

The Dutch Colonial Presence in the West Indies in the 17th Century: A Historiographical Overview*



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This overview summarizes the Dutch presence in the America(s) with special attention focused on the Dutch Caribbean and Suriname, (not exclusively, but with major focus) in the 17th century. The central aim of the text is to explore the chosen research topics and scholarly interests throughout the second half of the 20th century and to emphasize the current historiographical and archival tendencies in the Dutch West Indies, revealing the initial colonial events which irreversibly redrew the map of the Spanish dominions in the New World.

KEYWORDS:

Historiography; Dutch Caribbean; West India Company; Privateering; Suriname

INSTEAD OF INTRODUCTION: OOSTINDIE ABOUT THE WEST INDIES

In 1987, Gert J. Oostindie, one of the most eminent historians specialising in the Dutch Caribbean, published an article summarizing the situation in historiography at that time. Apart from a list of the most relevant bibliographical sources up to 1985, his article raised a number of doubts and expectations about the future, and raised the pointed question whether the Dutch Atlantic historiography was “catching up”. Oostindie outlined some problematic approaches to the Dutch presence in the America(s), including the general neglect of the topic at the expense of the Dutch East Indies, and a lack of history writing in the Antilles and Suriname caused by absence of history studies at the Paramaribo and Curaçao universities. Another of Oostindie’s concerns was at that time the monopolistic retention of the documents about the former American colonies in the Dutch State Archives.¹ However, in the end Oostindie was “feeling confident that the quality of research and publications will improve and a comparative approach [would be] added over the next years”.² Those are the starting points for this study, which could be thus considered to be a “follow-up” to Oostindie’s premises.

To conclude this “Instead of Introduction”, the author of this text would like to mention that the intention of this study is to show the timeline on which different topics are being treated with the period end at the 17th century, when the Dutch West India Company was founded (West-Indische Compagnie, WIC), which colonized the lands of

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1 Gert J. OOSTINDIE, *Historiography on the Dutch Caribbean (-1985): Catching Up?*, *Journal of Caribbean History* 21, 1987, No. 1, pp. 1–18, here p. 10.

2 *Ibid.*, pp. 1–3.



Suriname, the former “Netherlands Antilles”,³ the north-eastern part of Brazil during the years 1630–1654, and the territory of today’s New York, and the colony of New Netherland in the period 1614–1667. Since summarization of all the available bibliography on all the Western possessions in the WIC would demand an entire monography, the sole focus of this text is on the Caribbean zone, including the territory of Suriname.

SUMMARIZING THE HISTORIOGRAPHY REVIEWS ON THE DUTCH PRESENCE IN THE CARIBBEAN

There are not many works on historiography focusing solely on the Dutch-American colonies. Apart from the text by Oostindie from 1987, there is an important overview of the bibliographical sources by W.P. Coolhaas.⁴ In his publication, he focuses in detail on practically every published source on the Dutch colonialization, both by the Dutch East-India Company (Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, also known as VOC) and by WIC.

Ingrid Koulen and Gert Oostindie as editors of “A Research Guide” on the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba published in 1987, went a step farther.⁵ This slim publication contains information about the historical and political research on the Dutch Antilles, linguistics, and other scholarly topics. Numerous bibliographical takes on the Surinamese history were summarized by Jaap Meijer in an outdated but still useful publication.⁶ Much later, another important summarizing step regarding the scholarly tendencies in historiography, research and many other scientific branches was taken in 2002 by Michiel Baud, director of CEDLA.⁷ Baud divided in his article the research on the Dutch American history into three phases — until the 1970s, since the 1970s and after the 1990s. The turning point between the first and second phase is the worldwide decolonization (in the case of the former Dutch territories this happened in 1975 in Suriname) and increasing interest in the “Third-World” Latin America and Caribbean. The third phase is, according to Baud, typified by the renewing of scholarly generations, by former students of the leading authorities of the previous phases.

3 Thus Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, half of Sint Maarten, Saba and Sint Eustatius. The name “Netherlands Antilles” is still being used to describe the geopolitical union of the six islands, but since 2010 it is incorrect as this island union was dissolved. A general name for this union is “Dutch Caribbean”.

4 Willem Philippus COOLHAAS, *A Critical Survey of Studies on Dutch Colonial History*, Den Haag 1980.

5 Ingrid KOULEN — Gert J. OOSTINDIE et al., *The Netherlands Antilles and Aruba. A Research Guide*, Dordrecht 1987.

6 Jaap MEIJER, *Sleutel tot Sranan: wegwijzer in de Surinaamse geschiedenis*, Amsterdam 1957.

7 Michiel BAUD, *Latin American and Caribbean Studies in the Netherlands*, *Revista Europea de Estudios Latinoamericanos y del Caribe* 72, 2002, pp. 139–160. CEDLA (Centrum voor Studie en Documentatie van Latijns-Amerika, Center for Latin American Research and Documentation) is one of the leading Dutch institutions in the field, founded in 1964 as part of the University of Amsterdam.

