Part A – ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

1 Summary

“Papiamentu is widely spoken by almost a quarter million people in the Dutch Caribbean islands today, across social class, race and ethnicity. This language is also spoken by a growing Antillean Diaspora community in the Netherlands.”1

The word Papiamentu comes from the verb “papia”, which means to speak. “-mentu” is the suffix that forms the noun, denoting: “the way that something is done.” Papiamentu translates into “the way of speaking”. But more than a way of speaking the Papiamentu-language is a way of life. It is the backbone of the community and identity on the ABC-islands of the Netherlands Antilles2 located off the coast of Venezuela.

Papiamentu is an Afro-Portuguese-based Creole developed by the enslaved who lived on the ABC islands of the Netherlands Antilles from the 17th till the mid 19th century. The importation of African enslaved people to the Netherlands Antilles started after the conquest by the Dutch of Portuguese strongholds in Angola in 1641. For the evangelization of these enslaved, through the years, many foreign missionaries were sent to these islands. This was also the case with Mgr. Martinus Joannes Niewindt, a Dutch Catholic priest, who arrived at Curaçao in 1824.3

The translations of the Roman Catholic catechism into Papiamentu in 1826 and 1837 by Mgr. Niewindt have had great impact on the history of the ABC-islands because they represent the genesis of writing in Papiamentu. The Catechism is the oldest surviving document where Papiamentu appears in a full book-form printed publication. It is one of the few remaining examples from the early 19th century Catholic press on the Netherlands Antilles, when Papiamentu began appearing in print for the first time in its linguistic history. These publications mark a turning point in the process of recognition of Papiamentu. This Creole language evolved from an informally popular spoken tongue to the official language of the people of the ABC-islands. This recognition took place in 2007 in Curaçao.

The struggle for, and eventual recognition of, Papiamentu – represented in part by this Catechism – is one instance of the many struggles that communities around the world are facing in order to gain recognition for their languages. With the nomination of the catechism to the Memory of the World list, we hope to raise awareness and provide inspiration and incentive for the

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1 Rupert, Linda M. *Inter-imperial trade an local identity: Curaçao in the colonial Atlantic World*, 2006: Duke University Department of History: 243

2: The islands of the Netherlands Antilles are Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, St. Maarten, St Eustatius and Saba. Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao in the southern Caribbean are also known as the “ABC-islands” or “Leeward Islands” of the Dutch Caribbean.

3: A short biography of M.J. Niewindt can be found in § 3.2 Description
acknowledgement of linguistic diversity around the world.

2 Details of the nominator

2.1 Name:
The National Archives of the Netherlands Antilles

2.2 Relationship
The National Archives of the Netherlands Antilles is proprietor and custodian of the catechism

2.3 Contact Person
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3 Identity and description of the documentary heritage

3.1 Name: “Catecismo corticu pa uso di catolicanan di Curaçao”.
(Short Catechism to be used by the Catholics of Curaçao)
Text by: M.J. Niewindt, Prefecto Apostolico di Curaçao, 1837
The Catechism can be consulted at the National Archives of the Netherlands Antilles in Curaçao.

3.2 Description
The first edition of a catechism in Papiamentu was issued in 1826. Unfortunately no copy of the first issue has survived. The second edition of the catechism was published in 1837. In the absence of a copy of the first edition, the second edition has become the oldest issue in existence of the catechism in Papiamentu.

A few books, including the catechism, were saved during the civil disturbances of May 30th, 1969 when the working class revolted against their employers The library of the Diocese of Willemstad was one of the buildings that was lost during a fire. Almost everything within the library was destroyed. After the disturbances the books that were saved, have been kept by Father Streefkerk, the parish priest of Santa Rosa and a member of the Dominican Order. When the Dominican fathers left the parish in 2001 the books that had been saved from the fire were put at the disposal of the Libri Antilliani Foundation.

The catechism was added to the collection of the National Archives by way of a donation from the Libri Antilliani Foundation in 2001. It was the only document donated to the National Archives by this Foundation, so it stands on its own and does not form a part of a collection at
the National Archives. Therefore it has no catalogue or inventory number. For consultation and identification purposes it is referred to as “the Papiamentu Catechism of 1837”. The book is fragile and its covers are loose. It is stored in a fireproof safe and stabilizing conservation is being practiced to keep it in its original state. In 2001 a facsimile was created to facilitate consultation. This facsimile is the only other copy made of the catechism.

