



# NEWSLETTER

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## Confronting Caribbean Challenges

Dear reader of the CCC Newsletter,

Close to three years ago (May 2014), Gert, Wouter, and I received the very welcome news that the 'Confronting Caribbean Challenges' (CCC) project we had developed was one of the nine programs to be funded by the Dutch Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) under their 'Caribbean Research – A multidisciplinary approach' funding scheme. Our overarching goal – to look at how political reforms and intensive migrations affect historically grounded identities and political practices on these Dutch Caribbean islands- was going to be explored via two post-doc and one (which eventually became two via additional funding from the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences [KNAW]) Ph.D. projects. We were eager to begin analyzing themes such as small-scale, migration, non-sovereignty, and post-coloniality – and couldn't wait to answer urgent questions about governance, insular identities, media, cultural heritage, and nature conservation.

We're now two full years into the project, as both Sanne (December 2014) and Stacey (January 2015) joined us several months after Wouter and I began working on the project in September 2014. We thought it was high time to look back on these two years, and share with the readers of this newsletter what we've learned, what challenges we've faced, and where we see ourselves going as we enter the second half of the CCC project. Therefore, we've decided to alter our normal newsletter format a bit for this edition. You can still read updates on our specific projects' progress, though in much abbreviated form. Instead, the first part will draw together our projects and our experiences over the last two years for our readers. Not only is the halfway point of the project a good time to reflect under any circumstances, but it seemed particularly important at the moment because of some changes within the team. As you can read below, Wouter will be leaving us (though, happily, he will stay affiliated with KITLV and the project), and we will be welcoming Malcom Ferdinand to our team.



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## Confronting Challenges

In retrospect, it was entirely apt that we called our project 'Confronting Caribbean Challenges'. When we came up with the title, we were playing with alliteration, paying homage to Creedence Clearwater Revival, and referring to the intellectual challenges inherent in working on our respective topics. Two years into the research, one of the hallmarks of all our individual experiences, as well as of the project as a whole, has been the challenges we've faced, personally, professionally, and intellectually.

Due to the NWO's regulations for this grant, our project had to be based in The Netherlands, and, therefore, all of us are, ourselves, based here. This has meant, in turn, that all of us have spent significant amounts of time away from our family and friends while we're doing our research on the islands. Now, of course, it's hardly a great penance to have to spend time in the Caribbean, particularly during the Dutch winter! And we've largely been welcomed warmly by individuals and organizations on all six of the former Netherlands Antilles. Still yet, the weeks or months away from home can be lonely, put a strain on relationships, and lead to us feeling an 'inbetweenness' in our lives.

This very feeling of being between multiple worlds has challenged us to think about our own personal position within our research. Stacey put it succinctly when she said that "I have become increasingly aware of my own person within the work I am doing, the way in which it is being carried out, the ideas and knowledge I acquire, and the way in which all of this is being received by the community." This is a feeling that resonates with my own experience. As an American doing research on Saba, St. Eustatius, and St. Maarten, I have largely escaped the 'taint' of being personally associated with the legacies of Dutch colonialism. Nevertheless, I have been understandably asked how I think I can, or even if I should, write the history of the people of these islands – a question with which I still struggle. Wouter has, perhaps, been the one of us who has had to do the most reflecting on his own position.

He wrote that,

One aspect of the research that I underestimated is the effect of my own position as a Dutch white male conducting research in the Dutch Caribbean islands, particularly in this context of non-sovereignty. As a political scientist trained in empirical analysis, I never paid much attention to my own identity and positionality in relation to my academic work.

Beyond our individual positions in relationship to our own research, we've all had to confront the challenge of the ambiguity and, sometimes, outright controversy, associated with the CCC project, specifically, and the NWO's method of setting up its Caribbean research funding, in general. We've received mixed reactions from local academics, politicians, and citizens on the islands, but also from within the Dutch academic establishment. Defining ourselves in relation to our individual sub-projects, the

CCC project, as a whole, and the various stakeholders was, and continues to be, a challenge, personally and professionally.

