Conclusion

A Dutch Moment in Atlantic Historiography

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One of the foremost contributions of this collection is to bring together recent scholarship on the Dutch in the Atlantic world in an English-language volume for an international audience. The collection showcases varied approaches to the Dutch Atlantic. The essays investigate an impressive breadth of topics, with an emphasis on trade and commerce but also attentive to such themes as religious practices, domestic relations, slavery, circuits of knowledge, culture, and politics. The authors explore a wide range of connections, including transatlantic religious ties, migration, administrative appointments and patronage networks, commercial links of all sorts, and ties between Dutch settlements and other European colonies and ports. Some of those connections linked trading posts and colonies to the Netherlands, while others fostered ties within regions, to neighbors, or to important trading partners in more remote locales. These essays identify important similarities to other European outposts, as in the case of the free ports of Statia, St. Barthélemy, and St. Vincent, and also intriguing differences: there was, for example, a Dutch West India interest, as there was an English one, although the Dutch coalition looked different in ways that suited “the particularistic nature of the Dutch Republic.”¹

For those unable to read Dutch-language sources, this volume is a boon. It makes it possible for nonspecialists to deepen their understanding of different aspects of Atlantic history in general and the Dutch Atlantic in particular. Aside from assertions that the Dutch were important in the seventeenth century, many Atlantic historians really do not know with certainty how or why. Moreover, some of the assumptions historians have had about their role in sugar production or the slave trade, for example, turn out to be erroneous. Take the case of the Dutch role in the English sugar boom on Barbados. The old wisdom held that the Dutch instructed the English in sugar cultivation in Barbados and fostered its development with capital and slaves. The historian Russell R. Menard’s assiduous investigation into Barbados sources, however, has yielded no evidence that the Dutch provided instruction or significant capital for sugar production, although they do appear to have offered both a market for sugar in Amsterdam and vessels to carry the product. They may well have played some modest role in providing capital for the sugar boom. Menard suspects that the story of Dutch assistance was invented by English colonists

1 Han Jordaen and Victor Wilson, in this volume; Henk den Heijer, in this volume.

who were eager to protest the stringent Navigation Acts of 1660, which limited them to shipping goods on English ships, and they sought to justify their objections by pointing to the centrality of the Dutch to sugar production. English sugar planters blamed this law for their financial difficulties during a period of depression, and the “myth of the Dutch” was born.² This example points to the many potential myths that have evolved around the history of the Dutch Atlantic, and of the Dutch in the Atlantic, and which have endured thanks to linguistic impediments and source limitations. Thanks to this edited volume, nonspecialists will gain a deeper understanding of how the Dutch shaped the Atlantic world, how the Atlantic world shaped the Dutch, and what a Dutch Atlantic world looked like.

Several aspects of this volume echo the goals and accomplishments of *The British Atlantic World*, a major coedited work that contributed to the maturation of the field of Atlantic history at the time of its publication in 2002.³ At that stage in the development of the field, there was a lot of interest in looking at the imperial Atlantics, those European states that projected their power beyond Europe. This approach was fully displayed in a 1999 *Itinerario* forum, which contained essays on the Spanish, French, and British Atlantics, and an essay arguing that there was no Dutch Atlantic.⁴ This way of conceptualizing the Atlantic in national and imperial terms has had important staying power; two important edited volumes on Atlantic history published in 2008 and 2011 contained several essays taking this approach.⁵

When *The British Atlantic World* appeared, many historians imagined that volumes devoted to other national Atlantics might follow.⁶ Instead, in the years since that work’s publication, and with the development and maturation of the field of Atlantic history, two lines of criticism emerged that have pushed the field away from national approaches. One critique pertains to

2 Russell R. Menard, *Sweet Negotiations: Sugar, Slavery, and Plantation Agriculture in Early Barbados* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 51.

3 David Armitage and Michael Braddick, eds., *The British Atlantic World, 1500–1800* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

4 See the four essays published in *Itinerario* (32) in 1999: Carla Rahn Phillips wrote on the Spanish, Silvia Marzagalli on the French, Willem W. Klooster and Pieter C. Emmer on the Dutch, and David Hancock on the English.

5 Jack P. Greene and Philip D. Morgan, eds., *Atlantic History: A Critical Appraisal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), chapters 2–6; Nicholas Canny and Philip Morgan, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the Atlantic World c. 1450–c. 1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), chapters 11–14.

6 On this expectation, see “Are We All Global Historians Now? An Interview with David Armitage,” *Itinerario* 36, no. 2 (August 2012): 7–28, 14.

geography: what processes were unique to the Atlantic, as opposed to shared features of a period of global interaction and expansion.⁷ A second critique derives from concerns about examining a single ethnic or linguistic group in isolation. The most cogent critiques along these lines have called for an “entangled” history, one which scrutinizes interactions *across* imperial, national, linguistic, and ethnic lines.⁸ Although the *Dutch Atlantic Connections* volume appears at a historiographic moment when historians are, for the most part, shifting away from imperial Atlantics, the capacious intellectual perspective undergirding the book enables the collection to speak directly to current concerns among Atlantic historians. As these essays demonstrate, any study of the Dutch is one of entanglement.