DUTCH HUNGER FOR OVERSEAS TERRITORIES

As more European states ventured into the Americas, the Dutch also wanted to take advantage of the wealth with which the new continent abounded. Thus despite (or perhaps *because of*) the ongoing Eighty Years War against the Spanish Empire in Europe,⁸ first Dutch vessels set sail for America.⁹

Apart from coveting overseas territories, the Dutch had a special need for salt to preserve herrings. Originally, they were importing it from the Spanish territories but the Eighty Years War brought about an economic a commercial embargo imposed by the Spaniards. As a result, the Dutch were forced to prospect for salt farther inside the Spanish overseas possessions. The salt flats at Punta de Araya (in present-day Venezuela) solved this problem. However, after the expiration of the Twelve-Year Truce in 1621, they found the Spanish flats fortified. By this moment, the foundation of the WIC¹⁰ as a war “machine” against the Spanish Empire and the official Dutch arrival in the America(s) were just a question of time.

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- 8 An interesting revision offer Ana CRESPO SOLANA — Manuel HERRERO SÁNCHEZ (edd.), *España y las 17 provincias de los Países Bajos. Una revisión historiográfica (XVI–XVIII)*, Córdoba 2002. About the Twelve Years’ Truce is a highly recommendable publication by Simon GROENVELD, *Het Twaalfjarig Bestand, 1609–1621. De jongelingsjaren van de Republiek der Verenigde Nederlanden*, Den Haag 2009. A literary analysis of the textual sources from the period of this long-lasting Spanish-Dutch conflict is offered by Yolanda RODRÍGUEZ PÉREZ, *The Dutch Revolt through Spanish Eyes. Self and Other in Historical and Literary Texts of Golden Age Spain (c. 1548–1673)*, Oxford — Bern 2008. And finally, a “classic” lecture on the Spanish-Dutch relations in Europe was marked by Geoffrey PARKER, *Spain and the Netherlands, 1559–1659*, London 1979.
- 9 The Dutch discovering voyages during the period 1550–1650 are described by Vibeke D. ROEPER — G.J. Diederick WILDEMAN, *Ontdekkingsreizen van Nederlanders (1590–1650)*, Utrecht — Antwerpen 1993. A very good introduction to the first Dutch overseas attempts is summarized by these authors: Leonard BLUSSÉ — Jaap DE MOOR, *Nederlanders overzee. De eerste vijftig jaar 1600–1650*, Franeker 1983. Blussé and De Moor focus on the introduction of the Dutch traditions, society and culture, follow this with a description of the VOC through the history of first robberies and colonial attempts in the New World, describing the WIC and its initial successes as the one of Piet Heijn (see the chapter “Privateering”). Leonard Blussé returned to this topic again at his later work (again in Dutch) describing the politico-cultural relations between the Netherlands, Asia, Africa and America: Leonard BLUSSÉ, *Het verre gezicht. Politieke en culturele relaties tussen Nederland en Azië, Afrika en Amerika*, Franeker 2011.
- 10 The first official history of the Dutch West India Company was published in 1644: Johannes DE LAET, *Historie ofte Jaerlijck Verhael van de Verrichtingen der Geotroyeerde West-Indische Compagnie. Zedert haer Begin, tot het eyende van’t jaer seshien hondert ses-en-dertich*, Leiden 1644. As his publication served as the main source for all the upcoming works on the WIC, in 1931–1934 it was reedited and published under the same title by Samuel Pierre l’Honoré Naber (Den Haag, 1931–1934). Further works on the WIC were written by W.R. MENKMAN, *De Geschiedenis van de West-Indische Compagnie*, Amsterdam 1947, who described both the WIC and the VOC. Another point of view is given in a publication from 1928 analysing



THE DUTCH PRESENCE IN THE NEW WORLD (WITH SPECIAL FOCUS ON THE 17TH CENTURY)

The Dutch presence in the Americas, together with the French and English presence, was a paradigm shift in respect of the Spanish *mare clausum*.¹¹ While much has been written about the Spanish, French and English colonization of the New World, the Dutch colonization remained for a long time neglected. Besides the topics raised by Oostindie, we face another complication when speaking explicitly about the 17th century Dutch presence. In general, the historiography of the 17th century in the New World used to be regarded as a “historical vacuum”, which tends to be perceived as a state where actually “nothing happens”.¹²

