



# NEWSLETTER

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## IN THIS ISSUE

# Confronting Caribbean Challenges

Dear readers,

Our latest newsletter updates you on the activities of the program's researchers. I'll skip summarizing what Jessica, Sanne, Stacey and Wouter have told you about their own work – you'll find out yourself that they are all in their own ways engaged with truly exciting work.

One issue that has been on our minds from the very start of the program is how to optimally connect with the islands – more precisely, to scholars and activists working on the islands, as well as to the populations of the islands as a whole. But what is relevant, and what is feasible? There are no easy answers here, as we have discovered over the past two years. Therefore, we thought it would be good to discuss this major challenge with other scholars in the humanities and social sciences financed under the same Dutch Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) funding scheme. To that end, we held a meeting here at the KITLV on the 31<sup>st</sup> of August.

The theme of the meeting was 'Implementing our Results: What, How, with Whom?' and we exchanged quite a few ideas about these questions. But as we were discussing, we were all painfully aware that this was a somewhat hazardous business. We were thousands of miles away from the Caribbean in a room full of Netherlands-based experts discussing amongst ourselves 'implementation' rather than, say, joint Caribbean-Dutch research design. Bridging this gap remains a top priority, and we hope that the outcome of the second round of the NWO's Caribbean research funding scheme will help to shift the balance towards our Caribbean partners.

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

- Presenting CCC-opinion survey results on ABC islands
- Data collection for nature conservation and cultural heritage survey
- Leisurely moments of our CCC-team

## 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.*

I just finished writing an article for a special issue of [Atlantic Studies](#) on free people of color in the Atlantic. I was honored to be asked to write the part about the Dutch Antilles. As many of you know, the Dutch islands are, if not completely ignored, at least given rather cursory treatment in works on the Caribbean. The English, French, and Spanish islands tend to dominate historical studies. It's been heartening to see how much interest there is in the Dutch Antilles in wider scholarly circles, and how eager editors are to include something on the Dutch territories.

Writing the article was a challenge, though. Of course, there have been some wonderful studies on free blacks on Curaçao, and I included the excellent works of Wim Klooster, Han Jordaan, Gert Oostindie, and Linda Rupert in my own article. But, as usual, there was next to nothing written about Saba, St. Eustatius, and St. Maarten. Of course, that was and is my challenge as an historian – to find new stories among the scattered bits of evidence left to us and try to find some way to understand how free blacks, who comprised almost half the free population on St. Maarten in 1842, lived and were perceived. This article is only a beginning. My curiosity has been piqued, and I hope to keep writing about this understudied group.

I've also been working with Wouter on an article combining political science and history to understand the place of the *Bovenwindse* islands regionally. In keeping with our interdisciplinary approach, and the aims of our CCC project as a whole, we hope to have it published in a journal focused on social and cultural geography.

These are very typical academic sorts of publication, and that's what we're supposed to do as scholars. However, a key component of CCC, as well as of the overall NWO Caribbean funding scheme, is to 'valorize' our research. For those of you all who are not that up-to-date on academic jargon (and I envy you all for that!), this means, basically, making our research valuable or useful to a larger public. We hosted the second annual meeting of the projects that were funded by the NWO Caribbean research grants here at KITLV, and one of our main points of discussion was how we could translate, sometimes literally, always figuratively, our work to the general public, particularly on the islands. We had a fruitful and open conversation with our fellow researchers at other Dutch institutions, in various disciplines, and shared experiences, advice, and perspectives. Of course, what was missing, quite obviously, were representatives from the islands themselves . . . something that we hope will be remedied in the next round of funding for the Caribbean grants.

Speaking of which, both Gert and I are eagerly awaiting the results for our respective grant proposals, as are our Antillean partners. We expect to hear something in December or January. Fingers crossed!

This summer, I concluded the final stage of fieldwork for the qualitative part of my project. On beautiful Bonaire, I conducted 18 interviews with a variety of local experts, among whom the Governor, two Commissioners, members of the Island Council, and leaders of non-governmental organizations. In addition, I had meetings with representatives of the Dutch government working at the Rijksdienst Caribisch Nederland (RCN) on the island. It was great to learn more about the dynamics and intricacies of Bonairean politics, which also allowed me to observe some fascinating differences and similarities with the other two public entities – Saba and St. Eustatius – in which I have conducted field research before. I would like to thank all the interview respondents on Bonaire for their openness and willingness to share their knowledge and political experiences with me. During the fieldwork, an opinion piece in which I outline my views on Bonairean politics and the relationship with the Netherlands was published in [Trouw](#). After processing all the interview data, in the coming months I hope to conduct a comparative analysis between all three islands of the Caribbean Netherlands, highlighting their vastly dissimilar political environments.

## Update Project: Wouter Veenendaal

In addition to the qualitative fieldwork on Bonaire, in the same period I also gave presentations of the results of our opinion survey on all three of the ABC islands: [Curaçao on 23 June](#), [Aruba on 24 June](#), and [Bonaire on 7 July](#). These presentations generated plenty of media attention, resulting in a number of additional interviews on [radio](#) and [television](#) channels on the islands. Due to the upcoming legislative elections, I noticed an especially large amount of interest in research about local politics and the enduring constitutional relationship with the Netherlands on Curaçao. Now that survey presentations have been held on all the islands as well as in the Netherlands, in the coming period I primarily aim to write about the survey results in academic publications.

