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**How do Post-colonial Ties and Migration Regimes shape Travel Visa Requirements?**  
**The Case of Caribbean Nationals**

**Simona Vezzoli**

**Marie-Laurence Flahaux**

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**Abstract:**

Travel visa requirements are generally recognized as the result of a trade-off between preventing irregular migration, ensuring security and allowing potential economic benefits to countries. The role of history has been overlooked. This article focuses on the case of the Caribbean, a region heavily influenced by colonialism, which experienced important changes in political status and migration policies over the 20th century. Using bilateral travel visa requirement data, we examine the importance of two travel visa determinants: post-colonial ties and the migration regimes established by the former colonial state after independence. We show that post-colonial ties explain patterns of travel visa requirements for France, the Netherlands and the US, but less for Britain and British-sphere Caribbean countries, revealing the less uniform and changing role of post-colonial ties. Travel visa requirements largely reinforce migration regimes types, so that Caribbean citizens from countries with a closed migration regime also experienced reduced travel opportunities. This reveals a perception that when the former colonial state limits migration opportunities, it might lead to travel, and potential overstaying, in other destinations. These findings provide new evidence of the relevance of colonial history and migration policies with the former colonial state in shaping travel opportunities of citizens of former colonies.

**Keywords:** travel visa determinants, visa policies, post-colonial ties, migration regimes, Caribbean

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## 1. Introduction

Among the arsenal of migration policy tools available to regulate migration, travel visas have become increasingly recognized as the ‘first line of defense’ used by states to prevent the entry of undesirable non-citizens (Torpey 1998: 252). Although travel visas formally concern the mobility of travellers, states have adopted them to prevent entry, reduce asylum requests and limit potential overstaying beyond the validity of the visa (Czaika and de Haas 2014; Mau et al. 2015; Neumayer 2006). However, by controlling the entry to their territories, states may also lose some economic benefits related to trade and tourism (Neumayer 2006; Neumayer 2010). Thus, shifting national interests may result in changes in travel visa requirements. For example, in an effort to boost tourism, Suriname relaxed its visa requirements for nationals of 13 extra-regional countries, including China, India, Indonesia and Turkey in March 2016 (Chickrie 2016).

States evaluate advantages and disadvantages when they determine which nationalities to include and which to exclude from travel visa requirements. Although limited, research on travel visa requirements has identified or suggested a few determinants, such as a country’s income levels, tourism, bilateral trade, cultural, religious and geographical proximity, political regimes and levels of democracy, as well as colonial links (Mau et al. 2015; Neumayer 2006). The principle of reciprocity may also explain the requirement of, or exemption from, travel visas (Laube and Heidler 2016; Neumayer 2006). If a country does not have a visa for a certain nationality, the country of the benefitting nationality may also remove the visa requirement. Conversely, a country may introduce travel visas as a reaction to the visa requirement by another state.

On the global scale, patterns of travel visa requirements for 2004 show a great “inequality in access to foreign spaces based on the principle of nationality” (Neumayer 2006: 81). A comparison of travel visa requirements in 1969 and 2010 similarly reveals that while OECD country citizens can largely travel visa-free to many parts of the world, nationals from non-OECD countries, particularly from Africa, face high levels of travel restrictions (Mau et al. 2015). This has led to a division between a group of countries whose nationals enjoy great freedom of movement and a larger group of countries with nationals facing great levels of restriction, leading the authors of this research to suggest that we have reached a ‘global mobility divide’ (Mau et al. 2015). In a recent article, Laube and Heidler (2016) also examine travel visa requirements in 1969 and 2010 and find that in 1969 travel visa policies were influenced by colonial ties and political alignment, i.e. Western or Soviet sphere, but in 2010, these factors weakened as states clustered in groups which generally emulate the policies of states in core areas, but include two important groups representing Commonwealth countries.

Global level analyses provide great insight in general patterns of travel visa policies, but are unable to explain the ambiguous effect of some factors – such as the role of colonial links –, and they have left unexplored the role of a potentially significant driver, migration policies or, more widely, migration regimes. We suggest that people’s possibility to travel to a certain country is not only related to a state’s cost-benefit analysis, but also to broader historical processes, which have been largely overlooked in previous studies. New and more precise evidence is necessary to better understand the influences of post-colonial ties and migration regimes on travel visa requirements.

This article aims at analysing the evolution of short-term travel (visitor) visa requirements for nationals of Caribbean countries since the 1970s. The Caribbean region is a particularly interesting case because (1) the region has been heavily influenced by various former colonial states and (2) it has experienced different evolutions in terms of political status and

**Commenté [VS1]:** Here, Laube and H. that try to go beyond analyses that look at the domestic interests of countries – tourism, trade, immigration control – but also based on the interaction between actors; through social network analysis of the position of groups of countries in the visa policy networks we can understand if policy emulation, institutionalisation or coercion took place.

implementation of migration policies. While some of the countries have become independent and have seen their migration regimes closed by their former colonial state, others have shifted to non-sovereign status and continued to benefit from open migration regimes with their former colonial state. This particular context offers a unique opportunity to better understand whether Caribbean nationals face low or high levels of restrictiveness to travel, not only to their respective former colonial states but also within the region, according to their country's (1) post-colonial sphere (e.g. British, Dutch, French and U.S.), and (2) migration regime type (open or closed) with their former colonial state. Through the Caribbean case, we generate new evidence of the relevance of colonial history and migration policies with the former colonial state in shaping the travel opportunities of citizens of former colonies.

We take advantage of the data extracted from the DEMIG VISA database, compiled for the Determinants of International Migration (DEMIG) project, which provided yearly bilateral short-term travel visa requirements for the 1973-2013 period for 25 Caribbean countries<sup>1</sup> plus Britain, France, the Netherlands and the US, the former colonial states in the region and main destinations of Caribbean migration. Largely descriptive and focusing on a specific regional context, our analyses offer new insights on the role of post-colonial ties and migration regimes in the determination of travel visa requirements.

## 2. Background

### *a) Considering the Role of Post-colonial Ties and Migration Regimes*

The role of **(post-)colonial links** has been an important 'sidenote' in migration studies over the years. Post-colonial ties represent a shared set of cultural, linguistic, institutional affinities, communication and transport channels and networks that make the former colonial state a preferred destination for people from the former colonies (Beine, Docquier and Özden 2009; Fassmann and Munz 1992; Thielemann 2006). Empirical tests find positive colonial effects on migration destinations at the general level; however, when this relation is examined bilaterally the evidence is much more ambiguous (Beine, Docquier and Özden 2009; Constant and Tien 2009; Hooghe et al. 2008).

The notion of post-colonial ties also assumes that there are 'privileged relations' between former colonial states and former colonies, which lead to the establishment of preferential migration channels for populations in former colonies (Belot and Hatton 2010; Fassmann and Munz 1992). This, however, is not always the case. For example, Britain introduced immigration policies starting in the early 1960s specifically restricting the entry and settlement of colonial immigrants, and the Dutch government took a particularly hard stance with Surinamese citizens in 1980, after an initial 'grace period' (Vezzoli 2014a).

