Hans Ramsoedh, *Surinaams onbehagen: Een sociale en politieke geschiedenis van Suriname, 1865–2015*. Hilversum, the Netherlands: Verloren, 2018. 365 pp. (Paper €29.00)

In this captivating volume, Hans Ramsoedh offers a comprehensive and detailed historical analysis of social and political developments in Suriname over the past one and a half centuries. Employing the concept of “discontent” (Dutch: *onbehagen*) as a thread that runs through the book, he discusses and analyzes three periods of Surinamese history: the colonial period (1865–1945), the postcolonial period (1945–75), and the postindependence period (1975–2015). He offers an exciting, well-written narrative of political developments in each of these stages, discussing them against the backdrop of broader cultural, economic, and social trends. The volume is sprinkled with fascinating details of key episodes in the political history of Suriname, making it an indispensable read for anyone interested in the country’s unique historical and political trajectory.

Surinaams onbehagen is particularly well embedded within existing historical and political studies of the country, discussing a great number of earlier publications on Suriname and productively building on their findings. Thus, in addition to offering a solid historical analysis of the country, it provides a welcome overview of contemporary scholarship on Suriname’s political history. In an intriguing final section on historiography, Ramsoedh pays attention to contrasting scholarly perspectives on Suriname, and discusses recent calls to “decolonize” Surinamese historiography by employing an explicitly Surinamese perspective on the country’s history. The section concludes with an unambiguous and convincing denunciation of ideologically inspired scholarship (or, as the author calls it, “inquisition history” [p. 283]), and a plea for inclusive historiography that allows room for diverse academic perspectives.

Another particularly strong section is Ramsoedh’s analysis of Suriname’s “drama democracy” (pp. 224–38). Here, he connects political features from patronage and ethnic mobilization to the absence of ideology and populism into a compelling analysis of Surinamese political culture, on the basis of which he explains the persistence of political discontent in the postindependence period. This discussion can clearly be extended to other multiethnic Caribbean societies such as Guyana and Trinidad, and throughout the book Ramsoedh makes thought-provoking comparisons with these similar, yet also different, cases. While arguing that Dési Bouterse’s presidency can be regarded as the apex of populism and drama democracy, he also demonstrates that clientelism, corruption, and top-down politics have always been integral features of Surinamese politics. In this sense, the fixation of Dutch politicians and journalists

on Bouterse as a “national trauma” (p. 251) and the root of all evil in Suriname indeed appears to be disproportionate. Nevertheless, as Ramssoedh makes clear, the continuation of the December murders trial—which included an investigation into Bouterse’s involvement in the killing of fifteen prominent opponents of the former military regime in 1982—represents a profound threat to the former dictator’s presidency, and the question of whether Bouterse will eventually be convicted is arguably the single most imperative issue in contemporary Surinamese politics.

While feelings of discontent and frustration have unquestionably been widespread throughout the different stages of Suriname’s history, *Surinaams onbehegen* mostly focuses on political developments at the elite level, devoting less space to the perspectives of ordinary Surinamese citizens. The five indicators of discomfort mentioned in the beginning of the volume (p. 10) clearly refer to the attitudes and experiences of citizens, but their perspectives remain somewhat underexposed in the remainder of the analysis. This is perhaps a reflection of the pervasiveness of patron-client linkages in Suriname which, as Ramssoedh indicates, tend to translate into a lack of intraparty democracy and an “absolute loyalty to political leaders” (p. 231), presumably undermining citizens’ opportunities to openly voice criticism or opposition to the ruling elite. The scarcity of opinion surveys among Surinamese citizens also obstructs a more fine-grained analysis of political attitudes, making it unclear to what extent the feelings of “discomfort” that Ramssoedh highlights actually prevail within the Surinamese population.

Aside from this minor point, I am convinced that the book will serve as a very useful reference for anyone interested in Surinamese history, and it surely lays important groundwork for future studies. Indeed, its findings will not only appeal to scholars of Suriname, but also to academics focusing on other Caribbean states, or small, postcolonial, and multiethnic societies in other parts of the world. Because Caribbean scholarship unfortunately continues to be highly compartmentalized along colonially determined and linguistic boundaries, it would be worthwhile to consider publishing an English translation of the book in order to make its findings accessible to a non-Dutch speaking public.

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