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# Life in "Paradise" a social psychological and anthropological study of nature conservation in the Caribbean Netherlands

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## PROLOGUE

“white worries about coral riffs
not black women & men locked up
that can’t feed their kids.
animal & environmental activisms,
don’t care about the violations of
rights of Caribbean children
To them: Black cadavers behind
bars
To us: dutch white politics & human
whites NGOs
capsized carcasses in The Hague….”
(Excerpt from “Unhuminizers”, by Jermain Ostiana)

While I was in the midst of setting up a research collaboration with the World Wide Fund for Nature - The Netherlands (WWF-NL), concerning the fishery sector on Bonaire, Sint Eustatius, and Saba, a colleague shared a poem with me called “Unhuminizers” written by working class social and media critic and blogger Jermain Ostiana from Curaçao. At first, I was annoyed and then I started feeling angry. Despite the fact I had some knowledge of the author’s background and negative feelings towards the relationship between the Netherlands and the Dutch Caribbean, I felt offended. Here I was, born and raised on Curaçao, working my hardest to protect the natural environment of three Caribbean islands and this activist criticized my actions and those of people like me. But once this initial flood of emotions had passed, I realized that this poem illustrates several themes and highlights the complex dynamics around nature conservation in the Dutch Caribbean that are central to my research.

The poem reflects on environmental conservation efforts in relation to poverty, inequality, and the legacies of colonialism and slavery. Particularly relevant to my research is the way in which this poem expresses negative sentiments towards the Dutch (government) and addresses white privilege and ignorance, history, culture, human rights, and identity in relation to environmentalism, loosely defined as concern about and action aimed at protecting the natural environment. Even though it is not clear which specific Dutch Caribbean island the author is referring to, his critique could apply to all six islands. In this thesis, I look at environmental conservation and management efforts on three Dutch Caribbean islands: Bonaire, Sint Eustatius, and Saba; henceforth referred to as the Caribbean Netherlands, where, indeed, sentiments like the ones expressed in the poem are strong.

As is the case elsewhere in the Caribbean, economies in the Caribbean Netherlands depend heavily on the state of the natural environment, as tourists who visit the

islands for their "pristine and unique" environment (a.k.a. "Paradise") are one of the main sources of income. Thus, aside from the intrinsic importance of having a healthy, biologically diverse, environment, the natural environment of the Caribbean Netherlands is important to protect for economic reasons as well. But tourism brings with it ecological challenges. In addition to these issues, islands all over the world are increasingly susceptible to the consequences of global climate change such as destructive hurricanes, rising sea-levels, ocean acidification, and degrading ecosystems (Kelman, 2018; McGregor, Dodman, & Barker, 2009). These very real threats only serve to increase the need to act on environmental issues.

Since the three islands became special municipalities within the Netherlands on the 10th of October 2010, they have been experiencing rapid change on many fronts: political, economic, sociocultural, ecological, and psychological. Like many other policy domains, environmental management has been directly impacted by the increased involvement of the Dutch government and its adherence to international policies and agreements such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 (IES GS, 2017). Moreover, long standing international agreements such as the Ramsar Convention or Convention on Wetlands (1971)[1] and the Convention on Biological Diversity (1992)[2] are now receiving more attention with a greater emphasis on their implementation. These developments put pressure on Dutch and island government authorities to take the required measures to safeguard the environment of the islands (Debrot, Henkens & Verweij, 2017).

Beyond these developments in the realm of environmental protection, changes are also taking place in the composition of the people residing in the Caribbean Netherlands (Van Duin, van der Gaag & Ekamper, 2019). Following the constitutional reforms enacted in 2010, a larger number of European Dutch have settled on the islands. Notably, a public opinion poll executed in 2015 found that residents of the Caribbean Netherlands feel there are too many "foreigners" residing on the islands (Veenendaal, 2016a). While the number of new migrants from the Netherlands is not necessarily greater than the number of migrants coming from other islands in the Caribbean region, there still exists a strong sentiment of "the Dutch taking over" (Evertsz-Ipcedencia, 2020). This is likely because of the small scale of the islands and the fact that the presence of white Dutch migrants is particularly visible due to the positions they hold on the islands, for instance as representatives of the Dutch government. Their visibility is made greater by (perceived) differences in color, culture, norms and values, and economic status, with European Dutch people often being wealthier than the "local" population.