The Dutch colonization style was considerably different from the Spanish or Portuguese one. The Dutch, generally speaking, showed no interest in the introduction of their language, culture or religion in their colonies, and more likely they proclaimed the traditional liberty of faith as a consequence of the Erasmian school of thought in the Netherlands.¹³ The Dutch objective in the New World was commerce,

the buildings of the WIC and VOC in the Netherlands: Jacob Cornelis OVERVOORDE — Petrus DE ROO DE LA FAILLE, *De gebouwen van de Oost-Indische Compagnie en van de West-Indische Compagnie in Nederland*, Utrecht 1928. The most recent contribution to the WIC's historiography was published by Hendrik Jacob (Henk) DEN HEIJER, *De geschiedenis van de WIC*, Zutphen 1994, who also participated in a great geographical effort on a historical basis: Bea BROMMER — Hendrik Jacob (Henk) DEN HEIJER, *Grote Atlas van de West-Indische Compagnie = Comprehensive Atlas of the Dutch West India Company. I — De Oude WIC 1621–1674 = The Old WIC 1621–1674*, Voorburg 2011, which offers a visual perception of the different colonization periods.

- 11 This term was coined by Hugo de Groot, a Dutch philosopher, as natural opposition to the *mare liberum*. De Groot's intention was to proclaim the innate right to all the seas. See Ralph VAN DEMAN MAGOFFIN (transl.) — James BROWN SCOTT (ed.), *Hugo Grotius: Mare liberum*, New York 1916, accessible online: <http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/552> [retrieved 31.8.2016]. Jonathan Israel offers a very valuable book dedicated to the Spanish-Dutch struggle in the 17th century: Jonathan I. ISRAEL, *The Dutch Republic and the Hispanic World 1606–1661*, Oxford 1982.
- 12 This was stated by Cornelis Goslinga in the very first publication about the Dutch presence in the Caribbean and on the Wild Coast between the 17th century and the 1970s and no such analysis was published in Dutch. See Cornelis GOSLINGA, *The Dutch in the Caribbean and on the Wild Coast 1580–1680*, Assen 1971. He gives other reasons for the less developed historiography concerning those topics (e.g. language barrier) in his later publication *A Short History of the Netherlands Antilles and Suriname*, Den Haag 1979. Also, Oostindie made numerous attempts to break this historiographical silence with a series of essays about the Dutch historical memory: Gert J. OOSTINDIE (ed.), *Dutch Colonialism, Migration and Cultural Heritage*, Leiden 2008.
- 13 This fact uses to be emphasized by the modern historians, based on observations of witnesses of the Dutch colonization in the 17th century. See Jonathan I. ISRAEL, *Conflicts of Empires. Spain, the Low Countries and the Struggle for World Supremacy 1585–1713*, London 1997, p. 241.

not cultural or religious conquest as in the case of the Spaniards.¹⁴ The Dutch colonies are lacking in elaborate colonial structures, having been built generally on naval, commercial and administrative bases.¹⁵ Finally, the island colonies in the Caribbean, compared with other islands in the region which were dominions of other European states, were never transformed into plantation colonies with a large slave population.

One of the first attempts to summarize the Dutch colonial history was made by H.T. Colenbrander in 1925,¹⁶ with a great introduction to the comparisons of colonial styles of the European states. Nevertheless, Colenbrander's study was followed by a long period of silence, ended by a seminal work on the Dutch Caribbean by Cornelis Goslinga in the 1970s.¹⁷ The 1980s and the 1990s saw a constantly growing scholarly interest, doubtless inspired by the independence of Suriname proclaimed in 1975. This significant date was a cut-off point for a colonial overview by Boogaart & den Drooglever in 1982.¹⁸ More studies were published around the same years on the Dutch colonies.¹⁹ After this series of publications, almost two decades had to