The book’s focus on interactions and connections is a marked departure from earlier approaches to the Dutch Atlantic, including important ones by contributors to this volume who in the past evinced some skepticism about the existence of a Dutch Atlantic.⁹ As Oostindie and Roitman observe, previously the historiography of the Dutch in the Atlantic largely examined the Dutch in isolation.¹⁰ Such an approach is hardly true only of the Dutch, of course, and it is perhaps even more true of other imperial historiographies with more linguistically constrained historians. In response to this older historiographic practice, then, the ambition of the *Dutch Atlantic Connections* volume has been to pioneer an approach to the Dutch Atlantic that privileges connections, insisting that any study of a small place be conceptualized solely in terms of its linkages with other locales. This kind of transnational or entangled history is easily called for, but very hard to do. For all its challenges, however, it is vitally important to try to do this kind of research – transnational, multilingual, looking at the Atlantic in terms of intersections, entanglements, and interactions. The contents of this volume therefore start to model how a history organized around examining connections might work, and it is this aspect that produces the second important contribution of this book. 2014 is, historiographically speaking, a Dutch moment in Atlantic history.

7 “Forum: Beyond the Atlantic,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 63, no. 4 (October 2006): 675–742.

8 “AHR Forum: Entangled Empires of the Atlantic World,” *American Historical Review* 112, no. 3 (June 2007): 710–799.

9 For two skeptical views, see Pieter C. Emmer and Willem M. Klooster, “The Dutch Atlantic, 1600–1800: Expansion without Empire,” *Itinerario* 23, no. 2 (1999): 48–69; Benjamin Schmidt, “The Dutch Atlantic: From Provincialism to Globalism,” in *Atlantic History*, ed. Greene and Morgan, 163–190.

10 See Gert Oostindie and Jessica Vance Roitman, “Repositioning the Dutch in the Atlantic, 1680–1800,” *Itinerario* 36, no. 2 (August 2012): 129–160.

This close study of the Dutch Atlantic prods Atlantic historians to rethink some of the basic frameworks they have deployed in their approaches to Atlantic history. Because historians of the British and Iberian (mainly Spanish) worlds have been especially active in writing Atlantic history, and, indeed, played an important role as pioneers of the field, patterns for these European kingdoms as they projected themselves into the Atlantic have come to stand in for the Atlantic world as a whole. As a result, themes pertaining to territorial occupation and the growth of colonial societies have generated important typologies for the Atlantic writ large.¹¹

The first Europeans to secure permanent footholds in the Western Atlantic were the Spanish, and, drawing on models of occupation tested in the Iberian peninsula during the “Reconquest,” they established a style of colonization based on the exploitation and conversion of indigenous people, the resettlement of Spanish migrants, and the transfer of fundamental Iberian institutions to the Americas. Even though the Portuguese had already established important trading posts on the West and Central African Coasts, and with these commercial enterprises indicated the multifaceted endeavors Europeans pursued in the Atlantic, it was the Spanish model of American colonization that shaped historiographies, making this style of occupation and exchange appear to be a dominant European strategy in the Atlantic. The British likewise ended up displacing many indigenous people (through war and disease) from their home territories, and claimed this territory for themselves, echoing Spanish strategies in important and occasionally deliberate ways.

These are obviously gross caricatures of widely varied and complex processes, but the historiographic dominance of these patterns of territorial dominion and control over people has made major trading enterprises (in Canada, Brazil, and West and Central Africa) look too much like anomalies within the larger Atlantic, even though that list of regions alone might indicate that trade was a pervasive pattern, not to mention the economic value of the commodities (dye goods, pelts, gold, ivory, salt, textiles, and slaves, to name some of the key items), or of other extractive industries, including the lucrative fisheries. Putting the Dutch in the equation should continue to put pressure on the historiographic emphasis in Atlantic history on European control (or aspirations for control) of land and indigenous subjects, as these tended not to be

11 See, for example, the four-part periodization in *Oxford Handbook*, ed. Canny and Morgan, “Emergence,” “Consolidation,” “Integration,” and “Disintegration”; and the three-part typology in *Atlantic American societies: from Columbus through abolition, 1492–1888*, ed. Alan Karras and J.R. McNeill (London: Routledge, 1992): Implantations (1492–c. 1650), Maturity (c. 1650–1770), and Transitions (1770–1888).

major preoccupations of Dutch colonists, with some notable exceptions. These exceptions include the Dutch settlements on the so-called “Wild Coast” of South America (Suriname, Berbice, Demerara, Essequibo, and Guiana), which are included in this volume, and New Netherland and the colony at the Cape of Good Hope, which the editors decided to exclude.