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1 Named after the city of Ramsar in Iran where it was signed in 1971, the Ramsar Convention is an international treaty for the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands. The convention aims to halt loss of wetlands and conserve existing wetlands through proper management. (Source: www.ramsar.org).

2 The United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is a multilateral treaty. The Convention's objective is to develop national strategies for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity.

When it comes to nature protection, the active group of individuals who try to protect the environment is usually comprised of a majority of migrants (non-locals), with only a minority of locals taking part. Their initiatives to clean up plastic from beaches, help save and protect sea turtles, rescue iguanas, or restore nature trails and coral reefs, are not always broadly supported by the local population. Jermain expresses this in his poem, stating that there is a discrepancy between the worries of "whites" and the concerns of the "blacks" ('white worries about coral riffs, not black women & men locked up that can't feed their kids'). Previous researchers have, indeed, observed and studied the racial and class composition and divisions of people involved in environmental conservation efforts (Jaffe 2016, for Curaçao).

**Figure 1.** Green Iguana disguised against the cliffs on Bonaire, starkly contrasted by the turquoise waters housing Bonaire's coral reefs.

Not all sentiments towards environmental protection on the islands are by default as negative as the one expressed by Jermain. Others are much more nuanced and more positive. I came across a clear example in a column in the Dutch magazine *FD Persoonlijk* about Jossy, a Bonairian photographer who returned to Bonaire fifteen years after leaving his place of birth at the age of eleven. The column starts with a nostalgic description of the Bonaire Jossy remembered from his youth: bare, wild, and thorny, and how he played in the *mondi* (dry forest or wilderness), chasing iguanas and herding goats – poor but colorful. This is followed by Jossy's more recent observations after his return to the island,

in which he observes the physical and socio-economic changes brought by the arrival of newcomers (i.e., the Dutch). "Bonaire is still, poor, but also became very rich (…). Hills are bulldozed and sacrificed for an ocean view. (…) Madagascar palm trees and strange blue Agaves replace the *cadushi* (local cacti) and thorny bushes (…)". What he shares next are the shifting social interactions and sentiments that accompany these changes. The author of the article writes, "He [Jossy] did not expect it, but it is often precisely the newcomers who are very involved with the island. They build their environmentally friendly houses or set up an animal ambulance for the many ran over stray dogs. They learn Papiamento, the main creole language." Jossy does make a distinction between the different newcomers or European Dutch residents. Namely, that the efforts to integrate into the community are made significantly less by the last group of Dutch migrants who came to Bonaire after the constitutional changes in 10/10/10. They stick more to themselves. Lastly, Jossy shares that when he complains about the plastic bags littered in the *mondi* or the cans lying by the side of the road, "they" (Bonairians) laugh and scold at him for being a "*Makamba Pretu*" ('Black Dutchman', a derogatory term).

There are several noteworthy phenomena shared in the three-page interview with Jossy that relate to the natural environment, social dynamics, and constitutional changes of 10/10/10 on Bonaire, which is the largest of the three overseas municipalities of the Caribbean Netherlands, and the main focus of my thesis. First, the visible environmental changes: the physical transformations made to the environment, the arrival of exotic plant species replacing the natives, the building of luxury villas, but also the [increased] amounts of litter. Second, the visible socio-cultural changes: the demographic shift with the arrival of the European Dutch, and the growing gap between the rich and poor. Third: relations between the residents' experiences from his point of his view. The fact that he is surprised by the warmth with which he was received by the (rich) Dutch residents, indicates he perhaps expected a more hostile denigrating attitude with little respect for the island and its environment and culture. This negative preconception about the post-10/10/10 migrants may not have been entirely misplaced, however, considering that Jossy shares that these same migrants are, in his eyes, less friendly to, and involved with, local society, in general. This makes them less welcome as residents of Bonaire to the local population. Finally, this narrative hints at another question addressed in this dissertation: whether or not efforts to protect the environment enhance a person's sense of belonging within the community. While Jossy applauds the environmentally friendly efforts and involvement of the Dutch migrants, he also shares how Bonairians ridicule him for his discontent with environmentally damaging developments on the island. Jossy's experience highlights the complex dynamic at play underlying efforts to protect the natural environment.

