

## ARTICLE

# Plantation Logics, Citizenship Violence and the Necessity of Slowing Down

## Reflections Inspired by Anton de Kom\*

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### 1 Introduction

Stuart Hall reminds us that

We all write and speak from a particular place and time, from a history and culture which is specific. What we say is always ‘in context’, *positioned*. I was born into and spent my childhood and early adolescence in a lower-middle class family in Jamaica. I have lived all my life in England in the shadow of the black diaspora – ‘in the belly of the beast’. I write against the background of a lifetime’s work in cultural studies. If the paper seems preoccupied with the diaspora experience and its narratives of displacement, it is worth remembering that all discourse is ‘placed’, and the heart has its reasons.<sup>1</sup>

Hall, in other words, takes issue with a still influential view of knowledge as a neutral, disembodied practice; this is the idea that (taken to extremes) reality can be seen from an omniscient, ‘once and for all’-knowing point of view. Donna Haraway calls this ‘the god trick’, a disembodied way of ‘seeing everything from nowhere’, a ‘conquering gaze’ that hides the power conditions of its own creation while escaping the particularity of its representation. Haraway replaces the notion

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1 Stuart Hall, ‘Cultural Identity and Diaspora’, *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 36 (1989): 222-237.

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of (disembodied) objectivity with a doctrine of ‘embodied Feminist objectivity’, which she terms situated knowledges.<sup>2</sup>

From this epistemological lens everyone is situated, including those who claim to possess objective and authoritative knowledge. The necessity of utilising a situated understanding of knowledge seems particularly urgent for knowledge production on colonialism and slavery, as the work of Anton de Kom and others working in the critical Caribbean tradition demonstrate. Perhaps nowhere is the ‘conquering gaze’, of defining what reality is, of deciding which bodies are fully human and which are not, who is entitled to personhood and citizenship and who is not and based on which rendering of the ‘facts’, more consequential than in the history of colonialism and slavery, and Anton de Kom was keenly aware of this. Long before the critical turn in academia concerning disembodied objectivism and positivist epistemologies, Anton de Kom showed a keen awareness of the power dynamics involved in the particularity of Dutch colonial knowledge production, while offering an embodied perspective on reality from the perspective of the colonised. However, his perspective on Dutch colonial history (and my invocation of it in this article) should *not* be reduced to a mere matter of ‘emotional involvement’, a judgement that is recurrently attributed to the knowledge production of people from the colonies and their offspring about this subject,<sup>3</sup> but is a valid and necessary epistemological intervention. Anton de Kom’s *Wij Slaven van Suriname (We Slaves of Suriname, hereafter We Slaves)* is a telling example of a positioned, situated, account of Dutch slavery and its immediate colonial afterlives. The book, first published in 1934, was written as a counter history to Dutch history education, informed by the experiences, memories and vernacular wisdom of the enslaved and indentured labourers and their offspring. As he noted:

Better than in the history books of the whites, the mistreatment of our fathers is recorded in our own hearts, never has the suffering of slavery spoken to me more strongly than from the eyes of my grandmother, when she told us children, in front of the cabin in Paramaribo, the stories of the old days.<sup>4</sup>

- 2 As Haraway explains: “This is the gaze that mythically inscribes all the marked bodies, that makes the unmarked category claim the power to see and not be seen, to represent while escaping representation. This gaze signifies the unmarked positions of Man and White, one of the many nasty tones of the word “objectivity” to feminist ears in scientific and technological, late-industrial, militarized, racist, and male-dominant societies, that is, here, in the belly of the monster, in the United States in the late 1980s. I would like a doctrine of embodied objectivity that accommodates paradoxical and critical feminist science projects: Feminist objectivity means quite simply situated knowledges.” Donna Haraway, ‘Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective’, *Feminist Studies* 14/3 (1988): 581.
- 3 I have discussed the function and meanings of binaries such as ‘emotional’ and ‘rational’, ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’, ‘activist’ and ‘scholar’ in (debates about) the knowledge production on this subject in two articles: Guno Jones, ‘De Slavernij is onze geschiedenis (niet). Over de discursieve strijd om de betekenis van de NTR-televisieserie De Slavernij’, *BMGN Low Countries Historical Review* 127/4 (2012): 56-82 and Guno Jones “Activism” and the afterlives of Dutch Colonialism’, in *Smash the Pillars: Decoloniality and the Imaginary of Color in the Dutch Kingdom*, eds. M.F. Weiner and A. Carmona Báez (Lanham/Boulder/New York/London: Lexington Books, 2018), 161-173.
- 4 Anton de Kom, *Wij Slaven van Suriname*, 3rd ed. (Bussum: Wereldvenster, 1981), 34-35.

For De Kom the memories of his (enslaved) grandparents and other colonised are essential for understanding the impact of slavery and its immediate afterlives. De Kom's *We Slaves* eloquently demonstrates why an approach that radically departs from the experiences and the memories of the colonised yields perspectives on colonialism and slavery that for a long time were silenced in dominant Dutch historiography. By taking the position of the colonised as a starting point he critically reframes and rethinks Dutch colonialism, in particular slavery, while vindicating acts of resistance by the colonised. De Kom presents those who were classified by the colonial authorities as 'scum' (Dutch: *het gespuis*) as heroes of the liberation struggle, calls attention to the psychological violence and injuries of Dutch education and cultural politics, situates modern Dutch law at the cornerstone of slavery, and critically discusses the limited value of formal abolition in providing substantive equality in light of the proletarianisation and continued colonial oppressing of the offspring of the enslaved and indentured labourers.