Mgr. Martinus Joannes Niewindt, Apostolic Prefect translated and published the catechism in order to give the people of Curacao a catechism in their spoken language. Mgr. Niewindt was born in 1796 in Amsterdam. In 1824 he left to Curacao to give spiritual assistance to the people, first as a priest and later on he became Apostolic Prefect of the Netherlands Antilles. In 1843 he was ordained as bishop in Warmond, Holland. He was a fervent advocate of Roman Catholic education to the enslaved community and abolition of slavery in the Netherlands Antilles. He served in the Netherlands Antilles for 36 years and passed away on January 12th 1860, just three years before slavery was abolished.


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4 Justification for Inclusion/Assessment against Criteria.

4.1 Authenticity
This is the only surviving copy of the 1837 issue of the Catholic catechism in Papiamentu. A stamp of the Diocesan library can be seen on the title page.
The catechism was inspected by Mr. Peter van Dijk, the book and paper preservationist at the National Archives. After studying the document Mr. van Dijk confirmed that the paper used to print this catechism dates back to the beginning of the 19th century. The document bears watermarks that validate this finding.

4.2 Unique and irreplaceable
The catechism is the first known book written and published in Papiamentu, and one of the last surviving relics from the historical moment when Papiamentu began its transition from an oral language to a written, literary language. The development of Papiamentu into a written language has been a decisive factor for the survival of the language and culture of the Leeward Antilles, but also an important step towards eventual acceptance and political recognition of the language.

Not only is the catechism representative of a turning point in the aforementioned developments, but the catechism itself has also played a direct role in them. The catechism has worked as a tool to keep Papiamentu alive and thriving during attempts to marginalize the language in the late colonial period (1850-1950s). Once published, the catechism was used by the humblest of Arubans, Bonaireans and Curaçaoans to teach each other how to read and write in Papiamentu, thereby safeguarding the continued existence of the language into the future. After its first appearance, the catechism encouraged the publication of other works in Papiamentu and thus helped pave the way to the social acceptance and eventual officialization of the language. In addition, the document has played an important role in the teaching of literacy to the population and is to this day regarded as essential reading for all Catholics on the Leeward Antilles. Finally, this catechism represents an important milestone in the development of the Leeward Antilles from societies characterized by colonialism, racial prejudice and inequality to societies characterized by inter-cultural dialogue, multiculturalism and mutual respect that they are today. The cultural heritage and social values of Netherlands Antilles and Aruba would suffer a devastating blow were this catechism ever lost.

The catechism has had – and continues to have – an enormous impact on linguistic studies of Papiamentu. As the earliest published book in Papiamentu, and one of the earliest surviving examples of written Papiamentu, this book has served – and still serves – as essential material for historical linguistic study of the Papiamentu language, a testament to the linguistic changes that this language has undergone over the centuries. The catechism is crucial for researching the development of orthography, vocabulary, phonology, semantics and syntax of Papiamentu. It demonstrates the state of Papiamentu just as it was evolving from a spoken to written language. Thus, this publication has, over time, had a tremendous impact in the understanding of Papiamentu and the evolution of its written form.

The publication of the Papiamentu translation of the Catholic catechism does not only mark a milestone in the ascendance of Papiamentu; it is also a milestone in the struggle of indigenous, Creole and minority languages worldwide against ethnocentrism and linguistic prejudice. For this reason, the nominators are fully confident that wider knowledge of this historical moment for the Netherlands Antilles will inspire and be of significance to many other cultures and societies around the world.

4.3a Time The Catecismo corticu is indeed first of its kind by being the first full length booklet ever to be printed and published in Papiamentu. Aside from the intended purpose of Catholic evangelization during the colonial period, the catechism greatly contributed to the ascendance of Papiamentu as a written language. In this way, the Catechism contributed to the survival of Papiamentu into the 21st century. The Catechism is a milestone product of the Catholic press that emerged in the 19th century, right around the time when the societies of the ABC islands were changing their opinions about Papiamentu. When Dutch missionaries first started working
on the island in 1704, they attempted to evangelize in the Dutch language and effectively marginalize and eradicate Papiamentu. The reluctance and resistance to evangelization in Dutch made the Catholic missionaries quickly realize that Papiamentu would be vital and inevitable if any advance in disseminating Catholicism on the Leeward Antilles was to be made. The Catholic printing press on the Netherlands Antilles, though initially solely devoted to evangelization of the Papiamentu-speaking population, has enabled Papiamentu and its speakers to make the transition from an oral to a written culture. This 19th century move from oral to written culture forms a crucial step in the process of recognition of this Creole language. During the 19th century the tides were just beginning to turn in favor of Papiamentu. The publication of the catechism and other works by the Catholic press had encouraged the publication of other material, from newspapers and later on even literary works at the beginning of the 20th century. By the late 1800s Papiamentu had largely replaced Dutch as the mother tongue in all social groups, including the urban European-descendant elite of Aruba, Curaçao and Bonaire.

