

# Stuck in a Caribbean deadlock

The entrapment of Venezuelans refugees in the Kingdom of the Netherlands

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## Abstract

The collapse of the Venezuelan economy as a result of years of mismanagement has unleashed a chain of devastating events. For many Venezuelans, life has become unbearable, and roughly four million people had decided to leave the country. The Venezuelan exodus has spread throughout the Latin American region in the last couple of years. Also, the island of Curacao on just 60 kilometres north of Venezuela, has seen a relatively high number of refugees arriving, in comparison to their population. Their reaction to the increased arrival has been deplorable, and many Venezuelans are being detained as a first step towards certain deportation. The situation on the outer borders of the Kingdom of the Netherlands is unique as Curacao only gained their autonomous status in 2010 and has never experienced a similar situation. However, the experience and expertise of the Netherlands have not been shared with Curacao. The Netherlands has held on to their position claiming immigration is an internal affair of Curacao. Curacao, on the other hand, is not willing to arrange a humanitarian response to the immigration crisis, as they fear the impact of more migrants on their fragile island. The outcome of this combined approach is that the situation got stuck in a deadlock, with Venezuelan migrants entirely unable for manoeuvre. No chance at a legal status without an asylum-procedure, always in fear of detainment and deportation and no protection or access to healthcare because of the risk of being detected. Although academic interest is increasing in the crisis, most literature focusses on more prominent neighbouring countries of Venezuela. The scope of this research does not only focus on a migration dilemma, but it also digs deeper into a complicated relationship between former colonial power, and a newly autonomous sub-national country of marginal size. In this research, I have explored the deadlock situation, surrounding Venezuelan refugees, that has arisen on Curacao. Additionally, I focussed on the role of framing migrants in the Curacao-Venezuelan context, as the legitimisation of the current approach is based upon the perception that these people are solely coming for economic gains. I argue that this rhetoric is vital in the persistence of the deadlock



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## Introduction

Once the wealthiest, most prosperous country on the South American continent has nosedived into complete disarray. In Venezuela, the massive inflation of national currency and great scarcity of all essential goods are the result of years of mismanagement by the current president Nicolás Maduro and its infamous predecessor Hugo Chavez (Blutstein, 1976, p. 27). The socio-economic crisis is reaching lower lows every month, with the end nowhere in sight. It has been roughly five years since the crisis started to drift to the surface of Venezuela's society. After the death of the beloved president Hugo Chavez, the cracks of an already broken system began to show (Corrales & Hidalgo, 2017). Unable to survive and provide for their families, people started to seek refuge abroad. In five years, the number of Venezuelans that have left their country is estimated at over four million (UNHCR, 2019). To put that in perspective, in 2013 and 2014, the World Bank estimates the population at roughly 30 million (The World Bank, 2019). This mass exodus has made an impact on the region as most refugees cross the border by land into Colombia and Brazil (the vast majority crossed into Colombia). However, some migrants choose to cross the ocean to seek refuge (IOM UN migration, 2019)

In the borderlands of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the crisis has created a very tensed environment. The ABC-islands (Aruba, Bonaire, Curacao) are three of the islands that are within a 60-kilometre radius of the Venezuelan coastline. Not too long ago, the borderland of the ABC-islands was considered quite stable, as Venezuela used to be a relatively stable and prosperous country in Latin America (Blutstein, 1976). The islands and Venezuela also share a historical bond, as well as lots of family ties. Even the biggest hero in Venezuelan history: Simon Bolivar, stayed on Curacao for a decent amount of time when he got beaten by the Spanish (Broek, 1990). Also, Venezuelans were significant contributors to the tourist-sector on Curacao, but the number of Venezuelan tourists on Curacao has been declining rapidly in the last couple of years (CTB, 2017).

Furthermore, the refinery on Curacao did not only bring wealth to the island in the early- and mid-1900s, it is another indicator of the strong ties between the countries as Venezuela

is responsible for operations at the facility which is leased from Curacao by state-oil company PDVSA (Kreling, 2018; Leidel-Schenk, 2019). However, the island faced more economic backlash as state-owned Venezuelan oil company PDVSA got sanctioned and crude oil export has been disallowed. The Curacao based Isla refinery has been without supplies and unable to operate ever since (Sullivan, 2019). The impact of the Venezuelan crisis has been piling up for a country already suffering from economic malaise. Understandably, Curacao fears further implications from the Venezuelan crisis.

On Curacao, the effects of the Venezuelan refugee crisis have become very tangible in the last couple of years. Increasingly more Venezuelans risk the dangerous route to the island at night, to avoid detection by authorities (ANP, 2019). Getting caught by the Coast Guard or the Police results almost every time in detention, which results practically unavoidable in deportation (Amnesty International, 2018). These circumstances are in violation with the 1951 Refugee Convention, a convention which Curacao has not signed as an autonomous country. Applying for asylum, therefore, is impossible, as Curacao does not recognise the refugee status as written in the 1951 Refugee Convention. When this Convention was signed, Curacao was part of the convention, however upon gaining the autonomous status the country did not exercise the option of re-joining the convention as a newly autonomous country (OHCHR, 2019).

The number of people that are leaving Venezuela to seek refuge overseas in the Dutch Kingdom has grown from a few hundred in 2014 up to an estimated twenty-six thousand in 2019 (UNHCR, 2019). It is hard to tell the exact number, because of the lack of registration and the community of Venezuelans already residing on Curacao. Although the self-proclamation of interim-president Juan Guáido has stirred up the situation, the outcome of the current crisis is very insecure. Whatever may happen politically and economically in the near future of Venezuela, the country will need time to recover and regain stability.

Since Venezuelans started to seek refuge on Curacao, the situation has not been dealt with humanely nor adequately. Curacao has been referring to the Venezuelan immigrants as merely economic refugees, for whom there is no place in society, which is facing poor economic conditions itself. Also, geographically it proves a significant challenge to a small island to provide shelter for thousands of refugees. Therefore, by allowing some immigrants, it fears it will attract more people than it can bear. Backed by these arguments, Curacao is completing denying the responsibility of adequately sheltering Venezuelans in need of protection, and instead of providing humanitarian aid, undocumented immigrants are arrested and detained while awaiting deportation (Amnesty International, 2018).

The Dutch coalition, formed in October 2017, added a statement to their policy plans that indicated the awareness of a crisis emerging within the borders of the Kingdom. Through the following statement the Dutch government, installed in 2017, indicated that they acknowledge the interest of a good relationship between Venezuela and the Kingdom: "due to tensions in Venezuela, the relation with this neighbouring country directly bordering our Kingdom, deserves special attention" (Rutte, Pechtold, Van Haersma Buma, & Slegers, 2017). In October 2017, the crisis in Venezuela was officially added to the coalition plans, also indicating the awareness of the impact of the crisis in Venezuela and the subsequent influx of refugees to the kingdom. As a way of dealing with the impact of the crisis, the statement indicates a strategy of investing in the relationship with the Venezuelans by giving it so-called special attention. However, the implementation of investing in the relationship is not specified nor is the exact nature of the current relationship clear. The relationship as of October 2017.

The complexity of this case can be partly explained by the number of actors involved and how these different actors have unique ideas of who is responsible and what needs to be done. As the situation is affecting the ABC islands, there are three autonomous countries within the kingdom directly involved: Curacao, Aruba and The Netherlands as Bonaire is a special municipality as well as the fact that The Netherlands is responsible for the external

affairs of the kingdom (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015). The situation seems to be the worst on Curacao, giving the number of refugees that have settled there since the crisis, and the lack of humanitarian response that is provided as a result. Curacao has no experience with the scale of refugees arriving on the island, not when they were a colony, nor when they gained an autonomous status as being part of the Dutch Antilles and later as an autonomous island. As a result, there is no protocol in place on how to react, neither can they build upon lessons learned from own experience or experiences of neighbouring islands who mostly experience a similar first-time occurrence (Sillevis Smit, 2019, p. 15).

In 2010 the Kingdom went through its most recent reorganisation. Curacao, as well as St Maarten, gained their autonomous status, comparable to the status Aruba has since 1986. Since the 10-10-10 agreements, named after the date of the reorganisation, the Dutch Kingdom has four autonomous countries, and three 'special overseas' municipalities: the remaining islands: Bonaire, St Eustatius, and Saba (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015). Technically, Curacao joined the Kingdom of the Netherlands as an autonomous country, meaning; everything but a few matters that are deemed kingdom affairs are responsibilities of the government of Curacao. Most importantly foreign affairs and defence are still considered kingdom affairs, which can be roughly interpreted as: the Dutch ministries of Foreign Affairs & Defence are taking care of and acting on behalf of the entire kingdom.

Additionally, Dutch citizenship and extradition are still kingdom affairs. However, Curacao is responsible for immigration. These exceptions on Curacao's, Aruba's and St Maarten's autonomous status are embedded in Article 3 of the Charter for the Kingdom of the Netherlands (Statuut voor het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden, 2017). Lastly, the Constitutional Order also contains a section (article 43) which describes the responsibility of every country in the Kingdom to ensure the protection of fundamental human rights, liberties, legal security and good governance. Article 43 concludes with: The Kingdom's guaranteeing these mentioned above if one of the countries is lacking in their responsibilities (Statuut voor het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden, 2017).

The Netherlands, has so far taken a reserved position in the problematic situation on Curacao, continuously referring to the New Charter for the Kingdom of the Netherlands (henceforth: NCKN). The first kingdom's constitution was drawn up in 1954, registering the autonomous statuses of the remaining (Caribbean) territories (Oostindie & Klinkers, 2012). In 2010 the latest alterations were written down when two more islands got their autonomous status, resulting in a Kingdom with six Caribbean islands, three of them; Aruba, Curacao and St Maarten as autonomous entities and the other three registered as special municipalities of the Netherlands (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015). As the NCKN registers the relations between different entities within the Kingdom, it contains the distribution of roles and responsibilities of the autonomous countries. In the case of migration, which is the point of focus in this thesis, the NCKN indicates that immigration is part of the internal affairs of any of the autonomous countries as it is not part of the exceptions to this rule in Article 3. (NCKN, art 3). However, the involvement of the Netherlands, acting on behalf of the kingdom, on the current case of migration is quite noteworthy. The coast-guard is part of the Royal Dutch Marines, and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs is negotiating on behalf of the entire kingdom. Migration is hardly ever solely an internal affair as it by definition exceeds the borders of just one country.

Furthermore, other than the vague division of responsibilities regarding immigration on Curacao, there are multiple articles in the NCKN that indicate a broader responsibility of the entire kingdom, in case of one of the countries completely lacking in keeping up the Kingdoms standards. In other words: The Kingdom should vouch for a situation where a country is not able to maintain or protect fundamental human rights, liberties, legal security and good governance (art. 43, Statuut van het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden). Additionally, article 36 of the NCKN states the following: "The Netherlands, Aruba, Curacao and St Maarten provide one another with aid and assistance" (art. 36, Statuut van het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden). These particular segments in the constitution at least suggests that in a situation like the current one; regarding Venezuelan refugees on

Curacao, the responsibility surpasses the level of the autonomous countries and becomes a Kingdom's affair rather than just a country's affair.

On top of that, the Netherlands is quite keen on preserving human rights and spreading our liberal values to all corners of the world. When our military is contributing to a peacekeeping mission, it is usually in the name of liberty and stability. The Ministry of foreign affairs is claiming that it wants to contribute to stability, safety and a warranty for human rights throughout the entire world (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017). The portrayed image of being an advocate human rights protection does not seem to align with the minimised action the Netherlands has taken preventing violations of refugees on Curacao. Unfortunately, the NCKN is not conclusive on the question of who is responsible, resulting in the fact that no one seems to be held fully accountable. Curacao, understandably, lacks the experience of dealing with an increased arrival of undocumented migrants, as the island barely ever dealt with asylum seekers, let alone dealt with multiple at once. As a result, a proper procedure has never been installed, which makes the situation non-transparent, unjust and precarious (ACVZ, 2019; AIV, 2018). Curacao does not know who is coming in and therefore has no idea what persons it is sending back. Sending refugees back to the country where they might face (political) prosecution for dissidence, would be against the 1951 Refugee Convention.

The realisation that Curacao is not capable of dealing with the arrival of many thousands of Venezuelan refugees is not just an observation I made as a researcher. In contrary. Several advisory-comities, NGO's, researchers and journalist have reported on human rights that are being violated, the absence of an asylum procedure and the inaccessibility of legal assistance for immigrants (Refugees International, 2019; AIV, 2018; ACVZ, 2019; Amnesty International, 2018). Many of these parties have published reports signalling violations in the detainment of refugees and deportation, as well as the dire situation of Venezuelans that live in illegality on Curacao (Refugees International, 2019; Amnesty International, 2018). In addition, the reports that have been released by NGO's, several journalists have covered the situation on the islands as well. A film crew of a Dutch

investigative-journalism TV-show Zembra sat down with Curacao's minister of Justice Mr Quincy Girigorie (Otten & Glissenaar, 2018). After talking to different informants on the islands, they confronted the minister with a case of a refugee that was pending deportation, who had a potential risk of being prosecuted upon returning, as he claimed to have witnessed electoral fraud in Venezuela. In another example, a deported Venezuelan's lawyer showed evidence of filed summary procedure three days prior to the deportation. This should have prevented her from being deported until a judge ruled a verdict, which it did not (Otten & Glissenaar, 2018). The documentary displayed the alleged violations of human rights, but it also gave the viewers an insight into the lack of capacity and experience of the Curacao authorities and their inability to act in this precarious situation. All of these indicators got picked up by a view Dutch politicians which resulted in the questioning of the designated ministers and secretaries of state. Recently, two official advisory commissions wrote up an advisory-report on the matter asking the ministers to consider taking another look at the NCKN and explore how the Dutch government could be of assistance within the mandate of the constitution (AIV, 2018; ACVZ, 2019).

Despite the widespread attention, the issue is getting across the board, the reaction of the involved Dutch ministers has been timid. In response to the recently published advisory report of the Advisory Committee on Migration Affairs (ACVZ) the Dutch Minister for Migration declined the advisory offer and replied: "full attention for developments in Venezuela and consequences for Dutch Caribbean" (Harbers, 2019). Admitting being fully aware of the situation without initiating a thorough approach has been a recurrent line of action in the last two years.

### Societal relevance

The underlying societal issue that is presented in this particular research touches upon multiple aspects of the broader debate on migration. In a broader sense, it touches upon a universal issue in the response towards migration. How does society deal with arriving refugees? Moreover, to what extent do we understand migration flows, what motivates migration, and how does responsive policies influence migration, if it influences migration

flows at all. In the last decade or so, many pieces of research have been conducted in the European setting, addressing, e.g. framing of migrants from a political perspective, and the detainment and deportation of migrants at Europe's exterior borders (De Genova, 2017; Van Houtum, 2010).

Given the recent emergence of Venezuelan refugees that head towards the ABC-islands of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, and the absence of similar occurrences prior to the recent developments, this Caribbean context is mostly uncharted terrain. The minor scale of the Dutch Caribbean islands does not generate mass attention, like the more prominent neighbouring countries of Venezuela do. However, researching the situation on Curacao is beneficial to understanding the context of the arrival of refugees to a small autonomous island, as the examples of these particular circumstances are not widely available. Indeed, the issues regarding Venezuelan migrants on the ABC-island have not been addressed in any of the available academic literature.

