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News in a glasshouse: media, publics, and senses of belonging in the Dutch Caribbean

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News in a Glasshouse

Media, Publics, and Senses of Belonging in the Dutch Caribbean

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News in a Glasshouse

Media, Publics, and Senses of Belonging in the Dutch Caribbean

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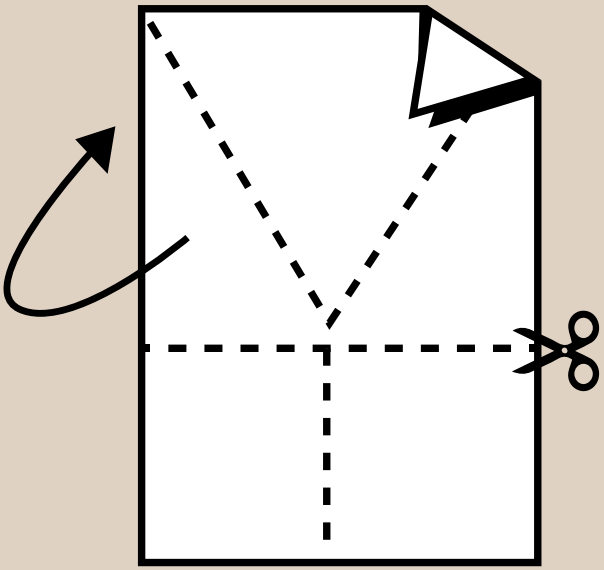
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1 | Introduction

What does news mean and what does it do as an ongoing set of practices for sociability and community? How does it generate common, contested, and even cathartic senses of belonging? In the first week of my fieldwork in the Dutch Caribbean it was already apparent to me that 'news' as a social and cultural phenomenon goes beyond what people normally associate with 'the news' – the world of the news media and their output. As is the case elsewhere, news outlets on the islands of Curaçao and Sint Maarten, two countries in the Caribbean part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands which are the locus of this study, are prominent yet not exclusive mediators of "newly received or noteworthy information, especially about recent events" (Oxford Dictionaries, n.d.).[1] This fieldwork inspired me to formulate my main research question, namely:

How do institutional and popular practices of newsmaking in the public sphere on Curaçao and Sint Maarten – understood as social processes of turning events into collective stories – generate common, contested and at times also cathartic senses of belonging?

My main argument in this book and my partial answer to this question is that to appreciate the meaning and function of news on Curaçao and Sint Maarten, one has to study both the institutional and popular public. This allows a scholarship on newsmaking and community which critically represents the common, contested and at times cathartic sense of belonging emerging in the public sphere on Curaçao and Sint Maarten. In doing this type of scholarship and recognizing how intrinsically linked these two publics are even whilst remaining distinct, we have to look to the colonial past and how that past informs the present, to understand the complexities of how news functions in these spaces, particularly as a marker of belonging. Throughout this thesis I employ the metaphor of the glasshouse as an example of how people see and are seen and how news and newsmaking practices are intrinsically entangled with colonialism and the imposition of capitalist modes of being.

[1] A quick look around the main English-language dictionaries tells that 'news' has three main definitions: 1. as previously unknown information (about a recent event); 2. as the (material reported by the) press, and; 3. as a newscast (i.e., Merriam-Webster, n.d.). The second and the third definition emerged as part of the historical development of journalism. My point of departure for this study has been the first definition. I elaborate on my conception of news (and 'the news') in Section 1.2.

With this as my overarching goal, my theoretical aim with this book is two-fold. First, I aim to contribute to critical scholarly work across the fields of political philosophy, the social sciences, and communication and media studies on the dominant model of the bourgeois public sphere. The particular contribution that I envision is one that comes from the Caribbean world – a world that has emerged in close relation to and through modern Europe. Yet this distinct Caribbean world emerged in such a way that multiple publics have never been fully silenced and overshadowed by the dominant liberal-democratic project of the bourgeois public sphere. Instead, I argue that the Caribbean teaches us how public life always comes into being because of a contestation that enables emergent counter-publics to form. At times, there are also glimpses of catharsis, whereby the possibility of a Caribbean undone of the wrongs of colonialism emerges. This was the case after Hurricane Irma devastated Sint Maarten. I end this thesis with a discussion of these events. My aim throughout the book is to highlight how through these processes of contestation in daily Caribbean life, those excluded from the ideal bourgeois public sphere become central to its construction. In fact, I show that these people have always been a part of this sphere, though they have often been obscured from view.