This overlap between professional and personal challenges is something we've all seen as we've dealt with getting our research projects off the ground. For Stacey and Sanne, as, indeed, for almost all people working on their Ph.D.s, one of their biggest issues has been to create innovative, yet feasible, research plans in their highly diffuse, interdisciplinary fields of, respectively, nature conservation and cultural heritage, and media/journalism studies. This challenge has been exacerbated by the fact that they are not working within a team with much or any expertise in these fields. Happily, though, they've both gotten lots of help from experts at [Leiden University](#), particularly [Professor Jaap de Jong](#), Professor [Gerard Persoon](#), and [Dr. Henk Staats](#).

Wouter and I have also had to deal with coming up with workable research plans due to the sheer, sometimes overwhelming, amount of information out there which we need to sift through. This isn't a bad problem to have! But it can form a challenge in terms of making sure we stay focused on our specific research projects and don't drown in all the data. As post-docs, we've also been faced with the harsh realities of the Dutch academic job market, and have been challenged by the fact that we've had to simultaneously look for permanent employment, continue to apply for grants to continue our research, and give our time, attention, energy, and passion to the CCC project. No easy balancing act. This is affects Gert, as well. He's had to continue to apply for funding for not only Caribbean research, but also for the KITLV, as a whole, while also juggling his jobs as Director of the KITLV, Professor of Caribbean History at Leiden University, Head of [Leiden Global](#), and project leader to not only the CCC project, but also a major project on [Indonesian decolonization](#).

Up to this point, you all reading this text might think it's all been difficult. While there certainly have been difficulties for all of us along the way, after two years of working on the CCC project, it is safe to say that these were challenges in the best sense of the term: not just as a euphemism for 'difficulty' but, as the *Cambridge English Dictionary* defines it, "the situation of being faced with something that needs great mental or physical effort in order to be done successfully and therefore tests a person's ability." We've certainly been tested, but have all learned, grown, and continue to be interested in, and excited by, our research. Moreover, with a few minor exceptions, we've been able to form wonderful relationships with the people of the islands, who have generously shared of their knowledge, expertise, and time, something for which we are all very grateful.

As you've read in the previous CCC newsletters, we've managed to attend and present at lots of conferences, publish in a large number of journals, including articles that are interdisciplinary, and engage in all sorts of positive outreach efforts, both on the islands, and in the European Netherlands. Moreover, we've worked incredibly well as a team. Interdisciplinarity is talked about all the time. In fact, it's the new buzz word in academia. But actually achieving it is another thing entirely. I dare say that our CCC team **has** achieved it. We're still firmly entrenched in, and committed to, our individual disciplines, but we've learned a

great deal from each other, and have pushed ourselves not only as individuals, but as scholars and researchers, by our encounter with each other.

Another success has been Wouter's [Veni](#) grant on political stability in small states. Although this means that he will officially be leaving the project to work for the [Political Science Institute](#) at Leiden University, he will stay around the KITLV two days a week as he embarks on his new project, which will include Suriname, one of the areas of expertise of the KITLV. Malcom Ferdinand will take over the comparative aspect of Wouter's research by comparing and contrasting the Dutch Antilles with other small-scale, non-sovereign territories in the Caribbean, as well as other parts of the world. Change is part of the process, and sometimes painful, though rarely a bad thing. Wouter will be missed, but we're thrilled to have Malcom join us.

And on that note, let's briefly fill you all in on our individual projects since our last newsletter.

## Updates

[Sanne](#) attended the conference [Constructed|Constructive Journalism](#) in Brussels, and presented a paper entitled, "Small Islands, Big Impact: Constructive Journalism Practices in St. Maarten and Curaçao." Sanne's been busy. In addition to this conference, she also attended the RMeS (Research School for Media Studies) [Winter school/Graduate Symposium 2017](#) (in mid-January) where she explored questions such as: 'Is there such thing as an academic activist?', while reflecting on journalism practices in the Caribbean. As if this weren't enough, she has started co-lecturing in the pre-master program 'News and Identity in the Caribbean' at the [Journalism and New Media Department](#), Leiden University. Working together with students, she will analyze news articles in light of the institutional and socio-historical contexts of St. Maarten and Curaçao.

[Stacey](#) has been busy analyzing the data she's compiled from her survey (again, many thanks to all those who participated in the survey, and/or who helped spread the word about it), and is also determining the ways in which she can best delve into her qualitative (interview) data. But Stacey hasn't just been behind her desk working with SPSS and other programs. She's presented her preliminary findings at the ASPO ([Associatie van Sociaal Psychologische Onderzoekers \[Association of Social Psychology Researchers\]](#)) conference. This won't be the only conference she'll present at, however. She's actively applying for other conferences, writing up the results from her data analysis, and has been a regular attendee at various graduate school courses, at which she exchanges ideas about her fieldwork, methodologies, and directions for future research.

