not have a strong opinion about independence as

such, or whether it made Surinam a better place to live in. She joked that one still has ‘to pay for everything’. When I asked what was really different right after independence, she told me in general terms that differences were great. She did not leave her house often, she stayed at home a lot of the time. Interestingly, she said that some people would say that they (themselves) ‘lived poorly’ and others would say that things were ok. Some people just like to complain a little (then she laughed).

#### *Reflection*

It’s noteworthy that the work and opinion of her husband was quite dominant regarding the places she lived (and did not live). In other words, to a large extent she depended on her husband.

Furthermore, even though she knew there were different (conflicting) opinions about independence, she valued it positively since she could still eat. It is significant that this seems to be the central indication for her to experience the independence as ‘not bad’. This is backed by her indifferent attitude towards the question whether independence was good for ‘Surinam’ in general. Even though she acknowledged that there were large differences before and after independence, she put different opinions in a somewhat relativist perspective.

### **4.5 Interview four: Nostalgia for the good old days**

#### *Biographical aspects*

This Creole woman was born in 1921. She was quite knowledgeable and used vocabulary that indicated she was well educated. She grew up in Paramaribo and explicitly called herself a ‘Roman-Catholic’. The father of her mother was French, which explained her French last name. She went to a Catholic school till she was 14 years old. Between her 14<sup>th</sup> and her 17<sup>th</sup> year, she stayed at the ‘fashion school’. She could also opt for a study and work in the educational sector, but her mother explained her that a profession would be better, financially (like designing and making clothes). This would enable her to take care of her parents. She worked for someone else for 24 years, but after that she started her own shop (in the same ‘industry’). This would increase her income, so she could support her parents financially. Interestingly, she got married when she was 47 years old. She did not have any children. Her husband did not have a high income, which was also a reason for her to keep on working. Her husband died when she was 58 years old. After his death, she did not stop working. Two years before she started living in the elderly house, she stopped with her own shop because her legs started hurting whenever she worked.

#### *Thematic aspects*

She explained that before independence things were much better, for instance regarding ‘civility’ and ‘upbringing’. Today, nobody takes care of each other. According to her, we now live ‘in a different period’. But in general, she and her friends and relatives did not speak about politics and

independence that much. It was not of her interest, she was primarily occupied with her job, her work. When we talked about politics, she immediately said she did not participate in elections that much, she did not vote for three times. What she did remember though, is that after independence 'everything became more expensive'. However, she did not like independence. Suriname became independent much too quickly in her eyes, which was Arron's responsibility. Right after Arron became president he declared independence. Things were not organised adequately. That was the reason why so many people fled to the Netherlands. A lot of people sold their home or put it up for rent. She stayed in Surinam and joked: 'where should I run to?' 'If you flee, you have to be lucky and know people'.

The issue of civility returned in the interview, and she said that prior to independence 'we were much more civilised than today's world'. Things were more 'cosy' and 'nice' before independence. She was quite critical towards the decline of Surinamese social security payments over the years, and even talked about specific details including percentages. She said that she considered herself to be Dutch for a long time in her life (50 years), after independence she became Surinamese. She said that Suriname is 'a great country', but not everyone can take care of it decently. Today, in the elderly house, she reads the newspaper and watches football games.

After the interview, she asked me some questions about where I stayed in Surinam and what I did in the Netherlands. She stimulated me to go on with studying, as this was very important. 'Today's youth doesn't really do this'. She explained me that education 'makes you equal to your partner'. When 'your husband' kicks you out of the house and you have no good education, 'you're finished'. One shouldn't be depending that much on others.

### *Reflection*

This woman was clearly more intelligent, self-conscious and critical than the previous respondents (also indicated by her last comments). She did not only depend on herself financially, but conveyed and supported her opinion about independence quite eloquently and convincingly. There were three major criticism; (1) things became more expensive; (2) civility decreased; and (3) Surinam was not yet prepared for independence. She blamed Arron for rushing into independence and for the big 'exodus'. Her position towards independence and Surinam more generally is somewhat ambivalent. On the one hand she considered herself to be Surinamese, because of independence. On the other hand, she thinks that some people just cannot take care of Surinam.

## **4.6 Interview five: A moment of celebration**

### *Biographical aspects*

This respondent was a 75 years old Chinese woman. She went to the MULO-school. After her years of education, 13 years later, she got married. They had lived together for over 48 years, and

had two children. After the death of her husband she got health problems herself (diabetes). Her husband worked for the government. After she was 30 years old, they went to the forest/inland, and lived there for a while. He had his own cook, as her husband did not want her to work. Her daughter went to the Netherlands, but her son stayed in Surinam. In the 1970 she lived both in the city and in the inland, but more in urban areas. She considers herself to be a Surinamese woman. Her father (a Chinese man) got a son and fled to China. This respondent stayed with her sister in Surinam.

### *Thematic aspects*

Regarding independence, she said that some liked it and some did not. She liked it, because 'you have to, in the end, become independent, right?'. According to her, the period of independence was a nice time. She read a lot, and 'when one reads', she said, 'one learn a lot'. 'But', she continued to speak in a whispering tone 'Surinamese people don't like to read'. Surinamese people, according to her, only like to talk about 'all kinds of things'. When she was young she used to read all the books she could get her hands on. Because she used to be poor, she got books from the library. She read fiction, and basically all kinds of books she thought were interesting. When I asked her what book she still remembers, she replied that she recalls a book about South Africa. In that book (of which she couldn't recall the title) she read about how the South African people wanted to get independence, 'so why not we?'. She read a lot about South Africa in Surinam, but she forgot them. She still reads each day. She says, when you don't read, you start to digress and 'become old'. She said that she learned a lot from those books, 'her life'. 'One can repair one's life if one reads'. When talking about her (girl)friends, she said that they did not read, she was her own best girlfriend. During the period around independence, she read 'all newspapers', listened on the radio, talked to people. She did fear a 'war', but nobody was violent. All the people were happy to see each other on the street. 'They were happy to get independence, even though they didn't exactly know what it was' (she laughed). People were very calm, they didn't even fight for their own independence. On the actual day of independence, you did not even know if you were a Hindustani, or a Javanese. She was 'there' [the official declaration of independence, SJ], two hours before the official start. She was there quite early, because otherwise you could not get a spot. Since she was early she 'ate some chips and drank a little', she said. It was a nice and warm period. 'But then, there is politics', she continuous. 'Maybe you support that [political] party and I another one'. She felt a little bad for princess Beatrix when the Dutch flag was taken down while the Surinamese flag rose. However, that was the way it was supposed to work. 'We served under the Dutch flag for over 300 years, and we had it quite good then'. 'We now have to work harder', after independence. Before independence, with one gulden 'you could buy a lot, but after that you have to work harder for the same things'. Things became more expensive. 'Surinamese people quarrel a lot and fight a

lot among each other'. She said that 'after independence things got better slowly', people started to build. But 'now', things are quite 'tight'. One has to live with few financial means, she gives an example of her own life. She says, 'here in Surinam, you have to own money to get things done'. And 'I, we, poor people, we can just take care of ourselves'. According to her there are old people that still suffer [because they do not have sufficient amount of money, SJ].

This respondent said she has travelled a lot in her lifetime, and really seen poverty. But in the end, she says, 'I love my country Surinam'. She also said that she 'cannot breath properly in other countries' (for instance, in the Netherlands, in Alphen aan den Rijn), but in Surinam 'it is great'. When praising Surinam, she contrasted it with the Netherlands. She said: 'in Surinam you grow a tree today and get fruits in a couple of years'. But there [in the Netherlands, SJ], 'you have to steal from a farmer'. She found the period of independence 'great'. 'I can't describe it. It was a great day! Everyone was dressed beautifully. If Surinamese people could be one like that, then it would be great. But as soon as they went to their homes, they talked about Cafferries<sup>18</sup> and Javanese. But they don't mean it in a bad sense. We are one, but we won't understand that we are one'.

### *Reflection*

This respondent accentuated the importance of reading and self-education, even though she classifies herself as 'poor'. Given her image of independence as a self-emancipatory redemption, based on the books she read about South-Africa, she thought it was noteworthy that there was no 'war' and 'violence' in Surinam. She said that people did not even fight for their independence. The independence nevertheless was inevitable and justified. However, interestingly, she stated that things were perhaps better under Dutch colony than after independence (in hindsight). Life, for example, became more expensive. She also praised Surinam and its nice people, while also friendly criticising particularism among Surinamese people.

## **4.7 Interview six: An intelligible and critical stance**

### *Biographical aspects*

This 73 years old woman was Creole. She considered herself to be a Lutheran. She was born in Paramaribo and has never lived somewhere else. She has never been married as well. She worked in the educational sector for 40 years and (formally) started receiving her pension when she turned 60 years old. She went to the 'kweekschool' and after that the 'hoofdakte'. Since the hoofdakte period she also started working in the field of education (since she was 19 years old). In education she did courses that related to trade, accounting and math. She really liked the profession of teacher. She learned that people outside Paramaribo were much 'more disciplined' than Paramaribo children.

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<sup>18</sup> 'Cafferries' is a negative word for Creoles.

They didn't have television and had respect. Interestingly, she did not really want to go to the elderly house.

