



# NEWSLETTER

#10 | 2017

## Confronting Caribbean Challenges

Dear readers,

This issue of our CCC Newsletter is late, for obvious reasons. As you will read, our team members had all written their usual updates in August. Jessica reports how she has contributed yet another article in her unrelenting quest to give the Dutch islands in the Northern Caribbean their fair share in the historiography of the region. Wouter summarizes the contents of a recent article the two of us co-authored, tracking the seemingly inescapable 'head-versus-heart' dilemmas that citizens of the Dutch Caribbean face, as do so many other inhabitants of non-sovereign jurisdictions world-wide. Sanne explains why and how, after two years of hard field work and desk research, she made the valiant decision to reconfigure the outlines of her PhD dissertation. Stacey too reports on her ongoing PhD research on activism in nature conservation and cultural heritage, writing of our "... common goal: taking better care of our planet for the sake of the well-being of human beings, animals and all organisms as a whole." And Malcom, , writing presciently days before Irma blasted through the Caribbean, offered his thoughts on the devastating effects of climate change and "The need for climate justice for non-sovereign territories."

Then came September -and Irma. And after Irma, Maria. And suddenly we were

watching aghast as these monster hurricanes ravaged the Northern Caribbean, devastating islands, killing people, destroying natural resources and towns, roads, airports, harbors, and much else in-between. So we decided to postpone the publication of this issue of the Newsletter. Instead, in our own individual ways, we tried to inform the media and the public about the moral, historical, and constitutional responsibilities of the Kingdom government to the Dutch Caribbean islands; about the local political situation; the relationships within the Kingdom; and about challenges facing future cooperation for the rebuilding of Sint Maarten, and for supporting the fortunately less badly-afflicted islands of Saba and Statia. But as we talked, I could not help worrying about the future. I worry about the Caribbean as an ecologically extremely vulnerable region, with its very existence put in jeopardy because of climate change beyond its control. Furthermore, it was a painful realization that sovereign small states such as Antigua and Barbuda suffer even more than do non-sovereign places like Sint Maarten because there is no metropolis to help them out. But then again, as I write these lines, I see how even non-sovereign Puerto Rico is grossly neglected by its metropolis, the U.S.



### Update sub-projects

There is every reason to remind the Dutch government of its responsibilities towards its 'own' Kingdom partners, and I am happy to see that this responsibility seems to have been taken up. There is also every reason to echo Malcom's plea for "climate justice for non-sovereign territories." But the challenge goes beyond that. This is not just about the islands of the Dutch Kingdom, nor is it exclusively about other non-sovereign territories in the Caribbean and elsewhere. This is about climate justice worldwide. What a great opportunity for the former Dutch colonial partners in the Caribbean to take these horrifying natural disasters as a point of departure for joint action on what, as Stacey wrote, should indeed be our common goal: "taking better care of our planet."

Gert Oostindie

## 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. [www.kitlv.nl/researchers-roitman/](http://www.kitlv.nl/researchers-roitman/)

I've taken on a bit of a dual mission since beginning the CCC project almost three years ago. I believe passionately that the histories and experiences of the people of the Dutch Antilles need to be included in larger discussions of Caribbean History – discussions that tend to be focused on the (former) British, French, and/or Spanish territories. I also want to counter what I believe has been a pervasively Curaçao-centric version of Dutch Antillean history. These narratives privilege the story of Curaçao as being representative of the history of all the Antilles, much to the detriment of the other islands, particularly the *bovenwindse* (Leeward) islands of Saba, St. Eustatius, and St. Maarten.

That's why I was so pleased when my recent article "[A mass of mestiezen, castiezen, and mulatten](#)": Contending with color in the Netherlands Antilles, 1750–1850" came out in July as part of a special issue of *Atlantic Studies*. The special issue addresses the situation of free people of color in the Caribbean during the so-called 'Revolutionary Era,' and includes not only articles on the standard case studies of Cuba, Jamaica, and Haiti, but also a piece on St. Bart's (Swedish), and my comparison of St. Maarten and Curaçao.

Thus, my twin goals of writing the history of the Dutch into broader discussions of Caribbean History and going beyond Curaçao as the main focus for the study of the Dutch Antilles were reached. In my article, I compare Curaçao and St. Maarten, and look at the role of free people of color in these societies. The article is available in Open Access format, meaning it is freely available to anyone who wants to read it, without a subscription to the journal or access to an academic library. You can click on the link in the title above.

Please feel free to share it with anyone you think might be interested.

## Update Project: Wouter Veenendaal

This summer, Gert and I received the happy news that our article "Head versus Heart" will be published in the political science journal *Regional & Federal Studies*. In this article, we draw a comparison between the two extensive opinion surveys about Kingdom relations that we have conducted on the six Dutch Caribbean islands. The first of these surveys was effected by Gert and Peter Verdon in 1998, and has been published as *Ki sorto di Reino? / What kind of Kingdom?*, whereas I conducted the second survey in the fall of 2015 as part of our CCC project. A comparison between the two surveys offers us a unique opportunity to track changes and developments in people's opinions and attitudes towards the Kingdom over the past 17 years. This is particularly interesting in light of the dissolution of the Netherlands Antilles in 2010, which culminated in a changed political status for all islands except Aruba.