Post-colonial ties generate the same ambiguity when they are used as an explanatory factor of travel visa requirements. Neumayer (2006) finds that "former colonial links as such have no impact on the visa regime" (Neumayer 2006: 79) and Mau et al. (2015) suggest that colonial links may, in fact, have resulted in stricter visa requirements between former colonial states and former colonies, a finding that is linked to the political instability and civil wars experienced by many newly independent countries. However, in a later paper, Neumayer (2010) refers to the likelihood of lower bilateral visa restrictions when there is a former colonial link. A possible explanation is provided by Laube and Heidler (2016) who compare travel visa

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<sup>1</sup> The 25 Caribbean countries considered in this study are: Anguilla, Antigua & Barbuda, Aruba, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Dominica, French Guiana, Grenada, Guadeloupe, Guyana, Jamaica, Martinique, Montserrat, Netherlands Antilles, Puerto Rico, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent & the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, Turks and Caicos, Suriname, US Virgin Islands.

policies in 1969 and 2010 and observe that the role of post-colonial ties on visa policies has weakened as some former colonies, i.e. rich Commonwealth countries, emulate the travel visa policies adopted by developed countries. This shows the oft-neglected fact that post-colonial ties are not fixed but evolve over time.

While the existing literature seems to show an entrenched belief that history, and colonial history in particular, influences migration and migration policies, research on this link remain superficial and at the global level. For example, studies pay little attention to the types of colonisation and decolonisation processes, which may have affected colonial and post-colonial relations (Vezzoli 2014b). Moreover, research limits the analysis of post-colonial relations between former colonial state and individual former colonies, neglecting the role of post-colonial links among former colonies belonging to the same sphere, e.g. among former British colonies, former Dutch colonies and so on.

A factor that has been missing conceptually and empirically in the study of travel visa restrictions is the role of migration policies, more broadly **migration regimes**. Migration regimes are a package of migration policies that aim to regulate the settlement - i.e., residence and work rights - of foreign nationals. Migration regimes may gradually come into being or may be established suddenly, as in the case of the transition from colony to independent country. Migration regimes then may become closed as settlement to the former colonial state is no longer permitted, except through official immigration channels. Migration regimes may also remain open when the former colonial state does not introduce any barriers to long-term migration, allowing residents in the former colony free right to settlement (Vezzoli 2014b).

It remains unclear whether migration regimes, which affect the long-term migration options of a country's citizens, also impinge more generally on their ability to travel. It seems logical that a state would use travel restrictions in combination with its migration regime, particularly if it intends to restrict immigration. But what if a country's nationals can migrate to one or more major migration destinations? Does this encourage other potential destination countries to grant visa-free travel? This seems to be the rationale used by many migration destination countries, which give travel visa exemptions to travellers of any citizenship who hold a valid residence permit from major developed countries such as a European Union member state (International Air Transport Association 1973-2013). This leads us to ask whether a country's migration regime with the former colonial state may also matter in determining travel visa requirements by other travel destination countries. Thus, travel visa requirements should be low for citizens of former colonies that have retained free settlement rights in the former colonial state. Conversely, citizens from countries whose migration regime was closed by the former colonial state may have seen their travel opportunities constrained by other potential destinations.

#### ***b. The Caribbean as a Region with Multiple Former Colonial States***

Caribbean countries share a past rooted in hegemonic colonial relations, rich histories of long-distance forced migration (slavery) from Africa, and indentured and voluntary migration from Europe and Asia, creating highly diverse populations that share a common heritage and regional coherence (Clarke 1978).<sup>2</sup> Starting in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Britain, France, the

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<sup>2</sup> Several definitions of the Caribbean exist, but we decided to use this historically-based definition (Gaztambide-Géigel 2004). Accordingly, the Caribbean region includes 28 independent and non-sovereign countries in the Caribbean Sea, plus Belize, French Guiana, Guyana and Suriname. Because this paper considers post-colonial ties of countries and migration regimes that were politically connected until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, we exclude Cuba, Haiti and the Dominican Republic, which became independent and separated by a border and migration regime over the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. While the US territories have also not changed their status in the last 85 years, they were

Netherlands, Spain, and later the US, controlled territories in the Caribbean.<sup>3</sup> The colonising powers had very different objectives and strategies in their colonies. For instance, the British were keen on establishing fully functioning colonies with an administrative system that had some decision-making power, although London was ultimately in charge. Conversely, the French colonial experience was much more paternalistic as it was interpreted as an opportunity to spread French culture; hence, soldiers and undesirables were sent at the forefront and only later, when the colonies were safe, would civilians be allowed to 'civilize' the 'less fortunate' non-European populations (Heffernan 1995). These ideologies and practices strongly influenced the colonies' socio-cultural norms, creating internal boundaries – which go beyond linguistic barriers - within the region along the various colonial spheres of influence.

Caribbean colonies underwent rapid political change in the post-WWII period, when some of these colonies became independent states, while others were transformed into non-sovereign countries,<sup>4</sup> retaining dependence while gaining greater autonomy in local political and budgetary matters, including determining their own immigration policies, and establishing travel visa requirements. Important differences occurred across France, the Netherlands, Britain and the US not only in their decision to grant independence or non-sovereignty but also in their preference to allow inhabitants of former colonies to retain rights of entry, residence and work in the former colonial state.<sup>5</sup> The strategic interests of former colonial states were paramount in these decisions and in their pursuit, or lack thereof, of bilateral relations with their respective former colonies. While the French and US governments retained easy access to workers at a time of economic boom (Marshall 1987; Zolberg 1978), the British government steadfastly introduced the 1962 British Commonwealth Immigration Act to increase restrictions to immigrants who, albeit full British citizens, suddenly required employment vouchers to be admitted to Britain (Peach 1968). In the late 1960s, the Dutch government also grew increasingly concerned about immigration, particularly from Suriname (van Amersfoort 2011).

The impact of colonialism and decolonisation on intra- and inter-regional migrations is visible in the Caribbean. Since emancipation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, West Indian islanders<sup>6</sup> went to British Guiana and Trinidad (Chaney 1989) although their migration was directed to many countries in the Caribbean basin (Thomas-Hope 1978). By the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, migration had become an essential part of Caribbean life, particularly in the British colonies, so much so that it was recognized as an essential part of West Indian culture (Thomas-Hope 1996). However, in French and Dutch Caribbean colonies migration was not as prevalent as in British colonies (Calmont 1981; Milia-Marie-Luce 2007), and migration from the Dutch Caribbean primarily concerned the pursuit of tertiary studies in the Netherlands (Oostindie 2009).

From the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, Caribbean migration patterns diversified towards overseas destinations (Peach 1991; Peach 1995), the result of a combination of economic, political and migration policy factors. It is noticeable how Caribbean overseas migrations followed different trajectories shaped by colonial and decolonisation history. The post-WWII reconstruction

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retained because they belong to the group of counterfactual cases that have not been subjected to the structural changes under examination (closure of migration).

<sup>3</sup> Although the U.S. are generally not considered to have a colonial past, we classify them as a former colonial state because of: (i) their brief occupation of Cuba; (ii) Puerto Rico held a colonial status until its establishment as an associated free state in 1950; (iii) the US are the sovereign state of the US Virgin Islands.

<sup>4</sup> The term country seems appropriate given the distinct political and national identities, which typically characterise these territories in spite of political unity, e.g. the Basque country.