### *Thematic aspects*

People didn't talk about independence very much. People knew; 'it had to come'. We were not a colony anymore, so it just had to come. Therefore, 'we didn't talk about it very much'. She stated that colleagues talked about it sometimes. They discussed whether Surinam was 'ready for independence or not'. In-depth debates about politics, health, finances were not present. The idea was that 'we had to become independent, end of story'. She was also 'too happy' with the independence to discuss those issues. In that time 'we didn't worry about them bakkra's' [whites/Dutch, SJ]. Interestingly, she explicitly asked me whether I knew what that word meant. Since I was interested in her understanding of the word I did not answer right away. She directly added that it meant 'those Europeans, Dutch'. Even though 'they' controlled education and so on, she did not experience it as a burden. She highlighted that the Dutch teachers (of whom she received education) were nice and very good, competent. They had a broad (and more international) perspective on things. 'Our teachers', she said, 'didn't have that'. More and more Surinamese people started to take over the jobs of the Dutch people, but the atmosphere was very good and things were organized smoothly. She didn't have bad feelings towards Dutch teachers and Dutch people in general. She learned a lot from them, and the atmosphere was very good. She had Dutch colleges with whom she was very close and whose wives she knew very well. But they felt they 'had to leave Surinam'. She still communicated with them after they left to Surinam. This respondent did not have a different feeling regarding being a Surinamese or Creole. She went to the Netherlands two times before the independence and didn't experience that the colour of her skin was relevant whatsoever. She did not feel discriminated in the Netherlands at all. She gives an example about a friendly bus driver (he spontaneously greeted her). When I returned to the theme of independence more specifically, she told me that she was touched when the Dutch flag went down and the Surinamese flag went up. She was both proud and felt a kind of melancholy. Since her birth, she knew the 'red-white-blue'. But there was a group of extreme Surinamese that said that 'those bakkra's should leave'. They even removed a statue of Jualiana, because everything 'had to be Surinamese'. And, five years later 'they saw what happened, the revolution'. 'They had the image of Cuba and Venezuela, they also wanted that'. But they forgot the difference between the pressure of a colonizer and Surinam (without this pressure). After independence, they did not notice very much. Pupils and students also did not notice it very much, they 'already knew freedom'. And 'we can also learn discipline from them'. For instance, when 'a Dutch person meets at 8 o'clock, he is there 7.55. Whereas a Surinamese person would arrive at 9 and you should be happy that he arrives at all! We are quite indifferent'.

She talked about the large number of Hindustani people fled to the Netherlands, because there were rumours about the Creoles 'taking over and raping their women'. Creoles thought: 'this is our country, we do not have to go to the Netherlands'. The respondent herself was always happy in Surinam, she didn't even think about it. But again and again, she conveyed to me that independence was not really an issue in everyday live. She did want to be in the Netherlands during the coup, because there was some kind of pressure. 'One could not even trust one's own family when talking about Bouterse'. She is not sure whether Suriname was really ripe for independence. She, again, emphasised how friendly the Dutch were and how they 'together ate roti and bami' in your own home. They made you feel like 'you were all one'. 'We creoles' have a 'passive mentality', different than the Dutch and the Hindustani. 'They are much further than us, they work very hard. But we, we must have a Mercedes and a mistress'. She illustrates this difference in mindset by referring to the difference between a Dutch person that rightfully asks back his 10 cents and a Creole person 'who doesn't mind'.

#### *Reflection*

This woman was well educated and had a firm and critical opinion about what happened during independence. Noteworthy is her critical position towards Surinamese people and their mentality. Examples are the lack of in-depth political discussions and the irrational political fanaticism. This opinion is supported by contrasting Surinamese (which she sometimes equates to Creole) mentality to a Dutch (and Hindustani) on e.g. punctuality and educational professionalism. Nevertheless, she was happy in Surinam and the independence was not very important in everyday life. For her the independence as such was not really an issue, compared to the 'irrational' and 'unprofessional' mentality of Surinamese and Creoles in general.

### **4.8 Interview seven<sup>19</sup>: The independence was a celebration theme**

#### *Biographical aspects*

This respondent was a 76 years old Creole male. He was born in Paramaribo and has mostly lived there as well. He went to the Netherlands (Utrecht and Rotterdam) when he was young and went back to Surinam to live here around 35 years [he can't remember when he went to the Netherlands]. He went to the Netherlands with his first wife. This man worked for Billiton, also in the Netherlands. When he received his pension and went to Surinam. He became a front man of a Districts office of Billiton Surinam. He considers himself to be both a Surinamese and Dutch.

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<sup>19</sup> This respondent was somewhat chaotic in answering the questions. He did not make very coherent sentences. Nevertheless, I tried to give him time and make sense of his arguments and statements.



### *Thematic aspects*

During the official independence, he was not in Surinam. But two days after the independence he went to Surinam. He celebrated the independence both in the Netherlands and in Surinam. But, interestingly, he said that in that time ‘one was dumb’. ‘You did not exactly know what independence meant’. However, they did party and celebrate it. When I asked him how he experienced independence, he stated that he can think more clearly now. Earlier in his life, he could not act according to the things he thought. When he arrived in Surinam, he saw that ‘people were partying’. Pengel talked with Lachmon after some differences of opinion. He now still receives pension of the Dutch Billiton. Things have become more and more expensive. After independence, if you do not have a job, you ‘have to pick your own fruits’. This respondent sometimes said that he was Dutch, whenever I talked about specific Surinamese issues. He would like to go back to the Netherlands, he even asked me if I could arrange it. When I explicitly asked him whether he considered himself to be Surinamese, he confirmed. At the end of the interview he talked a little about how ‘we Surinamese’ cannot run a country. A land ‘needs management, we can’t do that’. He again mentioned that he did not receive his pension from Surinam, but from the Dutch Billiton.

### *Reflection*

This respondent positioned himself as being Dutch *and* Surinamese in different contexts. Since he celebrated the independence, it can be argued that he supported the independence. At the same time he said that ‘one was dumb’ and celebrated without knowing the actual meaning of it. Regarding the politics of the independence, he mentioned Pengel (NPS) and Lachmon (VHS), without mentioning the topics of the debate and other politicians. More important was the fact that he still receives pension from Dutch Billiton. After independence, life became more expensive and quite tough economically. Interestingly, he asked me if I (coming from the Netherlands) could help him out with going to the Netherlands. His motive was not very clear but it looked as if he wanted to ‘go back’ (as he experienced himself as being Dutch) or expected to have a better life in the Netherlands.

## **4.9 Interview eight<sup>20</sup>: From certainty and happiness to inferior professionalism**

### *Biographical aspects*

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<sup>20</sup> The wife of this respondent sat directly next to us. This interview was sometimes an interview with two people, because of her presence. If I friendly tried to ask her to leave, I guess the interview would not take place at all. She was quite dominant and wanted to be in the interview setting. I tried to let him speak as much as possible and let her be as ‘irrelevant’ as possible. Whenever she interfered, I looked at the way in which the respondent reacted.

This respondent, a Javanese male, was born in Paramaribo in 1923 (85 years old). He was a seaman and went all over the world (e.g. Cuba, Italy, United States, South America, Germany). He worked in the ‘machine chamber’ of cargo ships and started working around the age of 25. When his mother died he came back to Surinam. Then, there was very little work. The people, in his eyes, were poor and had to work hard, but there was little work. He got married when he was 45 years old, which he thought was ‘quite late’ because of legal and financial reasons.

#### *Thematic aspects*

Around independence, he was busy with other things, football and swimming. He could not really remember how he felt about independence. He did not have time to think about independence. This respondent did not know what would happen, but ‘people were happy’. Things were different than now. After independence, he went to the United States, in Brooklyn, New York. They went there because Surinam didn’t have anything (to offer), in terms of jobs. He started talking about Surinam in a more general way. Then he talked about the fact that Creoles caused ‘problems’.

During the final part of the interview his wife ‘interfered’ more and more, about her own perspective and experience. Her husband let her talk and I had to subtly deal with it. Since I already had a fruitful interview, it was no problem to end the interview in a conversation with the two of them. Interestingly, the man stated that the Dutch know how to organise things much better and ‘tight’. ‘Now there are no clear rules any more’. The Javanese get into government, and get their own people in. The same holds for Hindustani and Creoles. So, all groups have their own little interest (friends and families). He said: ‘under the Dutch authorities, things were much more strict’.

#### *Reflection*

This respondent portrayed an image of independence as a happy event. He experienced little or no problems or concerns at the time. The bad economic climate right after independence made him move to the United States. He praised the Dutch and their rule because of the clarity and regulations. This opinion is backed by the different ways in which Surinamese people organise things badly. Surinamese people also prefer to pursue their own particular interest. He did not, however, explicitly state that the Dutch pursued the interest of all people.

### **4.10 Interview nine: Surinam was not ripe, but afterwards business as usual**

#### *Biographical aspects*

This woman was 84 years old. She was born in Paramaribo and went to Curacao when she was 24. She moved to Curaçao for a job. Before she did the so-called ‘hulp-akte’, she finished the ULO-school. She was educated as a teacher, and performed as a teacher for 42 years. She met her

husband when he was 20 years old and came back from Curaçao after 15 years. The reason for their return was that they preferred Surinam to Curaçao.

#### *Thematic aspects*

This woman was not a proponent of independence, Surinam 'was not ripe' for it. According to her, Surinam did not have a good financial organization. They did not talk about independence that much, at work they just talked about work. She was a little sceptical about independence. She learned about independence through radio and newspapers (mainly *De West*). She said that after independence, things were not very different. 'You make the best out of it'. Some people just like to complain, so 'they' also complained about independence. But there were no big differences, 'you go to work and go home to your children and you eat'. This woman could put things in perspective quite easily, you just did what you could do and you adapted to the circumstances (e.g. to higher prices). She (still) reads every day and checks the news on the television. She also makes puzzles much, it keeps her busy. It trains 'her brain'.