For the purpose of this article, I want to discuss three questions in relation to Anton de Kom's situated anti-colonial work. *We Slaves* combined a critique of colonialism and capitalism with a critique of liberalism.<sup>5</sup> In this connection we can, firstly, ask: How does De Kom's thinking, informed by the Dutch colonial experience, especially slavery, speak to the myths of modern citizenship (the myths of legal equality and progressive legal inclusion)? Anton de Kom was an organic intellectual, he constantly recalibrated his activism to the specific moment and context, keeping in mind a variety of oppressed, persecuted, or exploited. Can we, along this line, interpret *We Slaves* in such a way that it, secondly, serves as an instrument for a critique of the coloniality of Europe's citizenship and migration regimes and other post-independent colonial continuities? Lastly, can Anton de Kom's anti-colonial and anti-capitalist critique be translated into a critique of neo-liberal subjectivity and a plea for slowing down?

The discussion of the first two questions significantly draws from and builds on two earlier publications<sup>6</sup> and a lecture I held for the Winter Meeting of The Netherlands Association for Philosophy of Law on 10 February 2023 at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam. From a diasporic lens on citizenship, *We Slaves* points to the need to radically rethink the meaning of legal citizenship in light of the shadows and catastrophes it has produced for the (formerly) enslaved and other colonised, and for those who, through dominant discourse and border violence, are

5 *We Slaves of Suriname* offers a thorough deconstruction of the universalist-inclusive assumptions of liberalism. For a very insightful examination of the links between colonialism, slavery and imperial trades, and Western liberalism, and the relationships between Europa, Africa, Asia and the America's that were forged in that process in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, see Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2015).

6 The two publications I significantly draw and build on in this article are: Guno Jones, 'Anton de Kom en het geweld van het moderne burgerschap. Enkele reflecties over Anton de Kom en de (h)erkenning van historisch en eigentijds onrecht in Suriname en Nederland', in *Antonlogie. Verhalen over het gedachtegoed van Anton de Kom*, eds. Mitchell Esajas et al. (Amsterdam/Antwerpen: Uitgeverij Atlas Contact, 2021), 36-64; Guno Jones, 'Citizenship Violence and the Afterlives of Dutch Colonialism: Re-reading Anton de Kom', *Small Axe* 70/3 (2023): 100-122.

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considered not to belong in contemporary Europe metropolises. Unpacking the concept of Citizenship Violence is such an attempt. The third question is inspired by my experiences with the exhausting neo-liberal academy that normalises production in an increasing speed, a rat race, and what this means for our subjectivities and, importantly, our mental well-being and bodies. Decolonial efforts should not be limited to deconstructing outside oppressive structures, but should take issue with the impact of neoliberalism on our lives. I see (self-)exhaustion as a result of the internalisation of the neoliberal ethics of production as a potent yet largely overlooked afterlife of slavery and the capitalist system with which it was intertwined, and this issue concerns us all, both the offspring of the colonisers and the those of the colonised.

## 2 Trailblazing Epistemological Intervention

Anton de Kom's situated and engaged perspective on colonialism and slavery was at odds with the dominant historical scholarship of his days in which his positionality was viewed as an obstacle for a 'proper insight' into colonial history. This scholarship assumed a neutral and disinterested objectivism, which would supposedly guarantee an authoritative, valid, reliable account of the colonial history of Suriname. I have argued elsewhere that this approach to history is exemplified by Surinamese Dutch scholar Rudolf van Lier, at the time professor at Leiden University in the Netherlands. His highly influential social history of colonial Suriname *Samenleving in een Grensgebied (Frontier Society)*, published in 1949, is an instructive social history of colonial Suriname. However, it is important to note that in the book, he promoted the idea of respectable knowledge as a disengaged and disembodied practice while distancing himself from Anton de Kom's work. Van Lier, a representative of the upper classes, disqualified *We Slaves* as 'a work that primarily has value as a document that enables us to know the mindset of the Surinamer of the lower middle classes', and in his view 'this memory has become part of the pathetic grievance and resentment that, however understandable given the situation of the lower classes, hinders an accurate understanding of the past'. This standpoint, which would now be deemed neocolonial, clearly expressed a deep investment in the idea of knowledge production from an gods eye, an objective view, a gaze that 'sees everything from nowhere' supposedly resulting in one authoritative version of history.<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, accounts like Anton de Kom's *We Slaves* were uncommon in colonial Suriname 'as the imperial time of history systematically erases, literally and semantically, multitudes of histories in order to make itself', as Carolyn Nakamura

7 Jones, 'Citizenship Violence', 105; Rudolf van Lier, *Samenleving in een grensgebied: Een sociaal-historische studie van Suriname*, 3rd. ed. (Amsterdam: S. Emmering, 1977 [1949]), 279; Hans Ramsoedh, *Surinaams onbehagen: Een sociale en politieke geschiedenis van Suriname 1865-2015* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2018), 53-62.