So this is the situation: the crucial importance of the natural environment of these three small-scale islands for their economies and well-being; the recent demographic growth through migration; the fact that migrants tend to be more actively engaged in nature

conservation; the reality that locals who engage in pro-environmental behaviors are not always applauded by their peers. This interplay of issues and observations brought me to my main research question: *How are the efforts of conservation actors to protect the environment of the Caribbean Netherlands affected by the recent social and political changes and their (post) colonial context?* In answering this question, I hope to contribute to the development of ecological policies that seriously address local challenges and sensitivities.

## Reflections: A Caribbean Researcher in the Caribbean

My academic background is in social psychology. I have gone beyond my disciplinary boundaries and the methods in which I was initially trained to understand the problems and dynamics of environmental protection in the Dutch Caribbean which I described above. While reflexivity about the position of researcher is a common and necessary practice within the discipline of anthropology, this is not common practice in psychology (Berger, 2015). However, because I was using insights from both disciplines, I needed to reflect upon my own position in the field and the ethical issues I encountered prior to, during, and after my fieldwork. Using multiple methods meant I had to be aware of the ways these different methods affected my position in, and relationship with, the respondents, and the field in general, as well as the way I interpreted my findings.

As a researcher who is, herself, originally from the Caribbean, I had the advantage of being able to relate to many people I encountered during my fieldwork. When people ask me who I am, where I am from, or what I consider myself to be, I used to jokingly say I have an identity crisis. This is how I used to describe myself: "I was born and raised on Curaçao. However, my upbringing was very much coloured by Surinamese culture. My father was born in Suriname but moved to the Netherlands around the age of twelve with his parents and five siblings. His parents were born and raised in Suriname just like my mother's parents. My mother, however, was born on Aruba, but also moved with her family to the Netherlands when she was about 11 years old. My parents met each other in the Netherlands and had their first daughter together, my sister, in the Netherlands. Because my father longed to move back to Suriname (I believe especially because he hated the Dutch cold weather and longed to be more in touch with his Surinamese roots) and my mother always felt like she was Surinamese (despite the fact she never lived in Suriname herself), they decided to migrate to Suriname. However, at the time there were no job opportunities in Suriname. My mother had family living on Curaçao who offered them a place to stay, and my father was able to work there as a physical therapist. Therefore, they decided to make what was supposed to be a pit stop on Curaçao before migrating to Suriname. My dad was successful in his job and was able start up his own physiotherapy practice. My mother had two more children, my brother and me. Moreover, quite a large Surinamese community lives on Curaçao, some of whom were friends or acquaintances from the past they (re)connected with. This community helped in my parents' feeling of belonging on the island. Because there was no urgency to move

to Suriname, my sister, brother, and I grew up on Curaçao. Like most children on the island, my sister, followed by my brother and I in 2007, migrated to the Netherlands to continue our studies after graduating from high school. Today, my mom still lives on Curaçao, my dad eventually did migrate to Suriname, and I currently still (with a short intermission in Curaçao) live in the Netherlands as do my siblings.

My story is not unique, but it illustrates the complexity of (Caribbean) identities. There is no clear-cut answer to the "where I am from" question. However, during this doctoral research I have come to realize that I actually know who I am quite well. Above all, I learned that who I am is heavily dependent on where I am, and with whom I am surrounded. During my research I came to understand that I can also use my identity is as a strategic tool.

Growing up on Curaçao I always felt more Surinamese (and at times even more Dutch) than Curaçaoan due to my upbringing. I only learned the local language, Papiamentu, in high school and was never exposed much to the local Curaçaoan culture. Yet, I noticed on a trip to Suriname that I identified myself more as Curaçaoan than Surinamese. When I moved to the Netherlands, I noticed I was not typically Dutch either, even though this was never obvious to other members of Dutch society. I was familiar with many things considered Dutch, such as being on time, cycling everywhere, and always being in a hurry to catch the right train. The most illustrative was my ability to speak Dutch fluently with hardly any accent, which is somewhat uncommon among people from the Antilles. This was something I already mastered while growing up on Curaçao to the extent that my mother used to tease me and ask from where I got my posh Dutch accent. I remember the first classes and working groups at university when we would have introduction rounds during which all the students would briefly introduce themselves. Whenever I would say that I was from Curaçao, they would look somewhat surprised and then ask or presume that I moved to the Netherlands at a very young age. Their surprise was not necessarily directed towards my brown skin tone or curly hair, but because of the absence of a foreign accent. Whenever I shared that I had only just moved to the Netherlands a couple of months before, they would be shocked and say something along the lines of "...but you have no accent! Your Dutch is so good!".

