



# NEWSLETTER

#5 | 2016

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## IN THIS ISSUE

# Confronting Caribbean Challenges

Dear readers,

Welcome to our fifth Newsletter. The team members are making good progress, thus contributing to a better understanding of the history and contemporary issues of the Caribbean islands of the Kingdom of the Netherlands – societies where the Dutch flag may be waving, but where local identities are first and foremost Caribbean. In this issue, Jessica Roitman informs us about her ongoing work on the social history of the Dutch Leewards Antilles – St. Maarten, St. Eustatius and Saba. She is digging up more and more archival stuff, but at the same time manages to write one article after the other on this hitherto sorely neglected history.

Wouter Veenendaal reports on the extensive survey conducted on all six islands, a follow-up to the 1998 survey *Ki sorto di Reino/What Kind of Kingdom?* The results point to a continuing, perhaps even growing head-versus-heart dilemma: while clear majorities on all islands find Dutch support and supervision indispensable, there is also deep concern about losing control. To our utter dismay, the survey results for St. Martin had to be discarded because of fraud.

Stacey MacDonald has worked hard in preparation of her fieldwork in Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba on activists in local cultural heritage and/or the natural environment conservation, and the way they interact with the complex societal and governmental situation in these islands. She's eager to contact more informants, so do feel welcome to contact her.

Sanne Rotmeijer, the other Ph.D. student, finished her field work in Curaçao, where she worked as an intern at the *Antilliaans Dagblad* and *Èxtra*, and has now moved to St. Maarten where she's working at *The Daily Herald*. At the same time, she's also scrutinizing digital media all over the Antilles.

For what it's worth, I am supervising this great team of researchers. That's mainly a matter of advising and occasionally of encouragement. And yes, many years of research experience in the Caribbean do come in useful sometimes.

Enjoy! Gert Oostindie



## Update sub-projects

The four researchers give an update on their individual sub-projects.



## Picture compilation of attended meetings and research trips

- NWO Caribbean Research meeting: presentation second call for Caribbean research
- Research trips to St. Maarten, Saba, St. Eustatius and presenting opinion survey results
- CCC-research results in Dutch Caribbean media

# Update project: Jessica Vance Roitman



*Jessica researches the social history of the Dutch Leeward (confusingly known as 'Bovenwinden' in Dutch) islands of St. Maarten, St. Eustatius, and Saba in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Her focus is on the intersection of migration, governance, and the formation of identities on these islands. The project will also tie into larger discussions about (intra) Caribbean migrations, hybridity, and the disjuncture between sovereignty and identities.*

My escape from the grim, gray Dutch winter was a stunning success. Not only did I get some much-needed Vitamin D, I also added a great deal to my ongoing research into the social and cultural history of Saba, St. Eustatius, and St. Maarten. This progress owes a great deal to the continued help and graciousness of the people on the islands and I am very grateful to them. I spent my first week on St. Maarten where I was busy in the [Philipsburg Jubilee Library](#). As usual, Monique Alberts and her staff were wonderfully helpful and kind.

I spent a long time reviewing the recordings of the "Profiles of the Windward Islands" which have been very professionally cataloged. These recordings give me a great deal of insight into the recent history of the islands and are invaluable as a source for oral history. In addition, I made extensive use of the large collection on the history of St. Maarten which is housed in the library, including copies of journals of the Lt. Governors (*gezaghebbers*).

I spent the second week of my trip on Saba where I joined Wouter and where, later, Gert joined us. There I met with local historian and all around island expert, Mr. Will Johnson, who gave me several hours of his time, and shared his knowledge and perspectives on doing local history with me. Bobby Zagers of the Planning Office on Saba very graciously allowed me access to the records housed in his office, including notarial records going back to the early nineteenth century. These sorts of documents give historians a picture of who owned what, how things like land,

houses, businesses and even people, were transferred between people, and generally give a glimpse of what was going on Saba. But I didn't just look at old paper! Mr. Ryan Esperson, local archeologist and soon-to-be Ph.D. from Leiden University, took a morning off from finalizing his dissertation and preparing for the opening of the [Saba Heritage Center](#) to lead Gert, Wouter, and me to the ruins of Mary's Point. This village was abandoned in the 1930s and the 80 or so residents were moved to The Bottom. Scrambling up the scrabbly, steep hillside to the beautiful point overlooking the sea was no easy task. The hike made us all realize how much more difficult things had been for Sabans centuries ago. Not only that, though, Ryan showed us the remains of the houses, cisterns, and graves by which we got a real sense of life on Saba in the past.

