Social science research and designs in Caribbean societies: the case of Suriname

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Abstract

This article evaluates social research in Caribbean societies with a complex diversity, taking the example of Suriname. The argument is that a research method is always instrumental and consequently a context free methodology does not exist. The implication is that each method needs to be tested on its validity in the society that is being studied. Social research conceptualizations and methodologies transplanted from the global centers to Suriname are addressed, as well as the ideological implications. Recent initiatives towards conceptualizations and research designs on a variety of research topics that emerged from within the academic community in Suriname are reviewed. The differences between multicultural societies of the global centers and societies with a complex diversity are assessed, as well as the implications for social research. The article concludes with an outline for future social research of Suriname and places biodiversity high on the research agenda. This is a crosscutting theme with a high relevance for the cultural, social and economic development of Suriname that at the same time is appropriate to connect researchers of various social, bio-medical and natural sciences.

Keywords: research design, social research, Caribbean, complex diversity, multicultural society

Introduction

Social research methodology, developed in the global centers of North America and Europe, is generally considered the standard for research in the so-called developing world. Textbooks on social research methods and other academic writings often treat methodological issues in a context free way without taking account of the historical evolution and the nature of the society under study. The following statement (Bulmer and Warwick, 2001) is illustrative:

> It would be a sharp mistake to draw too sharp a distinction between methods of research used in the developed and in the developing world. It is true that most general textbooks on research methodology assume that the reader lives in Western Europe, or North America or perhaps Australasia, and that conditions in those societies provide the backcloth for the carrying out of the procedures that are described in the texts. Nevertheless, the procedures described in the texts are not qualitatively different. They differ in degree, perhaps, but not in kind (Bulmer and Warwick, 2001: 7).

I disagree with this generalization because there are fundamental differences between societies in the global centers (Western Europe, North America) and the 'developing world' which has implications for the methodology. I will argue that a research method is always instrumental and consequently a context free methodology does not exist. The implication is that like a basic concept each method needs to be tested on its validity in the society that is being studied. To impose a method that is imported from Europe or the United States of America to a 'developing' society implies the dictatorship of the method rather than the development of the social reality in the latter society.

In Caribbean societies with a complex diversity the scientific principles and methods generally originate from Europe and the United States of America. Like in other Caribbean societies the social sciences were transplanted to the Surinamese society as part of the European academic heritage (Sankatsing, 2001). Because they do not originate from the own social reality, there has been a constant struggle by local social scientists towards endogenisation. This process refers to efforts being made to redefine existing European theories and methodologies in order to provide valid instruments to explain the own social reality. A clear example of

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endogenisation in the context of Suriname is the plural society model. The article addresses some principal social research conceptualizations and methodologies in Suriname since the Second World War, as well as the ideological implications. Recent initiatives towards conceptualizations and research designs on a variety of research topics that emerged from within the Surinamese society are reviewed, followed by an outline for future social research designs.

Methodology

For this study publications from primary and secondary sources were analyzed to obtain insights from a new perspective. The primary sources were science dissertations and other relevant publications that emerged from within the academic community in Suriname. The secondary sources consist of academic publications, academic journals, conference papers and websites. Among these are publications by Surinamese and foreign academics that provide the basis for identifying standard and new social science conceptualizations and methods, as well as current research paradigms originating from the global centers and the Third World.

Results

Social research in Suriname since the Second World War

Social research in Suriname up to its independence in 1975 was descriptive, in particular the cultural and economic studies. The 'plural society', introduced in 1949 by Van Lier (1971) became the key concept to describe the Surinamese society. This was reflected in the most important economic studies that focused on development planning in the context of the decolonization process (Adhin, 1961: 137; Dusseldorp, 1967: 56; Essed, 1973).

Sociological, anthropological and demographic studies focused on the major ethnic groups and their interrelations. Studies conducted in the 1950s and 1960s, in particular by Dutch academic institutions, focused on one particular ethnic group: Creole (Van Renselaar, 1963), East Indian (Speckman, 1965) and Javanese (De Waal Malefijt, 1963; Suparlan, 1976).

The concept of the 'plural society' was not only popular in academic publications but also in other publications on development policy such as economic studies focusing on development planning in the context of the decolonization process (Adhin, 1961: 137; Dusseldorp, 1967: 56; Essed, 1973). The wide application of this concept in the Dutch speaking and English speaking Caribbean raised critical questions on its validity for Caribbean societies.

The plural society was criticized by scholars with different theoretical backgrounds (Braithwaithe, 1960; Wertheim, 1966; Van den Muyzenberg, 1966; Kruyer, 1977; Hira, 1982; 1988). The criticism from Kruyer and Hira are based on a class approach. Illustrative is the criticism by Hira, who argues that the pluralism of Van Lier (1971) reduces class conflicts in the Surinamese colonial society to socio-psychological

phenomena, that are explained in terms of frustration and aggression of the oppressed classes (Hira, 1982).

Other critics of the plural society point to a false dichotomy of homogeneous versus non-homogeneous or plural versus non plural societies. The argument is that every society contains elements of unity and elements of plurality at different levels (Wertheim, 1966: 111). To put it more generally: every society has a dominant and a non dominant value system. The latter is politically, rather than culturally subordinated. Unlike the plural society and related approaches like consociationalism (Dew, 1978; 1994; DeSales Affigne, 1997; Hoppe, 1976), followers of alternative approaches do not consider ethnicity and cultural differences to be obstacles for developing a harmonious society. These new approaches, that are addressed further, are based on a positive appreciation of cultural diversity in the context of nation creation (Menke, 2008).