Secondly, and closely connected to the first goal of the book, I aim to problematize two ongoing dominant representations of the island communities in public discourses across the Dutch world. The first one is informed by the dominant model of a bourgeois public sphere. Island societies are represented as spatio-temporal others: being intrinsically different ('islandness', 'Caribbean culture') from and, at the same time, backward ('developing', 'dependent', 'uneducated') to the European-Dutch mainland. This spatio-temporal othering continues to buttress public debates, political campaigns and media representations across the Dutch Kingdom as well as the many 'development projects' employed on the islands. During my fieldwork, I saw many of these projects initiated – for example, with the aim to enhance public awareness on corruption or to empower the news media – without fully taking into account the multiple publics in daily island life. As a result, these projects had only limited and short-term effects and were often ineffective due to the unforeseen consequences of not allowing for the cultural contexts in which they were situated.

The second dominant representation is one which highlights Afro-Caribbean cultural practices and 'black' forms of expression. During the course of this study,

this discourse was enforced by global anti-racism debates that gained momentum as the US Black Lives Matter movement took off internationally in 2020. In the Dutch Caribbean, these discussions added to an Afro-Caribbean representation of the islands – mainly employed by those who wish to counter the representation of the islands as spatio-temporal others. Yet, in doing so, the island communities are again represented as intrinsically different from and backward to (through ongoing oppression by) the European-Dutch mainland. Moreover, like the first representation, this discourse does not acknowledge how Caribbean communities have always come into being by multiple publics that interact in between oppression and invention.

The metaphor of the 'glasshouse' refers to how social life on Curaçao and Sint Maarten was designed under Dutch colonial rule and has evolved as part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands since colonial times. Like (real) glasshouses, constructed as regulated artificial atmospheres to optimize the growth of plants outside of their natural environment, I argue that as part of the Dutch colonial enterprise, Curaçao and Sint Maarten were designed and regulated as social environments to optimize processes of production and distribution. As a metaphor, the glasshouse resembles a microcosmos of a logistic operation of reducing the world (production process, producers, and goods) to the dictates of capitalism. News media were vital to this operation, as were the many informal circuits of news circulation.

As capitalism took off globally in the course of the 17th century, the infrastructures of news, media and information took shape. These did not yet represent the institutionalization of 'journalism'. Norms and practices of journalism were introduced as part of the liberal-democratic ideal of the (bourgeois) public sphere, which, in turn, was closely related to the rise of nation states from a century later (18th century). Journalism as a practice would not replace, but, rather, be inserted into the infrastructures of news, media, and information as dictated by modern capitalism.

This too was the case on Curaçao and Sint Maarten. Like glasshouses, these islands were microcosmoses of the penetration of society with the logics and demands of modern capitalism. It would take until the early 20th century before journalism as a norm and as a practice of newsmaking was transferred and introduced to the established news systems on these islands. However, there was never an attempt to exert full control. And, anyway, by the early 20th century, news as understood and practiced on these islands had also taken unforeseen

paths. The dynamics of both the planned and unanticipated news practices on these islands – understood as collective articulations of senses of belonging in today's world –, inform the processes of newsmaking that I study in this book. But, first, a little about these islands themselves.

1.1. CURAÇAO AND SINT MAARTEN: THE CONSTRUCTION OF TWO GLASSHOUSES

> Let no one ever be deceived by the smallness of the Netherlands Antilles. In numbers of population, it may not amount to much, the issues it faces and the problems it is confronted with deny the expression 'small is beautiful'. Exciting, it is yes, and in no small measure. But he who expects this society to be anywhere close to the proverbial village, is utterly mistaken. Not only are international relations between the islands and the relation with Holland most complicated, its size on the world map of finance and trade stands in no relation to the geographical specks which represent the islands.[2]
>
> – Roger F. Snow († 2017), former publisher and journalist on Curaçao and Sint Maarten

A SNAPSHOT OF CURAÇAO AND SINT MAARTEN

Curaçao and Sint Maarten are two Dutch Caribbean islands that – together with four other islands throughout the Caribbean Sea – are part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The six islands together form the Dutch Caribbean [see **Figure 1**]: Aruba, Curaçao, and Bonaire lie just off the coast of Venezuela and are known as the Dutch 'Leeward Islands', while Sint Maarten (the southern part of the island St. Martin, shared with France), Saba, and Sint Eustatius are located at the northeastern end of the Lesser Antilles and known as the 'Windward islands'.[3] Curaçao and Sint Maarten are located more than 900 kilometers apart and differ considerably in terms of language, culture, and regional affiliation. What the

[2] (Snow, 1984, p. 3).