Back here in the present, I'm working hard to get my research findings out and into the public domain. My article, "[Land of Hope and Dreams: Slavery and Abolition on the Dutch Leeward Island, 1825-1865](#)" has recently come out in the journal *Slavery & Abolition*. The article Wouter and I co-authored, "We Take Care of Our Own: The Origins of Oligarchic Politics in St. Maarten" will be coming out in the October issue of the [European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies](#). Meanwhile, I'll be visiting a non-Dutch Caribbean island in June – Cuba, for the Association of Caribbean Historians Conference where I'll be talking about maritime marronage in the Dutch Windward islands.

But before I forget, I should add that I'll be going to Curaçao at the end of March to do more research at the [National Archive of Curaçao](#) and the [Maduro Library](#). As some of you all know already, many of the records of Saba, St. Eustatius, and St. Maarten are actually housed in Curaçao. Despite the occasional sunny day here in the Netherlands and the promise of Spring shown in the flowers peeking through the grass, I'm looking forward to more sun and, even more importantly, more great insights into the history of the Windward islands.

Over the past 3 months, I have primarily been working on the first analyses of our opinion survey. While the survey on St. Maarten was an unmitigated failure due to serious suspicions of interviewer fraud, the first results of the survey on the other five islands have now been gathered. In the past month, we have shared some preliminary results with the news media in the Netherlands and on the Dutch Caribbean islands. For example, we have released figures regarding [political status preferences](#), and concerning [Dutch inhabitants, foreigners, and tourists on the islands](#). In the coming weeks and months, more results of the opinion survey will be published, and we will do more in-depth statistical analyses of the survey data. All the publications related to the opinion survey appear on our [special survey website](#).

Between the 10<sup>th</sup> and the 26<sup>th</sup> of January Jessica, Gert, and I visited the three Windward Islands for the next stage of field research. My fieldwork primarily took place on Saba, where I conducted in-depth interviews with various local politicians, journalists, and civil servants. The many lengthy discussions I have had with Saban respondents on the island have provided me with great insights about the

# Update Project: Wouter Veenendaal

political dynamics, opportunities and challenges of this small island, and about the changes that have occurred since 2010. Towards the end of the trip, Gert and I presented the first [results of our opinion survey on Saba](#) (21<sup>st</sup> of January) and [St. Eustatius](#) (25<sup>th</sup> of January). It was absolutely fabulous to have the opportunity to discuss the survey results with respondents and local politicians on these two Windward islands, and to hear their opinions and interpretations of our research findings.

Regarding academic publications, a number of developments have occurred, as well. Jessica and I made a successful attempt to reach across disciplinary boundaries, and we co-authored an article about the historical origins of oligarchic politics on St. Maarten, combining insights from history and political science. This article has been accepted for publication in the [European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies](#). In addition, an article I wrote about the influence of smallness on political status debates in overseas territories has been published in *Geopolitics*, and has now [appeared online](#). Based on evidence from the Dutch Caribbean islands, in this article I discuss how personalistic politics and close relations between politicians and citizens influence and sometimes distort debates about the political status of small, non-sovereign jurisdictions.

In addition to analyzing and publishing more survey results, in the coming months I will prepare the following stage of field research in the ABC-islands, which will happen towards the end of June and the beginning of July. This fieldwork will consist of a presentation of survey results on each of these three islands, as well as a series of in-depth interviews that I hope to hold with various respondents on Bonaire. After having conducted qualitative research on Saba and St. Eustatius, I am very eager to learn more about the political dynamics of Bonaire, and how the changes of 2010 have impacted governance on this island.