#### *Reflection*

It should be noted that this respondent, as many other respondents, had an ambivalent opinion. On the one hand, she clearly argued that Surinam was just not ready to be independent. She thought the organisation of society and economy were expected to be problematic. On the other hand, at the level of daily life after the independence, she did not actually notice any significant differences. Even though she highlighted actual differences (e.g. higher prices), she did not experience major problems with adapting to these changes.

### **4.11 Interview ten: Advocating historical necessity and spreading divine wisdom**

#### *Biographical aspects*

This 93 years old woman was half Creole and half Hindustani. She was born in Paramaribo and lived both in Paramaribo and in Nickerie (from her second till twelfth year). She went to a school in Nickerie. Her mother died at the age of 38, which is why she partly took of her brothers and sisters. She went to the MULO-school, she was taught to be a teacher. She also studied French, English and Spanish because she liked languages. After she finished her study, she started working (when she was 18 years old) while still studying different languages. In total, she worked in the educational sector for 42 years. She taught Dutch, English, singing and later on also French. She has also worked for several organisations next to her work: the Christian community (youth work), she attended two large international conferences, in Canada and Switzerland) and scouting. She has never been married and did not have any children. She did had a boyfriend, but he got another girl. She did not found someone whom she could trust. In addition, she did find god. She turned to the

Salvation Army for some years. She even became a Salvation soldier and learned how to play the mandolin.

### *Thematic aspects*

Regarding independence, she started by saying she went to the Netherlands several times (1953, 1967 and 1974, for holiday and meeting family). In October 1975 she went back to Surinam. She really liked the Netherlands. The currency was good, 1 Surinamese gulden was 2 Dutch gulden, but there was a lot of “Djoegoe Djoegoe”<sup>21</sup>. She followed the formal ceremony on television. She and ‘they’ were happy with the independence. Some people would say that ‘we’ aren’t ready yet. Her idea was that ‘we should be independent’, not to keep your hand open to get help. She especially liked that there was very little or no violence. When asked if and how she picked up the developments around the independence she replied that she frequently read the newspaper, and also talked with YUUCA-members about it. There was ‘a little ethnic thing’, with Hindustani and Creoles. She remembered that ‘a Creole man had a Hindustani girl and had to run to Guyana’. Luckily things ended fine when they returned later to Surinam. Right after the independence, she didn’t notice real differences. There were different parties (she mentioned the VHP, NPS). Interestingly, she tried to explain why things did not work out really well by highlighting that there maybe were too many nationalities in Surinam. ‘What objectives can you reach, when things are fragmented in politics?’ Especially the revolution [of 1980, SJ] had its impact. ‘It effects a lot of things’. According to her we should ‘forgive each other’. ‘If we have hate in our hearts, we are aching ourselves more than the ones we hate.’ This is something her cousin preaches, and some people do not like this. She refers to god and the forgiving nature of Christianity. This could help the nation. Looking back on the independence in 2008, she said that ‘we’ could be ‘much further’. She takes the United States as an example to work together, something Surinamese politics does not. It is ‘party politics’ (she laughs).

At the end of the interview she asked me about myself, whether I (the interviewer) was married or had a girlfriend. After saying that I was first focussing on finalising my study, she argued that the Surinamese youth was lazy and wants things the easy way. She adds, the Hindustani really work hard and take care of themselves. ‘We Creoles’ should not complain when we are reaching less than others. In the Netherlands it is now ‘Sodom and Gomorra’. She refers to accepting ‘partying’ gays, which is not something that is accepted by scripture. She laughs while saying that ‘if there were only gays in the world, there would be no mankind any more’.

### *Reflection*

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<sup>21</sup> Djoegoe Djoegoe can be translated as creating unrest or disturbance.

This respondent was happy with the non-violent character of independence. However, she had some trouble with the fragmentation and different identities within Surinam, which was (and is) an important barrier for effectively reaching decisions and results. This could be overcome by forgiving the other in the context of the Christian religion. Surinam could be further if this was the case. She did not explicate where this would lead, 'further towards' what? In a more general way she was critical towards the passive attitude of Suriname people. She also labels herself as a Creole, as being part of a group (different from Hindustani), that should complain and grumble less.

#### **4.12 Interview eleven: Opposing independence and averting politics**

##### *Biographical aspects*

This was Dutch woman of 83 years old. Her parents came to Surinam, as colonists. She was born in Paramaribo. Her father had a farm at Hermitage (a rural district). She did the Bonifacius, till 3th grade. After that, she stayed at home and helped at the farm (around 12 years). She had seven brothers/sisters. She left when she was 24 and got married to a Chinese man. Her husband had a small supermarket, and she helped him out.

##### *Thematic aspects*

She did not care for independence whatsoever, she did not identify and engage with it. She also did not think Surinam was ready to deal with independence, 'they were just not ready'. So, she was not in favour of independence. After independence, things got worse according to her. Queues got longer, for instance 'to get milk'. She said that 'now [in 2008, SJ] it seems that things are getting better'. When talking about politics, she said she did not trust political parties, she just 'had to work'. She nicely illustrated this by showing her own little garden next to the elderly house. She also reads a lot, fiction. She now has time to read. When she was younger she had to work a lot. At the end she said that other countries are much worse off. 'We should thank god that we live in Surinam', as Surinam doesn't have 'natural disasters'. She still watches television, but not politics, 'she detests it'.

##### *Reflection*

This respondent had an inter-ethnic marriage, which could be expected to be somewhat exceptional in the 1970s. She had ambivalent attitude towards independence. On the one hand, she did not care for it whatsoever. On the other hand, she argued that she thought that Surinam was not ready to be independent, indicating her negative stance towards independence. Politics according to her, was and is inherently negative. In her daily life, she just had to work hard. Independence indeed made things worse in her eyes, mainly economically.

#### 4.13 What does the literature say about the public discourse on Surinamese independence?

When we look at the literature, we can portray how ‘public discourse’ or ‘ordinary life stories’ of Surinamese independence are represented. Even though chapter two has shown that these voices and perspectives are relatively marginal in the literature, I found an interesting study conducted by Auwerda and Smits (2000), who interviewed Suriname people that left Surinam in the 1970. This study was about the opinion of Surinamese in the Netherlands on recent developments in Surinam (since 1975) and their relationship with Surinam.

I present these result of their study given their relevance, but it is important at the outset to note that these people left Surinam. Methodologically, this means they do not have the same profile as the other respondents of this chapter, who stayed in Surinam. Not only did they leave Surinam, but their opinions and experiences vis-à-vis Surinam and the independence were not based on their lives during independence itself, but based on their lives in the year 2000. Auwerda and Smits interviewed 409 people (that were at least 16 years old in 1975). The results of the study, specifically regarding independence, can be presented as follows.

- On the question whether the respondents were in favour or against independence in 1975, 59% of the respondents responded negative, 28 % in favour and 13 % had no opinion. Differentiated by cultural/ethnic identity; 84 % of Hindustani respondents was against independence, 71 % of Javanese, and 40 % of Creoles;
- When the interviewers asked the respondents to mention ‘bad’ and ‘good’ things in Surinam *after* independence of 1975, they responded in the following way. The motives of the respondents to leave Surinam around 1975 were different. 29 % mentioned reasons related to the possibilities to study, 23 % mentioned economic reasons and 8 % moved because of political reasons. Other reasons were related to love or divorce, or family reunion. Regarding negative aspects of recent Surinamese history 33 % said it was the so-called ‘December murders’ of 1982; 20 % mentioned the 1980 military coup; 13 % mentioned the inflation; and other phenomena were mainly economic and public services (e.g. rich/poor division, education, health care). Some of the more positive aspects were less clear, 23 % could not even mention a good development at all. However, there were some positive aspects: 30 % mentioned positive terms that related to the independence: ‘self-confidence’, ‘self-dependence’ and ‘freedom’. A second positive sign are ‘the bridges’ mentioned by 28 %. These bridges were built over the two rivers the *Surinamerivier* and the *Coppenamerivier*.
- Another result was the average grade of 4 out of 10 for how Surinam was actually doing 25 years after independence (in 2000, the year of the study). Again, it seems that Creoles are

more positive (4.5 out of 10) than the Hindustani (3.5 out of 10) and the Javanese (4.2 out of 10).

- A final interesting result was that 62 % loved Surinam more than the Netherlands, whereas for 18 % this was the opposite. The main reasons that were given to choose Surinam were: no stress, the nice weather, degree of freedom and more beautiful nature. The reason to love the Netherlands more than Surinam were: presence of family, more opportunities, education, health care, social security and public services. And again, more Creoles choose for Surinam instead of Netherlands (74 %), then Javanese (56 %) or Hindustani (46 %).

All in all, it seems that this study showed that Creoles identified with Surinam in general and independence in particular more positively than Hindustani and Javanese, for various reasons. This might relate to fear that existed among Hindustani about independence and the possible consequences. The fact that more Surinamese had a negative attitude towards independence in 1975 than positive, partly explains why they moved to the Netherlands in the first place.

It is important to note that the results of such a study are aggregated and are general social categories. Since these respondents do not really address the main focus of this study, but even more problematic is the fact that the categories used to study positive or negative attitudes is quite static as well as only based on 'ethnicity'. Therefore, it is fruitful to complement these statistical results with a more individual account of how people experienced independence of Suriname, linked to the same aspects of 'support/oppose' independence and 'positive/negative expectations'. However, such binary and static categories and aggregated data are very hard, if not impossible, to compare with in-depth interviews with people that stayed in Surinam.

