

French Caribbean Literary Fieldwork

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What role does literature play outside academia? How does what we read influence the way we think about the world, and our role within it?

Two University of Birmingham researchers from the Department of Modern Languages have recently returned from fieldwork in the French Caribbean island of Martinique, and these questions were ever present. Martinique has been French since 1635 and in 1946 it became an Overseas Department of France, making it one of the more far-flung regions of the EU. Its history and culture reflect a rich, diverse heritage and the island has produced some of the greatest authors of modern French literature, notably Aimé Césaire, Edouard Glissant and Patrick Chamoiseau, whose work presents a compelling examination of colonialism, transatlantic slavery and their legacies.

Dr Louise Hardwick and Dr Alessandro Corio, both specialists in Francophone Caribbean literature, are currently working on a major 2 year research project on

Caribbean literature and culture funded by the European Commission/Marie Curie FP7 scheme, and the visit was a vital opportunity to discover the most recent social and cultural developments in Martinique and to develop their research perspectives and approaches.

During the visit, Louise and Alessandro met with leading Martinican cultural figures including Martinique's Director of Museums and the Directors of libraries and cybercentres who work closely with the Martinican public and local schools. Their discussions focused in particular on the social and economic impact of the arts and presented the opportunity to plan future collaborations. In addition, Louise and Alessandro conducted interviews with Martinican authors, journalists and artists. They also developed links with academics at the University of the Antilles and Guyane (UAG) and attended an inaugural event at the UAG's Caribbean Campus of the Arts, where they had the chance to discuss the social and political significance of literature and the visual arts with Lecturers and students.

Louise was invited to donate a copy of her most recent book, [Childhood, Autobiography and the Francophone Caribbean \(2013\)](http://schools/cahm/departments/french/news/2013/hardwick-childhood.aspx) ([/schools/cahm/departments/french/news/2013/hardwick-childhood.aspx](http://schools/cahm/departments/french/news/2013/hardwick-childhood.aspx)), to the iconic Schoelcher Library (shown in the photograph), named after the famous French abolitionist Victor Schoelcher.

The visit concluded with Louise and Alessandro being interviewed by the Martinican newspaper, France-Antilles, about their research and the insights that the substantial, prize-winning body of Francophone Caribbean literature provides on urgent European and global debates concerning history, memory, domination, resistance and compassion.

More information about their project can be found on their blog: www.caribiolit.wordpress.com (<http://www.caribiolit.wordpress.com>)

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