On top of that, the developments on Curacao regarding the arrival of Venezuelan refugees also gives a prime insight in the complicated relationship between the Netherlands and an autonomous country that recently required its status within the kingdom. It shows that the process of becoming self-ruling autonomous islands, while maintaining a connection with the former 'motherland', has created uncertainty in terms of decision-making, and in answering the question who is responsible (Oostindie & Klinkers, 2012). The treatment of refugees has been very poor and assertive attempts to improve the situation seem not to lift off, as involved parties seem reticent in taking the lead (ACVZ, 2019). On top of that, the authorities on Curacao and the Netherlands have tried to alter the narrative by claiming Venezuelan migrants arriving on Curacao are by default economic migrants (Otten & Glissenaar, 2018; Amnesty International, 2018, p. 23). I believe that the debate on framing migrants and migration is an essential aspect of the issue on Curacao, as well as a societal dilemma requiring further elaboration.

By researching this deadlock situation, I attempt to explore the specific situation in Curacao and in a wider scope gather insights on refugees in small (autonomous) (is)lands. By

contributing to the debate on the framing of migrants in the context of Curacao as well, I try to build upon the already acquired knowledge.

### Scientific relevance

In the previous section, I introduced the societal relevance of this research. To be able to get a full grasp of the situation, there are a few theoretical debates that are closely related to the issues on Curacao. The focus in this research will be on the underlying causes of the deadlock regarding Venezuelan immigrants on Curacao. Currently, Venezuelan immigrants are treated from the idea that they (potentially) negatively impact the island's economy and overall stability. By labelling all immigrants from Venezuela as 'economic refugees', the government of Curacao and the Dutch government distance themselves from the responsibility of sheltering refugees, clearing the road for detainment and deportation without a fair chance on asylum (Otten & Glissenaar, 2018; NOS, 2018; Amnesty International, 2018).

The framing that is used to legitimize the current inhumane approach towards migrants is uncommon in immigration discourse. According to De Genova (2013), framing refugees into deportable non-citizens is a modus operandi deployed globally to keep out the 'unwanted' (p. 1180-1182). By creating a stigma of the 'undeservingness' of migrants based on having merely economic motives, and/or by stressing the enormous pressure they are having on society, a foundation is created for detainment and deportation (De Genova, 2017; 2013). Framing undocumented refugees as 'illegal' contributes to the narrative of the arrival of the 'unwanted', it creates the 'citizen' versus the 'non-citizen' along those lines you 'other' insiders from outsiders (Dervin, 2015).

What makes this case unique is the fact that Curacao is an inexperienced sub-national island with ties to the former motherland through the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The current approach of Curacao, framing Venezuelans as deportable and unwanted, has been continuously backed by Dutch ministers, although external opposition towards the circumstances on the island has been growing (Amnesty International, 2018; UNHCR, 2019).

Due to my presence as an intern/observer on the island, as part of the Dutch Representations Office on Curacao, I got an insight into the relationship between the former motherland and the newly autonomous country in the context of a refugee crisis.

## Research objective

It has been very frustrating for those who look after the interest of the Venezuelan refugees. Simultaneously, I want to understand why, and what is motivating the approach the Dutch government has been taking ever since they've admitted their awareness of the Venezuelan crisis and its implication for the Dutch Caribbean in October 2017. The approach that has been taken regarding refugees in Curacao does not seem to be aligned with the overall vision of the Netherlands to protect human rights and shelter refugees. To what extent does the fact that it is happening in the Kingdom alter the approach? In other words, why does the Dutch government take a different line towards refugees, and sheltering them locally, when a precarious situation is unfolding on Curacao? Why is the Netherlands sheltering refugees from the countries with a tyrant regime like Eritrea, but complies with framing refugees from Venezuela as merely 'economic refugees'? And why does the government of the Netherlands persistently refer to the situation as being an internal affair of Curacao, despite official requests for assistance (Rhuggenaath, *Bijstandsverzoek Curacao*, 2019)? As Venezuelan refugees are being framed as (unwelcome) economic migrants by both Curacao and the Netherlands, they are being transformed into detainable and deportable humans. The main research objective of this research is to explore the deadlock Venezuelan refugees get trapped in created on the autonomous island Curacao. Hence the main question of this research is: How can the process of framing Venezuelan migrants by Curacao and the Kingdom of the Netherlands, creating a deadlock for Venezuelan refugees, be understood?

Addressing the response to the arrival of Venezuelan refugees I identify two major actors: the government of the autonomous country Curacao and the government of the Netherlands as the most powerful body in the Kingdom of the Netherlands. In the response towards the increased arrival of Venezuelan refugees on Curacao, the relation between the two countries has a very significant role as well. From time to time the countries have joined in shared statements addressing the situation, which also indicates a communality in the approach, but at the same time Dutch ministers have referred to the situation as a

'country's affair', and Curacao has repeatedly requested support from the kingdom (Rhuggenaath, 2019; Harbers, 2019, p. 1). It seems to be very clear that both sides fear an 'invasion' if Venezuelans were facilitated in their search for refuge on the Caribbean island. Centralised in expressing this fear is the Dutch term: 'aanzuigend effect', which roughly translates to a 'suction effect' (Otten & Glissenaar, 2018). In other words, facilitating Venezuelan refugees would form a pull factor which would suck in more refugees. Clearly, that is the one thing all parties involved are trying to avoid, at all cost.

The response to the arrival of refugees as a result of the ongoing crisis can be seen as unwelcoming. By not recognising that these people are indeed refugees, but rather 'economic migrants', the need for the protection of this group is being removed. The (re)framing of arriving Venezuelans is being used as the legitimisation of detainment and deportation, as they are solely perceived as a burden to a country economically struggling (Ministry of Justice Curacao, 2018). Because the framing of immigrants is essential in the legitimisation of unwelcoming approach, the concept will be further addressed in this thesis.

In its entirety, the unwelcoming approach/response does not just include the framing of immigrants. As an unwelcoming response, I understand the complete cycle of the arrival of undocumented Venezuelans, their detainment as a result of being undocumented, and eventually their (practically) certain deportation as a result of being undocumented. There have been a handful of Venezuelans that were granted special status by the UNHCR (Drayer, 2019). Being undocumented presumes that there is a possibility of getting the right documents. However, the absence of an asylum procedure disallows Venezuelans of obtaining legal status, making it part of the mechanism I understand as an unwelcoming approach/response (Marijnissen, 2018; Sillevius Smit, 2019). Because this mechanism is created by the unwillingness of adapting the system and/or holding on to existing structures, I have identified the involved actors. Curacao and the Kingdom of the Netherlands are the only bodies capable of influencing the situation on Curacao.

Furthermore, the relationship between former colonial ruler and the newly formed autonomous country is vital in understanding the complexity of the relation. A thorough look into the past is crucial in understanding the contemporary relations and tensions, as well as motivations of current decision-making (Oostindie & Klinkers, 2001; Oostindie & Klinkers, 2012). The official relation between the Netherlands and Curacao (as well as the relation with the other Caribbean islands in het kingdom) is embedded in the Charter for the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Since the first version of the Charter was drafted in 1954, it is a common thread in the post-war history of the kingdom (Oostindie & Klinkers, 2012). Nevertheless, the power relations on paper might give a slightly deviate view from the actual relations (Oostindie & Klinkers, 2012). The post-war process of gaining independence or an autonomous status within the kingdom of the Netherlands shows dissimilarities with the worldwide trend of the era, specifically for the (former) Dutch islands in the Caribbean (Baldacchino, 2004; Baldacchino & Milne, 2006; Oostindie & Klinkers, 2012).

#### Trajectory of the text

The text will be divided into three sections. In the first section, I will address my observations during my six-month stay on Curacao. This section will provide the reader with the trajectory of my internship, discussing my positionality and the methodology and how it formed my research. In addition, I complimented the section with a view perspectives gathered during my fieldwork. In the second part of the research, I introduce a few theoretical concepts that should lay the foundation for the analysis. Since I am trying to stress the importance of the former colonial ties and the recently required autonomous status of Curacao, I intertwined the historical perspective with a theoretical foundation. In the final section, the situation on the island and in Venezuela will be addressed, by focussing on what has happened since 2017 and what the role of the Kingdom of the Netherland has been in the entire situation, as the final insight leading up to the conclusion of this thesis.

## 1. Towards a research topic and a relevant internship

In October 2017 the coalition negotiations were completed, and the roadmap for the following four years was presented, in the coalition agreements Regeerakkoord in Dutch. The addition of the one sentence indicating the urgency of an emerging crisis at the borders of our kingdom caught my attention when a host of a well-known Dutch Late Night show host, Arjen Lubach, aired an episode based on the Venezuelan crisis and the involvement of the Dutch government (Lubach, 2017) I was interested in the situation in Venezuela before but I predominantly looked at it in the context of Latin American far-left versus far-right and the widespread violence and corruption that the continent had dealt with in recent history. In his show, Arjen Lubach reflects on the segment added to the coalition agreement: "due to tensions in Venezuela, the relation with this neighbouring country directly bordering our Kingdom deserves special attention". He ridicules the statement for lacking an explanation of how any Venezuelan approach should take shape, as the segment reveals no practical implementation whatsoever (Lubach, 2017).

In order to get a better grasp of the situation at hand, the logical follow up would be to experience the impact of the crisis on our Kingdom and to come to terms with whatever has been put in to place to give "special attention" in the "relation with Venezuela" by getting myself in the field. The most relevant internship would be anything related to the government and their practices, preferably on Curacao. Luckily I was able to fulfil this particular preference.

On Curacao, I became an intern at the Representative Office of the Netherlands in Willemstad (Dutch abbreviation: VNW). The role of the Representative Office is comparable to that of an embassy or consulate, with a few exceptions. Firstly, unlike Dutch embassies and consulates, the Representative Offices of the Caribbean autonomous islands: Curacao, Aruba and St Maarten operate within the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Secondly, the representative offices are assigned to the Dutch Ministry of Interior and Kingdom Affairs, despite most diplomatic outposts are part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Representation Offices function as the link between the Ministry of the Interior and

Kingdom Relations and the autonomous islands. Another important role of the VNW is to assist all (European-)Dutch citizens that live or visit the island with all different kinds of (consular) issues.

As an intern at the VNW, I got the opportunity to get some experience in a vast spectrum of tasks in different fields of work. To name a few, this included working on projects that were aimed at improving the economic conditions on Curacao, counting votes for a referendum, attending and assisting several conferences. However, mostly the work consisted out of talking to people from all different backgrounds, gathering intel allowing the organisation to be continuously informed. This enabled me to get an understanding of all things that were playing, including the struggles that Curacao has as a small island-country. Due to my background as a master student in conflict studies with enhanced interest in the Venezuela situation, I sat down at the table when some of the issues were discussed. This included conversations with representatives of UNHCR, a delegation from Aruba and several Curacao officials. Furthermore, the oil embargo, which was sanctioned by the USA against Venezuela had (and still has) severe implications for Curacao (Sullivan, 2019). At the time of my presence, the refinery on the island stopped receiving crude oil from Venezuelan tankers. The Venezuela state-owned oil company (PDVSA) was not able to keep the refinery going, without the ability to ship crude oil to Curacao. This threatened the refinery with a closure which meant the loss of jobs and economic activity for Curacao (Kreling, 2018). While this situation was unfolding, it became clear to me how important the relationship with Venezuela is for Curacao and how worried the people get when this gets jeopardised although I did not have the ability to influence conversations, being able to observe and collect helped me shape my research.

To an extent, my role as an intern determined my position as a researcher. Having been part of the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations gave me a fascinating insight into the existing structure within the kingdom. It taught me that there is a discrepancy between the reality of the government and ministries in The Hague and the actual reality and perception of Curacao. Since I have completed my internship and my stay on Curacao

the thesis is not a product for the organisation, it more or less grew as a result of my experiences working for the VNW and living on the island. However, the topic of the research finds its roots in a multi-layered issue that is supposed to be relevant to multiple actors, including the VNW. The organisation is grounded in Curacao and operates in its context but operates on behalf of policy-makers in the Ministry of Internal Affairs. At the same time, it is providing The Hague with measured advice trying to take break down the walls of misunderstanding between Continental Europe and the reality on the Caribbean. Experiences and insights that I gained from my time spent on Curacao have naturally affected my positioning as a researcher within this particular topic. It shaped the aim of this research to a great extent, and it pinpointed me towards relevant aspects of the problems at stake. The internship made me realise how complicated the relations are, and not just with Venezuela, but mostly within the Kingdom. Understandably, the fact that the Netherlands and Curacao are roughly 8000 kilometres apart and have a time difference of five to six hours is not helping much either.

### Positionality

Since the research that I am trying to conduct is an actively developing situation, it presents many challenges going forward. Also, since I have lived on the island for six months and as an intern was somewhat involved in the refugee situation, I am not a blank page when it comes to researching the case. Therefore I will address my positionality as a result of my internship first.

As an intern of the VNW, I have been working for the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, which has become an important element of the aim of the research. The Dutch approach, as it will be referred to in this thesis, is not a one-sided product of a single entity. It is constructed out of multi-layered input and builds upon former discussion-making. My former employee makes up an important part of that construct. However, as a representation office, the tasks of the VNW did not involve creating policy. Merely, providing and gathering intel by creating and strengthening local relations. Sometimes, this resulted in writing an advisory report, but that was certainly not the main goal. Being

involved in the act of gathering information, I found a side of the Venezuela crisis that was not just affecting its citizens; it was also putting a nearby island in a very precarious situation. Naturally, my focus on the Venezuelan crisis shifted towards the field I was operating in. Other than focusing on a developing crisis, I started to narrow down on a very small minority of refugees that was trying to seek refuge on Curacao. Every time the internship organisation was asked on what the Dutch point of view was regarding the situation the official take was being reproduced over and over: "*migration is a country's affair*" (Harbers, 2019). The message was being put out by the ministries in The Hague. This made me very sceptical of the intentions of the Netherlands in assisting an inexperienced country with some severe geographical disadvantages.

My interest in the situation got soon replaced by disbelieving and a feeling of frustration due to the lack of humanity in response to Venezuelan refugees. Both Curacao and Dutch government kept referring to arriving Venezuelans as 'undocumented economic refugees', while at the same time it is impossible to file for asylum which decreased the chance of a Venezuelan to arrive on Curacao and get legal status to mere zero (Marijnissen, 2018). Possibly, the hopeless odds of getting legal status in Curacao led to an increase of people willing to risk the dangerous crossing of the waters between coastal Venezuela and Curacao, which resulted in many unfortunate deaths (ANP, 2019). People lost their lives trying to reach the island that does not want them. In fear of attracting more people to the island, the overall experience is meant to be hard, or at least politicians admit that everything is done to prevent the creation of a suction-effect. Migrants have to realise that they are not welcome and that reaching the island is life-threatening and even upon reaching the island, you have to fear being arrested (ANP, 2019; Drayer, 2019). Realising that the kingdom, that I am a citizen of, is not willing to facilitate refugees of a crisis, bothers me and made me sceptical of the incentives fuelling the Dutch approach to refugees in general. It is important to note that, for the reason mentioned above, I am very critical of the response to Venezuelan refugees in the kingdom. However, I want to make an effort in understanding what the reasoning is behind the mechanisms of these

migration policies. I understand that Curacao's has limited recourses to facilitate groups of immigrants and fears the impact on its fragile economic situation. Nonetheless, striving for improvement of the conditions for undocumented Venezuelans should be part of the approach.

