




CCC
Confronting Caribbean Challenges

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IN THIS ISSUE

Confronting Caribbean Challenges

Dear readers,

In this 9th CCC Newsletter, you will find updates on the research, publications, exchanges and what have you of the various team members, including our new colleague Malcom Ferdinand. His observation that the French and the Dutch Caribbean, in spite of their various arrangements of non-sovereignty, occupy 'similar positions of marginality in the imagery of the nation' made me think of something that is largely left out in our newsletters: metropolitan policies and their consequences in the Caribbean.

Non-sovereignty in the Caribbean is the product of a colonial history characterized to a large extent by slavery, racism, exploitation, and, later on, abandonment and neglect. The choice consistently made against full sovereignty in the Dutch and French Caribbean – as is also the case in the remaining British Overseas Territories, and in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgins Islands – does not necessarily reflect an identification as French, Dutch, British, or American, nor does it mean that people approve of this past, but, rather, it is an outgrowth of pragmatic concerns about the present and the future. And wherever local populations speak out about their views of the costs and benefits of non-sovereignty, we encounter a head versus heart dilemma. Resentment about the colonial past or about

contemporary postcolonial interference does not translate into any significant call for independence. The risks are deemed too high.

And hence the Caribbean parts of the Kingdom of the Netherlands remain caught in this postcolonial imbroglio – and many are therefore eagerly awaiting to find out whether the Dutch elections last March will make a difference in their lives. Will the incoming Dutch government formulate new policies for the 'Dutch' Caribbean, and if so, what will this mean? From my own conversations with stakeholders on both sides of the Atlantic, I am not so sure that anything significant will change. Relations with the Caribbean continue to be a low priority in Dutch politics. Surely the islands deserve more positive engagement, but alas: 'marginality' indeed characterizes their position in the Dutch political arena.

It should be different. That's surely a driving force behind the work of the CCC-team – and, equally, for other scholars working on the Caribbean at KITLV and in many other academic institutions in the Netherlands!

Yours,

Gert Oostindie



Update sub-projects

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



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 19th and 20th 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 returned from a week at the Association for Caribbean Historian's annual conference. The conference is held in a different Caribbean territory yearly, and this year Tobago was the host. The conference is a wonderful way to learn about new scholarship, and meet other historians from throughout the Caribbean, as well as the rest of the world. The breadth of topics and chronologies covered was impressive, with papers on everything from Early Modern piracy to very contemporary migrations.

That being said, there does tend to be a preponderance of presentations on the Haitian Revolution (happily back in vogue after being ignored for decades) or else on the English-speaking Caribbean in the post-emancipation era and into the twentieth century. That's why I was so pleased to come across a young Swedish historian who, like me, is passionately interested in the Leewards, in his case, St. Bart's under Swedish rule.

As readers of this newsletter have heard me lament in previous issues, the Leewards are so often ignored or written off as unimportant. That someone else was not only interested, but also had done original archival research into the non-English islands, was a wonderful discovery. We are planning a few collaborative articles going forward. And that's why conferences are more than just a trip to somewhere interesting and drinks with old friends (as nice as those things are!). At their best, a good conference will help us find ways to maximize our resources and our potential for high-quality research with other scholars.

Update Project: Wouter Veenendaal

My official role in the CCC project ended this past January, but in addition to starting my new research project at Leiden University, in recent weeks and months I have also been finalizing a number of CCC-related papers. An article Gert and I wrote comparing the 1998 and 2015 opinion surveys on the Dutch Caribbean islands is now under review with an academic journal, and Jessica and I are finishing up another paper on the interaction between (post)colonial legacies and Caribbean regional identities.

My main focus, however, has been on an article processing the results of the field research and in-depth interviews that I conducted on Bonaire, Saba, and St. Eustatius in 2015 and 2016. Based on the data coming out of these interviews, in this article I aim to provide an analysis of the predominant political dynamics on the three islands after the reforms of 10-10-10. Highlighting both the small size and insular geography of the islands, as well as the broader characteristics of politics in the postcolonial Caribbean, the article addresses the question of why the implementation of the Dutch municipal model has not (yet) produced a significant improvement in governance on the islands. While Saba has been politically stable since becoming a public body of the Netherlands, Bonaire and St. Eustatius have experienced numerous failed governments and pervasive political instability over the past seven years, and the article makes a comparison between the islands in order to explain these differences. I hope to publish this article in a Dutch-language academic journal, and I very much look forward to sharing and discussing my findings with citizens and politicians on the islands, as well as Dutch public officials working in The Hague and on 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.

