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One of the consequences of decolonization upon the bibliography of Caribbean Studies was a notable decline in the attention given by Caribbean authors to the subject of colonialism. As new countries were created in this region from the ruins of colonialism the research concerns in the social sciences gradually but steadily turned towards “nation-building” and the host of problems the new nations faced during the beginning years of the second postwar of the twentieth century. This is particularly true in the case of Suriname. While there is a fairly large body of literature written by Dutch and other historians about the long period that extends from the initial years of Dutch colonization in the seventeenth century to the postcolonial period in Suriname’s history, it has taken many years for its own intellectuals to form a historiographical body of their own. That is why Marten Schalkwijk’s book, *The Colonial State in the Caribbean: Structural Analysis and Changing Elite Networks in Suriname, 1650-1920*, is a welcome addition to the bibliography on historical colonialism in the Caribbean in general, and to Suriname’s in particular.

The book is the end result of the research made by Marten Schalkwijk for his doctoral dissertation, which now sees the light in this edition from the Dutch publishing house Amrit/Ninsee, based on The Hague, Netherlands. Schalkwijk who is Professor of Social Sciences at the *Anton de Kom Universiteit van Suriname* in Paramaribo, is a leading historian of Suriname who is actively working with students at his institution to revisit many chapters of the history of Suriname.

The book takes the reader from the beginning of Dutch colonization during the mid-seventeenth century to the critical years of the 1920s. That decade culminated a period of crisis that had begun during the early years of twentieth century, which triggered changes in the Colonial state structure of the Dutch Guiana, particularly in its coercive component. The author is principally concerned with two research areas. One is related the development of a theoretical framework for understanding the colonial State in Caribbean history, particularly its
Surinamese chapter. This task leads the author into a critical incursion of the literature in the social sciences dealing with the different types of colonial enterprises in this region. The other is bringing to light the particularities of Suriname as a distinctive case study of colonialism in the Caribbean. The book has ten chapters where the author compares and contrasts colonial State formations, particularly the British and the French, and explores the evolution of the economy and society in Suriname, its particular ethnic configuration, the religious ingredient in the colonial society, and the networks formed by elites in Suriname during the period of scrutiny.

From the beginning, the author makes clear his intent of providing new insights about the colonial history of Suriname, discussing the theoretical and historiographical contribution made by others, but providing his own vision of historical events as a native intellectual that has lived the transition from Dutch colonial rule to the establishment of an independent State in 1975. Thus, beyond the careful historical research and sociological analysis that is a mark of the book, there is also a continuous reflection by the author of the impact of Dutch colonial rule upon State formation in post-colonial Suriname that is at times explicit and sometimes embedded in the narrative itself.

The author attempts a comparative historical analysis of the different manifestations of colonial rule in the Caribbean in order understand colonialism beyond a single case study. He therefore draws from the British experience with Crown Colony government and the centralized policies of French colonial rule in the Caribbean. However, his central attention is placed in the Dutch Guiana itself, where the relationship between the State, the economy and the society took an exceptionally particular form. The Dutch, he argues, was not an archetypical empire. Contrary to French colonial pattern, where complete control of the economy and society by the State was a central objective, the plantation colony in the Dutch Guiana was never fully under the grip of the Dutch state. Although the early stages of colonization in the Caribbean was done primarily by private companies, rather than through state initiative, this process was exacerbated in the case of Suriname, where local actors had a comparatively enlarged role.

Nor was Suriname the typical colony, since such a pattern led to the formation of a Colonial State where “the local colonists, rather than imperial agents, were able to dominate the colonial government. Self-government was rule rather than exception” (p. 85). This led to a long lasting conflict between the State bureaucracy, representing the Empire, and the powerful local agents involved in different aspects of the internal operation of the colony. Moreover, although the establishment of Crown Colony government by the British during their second occupation of the
territory between the 18th and 19th century gave strength to imperial agents, “it took the Dutch state about two centuries to wrest control over the colonial state apparatus from the local elites (p. 300). Therefore, his analysis of the configuration of a local grid of economic, political and social relations, built by those at the top echelons of colonial society, has particular importance for understanding state formation in the historical Dutch Guiana and as well as in contemporary Suriname.

He analyzes the network and its linkages through a detailed description of the colonial agents, the profile of the political elite, and their location in economy and society. This is intended as a way to uncover the intersection of sectors and actors in order to understand the specific nature of the relationship between the State and the society, during the period of colonial slavery, as well as during the post-emancipation period. Schalkwijk examines the changing elite structure in Suriname through mathematical models that consider the connections between social and economic agents and the state, the patterns of conflict between competing elites, and the demise and rise of a variety of social classes and sectors over time. The book also has very valuable tables and figures on such aspects as ownership in the plantation, the planter and political elites, the economic relations within the plantation system, the political and bureaucratic structure at various historical moments, the social and religious structures, and the judicial and coercive element of the colonial order, that both the specialist as the student of colonial history will appreciate. There are other areas that will be of interest for both academicians and students concerned with the Dutch colonial experience in the Guianas. For example, Schalkwijk considers the formation of ethnically diverse echelons at the top and at the bottom of the society, and the religious factor in the formation of networks, all that providing a vivid view of what life in the colony would look like in those days. In this regard, the author gives a close look at the role of Jews, admitted as colonists in large numbers, whose commercial power and religious separateness prompted what the author considers a “pseudo State” within the colonial State (pp. 107-115).

I find Marten Schalkwijk’s book, *The Colonial State in the Caribbean: Structural Analysis and Changing Elite Networks in Suriname, 1650-1920*, to be an essential addition to the bibliography. It is an important book in these days in which the Anton de Kom Universiteit van Suriname is developing plans to strengthen its History Department. It is also a valuable work for researchers in this region, which have longed for works about the former Dutch Guiana, in English, written from within the region itself, which is so much a part of our past regional history, and paradoxically so absent from our present collective Caribbean imaginary.