Both the 1998 and the 2015 opinion survey point to strong ambiguities in people's attitudes towards the non-sovereign status and the enduring relationship of their island with the European Netherlands. On the one hand, in 1998 just as in 2015, survey respondents indicated that they appreciate the material benefits resulting from being part of the Kingdom, among which: 1) the Dutch passport and right of abode in the Netherlands; 2) financial and economic advantages; 3) Dutch military protection; and 4) administrative supervision and the role of the Kingdom in safeguarding democracy and the rule of law.

On the other hand, however, both surveys point to widespread disenchantment and frustration with some of the more ideational or psychological aspects of their non-sovereign status, and, in particular, the low levels of knowledge of, and respect for, the islands among Dutch public officials. In sum, in both surveys we find evidence of what we label a "head versus heart dilemma." Non-sovereignty is perceived as a rationally pragmatic, yet morally unsatisfactory, political arrangement. What's more, a comparison between the 1998 and 2015 surveys reveals that the feelings of resentment towards the metropolitan Netherlands have actually increased over the past 17 years, and most profoundly so on the three smallest islands (Bonaire, Saba, and St. Eustatius), which in 2010 became public bodies of the (European) Netherlands. As we emphasize in the article, this worrying trend should alarm politicians and policymakers on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.

While our analysis focuses on the Dutch Caribbean islands, in the article we also highlight that the 'head-versus-heart' dilemma is actually a common phenomenon in non-sovereign territories and 'peripheral' regions around the world, and in this sense the attitudes of Dutch Caribbean citizens are in some ways comparable to those of Catalans, Flemish, and Scots. However, while the larger size of these regions facilitates a lively debate about independence, our surveys show that in spite of mounting dissatisfaction on all Dutch Caribbean islands, support for independence has only marginally increased over the past two decades.

While we do not have the funds to publish our article in Open Access, the journal gave us access to 50 free e-prints. These can be accessed by using the following link, which we gladly provide to the readers of our newsletter: <http://www.tandfonline.com/eprint/PR5UCTWXrrQYwGHU2KrR/full>.



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. [www.kitlv.nl/researchers-veenendaal/](http://www.kitlv.nl/researchers-veenendaal/)

## 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.

[www.kitlv.nl/researchers-macdonald/](http://www.kitlv.nl/researchers-macdonald/)

From the 31st of August until the 2nd of September I attended the [International Conference on Environmental Psychology: "Theories of change and social innovation in transitions towards sustainability"](#) held in [A Coruña, Spain](#). There I presented my first (soon to be published) article, titled "Conservation as Integration". I expected my question of "Do people protect the natural or cultural environment of a place as a means feel a sense of belonging within that community?" would be somewhat unconventional. It wasn't. I was surprised to see a shift taking place within the field of environmental psychology. Usually, environmental psychologists focus on factors on the individual level to explain and predict pro-environmental behaviors. For example, they might look at a person's attitudes towards the environment, monetary incentives, personal values, or feelings of concern. However, many researchers at the conference emphasized that we should shift our focus to social determinants of behavior. For instance, how being part of a community, having friends, and even how a person's social status can motivate and guide behavior towards environmental protection. Surprisingly, not much attention has been paid to this line of research, and it was encouraging to learn I am one of the first, along with a few other researchers, to be looking into these dynamics.

In addition, many scientists urged that more research include people who *do not* take part in pro-environmental behaviors, so that the research would be more inclusive instead of exclusive. As researchers, it should be our mission to figure out ways to motivate others with different interests to join forces and work towards a common goal: taking better care of our planet for the well-being of human beings, animals, and all organisms. This is in line with an unexpected turn that took place in my research project as whole. In collaboration with the [World Wide Fund for Nature - Netherlands \(WNF\)](#), I am going to do another round of fieldwork. I will be spending three months on Bonaire, and will be teaming up with WNF and local stakeholders in a project related to local fisheries. When dealing with fisheries, cultural sensitivities and the practical difficulties local fishers face daily need to be taken seriously and be given priority. Hence, I was asked to provide guidance to the WNF on ways to protect the environment and cultural identities, while also safeguarding the livelihoods of the local fishers. I am looking forward to getting back in touch with all the great people I met last year. I will share updates on our [Facebook-page](#) on a regular basis, so keep your eyes out for the latest updates and developments there!

## Update Project: Sanne Rotmeijer

*Science is founded on uncertainty. Each time we learn something new and surprising, the astonishment comes with the realization that we were wrong before* - Lewis Thomas (1980)

This is a quote that often came to my mind during the past summer months. Having crossed the halfway point of my research, embracing uncertainty, and being open to new directions, was something I have had to learn to do lately.