Commonplace periodizations of the Atlantic also have a reduced salience when we look closely at the Dutch experience over the long eighteenth century. For the Atlantic as a whole, the eighteenth century was an era of tightening imperial ties, of the maturation of political, cultural, social, economic, and religious institutions. The late eighteenth century and early nineteenth centuries witnessed independence movements in mainland colonies, accompanied by loyalism for most island colonies. This characterization of the Atlantic in this era as in the midst of an Age of Revolution endures, a depiction that applies to most, but not all, places in the Western Atlantic, and which increases the omission of Africa from the larger field of Atlantic history. For the Dutch, this period was certainly one of warfare and disruption throughout the Atlantic. But this era was not a time of revolution or independence in the Western Dutch Atlantic, despite considerable political upheaval in the Republic in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Integrating the Dutch experience in the Atlantic challenges these generalizations, already problematic because of their limitation to the American mainland, and thus better suited to a history of the Americas than to a history of the Atlantic.¹² Finding new periodizations and typologies that encompass multiple historical actors and approaches, however, remains challenging. Jan de Vries proposes a four-part periodization for the Dutch Atlantic, but this interpretation derives from his study of the Dutch Atlantic economy and reflects the economic patterns of the Dutch Atlantic world.¹³ As Karel Davids’ essay reminds us, different subjects require their own periodizations. Even when the Dutch Atlantic waned in the eighteenth century, Davids argues, the intellectual engagement of Dutch scholars continued unabated.

Beyond important questions about typologies and periodizations, a focus on Dutch Atlantic connections brings important issues to the fore and helps us

12 A history of the Americas has its own value, but it should not be confused with a history of the Atlantic world. On such a history, see for example, Herbert Bolton, “The Epic of Greater America,” *AHR* 38 (1933): 448–474. See also Silvio Zavala, “A General View of the Colonial History of the New World,” *AHR* 66 (1961): 913–929; Jack P. Greene, “Hemispheric History and Atlantic History,” in *Atlantic History*, ed. Greene and Morgan, chapter 11.

13 Jan de Vries, “The Dutch Atlantic Economies,” in *The Atlantic Economy during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries: Organization, Operation, Practice, and Personnel*, ed. Peter A. Coclanis (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2005), 1–29.

envision what Atlantic history might look like if historians take connections more seriously. First, a Dutch-informed Atlantic history privileges an international orientation. This perspective emerges in many different ways in these essays, starting with the composition of the population in Dutch-claimed territory. A highly diverse European population inhabited WIC settlements, which might be a distinctive characteristic of the Dutch Atlantic.¹⁴ While many other colonial regions contained diverse European inhabitants, the territories under the Dutch West India Company (WIC) seem unique in the *percentage* of the European population that was not Dutch. (African-born and African-descended populations often outnumbered European populations in the Atlantic world.) In Demerara, for example, the white population was two-thirds British in 1800.¹⁵ Many of these non-Dutch Europeans acquired considerable political and economic power, such as the Bermudian Richard Downing Jennings who lived on Statia. These essays demonstrate the ability, willingness, and, often, eagerness of the Dutch to assimilate other people, not necessarily into a single Dutch culture, whatever that might be, but into a Dutch political dominion and commercial operation.

As Jennings' Bermuda background intimates, this diverse population in Dutch colonies enhanced regional ties between Dutch settlements and other locales, within the Caribbean, on adjacent islands, or on the mainland, whether as close as Venezuela or as far as Boston. This heterogeneity turns out, we learn from Victor Wilson and Han Jordaan's essay, also to have been characteristic of the Danish and Swedish islands, which contained English, Dutch, Spanish, Italian, and French inhabitants, not to mention Danes and Swedes. Many of these colonists had immigrated from within the region, so this heterogeneity suggests both a European cosmopolitanism and a thickening regional network. Gert Oostindie's examination of Berbice, Demerara, and Essequibo indicates that these three colonies were precociously British, before any official takeover, because of the deliberate recruitment of British colonists from the West Indies to settle there. Thus when we focus on European populations, we can discern how connections enhanced *regional* ties, not necessarily *transatlantic* connections. It would be interesting to compare these patterns of regional and oceanic connectedness with those of African and African-descended populations in the Dutch Atlantic world.

Looking at the "Dutch" Atlantic world, then, has the intriguing benefit of bringing into focus a wide range of minority populations – some of whom,

14 On this heterogeneity, see especially Oostindie and Roitman, "Repositioning the Dutch," 139–142, and their introduction to this book.

15 Oostindie essay, in this volume.

as was true for the British in Demerara, were in fact the majority. Religious minorities – most notably Jews – were also important in the Dutch Atlantic, as Roitman and Ben-Ur demonstrate in their contribution, and in the case of Suriname, they comprised a significant portion of the free population. Even the Dutch inhabitants of Dutch colonies did not necessarily feel bound to the Netherlands or to the interests of the WIC. Oostindie shows these conflicted loyalties in the case of the Dutch planters in Demerara, Essequibo, and Berbice, who seemed ready to accept British takeover if it liberated them from their debt obligations.