[3] According to geographical conventions, Aruba, Curaçao and Bonaire are known as the 'Leeward Antilles' and Sint Maarten, Saba and Sint Eustatius as the Dutch 'Leeward Islands'. In this book, I refer to the respective island groups as they are known in Dutch: *Benedenwindse eilanden* [Leeward islands] and *Bovenwindse eilanden* [Windward islands].

island countries share is a Dutch colonial past that translates into a present of closely interwoven inter-personal, political, economic, and monetary relations as well as ongoing ties with the Netherlands. With the dismantlement of the Netherlands Antilles in 2010, both islands became (after Aruba in 1986) constituent countries within the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

Curaçao at a glance

Curaçao is the biggest island of the Dutch Caribbean with a territorial surface of 444 km^2 [see **Figure 2**] and a population of around 155,000 (World Bank, 2022a). Located just sixty kilometers from the northern coast of Venezuela, Curaçao has long been a contested strategic trade hub and the center for geopolitical struggles in the region (i.e., Klooster, 2014, p. 25; Witteveen et al., 2013, p. 15). Since the Dutch took control of Curaçao from Spain in 1634, Curaçao has played a central political and economic role in the Dutch Caribbean; as an international free port, a transshipment depot and distribution center for enslaved African people during the transatlantic slave trade, and later as the location for the colonial council of the Dutch colony 'Curaçao and Dependencies' (1815–1936). The island would maintain its central administrative position in the 'Territory of Curaçao' (1936–1948) and the 'Netherlands Antilles' (1948–2010), all of which were colonial governance structures. Due to the (forced) migration of people from all over the world to (and through) the island, Curaçaoan culture is comprised of a plethora of African, Latin-American, European-Dutch, South-East Asian, Middle Eastern, Chinese and Caribbean creole elements.

Curaçao has a 'high income economy', as defined by the World Bank, with a relatively high standard of living compared to other (independent) Caribbean countries. At the same time, the island has among the highest air pollution levels measured globally (Pulster et al., 2019). A common denominator is the 100-year-old oil refinery, established in 1915 by the Anglo-Dutch multinational Royal Dutch Shell. The refinery soon became one of the largest in the world, attracting laborers from all over the world. In 1985, Shell sold the refinery for a symbolic sum to the Curaçaoan government that, in turn, leased it to the Venezuelan state-owned oil company, Petróleos de Venezuela S.A. (PDVSA).

Since World War II, when many Dutch corporations moved to Curaçao to avoid German confiscation, the island has had an important offshore financial sector, which "peaked in the mid-1980s, when virtually every major U.S. corpora-

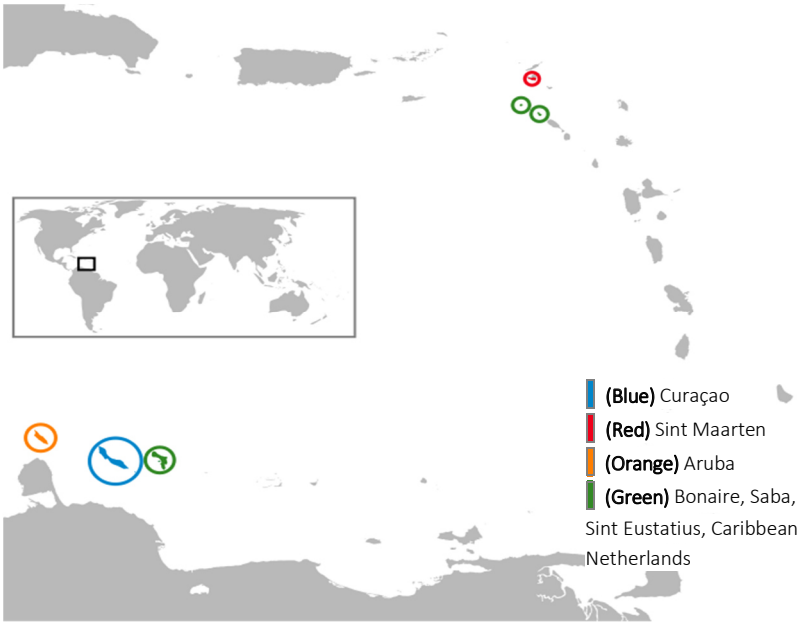


Figure 1: Dutch Caribbean islands. Source: Wikipedia, 'Dutch Caribbean' (legend adjusted – SR).