tellingly notes in a different context.<sup>8</sup> Dutch colonial authorities saw De Kom's radically different take on the history of Suriname as a threat to the colonial order and repressed his work throughout his lifetime. Even today, knowledge production of Dutch slavery is still ruled by a largely unproblematised positivist epistemology in which many actors rely on the notion that 'the facts speak for themselves', while the power dynamics surrounding the knowledge-field of slavery precisely demonstrate its agonistic and situated nature.<sup>9</sup> There still seems to be a deep and largely unreflected investment in disembodied 'neutrality' and 'objectivity' as guiding principles in Dutch academic historical discipline, which has been conducive to the maintenance of single, authoritative narratives about the Dutch colonial past and the repression of decolonial perspectives. Dutch academic historical knowledge production is based on a clear and policed binary between 'activism' and 'scholarship', and engaged scholarship is still largely frowned upon. Often, the associated disciplinary practices signify academic snobbism and pomposity.<sup>10</sup> In this sense, De Kom's situated account of colonial slavery and its afterlives is still trailblazing, and we can learn a lot from it and from other knowledge interventions from the vantage point of the colonised and their offspring. However, I think it is good to keep in mind that no essential political black subject exists, and that the colonial modernity conditions us all, although in varied ways.

### 3 Citizenship Violence in Colonial Suriname

Anton de Kom, in my reading of his work, did not ask what dominant conceptions of citizenship could tell about the lives of the colonised, he rather asked what the lived experiences of the colonised revealed about the violence of modern citizenship. Anton de Kom's *We Slaves* offers a radical and early deconstruction of the universalist-inclusive and progressive myths of modern law and citizenship, of liberalism. These myths are, firstly, the idea that introduction of modern law and modern citizenship signify the beginning of a more equal social order and are connected to justice and equality (after feudalism), and secondly, that with the passing of time, the rights of citizenship become more substantial for everyone (a progressive temporality of citizenship). In contrast, De Kom demonstrates how modern European law and citizenship (legal membership and rights) are

8 These observations by Carolyn Nakamura made in the context of an essay on David Graeber and David Wengrow's *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity*, are very instructive in this regard. Nakamura observes that colonialism nourished the Enlightenment conception of history that 'superseded a plurality of histories with a collective singular "history in general"', and we can also make sense of historical knowledge regimes of (colonial) Suriname and other (former) Dutch colonies through this lens. See Carolyn Nakamura, 'Untenable History', *offshoot*, March 13, 2022, at <https://offshootjournal.org/untenable-history/>.

9 See Jones, 'De Slavernij is onze geschiedenis (niet)', 56-82; Pepijn Brandon, 'Slavernijgeschiedenis zonder polderen: observaties over een debat vol contrast', *Beleid en Maatschappij* 46/2 (2019): 258-264. For a seminal work on the relation between power and historical knowledge production, see Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

10 Guno Jones "'Activism" and the afterlives of Dutch Colonialism', 161-173.

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cornerstones of colonial oppression and exploitation, instead of signifying a more equal social. His situated anti-colonial critique did not depart from myths of legal equality, but revealed the unacknowledged and violent formative shadows of modern law and citizenship by taking the lived experiences and perspectives of the colonised and their racialised offspring as a starting point. The colonial scene clearly demonstrates the need to balance universalist-inclusive accounts of modern law and citizenship (that are still common today) with an analysis of the catastrophes of citizenship. Along this line, Anton de Kom's *We Slaves* reveals what I have termed Citizenship Violence. De Kom's work demonstrates how omnipresent European sovereign power divides modern citizenship into bodies with legal personhood (the citizens) and bodies denied legal personhood (the enslaved). I consider the socio-legal distinction between citizens and enslaved to be the violent *formative* shadow of modern citizenship because this binary was foundational for European colonialism and wealth creation for the metropolises inherent to it. Nonetheless, his work does not suggest the uncontested existence of this binary. The logics of this hierarchical legal classification were at odds with social reality, because the colonised demonstrated agency: throughout *We Slaves*, he demonstrates that the colonised were not passive subjects, but resisted slavery and indenture. Moreover, I want to suggest that both colonised and colonisers inherited colonial logics.<sup>11</sup>

De Kom, like other anti-colonial Caribbean thinkers, critically reflects on the connections between colonialism, capitalism and liberalism.<sup>12</sup> As regard the connection between colonialism and capitalism, he classifies 'conquerors and robbers as capitalists' and argues that 'they were driven by the same spirit that moved big merchants in every colonial system up until the 18th century'. 'One might ask why I classify these conquerors and robbers as capitalists. The answer is simple: not only were they a kind of capitalist entrepreneurs, they were driven by the same spirit that moved big merchants in every colonial system up until the 18th century. [...] The adventurer, the pirate and the big merchant morph into each other unnoticed.'<sup>13</sup> This could be read as an early articulation of a hypothesis that would later be developed for the British context by Eric Williams in his seminal *Capitalism and Slavery*. A recent study by Pepijn Brandon and Ulbe Bosma points to the significance of trans-Atlantic slavery for the economy of Holland in the eighteenth century.<sup>14</sup> This is not to suggest, however, that *only* colonialism and slavery were relevant for the development of capitalism, but that colonialism and slavery, and other forms of unfree labour, were important elements in the formation of capitalist modernity and were not external to it, as Lisa Lowe, Cedric Robinson and others have argued. Capitalist development, from this view, was not only a function of 'capital-wage labor relations' in Europe, but significantly included

