

MINERVA SCHOLARSHIP FUND – FINAL REPORT

Project: Bonaire's talen

Grant Beneficiary: Victor Navarro Izquierdo

Study program: Master Visual Ethnography at Leiden University

The Project 'Bonaire's talen' (Bonaire's languages) for which I received the financial contribution of Minerva Scholarship Fund, lies in the fields of Linguistic Anthropology and Visual Anthropology. During the months of January and February I performed Visual Ethnographic fieldwork in the island of Bonaire, researching how Non Native Papiamentu speakers learn and use the creole language Papiamentu. The innovation of this Project comes from the combination of multimodal methods from Visual Ethnography to research sociolinguistic phenomena, in this case the adaptation of newcomers to Bonaire through the use of the Papiamentu language. Bonaire is a multilingual setting, and Native Papiamentu speakers are normally multilingual. During this research I explored the challenges that Non Native Papiamentu speakers face when learning this language, and explores the different strategies that they develop to make pragmatical use of this language in their daily live routines.

My Project differs from the Linguistic discipline and lays in the methodology of Anthropology, because it is centred on the individual level of analysis. It focuses on the personal level of lived experience, and on the pragmatic use of the language they have learnt during their daily life activities. On one hand, I performed several interviews to informants about their experience engaging with Papiamentu and for what different purposes they use the other languages they know in this multilingual environment. I followed them with the camera and filmed some of their different activities involving language use. I also filmed Papiamentu classes addressed to Dutch speakers and Spanish speakers, in order to gain knowledge of the educational environment. On the other hand, I interviewed local Bonarians and gathered their perspective of the vitality of their own mother tongue Papiamentu, in order to put that in relation with the Non-Native speakers' perspective, framing this phenomena in more detail.

The outcome of this Project will be a written MA Thesis and an ethnographic documentary. The documentary will portray the multilingual environment of Bonaire with focus on the Papiamentu language, and wants the audience to familiarize with the linguistic context by audio-visual means, showing how the different languages also widely spoken in Bonaire (Spanish, Dutch and English) interact and affect the local native language Papiamentu. It will be a kaleidoscope of perspectives from people with different nationalities and mother tongues who have learnt this creole language. The written Thesis will be an in-depth analysis of the situation of Non Native Papiamentu speakers in Bonaire, where the different challenges and strategies designed by informants registered during fieldwork will be put in common under anthropological analysis. This set of information may be useful for the people who are learning the language, may create interest in those residents who do not speak it, and will shed light to the native speakers about the current sociolinguistic situation of their own mother tongue. Furthermore, this information can be useful for cultural diversity management, and for the design of linguistic policies in the islands where Papiamentu is spoken.

This project aims to contribute to the science of Anthropology as a new methodological approach to the study of language use. Visual ethnography is not normally used to research linguistic phenomena, and through this multimodal combination of written Thesis and ethnographic documentary I want to prove that this is a fertile ground for academic research. Linguistic Anthropology and Visual Anthropology can speak to each other in very productive ways, allowing academic research to reach a wider audience that is not familiar with academic texts. After this first ethnographic fieldwork, I am considering going further with my academic studies and continue exploring the Papiamentu language through a PhD. In a wider frame, a longer four-year research period could make it possible for me to include the other islands where Papiamentu is also spoken: Aruba, and Curaçao.