<sup>5</sup> Bridget Anderson provides a detailed and beautifully described historical process of inclusion and exclusion by the British Empire towards its 'British subjects' (cf. Anderson 2013).

<sup>6</sup> The term 'West Indian' refers to the former Caribbean British colonies.

efforts had an important role both in attracting West Indians to Britain and the US, and Puerto Ricans to the US (Levine 1987; Peach 1968; Thomas-Hope 2000). The rapid growth of migration from the French Antilles to metropolitan France was encouraged by the state-organized recruitment system which attempted to reduce high unemployment and prevent social unrest in the French Antilles, while filling low-level civil service positions in France (Condon and Ogden 1991). Emigration from the Dutch Caribbean was also tied to growth in employment opportunities in the Netherlands, but it was strongly influenced by the sudden departure of many Surinamese uncomfortable with the uncertainties associated with Suriname's independence and the establishment of a migration regime with the Netherlands in 1975 reinforced by a travel visa requirements in 1980 (van Amersfoort 2011; Vezzoli 2014a). While overseas migrations have captured most of the attention of researchers, intra-regional migrations also continue at a steady pace (Thomas-Hope 2000). Within the region, there is ample evidence of various forms of movement, which reflect migrations to work in the niche areas of tourism and off-shore financial services, and other forms of migration that follow trade and networks of opportunities (Carnegie 1987).

Thus, Caribbean history and migration patterns have resulted in specific orientations towards the former colonial states and their respective spheres of influence, as well as to specific intra-regional destinations. Yet, the potential effects of this history on travel visa requirements have never been analysed.

### *c. The Caribbean as a Patchwork of Migration Regimes*

Changes in political status, such as the transition from colony to independent state, are often associated with the establishment of migration regimes. However, these two changes do not always mirror each other. Independent countries generally experience the closure of migration opportunities to the former colonial state, although the establishment of migration regimes may occur before or after independence (cf. Vezzoli 2014b). Non-sovereign dependencies, conversely, are generally believed to benefit from unrestricted rights of settlement to the former colonial state, although this is not always the case.

With the exception of Dutch colonies, whose right to reside in the Netherlands was revoked between 1927 and 1951 (Ahmadali and Luk 2015), former Caribbean colonies had an open migration regime during colonial times, giving the population full rights to circulate, work and reside in the colonial state (Hendry 2011).<sup>7</sup> As illustrated in Figure 1, which presents the separate evolution of political status and migration regimes in the 25 Caribbean countries, migration regimes in the region evolved in different ways over time. Some countries retained an open migration regime over time as they transitioned to non-sovereign status, while others had their right of settlement curtailed, whether they gained independence or retained a non-sovereign status. Hence, the inhabitants of some non-sovereign countries did not enjoy freedom of settlement in their metropolitan state, while some independent countries experienced a time gap between migration closure and independence.

The seven Dutch, French and US colonies that transitioned to a dependent non-sovereign status, and that have been guaranteed access to the metropolitan state through full citizenship and freedom of settlement have maintained an open migration regime continuously since decolonisation.<sup>8</sup> The other 18 countries evolved from open migration regimes to closed

<sup>7</sup> For Britain, the British Nationality Act of 1948, which retained 'open migration' until 1962, depicted movement from the colonies as 'mobility of subjects' and not as 'migration' as in later years (Anderson 2013: 39).

<sup>8</sup> Whether non-sovereign countries have fully "decolonised" remains subject to debate. For the purpose of migration policies and travel visa requirements, a transition has occurred which has granted these countries the right

migration regimes. This is the case of all British former colonies, regardless of political status, as well as Suriname. In the early 1960s, British citizens in the colonies were subjected to partial closure starting with the Commonwealth Immigration Act of 1962 and 1968, which restricted the right of settlement, and the 1971 Immigration Act which restricted all rights to remain. Finally, the 1981 British Nationality Act created a British Dependent Territories citizenship, which did not give the right to settlement and essentially gave the Dependent Territories' citizens no legal status (Clegg 2005). Because of the immediate restriction on work and residence, all the former British colonies can be categorised as having passed from an open to a closed migration regime in the 1960s. Similarly, in the case of Suriname, where initial immigration barriers were introduced in 1975 and full immigration policies applied in 1980, migration closure was recorded in 1975, when free movement and right to residence and work were first curtailed.

However, since 2002, a reopening of migration rights took place in the British non-sovereign countries: the Monserrat crisis, triggered by the explosions of the volcano Mount Soufrière starting in 1995, and the departure of two-thirds of the population in the following years, brought to the surface the peculiar lack of a legal status of the inhabitants of British dependencies. By 2002, the British Overseas Territories Bill gave the five British non-sovereign countries the right to British citizenship upon request with matching right of abode in Britain, and the right of free movement and residency in the EU and European Economic Area member states (Clegg 2005).

< FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE >

This categorisation of migration regimes as “open” or “closed” is based exclusively on the full set of migration policies established by and with the former colonial state. It is meant to provide a lens to observe whether migration regime types affect visa requirements. The open migration category is intended as freedom of settlement for countries within their own colonial sphere, including their respective former colonial state, e.g. French Antilleans migrating to French Guiana or metropolitan France, and not to countries outside of their colonial sphere. Thus, even open migration countries may be affected by migration policies and travel visa requirements of potential destinations countries outside of their colonial sphere, e.g. French Antilleans migrating to Dutch-sphere Curaçao, or the Netherlands. Similarly, non-sovereign countries may set their own travel visa requirements apart from those implemented by the respective metropolitan state. Thus, while France requires a visa for Dominica, its neighbouring Guadeloupe, a French overseas department, does not. Consequently, the Caribbean region provides a lens through which to study whether migration regimes and post-colonial spheres of influence are associated with changes in Caribbean nationals' travel visa requirements instituted by former colonial states and Caribbean countries.

### 3. Scope, Data and Methodology

We analyse the evolution of travel visa requirements for Caribbean nationals to better understand i) the role of post-colonial ties in explaining patterns of Caribbean nationals' travel visa requirements by former colonial states – i.e. Britain, France, the Netherlands and the US – and Caribbean states; ii) whether a bilateral open or closed migration regime with the former

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to determine their own policies, a form of self-government that distinguishes them from the old colonial status (Aldrich and Connell 1998:3).



colonial state influences Caribbean nationals' travel visa requirements by the former colonial states and by Caribbean countries.

The analyses rely on data extracted from the DEMIG VISA database, compiled during the DEMIG project to examine the role of the state and its policies in migration processes. The DEMIG VISA database covers short-term travel (visitor) visa requirement data for the 1973-2013 period collected from the IATA Travel Information Manual (TIM), which was published monthly starting in 1969. DEMIG VISA records data published in the TIM manual each January from 1973 to 2013, with the exception of December 2003, which was used in lieu of January 2004. Visa requirements are tracked with a 1, while visa exemptions are recorded as 0.<sup>9</sup> Visa exemptions are generally time-specific, allowing entry for a few days up to a few months (generally up to 90 days). This has not been recorded in DEMIG VISA, which considers a visa exemption to be applicable regardless of the time allowance.