11 For a more elaborate discussion, see Jones, 'Citizenship Violence'.

12 Jones, 'Citizenship Violence', 102-103, 107-108.

13 De Kom, *Wij slaven*, 19 (quotes from the book are translated from Dutch).

14 Pepijn Brandon and Ulbe Bosma, 'De betekenis van de Atlantische slavernij voor de Nederlandse economie in de tweede helft van de achttiende eeuw', *Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische Geschiedenis* 16/2 (2019): 5-45.



colonialism, slavery and other forms of unfree labour, as Anton de Kom already suggested in 1934.<sup>15</sup>

Slavery relied on conquest and military violence, but it also relied on the system of modern law. Antony Anghie has argued that the international legal doctrine of sovereignty ‘was constituted through colonialism’ in that it denigrated non-Europeans and legitimised their extreme and even violent subordination by Europeans.<sup>16</sup> De Kom observes how the Dutch Sovereign (*Algemene Staten*) claimed sovereignty over territories inhabited by indigenous communities and how they resisted.<sup>17</sup> Even today, the colonial history of land grabbing of indigenous land and genocide on the indigenous peoples of Suriname, which was part of a broader phenomenon and inherent to European colonial expansion,<sup>18</sup> is still largely silenced in the public sphere and no effective legal redress (such as legal recognition of collective land) of these historical crimes has taken place yet.<sup>19</sup> In colonial times, sovereignty over conquered territories was intertwined with the expulsion and/or genocide of Indigenous populations and provided the legal conditions through which citizens could utilise their property rights, as elements of civic rights, via enslaved African bodies captured and traded as chattel in the transatlantic slave trade or, initially, captured Indigenous people. Wouter Veraart points out that ‘the Dutch Civil Code still defines ownership as the most comprehensive right that a person can have to a thing’, and the ‘despotic power relations’ this right enabled in the context of slavery was ‘completely in line with this classical-liberal conception of property rights’.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, Anton de Kom shows how property rights in the colonial setting of Suriname were about the commercial sale and maximum exploitation of enslaved bodies, how this right was solemnly protected even when European rulers changed, and how slave owners viewed torture and random executions of enslaved bodies as inherent to their property rights, as the following quotes demonstrate:

The law that rendered the slave personal property and chattel was strictly maintained. In this context, Surinamers developed the following proverb: ‘The cockroach has no rights in the bird’s beak’.<sup>21</sup>

Every new ruler that violently took possession of the settlement of other Europeans, solemnly declared to uphold the sacred nature of the right to

15 For an instructive explanation of this point, see Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, 149-150.

16 Antony Anghie, quoted in Tendayi E. Achiume, ‘Migration as Decolonization’, *Stanford Law Review* 71/6 (2019): 1536-37.

17 De Kom, *Wij slaven*, 12, 26-27.

18 Sven Lindqvist, *Exterminate All the Brutes* (London: Granta Books, 2018).

19 See e.g. ‘Diana Vlet: “Ik word er moe van om als activist weggezet te worden”’, *Opzij*, June-July 2023, at [www.opzij.nl](http://www.opzij.nl) (last accessed 5 October 2023).

20 Wouter Veraart, ‘Excuses uit het hart. Enkele overwegingen bij nationale excuses voor het koloniale slavernijverleden’, *Tijdschrift voor Herstelrecht* 22/2 (2022): 39.

21 De Kom, *Wij slaven*, 54.

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property, meaning the right to use and abuse of livestock, the right to buy and sell our fathers and mothers.<sup>22</sup>

The new governor, Sir Charles Green, reassuringly stated that all Europeans would keep their freedom and the possession of their property under British rule.<sup>23</sup>

The Gentleman was brutal enough to request the colonial government compensation for twenty-eight slaves executed by himself. The request was approved, and he received an amount of 5600 florin!<sup>24</sup>

The last quote refers to the institution of domestic jurisdiction in which Dutch criminal law, based on Roman law, granted the slave owners the right to punish the enslaved, which in practice constituted the normalisation of torture of enslaved bodies. De Kom mentions many examples in this regard. In essence, we see here the figure of the citizen-owner-prosecutor-judge in the colonial scene. In a later phase of slavery (1851), the administering of punishment was transferred to the colonial administration, while slave owners still determined indictment and sentence. Criminal law in the plantation setting implied an instrumental contradiction: it treated the enslaved both as chattel and legal subjects, which maximised the control over enslaved bodies. Offenses, innocence and guilt are attributes of legal subjects to whom 'reason' is attributed, not of chattel. However, regardless of chattel status, which signified the tradability of their bodies, the enslaved were held liable and tortured or killed for actions classified as offenses, hence in that particular sense also treated as legal subjects. At the same time, due process was withheld from them and chattel status was firmly upheld, since testimonials of the enslaved were not considered valid (they carried no legal weight and could be ignored).<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, members of the Court of Police (*Hof van Politie*, the criminal court) were often slave owners themselves.<sup>26</sup>

De Kom's work is also trailblazing in that he was sensitive to gender; he demonstrates intersectional awareness in the language of today. De Kom observes the double exploitation of enslaved women, as plantation labourers and sexual objects:

When the last row of women turns back home across the fields, carrying heavy baskets with cotton on their heads, the master (or administrator) frequently lays his eyes on one of the young negresses, beckoning her to lay down her cotton-basket. Then the second task awaits her in the night, meeting the horny desires of her master. No exemption was granted for this duty. Because

