

# **Kwakore, Baba and Mai: Revisiting Dutch Colonialism in Suriname**

**Praveen Sewgobind**

## **Abstract:**

Three hundred and twenty years of European colonialism in Suriname have resulted in the presence of large African and South Asian communities in this Caribbean country. Having gained formal independence relatively recently (in 1975), British and Dutch colonial politics have shaped many aspects of its socio-political and cultural life. This paper investigates the extent of and the ways in which processes of racialization of African and South Asian communities have been forged by a racial schema imposed by a system of white supremacy under colonialism.

The paper analyses two statues in the capital city of Paramaribo: Kwakoe, which represents the abolition of slavery, which de facto occurred in 1873, and a statue named Baba and Mai, which represents the arrival of South Asian contracted labourers after 1873. Both statues, importantly, omit white Dutch colonial responsibility for the enslavement of African people, and the ongoing oppressive conditions that were operative on the plantations.

The argument is made that a wilful obfuscation of Dutch wrongdoing stems from a sustained dynamic of elevating an innocent white Dutch subjectivity which is intricately linked to the subordination of both African and South Asian peoples. These groups, then, are left with both an embodied sense of inferiority, as well as with an inculcated perception of the other group as inferior, which stems from a racializing Dutch politics of divide and conquer.

As the category of race and, subsequently, racialization, are largely denounced both in the Netherlands and in Suriname, the paper aims to re-centre race as a fundamental social marker.

**Keywords:** racialization, white supremacy, colonialism, African diaspora, South Asian diaspora.