Visa waivers, as those provided by the US visa-waiver program, have been accounted as visa-free travel as in other datasets (Mau et al. 2015; Neumayer 2010). Visas on arrival have been tracked as a visa requirement, i.e. 1. This departs from previous research, which listed visa upon arrival as a visa exemption (i.e. 0) based on the fact that a visa-on-arrival is conceptually different from pre-departure visas (Neumayer 2010) and because it is not thought to be the same form of control without any real repercussions on travel opportunities (Mau et al. 2015). While it is true that visas on arrival often simply entail the payment of a visa fee, two reasons justify this choice: i) these visas may also be based on criteria (e.g. proof of onward travel, sufficient funds to support the stay, hotel booking) which may be similar to the criteria needed for other visas and failure to provide these proofs may result in the refusal of a visa; ii) travel visas on arrival may also affect migration as fees increase the cost of travel, possibly making mobility unaffordable for some travellers who already face high travel costs.

The list of countries issuing visas includes both independent countries and dependent territories. For newly independent countries, data is recorded as soon as available, which may be before or after independence. For instance, travel visa requirements for Belize, which became independent in 1981, are available since 1973 under the heading 'British Honduras'. In the 1970s, data for many Caribbean countries was listed according to island groupings (e.g. Leeward islands and Windward islands), which changed over time. This required data to be duplicated to reflect current independent countries or dependencies, e.g. Leeward Islands data was entered for the various independent and dependent countries reported within this group (see Table A1 in Annex). Visa requirements needed by travellers from former Caribbean colonies before political status transition (e.g. visa requirements for Anguilla, a British territory, or St Lucians before 1979) may have been listed separately only by certain travel destination countries. Whenever listed in the TIM manuals, this information was recorded in DEMIG VISA. In all other cases for which visa requirements for travellers from former colonies or dependencies were not listed, visa requirements have been set to be the same as that for nationals of the sovereign country (e.g. Canadian visa requirements for British Virgin Islanders would be the same as for British nationals unless specified).

We calculated a visa restrictiveness index by computing the percentage of Caribbean countries that need a travel visa to enter a destination country for every year, for all countries and also distinguishing between open and closed migration regimes with the former colonial state. Each year, a country was considered to have either open or closed migration and grouped accordingly. Therefore, the list of countries included in each group changed over the years.

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<sup>9</sup> DEMIG VISA also tracks blacklisted countries with a 2; however, the data selected for this article does not include any blacklisted countries.

Thus, Jamaica is in the closed migration group throughout the entire period, but Montserrat is found in the closed migration countries until 2001 and in the open migration country group after the 2002 policy change.

For language clarity, the results are presented from the perspective of Caribbean nationals. Expressions such as ‘the majority of Caribbean nationals’ is to be understood as ‘the majority of Caribbean countries’ and not in relation to the size of these countries’ populations.

#### 4. Results

The analyses focused on understanding the role of post-colonial links and migration regimes on (1) Caribbean nationals’ visa requirement to travel to the former colonial states and (2) on Caribbean nationals’ visa requirements to travel within the 25 Caribbean countries. The same structure is used to present the results.

##### *(1) Evolution of Caribbean Nationals’ Visa Requirements to travel to Britain, France, the Netherlands and the US*

Over the 1973-2013 period, Caribbean nationals experienced an overall increase in visa requirements to travel to the main former colonial states (Britain, France, the Netherlands and the US aggregated), especially over the 1970s to early 1980s. This period coincides with the transition to independence of many Caribbean countries and suggests that independence was perceived by main destination countries as a trigger for increased migration (Figure 2). The disaggregation by migration regimes shows that Caribbean nationals from countries with open migration with their former colonial state have seen a significant drop in their travel visa requirements since the late 1980s to travel to France, the Netherlands, Britain and the US combined, while these destination countries have gradually increased travel visa requirements for nationals of countries with closed migration with their former colonial state, reaching a visa requirement rate of 80 per cent of Caribbean countries in the 2000s.

Overall, Caribbean nationals who benefit from an open migration regime have enjoyed far greater visa-free travel opportunities not only to their former colonial state, but also to other important former colonial states. The gap between these two groups has grown over time, although the European Union’s gradual relaxation of visa restrictions for island nations suggest a future reduction of this gap (Council of the EU 2015). The factors leading the European Union to increasing visa-free travel include business interests, lowered immigration and security threats, the principle of reciprocity as well as the value of “more people-to-people contacts” (European Union 2012).

< FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE >

When we analyse Caribbean nationals’ visa requirements by each of the individual former colonial states and by migration regime (Figure 3), we find important variations. There is a net increasing gap in visa-free travel opportunities between Caribbean nationals from open migration and closed migration countries travelling to **France** and **the Netherlands** (Figure 3a and 4b). Since the early 1980s, between 85 and 100 per cent of nationals from closed migration countries require a visa to travel to France and the Netherlands. The increase to 100 per cent in 2002 is due to the fact that British non-sovereign countries, which were visa-exempt, went from the category of closed to open migration. Thus, in that period all nationals from countries with closed migration needed a travel visa to travel to France and the Netherlands, while the

drop in the late 2000s to about 70 per cent reflects the 2009 EU visa exemption for Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Saint Kitts and Nevis (The Daily Observer 2015). This suggests a role of the EU's harmonization process in weakening potential bilateral post-colonial effects.

For Caribbean nationals travelling to **the US** (Figure 3c), the benefit of open migration has been less stark, especially until the end of 1980s. Their visa-free opportunities to the US increased only in the 1990s. Nationals from closed migration countries have, by contrast, seen an increase in travel visa requirements. US travel visa requirements in the Caribbean region appear targeted: while nationals of French and Dutch dependencies gained visa exemption in 1990, requirements for British dependencies varied. Montserrat and the British Virgin Islands have seen the reintroduction of travel visa requirements after a hiatus of 4 years between 1989-1992. Overall, the US shows more ambiguity towards open migration countries, which may be explained by the fact that the US perceives these countries as potential sources of migration.

**Britain** stands out due to its relative low travel visa requirements for most Caribbean nationals over the entire period (Figure 3d). Open migration countries have enjoyed visa-free travel over time. Although Caribbean nationals from closed migration countries have seen an increase in travel visa requirements since the late 1990s, visas are required by Britain for just about 20 per cent of Caribbean closed migration countries since 2004. Such a low visa requirement rate is surprising, particularly when we consider the early immigration policy restrictions introduced by Britain already in the 1960s, which might have suggested that the British government would have relied more strongly on travel visa requirements to regulate entry and possible overstaying. This analysis reveals a very interesting visa requirement strategy pursued by Britain: in fact, Britain introduced visa requirements for its former colonies only for a few years around independence, which we observe in the undulating increases until 1984 (the last Caribbean country to obtain independence from Britain was St Kitts and Nevis in 1983). This shows a clear awareness among British policy-makers of the sudden short-term migration effects of independence through 'now or never migration' (*inter-temporal substitution*) (de Haas 2011) as individuals may prefer to emigrate rather than facing the uncertainties brought about by independence (Vezzoli 2014b) and an effort by the British government to try to prevent immigration exactly around these critical years. With the passing of the short-term 'migration threat', Britain regularly removed visa requirements. It reintroduced visa only for Guyana in 1997 and Jamaica in 2004, which may have been in response to political and social tensions in these years in the two countries. Considering that all closed migration countries, except one – Suriname –, are former British colonies, this important difference certainly suggests Britain's careful treatment, if not privileged policy conditions, towards the nationals of its former colonies.

< FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE >

To test this hypothesis, the next analysis disaggregates travel visa requirements for nationals with a colonial link and those without, as well as by migration regime of former colonial countries. Caribbean nationals without colonial ties to France, the US and the Netherlands (see Figure 1) have higher travel visas requirements than Caribbean nationals with colonial ties to these former colonial states (Figure 4a, 4b and 4c). The only exception is for Surinamese nationals, who have needed a visa to travel to the Netherlands since 1980 (Figure 4b). Britain, however, has maintained overall openness to all Caribbean nationals, regardless of colonial ties. Britain's general low levels of travel visa requirements for Caribbean nationals at large,

Commenté [VS2]: What do you think of this addition?

Commenté [q3R2]: I agree!

as well as the Dutch constant visa requirement for Surinamese nationals, encourages us to question the general assumption that former colonial states tend to extend preferential treatment to their respective former colonies.

< FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE >

A brief detour is needed at this juncture to examine whether the travel visa requirements of Caribbean nationals wanting to travel to other important destinations that have no colonial ties correspond to our findings. We observe that other EU countries such as Belgium, Germany, Italy and Sweden increasingly required travel visas for Caribbean nationals from the 1970s to the early 2000s, when 60 per cent of Caribbean nationals required a visa. Non-EU OECD countries, excluding the US, have required travel visas for 40 to 50 per cent of Caribbean travellers since the early 1980s. Overall, Caribbean nationals travelling to major global destinations experienced higher levels of travel visa requirements than those observed for the former colonial states. Moreover, travel visa requirements to travel to many major world destinations have increased over the years, although the recent EU harmonization policies and the EU's opening to the Caribbean region have resulted in an overall decrease in visa requirements since 2008.

Travel visa requirements of major global destinations also show that Caribbean nationals from countries with an open migration regime have enjoyed greater visa-free travel opportunities to important global destinations.<sup>10</sup> EU countries replicate the French and Dutch trends, which greatly favour open migration countries, although with higher travel visa requirements. Non-EU OECD countries, however, differentiate less between open and closed migration countries, with lower requirements for closed migration and higher requirements for open migration, showing some similarities to the British travel visa requirement patterns. What we generally see then is that the distinction between open and closed migration regimes is important also outside of the colonial sphere, although its relevance diminishes outside the European and North American context.

## ***(2) Caribbean Nationals' Travel Visa Requirements for Intra-Caribbean Travel***

To travel within the region, Caribbean nationals generally face low visa requirements: in 1982, the year in which most Caribbean nationals required a travel visa, only 29 per cent of all Caribbean countries had a visa requirement. The trend in visa requirement within the region has decreased afterwards. As per the analyses on visa requirements by the former colonial states, citizens of countries with closed migration have had higher travel visa requirements than those from open migration countries (Figure 5). However, the difference between these open and closed migration countries is generally small, particularly when compared to the difference in visa requirements by former colonial states (Figure 2). The overall low visa requirements within the region seems associated to the rich history of intra-regional migration, which affects both open and closed migration countries, and the fact that some Caribbean governments have promoted emigration to reduce unemployment and political tensions (Chaney 1989; Segal 1975; Segal 1987). Thus, travel visas are used actively by Caribbean governments to regulate migration from specific origins, with low regard for open or closed migration regime, when

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<sup>10</sup> There are important variations among OECD countries, such as Australia requiring travel visas for almost all Caribbean nationals regardless of migration regime and Canada, which has never had any travel visa requirement for open migration countries.

immigration is perceived too high or the economic conditions are not favourable (Segal 1975: 10).

A maximum of 35 per cent of closed migration countries have ever had a visa restriction, in 1982, and since 2012 only 11 per cent of these Caribbean country nationals required a visa. It is essential to note that the low and decreasing visa requirements for closed migration countries is closely associated with the establishment of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the CSME (CARICOM Single Market and Economy) in 1989, which promote free movement of goods, services, capital, technology and skilled labour. While this regional organization has only guaranteed freedom of work and residence only to member state citizens of specific professions (e.g. university graduates, musicians, athletes, entertainers) (Pérez Caldentey and Schmid 2006), travel visa requirements have been reduced for all citizens of member states, which include all British former colonies plus Suriname, but does not include any of the French, Dutch or US open migration countries.

< FIGURE 5 ABOUT HERE >

The evolution of travel visa requirements varies when Caribbean countries are disaggregated by colonial sphere (Figure 6). **French** dependencies, which are open migration countries, have implemented strong visa requirements for closed migration countries, and close to no visa requirements for citizens of open migration countries, largely reflecting national French policies (Figure 6a). However, these countries have shown greater desire to determine their own affairs and to establish stronger relations with neighbouring countries apart from French metropolitan interests. Visible signs are Martinique's membership in the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) in 2015 and the 12<sup>th</sup> Cooperation Summit held in French Guiana in early 2016 entitled "Integration of the French Collectivités of America into their Environmental Region: Through a Resolutely Economic Prism" (The Daily Herald 2016). This has resulted in some divergence from French metropolitan visa requirements as in the case of nationals of Dominica who can travel visa-free to French Guiana, Guadeloupe and Martinique since 2010, while France retains a visa requirement for Dominicans.

**Dutch**-sphere Caribbean countries, which include both Aruba and the Netherlands Antilles (open migration) and Suriname (closed migration), have had equal visa requirements for Caribbean countries with open and closed migration between the mid-1970s and the mid-1990s, a distinct pattern from that of the Netherlands (Figure 3b). However, this figure strongly reflects the visa requirement changes for Suriname, since both Aruba and the Netherlands Antilles have not required visas for any Caribbean nationals, with the exception of Aruba requiring travel visas for Jamaican nationals since 2003. This reveals that Dutch open migration countries allow visa-free travel to all Caribbean nationals, distinguishing itself from Dutch metropolitan visa policies. Conversely, since 1976, a year after independence, Suriname has had very high travel visa requirements for all Caribbean nationals. The requirements have been eased only for CARICOM members since 1997, after Suriname joined the Caribbean Community in 1995. However, Suriname has removed visa requirements gradually: for instance, Jamaicans required a Surinamese travel visa until 2000 and Bahamian nationals until 2006. Distinctively, all open-migration country nationals require a visa to travel to Suriname, even Arubans until 2009 and Dutch Antilleans for most of this period (1973-1981, 1985-1997 and again in 2013). The only exception is nationals of Montserrat who, being CARICOM members, have not required a visa since 2003. Given Suriname's low historical intra-regional migrations, Suriname's unique patterns suggest a strong intention in determining sovereignty

after independence, and departing from the Dutch position, rather than reflecting immigration or security concerns. Curiously, Guyanese nationals, who since the late 1970s have been one of the strongest migrant communities in Suriname (Vezzoli 2014a), have enjoyed visa-free travel since 1997 due to CARICOM membership.

Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands, the countries in the **US** sphere (Figure 6c), have had high travel visa requirements for Caribbean country nationals: for nationals from closed migration countries this trend has increased since the 2000s, while nationals from open migration countries saw their visa requirements suddenly decrease in 1990-1992, with some visas being gradually reintroduced since then. A closer analysis shows very interesting patterns for Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands, which seem to have exempted countries on the basis of geographical distance (Cayman and Turks & Caicos) and high relative income levels (Cayman, French and Dutch dependencies), discriminating against open migration countries that have lower incomes and have higher immigration potential (Anguilla and Montserrat) or are in the vicinity (British Virgin Islands, particularly for Puerto Rico).

Countries in the **British** sphere have had relatively low travel visa requirements, irrespectively of migration regime (Figure 6d), strongly mirroring Britain's own travel visa requirements. British Caribbean countries were more restrictive towards nationals of closed migration countries in the 1970s to mid-1980s and towards nationals of open migration countries for a brief period between the mid-1980s to mid-1990s, but they have since required travel visas for nationals from the two groups nearly equally. Britain's overall low requirements (Figure 3d) are strikingly similar to the low travel requirements of the Caribbean countries of the British sphere, which suggests that colonial influence in migration policy goes beyond the conventional belief that former colonial states extend privileged migration policies to former colonial nationals. This also seems to be reflected in the potential (post-independence) continuation of policy perspectives, in this case concerning migration and travel visa requirements.

< FIGURE 6 ABOUT HERE >

Our interest in understanding whether a bilateral open or closed migration regime with the former colonial state influences Caribbean nationals' travel visa requirements by Caribbean countries, led us to ask one last question: Do Caribbean countries with open migration with their respective former colonial state require travel visas for Caribbean nationals more frequently than Caribbean countries with closed migration? The results show that, compared with closed migration countries, open migration countries indeed require visas more frequently for Caribbean nationals. Moreover, in order to travel to open migration countries, Caribbean nationals from closed migration countries require a visa more frequently than those from open migration countries (Figure 7a), displaying a pattern that stands between that of former colonial states (Figure 2b) and that of the Caribbean region overall (Figure 5b). This seems to reflect the in-between position of many of these non-sovereign countries, which retain official ties with the metropolitan states while at the same time attempting to strike out on their own, particularly paying attention to geopolitical interests in the region. In parallel, closed migration Caribbean countries have relatively similar travel visa requirements for open and closed migration countries (Figure 7b), as seen previously for British sphere countries (see Figure 6d), which largely make up this group. CARICOM membership has been an important driver of increasing regional visa-free travel for citizens of closed migration countries.

< FIGURE 7 ABOUT HERE >

### **(3) General Discussion**

Overall, these analyses generate a number of valuable insights. Post-colonial links seem to have some influence on the visa requirements of Caribbean nationals, but do not generate great preferential treatment. However, we see a difference across the former colonial state: while France, the Netherlands and the US show low levels of restriction for their own former colonial nationals, Britain has similar visa requirements for all Caribbean nationalities regardless of colonial ties (e.g. Jamaicans and Surinamese alike). Moreover, within the region, Caribbean countries require few visas for nationals of the region, showing that proximity, particularly regional history and current regional agreements, may reduce visa requirements.

Migration regimes also seem to shape travel visa requirements. Caribbean countries that still enjoy open migration with their former colonial state can generally travel visa-free to other former colonial states, with the exception of nationals from a few British non-sovereign countries travelling to the US (i.e. Anguilla, Montserrat and British Virgin Islands). This pattern generally holds true also for travel visa requirements by other major global destinations such as Canada and Japan. This suggests that open migration rights granted by the former colonial states are reinforced by visa-free travel by other former colonial states giving these nationals greater mobility rights. This advantage remains but is much reduced for travel within the region, suggesting that geopolitics and regional factors, including economic trends and intra-regional migration flows, influence travel visa requirements within the region. However, it is in particular Caribbean countries with open migration (e.g. Aruba, Martinique, Montserrat) that require higher levels of travel visa from Caribbean nationals, whether from open or closed migration countries, while Caribbean countries with closed migration (e.g. Antigua, Guyana, Suriname) have required lower levels of visas.

### **5. Conclusion**

This article set out to understand the role of colonial links and migration regimes in determining short-term travel (visitor) visa requirements. It focused on the Caribbean, a region where colonialism left a strong imprint, including a variety of migration regimes. This analysis shows that **post-colonial ties** are generally associated with lower restrictions for Caribbean nationals to travel to their former colonial state, supporting the notion that colonial relations often result in more favourable policies to population of former colonies. Interestingly, colonial links also influenced Caribbean nationals' visa requirements for travel to other Caribbean countries. However, there are exceptions. Britain has generally granted visa-free travel to most Caribbean nationals, regardless of colonial links. This may be associated with the low migration potential from the few small Caribbean countries outside of the British sphere. Moreover, Caribbean countries are gradually departing from setting policies that mirror those of the former colonial state. This mostly reflects a growing desire among non-sovereign Caribbean countries to claim greater autonomy and pursue geopolitical alliances within the region. Only US-sphere countries have not joined this trend, revealing some concerns over potential immigration and overstaying. Thus, we see evidence that the role of post-colonial ties has been evolving depending on the former colonial state (e.g. former British, Dutch, French colonies or US) and as geopolitical interests diverge, supporting results found in other studies (Laube and Heidler 2016; Vezzoli 2015). In fact, its relevance may weaken as new strategic interests and alliances are pursued with neighbouring countries.

An important contribution of this analysis is that travel visa requirements largely overlap and reinforce **migration regimes**. Thus, countries with a closed migration regime with the former colonial state also experience the closure of travel opportunities by other countries both overseas and within the region, leading to overall high travel restrictions for most Caribbean nationals from closed migration countries. Conversely, countries that have retained open migration with the former colonial state continue to benefit from a less restrictive visa regime even by countries outside of their colonial sphere. This suggests an implicit assumption that migration closure by the former colonial state (e.g., Britain) might lead to travel and potential overstaying in other destinations (e.g., the Netherlands, France or the US) resulting in ‘spatial substitution’ policy effects (de Haas 2011). Moreover, we have shown that travel visa policy may diffuse not just among former colonial states, which are generally thought to influence each other, but also to former colonies and important global destinations that are not connected by colonial links. Further analysis should test the effects of open or closed migration regimes with the respective former colonial states on Caribbean nationals’ travel visa requirements, accounting for other potential determinants, such as wealth, socio-political tensions, conflict and migration flows.

This article also showed that geopolitical and national interests and membership to regional communities are also important determinants of travel visa requirements. In particular, the role of the EU in harmonizing travel visa policies, potentially reducing the influence of post-colonial ties, and CARICOM as a driving force that has led to the introduction of the principle of reciprocity in the travel visa regime of its member states, forcing even some countries’ high travel visa requirements (such as Suriname) to gradually decrease over the past two decades. Moreover, several Caribbean countries also share economic interests, particularly a focus on tourism and off-shore financial services, factors that encourage the reduction of travel visa requirements. Therefore, even Caribbean countries are balancing a trade-off between free trade and free movement and the introduction of travel restrictions to prevent overstaying, particularly visible on those islands that have stronger economies and growing immigration flows.

Ultimately, this article generates new evidence of the relevance of colonial history and of migration policy regimes set by the former colonial state in shaping travel opportunities of citizens of former colonies. Whether this can be observed in other post-colonial contexts such as in Africa or in the island setting of the Pacific remains to be tested.