The plural society concept should not be discussed in isolation from major paradigms and related theoretical or methodological frameworks. The broader theoretical framework where it fits in is structural functionalism, which in its turn is based on the positivist paradigm (Sankatsing, 1989: 75-76). The empirical studies conducted in Suriname that were based on the plural society concept, are illustrative for the way the respective research designs are linked with the structural functionalist approach. The studies that focused on Creoles (Van Renselaar, 1963), East Indians (Speckman, 1965) and Javanese (De Waal Malefijt, 1963) have some elements in common.

First, ethnic groups (compare with the social system of structural functionalism) are selected as unit of analysis with a strong focus on the absence or the lack of integration of individual ethnic groups in the national society. Second, the studies employed a mixed research design (quantitative and qualitative research strategies) with emphasis on a cross-sectional design based on a sample survey. The researchers gave priority to the generalization of the results and causal relationships between variables within the plural society model, with a strong focus on differences or negative perceptions between ethnic groups. From a methodological point of view a serious limitation of the various empirical studies based on the plural society model is that the conceptualizations and research designs leave little or no room to understand common cultural values and behavior as a result of inter-ethnic relations in a wider context of the national society. The structural functionalist approach that underlies these studies provided a shared pattern of thought and dictates how to do research, while this also feeds the research strategy and the theoretical and ideological preferences of the researchers to emphasize differences and plurality rather than dimensions of unity and cohesion. It will be argued further that when taking the national level as the unit of analysis and a conceptualization of plurality that seeks to identify unifying or cohesive processes, this will yield a very different outcome.

From 1975 – the year of Suriname's independence - to 1990 attempts were made towards an

integrated social science approach and regional integration (as opposed to the fragmentation into separate disciplines) and to legitimize and disseminate knowledge in the Caribbean region. Characteristic was the integrated approach towards research and education of the faculty of social sciences, which was reflected in its own academic journals and other publications, development of methodology such as sampling procedures (Sankatsing, 1978) and multi-annual research projects of language and linguistics and the informal economy. However, the own initiatives towards regional integration were not sustainable. This was partly due to the strong focus of most academics and policymakers on Holland, except during the military regime from 1980-1987.

After 1990 there was a growth of social science publications that originated from within the Surinamese academic community. At the same time an increase of international 'donor-driven' policy research occurred that has been accompanied by fragmentation of social research (Menke, 2001). In this period some Dutch academic institutions also started projects to revisit existing conceptualizations on the Surinamese society.

It has already been argued that the colonial and neocolonial conceptualizations on ethnicity and the nation generally associate a pejorative meaning to cultural diversity. This is related to the Eurocentric ideal of a uniform culture which is expressed in the concept of the 'plural society'. A recent example is the theoretical point of view of the research project 'History of 20th-century Suriname' of the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV) in the Netherlands. The second thematic study of this project 'Culture, creolization and external orientations in 20th-century Suriname' formulates the hypothesis 'that creolization in Suriname is a process of contention rather than a process of inclusion, thus strengthening ethnic diversity. This development is intensified by cultural globalization, transnationalism, and the diminishing role of the state as mediating actor. The focus will be on the tension between the strengthening of ethnic identities based on culture and the opposite phenomenon of an unfolding integration and ethnic and cultural homogenisation and the wish to create a culturally unified, truly Surinamese nation' (KITLV, 2010). It should be noticed that this points to an Eurocentric conceptualization of the nation that is based on the ideal of cultural homogenization. The following statement by an adherent of consociationalism clearly illustrates the pejorative meaning associated to cultural diversity in Suriname: 'While the plurality of ethnic groups makes consociationalism possible it also tends to block development initiatives, undermine nation-building, and invite regime collapse' (Dew, 1999: 359). '…consociational alliances are essentially little timebombs waiting to explode. Under these conditions, any thought of nation-building is out of question' (Dew, 1999: 367).

Dew expresses his pessimism about 'consociationalism', but at the same time he attempts to formulate the problem in a broader context of development and nation building. The term 'nation-building' is misleading, as the state with its juridical-political structure precedes the development of the nation with its constituting (ethnic) groups. Therefore, I define nation-building as the intentional attempt by the (colonial) state to design a project of the nation in the (ex)-colony, based on the Eurocentric ideal of a uniform culture. Contrary to the notion of nation-building that relates to the unitary nation-state is the concept of *nation-creation* that relates to the inspirations and creativity of various social layers and groups in the society (Menke, 2008). Nation creation refers to the collective efforts of (cultural) groups in the nation-state to develop society based on solidarity, mutual respect and a harmonic interaction between ethnic groups and their cultures. Nation-building and nation creation correspond with different ideological positions. The process of nation-building is based on a mono-cultural ideology emphasizing the centrality and power of the state from a top-down perspective. [1] The process of nation-creation departs from an ideology of harmonic ethnic diversity and stresses a bottom-up approach based on the dynamic interaction between the constituting groups in the society.

I conclude that during the past 60 years social research in Suriname was ideologically under influence of Eurocentric conceptualizations, while traditional local knowledge systems were neglected. Standard conceptualizations such as the plural society, to characterize the Surinamese society, are not neutral but ideologically loaded and this was maintained during decolonization. From the early 1990s various research projects emerged in Suriname, some of which contrast with the old and new Eurocentric conceptualizations that generally originated in the global centers. The next section addresses social science research paradigms and initiatives towards conceptualizations and research designs that emerged from within the Surinamese academic community.