Over the 20th century the Papiamentu language press also branched out into a full fledged Papiamentu media world, with newspapers, television, radio, books, and now even websites and blogs. Papiamentu finally became the official language in Aruba in 2004. Papiamentu was accepted by the parliament of the Netherlands Antilles as the official language of Curaçao and Bonaire in 2007. Prior to this, Dutch had been the sole official language on these islands. It took more than 350 years for Papiamentu to complete the process of its recognition as an established language in the Antilles, and in that process the catechism marks an important milestone.

4.3b Place
Curaçao, the place of publication of the Papiamentu translation of the catechism, significantly contributes to its relevance for world history. During the 17th and 18th centuries, Curaçao served as a slave depot where enslaved people were brought from Africa to be distributed to the surrounding colonies in the region. Curaçao is also the site of one of the oldest Jewish settlements in the Western hemisphere. The first Jews landed on the island in 1659, founding the community of Mikvé Israel. Sephardic Jews who had been expelled from Spain in 1492 moved first to Portugal and then to the Netherlands. Some of these Sephardic Jews went to Curaçao directly from the Netherlands.

The role as nexus in the transatlantic slave route has, for better and for worse determined the destiny of Curaçao and its neighbor islands of Aruba and Bonaire as place perpetually connected to disparate regions of the world, places characterized by intercultural encounter and as the home of displaced people from around the world.

Papiamentu emerged from the intercultural encounters and conflicts that occurred during the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism. Papiamentu originates from the various trade pidgins that were spoken by Europeans and Africans in the West African littoral; over time it was gradually adopted as a mother tongue by displaced and enslaved Africans, Sephardic Jews, the indigenous Arawaks and their descendants, various other immigrant groups and even the Northern European colonial elites.

The migration and displacement continues after the era of slavery and colonialism, as Papiamentu spread from its home in the Leeward Antilles to the Windward Islands. Papiamentu also plays an important role on St. Maarten, St. Eustatius and Saba. People from the Dutch Windward Islands migrated to Curaçao and especially to Aruba for employment opportunities. As a result, their children grow up speaking Papiamentu. On return to their home islands they

4 In 1986 Aruba became an autonomous country. It is therefore no longer a constituent territory of the Netherlands Antilles.
take with them the habit of speaking Papiamentu. Some natives of Curaçao are also attracted by
the employment possibilities provided through St. Maarten’s expanding tourist industry.
Consequently, this serves as another means of reinforcing the use of Papiamentu in the
Windward Island of the Dutch West Indies. Another large Papiamentu-speaking community can
be found in the Netherlands. Since the Netherlands Antilles are part of the Dutch Kingdom there
are innumerable opportunities for cultural, social and other exchanges/interactions between those
from Holland and those from the Antilles, as many of the islands’ people move to the
Netherlands to study or work.

The struggle to gain acceptance of Papiamentu is part and parcel of the struggle of its native
speakers: the descendants of the indigenous peoples, enslaved Africans, Jews and other displaced
peoples who migrated to Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao during and after the colonial era.
Papiamentu, by its very origin and history as well as its current development, embodies the
human experience of displacement, migration and cultural hybridity that is increasingly
becoming commonplace in these globalised times. Papiamentu is at once the local heritage of the
Leeward Antilles but at the same time heritage of the global interconnectedness that has
generated it. The catechism, that made a great contribution to this struggle for Papiamentu, thus
has served to keep alive a living testament of historical displacement, migration and intercultural
contact for all living now in these globalizing times.

4.3e Form and Style As the first printed edition of a religious work in the local language of the
Netherlands Antilles, the catechism constitutes one of the earliest examples of written literature
in Papiamentu. It is one the earliest surviving examples of written literary forms and style of any
kind in the Papiamentu language. This fact alone makes the catechism noteworthy for its literary
form and style. In addition, by being the first document to be published in Papiamentu the
catechism has had a veritably immeasurable influence on the form and style of subsequent
publications in Papiamentu.