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## Annex

**Table A1. Data coverage: countries of travel visa issuances, historical island groupings and yearly coverage**

DEMIG VISA

Please cite as: DEMIG (2013) DEMIG VISA, version 1.4. Full Edition.  
Oxford International Migration Institute, University of Oxford.  
[www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk](http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk)  
© 2013 Copyright © by DEMIG. All rights reserved.

Completed  
Independent country does not exist  
No data entry

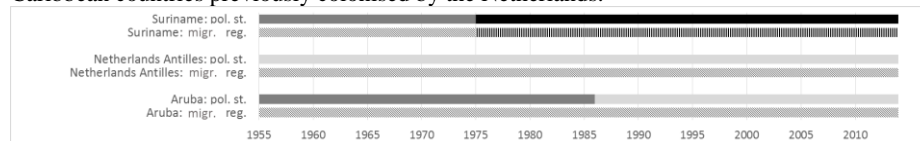
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**Figure 1. Evolution of political status and migration regimes of Caribbean countries (1920-2014)**

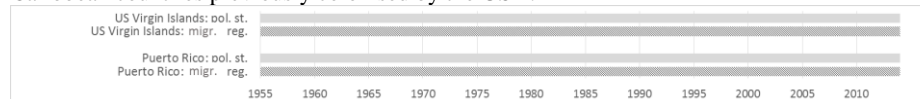
Caribbean countries previously colonised by France:



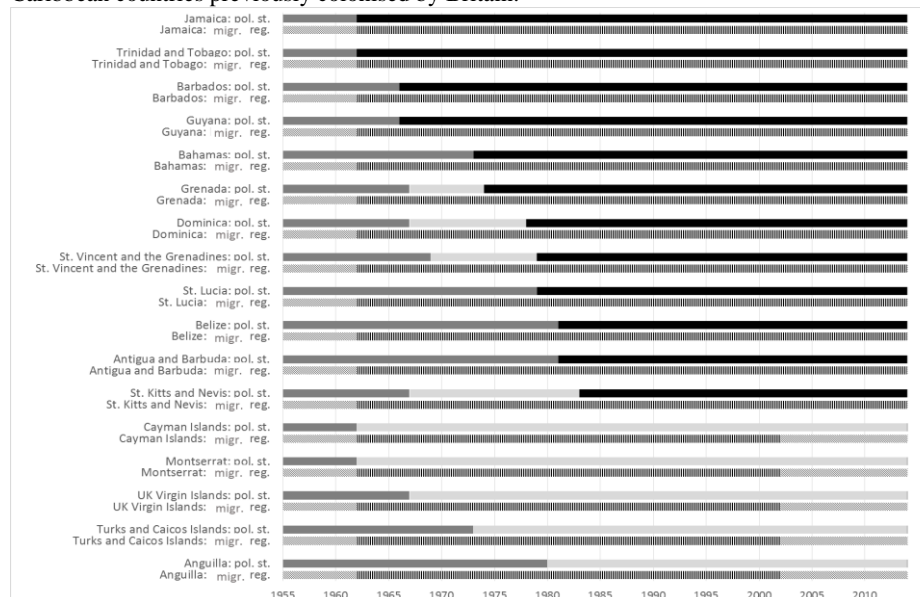
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Caribbean countries previously colonised by the USA:



Caribbean countries previously colonised by Britain:

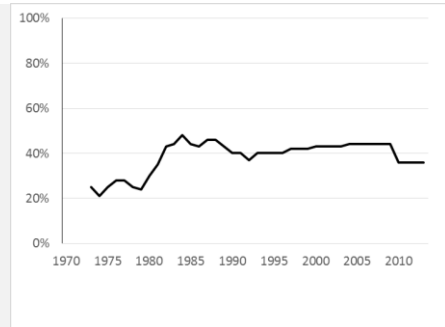


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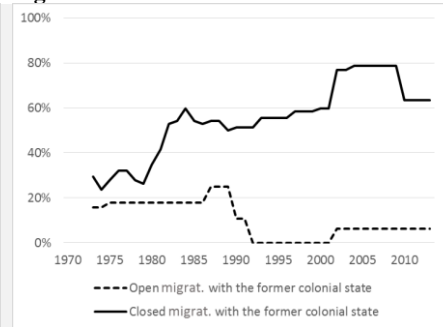
- Colonisation
- ⌘ Open migrat. with former colonial state
- Non-sovereign status
- Closed migrat. with the former colonial state
- Independent status

**Figure 2. Percentage of Caribbean nationals requiring visas to travel to France, the Netherlands, Britain and US combined, by migration regime of Caribbean countries with their former colonial state, 1973-2013**