#### **4.14 Conclusion**

This chapter presented 11 interviews with Surinamese people on the independence. It has become clear that these individual accounts vary in terms of their viewpoint and relation with regard to independence, which should all be understood in their specific economic, cultural, ethnic and social contexts.

In general, it can be noted that respondents that actually lived outside Paramaribo, were not well educated and lived from the things they planted themselves, were less engaged with independence as such. Respondents that did have a good education and a well-paid job and had stronger opinions regarding independence. What is more, the latter 'group' were more critical or ambivalent towards independence as an event. They mostly argued that Surinam was not yet ready, whereas the former 'group' found the independence either relatively irrelevant or a just and well-deserved happening. The respondents that were more critical towards independence, also seem to have (more) contact with Dutch people (e.g. as colleagues). A lot of the respondents, including less

well educated people, argued that Surinamese people could learn from the Dutch their way of planning and managing a country, as well as the mind-set of the Dutch. A study on the experience of Surinamese in the Netherlands, 25 years after independence, showed that Creoles identify with Surinam and its independence more positively than Hindustani and Javanese. This is hard to align with the individual accounts, since such a clear picture (based on ethnic and cultural factors) cannot be provided. For instance, one Creole respondent was much more critical towards independence than a Hindustani one.

It is quite difficult to comment in a generic way about these accounts. Not all Hindustani were afraid of Creoles, not all women were financially dependent, not all Creoles referred to a Christian God for moral guidance, not all respondents were poor. The same holds for specific viewpoints and attitudes regarding independence. For some respondents, independence was something that they had been waiting for, and they finally ‘obtained’. Others preferred that Surinam actually did not become independent at all. Again others expressed a totally different position, namely that of relative indifference and irrelevance. In their eyes, independence did not really matter that much, as long as they had food or a job. One respondent even said that they did not even know what independence meant, but they celebrated it nevertheless.

In fact, actual differences in experience and opinions cannot be reduced to and ‘explained by’ social identities such as gender, race, class, age or class. Rather, if one desires to ‘conclude’ or to grasp a ‘general logic’, I believe, the best thing to do is to delve into the specifics and details of each ‘individual account’. One can indeed examine how these each of these respondents related to political discourse. However, this is not the objective of this study. This thesis aims to reconstruct *public discourse* and its related to political discourse regarding Surinamese independence. So, instead of focussing on individual accounts per se, public discourse (as discussed in paragraph 1.3) should be understood in terms of public narratives.

In this sense, the 11 interviews are highly relevant in another way. They serve as the basic ‘data’ to reconstruct the public narratives, and how this relates to political discourse. This is what happens in chapter 5.



## **5. EXAMINING POLITICAL AND PUBLIC DISCOURSE ON INDEPENDENCE**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter examines Surinamese political and public discourse on independence more closely, as well as their linkages. Doing so, it provides a substantial part of the answer to the fourth research sub question. First, it analyses both discourses separately (paragraph 5.2 and 5.3). Second, in paragraph 5.4, the relationships between the discourses are highlighted in terms of similarities, differences and especially their intersections. The next chapter supplements this chapter by focusing more on how the relationships between the two discourses can be understood more reflexively (as the final part of the fourth sub question).

### **5.2 Examining political discourse on Surinamese independence**

Within Surinamese political discourse on independence, dominant (and marginal) themes and positions can best be presented along a number of ‘dimensions’ in the discourse. As argued in paragraph 1.3, discursive themes and positions can be presented combined (as a position often refers to a specific theme). Four themes, and interconnected sets of positions, can be discerned in the Surinamese political discourse on Surinamese independence: legality, electoral politics, culture/symbolism and economy. Some themes and positions dominated the discourse, others were marginal or negotiated dominant themes and positions.

#### *Legality*

One of the most dominant issues in the political discourse on independence were concerned with *legal* frameworks and procedures. Before the official independence of 1975, many debates centred around what legal issues independence will and might trigger. As independence came closer, legal issues were discussed in much more detail. After 25 November 1975, such legal concerns were still present. Independence, then, was about the role, status and legal-administrative organisation of the Surinamese state. Arrangements and decisions on the (re-)migration and citizenship were clear examples. Surinamese people that fled to the Netherlands, for various reasons, obtained a different legal status and both the Dutch and Surinamese government were involved in determining what should and would happen with these migrants. Obviously another major legal issue was the formal status of Surinam in relation to the negotiations on the Statute. In addition a wide range of issues on the ‘national interest’ of Surinam were associated with this legal dimension, such as the national border and the defence apparatus. It is difficult to generalise discursive positions for all discussion on legal debates, but some important positions should be mentioned here. At the international level,

Surinam and the Netherlands were debating about when to become independent, development aid, constitutional changes, citizenship and migration. Differences attitudes between these 'countries' should be understood at the national level, i.e. the role of specific ministers, political parties and civil society. Surinamese nationalists, for instance, dismissed the possibility of having a double nationality, whereas Dutch civil society organisations claimed that a double nationality would give people some legal certainty. Another lively debate revolved around how 'soon' independence should be announced. The Dutch government, represented by Den Uyl from the labour party, proposed a swift independence. However, Surinamese politician Lachmon (from the Hindustani Party), explicitly did not want to 'rush into independence'. Electoral politics, here, is directly linked with legal debates about independence. Such 'opposite positions' were mediated by the political and procedural structure, by trying to make 'a compromise'. Whether the results were actually 'a balanced compromise', is up for debate. The fact that many Hindustani left Surinam and started a new life in the Netherlands, for instance, suggests that not all concerns and fears were properly voiced and translated (legally).

#### *Electoral politics*

Directly related to these legal issues, all kinds of judgements and claims were expressed in terms of *electoral politics*. Different opinions and political stances between political parties in Surinam, between Surinam and the Netherlands, but also viewpoints from civil society organisations within the Surinam and Dutch society. It is hard to discern these spheres, as some arguments and positions expressed by civil society simply resonated with the official viewpoint of a minister. Regarding independence, Javanese and the Dutch government were in favour of independence. The VHP, however, did not favour independence, especially not on a short term. Creoles were mostly in favour, but also had some reservations. Many civil society organisations dealt with this political debate in their own way, by resisting decolonisation (Solidarity Movement Surinam) or preventing Javanese to join other Javanese in the Netherlands. These organisations exemplify the negotiation of the dominant discourse on being in favour or against independence. Negotiation, here, implies re-positioning oneself in relation to a dominant debate on independence. An example in which alternative or negotiating positions in political discourse did *not* resonate in political discourse, were Surinamese organisations that demanded better protection and rights for 'Surinamese immigrants' in the Netherlands. Worrisome socio-economic circumstances of Surinamese in the Netherlands were put on the public agenda by such organisations, even though political discourse did not pay attention to it very much.

### *Culture and symbolism*

Besides legality and electoral politics, the political discourse contained a wide range of *cultural and symbolic aspects*. Around independence, many debates that flared up centred around cultural identities. This is no surprise, as most political parties were organised along ethnic and cultural lines (e.g. Creoles, Hindustani, Javanese). The sceptical stance of the VHP was *both* political and cultural-ethnic, since the VHP feared that the Creoles would 'take over' both politically and in everyday life at the cost of Hindustani. This fear was not only caused by the fact that the VHP was a just different political party, but at the same time because they had a specific cultural or ethnic profile, different from Creoles. The political and cultural aspects were highly intertwined. This direct link is also evidenced by debates over e.g. 'citizenship' and 'the national flag'. However, during the official independence on 25 November 1975, many speeches and celebrations suggested 'unity' and 'harmony'. So, next to the cultural identity of Surinam as a fragmented nation, there was a clear emphasis on 'unity'. Surinam was a country that had the 'potential' to do great things as an independent nation. Such images of either fragmentation or unity were often about Surinam as a *cultural nation*. Here, also the SLM airplane (in context of the SLM-KLM relationship) is significant, since it can be said to refer to the cultural identity of Surinam that has 'its *own* airplane'. Regarding cultural or symbolic positions in the political discourse, one cannot say there was a dominant discourse on 'unity' or a harmonious Surinam. Rather, there were many differences and disagreements. Emphases on unity and being one nation, should then, be seen as strategic and being useful to politically mobilise the idea(l) of Surinam as a coherent nation. A nice example is the speech of the Surinamese prime-minister Arron on 25 November 1975.

### *Economy*

An final dimension was the *economic* dimension. An example of the economic meaning of independence was the large flow of migrants to the Netherlands. Migrants were, among other things (e.g. 'the Creole take over'), expected to leave Surinam because for economic reasons. The Netherlands was supposed to provide them with a 'easy living', without actually having to work hard. In Surinam, one was expected to work harder than abroad. In the political discourse, it was also debated whether political independence could exist at all without economic independence. This is another important example indicating that the role of economy was quite significant. Some argued that Surinam was not ready to be independent, exactly because of its 'economic weakness'. Directly related to this, 'Surinam people' were expected to (re)build the new country, even the ones that resided in the Netherlands. The economic stability, development and growth were crucial for the 'new country'. In this sense, the debate over development aid was purely economic. In a different way the socio-economic logic was also relevant for the Surinamese people in the Netherlands. They demanded 'proper housing and employment', which can be labelled as socio-

economic categories of conditions. And again, all these examples were not totally isolated from the political, legal and even cultural issues. In fact, they were highly intertwined with what was at stake politically and culturally. It is interesting to look at the discursive positions in the political discourse regarding economy. In a sense, many of these positions problematised an individual or collective level of economic strength, prosperity and welfare in one way or another.