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- 14 As claimed by Svatava RAKOVÁ, *Víra, rasa a etnicita v koloniální Americe* [Faith, Race and Ethnicity in the Colonial America], Praha 2005, p. 53: the Dutch came to the New World to engage in commerce, not to convert themselves into farmers. By this point, the Dutch colonization used to be considered to be an "expansion without empire", see Pieter Cornelis (Piet) EMMER — Willem Wubbo (Wim) KLOOSTER, *The Dutch Atlantic, 1600–1800. Expansion without Empire*, Itinerario 23, 1999, No. 2, pp. 48–69, here p. 48–49. An interesting contribution to the Spanish-Dutch relations was published Carlos FELICE CARDOT, *Curazao hispánico (antagonismo flamenco-español)*, Caracas 1973.
- 15 C. GOSLINGA, *The Dutch in the Caribbean*, p. 58.
- 16 Herman Theodoor COLENBRANDER, *Koloniale geschiedenis. Eerste deel algemeene koloniale geschiedenis met kaarten*, Den Haag 1925. In the same year, another two volumes were published, one up to the year 1816 and another one since 1816.
- 17 C. GOSLINGA, *The Dutch in the Caribbean*. His epic work continued with *The Dutch in the Caribbean and in the Guineas 1680–1791* published by the same publishing house in 1985, and *The Dutch in the Caribbean and in Suriname 1791/5–1942*, published in 1990. A few years later, in 1979, Goslinga took all his volumes and excerpted a study which gives a complete overview of the history of the Netherlands Antilles and Suriname: IDEM, *A Short History*.
- 18 Ernst VAN DEN BOOGAART — Pieter Joost DROOGLEVER et al., *Overzee. Nederlandse koloniale geschiedenis 1590–1975*, Haarlem 1982. When talking about the 17th century, it should be noted that the authors dedicated a chapter to the Dutch expansion in the Atlantic between the years 1590 and 1674.
- 19 Leonardus Gerardus Anne SCHELLEKENS, *Nederlanders in Azië, Afrika en Latijns-Amerika (1600–1900)*, Nijmegen 1980. Antonie Johannes Maria KUNST, *Recht, commercie en kolonialisme in West-Indië vanaf de zestiende tot in de negentiende eeuw*, Zutphen 1981. This Dutch historiographical-economical overview of the Dutch West Indies provides a detailed overview since the Discovery of America by the Spaniards, from the first attempts to enter their waters, the foundation of the first and second WIC, finishing with the initiation of the decolonization process. The book provides an overview of information from the end of the 15th to the end of the 19th centuries. Apart from this great overview,



pass before new topics and research conclusions about the Dutch overseas American economy appeared.²⁰

Meanwhile, another publication on the historiography of the Dutch presence in Netherlands Antilles and Aruba²¹ and a general overview of the Dutch colonization²² were published. *De Nederlandse koloniën* by Jurrien van Goor from 1994 deserves special attention as it clearly reflects the social and educational need for such publications, as during the first years after its publication it was reprinted four times and a reviewed version was published in 1997.

PRIVATEERING

Privateering, or *kaapvaart*, was a specific style of “piracy”, in which a garrison possessed a “letter of marque” (or *kaperbrief* in Dutch), which allowed it to seize enemy vessels (in most cases Spanish ones). The founding of the WIC after the expiration of the Twelve Year Truce during the Eighty Years War in 1621 was a starting point for the privateering practice, as it formed an inseparable part of the existence of the WIC, whose *raison d’être* was the war against the Spanish Empire,²³ and the company was supposed to harm it with any possible means.²⁴

the major contribution I consider to be the economic links, viewed both from Europe and from America.

20 Klooster presented a convincing study on the importance of the trade movement and contraband in the Atlantic and Caribbean based on comparative and interwoven methodology: Willem Wubbo (Wim) KLOOSTER, *Illicit Riches. Dutch Trade in the Caribbean, 1648–1795*, Leiden 1998. Another two economic studies are by Pieter Cornelis (Piet) EMMER, *The Dutch in the Atlantic Economy, 1580–1880. Trade, Slavery and Emancipation*, Hampshire — Vermont 1998 (Variorum Collected Studies Series); and a study in Dutch: Pieter Cornelis (Piet) EMMER — Jos GOMMANS, *Rijk aan de rand van de wereld. De geschiedenis van Nederland overzee 1600–1800*, Amsterdam 2012. The economic aspects of the colonization were studied more recently by Ana Crespo Solana, together with comparative contributions on the Dutch Atlantic presence: Ana CRESPO SOLANA, *Mercaderes atlánticos. Redes del comercio flamenco y holandés entre Europa y el Caribe*, Córdoba 2009. IDEM, *¿Alegoría de la Nueva Holanda? Imágenes y prácticas de la economía de plantación en Surinam*, Anuario de Estudios Americanos 67, 2010, No. 1, pp. 239–261; IDEM, *Holanda en el Caribe desde la perspectiva comparada. Aportación al debate sobre los modelos de expansión en los siglos XVII y XVIII*, Catharum. Revista de Ciencias y Humanidades del Instituto de Estudios Hispánicos de Canarias 9, 2008, pp. 39–48.

21 Hendrina Bernarda VAN ALLER, *Van kolonie tot koninkrijksdeel. De staatkundige geschiedenis van de Nederlandse Antillen en Aruba van 1634 tot 1994*, Groningen 1994 (Dissertatie-serie vakgroep Staatsrecht). Based on Aller’s research in the Netherlands National Archive and Central Historical Archive in Curaçao, she summarizes the Spanish conquest and in general the transatlantic voyages, following this with the Spanish presence in the present-day Dutch postcolonial areas.