Figure 2: Curaçao, CIA World Factbook (2010). Source: Wikipedia, 'Curaçao'



Figure 3: St. Maarten, CIA World Factbook (2010). Source: Wikipedia, 'Sint Maarten'

tion had at least one Antilles finance subsidiary" (Boise & Moriss, 2009, p. 379). The financial sector saw a decline since the end-1980s due to global economic changes and, recently, new tax policies within the Kingdom of the Netherlands. In the past decades, the island's tourism market has grown, although it is still small compared to other (Dutch) Caribbean islands. More recently, Curaçao's IT and e-commerce sector has increasingly seen public-private investments to exploit the island's ICT infrastructure and fiber-optic connectivity.

Curaçao's official languages are Dutch and, since 2007, Papiamentu and English, while Spanish is also widely spoken. Papiamentu, a Spanish / Portuguese-based creole with lexicon and grammar elements from West-African languages, Dutch and English, is the most widely spoken language on the island.

Sint Maarten at a glance

Together with the French collectivity of Saint-Martin in the north, the 34 km^2 southern part of Sint Maarten forms a binational island (total 87 km^2) located in the northeastern Caribbean [see **Figure 3**]. People on the island commonly refer to the island as 'SXM'[4] – the IATA code for its Princess Juliana International Airport, which is an important transportation hub in the region. Over the past decades, Sint Maarten has seen rapid changes in terms of economic development and population demographics. Since the early 1980s, Sint Maarten's tourism industry has exploded – and so has its official population, from 4,460 in 1965 to 40,812 in 2020 (World Bank, 2022b). Current numbers increase significantly when unregistered people living on the island are considered (US State Department, 2014).

Sint Maarten has a 'one-pillar economy' based on its tourism market with almost two million (US) tourists visiting the island each year – mainly from the cruise ships and private yachts that dock in the harbor of Sint Maarten's capital, Philipsburg. The rapid growth of the tourism market has attracted tens of thousands of regional (and international) migrants. This has caused an increase not only in the numbers but also in the diversity of the population of the island. Sint Maarten's official languages are Dutch and English, while French (official administrative language of Saint-Martin), French-based creoles (spoken by

[4] In this book, I use 'SXM' or 'St. Martin' to refer to the island. When referring to the southern part of the island, which is part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, I use its official name of 'Sint Maarten'.

migrants from Haiti), Spanish (spoken by migrants from the Dominican Republic), and Papiamentu (spoken by migrants or returnees from the Dutch Leeward Islands) are also spoken. English, to a large degree in a local English-based creole known as 'St. Martiners' English', is widely spoken across both sides of the island.

The weather on Sint Maarten differs from that on Curaçao with its relatively dry tropical savanna climate. Instead, it has a tropical monsoon climate and is located along the so-called 'Hurricane Belt'. During the past decades several hurricanes have hit Sint Maarten – Hurricane Luis (September 5, 1995) and Hurricane Irma (September 6, 2017) were the most devastating.

AN HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF GLASSHOUSE TECHNOLOGY

The Dutch East Asia Company (VOC), established in 1602, and the Dutch West Indian Company (WIC), established in 1621, were the first limited-liability companies[5] with publicly traded shares (Antunes, 2019, p. 20; Den Heijer, 2005; Gelderblom, 2013). The corporate structures of the VOC and the WIC, divided over separate chambers in different cities, reflected the social order of the United Provinces of the Netherlands, also known as the Dutch Republic (1588–1795). Feudalism had never been strong in this region and early processes of urbanization had led to the centralization of power in the cities, into the hands of wealthy burghers (both merchants and nobles). Urbanization had been accompanied by "processes of institutional, organizational, and technological change" to improve "the efficiency of production and distribution" (De Vries & Van Der Woude, 1997, p. 713). By upscaling land plots and introducing tenancy and wage-labor contracts, while investing in infrastructures to optimize transportation, communication, and specialized supply chains (i.e., Israel, 1995, p. 111; Van Bavel, 2010), Dutch elites had consolidated their positions of power and wealth.

The Dutch colonial enterprise functioned as an extension of these "urban social arrangements [that] had become a private-public enterprise" (Prak, 2010, p. 121). The fact that VOC and WIC directors were Dutch regents with lucrative posts on city councils and as representatives of the States-General (Dutch federal

[5] With the establishment of the VOC and WIC, the Dutch state designed the legal form of the *Naamloze Vennootschap* (N.V.), comparable to the British *Public Limited Corporation* (PLC) and the American *Corporation* or *Limited-Liability Company* (LLC). For the sake of readability, I will refer to either N.V. or LLC in this book.

assembly), while also being among the companies' biggest shareholders, illustrates this. To allocate and spread the risks of the Dutch colonial undertaking, the States-General decided to open up the stock market to investors across Europe. While Amsterdam became the center of a global financial market, "the VOC and WIC incorporated a substantial part of their "protection costs" into their trade balance, making warfare a direct subsidiary to the accumulation of capital by their merchant-investors" (Brandon & Fatah-Black, 2015, p. 89). Yet by the point at which this was happening – the mid-17th century – Dutch elites knew that the "logistical coordination of capital's valuation and accumulation [provided] a framework not only for enterprises of transport and communication" – which, together with warfare, were core-businesses to the chartered companies –, "but also, more generally, for the reorganization of production and the social relations that enable production" (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2019, p. 134).