Before I started my fieldwork in Curaçao and St. Maarten last year, I designed a research plan that was built on understanding how journalism on the islands reflects and shapes national identities. A substantial part of this research design was based upon a detailed analysis of news articles. However, the conversations I had with journalists and news bloggers, and my experiences during my fieldwork made me realize that to understand news media on the islands, and the role they play in the island societies, I had to shift my primary focus from text to context.

Why? Journalism in the small island societies (and beyond) is not, and never was, a distinct construct. It has always been embedded within specific local and global social realities. Moreover, and related to this, academics are now realizing the need for more situated knowledge about media worldwide in order to counter dominant 'Western' epistemological frameworks of journalism – a call I want to heed in my own research.

These, and other reasons –which I will elaborate on in my dissertation- have made me decide to build upon an anthropological approach to news media, as this "tends to look at media as situated within other sets of human action rather than approaching social phenomena with *a priori* assumptions about what media 'is'" (Peterson 2009: 338).

Of course, shifts like these in the process of my PhD work make me simultaneously excited and nervous. However, I also realize that dealing with uncertainties is not only unavoidable, but, indeed, foundational for research.



Sanne's research focuses on how news media practice and interpret journalism in the communities of Curaçao and St. Maarten in light of local Caribbean realities in a globalizing world. In 2015/16 she did 10 months of fieldwork at newsrooms of newspapers, and among Facebook journalists and news bloggers on the two islands.

[www.kitlv.nl/researcher-s-rotmeijer/](http://www.kitlv.nl/researcher-s-rotmeijer/)

# Update Project: Malcom Ferdinand



*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.*

[www.kitlv.nl/malcom-ferdinand/](http://www.kitlv.nl/malcom-ferdinand/)

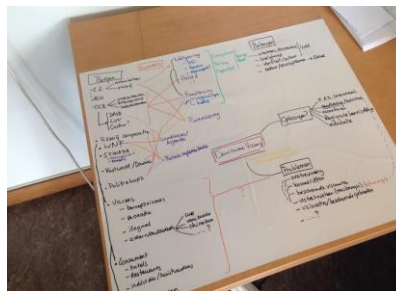
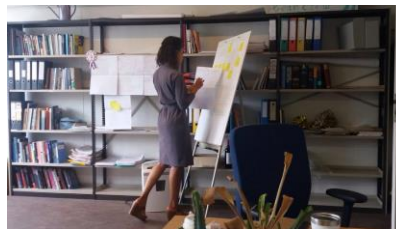
As Hurricane Irma looms large over the Atlantic horizon, those on the Caribbean islands hold their breath and keep a watchful eye out. Should we brace for the hurricane, run to the stores, and stock up on our supplies of food and water? Should we pray for a blessed last-minute turn northwards of this giant swirl so that it might be lost in the middle of the ocean? The catastrophic flooding and devastation that Hurricane Harvey brought to the United States so recently reminded me of the yearly anguish with which the people of the Caribbean look to the sky from June to October. Hurricane Harvey had not even left the shores of Louisiana when Hurricane Irma was already sounding another alarm for people living in the Caribbean. With his usual fact-free and presumptuous style, Donald Trump saw absolutely no contradiction between pulling out of the Paris Climate Agreement three months ago and promising relief to the embattled inhabitants of Texas. Yet, as the latest report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change indicated, we know that human induced global warming is already increasing the frequency of high intensity storms and hurricanes.

What about the Caribbean islands? How will they fare with these intensifying hurricanes? As part of the comparative aspect of the CCC project, I have written an article (currently under review) entitled "Climate justice perspectives from the French *Outre-mer*: Politics and geography of an epistemic shift." This paper investigates the way French overseas territories confront and adapt to climate change challenges. Their location at the geographical and political margins of France's national territory, puts these islands in the Pacific, Indian, and Atlantic Oceans in the eye of the storm, literally and figuratively. They face the harshest consequences of climate change, such as rising sea-levels and the devastation of ever greater numbers of high intensity hurricanes. In this article, I argued for the need for climate justice for non-sovereign territories. This is an approach where the European metropolises allocate adequate funding and enact specific policies to help these islands face the September sky and the future with more confidence. In the meantime, as Irma makes her way to Dutch and French Saint-Martin, let's brace together.

As we say in Martinican Creole: "Tjembé Red!" (Be strong!)



Reuvenplaats 2, 2311 BE Leiden  
Postbus 9515, 2300 RA Leiden  
+31 (0)71 527 229  
[www.kitlv.nl](http://www.kitlv.nl)



*L: Stacey preparing her second fieldtrip. R: Stacey at International Conference on Environmental Psychology*

*More info on the Confronting Caribbean Challenges project and the individual sub-projects: [www.kitlv.nl/research-projects-confronting-caribbean-challenges/](http://www.kitlv.nl/research-projects-confronting-caribbean-challenges/). Please find the previous editions of our newsletter under tab "Newsletter".*

*Questions or remarks? Don't hesitate to contact us!*