Another indicator of the international nature of Dutch Atlantic societies was language. The Dutch proved poor exporters of many elements of Dutch culture. Language provides the foremost example. Dutch seems to have rarely become the lingua franca of Dutch settlements. In Suriname and Curaçao, creole languages became the lingua franca – Sranan Tongo (an English-based Creole) in Suriname and Papiamentu (a Portuguese-based Creole) in Curaçao. These languages originated in enslaved populations. As Roitman and Ben-Ur demonstrate, however, Papiamentu was adopted by Jews and other people of European and mixed descent in Curaçao. Their analysis lets us see how language, as they put it, “had begun to cross socio-economic, racial, religious, and ethnic lines.” This linguistic heterogeneity was true of free ports and other islands as well: in St. Croix, inhabitants spoke English, while on St. Thomas and St. John, they spoke Dutch.

Language patterns had many implications in the Dutch Atlantic world, as Davids demonstrates. They shaped academic training in Europe and both circumscribed and expanded circuits of knowledge. The Dutch, for example, were connected to the English intellectual world because so many English-speaking students from England and Scotland studied in Leiden between 1680 and 1730. At the same time, more Dutch scholars were fluent in French than in English, thus opening another important intellectual sphere. The French, however, were unlikely to know Dutch and thus unlikely to enroll at Dutch universities. These linguistic patterns and the educational ambitions they fostered undergirded the circulation of knowledge in the Dutch Atlantic in the eighteenth century, shaping not only what information came to Dutch scholars and intellectuals but also what Dutch knowledge crossed linguistic lines. Davids’ essay points to an important difference between the Eastern and Western Dutch Atlantics, because inhabitants of different backgrounds in various West Indian locales may have found it *easier* to converse with each other than some of these scholars in Europe, where institutional traditions occasionally turned out to be impediments to crossing linguistic (and educational) barriers.

If the “Dutch” inhabitants of WIC colonies turn out not to have spoken the language of the WIC Directors in the United Provinces, cultural artifacts once regarded as important representations of Dutch culture overseas turn out to have an equally complex history, one that makes it difficult to discern when the Dutch themselves were expressing or conveying national or patriotic sentiments. Benjamin Schmidt’s analysis in this volume of paintings by Frans Post and their market makes this point effectively, illustrating as it does the diverse, non-Dutch market – and in the case of the Brazil paintings, the Catholic, Portuguese subjects they depicted. Schmidt challenges previous interpretations that regarded these works as expressions of a Dutch patriotic sentiment. Instead, he suggests that Post painted for a diverse and dispersed European market, one more interested in exoticism in general than in Dutch Brazil in particular.¹⁶

The Dutch Atlantic world was an international one – but so, too, were the territories claimed by the French, Portuguese, Spanish, and British, and inhabited by Europeans, Amerindians, and Africans, even if some of those cosmopolitan elements have been obscured by the ability of European rulers to impose more robust institutional and cultural structures on their subjects. Perhaps it would be a salutary exercise for historians to approach all the populations they study in the Atlantic as if they were “Dutch”: outward-oriented, connected to an assortment of national, religious, and ethnic actors in a variety of polities and locales, and quite probably not “Dutch” at all.

A second characteristic of the Dutch Atlantic is the important economic ties the Dutch forged (as middlemen, as traders, as brokers, as inhabitants of trade entrepôts) with other polities and people. The historical emphasis on the Dutch as traders, with a commensurate focus on connections, puts networks at the center of the Dutch Atlantic. The Dutch were entangled in multiple states and empires. One consequence of the economic ties Dutch people forged was new lines of political, cultural, and commercial exchange that linked Dutch settlements with non-Dutch locales. Karwan Fatah-Black shows us an important gap between the policy of the Suriname Company, which sought to sever local ties in favor of transatlantic ties, and the preferences of the colonists, whose commercial networks reached across imperial borders and embedded Suriname in the region. He argues forcefully that these connections were not incidental to the colony’s formation, but rather “*constitutive*” of the colony and of Dutch efforts in the region. He traces these linkages in a variety of ways – looking, for example, at efforts to recruit colonists from within the region, at the networks Jews established, and at the importance of Barbados to the

¹⁶ See Schmidt’s essay in this volume.

colony.¹⁷ Kenneth Morgan likewise shows that in 1720, most of the mill horses, fish, and other stores in Suriname came from New England.¹⁸

Other essays point to the importance of Dutch traders outside areas of Dutch control. Silvia Marzagalli argues that the French colonial system relied on non-French actors, and Ana Crespo Solano demonstrates the significance of Dutch and other foreign merchants in Spain's American trade. Morgan makes a similar point, observing that the British system's flexibility was essential in permitting English and Dutch commercial relations to thrive.¹⁹ The Dutch could only be successful middlemen in economic systems that provided them with breathing space, as the French, Spanish, and British did, to the benefit, it seems, of all parties. Dutch-descended traders outside the WIC-controlled Dutch Atlantic were also important, as Morgan shows for North American trade, with the continued significance of Dutch merchants in New York until the era of the American Revolution.