Research designs in Suriname

The choices in the preparatory phase of social research do not solely concern the research design that is about the methodological framework for the collection and analysis of data. To understand the way values and choices influence the research process, one should make a distinction between a paradigm, a research strategy, and a research design (Table 1). At the same time we should keep in mind that these concepts are interconnected: A paradigm provides a shared pattern of thought and dictates how to do research, that guides a scientific school or discipline. This feeds the research strategy that provides a general theoretical, epistemological and ontological orientation to the conduct of research. Thus, under influence of a certain paradigm the research strategy reflects the theoretical and ideological preferences of the researcher. Finally, within the theoretical and social context of the paradigm and the research strategy, the research design specifies the framework for the collection and analysis of data.

Characteristic of a more quantitative and

Table 1 Paradigm, research strategy, and research design

Paradigm	Research strategy	Research design
Shared pattern of thought and a common set of dictates and how to do research of a scientific school or discipline	General theoretical, epistemological and ontological orientation to the conduct of research	Methodological framework for collection and analysis of data
Components: • theoretical definition of the discipline and basic concepts or laws • methodological principles for doing research • shared examples that provide rules of the game and solutions for problems • social transfer mechanism	Focus on: • relation between theory and data • criteria and nature of scientific knowledge • ontological view of reality	Reflects priority given to: • causal relationships between variables • purpose of research (generalization of results to larger population or understanding the meaning of behavior in specific context) • evaluation criteria for research (reliability, validity,

causality-focused research strategy is the deductive approach to the relationship between theory and research, employing rigid norms of the natural sciences and the ontological view that reality is an external, objective entity (Bryman, 2004:19). This contrasts with non-positivistist (qualitative) research with its flexible guidelines in the research design, that first connects the paradigm with the research strategy and then with the data collection methods. Illustrative for the latter are constructivist, feminist and (neo-) Marxist paradigms. In the current Euro-American tradition there is a growing number of social science paradigms. They range from natural science related paradigms such as positivism, to paradigms related to qualitative research strategies, such as constructivism, feminism, cultural studies, queer studies and critical (Marxist) theory.

Recent social research in Suriname employs research designs that differ to some extent from the paradigms, conceptualizations and designs that are common in the global academic centers. This observation is based on an inventory of dissertations and other relevant academic studies since the 1990s. An overview of recent social research conducted by academic institutions in Suriname shows a large variety of research designs. Of the five research designs distinguished, the cross-sectional design and the case study are applied the most, while unlike the tradition in the global centers, the experimental and quasi-experimental designs are seldom or not applied. [2] To assess the state of the state of social research in Suriname one could depart from the unit of analysis on which a particular conceptualization is based. The two dimensions of the unit of analysis are the social sphere to which it relates, and the level of the unit of analysis (Sankatsing, 1989: 57). There are five levels of the units of analysis: the enclave, subnational, national, regional and international. The social spheres distinguished for Caribbean societies are culture, social structure, economy and politics.

An inventory based on the unit of analysis shows that hardly any study was done at the regional level.

The level of the unit of analysis of most studies is subnational, among others the ethnic group, gender and political party.

The following overview addresses the different research designs, the principal conceptualizations and how they relate to the social reality of Suriname.

Cross-sectional designs

The cross-sectional design relates to a cross section of a population by different characteristics and is based on a large number of cases and variables at one point in time, with the purpose to determine relationships. The survey and official statistics are among the most applied methods in Suriname. The latter method could have a large value added by combining two or more designs. Despite an often mentioned disadvantage – like the low reliability and validity of official statistics – there are some advantages. Among these is the smaller reactivity of research units when compared with survey research, the possibility of cross-sectional and longitudinal analysis, and savings in time and costs. Structured observation and diaries are hardly or not used in Suriname.

Content analysis that is concerned with systematically analyzing the content of documents and texts is hardly applied in Suriname. The few studies that employed this method relate to the political sphere, taking the political party as the unit of analysis. The methodology is characterized by a top-down approach. Illustrative to this is research on political mobilization with the political party selected as the unit of analysis and a strong focus on political elites who attempt to influence the voters (Blanksma, 2007). The disadvantage is that a bottom-up approach from the perspective of voters is not considered. As a consequence the motives, characteristics and needs of voters cannot be analyzed from their perspective. A simultaneous top-down and bottom-up approach might have contributed to broader and in depth insights in political processes.

A specific problem of choosing political parties as the unit of analysis in the context of 'consociational politics' is the pejorative and elitist meaning attached to ethnicity (Menke, 2009a). Further analysis shows the negative connotation attached to this concept as an ideological construction to justify an elitist political representation of a 'plural society' by the political elites of the different ethnic groups. Consociationalism justifies the political cooperation between the ethnic elites by pointing at the alleged explosive social situation that in the worst case could result into ethnic conflicts (Dew, 1978; Hoppe, 1978; DeSales Affigne, 1997). In addition to the justification of preventing conflict some adherents of consociationalism emphasize the positive function as a means for political mobilization and the emancipation of ethnic elites. Thus consociationalism is an ideology that underlies the construction of political practices, legitimizing the delegation of power from the people to the elites of the different ethnic groups, who on behalf of the groups authorize themselves to negotiate on the sharing of appropriated power.

Case studies

In the classical meaning, the case study is concerned with a detailed and in depth analysis of a single case. Modern case study research is often based on more than one case. Traditionally cases are related to a social group or location such as a community, an organization or a state. However, events, art, memorials, diaries and the like can be also very useful.

There is a diversity of case studies in Suriname. Some are combined with other designs. This opens interesting perspectives for future social research. The study of the marriage between a Guyanese and a Surinamese indentured worker by Jerry Egger (2009) is an example of a classical case study with a single case based on a diary. Diaries are useful to obtain descriptions and insights from the perspectives of 'forgotten' groups that are not accessible by means of colonial documentary sources. Illustrative is the diary of a female descendant of indentured workers, who brings forward interesting insights from the point of view of East Indian indentured workers in Suriname and Guyana (Egger, 2009) because the writings were made a posteriori about the life experiences of the narrator. The relevance of diaries as a source for historical and social research is great, because such life stories do not occur in colonial documentary sources. In addition this saves money and energy.