Eventually, these observations made me realise that this situation on Curacao is being sustained by multiple parties, including the involved Dutch ministries of which one of them was technically my employer. The narrative that I want to present aims at holding up a mirror, by positioning myself as a critic of the current circumstances. This then makes me not completely unbiased nor entirely objective, but rather intersubjective as I am following along with the growing external criticism, researching the role of the involved actors.

Throughout the thesis, I will appear as an observer within the research field. As I manoeuvred through the space that is the main focus in the research. At the time of my presence, this field my role was merely being an intern. My main focus was on learning, observing and gathering working experience. This meant that throughout most of my encounters with local actors, I had no complete control over the conversation nor the situation. However, during the times I had a seat at the table, I was taking notes by keeping a field diary. Since the direction of the conversation was mostly out of my control, I would consider myself a witness observer rather than a researcher observer during my time as an intern. Nonetheless, these encounters have helped me shape my research and gather data along the way. In the methodological reflection, I will address how these experiences have helped shape my research and how it guided me towards the relevant point of focus.

## 2. Methodology, methods and techniques

### Ethnographic approach

Thoroughly constructing a full-bodied research project that is suitable for the aim of your research would be straightforward and more or less textbook approach to most research projects. Given the way my journey has unfolded a particular approach has no potential. In my experience, empirical research has one recurrent characteristic that it is never straightforward and always uncertain. Studying spaces in which you have no experience of manoeuvring through prove how a pre-set research project would not be suitable. By developing the research project through step by step, starting to understand the case and space is a much better fit for this particular case. The trajectory of this thesis can be identified as a constant process of stumbling across new insights which develop along the way, or a qualitative inductive exploration of the role of a former colonial ruler in modern-day policy towards refugees on Curacao.

Methods of collection of data, from an ethnographic angle, varies from different approaches and sources. Typically the use of participant observation and/or informal conversation is the main form of data gathering. However, documentaries, social media, news articles are a few examples of sources that are also very useable (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 3'). There is usually not a pre-set research design, which results in a relatively unstructured method of data collection. Gathering data in a somewhat unstructured way has obvious disadvantages because isolating the research objective becomes very hard. However, it suits the type of research that is developing as it goes. Points of interest arise during the process of doing research. The method of unstructured gathering allows a researcher to shift from its initial research plan and delve deeper.

An important aim of ethnography is to understand the world of the native, the people that are interacting in the researched field (Spradley, 2016, p. 3). How do these people view the world, what is their vision?. Getting a grasp of the point of view of the different actors involved became the central point in the research. By debunking cultural differences,

deviant interest and by trying to unravel the structures (of power), I tried to visualise the different incentives of the different actors.

## Operationalisation and Methods

The analysis of the research will be based on field research conducted during my internship on Curacao from February 2018 until August 2018, complemented with desk research mostly conducted after the field research. During the fieldwork, most of the data was collected from conducting participatory observation, observation and numerous of (informal) conversations. Due to the confidentiality of the practices of the VNW, a lot of these conversations and observations have to be anonymised. The desk research mostly consisted of studying political and legal documents as well as several media outlets, interviews, documentaries, and social media. Back home after the fieldwork, I have conducted an additional semi-structured in-depth interview, anticipating a signalling report written by the ACVZ addressing the Dutch position in the situation. Also, in anticipation on a newspaper column piece in the *Volkskrant*, written by three researchers stated that the Netherlands should take their responsibility and comply in their duty of care towards Venezuelan refugees on Curacao, I reached out to the writers (Heintze, Hilhorst, & Dijkzeul, 2019). The informal conversations I had with one of the researchers proved to be valuable in reflecting on my own findings.

## Fieldwork

My time as an intern on Curacao is somewhat two-faced. I left the Netherlands with the idea that I had my main focus figured out already, spiked by the one sentence in the coalition agreements referred to in the introduction (Rutte, Pechtold, Van Haersma Buma, & Slegers, 2017). The initial idea was to explore that sentence and try to unravel what was behind the segment altogether. At the same time, I was gathering insights on the situation regarding Venezuelan refugees. My attention started to shift towards different sources addressing the Venezuelan situation and the implications it had for Curacao, and the kingdom. However, when I had spent a fair bit of time on Curacao, I started to realise the complexity and the urgency of the situation. A realisation that implied a significant part of

the issue could be found within the structure of the kingdom and the unwillingness of the involved actors to act. I felt that the urgency of the issue was not to be found in the relation between Venezuela and the Kingdom of the Netherlands anymore. As a result, I shifted my scope internally and focussed on the issues within our borders.

Within the six months of being an intern on Curacao, I had numerous conversations about the Venezuelan crisis and the situation that it caused on Curacao. Some of these conversations were in a professional setting and were meant to inform ourselves or to communicate a specific policy line. A couple of the more interesting meetings I have been able to observe will be addressed later on when I will present different perspectives regarding the topic at hand. A couple of interesting individuals have shared their vision during my work as an intern. In addition to the input derived from my internship, I reached out to an immigration attorney and a journalist that was about to enter Venezuela. The marginal scale of the Curacao society provided the opportunity for numerous informal chats with locals and other people that were somehow involved or felt affected by the outcome of the situation. But considerably the most relevant source of information would be the everyday encounters during my internship, as well as the exchange of information with the local actors. However, due to the confidentiality of the conversations and meetings, I won't be able to provide transcripts or direct quotes into the dataset. Nonetheless, these day to day experiences has been the vital guidance in pursuing the right direction in this thesis. Without disclosing confidential information, I will try and put into writing how the relation between two countries, thousands of kilometres apart, works through the eyes and ears of a representative office.

The fact that the settings are in its 'natural' form (in a conference room or office table) and not influenced by the researcher also means that outcomes are unfiltered, but not always useable for the sake of the researcher. The chances of people providing the researcher with a politically correct answer are reduced. As the research objective started to arise during my internship using an ethnographic approach, the need for a more in-depth interpretation of the gathered insights grew simultaneously. Different forms of data

collection were required to fill in the gaps of unanswered questions. Later on, I will elaborate on this matter.

### Participant observation in a formal setting

Effectively, as an intern, I took the role of a participant-observer every time the chance arose to sit down at the table. Usually, in a formal consultation, everyone in the room (assuming most not everyone knows everyone) would introduce themselves. This included stating your profession and role within the organisation one represents. Specifically for me, this meant introducing myself as the intern with a special interest in the Venezuelan crisis situation. As my research objective was still developing, I kept my interest very broad. Although everyone present was aware of my dual role as researcher and intern, at no point this obstructed the conversation. Giving the idea that I was an intern first, student/researcher second, I blended in quite well. Taking notes was not only required for me as a researcher; it was part of my responsibilities as an intern as well. It resulted in a collection of paper notes on all sorts of conversations, meetings and events. I will not refer to these notes as a field diary, as it also includes notes that have no implications for the research and the intention of writing these notes were not solely for the research. Nevertheless, the notes include data collected during different participant observations. In the following section, I will introduce different forms of participant observation and how it will fit in the ethnographic approach. This section will be complemented by a set of perspectives gathered during the participant observations, and how they may or may not have led to the alteration and the overall shaping of this research.

### Participant observation

Participant observation is a technique which allows the researcher to get close to the people that are central in the research. By interacting with people from a particular culture through complete immersion in their daily activities, the researcher tries to get a grasp of that culture. Describing culture is essential in ethnography, which aims at understanding the cultural fundamentals from a native perspective (Spradley, 2016, p. 3). From an epistemological assumption, the researcher has to stay as close to the participants as

possible to be able to understand them fully. The so-called 'fieldwork' is essential in this approach, "a good ethnography requires a prolonged stay at the research site" (Spradley, 2016, p. 20). To be able to conduct participant observation, the researcher has to be allowed to interact with the "field". For instance, if research aims at researching a minority community in any given city, the community has to be somewhat accepting of the researcher joining in. Accessibility can form a barrier to this type of research.

There are multiple types of observing, which can be categorised in four types, mostly depending on the role and position of the researcher/observer. These four types can be divided into two sides of the spectrum. Either a researcher is participating, or a researcher is observing, in other words, a researcher is either an insider or an outsider (Spradley, 2016, pp. 166-167). As a participant-observer, you fully engage in activities and conversations, while at the same time collecting data. The duality of the participant observations can be quite distracting, which can hurt the data collection. (Spradley, 2016).

The advantage that I had during the participant observations was that taking notes was part of my role anyway. This meant that I had considerably fewer problems combining the two, and at the same time, taking notes was barely noticed by everyone present during the observation. Probably the most significant disadvantage of my situation was the pre-determined setting of every observation, which did not allow me to participate in a variety of different surroundings. However, the "field" was not limited to the professional surroundings of the Representations Office. Outside of my nine to five working hours, I technically did not leave the field. However, in my day to day living environment I (unintentionally) surrounded myself with other (predominantly European Dutch<sup>1</sup>) interns. Nevertheless, as Curacao is such a small (unfortunately) segregated island, you inevitably find yourself in interactions with people from all kinds of backgrounds.

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<sup>1</sup> Since the distinction of being "Dutch" is somewhat disputed in the context of the Antilles, European is often added to describe an inhabitant or a person from (or originates from) mainland the Netherlands.

## Perspectives from Aruba and Curacao

After about four weeks into my internship, the first opportunity appeared to meet someone who was really involved in the situation regarding refugees in the kingdom. The recently installed prime minister was on an introduction trip around Curacao to meet up with the important actors on the other side of the pond. This involved a quick meet up at the VNW with the former interim representative of the Netherlands in Curacao. Aruba has similar problems as Curacao in terms of finance. Overall government spending is higher as the actual income resulting in a deficit. In exchange for relieving a big part of the debts of the Caribbean countries, the Netherlands has established a board for financial supervision (CFT). The CFT is meant to reduce the risk of budgetary problems on the islands but is often experienced as a barrier for economic growth. Aruba is under the impression that it needs more time to sort out the budgetary issues than the CFT is giving them. It is obviously noteworthy that The Netherlands has such an influential body on all the autonomous islands. Furthermore, another very interesting thought was mentioned during the meeting. The seeming subservience in which the Dutch government is investing in regions in the world which it does not share a historical relation. Aruba, and plausibly multiple Dutch Caribbean countries find it hard to understand that, in their experience, another standard is applied to the Caribbean. Certain countries get a generous donation; the islands get a committee of supervision.

This particular sentiment is a recurrent theme amongst actors from the islands. Around the same time during my internship, I was part of a meeting discussing an investment platform for sustainable entrepreneurial growth. The basis of the public-private platform would require some funds to be able to supply a local entrepreneur with a grant. In the process, I found out how hard it was for Curacao to get a hold of funds from the EU. The EU has a Caribbean regional programme. However, this program is meant for independent nations in the Caribbean (pre-dominantly with a European historical relation) (European Commission, 2015). None of the Caribbean countries in the Kingdom of the Netherlands is able to get support directly through the EU, making them even more dependent on Dutch

funding. This is very hard to swallow for some politicians in the Antilles whenever the Netherlands are investing in other countries by sending foreign aid or other forms of financial assistance. This can be perceived as a bit of a let down by the countries in the Caribbean, giving their inaccessibility to alternative funds and the strict supervision on their budgetary. A good example is the financial support the Netherlands directly or indirectly gives to Colombia, meant for sheltering Venezuelan refugees (Kaag, 2018). The amount was meant for the sheltering of Venezuelan refugees in Colombia. However, at that point, Aruba's and Curacao's requests for further financial assistance was still pending. Members of the Aruban parliament reacted, stating: "The Netherlands does not take us (Aruba) seriously in the Venezuelan crisis" (Samson & Henriquez, 2019).

Dissolving the Dutch Antilles in October 2010 is another sensitive issue for the Arubans. Although Aruba already had its autonomous status, they had hoped for a completed procedure by the 10/10/10 agreements. Eventually, the autonomous countries would get there status, even if negotiations were not entirely completed (Oostindie & Klinkers, 2012, p. 218). In a later chapter, I will elaborate on this particular event. According to the Aruban delegation, this portrayed a sudden withdrawal from the Netherlands, which still hinders optimal cooperation in the kingdom, the Netherlands should take a leading role in optimising the overall cooperation. Based on the statute's articles 36, 37, and 43, there is a set of rules and guidelines in which the countries should assist one another (Statuut voor het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden, 2017). Seemingly, the statute entails some guidance on how the relation and cooperation in the kingdom should be shaped. However, the interpretation of the statute varies, and different parties value the statute differently. This particular different point of view has some historical ground which will be discussed in a later segment of this research.

As the conversation shifted to the economic situation of Aruba, I came to the realisation of how heavily Curacao and Aruba (and Bonaire to an extent) are intertwined and dependent on Venezuela economically. The sanctions that were imposed by the US (as of 2018), mainly targeting Venezuela oil-export and its access to the American financial markets, hit

both Aruba and Curacao (Sullivan, 2019). Both the islands have refinery operations which suffer heavily from the cut of the flow of crude oil. This brings another aspect to the table in the grand scheme of things: Curacao has a much bigger interest in maintaining some relationship with the Venezuelan government, as the Venezuelan state-owned oil company is one of the biggest employers on Curacao (Kreling, 2018).

At this point, the structure started to unravel. It felt like some triangle had formed surrounding Venezuelan refugees on Curacao's territory. Multiple actors, uncertain relationships and different interests. People are forced to leave their homeland due to a humanitarian crisis maintained by an intolerant regime, led by a tyrant. Out of desperation, they decide to leave everything behind and set course to one of the nearby islands. Some by plane, the unlucky ones are doomed to cross the deadly ocean by boat. Upon arrival, they get caught in a deadlock. The island's government is expressing their fear of being 'flooded' with refugees and claims there is no place for immigrants on Curacao. Publically communicating Curacaos asylum-procedures would result in the attraction of many more, who would then instead of going to Brazil or Colombia come to Curacao. These are the words of Curacao Minister of Justice, Quincy Girigorie, in a Dutch journalism show called Zembla (Otten & Glissenaar, 2018, min. 14:00). As a result, the people that have fled a terrible situation and up in the deportation cycle ending in the inevitable. The 'motherland', is being alarmed by the situation on the outskirts of their kingdom, but repeatedly holds on to the idea that the situation is a country's affair (Harbers, 2019).

#### A legal perspective: Treaties, conventions and the statute

The inaccessible asylum procedures on Curacao is providing a hopeless situation for refugees. This trickles down to a situation in which trying to get a protected status on Curacao through the legal route is next to impossible, which leaves no other option than hiding in illegality. In these circumstances, basic human needs as access to medical care, education and overall protection are being denied to Venezuelan immigrant out of fear of getting caught and entering the deportation cycle.

As neither the Netherlands nor Curacao is taking actual responsibility for the situation, the Venezuelans are trapped in the created deadlock. Turning back to Venezuela is not an option, nor is applying for asylum. They are entrapped, because of the unwillingness of two countries, sharing a rough history and a troubled relationship.