Linkages were not limited to trade, although trade routes often circumscribed the flows of ideas or people. Wim Klooster sketches the many ways in which Curaçao was tied to different places in the Atlantic.²⁰ Runaway slaves provide an important and unusual vantage point on these connections. Klooster draws on their experiences to demonstrate how the colony's varied connections and networks shaped the patterns of runaway slaves, especially on the main route to freedom which took runaways to Venezuela. Klooster's inclusion of free blacks and slaves shows the tenacity of connections in the Dutch Atlantic that we might not otherwise have appreciated, and casts Curaçao in a new light, as a place shaped by multiple, parallel, intersecting connections. Klooster's essay is also a salutary reminder of the importance of further study into the experiences of slaves and free people of color in the Dutch Atlantic world.

The terminology of "connections" might suggest a benign interaction that was far from the case. There was, of course, profound asymmetry in many of these relationships. The flight of slaves from Curaçao brings this asymmetry into bold relief. Jews emerge as sinews of the Atlantic, forging connections both across the Atlantic and from one entrepôt to another and playing key

17 See Fatah-Black's essay in this volume.

18 See Morgan's essay in this volume.

19 See their essays in this volume. For another study of foreign merchants in Spain, see Heather Dalton, "Negotiating Fortune: English Merchants in Early Sixteenth-Century Seville," in *Bridging the Early Modern Atlantic World: People, Products, and Practices on the Move*, ed. Caroline A. Williams (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), chapter 2.

20 See also Linda M. Rupert, *Creolization and Contraband: Curaçao in the Early Modern Atlantic World* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2012).

roles in commercial exchange. But Jews did so in conditions of legal vulnerability, in which they were forced to assert their rights against those who denied them in order to secure their property. Jessica Roitman's study of Jews in the Dutch and British Atlantic world reveals gaps in legal regimes and political sentiment between centers and peripheries, where metropolitan courts upheld Jewish rights while colonists often tried to undermine them.²¹

A third feature of the Dutch Atlantic world was its decentralization. Ostensibly under Company control, with a clear administrative structure based in the Netherlands, the territories of the Dutch Atlantic also had important local power structures. This gap between preferences expressed by European investors and rulers and what inhabitants of settlements thousands of miles away actually elected to do was hardly unique to the Dutch, of course, nor atypical for the thwarted projection of centralized power in this era. In J.R. McNeill's memorable articulation of this gap between aspiration and reality, "imperial history is the product of metropolitan logic and decisions imperfectly inflicted on people and places poorly understood by the metropolitans."²² In this volume, for example, Gert Oostindie's work on the Dutch on the "Wild Coast" illustrates that individual officers were able to exert a lot of power. Distance and decentralization and patterns of territorial acquisition likewise contributed to state weakness. In Suriname, Dutch takeover of the English colony in 1667 did not sever the colony's connections to British trading partners, as Karwan Fatah-Black demonstrates. The States of Zeeland, which controlled the colony in those early years, simply did not have the capacity to sever these officially unsanctioned ties in the face of colonists' objections and needs.

For all the Dutch Atlantic's decentralization, of course, states and polities continued to be important in shaping sinews of commerce, international alliances and rivalries, and a range of local attributes. The major states of Western Europe emerge as important to the Dutch Atlantic in different ways and at different times. Consider the simultaneous promulgation of protectionist policies by the French and the English in the middle of the seventeenth century. Both sought to create and enforce monopolies for their own ships, with the result that the Dutch advantage as the main carrier in the Atlantic began to erode. Morgan shows how important state protection was to the development of the British Atlantic economy, and also highlights important intersections with the frequency of warfare. Elsewhere, Roitman has suggested that it

21 See Jessica Vance Roitman, "Creating Confusion in the Colonies: Jews, Citizenship, and the Dutch and British Atlantics," *Itinerario* 36, no. 2 (August 2012): 55–90.