[Wouter](#) has closed out the last few months within the CCC project by working on two articles in which he presents the data that he has assembled over the past two years. One of these articles is co-authored with Gert, and compares the results of the recent CCC survey with an earlier survey that Gert conducted in

1998 (published in '[Ki Sorto di Reino](#)'). This article analyzes the benefits and downsides of non-sovereignty as they are perceived and evaluated by the inhabitants of the Dutch Caribbean islands.

The second article that Wouter has been working on processes the results of his field research and in-depth interviews on the islands of Bonaire, Saba, and St. Eustatius. This article discusses how the constitutional reforms of 2010 have impacted local democracy, governance, and politics on the three islands.

Wouter writes, "I would like to thank my CCC colleagues, Gert, Jessica, Sanne and Stacey for the great collaboration and friendship in the past years. We have found an excellent researcher to finalize this particular subproject, and I am convinced that Malcom will be a great contribution to the CCC team. I will of course remain involved with CCC and the Dutch Caribbean islands from a distance, and I hope to stay in touch with you!" FYI: Wouter's KITLV email address will still work.

[Gert](#) has been busy administering the KITLV, Leiden Global, and working one day a week as Professor of Caribbean History at Leiden University, not to mention leading the CCC project and a project on Indonesian decolonization. He has had to continue to apply for outside funding so that the KITLV can continue to host new and innovative research. In this, he has happily been very successful. He received an NWO grant in the second Caribbean Research funding scheme for his project on "[Traveling Cultural Heritage](#)". This project is predicated on identifying and questioning the dynamics of heritage formation, and will clearly fit in wonderfully with the work that the CCC project is already engaged in. In addition, Gert has received funding from the Dutch government to head up a [major research project on Indonesian decolonization](#) with the [Netherlands Institute for Military History](#) (NIMH) and the [Institute for War, Holocaust, and Genocide Studies](#) (NIOD) as partners.

[Jessica](#) Although not directly related to CCC, I was invited to attend a conference on [religious change and cultural transformations in Western Sephardic communities](#) at [Hebrew University](#) in Jerusalem in November, where I presented on the relationship between Blacks and Jews in eighteenth century Curacao. This is the topic of a chapter I wrote that came out in October called, "The Repercussions of Rumor: An adultery case from Curaçao," in Michael Stedemund-Halevy, ed. *A Sephardic Pepper -Pot in the Caribbean* (Barcelona: Tirocinio, 2016), 76-94. I also had an article come out on migrations and the decisions (formerly) enslaved people made to either stay or go. It is entitled, "The Price You Pay: Choosing family, friends, and



familiarity over freedom in the Leeward Islands, 1835-1863," *Journal of Global Slavery*, 2 no. 2 (2016).

Lastly, we'd like to introduce **Malcom Ferdinand**. Malcolm is originally from Martinique. His research explores the extent to which contemporary relationships with the respective metropolitan powers shape local political conflicts, affect modes of governance, and impact current ecological preservation efforts.

Malcom obtained his PhD (summa cum laude) in political science and political philosophy at the Université Paris Diderot in 2016 with a dissertation on contemporary ecological conflicts in the Caribbean. Through empirical research on four islands (Martinique, Guadeloupe, Haiti and Puerto Rico), Malcom examined the way current ecological conflicts bring to the fore demands of social and environmental justice from the inhabitants, who criticize the current political relationship with

the metropolitan power. Combining historical, sociological and literary approaches, Malcom has developed a theory of Caribbean postcolonial ecological thought, one that articulates the imperative of nature and cultural heritage preservation and political claims of equality.

Well . . . that's it for now. . . This edition of the newsletter is quite a bit longer than our usual, but, as I wrote above, we felt like it was time to share with you all how we've experienced the last two years. We'll continue to keep you updated in the coming two years (about every three months or so) on our individual and team progress. As always, please feel free to pass along this letter to others who might be interested, and, of course, you can always unsubscribe! We love to hear from people interested in the CCC project, so you all are always welcome to get in touch.

Wishing all our readers all the best in 2017.

On behalf of the CCC-team, Jessica Roitman.



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