The study on sexuality and gender of Afro-Surinamese by Julia Terborg (2002) is illustrative for a case study of various cases with the purpose to give explanations from the perspective of the deprived informant. The study by Terborg employs a strategy that bridges the micro and macro level, and goes beyond monocausal and static explanations. There is more room for diversity, interconnectedness, and the specific contexts of actions at the individual and group levels. To this end a methodology is constructed that connects gender, class and ethnicity, to explain behavior and sexuality. The value added is that important myths are refuted, such as that of the strong, single black female, the sexual freedom and the

absence of emotions and love in sexual relationships. The underlying paradigm of the study is constructivism that assumes a constantly changing social reality that is influenced by actions at the individual and group levels. This paradigm is combined with feminism. The methodology employed makes it possible that underlying interpretations of the researched groups become visible and understandable. This holds true for the interpretations behind the positivist facts and figures that were initially believed to contradict the results brought forward by the constructivist approach.

Longitudinal designs

Longitudinal designs make it possible to assess changes of phenomena between periods.[3] Most important are panel, cohort- and trend studies, and time series based on official statistics or administrative data.

Although poor in numbers, a few interesting longitudinal designs were applied in Suriname. These studies employed time series based on official statistics and trend studies based on surveys. The trend study analyses waves of individuals of an identical population at two or more points in time.

This method was used in a study of social and economic processes with focus on employment and the informal economy (Menke, 1988). The principal hypothesis is that macro developments influenced changes in the employment structure of Suriname, rather than the socio-structural factors of sex, age and education. The study is a mixed cross-sectional and longitudinal design, with data collected in 1978 and 1998. The results are interesting because the effects of economic restructuring (structural adjustment) at the macro level and micro level are tested on employment measured on the basis of three jobs. In addition, the study assesses income poverty reduction by comparing the effects of foreign remittances and internal mechanisms, such as informal employment.

Time series based on administrative data were applied in an epidemiological study of cancer (Mans et al., 2008) and a study on state and elite formation (Schalkwijk, 1994) These studies – based on mixed designs that will be dealt with further – reflect the priority given to causal relationships between variables, with the purpose to generalize the results to a larger population.

From a methodological point of view the longitudinal designs are important because hypotheses are tested to assess changes in time, which is not common in Suriname. The application of longitudinal designs based on a panel– where data are collected of the same wave (sample) of individuals at different points in time – raises serious problems in Suriname. The major problem is the high non response rate due to the large mobility of respondents by residence.[4]

Comparative designs

Comparative designs are not applied very often in Suriname. However, this design can contribute to acquire in-depth insights in the social reality. Illustrative is the research project *'History and Nation-building'* that compares cultural and political processes in two contrasting societies of Suriname and Guyana

based on an identical methodology (Menke, 2009b). Characteristic of this design is the diversity of sources and methods, such as documents, focus groups, open-ended interviews of key persons, analysis of art products (memorials) and national symbols, official statistics and analysis of census categories. The added value of this study is the application of memorials as a source and method of research. From a constructivist point of view, the historically evolved relations between the different (ethnic) groups are explained by analysis of the meaning associated to the memorials concerned. This methodology enables researchers to do research from the perspective of nation-creation. This is a bottom-up approach to conceptualize the evolution of the nation by focusing on the collective efforts of (ethnic) groups to develop, with the diverse cultural heritage, a society based on solidarity, mutual respect and a harmonic interaction between the ethnic groups and their cultures. This contrasts with the traditional top-down perspective of nation-building that is conceptualized as an attempt by the (colonial) state to define the nation state according to the (Eurocentric) ideal of uniform culture. Finally, this new methodology provides an instrument that combines a constructivist and emancipatory approach to demystify modern western perceptions about unity and feelings of commonness in societies with a complex diversity.

The comparative study by Veira (2006) on differences and similarities in the position of the surviving spouse under succession law of Maroons, Caribs and the Surinamese succession law system employs a comparative design. Different from what is usually done in comparative research, this study applies a different method for each three contrasting societies. This is justified by the equality concept to examine the law systems of the three societies according to the respective cultures. The equality concept is applied in all phases of the research process. This begins in the preparatory phase with the choice of legal pluralism, rather than legal positivism. The researcher does not accept the latter approach because it departs from the Surinamese succession law system as the norm, which implies that the succession law of the Maroon and Carib people should be converted first in articles of law. The researcher's choice for legal pluralism that forms the basis for the theoretical and methodological elaboration of the problem is closely related to paradigms that give priority to the emancipation of indigenous and maroon people in the interior.

Combined designs

It was observed already that by combining two or more designs in a research project one could theoretically and methodologically obtain a large value added. The study of Caribbean colonial societies and elite networks from 1650-1920 by Schalkwijk (1994) is illustrative for a case study combined with two other designs, that employs both methods of description, explanation and the testing of hypotheses. The population comprised approximately 30 plantation societies in the Caribbean. The Surinamese plantation society was the selected case. The case study was combined with a longitudinal and cross-sectional design. The diversity of the methods used is justified as follows: "Especially if one explores the development of a whole society over an extended period there is probably no escape from having a mixed bag of analytical tools" (Schalkwijk, 1994:333). This study employed in addition to (historical) descriptions modern quantitative statistical techniques, namely time series and network analysis. A cross-sectional design was developed to link macro processes, derived from aggregated data of the longitudinal analysis, with processes at micro level.