22 J.R. McNeill, *Atlantic Empires of France and Spain: Louisbourg and Havana, 1700–1763* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), xvi.

mattered whether Jews lived under English or Dutch rule, and whether the state acted to protect their rights. She also focuses our attention on citizenship and the many different forms citizenship could take.²³ The example of the Jews points to the legal and administrative structures that circumscribed people's lives in the Western Atlantic. Roitman and Ben-Ur's study of adultery within the Jewish communities in Suriname, Curaçao, and Amsterdam reveals three legal systems at work: colonial, metropolitan, and that of the Jewish community itself.²⁴

Fourth, thinking about the Atlantic world through the prism of the Dutch experience offers a variety of new geographical perspectives. In the seventeenth century, the Dutch were a real Atlantic power: they had trading posts and settlements and diplomatic ties and whaling enterprises and territory in all four quadrants of the Atlantic. In the depth and breadth of their activity, the Dutch were unlike any other European state. The Portuguese came closest, with their exploitation of the fisheries giving them a claim to a similarly pan-Atlantic empire. Moreover, when we consider the Dutch and the Portuguese and their experiences in the Atlantic, Africa comes to the fore. Indeed, it is the starting point for thinking about Portuguese activity in the Atlantic, and for the Dutch, the trading posts of the gold coast were also valuable. Might an Atlantic history with themes drawn from Dutch and Portuguese experiences give us a way to rethink what the Atlantic world looks like with Africa fully incorporated?

A second geographic dimension that the Dutch bring to a reconceptualized Atlantic history is the relationship between Atlantic and global history. As global and transnational approaches have become increasingly popular among historians, it has become challenging for historians to distinguish the regional from the global and to set the regional in global context. At the same time, transnational approaches offer an exciting intellectual opportunity to revisit important events and processes in global contexts.²⁵ The problematic category of the "Atlantic" is nicely showcased in Schmidt's essay. Schmidt argues that for the Dutch we might be better served in thinking of the world beyond Europe, not specifically the Atlantic, since the Dutch seem to have been particularly active in creating an exotic world for Europeans to purchase – selling, as Post

23 Roitman, "Creating Confusion in the Colonies."

24 See their essay in this volume.

25 For an example of global approaches to formerly national or regional stories, see David Armitage, *The Declaration of Independence: A Global History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007); and David Armitage and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, eds., *The Age of Revolutions in Global Context, c. 1760–1840* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

did, an exotische. Some notable recent works focused on the Atlantic world have included chapters on global history, as did the second edition of the *British Atlantic World* in 2009.²⁶ Here the Dutch may offer a salutary example.

Transnational themes have special salience for the Dutch, with their global enterprises in this era, and in light of their greater financial success in the East Indies. There are some interesting points of contrast and connection to the world of the Dutch East Indies. Dutch men did not, it seems, take indigenous women as wives and sexual partners in the West Indies to the extent they did in the East Indies.²⁷ Roitman and Ben-Ur, however, point to the importance of mixed race people in Curaçao and Suriname, and to the existence of Creole populations who resembled the population of places such as Batavia. Their essay suggests that closer examination of sexual and domestic relations in the Dutch Atlantic might offer new points for comparison.

One final geographic question remains: *Where* is the Dutch Atlantic? The editors limited the Dutch Atlantic to places controlled by the WIC. The editors make a case for what is excluded in this volume, both in terms of chronology (for the most part, the era before 1680) and geography (the Cape, North America, the fisheries). The Dutch Atlantic that emerges in this volume contains places that were Dutch-controlled ports with tiny Dutch populations who spoke other European languages or creoles as important sites in the Dutch Atlantic. At the same time, however, the editors excluded places with vastly larger Dutch and Dutch-descended populations, such as New York (North America contained some 100,000 people of Dutch descent by 1789) or the Cape Colony. These essays leave us with the challenge of trying to think about aspects of Dutch culture in the Atlantic without examining those parts of the Atlantic where Dutch family migration might have permitted more components of Dutch culture to survive. Considering places where people *did* speak Dutch, for example, might help shed light on the cultural patterns and power dynamics at work in those many locales in the Dutch Atlantic world where

26 For some recent approaches to this issue, see “WMQ Forum: Beyond the Atlantic”; Nicholas Canny, “Atlantic History and Global History,” in *Atlantic History*, ed. Greene and Morgan, chapter 12; Peter Coclanis, “Beyond Atlantic History,” in *Atlantic History*, ed. Greene and Morgan, chapter 13; Emma Rothschild, “Late Atlantic History,” in *Oxford Handbook*, ed. Canny and Morgan, chapter 37; Lauren Benton, “The Atlantic in Global Perspective,” in *The British Atlantic World, 1500–1800*, ed. Armitage and Braddick, 2nd ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 271–299.

27 Two good starting points for the mestizo world of the Dutch East Indies are Leonard Blussé, *Bitter Bonds: A Colonial Divorce Drama of the Seventeenth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener, 2002); and Jean Gelman Taylor, *The Social World of Batavia: Europeans and Eurasians in Colonial Indonesia* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984).

inhabitants spoke other languages. Dutch whaling and fishing activities, moreover, might offer more good opportunities to consider intercultural interactions, since the North Atlantic fisheries were often multinational places.

The Dutch were also essential to the workings of other empires and their own Atlantic circuits. Marzagalli's essay raises the tantalizing question of whether it might be beneficial to think of Bordeaux as a Dutch nodal point. If the Dutch were important to foreign ports and places, so, too, were non-Dutch places essential to the development of the Dutch Atlantic. Numerous contributions in this volume, for example, suggest that Barbados played an important role in the development of Dutch settlements, as did the North American mainland. Dutch settlements such as Suriname might likewise be considered as extensions of the English Atlantic, at least in terms of the dependence of Suriname on North American shipping.