For the entirety of this project, I was inspired by writer Taiye Selasi's TEDTalk titled: "Don't ask where I'm from, ask where I'm a local", filmed at TEDXGlobal 2014. Taiye spoke on behalf of "multi-local" people, who feel at home in the town where they grew up, the city they live now, and maybe another place or two. "How can I come from a country? How can a human being come from a concept?" she asked. In her talk, Taiye touches on a subject central to this dissertation, arguing that it is possible for people to have a sense of connection with many places. She explains that a person does not have to be a local according to the typical standard to have a bond with a place. People can be "multi-local", and that a person's bond with a place depends heavily on the interaction

with that place. Having a mixed background or being "multi local" does not mean I have an identity crisis, after all. Nor does it mean that I don't know who I am. It means exactly what it says: I am "multi-local". I am local in multiple places. This has both its advantages and disadvantages.

How did my multi-local identity affect my research? As I mentioned previously, throughout my research I believed my identity mainly served a strategy and I have used it to my advantage as much as possible during my research. However, and naturally, my identity also affected my research – both in how I approached the topic, how and what information I received, and how I interpreted this information. Being from the Caribbean allowed me to easily gain access to organizations and recruit respondents. During my fieldwork, I always introduced myself as a researcher based at the Royal Netherlands Institute for Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (known by its Dutch acronym KITLV) but was sure to make it clear that I was born and raised on Curaçao. I also mentioned that I have Surinamese parents, when asked about my lack of knowledge about the local culture and as an explanation for not being perfectly fluent in Papiamentu. Another important reason to mention my parents' background was to lessen my "Curaçaoan" identity to some extent. Because the Netherlands Antilles government headquarters was based on Curaçao when the Dutch Caribbean islands were still the Netherlands Antilles (see Chapter 1 for more details on the complex series of administrative structures that have governed the islands since colonial times), the other islands often felt dominated by, and were therefore resentful towards, Curaçao.

Mentioning all these aspects of my identity, such as Curaçao being the island on which I was born and raised, my Surinamese background, and being able to speak Papiamentu, English, and Dutch, seemed to reduce the barrier between me and my informants. Even though I was not from the same island as my informants, we did have things in common which, from my perspective, led to easier and more open conversations. While being from one of the islands of the Caribbean Netherlands could have possibly removed the barrier between my informants and me completely, I felt that not being from their island ensured that I was able to keep some distance and could at least try to make more neutral observations and analyses. Despite this distance, I had to remain aware of the fact that I still risked having blind spots or becoming too personally involved with my informants. In addition, my respondents and I did not always share the same social class which can also have implications for the ways we experience, view, and interpret our surroundings. Being aware of these differences and being based in the Netherlands, however, allowed me to keep the necessary distance from my informants to process, reflect on and analyze the information I had gathered.

As a presumed "local", I was able to address certain more sensitive topics more easily than a researcher with a different background. And, of course, being able to converse in Papiamentu (or all three languages) made the respondent feel more comfortable and

it was easier for them to express and share information. However, simultaneously, this brought with it a pitfall - during interviews informants would often end their sentences by saying "… you know" or "you understand what I'm saying, sister", assuming that I understood immediately what they meant. In order to prevent this assumption, I would rely on my own interpretation or knowledge and also knowing that informants would be likely to withhold information, I prompted respondents to elaborate on their responses to my questions. Overall, my positionality in terms of ethnicity, gender, and place of birth has been beneficial to my research in terms of gaining access and building trust. I was able to relate to my respondents because of our shared personal roots on the Dutch Caribbean islands. However, I was, and still am, an outsider, as well. I am not from the islands in the same way as many of the respondents, which made it easier at times to pose critical or non-apparent questions. In the concluding chapter of this dissertation, I will reflect extensively on the ways in which my positionality shaped (the process of) this research, the findings, and conclusions.