What happens to these people when the authorities of the two countries do not seem to come up with a solution? Does anyone hold them responsible? The oldest convention regarding refugees is the 1951 Geneva convention, signed by the Netherlands at the time. However, Curacao did not exist as an autonomous country in 1951. Countries that break ties with their former rulers or gain independence have the possibility to sign the convention in hindsight. However, Curacao never did. And even if they would have, the 1951 Convention is technically legally binding; however, there is nobody that monitors compliance.

The legal side of the migration debate is undoubtedly something outside my scope as a geography researcher. Nonetheless, is it vital to understand the underlying structures and motives addressing refugees. To widen my scope on the legal side of immigration, I contacted a defence attorney who specialised in immigration law. Although I was familiar with the 1951 refugee convention, there is a relevant treaty that does apply to Curacao: the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).

Specifically, the third article of ECHR (henceforth: ECHR3), the article that prohibits torture and inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, is very relevant to the current situation on Curacao. Based on the prohibition of degrading treatment or punishment, the extradition of a person is prohibited, if there is a believable chance of the individual being exposed to torture (Art. 3 ECHR). Giving the continuous process of deportation, undermining an asylum procedure by proclaiming every Venezuelan refugee as an economic refugee, there is a possibility that this particular article is being violated. Curacao is unable to determine if a Venezuelan is prone to persecution if there is no procedure that researches individual cases of migrants (ACVZ, 2019). Multiple organisations have been

warning for the political persecution and torture of opponents of the regime in Venezuela, making it an unsafe country to extradite or deport to (Amnesty International, 2018).

The European states that signed the ECHR treaty had to include in article 56 of the treaty is compliant to overseas territories. In 1954 the Dutch government declared that the convention would apply to the Netherlands Antilles and Suriname. After the independence of Suriname in 1975, they withdrew from the convention. Since the redivision of the Netherlands Antilles, the Caribbean Netherlands (Bonaire, St Eustatius, Saba) remain part of the treaty. Aruba, who gained their autonomous status in 1986, also remained part of the treaty. However, Curacao and St Maarten gained their autonomous status in 2010, and this is where some of the confusion is originated from. According to defence attorney specialised in immigration law, Thomas van Houwelingen, The Kingdom did sign both ECHR as well as the 1951 convention. However, there is no provision for protecting refugees in Curacao's own declarations (Marijnissen, 2018). Nevertheless, Mark Klaassen, an Assistant Professor of the Institute of Law at the University of Leiden, is referring to a potential loophole (Marijnissen, 2018). If a refugee refers explicitly to his/her rights based on ECHR, claiming you will face dangerous or humiliating circumstances upon return to your country, an asylum request should be possible despite the fact Curacao did not implement an asylum procedure. A third party (In this case, the Red Cross or the UNHCR) would then assist in a procedure as such (Marijnissen, 2018).

#### Gathering perspectives: a few perspectives of NGO's

The mentioning of the Red Cross and the UNHCR is interesting. As a matter of fact, they were both assisting Venezuelans in getting them some sort of legal status, due to the absent asylum procedures on Curacao. In some of the conversations, I received indications of the UNHCR and the Red Cross assisting in aiding some refugees in legal procedures regarding. However, these procedures were eventually cut off. At the time of my arrival, the involvement of the two NGO's had already been put on hold. According to a press release of the UNHCR, they are still looking to get involved in Curacao assisting the refugee situation as of January 2019 (UNHCR, 2019). The Red Cross had different reasons to put

their operations on hold. Like the UNHCR, local communities are vital in their approaches towards refugee facilitating. While sheltering refugees, the needs of the host communities should be equally addressed. As local communities on Curacao expressed their fear regarding the arrival of refugees, the Red Cross (initially present on Curacao serving local purposes) got trapped in this dilemma. The dilemma of affecting local communities by helping newcomers seems somewhat farfetched at first, but given the potential backlash, it gets it becomes a very reasonable factor. Also, the vulnerable economic state Curacao is in requests a well-thought-through approach, as the burden should not be disproportionately high for local communities.

### Desk research

In addition to my time spend observing, a significant amount of the data collected for this research comes from desk research and will consist out of the analysis of different policy documents of the involved governments within the kingdom, as well as relevant reports of international-governmental and non-governmental organisations about the situation of migration and refugees in general and more specifically on the Venezuelan refugee crisis. Some information that I have gathered in order to conduct the desk research came from social media platforms, predominantly Twitter and LinkedIn (to a lesser degree, Facebook and Youtube). These platforms provide me with the opportunity to benefit from the information that is being collected by multiple actors. The reports that are put out by governments, NGO's and journalists should be critically assessed when it comes to the different interests that are at hand. Other than sheer information, the discourse of these reports could prove very vital in the analysis of different ways of framing the refugees and the crisis situation in a broader sense.

In addition to the observations and the desk research, I have had numerous formal and informal conversations to add to the data and provide further explanation. Some of the people I have spoken prefer not to be mentioned nor quoted in any form throughout the thesis. Most of these conversations I had, were not necessarily aimed at gathering specific

inside, but rather as a sounding board or to hear out some of their findings or visions on the matter.

### Concluding Methodological Remarks

To summarize: in my research, I have focussed on exploring the unwelcoming response to Venezuelan migrants on Curacao. In this context, I have identified two main actors who directly or indirectly influence this particular situation, multiple external parties that have signalled violations in the treatment of Venezuelan refugees who are the apparent victims of the approaches and decisions altogether. During my time as an intern, I have observed various conversations, meetings and other outputs regarding the situations. To provide the reader with a decent understanding of the different interests and actors that are involved, I have written a set of perspectives that derive from the observations, and overall paper notes that I took as an intern.

### 3. Theoretical concepts of migration

#### The Framing of Migrants/Refugee.

Framing can be understood as the process by which people develop a specific conceptualisation of an issue, object or person or reorient their view on an issue (Chong, 2007, pp. 104-105). In this particular definition, a framework is a construct of people, influenced by external input. The external input, aimed explicitly at shaping the view of other people, I also understand as framing. In this case, the act of framing is not the process by which people develop a specific frame, but the process of developing a specific frame for the people. Framing in this context refers to the system of views and beliefs that appeal to its members or believers. Based on the frames, they tend to motivate their actions (Benford & Snow, 200). In the debate on migration in the contemporary setting of immigration at the borders of Europe there has been a clear distinction between the 'merely economic' refugee, that comes to seek employment, or the 'asylum-seeking refugees' that fled a warzone or those who face political persecution in the country of origin (De Genova, 2013).

In order to tick any of the boxes, it has to be proven that the person has fled a country in a state of disarray (In other words: if a particular immigrant fits the frame). Although this seems straightforward, it depends on who is setting the rules. Destination countries are able to pre-determine the "safe countries" and the "conflicted countries". The Netherlands utilises a list of 'safe countries of origin', which mostly contains European countries (Rijksoverheid, 2018). De Genova (2013) describes the process of setting up asylum criteria for non-citizens as "completely predicated upon suspicion" (De Genova, 2013, p. 1180). It does not matter what the background is of an immigrant; it matters if it fits the frame of being of desirable origin. These asylum regimes "disproportionately disqualify asylum seekers and convert them into illegal and deportable" (De Genova, 2013, p. 1181). By creating the difference between illegal and legal migration, individuals are criminalised, making them allegeable for deportation.

De Genova (2017) further explores the framing of refugees in the recent proclaimed 'refugee crisis' in and around the Mediterranean. Many migrants that tried to reach Europe via the dangerous Mediterranean Sea found their graves (IOM UN Migration, 2019). The tragedies that were on display on the southern border of the EU were quickly deemed a refugee crisis. This implied that the situation got out of control, and the EU should step in to save people's lives from being lost. Nonetheless, it is the EU's border-regime that lets migrants no alternatives to reach mainland Europe other than risking the dangerous Mediterranean (De Genova, 2017). Illegalisation of people has been proven the modern method of othering those that are no welcome in society (Van Houtum, 2010). By the creation of lists, excluding selected nationalities of applying for visas to the Schengen, the EU aims to keep less fortunate people of the world out of their prosperous society (Van Houtum, 2010). Being born isn't a free choice, but it will decide the accessibility to the world, a phenomenon being described as the lottery of birth (Van Houtum, 2010). Along the lines of nationalities, the world has been divided into good and bad places of origin, in welcome and unwelcome people (Van Houtum, 2010). As is proven in the cases I am presenting in this research; this policy does not just apply to the (Continental) European context. However, when comparing the unwelcoming response of the Curacao government towards Venezuelans and the EU's border-regime, there is a difference when it comes to the implementation of certain restrictions towards migrants from particular nationalities. The same group of people that are now trying to reach the island undetected, sometimes by boarding a vessel and arriving in the dark or sail through stormy weather, used to be able to arrive by plane basically without restrictions and for a variety of different reasons (Casey, 2016). Today, the principal reason for Venezuelans to travel to Curacao is for the sole purpose of a chance at better life-conditions for themselves and their families.

Framing is a powerful tool which is currently being used to exclude selected non-citizens from permanently entering a state. To provide further perspective, I would like to touch upon the motivations behind framing migrant in a harmful matter instead of approaching this vulnerable group from a human rights perspective. Cook (2010) elaborates on the

advocate's dilemma discussing why human rights are not (frequently) used as a frame to approach groups of migrants entering the United States (Cook, 2010). Universally, human rights are embedded concepts, but for some reasons, it is completely denied or degraded when denying refugees access. Economic impact, security and law arguments become a legitimate argument for structurally excluding people, in the context of protecting a country's interest (Cook, 2010, p. 146). Despite all numerous conventions on human rights and refugees, there is no universal approach towards migration, let alone a way to globally enforce such standards.

Before I present a comparison between the European and the Caribbean migration case, there are two ways of framing that have been used to label the Venezuelans who are coming to Curacao, by their government and has been backed by Dutch ministers (Harbers, 2019; Otten & Glissenaar, 2018). Firstly, practically every Venezuelan immigrant arriving at this point has solely economic motives and should, therefore, be treated as an economic migrant. Secondly, taking care of the group of Venezuelans and potentially providing them with some sort of asylum would spike a growth of the number of people arriving, in other words: a suction effect or pull-factor. These two ways of framing adverse effects and motives of migrants completely fit the narrative of protecting a country from negative economic impact and security issues (Cook, 2010). According to the Curacao ministries, the refugees pose a threat to both the economy as well as a threat to overall law and order, especially when the island was to be 'overflowed' with Venezuelans (Rhuggenaath, Bijstandsverzoek Curacao, 2019). I will return to this topic when I further elaborate on the situation on Curacao.

It is interesting to note that the UN does make a distinction in what motivates a migrant to migrate. However, the UN in the first place uses the term migrant worker instead of an economic migrant to describe immigrant with economic motives. In the General Assembly resolution 45/158, International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (December, 1990), a definition is given implying that a migrant worker is someone who is to be engaged, is engaged or has been engaged

in a remunerated activity in a State of which he or she is not a national (article 2.1). Push-factors are vital in determining whether an immigrant is a refugee or a migrant worker. Practically it comes down to this: the migrant worker emigrates because one is looking for improved living standards because the economic opportunities or conditions in the country that he or she is leaving are insufficient. The big difference between a migrant worker or a refugee is the leading cause of one's departure. Migrant workers do not leave because they fear the persecution of any sort and they leave out of the free will (General Assembly, 1990). For a refugee, generally speaking, the leading cause of their departure is forced, and return cannot happen safely. The UN 1951 Refugee Convention (Article 1.A.2) states: "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted (..) is outside his country". Also, the inability or unwillingness to return fearing persecution grants an individual the rights of a refugee. Nevertheless, a refugee could have the intention to look for better economic opportunities abroad, that does not take away from the fact that the departure is forced and a safe return is impossible.

The other commonly used term, or effect rather, is the suction-effect. In Dutch migration discourse, it is known as 'aanzuigende werking', which is mentioned quite a lot in relation to the arrival of Venezuelan refugees. It derives from the theory that facilitating any sort of support for arriving migrants/refugees increases the rate of migration due to the improvement of the potential conditions for future migrants. A study was written on this particular discourse in the context of rescuing migrants in the Mediterranean titled: 'Blaming the Rescuers' (Pezzani & Heller, 2017). An assumption that rescuing operations would increase the number of migrants willing to risk crossing the sea. Therefore, providing support for the 'illegal' migrants would be a pull-factor or create a suction-effect. In this particular line of thought, the pull-factor outweighs the push-factor, not the situation in the countries migrants depart is the leading cause of migration, but better chances of making it across would be responsible for an increase in the migration rate. However, in the report, there was no direct causal link found between the actions of assisting NGO's operating in Libyan waters and the increased crossings by African migrants. This fact was

strengthened by an increase of 46% through the Moroccan-Mediterranean route during the same period where at the time no assisting NGO's were active (Pezzani & Heller, 2017).

Now realising that this is a single analysis showing that there is no causal link between the increase of migration in a specific timeframe and the presence of supporting rescue vessels in the Mediterranean, it does show that responsive phenomena could be confused for the cause. Keeping that in mind, the inability to prove that providing supporting activities for migrants is a pull-factor, it does also imply that the same applies to the opposite. Intentionally (or unintentionally) worsening conditions for approaching migrants might not decrease the number of people crossing, nor is it proven that it prevents destination states from having to deal with an increased number of migrants.

The European-Mediterranean 'refugee crisis' and the Caribbean equivalent: a comparison

In the decades after the Second World War, different groups of people in the Americas have been on the run. Some people fled civil war or escaped their country to avoid persecution from an authoritarian regime, and others were looking to find better opportunities to have a good life. As crises struck different countries in the region over time, flows of people changed in numbers and directions. Some aimed at going just far enough northwards until they had reached the United States, which has been an important destination for many Central-Americans looking for a better life (Cook, 2010). Others did not have the opportunity to decide upon their destination and were removed from their land and were displaced internally, which happened during internal conflicts in Colombia and Peru (IDMC, 2019). Motives to leave, change over time. Places that were once a destination turn into areas people want to leave. Migration is constant, and so is the anticipation towards migrants. Like some of the researches discussed above have described, destination states decide whether a migrant is granted access, or whether a migrant is seen as an unwanted intruder. In other words: it does not matter where you come from or why you chose a destination; it matters if your nationality is on the right side of the list.

To enter the European Union, your nationality has to be eligible to enter the Schengen zone. As expected, the list of nationalities that do not require a visa for the Schengen zone contains most European countries, as well as 'developed Western' countries like Australia, the USA and Japan. Slightly more interestingly, the list does also include most South- and Central-American countries (ironically including Venezuela) as well as most Caribbean and Pacific small island states (Schengen visa info, 2019). However, Middle-Eastern and African countries are dominated on the list, including nationalities that require a visa for the Schengen zone. The countries in the regions that are excluded from relatively easy access to the EU suffer from conflict and widespread unrest more often than the countries on the 'no visa required' list (Greenhill, 2016). Whether intentional or not, visa requirements exclude most refugees in the European hinterland to travel to the EU in conventional ways.

As written in an overview report of the European Parliament from 2016, the EU has budgeted roughly nine billion Euros to regulate immigration for the period from 2014-2020 (Kamarás, Saunier, & Todaro, 2016). The regulation of immigration focusses partly on legal immigration, asylum and integration (3.1 billion is reserved for this particular cause). About 3.8 billion is spent on controlling the outer borders of the EU and is used to finance (joined) police actions, border patrols, and visa matters (Kamarás, Saunier, & Todaro, 2016). Although the spending does not show the full picture, it indicates that at least as much effort seems to be put into controlling the outer border, as is spent on welcoming migrants. Greenhill (2016) has an interesting way of describing it: open arms behind bars.