I am waist deep in the writing phase of my project, and am currently working on a paper that I hope to publish in a social psychological journal. This paper is about the central question of my research: do people protect nature or cultural heritage to integrate the local communities of Bonaire, Saba and St. Eustatius (among other reasons)? In this paper, I focus on the data I collected with my online survey. It seems that people do indeed engage in activities to protect the natural and cultural heritage of the islands because it increases their sense of belonging within the community. This is especially the case for people who want to belong to the local communities. Furthermore, it seems that in the case of environmental protection, as expected, this is even more the case when people do not currently feel they are part of the local community. Among people who protect cultural heritage, this relationship was not present: only people who already feel they belong to the local communities, and have a strong desire to belong, were most involved in protecting the cultural heritage.

Writing is never an easy process – going back and forth between collected data, known theories, my own observations and experiences, and, most importantly, simple logic. Writing is frustrating, but also very rewarding. Nothing beats the feeling of reading a sentence or two that perfectly describes your thought process. Was it really that hard, I wonder? No, I guess not. Until I read it again the next day, and absolutely nothing makes sense. That being said, I feel my paper is starting to make a lot of sense, and I am eager to share my first findings, and my line of reasoning at the [Annual Conference of the Caribbean Studies Association](#) in June.

Update Project: Sanne Rotmeijer

It is the first Summer day in The Netherlands. And the last day of the pre-master program 'News and Identity in the Caribbean', which I have co-taught at the [Department of Journalism and New Media, Leiden University](#). While a tropically warm room sets the mood for an afternoon full of presentations on Caribbean news media, one by one the students enter with expressions varying from rather relieved to really nervous.

Today they are presenting the preliminary findings of their qualitative content analysis of a selection of Curaçaoan news articles published around 10-10-15, five years after Curaçao became autonomous within the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The class started in January 2017 with a group of pre-master students who were highly motivated to learn more about Curaçao and its news media landscape. After a couple of introductory sessions about the [characteristics of Caribbean Journalism](#) and the historical and socio-political situation in Curaçao, the students have worked on answering the question: How do news media in Curaçao represent national identities?

This afternoon, they present their interpretations, which vary from a focus on media-mediated hybridity of national identities to the political rhetoric underlying media debates about (presumed) national identities. They conclude that, depending on the content of the news articles, but also, and more importantly, on who speaks, identities are differently reflected and shaped.

After an afternoon full of presentations, not only I am proud of what these pre-masters have accomplished– diving deep in a media landscape and culture that is completely new to them- but it's also extremely gratifying that the students express their increased excitement about the Caribbean islands and its media.



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.



Update Project: Malcom Ferdinand

As the newest member of the CCC team, I have had the chance the past three months to familiarize myself with the different parts of the sub-projects, with my kind colleagues, and with KITLV in Leiden. More importantly, this was also the start of my stay in the Netherlands. Coming from Martinique and having lived in mainland France, I was startled by both the differences and the similarities between the countries with regard to the relations to their overseas territories, which is the focus of my project, as well as the place dedicated to the history of colonization and slavery. Despite their striking social, economic, legislative and political differences, it seems that both the France *d'outre-mer* and the Dutch Antilles occupy relatively similar positions of marginality in the imaginary of the nation. I was particularly interested in the way race is being (un)addressed in both France and the Netherlands. The “white innocence” of the Dutch definitely echoes the experiences of minorities in France.

With other team members, I will conduct comparative work on the Dutch Antilles and other non-sovereign territories in the world, with a special focus on the France *d'outre-mer*. These comparisons will touch on the differences and similarities in governance, in perceptions of identity, and on environmental preservation and discourses surrounding ecological issues.

Malcom conducts comparative research on the Dutch Antilles and other small-scale, non-sovereign territories in the Caribbean, as well as other parts of the world. He 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.



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