*Wouter's research focuses on the impact of the new municipal status of the smallest Dutch Caribbean islands on the opinions and behavior of local citizens, civil servants, and politicians. The project also draws comparisons with the larger Dutch Caribbean islands and other non-sovereign island jurisdictions in the Caribbean and elsewhere.*

## Update project: Stacey Mac Donald



*Stacey is interested in uncovering behavioral differences between/within the BES-islands when it comes to nature conservation and cultural heritage. She will use identity principles to explain the dynamics of locals and immigrants who are active in conservation of nature and cultural heritage on the BES islands.*

The dates are set and the tickets are booked. In the first week of April I am leaving for the BES islands for my second fieldwork trip. This time I will be gone for a total of three months. First, I will be on St. Eustatius from the 11<sup>th</sup> of April until the 27<sup>th</sup> of April. Next, I will conduct fieldwork on Saba until the 13<sup>th</sup> of May and, lastly, I will stay on Bonaire for at least 5 weeks. After my fieldwork I also planned a trip back home to Curacao. It's been over a year since I've been back on Curacao and I am really looking forward to being home in the sun and playing with my puppy!

In the previous newsletter I wrote about the development of my questionnaire. The questionnaire is very important because it is with it that I will collect my first set of data. I am currently working on the final checks and adjustments to it. Since my last update, I conducted a pilot study to gather more information for my questionnaire. I interviewed cultural heritage and environmental conservationists who are currently living in the Netherlands and asked about their motivation for protecting cultural heritage and the environment of the Dutch Caribbean. I will use this information to further adjust and make the questions specific for the BES islands. This way I can ensure that the questions I use are relevant for the people who will participate in my study on the BES islands.

The information I obtained from these interviews is very useful and I am grateful for the time my interviewees took to share their experiences and insights with me. During the interviews I already observed how different people experience the same activity (in this case, protecting cultural

heritage of the BES islands) very differently, and that these differences are reflected in their personal bond with the islands. Of course, I cannot draw any conclusions based on a couple of interviews, but any affirmation of my hypotheses is always welcome!

Currently I am trying to contact organizations and individuals on the islands who would be willing to participate in my research. I am looking for individuals who are concerned with protecting the local cultural heritage and/or the natural environment. I developed an online version of the final questionnaire which can also be filled in on paper. Participants will be given the option to fill in the questionnaire online or in person (either using a tablet or a paper version of the questionnaire). Having both versions available hopefully ensures that I will be able to reach as many people as possible to fill in the questionnaire.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of February, the NWO presented the [second call for proposals](#) and some results of ongoing projects. I prepared a poster presentation of my research plan which was very well received. The conference also was a good opportunity to meet other researchers from various backgrounds who are concerned with the Dutch Caribbean.

2015 has been a very challenging year for me, but it seems there has been an energetic shift in 2016. I've made big steps in my research project and have been working at a very fast pace since January. At the moment I am really looking forward to being back on the islands. It feels as if the real work is only just beginning!

After rounding off most of my work at the archive of the [Extra](#) in Curaçao, on January 23, 2016, I flew to St. Maarten to be reunited with my colleagues Gert, Wouter, and Jessica for a day or so. During six months of fieldwork - and counting - it goes without saying that we, as a team, have had regular contact via e-mail and Skype. And, in our digital age, this works wonderfully well. Spending a night eating BBQ ribs together, however, was just really fun after such a long time.

Apart from seeing these familiar faces, my arrival on St. Maarten has led to a lot of new impressions in terms of climate, food, and people, among many other things. The fact that Curaçao and St. Maarten were until only recently both part of the 'Netherlands Antilles' and were, therefore, subject to similar regional dynamics, certainly does not mean that they don't have distinct histories and cultures. Or in the words of a respondent: "When you arrive on Curaçao you immediately know: This is Curaçao. But here, it is different. St. Maarten is just very, very international." Indeed, the yachts look bigger and the cruise ships more present, while the combination of a 'French' and a 'Dutch' side gives the island a unique vibe - although many local people stress it is, and has always been, one island, an impression I share so far. I received a warm welcome from [Dr. Francio Guadeloupe](#), President of the [University of St. Martin \(USM\)](#), along with other researchers located on the island. Moreover, many inhabitants - such as my wonderful hosts- have been very helpful in showing me the way around the island.