Besides patrolling the borders of the EU by deploying all sorts of police forces, and coast guard, the EU also relies on its partners in and around the Mediterranean. In order to further restrain the flow of refugees to the EU, the controversial Turkey deal was made. Even Libya, completely torn apart by the aftermath of the fall of Khadafy's dictatorship in 2011, is a partner of the EU in the battle against human trafficking (Greenhill, 2016, pp. 330-331). The sad truth is that these policies only force migrants to pick an alternative, sometimes more dangerous routes. Signing the EU-Turkey deal spiked the number of migrants choosing the route through Libya (Greenhill, 2016).

If you look at the current migration crisis that has struck the region surrounding Venezuela, there are a few comparisons to be drawn with the European context. When regarding the Syrian civil war as one of the main catalysts of refugees fleeing their homes, like in the Venezuelan context, the vast majority is given shelter in neighbouring countries. Where the vast majority of Syrians has found refuge in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, most Venezuelans fled the land borders with Colombia and Brazil (UNHCR, 2019) (IOM UN Migration, 2019). However, a trend that is dissimilar to the situation regarding Syrian refugees is the fact that more than half of the Venezuelans refugees travel beyond Venezuela's directly neighbouring countries (IOM UN Migration, 2019). This is probably due to a more welcoming approach of most Latin American countries. However, this welcoming approach seems to be on its last legs, as Peru started to require passports and visas from Venezuelans immigrants. Given the deteriorated situation in Venezuela, these are very hard to come by, if not impossible, to acquire (Andina, 2019).

The vast majority of Venezuelan refugees left the country overland, comparable to most Syrian refugees when trying to reach their neighbouring countries. However, the most deadly routes are those that require crossing a massive body of water, like the Mediterranean- or the Caribbean sea. In both contexts, this particular form of transportation is being used to reach a destination. Crossing the Mediterranean does almost always mean reaching Europe, that is if you manage to cross it. The same thing applies for Venezuelans, as some have set sail for the ABC-islands or their North-Eastern neighbouring island Trinidad. Crossing presents an opportunity for freedom, safety or at least some sort of better opportunities. However, boarding a vessel heading for the wanted destination presents itself with a tremendously high risk. Only in 2018 alone, 466 deaths were recorded of migrants that attempted the crossing of the Mediterranean (IOM UN Migration, 2019). On the other side of the world, numbers are no less shocking. From late April (23rd) until June 2019, there were 80 recorded deaths in the Caribbean sea. In all instances, this regarded Venezuelans trying to reach the islands of Curacao and/or Trinidad (ANP, 2019).

What is driving these people on both continents to risk the deathly route? Does the push-factor outweigh the pull-factor? Are there no alternatives? Unarguably interesting questions. However, these questions are framed from a migrant's perspective. These questions presume that there is an element of choice and free will. What if you turn the questions around. Why is there no safe entrance route to the EU for most African and Middle-eastern migrants and or refugees? And why do some Venezuelans choose a dangerous landing on the shores of Curacao over their right of the visa-free entrance? In other words: what role does the destination country play in creating this deathly scenario? Previously I have discussed the border-regime of the EU, and although it is proclaimed to prevent refugees from coming in and it is supposed to discourage human trafficking in the Mediterranean, it is causing the deaths of many migrants regardless of its supposed intentions (De Genova, 2017). Similar to the EU, in the Caribbean context 'discouragement' of migration might have led to an increase of Venezuelans risking the crossing of the sea. The deployed discouragement policies on Curacao, however, are dissimilar to that of the EU. Reaching the shores of the EU means (in most cases) that every migrant at least has the opportunity to file for asylum (regardless of the likelihood of it being sustained). Being detected at the shores (or anywhere) of Curacao means immediate detention, no possibility of requesting asylum and eventually deportation. By deploying these policies, highly disputed by many NGO's and against international treaties, Curacao is (partly) responsible for increased risk-taking of Venezuelans that try to reach the island undetected, fearing potential arrest.

In both the EU-Mediterranean context as well as the Curacao-Venezuela context, the destination is actively trying to control migration flows. Restrictive migration regimes change over time. In some areas, policies have been deployed for decades in order to control migration, as migration flows have been somewhat constant. Think of more well-known examples as the Mexican-US border or the EU-North African border (De Haas, Natter, & Vezzoli, 2016). The placement of a wall or a high border fence is feeding the idea that these borders have become harder to cross. The externalisation of borders by

controlling migration outside the EU in neighbouring countries, or the securitisation of migration by actively linking it to national security, are two examples of policies that build upon the idea of increasing these restrictive border regimes (De Haas, Natter, & Vezzoli, 2016). In the example of the Schengen-visa requirements list, a selective trend is also visible. Restrictiveness can increase or decrease depending on the selection of a destination region. Clearly, the two examples of the US-Mexico border and the EU borders are examples of experienced and institutionalised border regimes. Although migration flows fluctuate in these surroundings based on the tendencies of the origins of migrants, there is extensive experience in dealing with migration (whether it being in a humane or non-humane way). Therefore, (restrictive) migration regimes develop over time, mostly affected by incidents or trends from past experiences. The terrorist attacks on 9/11 had a severe impact on border-control, pre-dominantly on airport-security and the narrative of terrorism and national security (Nguyen, 2005). A total lack of experience in adapting to fluctuations in migration flows, or dealing with far-reaching incidents can understandably result in inadequate actions towards migration and migrants. If there is no precedent, no experience, what does a government fall back on when a precarious situation occurs?

This is where the comparison between the European context and the Antillean context ends, based on a number of factors. To go without saying, neither Aruba or Curacao has prior experience with the arrival of refugees. That being said, labour-migration is not a new phenomenon to neither of them. Another critical factor that varies from the European context is the difference in governance experience. Both Aruba and Curacao went through their process of autonomisation (although in different time-frames and through different steps), but neither of the two islands is entirely sovereign.

### Autonomy, sovereignty and sub-nationalism

The behaviour of the Curacao government towards migration is vital to this research. However, given the short history of the autonomous status, Curacao obtained in 2010, a deeper analysis of what this status actually entails and how it should be interpreted in the context of Venezuelan migration is important. In the current approach towards refugees

on Curacao, it is their own government that claims that it is inclined to act this way due to the lack of capacity in terms of size, financial assets and the fact that the economic malaise does not allow any mass-influx of people in need of help (Rhuggenaath, Bijstandsverzoek Curacao, 2019). Based on these arguments, the local government is denying its responsibility to proactively and thoroughly providing help for refugees. According to the Netherlands (speaking on behalf of the Kingdom) immigration, and therefore the response to refugees is an 'interior affair' Referred to in the NCKN as landsaangelegenheid which roughly translates to country's affair which implies the sole responsibility of Curacao for taking care of refugees (Tweede Kamer, 2018).

To get a better understanding of the specific case of Curacao, the autonomous status needs exploration and some context. By understanding the difference between sovereignty and autonomy it comes to show that it trickles down to subtle details that potentially mean a great deal. At first, the two concepts seem very similar, and they are to an extent. However, the discrepancy between the two means a world of difference when it comes to certain delicate matters. Both promote free will and oppose to authoritarian power. Both are considered a form of self-determination. Nonetheless, autonomy indicates the existence of a central authority, that being the understanding of an autonomous entity within a state in most European countries (Suksi, 2011, pp. 2-3). The exact implications of the autonomous status for Curacao were agreed upon in conventions prior to the 10th of October 2010. From that moment on, the Netherlands Antilles stopped to exist, and the autonomous country of Curacao was born. Several alterations were made in the Constitutional Order of the Kingdom, and many responsibilities were shifted to the new formed independent entities in the Caribbean Netherlands. To be able to analyse the process of gaining the autonomous status and the installation of new institutions that were a result of the agreements, the historical framework will require some further exploration. This could be valuable when addressing the current behaviour and the response of the government of Curacao towards the arrival of refugees and their behaviour towards and within the Kingdom of The Netherlands.

#### 4. The kingdom, the road to autonomy, and Curacao after October 10th 2010

Amongst the world most famous explorers who travelled the world during the Age of Discovery were not too many Dutch seafarers. However, for a brief period of time the Dutch had a significant presence in various spots in the 'New world' and established a prosperous position in some of the most thriving trade routes (Oostindie G. , 2008). Some of the trade posts the Dutch had established were further conquered and colonised as some were gained through exchanging land with other colonisers (Oostindie & Klinkers, 2012) In the decades prior to the Second World War, and the period of decolonisation that followed, the Kingdom of the Netherlands consisted out of: the Netherlands, the Dutch Indies (present day Indonesia and Papua New Guinea), Suriname, and Curacao and Dependencies (including: Aruba, Bonaire, St. Maarten, Saba and St Eustatius). After the war of independence in the Dutch Indies shortly after the Second World War the kingdom overseas territories were reduced to the Caribbean (Oostindie & Klinkers, 2012).

The first king of the Netherlands, Willem I set out a plan for the colonies and believed that all assets of the Kingdom were profitable. However, this point of view changed during the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The Dutch Indies were the absolute cash cow, and the West Indies (all the Caribbean colonies) were actually showing a loss in terms of revenue (Oostindie & Klinkers, 2012, p. 22). Around this time and from this point on there were arguments raised to get rid of these colonies that were turning a loss. Selling colonies was not uncommon as the last colony of the Netherlands in West-Africa was sold to the British in 1871 (Mccaskie, 1980). Remarkably, there was an interested party for a takeover of the ABC-Islands as well. The Venezuelans were willing to take the islands (Oostindie & Klinkers, 2012, p. 22). Nevertheless, the overseas territories in the Caribbean remained in the possession of the Dutch kingdom.

The years after World War II unchained the beginning of a new wave of decolonisation predominantly in Asia and later followed by Africa. A first wave of decolonisation already took

place in the early eighteenth century and was mostly concentrated throughout the Americas (Strang, 1990). The famous liberator of the South-American continent, Simon Bolivar (co)liberated multiple countries including Venezuela, which used to be a Spanish colony. However, Caribbean overseas territories of the Dutch Kingdom were never affected by the first wave of decolonisation that struck the South American continent in the 19<sup>th</sup> century . When the Japanese capitulated and the Dutch-Indies were liberated from over three years of occupation, Indonesian Nationalists proclaimed the independent state of Indonesia. The considered 'crown jewel' of the Dutch colonies was lost in the Indonesian Independence War and in 1949 the Netherlands officially recognised the sovereignty of the Indonesian state (Penders, 2002) .

Interestingly, given the hostilities between the Dutch Royal Army in the Indies and the Indonesian nationalist, the Queen of the Netherlands gave a famous speech in 1942 claiming that the colonial relations would be dissolved. The statement raised a lot of expectations in the colonies but was not followed up properly until the 15<sup>th</sup> of December 1954 when the Charter for the Kingdom of the Netherlands was installed (Oostindie & Klinkers, 2012). This Constitutional Order was placed above the Dutch constitution and described a voluntary collaboration between the Antilles, Suriname and the Netherlands and it created the foundation of the current division of tasks (Oostindie & Klinkers, 2012, p. 23). At this point, it was decided that defence, foreign affairs, citizenship, and the warranty of good governance would become (or remain) responsibilities of the kingdom as a whole. The kingdom's government: The Dutch government combined with an authorised minister of each of the Caribbean countries, would decide over the kingdom matters. Also, equality was an important segment in the new constitutional order. All the countries in the kingdom would be on the same level, this particular statement was aimed at the biggest colony of and the most important one: Indonesia. It was not aimed at the relatively small parts in the Caribbean that combined had less than half a million inhabitants (Oostindie & Klinkers, 2012).

## Autonomous, not sovereign. Towards sub-national(ist) islands

In the decade after the revision of the kingdom, there was a sense of satisfaction with the new direction the kingdom was heading. This sentiment lasted until the revolt of 1969 on Curacao, an important event in multiple regards. Striking workers initiated the outrage on 'trinta di mei'(30th May) in the oil-industry of Curacao that were forced to work for lower paychecks and less insurance, combined with the loss of many jobs due to the atomization of the refinery (Nationaal Archief, 2019). Different people started to join the striking workers out of anger with the declining economic situation and the racial-inequality on the island. Eventually, after big parts of the centre of Willemstad went up in smoke, the government of the Dutch Antilles asked Dutch marines to take back control and stop the plundering (Nationaal Archief, 2019). The outburst of violence revealed the socio-economic problems that the Antilles had, at the same time the incident was valued as proof that the Caribbean part of the kingdom would continuously need the aid and assistance from the Netherlands (Oostindie & Klinkers, 2012). This conclusion broke the mentality of satisfaction with the state of the kingdom. It marked the beginning of a, to some extent, still existing line of policy in which the government in The Hague increasingly started to realise the disadvantages of the ties it has with its former colonies.

Moreover, it also proved that the expectations of eventual independence of the Caribbean countries in the kingdom might have been incorrect (Oostindie & Klinkers, 2012). These findings were then translated to a different kind of political sentiment that is still present in contemporary Dutch politics. Multiple politicians claimed the money consuming, and aid addicted parts of the kingdom would be internally problematic to the nation if they would not become sovereign at some point in time. The scale of the 'problem' in terms of financial aid, however, was highly oversaturated.

Nonetheless, Suriname became independent in 1975, which reduced the number of countries in the kingdom to two. A country with roughly 400.000 inhabitants, spread out over six islands in an area that is 900 kilometres apart from North to South (The distance

between Curacao and St Maarten is 912 kilometres). The Antilleans however, were not very keen on following Suriname's lead.

As the completely different views on the future of the kingdom became clear, the Dutch government altered its policy towards the Antilles once more (Oostindie & Klinkers, 2012, p. 25). It had to accept that it could not force the islands into independence. When the Aruban separatist wanted to establish an autonomous country within the kingdom, The Hague accepted with the condition that within ten years the country would completely cut ties with the kingdom and move forward as a sovereign nation. However, the Arubans managed to remove the important condition and remained part of the kingdom (Oostindie & Klinkers, 2012, p. 26).

Whether the Dutch government liked it or not, independence of the Antilles was off the table. The Antilleans were not interested in complete independence, and the Dutch government was not able to force it upon them. However, the precedent set by Aruba gained the interest of other islands in the Dutch Antilles. St Maarten and Curacao would eventually follow the lead of Aruba in establishing an autonomous status, although the route towards the latest division within the kingdom took almost thirty years.

