

Archives and libraries WORKSHOP

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AWAD = The Atlantic World and the Dutch

AWAD, however, is not a 'Dutch' project, but an Atlantic. So, the emphasis should be on the Atlantic. The geographical boundaries for AWAD are clear cut: the statute (octrooi) area of the Dutch West India Company. The AWAD program, however, is not about the Company, nor its overseas settlements or its successors. That's a rather narrow minded nineteenth century '*Hollandocentric*', imperialistic or colonial point of view. The Dutch Atlantic was not primarily about empire. Piet Emmer and Wim Klooster called it once: expansion without empire. And they are quit right.

During the conference the emphasis was on the bilateral relation between one country and the Netherlands. The Atlantic, however, is about multilateral connections. AWAD's emphasis should be focussed on the dynamics generated in the Western Hemisphere, in the Atlantic itself, in a very broadly defined Dutch context, whatever that means. I will illustrate this with two examples.

The first one is about the Virgin Islands. During the eighteenth century they were a Danish colony, governed by Danish Crown officials. The Lutheran church was the formal religion, and Danish the official language. So, what is the 'Dutchness' about this? Not much probably. Most of the plantation owners, however, came from the Dutch West Indian Islands. They were stout Calvinists and they spoke Dutch among themselves of course. Over time, on their plantations a Creole Dutch developed. It became the lingua franca of the African slaves on the islands. Several letters and sermons are preserved in this Creole

Dutch. In my opinion this is an obscure, but intriguing example of intangible cultural heritage outside the realm of the Dutch West India Company.

The second example is about Asia. As already mentioned on Tuesday, during the nineteenth century, the Dutch government contracted over three thousand African men from the Gold Coast to serve as soldiers in the Dutch East Indies; the so-called *Belanda Hitam* or black Hollanders. This resulted in a process of creolization in Asia. Not the *tapoeyers* or Euro-Africans on the coast, but the Indo-Africans. Furthermore, the returning soldiers introduced the so-called Dutch wax print or *batik* in West Africa. Today, Vlisko from Helmond uses this Indonesian print technique for exporting coloured textiles to West Africa. And if you visit Ghana today, you can not miss this. So, this is an example of tangible cultural heritage connecting Java, Ghana and Holland.

This peculiar inter-cultural exchange in a 'Dutch' Atlantic context is commemorated in the Elmina-Java Museum in Elmina. By the way another Asian link in the so-called 'Dutch' Atlantic are the indentured labourers brought to Suriname. But that is another story.

Now I will turn to the topic of our sessions: Archives and Libraries.

One of the major conclusion of yesterdays sessions, especially the third and last one, was that the main denominator, despite all the huge differences between the participating countries, of the AWAD program were the archival sources, the written heritage. All participants during the final session agreed on this. So, that is rather clear. For Brazil, Ghana, the six Caribbean islands, Suriname, Guyana, North America and even the Netherlands that is the case. However, if you accept the idea of an Atlantic generating its own dynamics, beyond the rather arbitrary and limited 'Dutch' scope, than we have to take into account the written heritage relevant for the 'Dutch' Atlantic outside the present AWAD boundaries, too.

Specifically I am thinking of the National Archive in Kew, London. The Public Record Office holds three important archival series relevant for AWAD:

1. the archives of Berbice, Essequibo and Demerara handed over to London after the Paris Treaty of 1816. The papers from the Zeeland chamber.
2. the Dutch papers, documents and letters in the archives of the High Court of Admiralty, confiscated by English privateers during the many Anglo-Dutch wars. For all participants, maybe with the exception of Brazil, the so-called 'sailing letters' are very important to understand colonial societies, from many different angles.
3. During the Napoleonic wars, with the exception of the castle of Elmina, the Brits attacked and occupied all Dutch Atlantic possessions. Vast series of letters and reports, sent by British officials in these 'Dutch' possessions, are located in the War Office and the Colonial Office. They contain, for instance, detailed information on the population in these settlements, including the, for instance, death and birth rates of the slaves.

If I can make one recommendation, I would advise AWAD to invite the Public Records Office to the program, at least for the archival section.

Thank you.