22 Jurrien VAN GOOR, *De Nederlandse koloniën. Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse expansie. 1600–1975*, Den Haag 1994 and 1997.

23 C. GOSLINGA, *A Short History*, p. 21.

24 H.B. VAN ALLER, *Van kolonie*, p. 51.



With regard to Dutch privateering, there was a colourful personality, Piet Heyn, whose capture of the Spanish Silver Fleet in 1628 was one of the biggest (if not the biggest) successes of the WIC. Adored by the Dutchmen and detested by the Spaniards, Heyn serves as a source of inspiration for numerous historiographical works.²⁵ Another privateering document was discovered in 2008 in the Archive of Utrecht, — the ship journal of the captain of the Nassau Fleet's (*Nassausche vloot*) Willem van Brederode, who sailed under the flag of the VOC to Spanish western coastal territories of America in 1623, aiming and failing to capture the Spanish Silver Fleet.²⁶

The topic of Dutch piracy is also broached in one of the most recent publications concerning an international pirate investigation in the Greater Caribbean written by Antonio García de León in 2004.²⁷

SURINAME STUDIES

Suriname has been studied more than other Dutch colonial dominions²⁸ and the scholarly interest was sparked primarily after the Surinamese independence from the Kingdom of Netherlands in 1975.

In addition to Cornelis Goslinga mentioned in the overview of the Dutch colonial presence in the Caribbean, in the Suriname Studies the most eminent scholar is Richard Price. He focuses in various studies on the 18th century Saramaka wars in Suriname, for the abolition of slavery, appreciated for Price's approach to the "ethnographic historiography".²⁹ Another major work authored by this well-known historian is a reviewed account of John Gabriel Stedman of his voyage to Suriname at the end of the 18th century.³⁰

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- 25 Samuel Pierre L'HONORÉ NABER — Irene A. WRIGHT, *Piet Heyn en de Zilvervloot*, Utrecht 1928. In 1946, another work on Heyn's major success with the Spanish Silver Fleet was published: Michael Georg DE BOER, *Piet Heyn en de zilveren vloot*, Amsterdam 1946. In 1959, another book came to be published, this time as a detailed story of Heyn's life in 1624–1625 on the West African coast: Klaas RATELBAND, *De Westafrikaanse reis van Piet Heyn 1624–1625*, 's-Gravenhage 1959.
- 26 Brederode's ship journal was discovered, reviewed and commented by Anne DOEDENS — Henk LOOIJESTEIJN, *Op jacht naar Spaans Zilver. Het scheepsjournaal van Willem van Brederode, kapitein der mariniers in de Nassause vloot (1623–1626)*, Hilversum 2008.
- 27 The Greater Caribbean is a geo-historical unit rather than a strictly defined geographical area of the Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico. See Antonio GARCÍA DE LEÓN, *Contra viento y marea. Los piratas en el Golfo de México*, México, D.F. 2004, p. 15.
- 28 Some of the works are featured in encyclopaedias: Conrad Friederich Albert BRUIJNING — Jan VOORHOEVE — W. GORDIJN, *Encyclopedie van Suriname*, Amsterdam 1977.
- 29 Richard PRICE, *Alabi's World*, Baltimore — London 1990. Price also explored the topic of Saramaka (or Saramacca) in other works: IDEM, *Ethnographic History, Caribbean Past*, College Park 1990, <http://www.lasc.umd.edu/Publications/WorkingPapers/1992LectureSeries/dta9.PDF> [retrieved 31.8.2016]; and in an earlier study on the Saramacca wars: IDEM, *To Slay the Hydra. Dutch Colonial Perspectives on the Saramacca Wars*, Ann Arbor 1983.
- 30 Stedmans' account was published in German: Jos FONTAINE (ed.), *Reize naar Surinamen door den capitain John Gabriël Stedman*, Zutphen 1987; and in English a year later: Richard



The most recent contributions to the Surinamese Studies include Henk Waltmans' politico-economic study from 2002,³¹ and, above all, Hans Buddingh. His *De geschiedenis van Suriname* relates the complete history of Suriname, including the postcolonial situation marked in the 1980s by the military rule of current president Desi Bouterse.³²

“GUILT-FOCUSED” PUBLICATIONS

A special chapter in this bibliographical review is the “guilty conscience of the former colonists”, which appeared in the last few decades.³³ Marc Ferro claimed appositely that after the decolonization, the European historical memory gave its ultimate demonstration of pride, — talking about its misdeeds, evaluating them and doing so absolutely uncompromisingly.³⁴

A compilation of essays from the literary-cultural revue *De Gids* includes essays on the (post)colonial topics of Suriname, Netherlands Antilles and the Dutch West

PRICE — Sally PRICE (ed.), *John Gabriel Stedman: Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Suriname*, Baltimore — London 1988. The 18th and 19th centuries of Surinamese plantation colony were topic also for Alexander VAN STIPRIAAN, *Surinaams contrast. Roofbouw en overleven in een Caraïbische plantagekolonie 1750–1863*, Leiden 1993.