#### *Dominant, marginal and alternative themes and positions*

First of all, legal and electoral themes were more dominant than symbolic and economic themes. That is to say, the political discourse 'observed' independence to a large extent as a legal and electoral topic, even though cultural and economic issues were part of many debates and quarrels. Interestingly, some of the cultural or economic issues were framed as being legal or electoral in nature. For example, cultural diversity and socio-economic differences of 'the Surinamese nation' were not as dominant as how ethnically structured electorates struggled for what independence should mean and what legal changes Surinam should undergo. What was virtually absent in the political discourse, was an explicit link between independence and socio-economic classes. That is to say, even though economic issues were raised, the ways in which different economic classes would suffer or gain from independence, was not really an issue. It is also important to note that it is hard to discern specific themes and positions, as they are often highly related within the political discourse. The same theme and framing of independence seemed to resonate at different levels. However, the exact ways in which the framing or discursive positioning took place, was very much context-dependent. It is here that negotiation of a dominant theme or set of positions took place. Alternative voices and positions were expressed *in relation* to dominant themes and positions, but they could not be reduced to them. It should be noted that marginal and alternative themes and positions in the political discourse, could not be 'really' marginal or alternative, as they already are positioned *within* political discourse. Such positions, however, can be alternative within political discourse; within newspaper articles, vocabulary of journalists, official statements of civil society organizations, language used by politicians and diplomats. This, however, is not alternative in the sense that it did not even resonate or link whatsoever with any of the discursive positions within the political discourse.

#### *Methodological reflections on the political discourse*

It should be noted that the political discourse can be represented and reconstructed in various ways, as is the case with any discourse. I have opted to employ newspaper articles since it would give an account of the ways in which politicians *and* other politically relevant actors and groups relate to a certain theme and position themselves in the discourse. However, different selections might have had somewhat different representations of the discourse. First, this holds for the *timeframe*. If I had

started in 1950 and ended in 2000, the analysis might have turned out somewhat differently. For example, in 1977 the independence became more and more irrelevant as a newspaper item. What is more, the impact of the *coup d'état* in 1980 and the 1982 so-called 'December murders' might have turned out to be much more important than independence itself in such a research. This, however, would have led me into a totally different focus, research question and set of findings. Every timeframe (be it 1, 50 or 500 years) has advantages and blind spots. Nevertheless, for the political discourse, this problem was not that relevant because in 1976, for instance, no newspaper article referred to the a coup or a revolution at all. Second, there is the issue of *quantity and diversity of data sources*. It can be argued that more newspaper articles and data sources, the richer the representation of the political discourse. Even though this might be true, I believe my representation and investigation of the political discourse is methodologically convincing, given the reliability of the DWT, the literature review of the political discourse on Surinamese independence (in chapter 1) and the comparison between the literature review and my own findings (in chapter 3). However, as stated above, what counts are 'an alternative subject position' should be understood in its context. To voice an alternative position within political discourse, is to be still acceptable to speak within political discourse. Being radically alternative, then, is not the same as being alternative within the given parameters of e.g. opposing independence.

### 5.3 Examining public discourse on Surinamese independence

Even though 'individual interviews' are very hard to 'aggregate' to a public discourse, it is my intention to examine the most important themes and positions that have been voiced by the respondents. These themes and positions should be positioned in what Habermas would call 'the public sphere'. Six themes, and related sets of positions, can be discerned which can be called *public narratives*: independence, ordinary life, links with the Netherlands (and Dutch people), relations between Surinamese people, 1980 revolution and migration. And again, some public narratives (and positions embedded in them) were more dominant than others.

#### *Independence*

Independence, for many interviewees, was something special and important. However, what it exactly meant differed. Here is where different discursive positions emerge. Most of the interviewees considered independence to be an event that actually and 'finally' made Surinam independent. They celebrated independence. They emphasised a kind of burden they were able to drop. After 'all those years' of depending on the 'Dutch coloniser', at last, Surinam experienced redemption. Other interviewees considered independence to contain a more pessimistic side. That is to say, some argued that Suriname was not yet 'ready' the independence. For instance, prime-minister Arron rushed into independence too fast, Surinam was not fully prepared or did not yet

have the capacities to deal with it properly. This is expressed in the work of Anil Ramdas as well. As stated in paragraph 4.14, respondents that were well educated and were articulate had a more sceptical or critical attitude towards independence.

#### *Ordinary life*

The direct impact or significance of independence in ordinary life often remained somewhat abstract or remote. The most striking example is that some interviewees argued that they enjoyed the moment of becoming independence (25 November 1975) even though they did not really know what it meant. It was considered to be a nice event that meant having a good time and being together. But in such cases, there were little or no references to the social, political and/or legal implications for 'the nation as a whole'. Politics was often considered to be a non-issue. People sometimes were not even interested in politics, they distrusted politicians or just detested the very idea of politics. These negative attitudes may relate to the association between the violent politics of the events in 1980 and 1982 in Surinam, but perhaps just because people do not like politics in general. Sometimes the male partner of a female respondent was indeed interested in independence and talked about (sometimes with friend or family). Furthermore, and related to this, the relevance of independence for ordinary life was often described in *socio-economic* terms. Sometimes respondents referred to themselves as 'poor people' that 'just had to take care of themselves'. Independence had real 'impact' since many of the interviewees stated that the 'prices of products' increased after independence. Also, sometimes, independence was not really an issue as long as people 'had food'. Economically, things were going bad 'after the moment Surinam became independent', queues were longer than before. This implies that socio-economic certainty of being able to have or buy food was a basic need. If this really became problematic, independence (hypothetically) might have become (more) relevant, in whatever way. Another issue is that some interviewees did not feel 'more liberated' or 'more free' after independence. They already 'knew' and 'experienced' freedom, they were actually treated quite well by the Dutch. Independence did not really change their lives, it did not denote a radical shift from being oppressed towards redemption. This was suggested though, but merely at the symbolic and more abstract level, e.g. 'one has to be independent one day, right?'

#### *Links with the Netherlands (and Dutch people)*

There were quite different and sometimes quite contrary views and judgements regarding the Netherlands and 'the Dutch'. Public discourse was quite ambivalent in this regard. On the one hand, the Netherlands was seen as a sort of 'enemy', a coloniser and power that ruled over them. This is evidenced by references to the redemption of the independence. On the other hand, the Netherlands (or 'the Dutch') was actually quite respected. In terms of discipline, proper education,

professional style of management and rational organisation and planning, the Dutch were 'better' than Surinamese people. They 'really' knew how to organise, how plan and manage things adequately. The Dutch were also considered equals in ordinary life. One of the interviewees had dinner with Dutch colleagues (she worked as a teacher) as they were good friends. This also explained why some respondents regretted independence; it would be better if the Dutch were still in power, they really 'knew' how to manage the country.

#### *Relations between Surinamese people*

The public discourse was often about the ways in which groups in Surinam co-existed (or rather did not co-exist). The general experience was that there was a peaceful relationship, but the groups lived relatively separate. Especially around the official independence and the ceremony on 25 November 1975, people experienced themselves as a harmonious unity, as Surinam people under the same flag. But, the moment people went home again, they started living and seeing things in their own world (as Hindustani, Creoles, etc.). All these groups had their own ethnic 'stereotypical characteristics'. For example, a Creole respondent said that 'we Creoles' are passive, whereas the Hindustani and Dutch are really disciplined and active in study and work. Also in politics, every group favours their own people (Javanese, Creoles, Hindustani). So, even though Surinam seemed to unite on 25 November 1975, all groups had their own lives, their own traditions and ways of seeing themselves and the others.

#### *The 1980 coup*

Whenever the 1980 coup or revolution was mentioned, it clearly was a sensitive topic. People were scared and things were really going bad. One of the interviewees referred to it as 'bombaris', which is Surinam for 'mayhem' and 'chaos'. The 1980 revolution was a moment that had quite some impact, as I experienced the interviews, even more than independence. Whenever people referred to it, they often used superlatives or generic moral statement. This, for me, meant that it was a crucial but also somewhat traumatic experience. One person even told me that, around that revolution, one could not even trust 'your own family'. Strictly speaking, this experience about 1980 (and maybe 1982), is not relevant when studying 1973-1977. However, it cannot be downplayed easily, because in the minds of many respondents independence cannot simply be separated from the events of 1980. Apparently, independence the memory of 1980 (and perhaps of 1982) which says a lot about the major impact of those events.

#### *Migration*

About half of the respondents talked about the question of *migration*. Migration was mainly about people that fled the country. Interviewees highlighted the large number of people that left the

country. Not only Hindustani, but all kinds of groups fled. The people I interviewed did not feel the urge to go to the Netherlands, they really liked Surinam (which perhaps justified the fact that they stayed in Surinam in the interviews).

#### *Dominant, marginal and alternative themes and positions*

The most dominant public narratives were about independence, ordinary life, links with the Netherlands (and Dutch people) and relations between Surinamese people. The 1980 revolution and migration were less dominant and mentioned less often or marginally. What this actually means, is that for people that were not politicians, diplomats, journalists or organised themselves in civil society, independence was indeed an issue, but it depends what is actually meant by it. For many respondents, independence was a vague notion that referred to redemption. For some, it meant virtually nothing, for others it had real socio-economic consequences. Interestingly, the relationships among Surinamese and 'the Dutch' or 'the Netherlands' was very dominant. These categories somehow were useful in reconstructing how respondents experienced and viewed independence. Articulate and educated respondents had a closed bond with Dutch people and (self)criticised Surinamese people (and their mentality) as a whole. Respondents with less symbolic capital were less nuanced about 'the Dutch' (colonisers) and also used less critical (and sometimes 'nostalgic or romantic') language to describe Surinamese people in general.