My research is part of the broader Dutch Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) funded project titled "Confronting Caribbean Challenges: Hybrid Identities and Governance in Small-scale Island Jurisdictions"; hereafter known as the CCC-project. Due to the NWO's regulations for this funding, this research had to be based at an institution located in the Netherlands, and, therefore, all the researchers who were part of this project, myself included, were based in the Netherlands. In addition to our individual positions in relationship to our own research, we have all had to face the challenge of the ambiguity and, sometimes, controversy, associated with the CCC-project.

I experienced some problems regarding the fact that I was working at the KITLV, an institute founded in 1851 to gather scientific knowledge about the Dutch colonies (Kuitenbrouwer, Poeze & Granger, 2013), though less so than some of my colleagues from the European Netherlands. I was directly confronted with this issue when an informant on Sint Eustatius warned me that people might be wary of answering my questions. He explained that this is because, according to him, locals do not want foreigners to understand them because they do not want to be controlled by others. Not only did he refer to me working at a Dutch research institute that has a specifically colonial focus and past, but he also referred to the fact I have a background in psychology, which carries with it the stereotype of being able to "read people's minds". This preconception about psychology was one that I would encounter more often. Whenever I would introduce myself to informants people would shy away when I said I was a psychologist. I only stressed the fact that I conducted my research based at an independent, Dutch scholarly institute to highlight the academic, professional, and credible character of my project. Overall, I felt informants were pleased to see a "local" conducting research and approaching the topic by emphasizing the individuals who are actively contributing to the development and conservation of the islands, instead of focusing on all that is not being done.

Aside from the benefits that being a "local" accorded my research process, I do feel that "being local" placed a certain degree of additional pressure on me, as well, because residents expected promising outcomes very quickly. Informants often expressed their frustration with the myriad researchers who had come before me from whom they never heard anything after they had left the islands. I was very aware of this fact, and I ensured respondents that I would share all my findings with them as soon as they were ready, but, in the process, I also learned that communication and managing expectations were key to gaining and maintaining trust.

Gender is an interrelated aspect of the research and it's necessary to understand how this played a role in my research and in my overall position in the field in relation to gender-based relations in Caribbean communities. I am familiar with the "machismo" cultures of Caribbean communities (Marcha & Verweel, 2009), but I did not initially realize the impact being female would have on my research. Except for several sexually tinted remarks directed at me, in particular during my collaboration with WWF-NL, I did not experience any explicit backlash or discrimination as a woman while doing fieldwork. In fact, during my work with the fishers, I experienced that being female was often a big advantage. The fishers I worked with took a protective role with me and made sure I was safe. Perhaps because I was not seen as a threat because I was a woman (clearly a very gendered understanding and expectation in and of itself) they trusted me, which gave me exclusive access to insightful conversations and debates. At the same time, I am aware that being female also excluded me from certain discussions and conversations. Despite this gender-based exclusion, however, I know that others would not have gained access to certain information that was entrusted to me. Caribbean scholars have argued that the subordinate position of women in the region intertwines with race, imperialism, and an existential experience of colonialism (Hume & Kamugisha, 2016; Rodriquez, 2015). Race and racism continue to play a negative role on the Dutch Caribbean islands' as is shown by expressions like *drecha koló* ("improving one's color" by looking for a partner with a lighter shade of skin) and "good" and "bad" hair (indicating the degree of coarseness, with "bad" hair being coarser and "blacker") (Roe, 2016). The recent debates around the Black Lives Matter (BML) movement in 2020 emphasize that racial legacies are still very present. However, I believe that precisely because I am black and from the region, many barriers to informants sharing their knowledge and experiences with me were removed. I was not seen as just "another white researcher coming in and telling people what to do". I also believe that being black helped to remove some boundaries that might otherwise have been erected regarding social class, especially during my work with the fishers on Bonaire who are generally from a lower class.