To be sure, this volume is not exhaustive, nor indeed was it intended to be. The work has a specific geography, chronology, goal, and focus. In these respects, a variety of topics are not included here which one imagines are also important to the history of the Dutch Atlantic. The themes of the volume ended up privileging Europeans and European activity in the Atlantic world, and thus slaves and slavery and indigenous people do not receive as much attention as one might have anticipated. The chronology of the project, emphasizing the period after 1680, means that we hear less about the Dutch Atlantic at war than we might have if the period of the three Anglo-Dutch wars had been included more fully.²⁸ These wars were essential in recalibrating the balance between the English and the Dutch, and in reallocating territory – in creating, in short, the geographic terrain of the Dutch Atlantic as it existed in 1680. The seventeenth century was also important in shaping how the Dutch became participants in the Atlantic. Christian Koot argues that the Dutch sought to benefit from English knowledge and expertise, permitting English soldiers to leave their positions with Dutch forces in order to serve as Virginia governors, on the expectation that they would profit from this arrangement. This seventeenth-century history is more than a backdrop; it was formative to the characteristics of the Dutch Atlantic as they had matured by 1680.

Another important subject that receives short shrift in this volume is religion. The absence is conspicuous largely because it is so difficult to imagine studying some of the other imperial Atlantics without looking at the importance of European religions in their development and in their self-images – the French, the Spanish, the British, the Portuguese – both as something shared by Europeans and European Creoles and something that was part of

28 See Christian Koot's essay in this volume.

how some Europeans interacted with non-European people. Evangelical missions yoked to commercial enterprises, conquests, and occupations gave different expanding kingdoms distinctive modes of cultural interaction through religious languages, symbols, and beliefs.²⁹ Religious affiliation came for some to be markers of identity. For the British, for example, Protestantism became an important expression of ethnic, national, and ultimately imperial identity, even if there were English Catholics throughout the Atlantic.³⁰ Confessional identities also served Protestants and Catholics as a language of difference and a justification for aggression, seen most vividly in the emergence of the “Black Legend” during the Dutch revolt, and in the importance of Northern European Protestant claims to liberate Amerindians from conversion to Catholicism.³¹ The Puritan-dominated Massachusetts Bay Company took this message to heart, placing an Indian at the center of their company seal, with the words “Come over and help us” contained in the cartouche around his head.³²

The absence of attention to religion in the Dutch world in these essays, with the notable exception of Ben-Ur and Roitman’s contribution, is striking, in light of the attention paid by scholars to religion, and especially toleration, in the Dutch Republic. Intimations of religious cultures, of the important way religious beliefs and institutions tightened sinews linking far-flung places in the Atlantic, and of how people drew on religious beliefs and communities to devise new cultural forms and practices around the Atlantic appear in these essays. But overall, the relative paucity of attention to religion in this volume points to one important area for historians to explore.³³

29 For a comparison of some of these evangelical projects, see James Axtell, *The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Early North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

30 On the importance of Protestantism to the British Atlantic world, see Carla Gardina Pestana, *Protestant Empire: Religion and the Making of the British Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); on the presence and significance of English Catholics, see Shona Helen Johnston, *Papists in a Protestant World: The Catholic Anglo-Atlantic in the Seventeenth Century* (unpublished PhD diss., Georgetown University, 2011).

31 On the connection between the Dutch revolt and the Black Legend, see Benjamin Schmidt, *Innocence Abroad: The Dutch Imagination and the New World, 1570–1670* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), chapter 2.

32 On the seal, see Kristina Bross, “‘Come Over and Help Us’: Reading Mission Literature,” *Early American Literature* 38, no. 3 (2003): 395–400.

33 See Danny Noorlander, “Serving God and Mammon: The Reformed Church and the Dutch West India Company in the Atlantic World, 1621–1674” (unpublished PhD diss., Georgetown University, 2011).

A final subject of considerable importance for the history of the Dutch Republic but barely visible in the history of the Dutch Atlantic is environmental history. In contrast, important interpretations of Netherlands society, culture, and politics place environmental history, specifically the cooperation essential to water management, at the heart of a particular kind of egalitarian and cooperative society.³⁴ Economic and social structures and racial hierarchies in Dutch colonies, settlements, and port towns in the western Atlantic point to dramatically different patterns than those that prevailed in the Netherlands. How, if at all, did environmental features affect these patterns?