Fifty years after the initial instalment of the Constitutional Order the kingdom had scaled down on landmass in the Caribbean. Although Suriname chose the path of independence, a dissimilar trend was occurring on the Dutch Antilles. The urge for independence had been replaced for a wish for autonomy without leaving the kingdom (Oostindie & Klinkers, 2012). As Aruba achieved a particular status in 1983, the other five islands remained in some autonomous alliance; The Dutch Antilles. However, the common feeling of separatism between (some of) the island became undeniable. The Dutch Antilles had never really been a united entity due to multiple reasons. The distances between the Bovenwindse and Benedenwindse islands, differences in culture, language and population had always frustrated the process of becoming a functioning country (Oostindie & Klinkers, 2012). Since the majority of the population lived on Curacao, the epicentre of power had always been pivoted towards Willemstad (which housed the parliament for the Dutch Antilles), as

14 out of the 22 were entitled to Curacao (NRC, 1998). This created the sense of inequality amongst the smaller islands, and the feeling of constantly carrying the smaller islands amongst the inhabitants of Curacao. The situation in the Dutch Antilles became untenable, and the Dutch government realised the unsustainability of the country (Oostindie & Klinkers, 2012). Therefore, plans for further separation of the kingdom were presented. Plans that would eventually lead to completely dissolving the Dutch Antilles (a wish of most of the islands), and further clarify and strengthen of the authority of the kingdom (the wish of the Dutch government). In order to achieve this particular combination of separation of the Dutch Antilles and at the same time further strengthening the influence of The Hague, a specific situation was needed. This situation occurred when an economic crisis was threatening the Antilles, and only the Dutch government was able to bail out the islands (Oostindie & Klinkers, 2012, p. 36).

Although the islands were seeking some sort self-rule separate from one another, the will to become independent from the kingdom of the Netherlands has always been remarkably marginal. In 1993 a referendum for the independence of The Dutch Antilles was rejected by big margins (Baldacchino, 2004, p. 78). So what drives these particular aim for autonomy without complete sovereignty?

In 1987, a political scientist by the name of Paul Sutton predicted that ten, then non-sovereign, territories would gain complete independence within a five-year time-span (Baldacchino, 2004, p. 77). Amongst these ten territories was the island of Aruba.

#### Box 1. Curacao's socio-economic situation

Curacao is the biggest and most populous country in the Dutch Caribbean. 160 thousand people live on the island that is roughly 440 square kilometres. Aruba is the second in terms of population (105 thousand) and in terms of size Bonaire would rank second (290 km<sup>2</sup>).

In comparison to the other islands in the region Curacao has a significantly higher rate of unemployment. 14.1% compared to 7.7% in Aruba and 6.2% in St Maarten. Youth unemployment is even more alarming, one in every three Curacaos youngsters, between the age of 15 and 25 is unemployed (CBS, 2019).

Interestingly, Aruba gained its autonomous status in 1983 and was indeed supposed to become completely independent within ten years. However, this was not necessarily the wish of the Arubans, rather a wish of the Dutch government to establish a precedent for leaving the kingdom (Oostindie & Klinkers, 2012, p. 26). Against the prediction of Sutton and the expectations of the Dutch government, nine out of the ten of the named territories never reached independence by the year of 1992, and like Aruba till this day remain some sort of sub-national, autonomous status within a federation, association or kingdom (Baldacchino, 2004). This particular trend of seeking some 'shared rule' rather than gaining complete independence appears more frequently in the Caribbean, and it is not surprising that a lot these territories that favour sub-nationalism are islands (Baldacchino & Milne, 2006).

Furthermore, Baldacchino (2004) describes an interesting trend of decolonisation. The trend is particularly interesting because it regards the size of former colonial territories and its power to obtain independence. Bigger territories tend to gain independence first, followed by the smaller territories all the way down to the smallest units that prove to be stubborn in gaining independence at all (Baldacchino, *Autonomous but not sovereign?: A review of island sub-nationalism\**, 2004, p. 79). The parallel with the decolonisation of the Dutch Kingdom is remarkable. Indonesia, 4<sup>th</sup> in the world when it comes to most populous countries on earth and 7<sup>th</sup> in size, was the first to gain independence. Completely against the will of the Netherlands at that given time. Territories that remained consisted out of six islands and an area four times the size of the Netherlands on the mainland of the South American continent. The last and only territory that gained its independence was unsurprisingly the country of Suriname as is already discussed. In support of Baldacchino's reading: the islands showed no willingness to go down the path of Suriname and prefer to remain in the Kingdom. Since 1983 none of the islands in the Caribbean established complete independence. The widely shared vision is to maintain some sort of link to a bigger entity. It seems to be the case that the pros of remaining outweigh the cons. Given the average size of the sub-national islands in the Caribbean, in terms of both population

and landmass, there are economic disadvantages as well as issues with security and diplomacy.

Due to their limited capacities partly caused by geographical disadvantages, most of these Caribbean sub-national states can be defined as small island development states (SIDS) (Briguglio, 1995). Briguglio describes a set of elements most small island states deal with, which allows an insight into the reasoning behind not wanting to be independent states. Other than the economic disadvantages of having a small market, lack of diversification in export and pre-dominant absence of natural resources, small size also complicates managing a good public administration and governance (Briguglio, 1995, p. 1617). Small size has its implication on many aspects of society including governance and the state. A lack of workforce is most likely the biggest issue for every island in the kingdom. Having to run multiple ministries while lacking the human resources to employ experienced and efficient administrators in every position is a very big challenge. Combine that fact with a constant flow of young students leaving the island for further education, and a result is a country that lacks experienced and educated employees in many (public) sectors. Another effect of the brain-drain Curacao and other islands in the kingdom are facing is the ageing of parliament caused by the lack of young talent in politics. A common phenomenon amongst SIDS is a specialist who originates from the islands that permanently settle abroad, often in the state of the former coloniser (Briguglio, 1995, p. 1617). To counter this phenomenon, Curacao tries to create impulses for young professionals to return. However, in one of their own researches, they have found that returning to Curacao also brings an additional barrier for potential returnees. Amongst parts of the population a Curacao individual that leaves the island is seen as a traitor, or rather as 'makamba pretu' meaning: black Dutchman. Particularly using the term of Makamba (Dutchman) in a negative sense indicates the hard feelings that exist towards the Netherlands. There is a shared feeling amongst people of Curacao that the Dutchman act as 'know it alls', getting the label makes re-integrating into the Curacao society, after living in the Netherlands for a while not easy. The returnees feel like they are being seen as pedantic because they

bring their Dutch accumulated knowledge and tell the people of Curacao how things could be done differently (Groot, Pin, & Vasquez Villaseca, 2014). On top of the lack of career opportunities and differences in working culture, these are forming the barriers for young professionals to return to Curacao. Although the government of Curacao is constantly trying to change brain drain into brain gain, the conclusion is that a lack of capacity in the public administration still exists and the gap is not easily filled.

Stimulating good governance in the kingdom has been one of the priorities of the Dutch ministries. It is also included in the latest update of the kingdom's constitution, as one of the pillars of society that should be guaranteed by the kingdom as a whole (Overheid, 2017). Even, my internship organisation had the stimulation of good governance as one of its key tasks. Giving the history of corruption amongst politicians and public administrators, this seems like a necessity. Nevertheless, although good governance is an issue according to the Dutch ministries, the internal affairs are being carried out by these troubled institutions. From the tenth of October 2010, Curacao is running its government and ministries.

#### 10-10-10 agreements, implications for Curacao and the rest of the kingdom

During the years before the dissolvent of the Dutch Antilles, some of the islands had gained a substantial debt due to the bad economic situation and the constant deficit in the budgets. Part of the deal became the complete debt restructuring offered by the government of the Netherlands (Rijksoverheid, 2019). This gave the Dutch government the much-needed leverage to negotiate more influence. Since gaining more influence is a very touchy occurrence, giving the colonial past, the resistance towards the Netherlands grew and politicised (Oostindie & Klinkers, 2012, p. 35). The term; "recolonisation" was used frequently by political parties opposing Dutch influence on Curacao. Despite the presence of negative sentiments, negotiations were pushed forward in the first decade of the century which resulted in the New Charter for the Kingdom of the Netherlands (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015). Completely in line with sub-nationalism of many small islands in

the region, an autonomous status without cutting ties completely with the motherland (Baldacchino, 2004).

## Conclusion

To be able to understand the context of the current response towards Venezuelan migrants from Curacao and the kingdom (with the Netherlands being the dominant actor) one has to be aware of the relationship and the history there is between the former 'motherland' and newly autonomous nation Curacao. As the Charter for the Kingdom of the Netherlands was put in to place, a dynamic was set which channels decision-making. In the particular case of migration-related issues, the NCKN appoints autonomous countries as those responsible. The Netherlands, on the other hand, are historically reluctant in assisting and guiding the smaller countries in the kingdom. 'Going separate ways' had been the aim of the kingdom for most of recent history (Oostindie & Klinkers, 2012, p. 26)

On top of that, the NHCKN has set up the framework for a power structure that does not reflect the differences of the countries in terms of (population-)size, power or finances. This becomes very clear when some prominent politicians of both the Netherlands and the Antilles were asked how they rated the NCKN (Oostindie & Klinkers, 2012, p. 29). From the Dutch side, some arguments were raised over the fact that the constitutional order has not tools to break an impasse. According to others, the fact that The Netherlands agreed upon an equal vote between the three initial autonomous countries of the kingdom in 1954 was foolish (Oostindie & Klinkers, 2012, p. 29). Statements of some prominent Antillean politician were completely contradictory to those of the Dutch claiming that it established the 'perfect relationship' and that it guarantees the autonomous status of the Antilles (Oostindie & Klinkers, 2012, p. 29). So remaining attached to the motherland, in an 'autonomous not sovereign' status, is not always to every party's likings. The context of the Caribbean Netherlands proves this.

On the one hand there is a state that wants to release its ties with the remnants of a former empire as it presents a continuous burden, and on the other hand the islands that want their autonomy but not at the cost of losing its safe keeper (Baldacchino & Milne, 2006, p.

490). As this historical power-struggle stretches into the present, it is important to realise that historical events and experiences will always influence cooperation in the kingdom. I learned that much during this research.

## 5. Today's Venezuela. A short history of the Bolivarian Republic.

### The democratic and prosperous beacon of Latin America

Like most Latin American countries, Venezuela knows a very turbulent history. It was the first Spanish colony that revolted against the motherland. The country gained its independence in 1830 and until the turn of the century knew about 50 more armed uprisings (Blutstein, 1976). Governments came and went rapidly. More stability came as authoritarian regimes marked the first half of the 19th century. Juan Vicente Gomez (1908-1935) became the first dictator of the country, and it wasn't until 1958 that Venezuela got its first democratically chosen leader. Simultaneously with the process of adopting democracy, a different development had been taken place that was going to shape Venezuela's economy and the country in its entirety. The petroleum industry started to develop in the 1930s and picked up massively as the world increasingly started to demand oil in the 1960s and 1970s resulting in the situation that by 1976, Venezuela had become the wealthiest country on the South American continent (Blutstein, 1976, p. 27).

### The collapse of a petroleum fuelled economy and the rise of Hugo Chavez

Compared to most Latin American countries, Venezuela remained democratic throughout the decades after their first elected president in 1958. As the country was benefiting from its oil revenues, the economy flourished, and the nation became the prime example of prosperity in South America. Although most Latin American countries were affected by military regimes and dictatorship throughout the four decades following 1958, Venezuela managed to maintain democratic (Mainwaring, Brinks, & Pérez-Liñán, 2007, p. 139). However, the decade of the 1980s presented itself with a worldwide crisis, in which the price of oil was hugely affected (Lander & Fierro, 1996). In response to the 1983 'Black Friday' recognition of a world-wide crisis the oil prices plummeted which affected the Venezuelan economy as all its prosperity was based on the petroleum industry's revenue, *"the accumulation model based on the distribution of oil revenue had become exhausted"* (Lander & Fierro, 1996, p. 50). In an attempt to contain the crisis in Venezuela the inefficient administrations, fuelled by corruption, made a number of terrible decisions. The

Bolivar/dollar exchange rate had to be devaluated. Then, the repayment of external debt was prioritised, and the private capital flight was facilitated by handing out Venezuela's foreign exchange. To make matters worse, they have kept the idea alive that the state was still accumulating lots of oil revenue by taking on more foreign debt to fill the deficit (Lander & Fierro, 1996). During the second half of the 1980s, the inflation rate grew to double digits.

Venezuela fell from being the number one economy in Latin America in 1976 to the most deteriorated country of the 1980s, and 1990 as the GDP dropped by 40 per cent (Shifter, 2006). An era of prosperity had made way for uncertain times. In this turbulent period for the Latin American country, a new figure appeared on stage that completely redirected the country's future. A lieutenant colonel by the name of Hugo Chavez led a military coup in 1992, trying to bring down the government (Shifter, 2006, p. 47). He failed, costing him two years in prison. Nonetheless, his action had caught the attention of the public, and when he joined politics in 1998, he gained a lot of popularity due to his "*straight-talking populist charisma*" (Shifter, 2006, p. 47). He went on and became the president of Venezuela in 1999 and immediately made a mark by initiating a new constitution through a referendum that same year. The new constitution opened up the ability for consecutive re-election of the seat he held: the presidency (Shifter, 2006). It indicated the reestablishment of authoritarianism as Hugo Chavez went on and held the presidency up until his death in 2013.

During his presidency, Chavez gained world-fame by giving handouts to the poor and creating his socialist utopia build on the vast oil revenues the country was generating. Chavez gained complete control of the oil of industry in 2002. As the opposition tried to get rid of Chavez through all sorts of strategies including (surprisingly) another coup d'état, the president was able to counter most of the actions and legitimise the extension of his power by taking control of the armed forces (Shifter, 2006, p. 49). Serving the 'country's interest' he also established control over the state oil company *Petróleos de Venezuela* (PDVSA) after a big strike at the end of 2002 (Shifter, 2006, pp. 49-50).

Taking control of PDVSA marked an important event in the line of approach the Chavista government had adapted: gaining complete control of Venezuela's institutions and assets. A good example of establishing absolute control was the state-owned media empire that was rolled out in Chavez's early years. Tv-channels, numerous radio stations and all sorts of media outlets were created to preach Chavista propaganda (Maya, 2015). The absolute crown jewel of the media dominance and the propaganda machine was *Aló Presidente*; a tv-show Hugo Chavez hosted himself.

### Laying the foundation for a crisis

In the period between 2003 and 2008, Venezuela experienced a period of massive peaks in the oil industry. Most of the revenue was injected in society by setting up expansive fiscal policies, which decreased the gap of inequality in the country and it stimulated an increase consumption (Corrales & Hidalgo, 2017, p. 107). By increasing the social spending, both absolutely and relatively (due to the peak in oil revenue and bigger emphasis of government social programs), the middle-class recovered from its drastic reduction in the period of 1990-2005 (from 21% to 3% of the population), and the number of poor and very poor people were reduced (Corrales & Hidalgo, 2017, p. 107). This narrative of removing inequality in Venezuelan society is what made Chavez famous far beyond Latin America. However, the reduction of inequality in Venezuela did not outperform other Latin American countries. On the contrary, they ranked the lowest out of 13 Latin American countries that reduced inequality in the period between 2000-2008 (Birdsall, Lustig, & McLeod, 2010, p. 2). Even with the historically high total income out of oil-export in thirteen years of Chavista governments (an estimated 700 billion USD), the country did not succeed in outperforming neighbouring countries without the enormous export income (Corrales & Hidalgo, 2017). Why? How was Venezuela not able to perform better? The exact public spending is hard to pinpoint due to a complete lack of transparency. Actual data on Venezuela's public spending after 2006 is unavailable. However, Birdsall, Lustig and McLeod (2010) suggest an interesting trend: left-populist regime spend more on social spending than non-left governments, but are unable to

outperform social democratic governments. The actual social spending of Venezuela is probably lower than the Chavista regimes like everyone to believe. During the oil-boom, there are a few trends that indicate mismanagement in the economy: Inflation during the period of enormous income, and an overall decreased production (Corrales & Hidalgo, 2017, p. 109). In its wider attempts to lower food prices, the government started to import most of its nutritional goods to fill up shortages in the nations own production cycle. Nationalising agricultural assets and other food-related businesses had led to lower production. The discouragement of private entrepreneurship had led to a decrease in employment in the private sector which was compensated by a rise in employment in the public sector (Maya, 2015, p. 76). By the time Hugo Chavez's health got severely worse during the last 21 months of his life, the economy of Venezuela became very fragile one and would spiral down in crisis as soon as the oil income could not keep up with the constant spending to compensate for the lack of production. Even at times of high oil prices, the Venezuela economy couldn't sustain itself with solely the income out of oil-export. It raised its external debts, often based upon its petroleum sector in so-called oil-for-loan deals. In 2007 the Venezuelan government had made a deal with the Chinese for a 50 billion dollar loan in exchange for roughly 50,000 barrels per day (BPD) (Wang & Li, 2016, p. 818).