22 De Kom, *Wij slaven*, 21.

23 De Kom, *Wij slaven*, 84.

24 De Kom, *Wij slaven*, 48.

25 De Kom, *Wij slaven*, 33-37, 43-49; Van Lier, *Samenleving*, 93-95; Jones, 'Citizenship Violence', 111-112.

26 Van Lier, *Samenleving*, 96.



negroe-slaves were after all not human, neither the sacrament of the church, nor civil rights applied to them.<sup>27</sup>

Hence, we see how Citizenship Violence also constitutes gendered sexual violence towards female enslaved bodies in a patriarchal colonial context. The institution of marriage, offering legal benefits and imbued with notions of respectability, was reserved for women with European citizenship status, while enslaved women were excluded from legal protection in the intimate sphere.

European men and European women were differentially positioned in these dynamics. Like the situation in the metropole, the cult of true European womanhood was also a patriarchal formation in the colonies, but in plantation society, it was a more complex formation. While white women, as citizens, were allowed to explicitly articulate their property rights regarding enslaved bodies (De Kom mentioned some striking examples in this regard),<sup>28</sup> they did not enjoy the same sexual prerogatives as white men.<sup>29</sup> White women citizens met with severe punishment when they acted as active sexual agents by entering into sexual relationships with Black men as a 1711 ordinance demonstrates. In this scenario, the Black man would be killed.<sup>30</sup> In eighteenth century Suriname, these intimacies represented a 'a serious transgression of racialized sexual colonial boundaries', as Wekker observes.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, it was socially accepted for White men to combine relationships with their white spouses and black concubines. Colonial ordinances were aimed at preventing mixed marriages, but sexual relations between White men and Black women were normalised.<sup>32</sup> Thus, the 'distribution' of intimacies between concubinage and marriage signified the maintenance of gendered and racialised hierarchies and respectability in the context of carnal relations between coloniser and colonised.

Anton de Kom pays ample attention to resistance and *Marronage*, and he challenges colonial discourses and reframes iconic figures as freedom fighters. From the lens of modern citizenship, different meanings of *Marronage* may be discerned. On the one hand, it may be viewed as threat to plantation economy and a transgression of Citizenship Violence: life in Maroon communities implied a social system that did not recognise individual property rights on the bodies of others, nor individual rights to exploit large areas of land. *Marronage* implied as dismissal of what Malcom Ferdinand terms 'colonial inhabitation', the violent way of inhabiting the earth inherent to European colonisation of the Americas and that was characterised by 'the genocide of indigenous peoples and the destruction of ecosystems', the transformation of 'land into jigsaws of factories and plantations that characterize

27 De Kom, *Wij Slaven*, 36.

28 De Kom, *Wij Slaven*, 31.

29 See Gloria Wekker, 'Of mimic men and unruly women: family, sexuality and gender', *20th Century Suriname Continuities and Discontinuities in a New World Society*, eds. Rosemarijn Hoefte and Peter Meel (Leiden: KITLV, 2001), 180-182.

30 Wekker, 'Of mimic men', 182-183; Van Lier, *Samenleving*, 55-56.

31 Wekker, 'Of mimic men', 182.

32 De Kom, *Wij Slaven*, 74.

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this geological era’[...], ‘resulting in the loss of caring and matrical bonds with Earth’[...].<sup>33</sup> ‘Maroon ecology’, Ferdinand observes, is very different: ‘Unlike the plantation company, the Maroon communities (and the same is true for Indigenous/Amerindian communities, G.J.), knew how to live with what was around them, within a limited ecological footprint’.<sup>34</sup> Nadira Omarjee’s feminist decolonial critique *We Belong to the Earth: Towards a Decolonial Feminist Pedagogy Rooted in Uhuru and Ubuntu*, in this connection, convincingly demonstrates that patriarchy is inherent to colonial inhabitation, and that belonging to *Earth* means getting rid of patriarchal domination and its exploitation of earth and humans, replacing it with caring relations broadly conceived.<sup>35</sup> From this lens, any restorative ecological politics should take the intertwinement of patriarchy and colonial inhabitation into account.

While life in Maroon communities signified a departure from Citizenship Violence and ‘colonial inhabitation’, at certain historical moments Maroon leaders, like Amerindian leaders, were also made complicit in the maintenance of the system of slavery. As a result of peace treaties signed with the Dutch colonial government, maroon leaders were obliged to hand over runaway enslaved to the colonial authorities. Frank Dragtstein shows that this provision was sometimes contested and sabotaged by Maroon communities, but at other times Maroon leaders complied with it.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, once colonial modernity started, it seemed almost impossible to get out of the system, even for those who actively resisted it.

The issue of how colonial modernity produced complicity has wider implications. In this regard, it is striking that De Kom pays little attention to *manumission* which was the only route to freedom that was legally and non-lethally available to the enslaved in plantation society. Manumission was about getting ownership of your body, getting legal personhood. Although manumission was part of the Dutch imperial legal order, it was irrelevant to the white population in the metropole since slavery was abolished there. But it was highly relevant for non-white enslaved individuals in the colonies and for those who moved to the Netherlands in order to try to get their freedom via Dutch courts. Manumission added new layers to racialised plantation society since the multiracialised offspring of European men and Black women were the disproportionate beneficiaries of it.<sup>37</sup> Manumission underlines the insufficiency of a structure-agency binary for making sense of plantation society dynamics, since enslaved individuals, unlike the Maroons,

33 Malcom Ferdinand, *Decolonial Ecology. Thinking from the Caribbean World* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2022), 20-21.

