

Jury Report NALACS Thesis Award 2009-2010

The Netherlands Association for Latin American and Caribbean Studies (NALACS) aims to promote the study of and attention for this region, within and beyond academic circles. To contribute to this objective, NALACS has instituted a prize for the best MA thesis on the region written at a Dutch university.

Important criteria in evaluating the theses are:

- Scientific quality and originality in terms of the contribution to theory development and methodology;
- The societal relevance of the topic or, in other words, the actuality of the research theme and its importance for debates beyond academic circles;
- The originality of the choice of subject and the research design;
- The style of writing and the structure of the thesis.

The jury for this year's thesis award consisted of Hebe Verrest (University of Amsterdam), Jean-Louis van Gelder (Netherlands Institute for the Study of Crime and Law Enforcement) and Imke Harbers (University of Amsterdam/CEDLA). The ten participating theses were of exceptionally high quality and it was a pleasure to read them.

The contributions came from a range of disciplines and methodological approaches. Four submissions came from Wageningen University, and two each from the University of Amsterdam, Utrecht University and CEDLA. The increasing internationalization of higher education in the Netherlands is highlighted by the diverse backgrounds of participants and the languages in which the theses were written. Seven contributions were written in English, two in Spanish and only one in Dutch. We see a continuation of the trend noticed in previous years in terms of the remarkably strong representation of young female scholars. This year, seven of the ten theses were written by women.

Gender was also a relevant category in thematic terms, with a number of studies bringing gender perspectives into the analysis of political and social phenomena. The issues addressed were quite diverse, ranging from legal aspects of art theft and free trade negotiations, through water rights and collective action in vulnerable communities. The countries covered include Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Nicaragua and Peru. We hope that next year we may welcome theses on a Caribbean county. In broad terms the participating theses can be classified as pertaining to the disciplines of anthropology, law, international development studies, political science, but also irrigation and water engineering. In several instances theses from different disciplines complemented each other. For example, one participating thesis approaches the armed conflict in Colombia by analyzing the implementation of the Justice and Peace Law. Building on legal concepts and theory, the thesis explores whether the law constitutes a viable and credible framework for holding responsible combatants guilty of grave crimes. Another thesis analyzes the struggle for justice by internally displaced women in Colombia. This thesis explores on the micro-level how victims of the conflict view the peace process and the Justice and Peace Law. The way in which theses from distinct disciplines generate insights into contemporary developments highlights once again the relevance of multidisciplinary research on Latin America and the Caribbean. It also made reading the studies, and thus the task of the jury, particularly enjoyable.

Each thesis offers unique perspectives on political, social or cultural developments in contemporary Latin America and the Caribbean, which made the selection not an easy one. After careful consideration the jury composed a shortlist of three nominees.

These were:

- *'Massacre in Colombia: Ending Impunity with the Justice and Peace Law'* by Maartje Stabel (University of Amsterdam);
- *'Navigating the Turbulent Waters of Public Participation in Brazil: A Case Study of the Santo Antônio and Jirau Hydroelectric Dams'* by Raimor Rodrigues Rezende (Utrecht University);
- *'Nefasto Incurigible: The Meanings of Violence in The Construction of Masculine Gender Identities in a Provincial Nicaraguan Prison'* by Juliënne Weegels (CEDLA)

In our opinion, these three theses came closest to the criteria for awarding the NALACS Thesis Prize. We then faced the difficult task of selecting the final winner and agreed that this would be Raimor Rodrigues Rezende with his study of popular participation in infrastructure projects in Brazil. The thesis combines original empirical research with a high level of theoretical reflection. Congratulations to Raimor for writing such an excellent thesis.