³¹ Henk WALTMANS, *Suriname 1650–2000: een politieke studie*, Oosterhout 2002.

³² Hans BUDDINGH, *De geschiedenis van Suriname*, Amsterdam 2012. Buddingh's publication appeared for the first time in 1995 and by 1999 and 2000 it was brought up to date. Talking about the historiography of the 17th century, Buddingh offers a penetrating insight into the social, international and economic aspects of the Dutch colonization. Apart from Buddingh's publication, another publication summarizes the Surinamese history: Eveline BAKKER, *Geschiedenis van Suriname: van stam tot staat*, Zutphen 1993.

³³ Or, more exactly, since the beginning of the 21st century, when the World Conference Against Racism was held in 2001. Dutch Minister Van Boxtel made public statements which are considered as an admission of guilt about the horrors of slavery and colonization in the Dutch Caribbean. See Armand J. ZUNDER, *Herstelbetalingen. De “Wiedergutmachung” voor de schade die Suriname en haar bevolking hebben geleden onder het Nederlands kolonialisme*, Den Haag 2010, pp. 429–431.

³⁴ Marc FERRO, *Dějiny kolonizací. Od dobývání po nezávislost 13.–20. století* [History of Colonizations. From Conquest to Independence 13th–20th Centuries], Praha 2007, p. 5. This study, comparing the worldwide colonization undertakings, is based on a French original, *Histoire des colonisations: des conquêtes aux indépendances (XIIIe–XXe siècle)*, Paris 1994. In Spanish it was published in 2000 as *La colonización. Una historia global*, México, D.F. 2000; and in English as *Colonization: A Global History*, London 1997. Despite the great number of translations (including a Czech one), this study is quite problematic regarding its ambitious comparisons between all the colonizations during a lengthy period (since the 13th to the 20th century), as it tends to present the historical events in too concise a way with some errors and inaccuracies. Nevertheless, Ferro's study offers an “essayistic” point of view, including the “vision of the defeated” and analogies with literature or film. However, when mentioning the Dutch colonization, Ferro dedicates only a few dozens of pages to this topic.



Indies.³⁵ Three of them are focused on Suriname, and specifically on the phenomenon of the Dutch colonial slave trade standing in stark contrast to the Surinamese motto in its coat of arms: *Justitia, Pietas, Fides* (Justice — Piety — Fidelity), and the fourth deals with the difficulty of the creation of a postcolonial cultural identity.

A great insight into the Dutch “black legend” is given in Benjamin Schmidt’s *Innocence Abroad*.³⁶ Schmidt suggests a parallel between the principles of the Eighty Years War’s struggle for Dutch independence from the Spanish Empire, and the Spanish colonization’s Black Legend, which serves as a sound ideological basis for the Dutch forays into the Spanish *mare clausum*. Using Dutch representations of America, Schmidt concludes with the Dutch change from “innocence” to “tyranny” in the colonial ideology of the Dutch Golden Age. After Schmidt, another drop into the sea of “guilt-focused” publications was added by Ewald Vanvugt in 2002,³⁷ summarizing the Dutch colonialism of the VOC and the WIC, giving the publication an expressive title: *Black Book of the Netherlands Overseas*. Also, in 2002, an essay based on a speech given by Bert Paasman at the Amsterdam University was published on the moral presence based on the colonial past.³⁸ Paasman’s line of reasoning suggests that although the colonial era might be over, its consequences are not — through economy, demography, geography, ecology and culture, the world has irreversibly changed.

A balanced study on colonialism and its consequences was published by Gert Oostindie in 2005.³⁹ In his *Paradise Overseas*, Oostindie presents a summary of Dutch Caribbean history and its enduring legacy, within a comparative and interdisciplinary framework. Oostindie’s main contribution consists in outlining different trajectories between the ex-colonial possessions at the moment of decolonization, accompanied by a deep insight into the Dutch post-independence assistance for the former colonies, also mentioning the current intolerance towards the Caribbean migrants in the Netherlands. He has these points in common with the foregoing Paasman’s discourse.

Finally, there is a sort of an “opposite” guilt-focused book by a Surinamese economist and former politician Armand J. Zunder, who published a rather provocative study based on empirical data from the Surinamese archives demanding from the Netherlands a “compensation” for the Surinamese nation for the centuries of colonialism and slavery.⁴⁰

35 Remieg AERTS — Theodor DUQUESNOY et al., *Een ereschuld. Essays uit De Gids over ons koloniaal verleden*, Amsterdam 1993.