It would be too easy to state that all public narratives 'alternative' and 'negotiated the dominant discourse' in their own way, just because the lives of these respondents resided outside political institutions. What is more, we have seen that there were different (and contrasting) positions within this public discourse as well. I will return to this issue in the next paragraph.

#### *Methodological reflections on public discourse*

As discussed in the methodological framework, the intersections between the biographic and thematic dimension in the interviews is important. In this context, some substantive and methodological reflections should be mentioned.

First, the role of *education and profession* of interviewees. It can be said that there are 'two groups of respondents': (1) people with a good education and profession; (2) people that were relatively poor and mostly stayed at home. This difference can provide an explanatory context for different opinions within the public discourse itself. A clear example is the attitude towards Dutch people. Respondents who had a relatively high education and good profession (often a background in teaching), experienced no resentment towards the Dutch. Ramdas is a good example of this. He was an intellectual, studied in the Netherlands and even had a PhD. His analytical skills, as well as the capacities of other respondents, enabled him to observe different aspects of independence and valued the Dutch presence before the independence. Most respondents who were neutral or



positive towards the Dutch were educated quite well and/or had personal experience with them. Others, that did not have such a background, were less cheerful regarding the Dutch. Another example is self-critique. Respondents who experienced a higher education and read books, were much more open and easy going in criticising 'their own group' and Surinam. Even though others were also somewhat critical, the level of self-critique differed significantly. Again, Ramdas can serve as an example, as a Hindustani he was quite critical towards the Hindustani community.

Second, the role of *gender and ethnicity*. Some of the respondents were female, which meant that most of 'their stories' dealt with marrying a man, having a husband, being a dependent or an independent woman, and so on. These classical gender-related aspects might have some influence on the ways in which public discourse is represented and reconstructed. Some argued that their husbands (males) were more into the political debates that revolved around independence. However, I did not experience that male respondents had significantly *different* opinions about independence in direct relation to their gender identity. Similarly, the cultural and ethnic background of interviewees did not seem to play an important issue. The respondents were quite diverse, which enabled me to be sensitive for different attitudes towards the independence based on ethnicity. Again, in my experience, these issues were less significant than the concern of education and profession.

It should be noted that these contexts *can* partly explain this difference, even though further research is needed to support such statements.

#### *My role in the interviews and public discourse*

As mentioned in the methodological framework, my personal role should be reflected upon as well. In my experience, my personal identity was not very significant for the construction and representation of the discourse. However, it can be said that three significant personal identities were somewhat explicit and potentially significant to some degree.

First of all, I introduced myself in the interviews as a *student*, some respondents, after the interview, said that I should go on with studying. One even stated that education is good as it 'makes you independent' (financially). Another respondent argued that I was doing my best, opposed to 'today's youth'. Second, and related, my *age – in relation to my education* - also became relevant. However, this was always before or after the substantive part of the interviews, making them much less relevant than if it was directly an issue during the interview. Third, my identity as a *Surinamese or Hindustani*. Mostly in the beginning, respondents asked me whether I was here on my own or with my family. Even though it was not expressed explicitly, it is quite common that Surinam people go to Surinam with their family. And since, I might look like a Hindustani for most of them (since they have lived all their lives in a country with some people that might 'look like

me’), this could also be an issue. One moment, Hindustani were contrasted with Creoles, in terms of work ethics and discipline, implicitly here my presence might have been relevant.

#### **5.4 Similarities, differences and intersections between discourses**

Now that we know what the dominant and marginal themes and positions were at the political and public discourses around 1973-1977, we can focus on the relationships between them. I will briefly discuss the similarities, the differences and the intersections. The latter will be discussed at a more conceptual and reflective level.

##### *Similarities and overlap*

There are quite some similarities in terms of themes and questions in both discourses. This was also the case for the attitudes and opinions related to them. First of all, the wide variety of opinions on *independence*. For example, if independence would make Surinam a better country or not, and whether it would favour some and not others. These positions can be found in both discourses. In other words, both discourses had a variety of opinions about independence as an event or phenomenon. The underlying assumption that revealed this shared focus was the reference to the date of 25 November 1975. Many issues that were framed in relation to independence somehow were connected to this formal moment of independence. This also meant references to a ‘pre-25/11’ and a ‘post-25/11’ period. Some debates, events and experiences occurred beforehand (e.g. preparations, negotiations, Hindustani started fleeing to the Netherlands) and afterwards (e.g. anniversary of independence in November 1976, prices went up). At the same time, there was quite some consensus in both discourses on the shared struggle and the unity of Surinam against Dutch dependency (as an external enemy or coloniser). In both discourses, Surinam was often seen ‘as Surinam’ in direct opposition against ‘the other’. Whenever this opposition was most evident, the unity of Surinam became evident as well (e.g. ‘us’ against ‘bakkra’s’, ‘the Dutch’).

Second, both discourses directly talked about *cultural issues and groups* within Surinam. Surinam represents a wide variety of cultural and ethnic groups. All groups had their own historical narratives and identity. Both discourses addressed this difference and, to a lesser extent, the problems that emerged because of the politically informed fragmentation around independence.

A third similarity can be said to be *economic issues* that seemed to play an important role, albeit functioning at the background. In the political discourse there was a focus on employment, development aid and economic growth. Public discourse was mainly concerned with the prices of products, work and having something to eat. The level of abstraction of economic categories on the one hand and everyday experiences of e.g. higher prices in ‘ordinary life’ on the other hand, were somewhat different in focus, yet both refer to the economic sphere.

A final similarity revolves around *migration*. Even though the political discourse was much more about policy and regulation about re-migration, and public discourse about whether one should (also) go to the Netherlands, they pretty much dealt with the same topic. So they related to the same aspect, but for different reasons.

### *Differences*

It has become clear that similarities between political and public discourse can be located at a somewhat general level of topics and a variety of opinions. As we go into specific narratives and arguments, it becomes clear that both discourses have quite some differences as well.

First of all, and most evident, the *legal and formal procedural* political dimension of independence, which constituted the very heart of the political discourse, was relatively marginal or even absent in the public discourse. For instance, all concerns about border issues, the defence apparatus, the national flag, the date of independence, development aid, and so on, were not even mentioned in the public discourse whatsoever. So, it can be said that all the state-related issues, which were central in the political discourse (international relations, legal issues, reference to independence day 25 November 1975, political agenda's between Dutch and Surinam government, and so on), were virtually absent or irrelevant the ordinary lives of the respondents during the years around 1975.

There are two striking examples of this difference. First, one of the individual accounts in the public discourse expressed that the independence was welcomed and celebrated, even though they did not actually understand its political meaning. This implies that people knew 'something' important was going on, but what it exactly meant was less obvious. Yet, they appropriated this event as a 'happy moment', a reason to party. And second, in the political discourse independence was often framed in terms of 'being independent and free' as 'a country' and as 'a people'. However, in the public discourse a different image was portrayed. Here it was argued that people already knew what freedom meant, they sometimes already had it.

Another clear difference was that some people in public discourse expressed their *distrust* and even *detestation of politics altogether*. Politics was mostly irrelevant in their lives. Some people only heard 'others' talk about it, it was not really an issue for themselves. They had concerns though, but they were mostly about their own living and about getting 'food on their plate'. More generally, the public narratives were basically about micro-level practices and concerns. People talked about their direct experience in their everyday lives. In the political sphere, ideologies, policies, debates over legal issues and international relations were discussed regularly.

A final difference, which is *methodological* in nature, is the fact that the public discourse sometimes linked independence to 'future issues' such as 'today's youth' and the '1980 revolution'. In the political discourse, there were links made with other places and times, but none of them

related to after 1977.<sup>22</sup> This also means that the positioning of subjects in public discourse, should be contextualised per case. As the past often justifies the current, a reference to intermediate historical events and developments say much about how a subject (respondents) positions himself or herself vis-à-vis a question, topic or researcher.

### *Intersections*

We have seen some similarities and differences between the discourses. Where do these discourses intersect? At which point do they stop having 'just similarities' and start having differences for what precise reason? There are basically three forms of intersection that can take place; (1) resisting or opposing a discourse or discursive positions; (2) identifying with another discourse or positions; and (3) an intermediate position between 1 and 2. This might seem abstract, but some examples will clarify this.

First, it seemed that some respondents positioned themselves in direct opposition to the political discourse. For instance, when a respondent argued that she did not like politicians and did not trust them, she thereby 'used' themes and positions within the political discourse, precisely to affirm what her position is: 'She is not like them, she hates them, she is different'. Politics is seen as 'dirty', as 'corrupt'. This suggests that in the lives of the respondents, cultural and economic aspects might be relevant (e.g. food, music, income, prices), but not politics. This does not imply that the political discourse is totally irrelevant, but relevant in a specific way (through a negative construction of identity). This respondent resisted political discourse altogether, thereby establishing an critical and alternative subject position. Interestingly, the same *cannot* be said for the political discourse. Most politicians say they 'know' what the Surinamese people want and think, as it resonates with what they want and say. Politicians that go against the 'will of the people' only go against the will of other political positions within the political discourse. For instance, the fierce political debate between the VHP and the NPS is also an opposition, but not a generic opposition vis-à-vis the 'ordinary people', 'the voters'. Political discourse (in a democratic structure), in this sense, cannot simply resist or oppose public discourse as such. It, however, can indeed resist specific voices, groups and people in public discourse. However, the political discourse indeed differs from public discourse, in terms of the legal and formal political aspects (e.g. border issue, development aid). At this specific level, the discourses do differ, as this was simply irrelevant in the lives of the respondents.