34 Ferdinand, *Decolonial Ecology*, 153.

35 Nadira Omarjee, *We Belong to the Earth: Towards a Decolonial Feminist Pedagogy Rooted in Uhuru and Ubuntu* (Bamenda and Buea: Langaa RPCIG, 2023).

36 Frank Dragtstein, *Alles voor de vrede: De brieven van Boston Band tussen 1757 en 1763* (Amsterdam-The Hague: NiNsee/Amrit, 2009).

37 Van Lier, *Samenleving*, 70-85; Ellen Neslo, *Een ongekende elite: De opkomst van een gekleurde elite in koloniaal Suriname, 1800-1863* (Sittard: HaEs Producties, 2016); Hein Eersel, *Taal en Mensen in de Surinaamse samenleving: Verzamelde artikelen over taal, geschiedenis, en identiteit, 1985-2001* (Paramaribo: Stichting Wetenschappelijke Informatie, 2002), 193-194; Jones, ‘Citizenship Violence’, 115-116.

sought their freedom through an institution that in essence legitimised the European slave-based ordering of economy and society. Manumission exemplifies a double constitution of individuals as actors within and subjected to the plantation system. Within the constraints of plantation society (manumission was the only non-lethal route to freedom available for the enslaved), a variety of conditioned choices existed. While there are many examples of manumitted individuals who used their free status to seek manumission for family members or partners, there are also examples of (offspring of) manumitted individuals who used their legal personhood and citizenship status to become plantation owners, and hence enslavers, themselves.<sup>38</sup> While manumission signified a certain degree of 'porosity' of socio-legal distinction between enslaved and free persons, it did not challenge the racialised logic or modalities of the plantation system itself. Manumission in combination with the exemption of 'whites' from enslavement in metropole and colony signified the racialised distribution of imperial Dutch citizenship that would constitute deep inequities between those classified as 'white, black or colored' in terms of wealth, opportunities, status, political representation etc. long after the abolition of slavery, and in this sense it was one of the elements in the formation of white supremacy.<sup>39</sup> I have argued elsewhere that David Scott's reflections on the constitutive relation between plantation slavery and modernity are very insightful in understanding the subjectivity of the colonised in the context of slavery, and I reiterate them here:

*Plantation slavery was organized through the modern technological form of large-scale agricultural production, and it obliged the slaves to relate to themselves, to each other, and to their slave masters in new and essentially modern ways: in ways that were informed by modern ideas about property, about personhood and individuality, about time and economic organization and efficient issues, about the relationship between the religious and the secular, about the nature of government and the sources of political authority, and so on. . . . The regime of slavery . . . positively reshaped the conditions in which the lives of the slaves were lived, and which, as a consequence, reshaped both the kind of choices available to them as well as the kind of subjects who made choices.*<sup>40</sup>

From this perspective, as I have argued, the Europeans, the enslaved, the manumitted, and the Maroons in the Dutch Empire were all, to quote Scott, 'conscripts of modernity', but in strikingly different ways in regard to their relation to the benefits and horrors of modern citizenship.

De Kom's *We Slaves* conveys a clear message that the formal abolition of slavery on 1 July 1863 did not equate the end of suffering for the formerly enslaved but was a continuation of exploitation in new forms, resulting in 'a class of free proletarians.'

38 See Van Lier, *Samenleving*; Eersel, *Taal en Mensen*; Neslo, *Een ongekende elite*; Jones, 'Citizenship Violence', 116.

39 Jones, 'Citizenship Violence', 116.

40 David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 128 (emphasis GJ); Jones 'Citizenship Violence', 116.

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I infer from his analysis that citizenship status is meaningless when certain basic living conditions are not protected by the law. He also discusses the exploitation of the indentured labourers who were recruited in China, India en Indonesia to replace the enslaved and mentions in passing the role of colonial law in these conditions. Indeed, the so-called punitive sanction, according to which presumed ‘breaches of labor contract’ were not dealt with by civil law but by criminal law, legitimised severe physical punishment of the indentured labourers. He viewed the ‘development of class consciousness and unity among the proletarians and the casting away of slave mentality’ as a precondition for ‘national reconstruction’, meaning ‘collective companies using modern tools and owned by the workers of Suriname’.<sup>41</sup>

#### 4 The Limits of Independence

Anton de Kom had hoped that Suriname would transform into an independent country in which workers would collectively own companies, but the independence of Suriname turned out to be independence along the capitalist principles of the hegemonic Western world economic and military order. Given the history of Western (in particular US) interventions in post-independent affairs of radically socialist countries, it could be argued that models for independence were kept limited for the former colonies. As a consequence, consecutive governments in Suriname, regardless of political composition, have firmly remained within Western dominated capitalist political economy, characterised by bauxite mining and aluminium industry (in the twentieth century) and, today, largescale logging, gold mining, and oil extraction, usually to the benefit of multinationals or a small group of local entrepreneurs and often resulting in ecological destruction and sometimes also damage to public health.