36 Benjamin SCHMIDT, *Innocence Abroad. The Dutch Imagination and the New World, 1570–1670*, New York 2001.

37 Ewald VANVUGT, *Zwartboek van Nederland overzee. Wat iedere Nederlander moet weten*, Soesterberg 2002.

38 Bert PAASMAN, *Wandelen onder de palmen: De morele actualiteit van het koloniale verleden*, Amsterdam 2002.

39 Gert J. OOSTINDIE, *Paradise Overseas: The Dutch Caribbean: Colonialism and Its Transatlantic Legacies*, Oxford 2005.

40 A.J. ZUNDER, *Herstelbetalingen*. It should be noted that the word “Wiedergutmachung” in the publication’s title, referring specifically to the post-WWII Germany’s reparations for the survivors of the Holocaust.



ARCHIVAL RESEARCH ON THE 17TH CENTURY DUTCH PRESENCE

Last, but not least, we have a brief summary of the principal sources for all the previously mentioned publications, archival resources. A foundation for the archival research on the Netherlands Antilles was laid by M.A.P. Meilink-Roelofs in 1954.⁴¹ She summarized the contents of all the volumes in the Netherlands General State Archives (Nationaal Archief)⁴² in The Hague. Regarding the 17th century, she gave an explanation for the disappearance of the archival sources of the First WIC between 1621 and 1674. Those archives disappeared, according to some theories, having been sold as scrap paper in 1821. Meilink-Roelofs offers an alternative explanation based on the inventories from the 18th and 19th centuries, which “clearly indicate that most of the First Company’s archives had already been lost at that stage”.⁴³

The National Archive of Curaçao (Nationaal Archief Curaçao, or Centraal Historisch Archief, hereinafter CHA), set up in 1969, contains documents from the period 1828–1939. Since then, the CHA has been acquiring actively further archival materials to be accessible both in the archive’s reading room and online as part of the “Access to Memory” digitalization programme.⁴⁴ The archive materials were last brought up to date in 2012 and the archive holds records dating from the 18th to the 20th century, including collections from Bonaire, Aruba, and numerous family archives.⁴⁵ Regarding the 17th century, and concretely the WIC archives, the CHA works constantly on the digitalizing of materials, in cooperation with U.S. archives, on the Dutch presence on the river Hudson in the 17th century, and with the International Council on Archives. At the same time, the CHA participates in the MIGAN project (Memory of the Islands: Gateway to Archival Networking) which is putting together an ambitious plan to exchange archival resources throughout the Caribbean.⁴⁶ Suriname has its National Archive (Nationaal Archief Suriname)⁴⁷ holding records dating from the 1820s in the reading rooms,⁴⁸ and digitised documents dating from 1662 online.⁴⁹

Furthermore, new online sources have appeared in the last years offering both visual and textual materials (not only) on the Dutch West India Company and related

41 Marie Antoinette Petronella MEILINK-ROELOFSZ, *A Survey of Archives in the Netherlands Pertaining to the History of the Netherlands Antilles*, reprinted from the *West-Indische Gids* (The West Indies Guide) 35, 1954, pp. 1–37.

42 <http://www.nationaalarchief.nl> [retrieved 31.8.2016].

43 M.A.P. MEILINK-ROELOFSZ, *A Survey of Archives*, p. 2.

44 <http://www.nationalarchives.cw/eid/521> [retrieved 31.8.2016].

45 <http://www.nationalarchives.cw/collectie/inventarissen> [retrieved 31.8.2016].

46 <http://www.nationalarchives.cw/onderwerpen/samenwerking> [retrieved 31.8.2016]. More on the MIGAN project at: <http://www.migan.org> [retrieved 31.8.2016].

47 Founded in 1956, and until 2006 called *De Landsarchiefdienst*.

48 <http://www.nationaalarchief.sr/collecties/archievenoverzicht> [retrieved 31.8.2016].

49 <http://www.nationaalarchief.sr/collecties/archieven-online> [retrieved 31.8.2016]. The archives were digitalized between 2009 and 2013 with archival resources brought from Suriname to the Netherlands during the 20th century due to inconvenient archival conditions. See <http://www.nationaalarchief.sr/actualiteiten/nieuws/item/5-surinaamse-archieven-online> [retrieved 31.8.2016].