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<sup>22</sup> Methodological note: The fact that I constructed the individual accounts in relation to the biographical storyline of the respondent, resulted in more context than the political discourse. For example, the relevance of the 1980 revolution could not even be expressed in the 1973-1977 political discourse, given the fundamental difference in data source (newspaper archives vs. living respondents with memory).

Second, respondents also directly identified with the political discourse, at least certain themes or positions within the political discourse in a specific point in time. The most evident example was that most respondents indeed were happy at the moment or day of the independence; they celebrated its redemption, its independence status, to be free from ‘our coloniser’. And again, from the perspective of the political discourse, identification with themes and positions from the public discourse only made sense politically. So, identification with ‘the public’ was mainly instrumental. If you were not happy for ‘Surinam and its people’ as a politician around 25 November 1975, you should have had really good reasons for it. This level of identification can be said to be the level in which discourses temporarily overlap and political and cultural aspects for a moment connect. These are one of the very few moments that the Surinamese nation-state contained some kind of temporary ‘harmony’. A harmony, by the way, that should be understood in its context, as serving a specific political goal (of decolonisation, and becoming an independent republic).

Finally, there were many intermediate positions. Here, different themes and positions of both discourses intersected. The specifics of such positions should be contextualised even more. If, for example, a respondent had the same opinion as the VHP and did not really know this official party line, and also lived in such conditions that she only ate whatever they she could cultivate, her resonance with the VHP viewpoint had a specific meaning. Namely, her political identity or position resonated with the VHP, but her socio-economic position was not the same as all the ‘VHP electorate’ or ‘VHP politicians’. Some of them were much richer and could eat whatever they want, others were perhaps even poorer. The same holds for positions within political discourse. Arron, for example, might agree with the people from public discourse that independence was the best thing that ever happened to Surinam, but his specific position was different in terms of education, financial capacity, responsibilities, and so on. To agree with someone you do not know or have not heard of before might create a ‘shared discursive position’, but this should be understood in its historical, socio-political and economic context. Subjects, in very specific ways, negotiate with different forms of identity. The previous two forms of intersection (opposition and identification) were quite generic and straightforward compared to this last form. If one contextualises the specific position within a discourse and how it intersects with another discourse, one obtains an even richer view on the relationship between the political and public discourse.

## 5.5 Conclusion

This chapter examined the political and public discourse on Surinamese independence, as well as their linkages. It becomes clear that both the political and the public discourse are highly complex and diverse, as well as their linkages. It would be naïve to draw a ‘final conclusion’ other than the following.

The political discourse on independence around 1975 were about different aspects that related to the Surinamese state and cultural/ethnic politics. The public discourse is also about many things, and is mainly about the cultural dimension of politics and social life outside politics. Nevertheless, there are many linkages and intersecting logics that play a role. The next chapter will try to put the relationship between the political and public discourse in a more reflexive context.

## 6. CONCLUSION

### 6.1 Introduction

This study started with a central question about the independence of Surinam: *In what way were the Surinamese political discourse and public discourse on the independence of Surinam (ca. 1973-1977) related?* This final chapter provides an answer to the last part of research sub question four in the context of the central question. I should clarify that the contribution of this chapter is not to ‘analyse the analysis’, neither to come up with ‘final conclusions’ to wrap things up, nor to come up with some meta-categories to ‘really’ understand the ‘true’ dynamics between the Surinamese political discourse and the public discourse on independence. Rather, this chapter should be considered as a set of reflections and personal insights I developed during the collection and analyses of ‘the data’ and writing this text.

In advance, I should start by saying that the findings of this study are based on a particular approach, specific methodological starting points and some pragmatic aspects. I have tried to be as precise and comprehensive as possible<sup>23</sup>. I will definitely disappoint readers that expect a clear-cut ‘answer’ on the research question. All I can do is refer them to this chapter and especially the previous chapters. After all, the issue at hand is much too complex to answer briefly. However, there are some conclusions, insights and reflections I want to address<sup>24</sup>.

### 6.2 The personal is political

What has become clear is that political and public discourse can be separated analytically, but in reality they are not separate at all. That is to say, political discourse was about for instance economic growth and the responsibility of Surinamese people to work hard for the success of ‘the new country’. At the level of ordinary life, people often experienced higher prices of products. In this sense, economy was a discussed in political discourse, but this does not mean that ordinary life was

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<sup>23</sup> It should also be noted that a lot of interesting questions have crossed my mind during the study. For instance on specific ways in which individual narratives relate to the daily experience of being a Surinam woman over time, or the ways in which people in elderly houses reflect on their childhood and other elderly people. Also, I came across some nice newspaper articles and interesting Surinamese advertisement in the 1970s. These questions are somewhat interesting, but as such not relevant for this study.

<sup>24</sup> I refer to ‘I’ somewhat explicit and extensively here. There are two reason for this. First, I understand any academic endeavor to have a personal dimension in which one constantly makes selections and choices (see also preface) that cannot always be rationalised or justified logically and deductively. Second, the analytical part of this thesis, in this chapter, indeed are my own interpretations and understandings of the relationship between the political and the public discourse on the Surinamese independence.

not political. To say that everyday experiences of ‘increasing or decreasing prices’ is somehow ‘apolitical’, overlooks the political nature of everyday life in general as well as how these experiences in prices and ‘growing your own food’ related to political institutions and economic structures in Surinam in the 1970s. In a sense, some of the experiences and positions in public discourse represented positions within the political discourse, without explicit links to formal and institutional politics.

However, we have also seen that political struggles and debates were not always articulated in ordinary lives and experiences. Political discourse was often about ideological, legal, international and macro-economic issues that were indeed part and parcel of institutionalised politics, but the ordinary lives and experience of ‘Surinamese citizens’ were sometimes quite remote. Regarding the ‘moment of independence’ on 25 November 1975, people in the streets sometimes did not even know what ‘independence’ actually meant, some considered themselves already to be ‘free’, or preferred the Dutch over the Surinamese in government. This raises important questions: what is Surinamese independence, if some people do not even consider it to be an issue in their everyday lives at all? Is it only a question for ‘some citizens’, ‘voters’ or ‘groups’? Citizens that are politically engaged and have been educated about the role of politics? Is it a questions for politicians and academics?

This may sound provocative, but my study shows that it is legitimate to claim that independence was sometimes understood as a ‘good reason for a nice time’, ‘an alibi to party’, without its actual serious and formal political meaning. One of the interesting things this study showed is that there is was indeed a lot of politics on independence, but there was also ordinary life *beyond the independence around the years of independence (1973-1977)*. The attention on the political discourse is enormous (in the literature), but a whole world of everyday life struggles, rhythms, routines, emotions and small concerns took place *during* independence, that had nothing to do with independence. This, again, does not mean these issues were not political (e.g. concerning gender). It means that political issues and questions can be addressed beyond independence, even though many scholars and people like to reduce it to independence just because it took place around 1975. This might explain why there has been relatively little attention for ordinary life *beyond* independence (and indeed its politics) in the literature on ‘Surinamese independence’.

### **6.3 Independence and (dis)continuity?**

In the beginning of this study, I was under the impression that independence could be understood as a ‘life changing event’. But, independence was actually about a lot of things. Both in the political and the public discourse, independence triggered a wide variety of questions, issues and concerns. It was about e.g. redemption from a coloniser, about a foolish and immature rush into self-government, about changing institutional structures, about dialogues between diplomats on legal



texts, about the cultural identity of a nation, about the price of rice, about having a party. The divergence of positions regarding the independence and any claim of what independence actually was, needs to be understood into the context of these positions and claims.

Now that I understand the complex background and dimensions of independence in political and everyday life contexts, I have changed my view. Independence, in my understanding, is not a historical and life changing event *per se*. However it *can* be considered as a historical discontinuity and life changing. I also found out that one's position about whether independence was actually 'life changing' is not neutral and depends on which sources and voices one actually highlights (or wants to emphasise). This is where, I think, this study contributes to the literature on Surinamese independence. I have come to this conclusion, since some of the people I interviewed, did not experience a sudden 'break' or 'discontinuity' because of independence. Their daily routines did not change, it was not a turning point whatsoever. Rather, for most of them, their lives went on as 'normal'. For others, 'prices went up', 'things became less civilised', or the government was managed 'not as well as before'. In this sense lives did change in relation to independence<sup>25</sup>. Public narratives that subscribed to independence as a relevant topic, did so by referring to its linear and temporal logic ('before', 'on 25 November 1975', and 'after'), thereby reproducing the institutional and procedural logic of formal independence. Yet, for some respondents life did not change at all. They still needed to work to have a dinner in the evening just as before<sup>26</sup>. So, it depends on whose knowledge and experiences one highlights or prioritises in order to claim that Surinamese independence actually refers to a historical transition<sup>27</sup>.

For the political discourse though, this was different. Independence was a major rupture indeed. It changed legal fundamentals radically; it changed financial structures, the official national flag, and relationships with other countries. A large amount of the population simply left the country. It meant a new political and economic period for Surinam. If we follow Ramdas' view, after Surinamese independence an era 'without real ambitions' began. Large amount of 'citizens' or 'productive forces' fled. In other words, the Surinam state 'missed out' on great amounts of tax

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<sup>25</sup> An important question, however, is how such changes (that were ascribed to independence) relate to other local and global political and economic forces that also had impact on such changes.