The study also illustrates how Euro-American values can intrude in research and inhibit that the social reality of (ex-) colonized societies is being studied from a national or regional perspective. Because of the choice of the colonial state as the key concept, Schalkwijk was at odds with the American theoretical tradition concerning the state, which he criticized as follows:

> *In terms of understanding our own societies, western social theory has often not been helpful, and at least biased. Modernization theory for instance has led us astray for many years by seducing us to compare our colonial and post-colonial societies with the European experience. (…) Probably the best illustration of what I am trying to say is that there have been theories of colonization, of imperialism and empire, of all kinds of economic and political domination structures, but there is no theory of the colony. Colonies have been treated mainly as a bunch of undifferentiated irrelevant periphery entities, which may have drawn some attention of local historians, but not of the social sciences. In the literature on the state this is very marked.* (Schalkwijk, 1994: xiv).

The study by Schalkwijk lays an important basis for further research on the formation of the state, the nation and elites in the period after 1920.

Another example of research that combines three (quantitative) designs is the epidemiological study on the incidence of cancer and the differences between urban and rural areas in Suriname (Mans et al., 2008). Administrative data is combined with cross-sectional and longitudinal designs. Longitudinal analysis made it possible to assess changes from 1980-2004, while at the same time cross-sectional analysis was applied by including the variables sex, age, ethnicity and district. The results showed statistically significant differences between the urban and rural districts with respect to the ethnic and age distribution of cancer. I suggest that in a follow-up project, a case study and comparative design are added to the three quantitative designs. This makes it possible to assess with accuracy the nature of the assumed differences in lifestyle and other factors between urban and rural areas.

Some concluding remarks need to be made. First, social science research designs that emerged from within the academic community in Suriname illustrate the struggle by local academics towards endogenisation

of conceptualizations and methodologies from the global centers. To this end existing methodologies are being redefined to provide valid instruments to explain the own social reality. Second, across the different research designs efforts are made to employ a bottom-up rather than a top-down approach. This is illustrated with the classical case study design of a single case based on a diary of a Guyanese indentured worker, the comparative design to conceptualize the evolution of the nation from the perspective of nation creation as opposed to the top-down perspective of nation building. The same holds true for the combined cross-sectional and longitudinal design within a case study to study state and elite formation in colonized societies from a national or regional perspective rather than from an Eurocentric perspective.

A third observation relates to the use of qualitative methods by combining different paradigms. Illustrative is the dynamic interconnectedness between gender, class and ethnicity that could influence social processes such as sexual relations. Here the paradigm of feminism is combined with constructivism. The latter assumes that social reality is changing constantly by actions at the individual and group levels. Methodology is considered an instrument of liberation to make the underlying interpretations visible and understandable to the researched groups.

A fourth observation regards designs based on a quantitative natural science model. An advantage under the principle of keeping the unit of analysis constant is that accurate estimates and relationships can be assessed. However, a limitation is that in some cases an in-depth understanding of the complex and fluid social reality cannot be achieved on the basis of statistical inferences. Illustrative is the complex interconnectedness between ethnicity, gender, class and the state that influences perceptions of the nation. A final observation is that poor or no attempts have been made by the academic community in Suriname to employ research designs based on alternative participatory paradigms such as indigenism. These designs could meet the challenges of indigenous, maroon and other communities in societies with a complex diversity, which will be addressed in the next section.

Future social science research

The answer to the question whether Eurocentric methodologies are valid to examine the social reality of societies with a complex diversity depends on the nature of the latter societies as well as the context and purpose of research. In the current Euro-American academic tradition many of the interpretive paradigms, that to some extent compete with each other, are situated in the context of the 'multicultural society' in the global centers. Various social science paradigms exist side by side (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005: 21). In addition to the well-known paradigms – positivism/postpositivism, constructivism, critical (marxist) theory and the feminist paradigm – paradigms emerged, that are related to new themes or groups. Among these are *cultural studies, ethnic studies* and *queer studies*. Mainstream academic circles

of qualitative research in the global centers argue that research from an objectivist and value-free positivist perspective is being replaced by a research process from a multicultural perspective, which is shaped by race, ethnicity, class and gender.

The multicultural context of the global centers, in which the qualitative research process is situated, is based on an ideology that justifies the recognition by the politically dominant white majority of other (racial and cultural) minorities and in this way celebrates the racial and cultural diversity in immigration societies.[5] It is important to clarify why the concept of multiculturalism is inappropriate to explain Caribbean societies with a complex diversity. Multiculturalism was introduced as a policy and an ideology in the second half of the 20th century in immigration societies in the global centers, such as Canada and the United States of America (Kymlicka, 2007). As a liberal ideology it celebrates the racial and cultural diversity and thereby recognizes the political domination of the white European majority vis-à-vis ethnic minorities with their characteristic cultural attributes – language, religion e.o. – as an important source of the personal identity in public life. It is a state-directed project that presents the politically dominant white European majority as native born and from that position promotes the insertion of other cultural and 'racial' groups. This differs from the historical and social context of colonized or ex-colonized Caribbean societies with a large social, cultural and economic diversity.

What are the principal differences between Caribbean societies and the multicultural societies of the global centers? First, in Caribbean societies with a large cultural diversity there is politically or culturally no dominant white European majority. Colonial attempts to construct a nation in these societies resulted in very different social realities, such as the complex relation between class, ethnicity, state and nation. Illustrative is Suriname, with its characteristic recognition and respect in public life of the various collective ethnic identities rather than the personal identities. I referred to this phenomenon with the term nation-creation.