#### Newly 'elected' president Nicolas Maduro

Chavez's illness eventually resulted in his death, March 5 of 2013. Since his illness was mostly hidden from the public, this came as a major shock to the public. During his last appearance on television, early December of 2012, he announced that he would return to Cuba for another treatment, in the meantime Nicolas Maduro was the assigned person to manage the country in his absence. He never returned (Maya, 2015, pp. 77-78). His death was announced to the public on March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2013. In the two years of his illness, a temporary interim president was never chosen. The public was told that Chavez was able to rule the country despite cancer. His successor used the propaganda outlets to create a myth surrounding the former leader, who in his last words denounced Nicolas Maduro as the

designated next president of Venezuela (Maya, 2015, p. 78). Nicolas Maduro went on to win the April 2013 elections, but not quite by the margin he had hoped for. Chavez used to maintain his electoral support by his legacy, created by his propaganda machine over the years. Maduro had hoped that he would be able to get the Chavista voters behind him, but the people doubted his capabilities. Opposition leader, Capriles Radonski, was way behind in the polls leading up to the elections (Lopez & Watts, 2013). However, the elections resulted in a marginal victory for Chavez's protégé by only 1.5 per cent. The outcomes were immediately questioned by Capriles Radonski's party: the Democratic Unity Roundtable (Maya, 2015). They demanded a revision of the voting process. When the National Electoral Council denied this petition, the council quickly denounced Nicolas Maduro as the new president of Venezuela. This spiked violence in the protests that were already tensed because of the 'potentially fraudulent' outcome of the elections. By the inauguration of Nicolas Maduro on April the 19<sup>th</sup>, the death toll rose to eight and 61 protestors injured (Lopez & Watts, 2013).

Nicolas Maduro had inherited a country restructured by his former chief, who's image is still used throughout the country portrayed as the father of the revolution. His election had immediately created friction and violent protest amongst the public. As Nicolas Maduro was aware that his position was weak, the years following his election were used to get a stronger grasp of the nation (Smilde, 2018). Widespread protests on the streets were a thorn in Maduro's side. The Armed Forces were an outcome for both strengthening his weak position and beat down every form of protest and opposition (Smilde, 2018, p. 307).

### The Venezuelan (refugee) crisis

Roughly six years have passed since president Maduro got into power and the crisis in Venezuela became imminent. Estimations of the number of people that have fled the plagued country get outdated so quickly that by the time this thesis is published the numbers probably have changed severely. The same thing applies to the inflation rate, the average monthly income and the overall decline of Venezuela's living conditions due to shortages of mainly every basic good or service. There is a constant shortage in food,

medicine, drinking water, and even gasoline(!) is not the assured good it once was in the country with world-wides biggest known oil reserves (Caraballo-Arias, Madrid, & Barrios, 2018, p. 512). However, the list continues, as Venezuela also suffers from regular power outages and failing (public) transportation (Reuters in Caracas, 2019). The authorities blame the entirety of the crisis on the intervention of foreign "imperial" powers; it even claimed the power outages to be the result of cyber sabotage by the United States (Gunia, 2019). Although the Venezuelan authorities are making bolt claims, the sanctions that are imposed on the country's export and foreign assets are hurting the economy (Sullivan, 2019).

## 6. Curacao's dilemma regarding Venezuela and Venezuelans

### Venezuela-Curacao relations

Just 60 kilometres of sea is separating Venezuela from Curacao. When there were still airliners operating on the direct route, it used to take you less than an hour to fly from Willemstad to Caracas. Due to its proximity, Venezuela served as a medical haven for the ABC-islands, and Venezuelans use to travel to the islands for their holidays. Crossing the border had never been an issue, not for goods nor for persons. As the islands struggle to produce enough recourses for their inhabitants, a lot of the fresh foods was shipped in from Venezuela. Although Curacao does not rely on the importation of goods from Venezuela, there has always been one asset that enhanced the ties between the two countries.

### The Isla refinery: over 100 years of petroleum industry on Curacao

The petroleum industry on Curacao has partly shaped the economy and society in more ways than one might presume at first. In the early 1900s, while Venezuela started to exploit its recently discovered oil reserves, the Royal Shell was asked to help pump up some of the oil from Venezuelan fields. As a result of the exploitation operations, the CEO of Royal Shell decided to build a refinery, and due to its geographical advantages, he decided upon building it on Curacao (Leidel-Schenk, 2019). The Isla Refinery was eventually opened after the First World War in 1918 and played a significant role in fuelling allied fighter planes in the Second World War (Leidel-Schenk, 2019). Decades later in 1984, Royal Shell decided that it did not want to extant its operations on Curacao. At this point, signs of pollution had shown in and around the refinery. The proposition was made to clean up the facilities as part of the complete closure of the refinery. However, local authorities were scared to close the Isla refinery as it employed over 2000 workers and cover up to 25% of the entire GDP of the island (Leidel-Schenk, 2019).

## Lease-contract with PDVSA

As the Curacao authorities wanted to keep the refinery running, afraid of the backlash of complete closure, they opened up to potential new parties. Royal Shell had pulled the plug because the facility had become outdated and barely provided profits for the companies, but despite the conditions of the refinery, a new company was found that was willing to lease the refinery. The Curacao authorities decided to buy the refinery for a symbolic one Gulden, depriving Shell from its responsibilities to clean up the polluted site (Kreling, 2018). PDVSA has been the sole lease-contractor since 1985 and has created an additional layer to the Curacao-Venezuela relations. State-owned PDVSA became an important employer for Curacao and provided the continuation of the petroleum economy that was perceived as indispensable.

## The political character of oil-refinement on Curacao

Why did the Curacao authorities fear the closure of the refinery in the 1980s? Due to the substantial loss of jobs and negative economic impact? Most probably. However, there is a related aspect that is always present in the background: oil-refinement on Curacao is heavily politicised. In 1969 on the 13<sup>th</sup> of May thousands of people took the streets protesting all-out inequality in Curacao society, the protest was initiated by a strike of Isla workers demanding equal pay (Broere, 2019). The movement of Isla workers grew in the present days into a very well organised, and potentially the most influential labour-union on Curacao. This became very clear when the permanent closure of Isla started to circulate again when destitute PDVSA was sanctioned, and all their foreign assets were ceased (Sullivan, 2019). The PWFC (the Isla refinery labour-union) started to put pressure on the government by threatening with strikes and protests. The position of the refinery in Curacao's society and economy is seen as essential by the majority. In my own experience, discussing the potential closure of a polluting facility is out of the question. Every politician that would decide to close the refinery will risk the backlash of the workers and their labour-union, and they have proven in history to be very powerful.

## Post-PDVSA era for the Isla refinery

The actual importance of the refinery to the economy of Curacao has demised over the years. PDVSA's takeover in the eighties might have been the saviour of the refinery. As the international sanction keep preventing PDVSA from utilising the refinery, Curacao has been on the lookout for a new partner to lease the refinery, and to guarantee the jobs of 2000 employees. In reality, it seems that there are not too many parties interested in leasing an outdated, polluting refinery in times of a global energy transition. With that in mind, PDVSA remains the only party willing to continue their operations in the Isla refinery, but with the sanctions preventing the Venezuelan crude oil from entering the harbour of Willemstad the refinery remains mostly inactive.

## Framing of refugees by host country Curacao

Many people of Curacao share family-ties with Venezuela and vice-versa, at its peak almost 20% of all tourists were of Venezuelan descent, and the requirements for a working-permit were quite accessible (CTB, 2017). Venezuelans were very welcome to work and recreate on Curacao, up until three to four years ago. The sudden policy change of Curacao, indirectly illegalising Venezuelan migrants, anticipating on the crisis at its borders, is what makes this particular case unique. Adding into to the matter that Curacao relatively recent gained their autonomous status and is now for the first time dealing with a situation alike (Rhuggenaath, Bijstandsverzoek Curacao, 2019; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015).

Previously I have addressed the concept of framing. In the context of Curacao, there are a few notable aspects. When members of the Curacao government discuss Venezuelan migrants, they are referred to as economically motivated. The reframing the refugees on curacao into economic refugees removes the idea of human beings in need of direct assistance (a refugee fleeing war or humanitarian crisis) into an individual seeking fortune solely for personal gains (Gobiernu di Korsou, 2019). Although, the government admits that it would want to help it's Venezuelan brothers if it could (Rhuggenaath, Bijstandsverzoek Curacao, 2019).

In the legitimisation of this approach, the government of Curacao refers to its inability to shelter the Venezuelans and their own precarious economic state (Rhuggenaath, *Bijstandsverzoek Curacao*, 2019). Like the distinction that is made in the context of migration towards the EU. The official description of the Government of Curacao is as followed: An economic refugee generally leaves his country out of free will, and mostly in the hope to get a better life, according to the government of Venezuela is suffering from an economic crisis. Therefore, its citizens are economic migrants (Gobiernu di Korsou, 2019; Gobiernu di Korsou, 2019).

However, in the case of Venezuela, the region you come from or the nationality you have is decisive in what your presumed intentions are. As discussed in the theoretical section, De Genova (2013) describes this exclusion based upon suspicion generated by once nationality as a common practice of asylum regimes (De Genova, 2013). My point is that coming from Venezuela somehow makes one by default an economic refugee, and this does not apply to other people coming in. The observation of Curacao that the number of Venezuelans that migrated to the island increased rapidly made them reframe the idea of all Venezuelans, to exclude them from settling on the island fearing an increasing trend (Rhuggenaath, *Bijstandsverzoek Curacao*, 2019). Reframing, in this context, is used as a means to legitimise exclusion.

In more fortunate times Venezuelans were welcome to come to Curacao to work or to spend their money. But, Venezuelans do not come to Curacao to spend money in their hotels and restaurants anymore (CTB, 2017). What is left is a significant number of people that require help. Even on the lower end of the estimations, it is certain that the number of Venezuelans currently staying on Curacao is severe given the marginal size of Curacao's society (IOM UN Migration, 2019). The number of refugees, fleeing a crisis that have been setting foot on Curacao is worrisome, if not sheltered properly.

Welcoming thousands of refugees could spark fear and incomprehension amongst the public, as (youth) unemployment rates are very high, and the economy on the island has been stagnated or declining for the last ten to twenty years (Rhuggenaath, 2017).

If Venezuelan migrants are framed as economic refugees (as portrayed by the government (Rhuggenaath, *Bijstandsverzoek Curacao*, 2019)), this adds additional pressure to the already fragile perception of the economy. The new government promised to improve economic conditions on the island in their coalition agreements in 2017 (Rhuggenaath, 2017). More mouths to feed and more competitors for very few jobs seems to be a scary idea. In my encounters with native inhabitants of Curacao, this view of the situation is mostly shared. The overall sentiment seems to trickle down to, 'we would like to help them, but we are too small'.

It is hard to determine exactly what drives the authorities on Curacao (and anywhere else) to state that Venezuelans migrants are by default have economic motives. Although, given their fragile economic stat, it seems to speak for itself. The problem, in my view, is the deliberate reframing. In the current description, none of the arrived Venezuelans is directly in need of assistance because they are solely fortune seekers as Venezuela is not that dangerous (Rhuggenaath, 2019). These assumptions have been proven to be false on several occasions. Former police agents, army defectors and people that openly supported the opposition do face prosecution in Venezuela, as has been documented by Amnesty International and the UN (Amnesty International, 2018). There is even individual evidence of Venezuelans on Curacao that are part of this endangered group (Drayer, 2019). An example of an army sergeant that had defected from Maduro's army and was about to be deported by Curacao back to Venezuela, where he had to fear for his life (Drayer, 2019). In the same article, published by Trouw in February of 2019, there is another incident that proves the incompetence of Curacao's treatment of Venezuelan refugees. A woman that had been given refugee status by the UNHCR, which should grant her protection from being deported, had been arrested anyway and was threatened with deportation (Drayer, 2019). In both instances, due to the mediation of NGO's deportation could eventually be avoided. But given the number of Venezuelans that have been arrested and deported already, based on the standardised assumption of them being economic refugees, it is hard to determine which people are facing prosecution upon their comeback in Venezuela.

Although Curacao did not recognise the 1951 Geneva Convention, they do follow the definitions of the UNHCR when it comes to determining whether or not someone is an economic refugee. Admittedly, in one of the requests from the prime-minister of Curacao for Dutch assistance in the situation, Rhuggenaath states the criticism on the deportation policies of the island (Rhuggenaath, 2019). Both countries are fully aware of the international aversion towards the practices on Curacao, and yet it continues till this day (Knops R. , 2018; Knops R. W., 2019).

## Undocumented

The current practice on Curacao already referred to in the thesis, involves arresting and detaining undocumented Venezuelans on Curacao. By 'undocumented' the authorities mean: 'not in possession of a legal document' granting one access and residence (temporarily or permanent) to Curacao. To be (temporary) allowed on the island, there are a few possibilities. Curacao does not require a visa for a temporary visit for Venezuelans, based on these requirements, many Venezuelans were able to get in. However, according to article 7 paragraph 1 of the Landsverordenening toelating en uitzetting (national regulation for admission and eviction) the definition of a tourist is: "a tourist is someone who stays on Curacao for no longer than three months, who comes for leisure, sports, healthcare, family matters, study, religious purposes or business visits, and who does not perform activities that he/she is being rewarded for" (P.B. 2014, no. 17; Pluijm-Vrede, 2010). A refugee does not meet the description of a tourist, for obvious reasons. Obtaining a (temporary) residence permit is bound to a strict set of rules unless you are an inhabitant of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. This means that Venezuelans have to apply for a residence permit if they want to obtain legal documentation. Residence permits are being granted by or on behalf of the Minister of Justice taking into consideration that granting a permit is not harming the public order, the common good or the overall economic situation of Curacao (Pluijm-Vrede, 2010, p. 5). One of the additional requirements for a residence permit is the payment of a deposit (Pluijm-Vrede, 2010, pp. 5-6).

Getting the required legal documents for Venezuelan refugees is impossible, since applying for asylum (or any refugee status) is a procedure that does not exist on Curacao (Amnesty International, 2018). Therefore, framing migrants as undocumented seems very unjust. It creates the false appearance of the existence of a right way to require legal documents, further criminalising the act of fleeing.