The subject of environmental history is relatively new for Atlantic history, but the Dutch Atlantic seems to be a promising subject for historians to investigate.³⁵ Experts at modifying their environment, turning sea into dry land, marsh into arable field, and flood-prone regions into safe havens through aggressive engineering, the Dutch were the consummate innovators and engineers. An emphasis on their commercial acumen and their important role in the carrying trades of the Atlantic has shifted attention away from settlement and agricultural activity, but there are indications that the Dutch in the Atlantic deployed the same strategies of draining land to create polders and irrigating to improve cultivation which they had developed at home. When the Dutch seized Suriname from the English in 1667, for example, the geographic center of habitation and cultivation shifted. The English had lived up the region's four main rivers. The more fertile land downstream was too wet for the English to farm. The Dutch, however, brought their expertise to bear on this predicament. They used systems of dikes and canals to put swampy coastal lands into cultivation, creating polders after 1700 and ultimately shifting all plantation activity to the coastal areas after 1740.³⁶ Dutch occupation changed settlement patterns and agricultural activity in the colony, altering the region's environment.

The potential Suriname's history offers for innovative environmental interpretations is also suggested in a 1995 essay by Gert Oostindie and Alex van Stipriaan on slavery in "hydraulic" societies, by which they mean societies defined by the ubiquity of water, both that redirected for plantation use and

34 See most recently Maarten Prak and Jan Luiten van Zanden, *Nederland en het poldermodel: Sociaal-economische geschiedenis van Nederland, 1000–2000* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Bert Bakker, 2013).

35 See J.R. McNeill, "The Ecological Atlantic," in *Oxford Handbook*, ed. Canny and Morgan, chapter 17.

36 Peter Boomgaard, "The Tropical Rain Forests of Suriname: Exploitation and Management 1600–1975," *New West Indian Guide* 66, nos. 3–4 (1992): 211–212; Radjinarain Mohanpersad Nannan Panday, *Agriculture in Surinam 1650–1950: An Inquiry into the Causes of its Decline* (Amsterdam: H.J. Paris, 1959), 15–17.

free-flowing water itself. They argue that hydraulic aspects should be considered when understanding the demography of a given slave population. Moreover, they depict numerous ways in which living in a water-dominated environment affected cultural features including language, religion, and music.³⁷ These glimpses at Suriname's environmental history suggest that there might well be an environmental history of the Dutch Atlantic waiting to be written: one that encompasses agricultural, commercial, and maritime activities and that builds on and extends the important history of people and the environment in the Netherlands.

Many features of the Dutch Atlantic world as depicted in this volume coincide neatly with current interests in "entangled" Atlantics – looking at interactions across borders, engaging in multilingual research. Such an approach renders the Atlantic by necessity more polyglot and, sometimes, more heterogeneous; it brings into focus boundary crossers and middlemen, statuses long believed to be Dutch specializations. But there is a risk in emphasizing these qualities too much. Historians of colonial British North America might recognize a pattern from their own field, once dominated by the study of the puritans of New England; when interests shifted to the planters, servants, and slaves of the tobacco Chesapeake (in the 1970s) and then to the polyglot, religiously diverse, mixed European inhabitants of the so-called "Middle Colonies" of New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware in the 1980s, historians argued in turn for the importance of the regions they studied by boasting that region was the source of important attributes (liberalism, racism, tolerance, pluralism, democracy, take your pick) of modern American society, or that one particular region was "normative" in terms of American development.³⁸ Each region, its proponents argued at different times, spoke to a larger American experience, and historians projected onto U.S. history as a whole the qualities of their own region of interest. But interests change; ideas about what the attributes of U.S. history were and are continue to be as hotly debated as ever. So, too, perhaps, with the Atlantic world. Right now, transnational history and entanglement are the rage, putting cross-cultural interactions at the center of historical analysis, and making Atlantic history look very "Dutch," but these trends are not likely to endure forever.

37 Gert Oostindie and Alex van Stipriaan, "Slavery and Slave Cultures in a Hydraulic Society: Suriname," in *Slave Cultures and the Cultures of Slavery*, ed. Stephen Palmié (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995), chapter 7.

38 On this question of which region was "normative" see Jack P. Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Social Development of Early Modern British Colonies and the Formation of American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

This thought-provoking volume on the Dutch Atlantic invites us to think more deeply about the varied nature of the Atlantic, its many different cultures, populations, economies, labor regimes, domestic arrangements, and any number of other features. Roitman and Oostindie hoped as part of their investigation to demonstrate the significance of the Dutch Atlantic for the Netherlands, and many of these essays suggest important repercussions. Yet in terms of setting and occasionally modeling future research agendas, the Dutch Atlantic might be even more important to Atlantic history than it is to the history of the Netherlands. A study of the Dutch in the Atlantic world reveals just the kind of Atlantic history that people have been calling for – entangled, international, multilingual, networked, connected. If on the one hand we might have envisioned a book on the Dutch Atlantic in 2002, when the *British Atlantic* volume appeared, on the other hand what we will end up with is a series of books on the Dutch Atlantic in 2014 and beyond which will sketch what the future of Atlantic history can be. And that future, it turns out, looks Dutch.