## Update Project: Sanne Rotmeijer

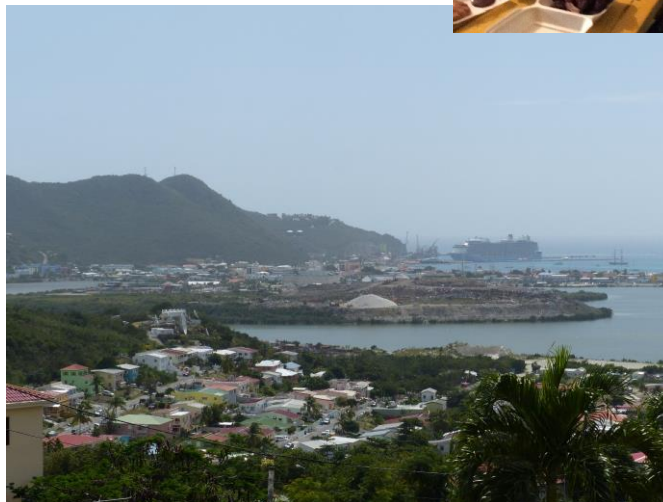
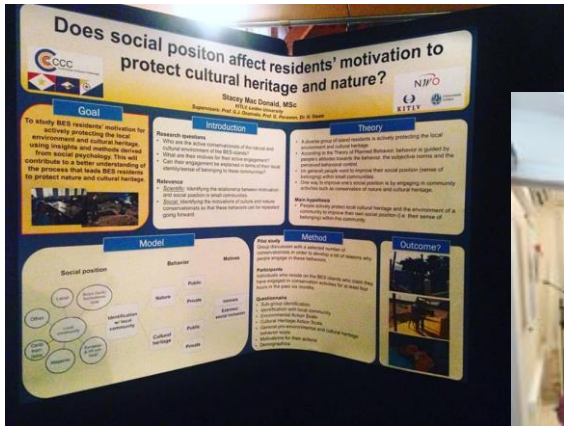
After two weeks of exploring the island, I started with participant observation at [The Daily Herald](#). This family-owned business is the biggest newspaper on St. Maarten and the surrounding islands. A large portrait of founder and President Roger F. Snow welcomes staff and visitors when they enter the big building where the newspaper and its own press are located, and, next to the portrait, hangs a poster that quotes a French journalist: "But really, what is a great newspaper? It isn't one that has exposés and revelations every day. It is one that has credibility, competence, and good writing." The quote continues with summing up admirable newspapers, such as *The New York Times* and *The Guardian*. While *The Daily Herald* unquestionably is incomparable to these giants, the poster perfectly exemplifies *The Herald's* American-inspired vision of what good journalism ought to be.

Apart from the daily editorial meeting, the journalists are in and out. I was able to join one of them on an expedition to the Court House, which provided me with valuable insights, not only into the work of journalists, but also into the dynamics of the Dutch law system. One thing that struck me was how Dutch prosecutors and lawyers were speaking Dutch in contrast to local suspects who were speaking English, or, even more often, the local English-based creole dialect, to the suspects and defendants who were there with their interpreters. This was just one of the many examples I have seen so far of divisions in St. Maarten's society today that are definitely more complicated than only the continued use of a colonial judicial and legal system. There are also issues such as racism, poverty and migration involved.

I will continue my fieldwork on St. Maarten until the end of April. I will keep reflecting on these and other observations, while participating in the editorial room of *The Daily Herald*, and interviewing journalists and other people involved in St. Maarten's (digital) press. After April, I will return to Curaçao to conclude my 10-months' of fieldwork.



*Sanne's research focuses on how traditional and new 'Dutch' Caribbean media reflect and shape discourses of (trans)national identities in the context of non-sovereignty, migration and small-scale politics.*



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