What secures cohesion in the relationship between complex diversity and unity? The process of nation-creation is illustrative as it refers to the collective efforts of cultural groups to develop a society based on solidarity, mutual respect and a harmonic interaction between ethnic groups and their cultures (Menke, 2009b). If one is to understand the process of nation-creation focus should be on the relationship between complex diversity and unity. Hall (1977: 158) points to the continuum of complexity and unity of various societies of which none is considered completely culturally divided (plural) or a completely unified society and consequently culturally homogeneous: *'Whereas the focus on plural differentiations requires us to concentrate on plural institutions, complexity-and–unity requires us to concentrate on the mechanisms of power, legitimation and domination: of hegemony.'*

The case of Suriname indicates that cohesion and unity are reflected in the nature of cultural diversity in the Surinamese society that is being portrayed as a harmonic amalgamation of different cultures without abolishing the individual cultures, and guaranteeing that each individual culture remains visible, audible and distinguishable (Menke, 2009b).

A second characteristic of Caribbean societies is the persistent structural discontinuity that in the course of colonialism until today is affecting every sphere of social, economic, cultural and political life. This finding is at the core of a new development paradigm based on an extra-disciplinary methodological approach (Sankatsing, 2001). The argument is that social processes and phenomena can be isolated only temporarily as objects of study. Immediately after this isolation they should be incorporated again in the original social reality with its specific relationships (Sankatsing, 2001: 62). In this regard the concept 'internal social dynamism' is relevant. It refers to the extent to which the development and evolution of a social unit is the result of endogenous forces that are emerged from within the society concerned. Sankatsing argues that Caribbean societies – because they were implanted during colonialism – lack the necessary 'internal social dynamism' to explain the social and historical processes (Sankatsing, 2001: 63). He concludes that most of the paradigms and theories of the western global centers are not valid for Caribbean societies. The reason is that 'they suppose a degree of internal social dynamism much greater than that which exists in the Caribbean , where historically there has predominated an endemic structural discontinuity affecting every sphere of social, economic, cultural and political life' (Sankatsing, 2001: 64). This has implications for key concepts and related methodologies, such as development, that cannot be valid or are meaningless in the context of Caribbean societies. Therefore, it is the task of social scientists to re-examine mainstream concepts and related

methodologies from the perspective of an extra-disciplinary approach.

Research priorities for Suriname

There is a wide variety of methodological strategies and paradigms in the social sciences. On the one hand one finds paradigms from the global center such as positivism, constructivism, feminism and critical Marxism. On the other hand paradigms emerged from within societies with a complex diversity, such as the development - envelopment paradigm and indigenism. There are principal differences between most of the paradigms from the global centers and those originating from societies with a complex diversity. Illustrative is indigenism that is based on active participation of the community and concerned with decolonizing Eurocentric research of indigenous people and transforming related research institutions (Smith, 2005). Positivism on the other hand emphasizes value neutrality to exclude values and subjectivity in the research process and perceives social science to be a rational activity, that develops – independent of historical and social factors – through logical reasoning and empirical testing.

It is not expected that in the near future a single 'conventional' social science paradigm will emerge in the world that is accepted by all or most social scientists.[6] On the contrary qualitative social researchers belief that they are at the threshold marked by controversies between paradigms. Two possible future lines are sketched.

The first is: 'The era of emancipation' and the second 'The age of greater spirituality in research efforts' (Guba and Lincoln, 2005: 212). The first line is characterized by emancipatory movements from non-western societies. Illustrative is the rise of indigenous social science that is designed and implemented by indigenous people and not influenced by colonial or

Table 2. Classification of conceptualizations and research settings in Caribbean societies (based on the unit of analysis)

Level of unit of analysis	Social Sphere			
	Culture	Economy	Social structure	Politics
Enclave	Amerindian community Maroon society	Enclave economy	"Saramaka social structure"	"Maroon kroetoe system"
Subnational section	Plural society	Dual economy (Lewis' model) Pure Plantation Economy	Gender structured society	Crown colony
National level	Creole society	Modern plantation economy Class Society	Stratified society	Parliamentary democracy Authoritarian state socialist state
Regional level	Afroamerica	Regional economic integration	Federation	Geopolitics
International level	African diaspora	Dependency	Global alliances	East-West rivalry

Table 3. Research on biodiversity at the (semi-) enclave level: Conceptualization and methodology

Social sphere	Conceptualization/ research line	Section	Paradigm	Research strategy	Research design	Method source	Objective
Culture	Language & visions on cosmology & the nation	Interior Tribe Ethnic group	'Indigenism'	Transformative, inductive, generating theory	Participatory Comparative/ Case study Comparative Case study	Oral tradition/ history Focus group	Participation in decision-making Response to western culture
Economy	Biodiversity, economy & development	(semi-) enclave vs modern economy	'Indigenism' Constructivism Positivism	Inductive, generating theory Interpretivist	Comparative Case study Participatory	Oral history Focus group	Assess changes over time Causal relations Participation in decision-making
Politics	Maroon & indigenous vs. parliamentary decision-making system	Communal unit (tribe) vs political party	'Indigenism' Constructivism	Inductive, generating theory Interpretivist	Participatory Comparative Case study	Oral tradition/ history Focus group	Participation in decision-making Enhance emancipation
Social structure	Communal & modern social structure	Communal unit (tribe) vs social class	'Indigenism' Constructivism	Inductive, generating theory Interpretivist	Comparative/ Case study	Oral tradition/ history Focus group	Explain meanings Enhance emancipation

neo-colonial conceptualizations (Guba and Denzin, 2005: 1118). This new line of social research 'provides a framework for both critique of Western deployment of social science methods among native peoples and the creative genesis of new forms of systematic inquiry into community conditions, problems and concerns devised by members of the indigenous community themselves' (Guba and Denzin, 2005: 1118).