Hence, ‘colonial inhabitation’ is ubiquitous in former colonies and metropolises alike. In the year 2023, that model came into direct confrontation with Indigenous communities in Suriname, when logging trucks were torched by Indigenous activists and the government responded with deadly force, killing two activists. The activism was motivated by fact that the government had granted the timber companies concessions on the traditional habitat of Indigenous people. This was followed by a large demonstration of Indigenous peoples in the streets of Paramaribo, the capital of the country. This crisis is a consequence of the fact that the collective land rights of Indigenous and Maroon people have not yet been enacted in Surinamese national law, regardless of rulings by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in 2007 concerning the land rights of the Saamaka Maroons and a ruling of that court in 2015 concerning the land rights of the Kalintha and Lokono Indigenous communities. At the time of writing, the local parliament considers a draft law regarding the collective rights of Indigenous and tribal peoples, but capitalist interests seem to slow down the legislative process that should lead to recognition, demarcation and effective protection of collective land

41 De Kom, *We Slaves*, 103-118, 122-128, 158; Jones ‘Citizenship Violence’, 117-118.

rights of these communities. When I had the opportunity to visit an indigenous village in Suriname in 2023, the chief of the village repeatedly stated that Indigenous communities have been fighting for the formal recognition of land rights for more than 500 years, in essence pointing to the colonial continuity of the past in the present. While the capitalist economic strategy of consecutive governments is motivated, at least publicly, by the desire to alleviate poverty in the country, and Western countries, whose wealth is significantly built on the capitalist model that is rooted in colonial exploitation should not pass easy moral judgements, it is tragic that independent former colonies seem to have had no other option but to follow this economic model. Citizenship is still conceived along the lines of the capitalist principles of individual ownership, exploitation of earth, unreflected accumulation and growth, even in former colonies that were established as exploitable lands (with exploitable peoples). However, perhaps it is a sign of hope that indigenous protest has become part of serious public debate in the country. Whatever the case, in the context of these intersecting crises, liberation continues to be an ongoing challenge.

## 5 The Citizenship Violence and European Borders

Not only did colonial logics structure the newly independent nation-states, they continued structuring the metropolises and its relations with people from the former colonies as well. While political independence was charged with expectations for a decolonised future, a sign of freedom, what is usually overlooked is that the arrangements concerning transfer of sovereignty and citizenship were detrimental to the formerly colonised because these arrangements, generally speaking, restricted their movement, excluding them from European metropolises that had appropriated and exploited the colonies and the colonised.<sup>42</sup> As I have argued elsewhere, political independence was part of a political economy of citizenship, since it ‘implied shifting modalities of the unequal distribution of wealth between the “global North” and “global South” via a post-independent politics of citizenship and an international migration regime that was detrimental to the ability (freedom) of the formerly colonized to relocate to those parts of the world that became rich as a consequence of the colonial enterprise’.<sup>43</sup> This has happened in the Dutch Surinamese case and is part of a wider European pattern. The metropolises were interested in the profits, not the people who enabled these profits with their labour. European Unification implied granting residence and socioeconomic rights to an increasing number of fellow Europeans who were transformed into European Union citizens, while people from the colonies lost rights of free entrance and

42 See Guno Jones, *Tussen Onderdanen, Rijksgenoten en Nederlanders: Nederlandse politici over burgers uit Oost en West en Nederland, 1945–2005* (Amsterdam: Rozenberg, 2007); Guno Jones, ‘Biology, Culture, “Postcolonial Citizenship,” and the Dutch Nation, 1945-2007’, in *Dutch Racism*, eds. Philomena Essed and Isabel Hoving (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 315-336; Guno Jones, ‘What Is New about Dutch Populism? Dutch Colonialism, Hierarchical Citizenship, and Contemporary Populist Debates and Policies in the Netherlands’, *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 37/6 (2016): 605-620.

43 Jones, ‘Citizenship Violence’, 119.

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residence in the metropolises after political decolonisation.<sup>44</sup> On a global level, Thomas Spijkerboer has observed the racialised nature of contemporary migration regimes.<sup>45</sup> Colonialism was obviously conceived as a one way street. Tendayi Achiume has argued that ‘the European colonial project involved the emigration of about 62 million Europeans to colonies across the world between the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century alone’.<sup>46</sup> Given the coloniality of the contemporary migration regimes, Achiume has viewed free migration of people from the former colonies to the metropole as a form of decolonisation. Unfortunately, we see opposite trends: the coloniality of the present is strikingly visible in Europe’s citizenship and migration regimes. Barak Kalir observes ‘continuities between present oppressive migration regimes and past colonial configurations for controlling the mobility’, arguing that ‘under colonial regimes, “subject races” were fundamentally seen by European colonizers as inferior, always restricted in their mobility, and never on par with the entitlements that pertained to White European citizens’. Restrictive migration regimes, Kalir argues, are ‘hardly ever applied to White people, or more specifically to citizens of Western states, either because their mobility is always already legally permitted or because they are not considered threatening, even when administratively lacking the right documentation’.<sup>47</sup> At the time of writing, EU politicians are considering a further expansion and intensification of ‘fortress Europe’, which has already created the conditions for the many thousands of border deaths of people from the global South.<sup>48</sup> It seems as if politicians in European metropolises have found it easier to engage with symbolic gestures, as belated apologies for slavery and/or colonialism in countries such as France, the Netherlands, the UK, Belgium and Germany demonstrate, than to address the colonial violence inherent in their border policies.