Not only did my personal characteristics affect my research, but also my professional identities and disciplinary backgrounds strongly shaped my work. I come from a positivist tradition of social and environmental psychology. I am used to viewing and researching the world in a particular way following specific research methods. Even

though the limitations of the more traditional quantitative research methods with which I was accustomed became apparent immediately, I remained hesitant to deviate from my training. I was dead set on identifying universal and quantifiable psychological factors to answer my research questions, so I developed an online questionnaire prior to conducting my fieldwork. However, my survey was not ready upon the start of my fieldwork. Therefore, instead, I decided to conduct a series of interviews. I did this with two purposes in mind: on the one hand to gain goodwill among potential survey respondents and increase the chance of them filling out my online survey later; on the other hand, to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences and perceptions of residents' efforts engaging in conservation action. Despite my own insecurities about, and hesitance to, employ a research technique I was less familiar with, the interviews proved to be much more fruitful for, and appropriate to, answering my research question. This was not only because of the richness of the data I garnered, but because the survey did not bring in the number of responses required to be considered scientifically valid within the field of (environmental) psychology. Happily, including and analyzing my qualitative data and fieldwork observations and, thereby, making it a multiple method research, allowed me to make a valuable contribution to the tradition of research in psychology. This contribution was enriched even further during the second phase of my dissertation, described below.

Halfway during the third year of my PhD work, WWF-NL came to me with a question regarding the fishery sector of Bonaire, Saba, and Sint Eustatius. WWF-NL took on a more direct role in conservation efforts on the BES-islands (the acronym for Bonaire, Sint Eustatius, and Saba – BES – is commonly used in writings about the islands that would become so-called "special municipalities" after 10/10/10, described at greater length below) since the constitutional change in 2010, mirroring the shift in the Dutch government's involvement. Because the government of the Netherlands has international accountability concerning fisheries, such as contributing to global monitoring of fish stocks, more pressure has been put on the management of the fisheries sector of the three islands. WWF-NL has worked on Bonaire, Saba, and Sint Eustatius for many decades and is interested in developing economically viable and community-supported sustainable fisheries. As WWF-NL learned about the difficulties present on the islands regarding the fisheries sector, they also became more involved in attempting to realize sustainable fisheries management on the islands. However, they soon came to the conclusion that every fishery directed project or initiative, whether these were for (economic) development or conservation, tended to end up as failures. WWF-NL was keenly aware of the fact that managing the fishery sector is as much a social as an ecological issue. Therefore, they asked me to assist them in identifying the social bottlenecks that lead to the failure of these projects, and to help them come up with solutions for these issues. The goal was to develop a roadmap for the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality, the local island governments (public entities) of Bonaire, Saba, and Sint Eustatius, other interested parties, and the WWF-NL itself. This roadmap was meant

to help all these organizations and groups break through the current impasse related to participatory fishery management, with an eye towards the creation of joint fishery management.

This question led to me entering the world of action research and working on Bonaire with the fishery community for three months. The goal of action research is to facilitate change within a community regarding a shared social issue. This is different from more traditional forms of scientific research, which is very much focused on surveys, interviews, and observations with a focus on perceived objectivity or "distance". In this case, my action research was centered on the overarching goal of establishing a fishery-co-operative on Bonaire. Throughout the project, I had to remain alert to the fact that I was playing multiple roles: a researcher based at a Dutch Institute, who was executing a consulting project for WWF-NL assisting fishers on Bonaire. I was aware of the opinions and sentiments about past research on the fishery community on Bonaire, so I focused on remaining transparent throughout the process. From the onset of my research, I stated to my respondents that indeed I was fulfilling many roles, but that all the support I gave to the fishers was based on their expressed needs.

In addition, I emphasized that I did not have any expert knowledge about the marine ecosystem or fisheries. To ensure full and meaningful participation from the fishers, I continuously demonstrated that I was willing to put in the extra hours and effort needed to support the cooperative in achieving its goals. This was necessary because of the, at times, conflicting roles I held. On the one hand, I had to present myself as a WWF-NL partner in order to gain access to nature conservation-oriented organizations and government departments so that I could create credibility and ensure the relevance of my work. However, WWF-NL does not have a positive reputation among all the stakeholders, especially among the fishers, meaning that, in some instances, I was more inclined to stress the independent role I was playing and focused on the relevance of the project for the (fishery) community of Bonaire.