The second line of 'greater spirituality in research efforts' emphasizes ecological values and respect for non-Western communal systems of living (Guba and Lincoln, 2005: 212). These research lines will be taken into account to address the research priorities for Suriname.

The extra-disciplinary approach (Sankatsing, 2001) – like emancipatory paradigms of the Third World such as Paulo Freire's conscientization – have elements in common with these proposed research lines. The extra-disciplinary approach provides a tool for alternative research strategies and designs to give an adequate response to the historically inappropriate conceptualizations and methodologies for the Caribbean of the current fragmented social science disciplines.

When doing research in Caribbean societies with a complex diversity one needs to consider each methodological step with care. In addressing future social research priorities for Suriname the unit of analysis on which a particular conceptualization is based, is used as the main classification principle. The advantage of this principle is that one could understand the variety of social science conceptualizations or paradigms better, for the 'unit of analysis' is not a

particular social science discipline but is located in the social reality itself (Sankatsing, 1989). Two dimensions of the unit of analysis are important: the social sphere to which it relates, and the level (Sankatsing, 1989). The following social spheres are distinguished: culture, social structure, economy and politics. The relevant levels of the units of analysis are enclave, and the sub-national, national, regional and international levels. The following example may clarify this classification principle. The concept of 'plural society' is related to the cultural sphere and based on the ethnic group, which is at the sub-national level of the unit of analysis (Table 2).

The future social research priorities can be outlined now for each level of unit of analysis. I will take the enclave level as an example, and sketch for each social sphere (culture, social structure, economy and politics) the possible conceptualizations, paradigms, research strategies, research designs and methods (Table 3).

Given its complex diversity, the formulation of research priorities for the Surinamese society should be based on a broad methodological approach that takes account of local, national and international knowledge systems. A comparative approach combined with research designs should have a high priority for studies at the enclave, sub-national, national, and regional levels.

Combined designs deserve attention in particular, for they make it possible to acquire in-depth understanding of the dynamics between various groups within the complex social reality. A special place is also needed for methodologies based on oral sources,

such as the oral tradition and oral history. Particularly in studies of maroon and indigenous people such methods allow to understand the specific meanings and perceptions of processes, and to take actions based on a participatory focus and the perspective of these groups.

Research at the enclave level is concerned with relatively isolated settings conceived as extra-geographical entities that are not (sufficiently) integrated into the national society. Illustrative are Maroon and Amerindian communities. During and after colonialism various enclave studies were conducted, based on conceptualizations from the global academic centers: cultural studies and the social structure of Maroon and Amerindian communities, and enclave economies in the 'hinterland of conquest' in earlier periods of colonization. It is important to present future conceptualizations and methodologies in each of the four social spheres (culture, social structure, economy and politics) from the point of view and interests of the indigenous people.[7] From the perspective of indigenous people, guidelines need to be developed for producing social science knowledge based on community participation and the oral tradition that takes account of the characteristic signs anchored in their cosmological and knowledge systems.

Besides the pure enclaves, there is a growing number of semi-enclaves that are no isolated extra-geographical entities anymore. This is due to the urbanization of indigenous and maroon people and acculturation processes in the traditional interior communities. Therefore, prior to studies in the cultural sphere an inventory should be made of enclaves and semi enclaves in the interior. As regards the semi enclaves, conceptualizations should make a link to other levels of units of analysis. For example, the conceptualization of 'language and visions on cosmology' it is recommended to relate it to 'the nation', which is at the national level of the unit of analysis (Table 3).

One of the research priorities of Suriname needs to include the interior – and the related biodiversity – that covers more than 80% of the land area, with a density of only 0.2 inhabitants per square kilometer. This southern located region is covered by a vast rain forest characterized by a large biodiversity and inhabited by a culturally diverse population of numerous (semi-)enclaves. By means of a combined comparative and longitudinal design a comprehensive study should focus on large areas of undisturbed biodiversity vis-à-vis areas with a more or less disturbed biodiversity with both modern and traditional production activities. From the point of view of communities at the (semi-) enclave level research should take account of the tension between the preservation of tribal cultures and their perspective on biodiversity, and the integration at the national level. This needs to be reflected in research lines and conceptualizations in all the social spheres. Biodiversity is recommended as a crosscutting research theme with a high relevance for the cultural, social and economic development of Suriname that at the same time could connect researchers of various social, bio-medical and natural sciences.

The biomedical and economic value is assessed by Mans (2009) who argues that Suriname is a country with one of the largest biodiversity per square meter in the world with approximately 6000 higher plants. If only 4% would contain medicinal characteristics the country could earn at the lowest an amount of three billion United States dollars per annum.

The local perspective on biodiversity based on the indigenous knowledge systems is indispensable in the crosscutting research on biodiversity and development. Biological diversity is an important asset to traditional indigenous communities, as it provides food, medicine and raw materials that are closely connected with the spiritual and cosmological systems to sustain the present and future generations. The urbanization of indigenous people and acculturation processes following the influx of modern western economic activities, technologies and culture in traditional communities, has led to a threat of gradual erosion of indigenous knowledge systems. As indigenous knowledge is carried by oral tradition, shifts toward modernization and non-indigenous languages are accompanied by a loss of local languages. This poses a threat to retaining local knowledge as an integral part of the oral tradition in the native languages. Therefore the inter-relationships between biodiversity and cultural diversity should be included in research that aims to reduce or eliminate the loss of traditional biodiversity-related knowledge.