## 6 The Urgency of Slowing Down

Critical engagements should not be limited to tracing colonial inheritances in structures, policies and laws, but should also, urgently, trace the afterlives of colonial slavery in contemporary neoliberalism. A politics of care and of slowing down in light of neo-liberal exhaustion is necessary decolonial work, and this is precisely where critical intellect should intersect with bodywork. For me, the pertinence of this issue gained even more salience in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and how it interrupted the productive human subject. In light of the

44 Jones, ‘Citizenship Violence’, 118-122.

45 Thomas Spijkerboer, ‘Wasted Lives: Borders and the Right to Life of People Crossing Them’, *Nordic Journal of International Law* 86 (2017): 1-29; Thomas Spijkerboer, ‘De mondiale mobiliteitsinfrastructuur: De dubbele bodem van de neoliberale legaliteit’, *Sociologie* 15/3 (2020): 333-346.

46 Achiume, ‘Migration as Decolonization’, 1536-1537.

47 Barak Kalir, ‘Departheid: The Draconian Governance of Illegalized Migrants in Western States’, *Conflict and Society: Advances in Research* 5 (2019): 19-40.

48 Paolo Cuttitta and Tamara Last (eds.), *Border Deaths: Causes, Dynamics, and Consequences of Migration-Related Mortality* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020); Kalir, ‘Departheid: The Draconian Governance of Illegalized Migrants in Western States’, 19-40.



ecological crisis, the necessity of non-exploitative and non-exhaustive ways of being human is perhaps even more urgent than it was before.

This brings me to my last point. Challenging injustices and oppressive structures comes with a high price, as the biography of Anton de Kom demonstrates. We, the empire's unwanted citizens, are tired. I see exhaustion all around me. However, I think our exhaustion not only stems from the necessity to challenge dominant discourse, although this is an important part of it. We need to take Anton de Kom's anti-colonial and anti-capitalist critique one step further and translate it into a critique of the neo-liberal subject we inherited from colonial modernity. A redistribution of the fruits and means of production is not enough, we should question the cultural valuation of production as inherently good. The valuation of production, accumulation, acceleration, competence, competition, self-aggrandisement, and excellence is untenable, depletes us all. Tricia Hersey calls this 'grind culture', which may be defined as 'the mentality that one must work all day every day in pursuit of their professional goals'.<sup>49</sup> This culture is, as Hersey explains, one of the afterlives of the exploitation and commodification of racialised bodies during slavery and under racial capitalism. Rest, according to Hersey, is a form of resistance against capitalism. This is, however, not only a particularistic interest. We all suffer from the coloniality of neoliberal subjectivity. Neoliberal grind culture undermines an ethics of care and self-care that is more than ever needed in this world. We should claim the right to slow down, wander aimlessly and rest. Not as ways of recharging in order to become even be more productive, but because our bodies do not belong to capitalism. We must reclaim our bodies and finally leave the plantation behind. This is, of course, easier said than done given the omnipresence of capitalism and our complicity in it.

## 7 To Conclude

Based on Anton de Kom's brilliant study *We Slaves of Suriname*, I have linked a number of historical and contemporary catastrophes. His situated intervention, which starts from the perspective of the colonised, deconstructs the universalist-inclusive assumptions about modern citizenship. His work shows that citizenship violence inherent in the racist socio-legal distinction between enslaved and citizens was inextricably linked to the colonial project and to capitalist exploitation for the benefit of colonial elites and the metropolitan Netherlands. Citizens' property rights, in conjunction with other elements of law, played a crucial role in this. His analysis is intersectional *avant la lettre*, because he shows that White men, White women, Black men and Black women were affected differently by the colonial regime. The colonised, as De Kom demonstrates, were not will-less objects but resisted slavery and capitalist exploitation in various ways. This resistance does not alter the fact that the colonised, just like the citizens in the metropole (the Netherlands), were also made complicit in the violence of the

49 Tricia Hersey, *Rest Is Resistance. Free yourself from Grind Culture and Reclaim your Life* (London: Aster, 2022).

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colonial system in various ways, as other sources indicate. Furthermore, the impact of colonial modernity in the present is painfully visible in the hegemony of the capitalist extractive economic model in independent former colonies such as Suriname, which conflicts with the collective rights of Indigenous and tribal peoples and with ecological sustainability.

Colonial inheritances are also strikingly visible in the post-independent opportunities for mobility. The arrangements concerning the transfer of sovereignty were telling in this regard. Political independence became part of a political economy of citizenship, since it turned out to be detrimental to the ability of the formerly colonised from Suriname to move the metropole, the Netherlands, that became a rich country during colonialism. This is part of a broader European phenomenon: after being transformed into European citizens, an increasing number of Europeans were granted residence and socio-economic rights, while people from the former colonies *grosso modo* lost rights of free entrance and residence in the metropolises after decolonisation. The normalisation of far right politics throughout Europe is an ominous sign of what is yet to come for racialised citizens in European metropolises.

This brings me to my last point. While fortress Europe might suggest a paradise for those who are 'inside', ruling neo-liberal ideals of citizenship (the valuation of competition, production and acceleration) exhaust 'us' all. While care, self-care, slowing down and solidarity across borders are more than ever needed in this world, 'we' seem to be heading to the abyss.