topics on the 17th century presence in the Americas. One of them is the website “Digital Collections” launched in January 2016, by The New York Public Library.⁵⁰ Another thought-provoking online project was launched in 2011–2014: Volunteers transcribed digital copies of the so-called “Sailing Letters” (in Dutch *Gekaapte Brieven*, thus letters of *kapers* (in English called *privateers*, sometimes *corsairs* or *buccaneers*), generating in this way the metadata for around 6,000 documents from the 17th and 18th centuries.⁵¹ Last but not least, there is the Huygens ING (Institute for Netherlands History) project launched in 2013 to mark the 150th anniversary of abolition of slavery in the Dutch West Indies. This online project builds up collections in the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Curaçao, Suriname and Guyana during the period 1670–1870, together with relevant laws and regulations.⁵²

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The Dutch West Indies have received sustained scholarly attention since the beginning of the 21st century. This trend contrasts sharply with the former focus on the Dutch colonial presence in South-East Asia. Many noted scholars have published ground-breaking studies on the Dutch colonies in the New World, many of them comparative and following the prevailing scholarly trends. The bibliography demonstrates that the group of recognized pioneers in the field from the 1970s and 1980s has been lately enriched by some fresh historiographical viewpoints by younger scholars. Taking into consideration Baud’s division of research periods, the author of this text would add to his division a fourth one, effective since 2010, when the Netherlands Antilles were dissolved, ringing the curtain on the Dutch colonial era in the Americas.

Finally, to go back to Oostindie’s initial concerns about the inexistence of history studies in the former Dutch colonies in America: Anton de Kom University of Surinam introduced in 2010 ‘History Studies’ in the Department of the Humanities,⁵³ while in Curaçao this issue is still unresolved. Thus, the social sciences are still being centralized in Europe, representing an “academic colonialism”.⁵⁴ Indeed, the major investigations were conducted (and in large measure are still being conducted) by Dutch scholars and institutions, which are part of the cultural legacy of the Netherlands through imports of scientific data from the ex-colony,⁵⁵ although the digitalization of the archive resources promises an expansion of scholarly research on the

50 <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org> [retrieved 31.8.2016], which include among numerous noteworthy materials images from the Dutch Caribbean colonial history.

51 <http://www.gekaaptebrieven.nl> [retrieved 31.8.2016].

52 <http://dutch-caribbean.huygens.knaw.nl> [retrieved 31.8.2016].

53 <http://www.uvs.edu/humaniora/geschiedenis-humaniora/> [retrieved 31.8.2016].

54 Jack K. MENKE — Henk E. MENKE, *Decolonizing Social Sciences in Suriname: a Strategic View in Favour of Regionalism*, *Sustentabilidade em Debate* — Brasília 6, 2015, No. 2, pp. 260–275, here p. 260.

55 *Ibid.*, pp. 261–262. In this case, Menke gives the example of the journal *OSO, Tijdschrift voor Surinamistiek*, see <http://www.surinamistiek.nl/oso> [retrieved 31.8.2016], which has been published in the Netherlands continuously since 1982.



Dutch American colonialism and its cultural consequences. There is no doubt that Surinamese and Antillean scholars would substantially contribute to the academic research efforts. Nevertheless, the new generation of scholars is unquestionably taking its chance to “catch up”, (not only) in the field of comparative studies, filling the supposed “vacuum” of the 17th century.

RÉSUMÉ:

This historiographical overview summarizes the Dutch presence in the New World with a special focus on the Dutch Caribbean and Suriname (omitting the territories of New Amsterdam, modern-day New York, and Dutch Brazil), colonized in the 17th century by the Dutch West India Company. It considers the central research topics and scholarly interests throughout the second half of the 20th century, and follows the prevailing historiographical and archival trends concerning the Dutch West Indies.

First of all, there is a note on works summarizing the bibliographical sources on the selected territory. It presents several areas of historiographical interest: Dutch desire for overseas possessions (summarized in the literature about voyages of discovery, the reasons for the Dutch forays into the Spanish *mare clausum*, as well as the first colonization efforts of colonization made by the Dutch East and West India Companies), together with bibliographical sources on the Eighty Years War and the Dutch Revolt against the Kingdom of Spain.

The bibliography review of the Dutch presence in the New World focuses primarily on the 17th century, which used to be regarded as a “historical vacuum”. It outlines the principal attributes of the Dutch colonization style, which differed considerably from the Spanish or Portuguese style, failing to import their language, culture and religion into their colonies, and focusing on the naval and commercial interests (including a specific style of piracy — privateering). Furthermore, it covers the topic of Suriname in the 18th century, which has garnered more scholarly attention than other topics.

A special chapter reflects the “guilty conscience of the former colonists”, appearing since the beginning of the 21st century as an important historiographical focus, which emphasizes the fact that not only the Spaniards had their *Black Legend*, but also the Dutchmen had their own. Finally, it gives an overview of the possibilities for archival research on the 17th century Dutch presence in the Americas, mentioning the major archival collections as well as online sources, which also reflect the growing scholarly interest in the Dutch West Indies since the beginning of the 21st century.

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