

IN MEMORIAM

H. U. E. (Bonno) Thoden van Velzen (1933–2020)

Erik Bähre

H. U. E. (Bonno) Thoden van Velzen (1933–2020) passed away at his home in Huijbergen, the Netherlands, on 26 May this year. Bonno Thoden van Velzen is internationally recognized for his historical and ethnographic study of Surinamese society and religious movements.

Thoden van Velzen studied Cultural Anthropology at the University of Amsterdam and did his PhD at Utrecht University under the supervision of André Köbben. In 1961, together with his wife and anthropologist Ineke van Wetering, he went to Suriname to do fieldwork among the Ndyuka. He studied the *Gaan Gadu* (Great Father) oracle and other religious movements and explored how people struggled to gain control over others, but also to control their own lives. He found that changing material conditions led to new interpersonal tensions that these religious movements addressed. He argued that a historical and material analysis could only partly explain the aggression and violence that he encountered during fieldwork. The movements were charged with people's emotions and fantasies that could not be reduced to material conditions and political strategies alone. Taking inspiration from Freud, Thoden van Velzen developed an approach that examined these desires and fears in great detail and showed how they became part of everyday power struggles of which religious movements were a part.

Upon completion of his PhD, Thoden van Velzen worked at the African Studies Centre in Leiden (1966–1971). He and his family lived in Tanzania for three years where Thoden van Velzen studied how *Ujamaa* reforms that formed the ideological backbone of socialist development projects intensified social inequalities instead of diminishing them. He became a professor at the Department of Cultural Anthropology at Utrecht University (1971–1991) and at the Amsterdam School for Social Science Research at the University of Amsterdam (1991 until retirement in 1999). In 1990, he was awarded membership in the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences. After retirement, he was a visiting researcher at the Institute of Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology at Leiden University (2014–2018).

He wrote an impressive oeuvre, including publications with his wife Ineke van Wetering, who died in 2011. In 2013, Brill published their final work together *Een Zwarte Vrijstaat in Suriname* where they used oral traditions to gain insight into nineteenth- and twentieth-century Ndyuka history. Thoden van Velzen's passion for anthropology and commitment to Suriname meant that he continued writing until the end of his life, working on the book *Prophets of Doom; A History of the Aukan Maroons*, which will be published by Brill.



Throughout his career, Thoden van Velzen supervised a great number of PhD researchers and played a stimulating role as teacher and mentor. He was also an early collaborator of *Focaal*. He kindly shared his ideas about how fieldwork was influenced by emotional dynamics and personal dependencies that we could only partly uncover. Generous, compassionate, and an anthropologist at the core, Thoden van Velzen continued fieldwork in Suriname into his twilight years, with his latest fieldwork visit in January 2019.

Erik Bähre is Associate Professor at the Institute of Cultural Anthropology and Development So-

ciology, Leiden University. He specializes in economic anthropology with research on money and finance in everyday life in South Africa and Brazil. He focuses on how economic change affects inequality and violence and how finance raises moral issues regarding solidarity and responsibility. Erik Bähre is the Principal Investigator of the ERC Consolidator Project “Moralising Misfortune: A Comparative Anthropology of Commercial Insurance” (Grant 682467). He is the author of *Money and Violence: Financial Self-Help Groups in a South African Township* (Brill, 2007) and *Ironies of Solidarity: Insurance and Financialization of Kinship in South Africa* (Zed Books, 2020).

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