<sup>26</sup> It should be noted that this is only relevant for this study. I can well imagine that if I interview Surinam people in the Netherlands, they have a totally different viewpoint. They could refer to the threat of 'the Creole takeover' in Surinam because of the independence, or the economic prosperity in the Netherlands that the independence enabled. In other words, these concluding remarks are only based on this study, its goal, its scoop and methodological approach.

<sup>27</sup> It, therefore, might be useful to speak of *Surinamese independence discourse* in future research. This would avoid the problematic of *a priori* accepting independence as a 'phenomenon', 'event' or 'process' in order to see whether and how political and social subjects appropriate this issue.

revenues and potential for economic stability and growth of the 'new Republic'. This was also evidenced by the efforts taken by the Surinamese politicians to get the migrated people 'back' into Surinam. So, independence in the political discourse actually denoted a discontinuity.

But, was there a 'real independence'? Did it really take place? I think answering such questions begins with *asking other questions first*: whose independence, which independence, at what level, in which place, in what year, from which position, in whose history, in which biography, why using the term 'independence' in the first place? Again, it is therefore difficult to directly and concisely answer the question whether independence was a historical break, a discontinuity in the modern history of Surinam. It is also important to note that the 'Surinamese exodus' might be highly relevant in politics, or even in the experience of ordinary people living in Surinam. But a final conclusion about Surinamese independence simply cannot exist. In 50 years from now, for instance, 'we' might have develop new perspectives, based on new data and understandings of what we call 'Surinamese independence'. And again, this all depends on whose experience is voiced or left unheard in scholarly attempts to unravel 'Surinamese independence', but more importantly, in history itself.

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## **Annex 1: Structure and questions interviews**

The interviews consisted of three parts, an introduction, biographic questions, thematic questions (i.e. about independence).

### *Introduction*

Before starting the interviews, I introduced myself and the purpose of the interview and its context: me being a student studying independence of Surinam.

### *Biographic questions*

The second section was about their age, their youth, their family context and living conditions and in general about the most important turning points in their life. This context was important as it provided me with a good overview of their general background and specific information about the subjects. I basically started with the question: Can you tell me about yourself? Did you go to school, and if so which school? Where did you live as a child? Did you get married, and if so around which age? Very often such questions led to follow-up questions that provided a good portrayal of the respondents' youth and biographical information.

### *Thematic questions*

The third section dealt with independence as such, as a substantive theme. I asked them about where they were located during independence, with whom they talked about independence and in which way, and obviously what independence meant for them. I also asked them whether they read newspapers around 1975 about independence. These questions enabled me to get a view about their opinion on independence, but also how their position relates to existing political debates and views.

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- 1975, June 7, p. 2. Onafhankelijkheid Suriname. Hindoestanen te laat bij plannen betrokken. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1975, June 9, p. 2. Met alle viezigheid naar de onafhankelijkheid. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1975, June 14, p. 1. Surinamebeweging ongerust over "dekolonisatie". *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1975, June 21, p. 8. Suriname zelfstandig, maar hoe dan verder. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1975, July 5, p. 3. Hondervijftig Surinaamse demonstranten tegen onafhankelijkheid. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1975, July 26, p. 2. Premier Burnham sprak tot studenten. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1975, July 26, p. 8. Surinaamse vice-premier in Afrika. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1975, August 2, p. 1. Binnen twee weken definitieve beslissing over samenwerking K.L.M. en Surinaamse Luchtvaart Maatschappij. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1975, August 13, p. 5. Surinamers niet gelukkiger in Nederland. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1975, August 14, p. 1. Mededelingen van minister Van Doorn. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1975, August 14, p. 2. Aantal Surinamers naar Nederland hoger dan verwacht. *De Ware Tijd*.
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- 1975, August 23, p. 7. Aanpassing aan nationaliteitswetgeving aan onafhankelijkheid. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1975, August 25, p. 1. Kabinet premier Den Uyl: Iedereen moet zich inspannen, zodat onafhankelijkheid Suriname niet vertraagd wordt. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1975, August 30, p. 2. Premier Den Uyl: Onafhankelijkheid Suriname moet op 25 november worden gerealiseerd. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1975, August 30, p. 2. Hindoestanen demonstreerden in Den Haag. *De Ware Tijd*.

- 1975, August 30, p. 4. Nederlandse persstemmen. *De Ware Tijd*.
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- 1975, September 20, p. 1. Eenzijdige uitroeping onafhankelijkheid Suriname zal i hoge mate betreurd worden. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1975, September 20, p. 4. Perscommentaar. *De Ware Tijd*.
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- 1975, October 4, p. 1. Kabinet Den Uyl: Absurdistisch als Surinaamse regering en oppositie elkaar niet vinden. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1975, October 11, p. 2. Den Uyl: Zorg over ontwikkeling in Suriname. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1975, October 20, p. 1. Lachmon. “Liever een weekje waarin een paar huizen afbranden dan jaren Bruma-dictatuur”. Suriname zwalkend op weg naar de onafhankelijkheid. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1975, October 25, p. 1. Suriname in de Nederlandse pers. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1975, October 25, p. 3. Suriname-comitee ongerust over eventueel Nederlands ingrijpen. *De Ware Tijd*.
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- 1975, November, 8, p. 2. Nederlandse militairen op 25 november per vliegtuig huistoe. *De Ware Tijd*.
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- 1975, November 22, p. 2. Het beeld van Koningin Wilhelmina verwijderd van het Oranjeplein. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1975, 22 November, p. 4. Opening van Suriname’s perscentrum. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1975, November 24, p. 1 & 9. Hoe Suriname onafhankelijk werd. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1975, November 27, p. 1. Na het wonder. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1975, November 27, p. 1. Buurland Guyana zoekt contact met Suriname. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1975, November 27, p. 2. Surinaamse manifestatie in Den Haag. *De Ware Tijd*.

- 1975, November 27, p. 3 & 4. Boodschap van de minister president van Suriname, de heer. H.A.E. Arron, i.v.m. de Onafhankelijkheid van Suriname. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1975, November 27, p. 7. Suriname vraagt lidmaatschap Verenigde Naties aan. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1975, November 27, p. 11. Officiële aankondiging Republiek Suriname. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1975, November 28, p. 2. Geen goed begin. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1975, November 28, p. 5. Commentaren van de Nederlandse avondbladen op de onafhankelijkheid van Suriname. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1975, December 6, p. 2. Verandering namen kampementen. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1975, December 6, p. 3. Ook Zweden erkent Republiek Suriname. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1975, December 6, p. 4. Surinaamse vlag gehesen voor V.N.-hoofdkwartier. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1975, December 13, p. 2. Cuba vaart uit tegen degenen die Suriname bedreigen. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1976, January 2, p. 3 & 4. Nieuwjaarsrede 1976 van President Dr. Johan Ferrier. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1976, January 3, p. 2. Surinaamse oppositieleider Lachmon: “Kom terug naar Suriname”. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1976, January 3, p. 3. Premier Den Uyl over Suriname. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1976, February 2, p. 3. Premier Arron roerde vele onderwerpen aan. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1976, March 20, p. 6. Steeds meer Surinamers willen naar huis. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1976, April 3, p. 1. Terugkeer Surinamers uiterst gering. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1976, May 3, p. 2. Suriname blijft voor Nederland bijzonder ontwikkelingsland. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1976, May 15, p. 2. Pendel van Surinaamse Nederlanders ongewenst. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1976, May 24, p. 1. Surinaamse opbouw moeizaam van start. Plan voorziet in remigratie. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1976, May 24, p. 4 & 5. Republiek Suriname aan half jaar. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1976, May 29, p. 1. Surinaamse premier in Nederland. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1976, June 5, p. 2. Bezoek koningin aan Suriname nog niet beslist. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1976, July 10, p. 2. Surinamers worden honkvast. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1976, July 10, p. 2. Nederland blijft stroef bij het verlenen ontwikkelingshulp. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1976, July 17, p. 2. Nederlandse deskundigen worden te duur voor Suriname. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1976, July 24, p. 3. Nog duizenden Surinamers wachten op huisvesting en op hun kinderen. *De Ware Tijd*.

- 1976, July 31, p. 2. Landbouwprojecten ter bevordering remigratie Surinamers. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1976, July 31, p. 4. Met heimwee kun je geen vliegreis kopen. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1976, August 7, p. 6. Surinamers ruilen Gliphoeve voor Limburgs kasteel. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1976, October 16, p. 2. Surinamers bezetten personeelskamer opvangcentrum. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1976, October 30, p. 1. Voorrang Surinaamse woningzoekenden nog steeds noodzakelijk. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1976, October 30, p. 1. Tekort aan vrijwilligers bij opvang Surinamers in woonwijken. *De Ware Tijd*.
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- 1976, November 22, p. 3. Viering een jaar onafhankelijkheid ingeluid met oecumenische dienst voor ouden van dagen. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1976, November 26, p. 3. De viering van de eerste verjaardag van de Republiek Suriname. *De Ware Tijd*.
- 1976, November 27, p. 5. Radio- en t.v. toespraken van premier H.A.E. Arron ivm het eenjarig bestaan van de Republiek Suriname. *De Ware Tijd*.
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- 1977, May 21, p. 5. Hoe denkt men in de Bijlmermeer over remigratie en integratie? “U hoort hier niet thuis”, zei Arron! Waar dan wel? *De Ware Tijd*.