Finally, and directly relating to Bonaire's fishery sector, was the history of failed fishery projects that loomed over the assignment from the start. Especially in the beginning, but also during the entirety of the project, people were apprehensive and skeptical about the effectiveness of setting up a lasting cooperative. Past failures negatively affected their perception of the project and, at times, their willingness to collaborate with, and contribute to, its success. It also affected my own position and outlook on the entire process, resulting in me choosing to "side" with the fishers to strengthen their representation with the various organizations involved. Lastly, this skepticism expressed by so many stakeholders affected my involvement and commitment enormously. No matter the cost, I wanted to prove that, if done correctly, the fishers could in fact be a strong, professionally organized stakeholder with a prominent voice in, and invaluable

contribution to make to, fishery management. I will reflect more extensively on this role and my (over)involvement in the conclusion of this dissertation.

The fieldwork I conducted, the participatory action research in particular, implies biases and raises concerns about the objectivity of the analysis in addition to myriad ethical considerations (Löfman, Pelkonen, & Pietilä, 2004; Persoon & Minter, 2011; Finnis, 2004). Some scholars may argue that this form of research can lead to unethical scientific conclusions and tamper with the objectivity of the analysis. Indeed, after my fieldwork, during the analysis of the collected data, I had to be wary of my own prejudices when interpreting and placing value to the information I collected from the different informants. I noticed I was tempted to place higher value on information received from informants who I felt carried similar values and beliefs as my own. For example, I noticed that when I interviewed a Curaçaoan civil servant working on policy issues for the Dutch government, I felt whatever he shared must be true and that his views most likely represented the complete story. However, I was aware of this, and I was able to consider and evaluate all perspectives and make sure I did not leave certain voices unheard. Therefore, I argue that similar to my dual identity of being somewhat local, being both a researcher and facilitator of change can be enriching and help in gaining insights that might be lost were other research methodologies to be employed. In addition, this approach allowed for the active participation of people who would in other cases perhaps be dismissed, excluded, or avoided (Stringer & Genat, 2004; Eelderink, Vervoort, & Laerhoven, 2020). This is perfectly illustrated by my work with the fishers, who tend to be considered a "difficult" group to conduct research with and are, therefore, avoided by other researchers. Moreover, I argue that the need to address environmental challenges by directly engaging in finding solutions to pressing social challenges is more ethical than being a "simple" detached observer in communities where these social challenges are so prominent.

Throughout my fieldwork and interactions with governments, and with those who I define as conservation actors, and fishers, I have been transparent about my objectives and intentions with my research. I ensured that everyone voluntarily agreed to be interviewed, to engage in conversations, and take surveys. Individual respondents were never faced with repercussions when they disclosed sensitive information, such as using illegal fishing methods. I ensured that informants had their anonymity maintained unless they requested otherwise. I made no payments for information, with the exception of two cases. The first case was a small raffle incentive attached to the online survey distributed among conservation actors of the Caribbean Netherlands to encourage participation in the survey. The second was the mandatory compensation given to the survey respondents acquired through Prolific (See Chapter 3). Ethical approval was granted by the Leiden University Psychology Ethics Committee. In addition, I gave respondents access to presentations and reports in which I shared my research findings. This gave the respondents the opportunity to share their views, ask questions, and provide

additional input. It helped us to step over the barrier that can sometimes be experienced in the interaction between academics and non-academics (Löfman, Pelkonen & Pietilä, 2004; Blake, 2007). Overcoming this perceived distance was especially relevant and helpful during my interaction with the fishers.

In sum, the fact that I was also from the Dutch Caribbean, worked at an historically well-established Dutch institute and, finally yet importantly, was a member of an interdisciplinary research team, meant that I was able to position myself in a variety of ways in many, if not most, situations. Throughout this book, and particularly in the case study described in Part 3 and in the Conclusion, I will reflect on how I became aware of my position as a researcher and how "being me" has affected the ways in which I approached this research. My background and my family's experiences on the islands are illustrative of the overarching contexts in which this research project is situated: a history of (post-)colonial migrations between and within the Caribbean and European Netherlands and the resulting complex and multi-local identities and feelings of (lack of) belonging. Given my personal history, it is perhaps not surprising that I ended up building on the positivist foundation of my academic training in the Netherlands while incorporating insights from other disciplines to understand the intertwined, complicated intersections I focus on in this dissertation. Namely, the intersections between notions of identity and belonging, post-colonial histories, and highly differentiated understandings of place and environment.

**Figure 2.** Colonial ruin on St. Eustatius in Lower Town, being engulfed by trees.