#### No Asylum-procedure, no shelter, no treaties

Understanding the motives of Curacao to pick this line of policies is vital to this thesis. In their own communique regarding the situations the reason for deporting Venezuelan refugees, 'despite the situation', mentions several reasons Curacao is not able to shelter these people. According to several government communiqués, the society of Curacao is not economically (especially the labour market) capable of absorbing thousands of immigrants (Gobiernu di Korsou, 2019; Rhuggenaath, 2017; 2019). Because the Venezuelans cannot support themselves economically, due to the lack of job opportunity, they would rely on governments benefits in terms of shelter. The government is not able to provide in that need, for the reasons that they lack experience, funds and capacity in orchestrating such shelter (Gobiernu di Korsou, 2019; Rhuggenaath, 2019).

Besides Curacao not having the capacity, funds, nor experience and its economy is in a fragile state, there is another reason that they have not implemented asylum procedures. The country fears that a well-laid out asylum-procedure and adequate sheltering will induce a suction-effect. They expect that more refugees would come if Curacao would improve the situation of arriving Venezuelans. In the words of the Minister of Justice: "there is an asylum-procedure on Curacao; however it has not been made public, and it is only known by my public servants because we did not want to create a suction effect" (Otten & Glissenaar, 2018, min. 14:00-14:21). In reality, the asylum procedures that are according to Girigorie is known by his co-workers, has not been proven to exist as of yet. However, more importantly, in this specific interview, which I have referred to before, he admits to not initiate in procedures to provide necessities for Venezuelans due to the fear of

attracting more. The suction effect narrative, in the EU-context, was never proven (Pezzani & Heller, 2017).

### Concluding remarks on the Curacao situation

The relation Curacao has with Venezuela is complicated and contains many layers. Curacao has lost a lot of economic activity due to the situation in Venezuela (Rhuggenaath, 2019). Primarily the country's refinery sector and the tourism sector (the biggest source of economic revenue) took a big hit (Sullivan, 2019; Rhuggenaath, 2019). These economic set-backs pile on top of a country already in an economic malaise (Rhuggenaath, 2017). As a result of the crisis in Venezuela, the country saw an increase in the number of migrants that arrived on the island and decided to refuse them access.

All arriving Venezuelan immigrants were deemed economic refugees. The alleged economic purposes of all Venezuelans removed the possibility of them to receive any protection based upon the universal protection of refugees. Based on Curacao's legislation, a person can be refused access or be deported if it might harm the economic situation on Curacao (Gobiernu di Korsou, 2018). The reframing of Venezuelan migrants who used to be welcome economic beneficial labourers and tourists, into unwelcome economic refugees is somewhat hard to comprehend. When exactly did all Venezuelans turn into economically harmful people?

The strategy of excluding migrants is hardly understandable from a humane perspective. Although the economic impact on Curacao is massive, it goes without standing that the approach is inhumane. The cycle that is created results almost every time in deportation without any proper background checks, because of the absence of a functioning asylum-procedure. At this moment, the potential threat of Venezuelans being persecuted after their deportation is completely being discarded. Simply every aspect of the immigration policies on Curacao begs for a more humane approach, in which the islanders are not forgotten.

## 7. Responsibility of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the accountability dilemma

The last actor in the situation that might have the key-role is the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Mostly, when referring to the kingdom, what is meant most of the time is the government of the Netherlands seating in The Hague. Yes, the kingdom has a council of ministers, but the most powerful entity in the Kingdom are the Dutch ministers that are involved in anything related to Kingdom affairs. As most actors and their motives are discussed already, there are a couple of questions unanswered. One of the most important questions is: what is the role of the kingdom in this situation. And eventually: why have they been behaving in a reticent manner?

Since October 2010 the Kingdom of the Netherlands went through a reorganisation. Before 2010 it consisted out of three countries, after October 2010 there were four. The Dutch Antilles were resolved, Curacao and St Maarten gained their autonomous status, and the smaller islands of Saba, St Eustatius and Bonaire became special municipalities of the Netherlands. As discussed previously in the thesis: although there are four countries in the kingdom, three of them have a sub-national, autonomous status. I discussed how this particular status does not shape to the likings of both parties in some instances. The advantages of a sub-national jurisdiction, providing an island with enough space to govern and protect its own identity, outweighs the benefits of full sovereignty. This does not seem to apply to The Netherlands. They would rather release the burden of the islands in the Caribbean rather than being its safe keeper (Oostindie & Klinkers, 2012). The political unpopularity of the Caribbean Netherlands, mostly with right-wing political parties, is a known fact (Oostindie & Klinkers, 2012, p. 38).

The Charter of the Kingdom of the Netherlands claims the equality of all countries in the kingdom (Overheid, 2017). In reality, it's hard to see that equality given the complete imbalance of power and capacity between the European Netherlands and all three of the Caribbean autonomous countries in the kingdom. As Oostindie (2012) points out that

values like 'equality' and 'mutual assistance' do not apply to the Kingdom of the Netherlands because of this imbalance or asymmetry of power and size (p.23).

This imbalance undermines the effectiveness of the statute when an autonomous island appeals to article 36 which states that all the countries are obliged to provide each other with assistance (Overheid, 2017). Understandably, when Curacao is this particular case requests assistance based on article 36, it is not St Maarten (an island of smaller than Curacao that is still recovering from the aftermath of disastrous hurricane Irma), or Aruba (that is struggling with the same need of assistance regarding Venezuelan refugees) that is going to provide assistance. It will come down to the interference of the Netherlands when a crisis occurs.

Recently, when Hurricane Irma severely damaged st Maarten, the Netherlands eventually assigned a budget for direct assistance and reconstruction (Algemene Rekenkamer, 2018). Although Curacao did their part by performing as a hub for humanitarian assistance, the difference in capacity will always be enormous, and therefore, assistance will always be provided according to scale. In the case of the hurricane struck St Maarten, 550 million Euros was eventually reserved for reconstructions. To put that in perspective, that is more than half the amount of Curacao's entire budget for 2018<sup>2</sup> (Gobiernu di Korsou, 2018). Article 36 seemingly puts all four countries on the same fictional level; in reality, this balance does not exist.

Where article 36 is stating that the countries in the kingdom should provide one another with assistance in time of need, article 43 §1 is leaning towards a more controlling relation within the kingdom. It states that every country carries the responsibility to establish and guarantee fundamental human rights, legal security and adequacy of governance (Overheid, 2017). Article 43 §2 than states that these values are part of the kingdom's affairs. This indicates that the countries should maintain some sort of mutual standard

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<sup>2</sup> Curacao's budget has a deficit of roughly 100 million euros.

across the kingdom regarding human rights, legal security and adequacy of governance. Now, I would argue that at least the first two values stated in article 43 are not being lived up to in Curacao. However, the statute does not specify how the Kingdom should be guaranteeing this. So in reality, article 43 §2 is not practised. The same sort of equality issue seems to apply here. Again, all eyes seem to be on the Netherlands when it comes to set things right. Numerous reports have been written about the Curacao situation actively addressing both the Netherlands and Curacao for violations of human rights in the kingdom (Amnesty International, 2018; Refugees International, 2019).

The Netherlands however, provides a different interpretation of the statute. Their reading of the situation goes along the lines of respecting the autonomy outweighs the potential violation of human rights. According to the Netherlands 'migration is an (autonomous) country's affair', as has been the answer repeatedly to questions of journalist or member of the parliament regarding this particular affair (Knops R. , 2018, p. 4). However, Article 3 §G refers to the two aspects of migration that are by the statute deemed Kingdom's affairs instead of the country's affairs. Article 3 paragraph G states that the establishment of general terms and conditions regarding admission and eviction of foreigners is a kingdom's affair (Overheid, 2017).

The effectiveness of the Charter of the Kingdom of the Netherlands is showing some flaws. The statute seems to be incapable of performing the self-control or at least lacks exact clarity in what should happen if certain article is not being obeyed by any of the four countries it applies to. Nevertheless, I already touched upon the fact that the equality principle it is based on does not exist in reality. The kingdom's power dimension is heavily skewed towards the Netherlands. Although there has been pressure from inside the Netherlands and the rest of the kingdom to act out in the situation, the most noteworthy critics the Kingdom of the Netherlands has received came from respected international NGO's like Amnesty and UNHCR (Amnesty International, 2018).

At last, (May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2019) the Netherlands agreed upon realising a budget of 23.8 million Euros that would be reserved for the sheltering of Venezuelan immigrants and the

strengthening of the asylum procedures on Curacao and Aruba (Hoekstra, 2019). This could be seen as the first significant movement in the deadlock, however as long as the money is not properly spent and managed, it is hard to say at the time of writing this research.

### Concluding remarks

The Charter of the Kingdom of the Netherlands does not offer a conclusive solution to the deadlock created on Curacao. It is not capable of holding one, or both parties responsible, nor does it provide the means to sanction properly. This allows for violations of human rights to happen in The Kingdom of the Netherlands, without consequences.

## Conclusion

I had been living on Curacao for half a year when I left in August 2018. It was a very nice and beautiful place to live and gain some experience. In my experience, the island is welcoming, warm and exciting. A nice Caribbean getaway. However, on the back of my mind, I knew that there was something brewing, out of the tourist's sights. By the time I left I figured out that the situation on the island regarding Venezuelans was a very complicated one. When I arrived on Curacao I was really eager to figure out what was going on, when I left that question had altered into why things went down the way they were. So I set off to explore why the situation on Curacao got stuck in a deadlock.

I set up the research objective by identifying the most important actors causing this deadlock, that is preventing all parties involved to form a humane solution for the crisis situation on Curacao. The country Curacao, with a special autonomous status in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, is the main actor and at the same time the geographical site of the migrant crisis. On paper, the second actor is the Kingdom of the Netherlands itself, but as I discuss the imbalance of power between the four countries that together form this kingdom, in practice, this mostly comes down to the Netherlands. Actively, these two actors have the ability to move towards improved conditions for all Venezuelans on Curacao in need of (in)direct assistance and protection. On the one hand, the island's authorities themselves who lack the experience, capacity, and to an extent the willingness to establish basic accommodations and procedures for Venezuelan refugees. On the other, a country that has the experience, capacity and international influence, but who is not keen on taking on the extra burden of a crisis situation. The result is that after roughly a year of leaving the island, the situation for many thousands of Venezuelans on Curacao is still very tough.

The unusual method I proceeded gave this thesis an unconventional approach. My own experiences and encounters with different persons of interest helped shape the angle of this research. It enabled me to find the urgent issue in the crisis-situation regarding Venezuela and our kingdom.

The entire issue regarding the deadlock on Curacao fits in the wider societal debate on how to respond to refugees and migration in general. In this thesis, I decided to pursue the trajectory of framing, with the pure intention of excluding an entire group of people based, solely on nationality and legitimised by the suspicion of being a potential threat to the economic condition of a country. I argue that discarding individuality in this particular instance, poses a threat to people fleeing a crisis and a tyrant regime.

I discussed the process of framing which can be understood as the process by which people develop a specific conceptualisation of an issue, object or person or reorient their view on an issue (Chong, 2007, pp. 104-105). The need for reorienting the view on Venezuelans coming to Curacao is what makes this particular case unique. National interest rapidly started to exceed the preservation of human rights. This fits Cook's (2010) advocacy dilemma on the framing of migrant rights. Fear of insecurity or negative economic impact exceeds the urge to humane treatment (Cook, 2010). A similar trend is already occurring in the context of the Mediterranean.

This thesis aimed to try and get a better understanding of why the appalling situation for Venezuelan refugees continued to exist, and why little action was taken to achieve a more humane situation. I ascertain a few key aspects that complicate the process of finding a solution and that slow down the implementation of a solution.

The sub-national status of Curacao and St Maarten was established as of the last redivision of the Kingdom on October 10, 2010. As an autonomous country within the kingdom, Curacao gets to govern its internal affairs, but relies on the Netherlands for most matters that exceed the internal affairs, like defence and international representation. The statute of the Kingdom of the Netherlands should provide the framework for this particular division of responsibilities, as well as set the boundaries for a mutual standard that should be fulfilled throughout the kingdom. In the occurrence of a country (continuously) stepping outside these boundaries, the kingdom should guarantee the mutual standard nonetheless. However, as I argue in this thesis, the safeguarding aspect of the kingdom does not function. Because of the imbalance between the countries in the kingdom, this safeguard

role mostly trickles down to the Netherland's willingness to interfere. That willingness is very prone to political sentiment in The Hague.

As a response to the current situation on Curacao, the Netherlands has repeatedly claimed that migration is an (autonomous) country's affair' (Knops R. , 2018, p. 4). I argue that different understandings, and more importantly, different interest in interpreting the sub-national, autonomous status of Curacao in regards to the refugee situation there, is partly motivating the idle response of the kingdom. Curacao lacks the capacity, experience and the willingness to initiate a thorough revision of the current migration policies. Therefore by maintaining an idle response, by both parties, is condemnable and practically means preserving the ongoing detainment and deportation of human beings who are potentially in need of assistance and protection, and do not get a fair chance of getting asylum let alone the possibility to object their deportation.

One thing became very clear to me. If the Kingdom of the Netherlands wants to maintain a believable image of being worldwide advocates of human rights, you cannot turn a blind eye to these unjust practices.

## Recommendations and Critical Reflections

What this journey thought me about the functioning of the kingdom is that multilateral issues, like the case of a migration crisis, exposes its inability to act as a safeguard. I think that the bigger issues that occur in and around or kingdom should somehow be sheltered from politics. That might sound a little naïve, but if the urgency for a solution cannot be separated from a political approach, then these atrocities might resurface.

The current urgent issue regarding the (miss)treatment of Venezuelan refugees requires a thorough short-term approach. I would suggest that the majority of the 24 million is used to assist these vulnerable people and offer them decent shelter. The local Venezuelan community has been proven to be very capable of assisting in the sheltering of their brothers and sisters, as they take on most of that job now anyway. Support those citizen initiatives. And at last, roll out a decent an asylum procedure.

Without a doubt, the necessity of further research on the migration crisis on both Aruba and Curacao goes without saying. Other than critical journalism and alarming reports by a few NGO's, not a single academic paper has been released on this topic.

Obviously, many questions surrounding the topic discussed in this master-thesis remain. What is a balanced approach towards venerable (small) countries and a substantial number of arriving refugees? Should you always consider the needs of the native inhabitants and to what extent?

The shortcomings regarding the research methods are quite noticeable. Due to the sensitivity of the information that was being collected by my internship, it was hard to thorough research in those settings. I decided nonetheless to build upon the observations gathered during these times because they give such an interesting take on the issue. It felt like the right way to go about the matter, looking both critical at the role of the Netherlands as well as the local wrongdoings. The conclusion of this research is very specifically aimed at the Curacao- Kingdom of the Netherlands context and therefore is not very generalizable. However, it proves that the framing of migration is a universal practice.

This particular kind of research could be vastly improved if full access is granted to every policy document available, and reflect those findings on the decisions makers in this case.

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List of important persons encountered during the research and internship

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Peter Heintze	(Researched situation on Curacao)
Thomas van Houwelingen	(Defense attorney)
Evelyn Wever-Croes	(Prime-Minister of Aruba)