When addressing the relevance of biodiversity and its relation with the economic, social, cultural and technological spheres, the paradigm of indigenism needs to be included at the (semi-) enclave level. Here again this perspective with its participatory approach is of importance to decolonize research. Indigenism is about decolonizing research that goes far beyond just refinements to qualitative research. Its focus is to "transforming the institutions of research, the deep underlying structures and taken-for-granted ways of organizing, conducting and disseminating research and knowledge" (Smith, 2005:88). This decolonization of research is multi-facetted and involves unmasking and deconstruction of colonialism in old and new forms; reclamation of knowledge, language and culture; transformation of the colonial relations between the indigenous and the (colonial) settler; and (re)establish the connections between the researchers (Smith, 2005:88). Thus in future social research the paradigm of indigenism is critical in (semi-)enclaves, which will often be at the expense of modern survey research. This holds also true for situations with dual structures where traditional and modern communities exist side by side.

Conclusion

Suriname is an example of a Caribbean society where the social sciences were transplanted as a part of the European academic heritage. Social scientists in the Caribbean made efforts towards endogenisation, a process by which they attempted to redefine existing European theories and methodologies to provide valid instruments for their own social reality. An example is

the concept of plural society that dominated social research in Suriname from the 1940s up to its independence in 1975. Standard conceptualizations, like the plural society, are not neutral and have an ideological loading that was maintained during decolonization, at the expense of traditional local knowledge.

Caribbean societies differ from the so-called multicultural societies of the global centers. Unlike the multicultural societies they lack a politically and culturally dominant white European majority in a social reality characterized by a complex relation between class, ethnicity, state and nation. Another characteristic of Caribbean societies is the persistent structural discontinuity that in the course of colonialism until today is affecting every sphere of social, economic, cultural and political life. Future social research in Suriname needs to take account of these differences that are not considered by the dominant social science paradigms in the world. Positivism on the one hand emphasizes value neutrality to exclude values and subjectivity in the research process and perceives social science to be a rational activity that develops through logical reasoning and empirical testing. Indigenism is an alternative paradigm concerned with decolonizing Eurocentric research of indigenous people and transforming related research institutions. This new paradigm introduces new forms of inquiry into community conditions and concerns devised by the indigenous communities.

An advantage of social science designs based on a quantitative natural science model, such as the survey, is the possibility of assessing accurate estimates and relationships. However, the survey is based on the individual, which raises problems in societies with a complex diversity. This holds true in particular for communal settings of indigenous people, because the individual as the unit of analysis may not provide insight in the collective structures of tribal societies. The implication is that an analysis based on statistical inferences in the context of the positivist paradigm inhibits to understand or transform the complex and often fluid social reality. Research designs based on an indigenous rather than a positivist paradigm should have a high priority in future social research if one is to unravel the complex diversity.

Biodiversity should be placed high on the research agenda of Suriname. It is a cross-cutting theme with a high relevance for the cultural, social and economic development of Suriname that at the same time could connect researchers of various social, bio-medical and natural sciences. In addition to the bio-medical and economic value, the local perspective on biodiversity based on the indigenous knowledge systems is indispensable in this crosscutting research. Thus the inter-relationships between biodiversity and cultural diversity should be included to identify solutions to reduce or eliminate the loss of traditional biodiversity-related knowledge. Combined comparative and longitudinal design should be employed in areas of undisturbed biodiversity vis-à-vis areas with a more or less disturbed biodiversity.

Thus, the relation between research, methodology and the society is a fundamental issue. A research method is always instrumental and consequently a context free methodology does not exist. The implication is that each method needs to be tested on its validity in the society that is being studied. In the context of the decolonization of the Surinamese academic institutes social scientists need not only be concerned to critically evaluate methodologies from the global centers, but at the same time utilize the own academic potential and local knowledge systems in the coastal area and the interior.

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Endnotes

[1] Nowadays in a world with the United States as the only Superpower conceptualizations of nation-building emphasize that it can be imposed from outside by the use of military force. The RAND Corporation defines nation-building as "the use of armed force in the aftermath of a conflict to underpin an enduring transition to democracy."(Dobbins, 2003).

[2] Consultancies for international and public institutions are not included in the inventory of academic research methods.

[3] A panel is generally based on the same probability sample of individuals with data collection at two or more points in time. A cohort study is based on a cohort of persons with identical characteristics (for example students of a class) whereby data are collected at two or more points in time. The trend study focuses on analyzing different 'waves' of individuals at two or more points in time, by selecting different groups (samples) from the same population.

[4] An example is research conducted by the Stichting Wetenschappelijke Informatie with an experimental panel of 1000 voters in district Paramaribo, drawn from the voters list a few months after the 1996 elections in Suriname.

[5] The social reality in Suriname differs in various ways from the situation in the multicultural societies. Characteristic is the 'imagined plurality', that legitimates and recognizes symbolically both the organization of political power and the identity of the different ethnic groups, affirming these at the same time in an egalitarian way (de Campos França, 2004). When adding the interconnectedness of class, gender, ethnicity, linguistic situation and religion, the social reality of Suriname becomes far more complex.

[6] A single 'conventional' paradigm refers to the conception of Thomas Kuhn (1970) indicating that the history of the natural sciences learns that only one paradigm will survive in the competition for scientific hegemony.

[7] In global academic centers the tide is changing. American social scientists argue in the prestigious 'The Sage handbook of Qualitative Research' that indigenous peoples in Australia, Canada, Alaska, the United States and New Zealand criticize modern western social sciences and make recommendations for education and research based on indigenous knowledge. (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005: 1120).