4.3f Social/spiritual/community significance
Papiamentu bears great spiritual, political and cultural significance for the communities of the
ABC islands. Not only has Papiamentu survived all colonial efforts to eradicate it, but it has
flourished into main language of public and political discourse as well as the cornerstone of
community solidarity. Unlike many other Creole languages in the world, Papiamentu has a
powerful role in this community and is strongly represented in formal contexts. Papiamentu is
used on official occasions, especially in Parliament, in the communication between government
and citizens, in daily life. Since 2001, Papiamentu has gradually been introduced as the language
of instruction as part of our efforts to modernize our educational system.5

Papiamentu is the embodiment of the cultural identity of the ABC-islands. In the ethnically,
culturally and linguistically diverse community of the Leeward Antilles, Papiamentu is often the
only common denominator that bestows a sense of belonging and unity. As a Creole language,
Papiamentu has thrived in a spirit of linguistic diversity and intercultural contact, something that
has been the hallmark of our societies. The values of tolerance, acceptance and intercultural
understanding that have made our societies successful are encoded in Papiamentu; therefore
Papiamentu is crucial for the transmission of these values to future generations and is vital to the
survival of the island societies as we know them.

The story of Papiamentu is one of triumph of linguistic diversity over an imposition of an alien
monolingualist ideology. The catecismo corticu is a milestone in this story of triumph. This

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achievement is a testament to the resilience of our island communities and inspires a profound sense of pride in all Arubans, Curaçaoans and Bonaireans. It is something that we all hope will raise awareness for the importance of linguistic diversity and will inspire other communities to keep up the fight for the acceptance of their languages.

4.4
Rarity
The only surviving example of the 1837 edition of the translation of the Roman Catholic catechism.

Integrity
The catechism is complete but fragile. Although the covers are loose, fortunately there are no missing pages. The book consists of 31 pages.

Threat
The threat of deterioration is low because it is correctly housed and looked after.

Management
Conservation work is being practiced to stabilize the document.

5 Legal Information
5.1 Owner of the Catechism:
The National Archives of the Netherlands Antilles
5.2 Custodian of the catechism
The National Archives of the Netherlands Antilles
5.3 Legal Status
a) Category of ownership:
The catechism has been donated to the National Archives by the Libri Antilliani Foundation
b) Accessibility:
Third parties have access to the facsimile for consultation to safeguard the original.
c) Copyright status: Not applicable for the heritage being nominated.
d) Responsible administration: Ministry of Constitutional and Internal Affairs of the Netherlands Antilles and The National Archives
e) Other factors: The catechism is properly placed in a fireproof safe as was required by the donor in the donation conditions

6 Management Plan
The public records of the Government of the Netherlands Antilles are kept at the National Archives of the Netherlands Antilles. As the party responsible for the conservation of all historical records of the Netherlands Antilles there is a general management plan which includes all records that are being housed in this institution. The catechism is stored in an acid free cover and is placed in a fire proof safe/repository to avoid damage to its physical integrity. General preventive security measures which are applicable for all institutions/repositories with archival holdings – such as a constant temperature of 18°Celsius and humidity controls – were instituted to halt the deterioration of cultural heritage for which the National Archives of the Netherlands Antilles has responsibility.

7 Consultation
Prior to the National Archives of the Netherlands Antilles being represented at the Memory of the World (MoW) workshop held in St. Lucia in November 2007, the Director of the National Archives approached the Minister of Education and the Minister of Constitutional and Internal
Affairs of the Netherlands Antilles to obtain approval and support for the nomination of the catechism for listing on the MoW’s International Register. The Director of the National Archives also contacted the National Commission of UNESCO in the Netherlands Antilles to acquaint it with the preparations for the nomination. At the MoW St. Lucia workshop the nomination was discussed with the UNESCO facilitators who hosted the workshop. During a meeting in February at which different groups associated with the cultural heritage of the Netherlands Antilles were represented, a National Committee of the Memory of the World for the Netherlands Antilles was established unofficially, and was also consulted before the nomination was submitted.

**Part B SUBSIDIARY INFORMATION**

**8 Assessment of Risk**

At present we consider that the conditions for the preservation of the catechism are stable. However, work has begun on a project for a new repository for the National Archives. This will improve both service and the physical and environmental condition not only of the catechism but of all archival holdings at the National Archives.

**9 Assessment of Preservation**

To assure the physical integrity in 2001 a facsimile of the catechism was created to facilitate consultation. This facsimile is used by visitors that are interested in this book. The original issue is placed in the repository of the Archives. With respect to the repository itself, it is a storage area with air-conditioning and humidity controls, as well as security services and alarm to prevent theft and fire.

**Part C LODGEMENT**

This nomination is lodged by:

The Director of the National Archives of the Netherlands Antilles.

Signature Date: Willemstad March 27, 2008