In terms of research output, at the end of June my article about the survival of the trans-Atlantic Kingdom appeared [online](#). This article, which is published in *Acta Politica*, discusses how the unique political structure of the Kingdom – constituting a hybrid between a federal and a unitary state – has contributed to its survival, even in the face of growing disillusionment and resentment on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.

Just after the conclusion of my field research, at the start of my summer break, I received the news that I have been awarded an [NWO Veni grant](#) for [a new research project](#). While this is of course very good news for me personally, it also means that I will leave the CCC project by the end of this year. My new research project focuses on sovereign small states, as a result of which I will also finish my research activities in the Dutch Caribbean. Nevertheless, I will of course remain personally involved with the progress of our magnificent CCC-research team, and certainly will continue to write and publish about the islands!



*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 past months have been busy, but also quiet compared to my months on the three islands. After the hectic, but fruitful, months of fieldwork I've spent my time back at the office in Leiden collecting, organizing, and analyzing my data. I launched the online survey and, despite many technical difficulties, a decent number of people participated. To ensure a large number of respondents, I used several distribution techniques. First, I made use of the network I built on the islands during my fieldwork. I also made a short promotional video with a call for participants for my survey, which I distributed via social media. Lastly, I used the built-in distribution application of the survey-software, with which I sent direct emails to everyone who met the research criteria and from whom I acquired an email address. I also wrote a [blog](#) about some 'best practices' to get people to fill out an online survey. Because the survey was quite long, I also included a reward for filling out the survey: five participants have been randomly selected and won a prize of 50 US dollars. In total, about 70 individuals completed the online survey. While more is always better, especially with survey research, I cannot say that I am dissatisfied with the level of participation. A very big thank you to all who took part!

I also spent time on writing up parts of my methodology chapter for my dissertation and in working on short articles in which I share my preliminary research findings. These have been published in the [Bonaire Reporter](#) and the newsletter of the DCNA, [BioNews](#). I am currently writing up the report of my findings from the pretest study, with which I collected the necessary data to develop the final survey.

In the coming months I will spend most of my time on analyzing and writing up my research findings. I will not only analyze the data collected with the online survey, but also transcribe and analyze the semi-structured interviews I held on the islands during my field work. For these interviews, I am developing a coding system, to systematically analyze and compare the information obtained during these interviews. In addition to the information collected on the islands, I will also conduct more interviews with Dutch civil servants and NGOs who are involved with the protection of nature and cultural heritage on the BES islands.

This mixed method design, and the use of information collected on the islands as well as in The Netherlands, allows me to give me a comprehensive answer to my research questions: to get a better understanding of who does what and why concerning the protection of the natural environment and cultural heritage on the BES islands.

Being back in the Netherlands, and with the opening of the new academic year, means that I will continue following courses to develop my research skills. Another exciting update is that I'm planning to present my research during several (special) occasions, but more on this and my research findings in the next newsletter!

## Update Project: Sanne Rotmeijer

It's already the end of September, and the new academic year is in full swing. This means that weekly research meetings and seminars have started again, and courses are about to begin. In my case, the [LeidenGlobal](#) Lecture Series: '[Discipline and Place in the Social Sciences and the Humanities](#)' is the first course I will attend this year. It is focused on stimulating 'transregional and transdisciplinary dialogue, in line with international developments in scholarship.' This course will help me to reflect on and position my research amid other disciplines and regions in the world.

Both self-reflection and positioning yourself as a researcher were also important themes during our regular Caribbean Research seminar, where researchers involved in the NWO Caribbean Research call come together to share research experiences and findings. This year's seminar 'Implementing our Results: What, How, with Whom?' took place at the end of August at the KITLV. We spent an afternoon sharing valuable insights on 'valorization' and ways of giving back, creating knowledge, and cooperating with partners in the Caribbean.

I continue standing with one foot in Curaçao and St. Maarten, and one here in the Netherlands, particularly at the moment. After the government crises in both Curaçao and St. Maarten last year, the islands are now totally wrapped up in the elections this month. In my [last blog](#) on the KITLV website, I shared my perspective on these elections in relation to identity construction, belonging, and what Brexit and nationalist discourses on Curaçao and St. Maarten may have in common. With the elections coming closer, tensions on the islands have risen, and journalists have their hands full covering current strikes and the differing political standpoints.

While I could easily follow the recent political developments in Curaçao and St. Maarten all day, I need to work on the material I collected during my fieldwork, including in-depth interviews, field notes and news articles. Going through all these documents makes me even more aware not only of the very inspiring stories journalists have shared with me, but also of the patterns within, and connections between, these stories, my observations, and the news articles I collected. Indeed, with transcribing interviews the analysis has begun. In the upcoming months, I will continue selecting and preparing material for further and more detailed analysis.



*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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