**a) Without distinction**

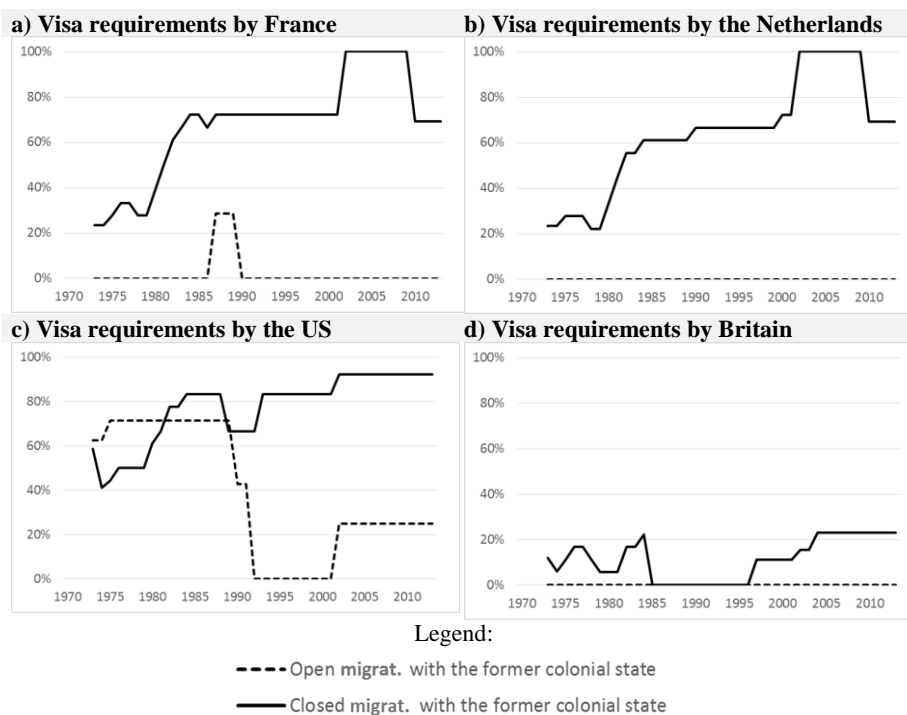


**b) By distinguishing between migration regime**



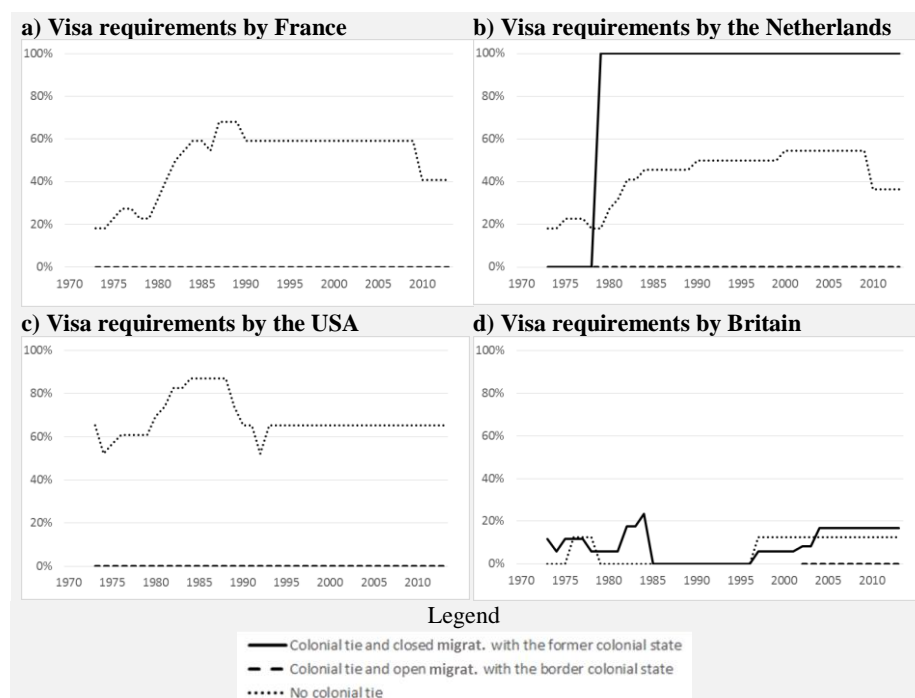
Source: DEMIG VISA

**Figure 3. Percentage of Caribbean nationals requiring visas to travel to France, the Netherlands, Britain and US, by former colonial state and Caribbean countries' migration regime with their respective former colonial states, 1973-2013**



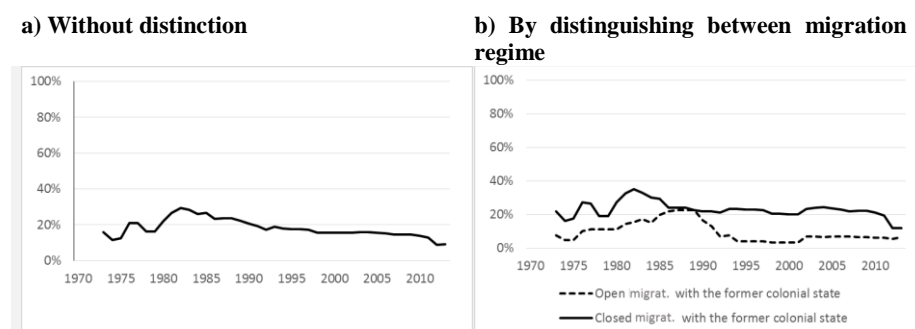
Source: DEMIG VISA

**Figure 4. Percentage of Caribbean nationals requiring visas to travel to France, the Netherlands, Britain and US, by former colonial state and type of relation with the former colonial state, 1973-2013**



Source: DEMIG VISA

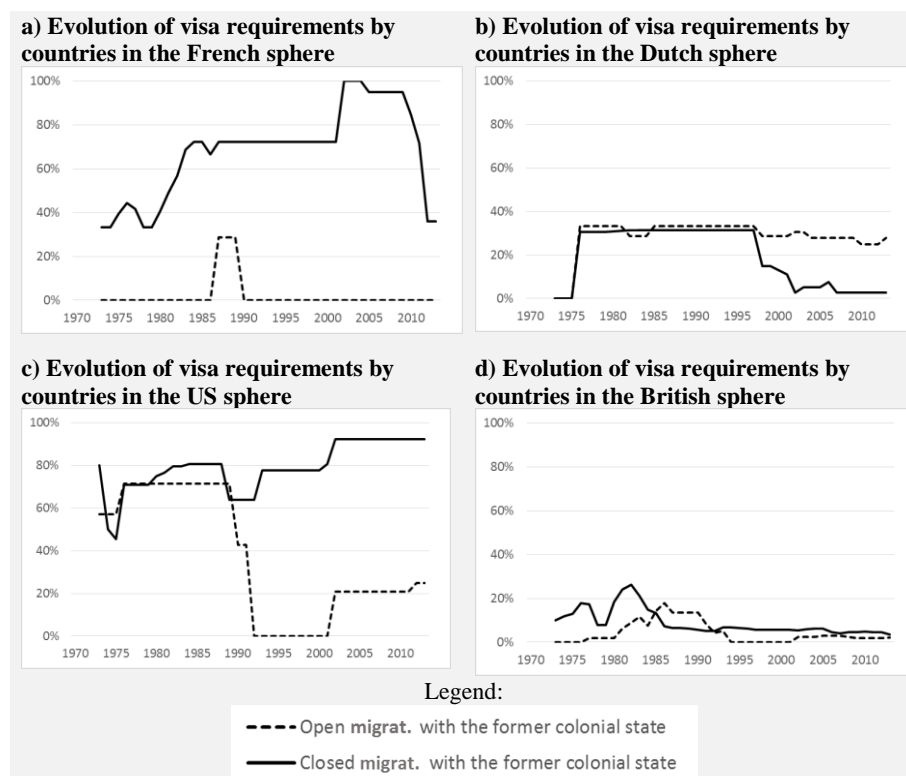
**Figure 5. Percentage of Caribbean nationals requiring visas to travel to Caribbean countries, by migration regime of Caribbean countries towards their respective former colonial state, 1973-2013**



Source: DEMIG VISA

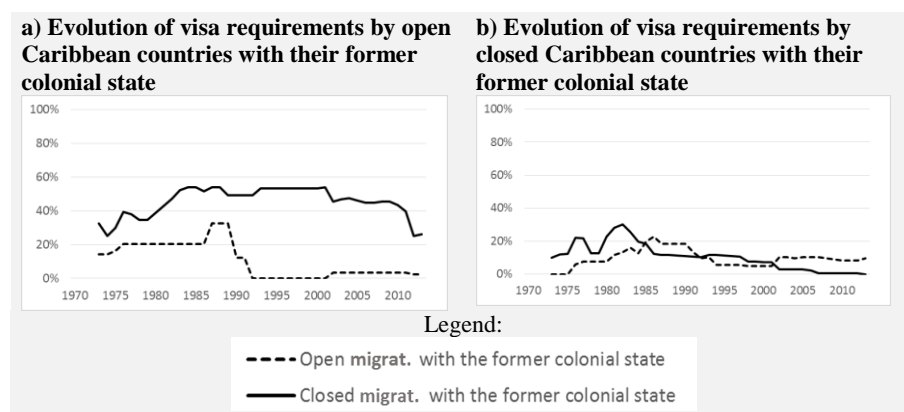


**Figure 6. Percentage of Caribbean nationals requiring visas to travel to Caribbean countries, by former colonial state and migration regime of Caribbean countries of origin with their former colonial state, 1973-2013**



Source: DEMIG VISA

**Figure 7. Percentage of Caribbean nationals requiring visas to travel to Caribbean countries with open or closed migration with their former colonial state, by migration regime of Caribbean countries, 1973-2013**



Source: DEMIG VISA