In economic historiography, the Dutch Republic during the first part of the 17th century is generally referred to as the first world-economic hegemon, followed by 18th century Great Britain and the United States since the 20th century. As political geographer Peter J. Taylor (2016) wrote:

> It is not overt power that defines a hegemon but its infrastructural power: The Dutch developed a social formula, which we have come to call modern capitalism that proved to be transferable and ultimately deadly to all other social formulations. (p. 118)

This is not to say that manifest Dutch imperial power was either minimal or insignificant – it certainly was not. My point here is, following Taylor, that the Dutch colonial enterprise was part of an infrastructural operation to (re)organize social relations and production to the dictates of globalizing capitalism. The capacity of a state – in this case, the Dutch state – to succeed in this operation was what sociologist Michael Mann (1984) termed "infrastructural power", which, in turn, depended on "the 'logistics' of implementation – that is 'technologies' or 'know-hows' integral to the enforcement process" (D'Arcy & Nistotskaya, 2020, p. 763). That this know-how was present among Dutch elites may account for why the Dutch Republic came to be known to the modern corporate world as "the birthplace of what we now think of global logistics" (O'Marah, 2018, n.p.).

Recent scholarship in the field of critical logistics (i.e., Chua et al., 2018; Hesse, 2020; Rossiter, 2016) argues that global logistics is more than a business strategy of managing worldwide transportation and supply-chains. It (also) refers to "a set of practices that makes worlds" (Neilson et al., 2014, p. 5). As a productive force for capitalism to be transferred and to penetrate social life across the globe, logistics sought to reduce the world into "flexible, adaptive, and manageable units that can be arranged according to their functional utility in aiding the circulation of world capital" (Chua, 2018, p. 11). In reducing social life to production, producers, and produce, logistics has provided a "technology of control through which the state-capital nexus orders and surveys populations, subjecting lives and livelihoods to increasing forms of logistical domination", with the aim "to reproduce relations of production and distribution" (Chua, 2022, p. 1455).

To me, this recalls the image of a glasshouse as a world designed to control the conditions for the reproduction of capitalist relationships based on production. Glasshouse technology resembles logistics – as a rationale and technology of control – in reducing the natural world into measurable and calculable compartments (flora, fauna, labor, humidity, radiation, temperature, fertilization, etc.) with the aim of maintaining active control over the production and distribution of plants. The rise of glasshouse technology in northwestern Europe went hand in hand with imperialism and colonialism.[6] When Dutch (and other European) elites started with glasshouse experiments in the 17th century, the Dutch colonial enterprise distracted and transported not only exotic plants, but also enslaved human beings via the transatlantic slave trade. And when the first Dutch glasshouses were designed as spaces to control, monitor, and maintain the optimal conditions for the growth of plants outside of their natural environment, the islands of Curaçao and Sint Maarten came under the direct administration of the WIC[7] as regulated social spaces for the reproduction of

[6] A salient example of the interrelatedness between plant science, glasshouse technology, and Dutch colonialism was that one of the first administrators of the WIC was the then rector magnificus of the Leiden University, Dr. Aelius E. Vorstius (Oostindie & Fatah-Black, 2017, p. 46). Vorstius was a physician and the head of the botanical garden (Hortus Botanicus), where initial Dutch glasshouse experiments took place in the 17th century. For an elaboration on the historical links between botany, horticulture, and Dutch imperialism, see i.e., Cook, 2007; Van Berkel, 2010.

[7] From 1680 until the late 18th century, the Antillean islands (Aruba, Curaçao, Bonaire, Sint Eustatius, Saba and [partly] Sint Maarten) and Elmina at the West coast of Africa, from where

capitalist relationships predicated upon production. The image of a glasshouse points to how "logistics has long been central to the circulation of colonial rule" (Chua, 2022, p. 1446).

As a metaphor, then, the glasshouse refers to how social life on Curaçao and Sint Maarten was designed and coordinated under Dutch colonial rule. Like glasshouses, these islands came to resemble a microcosmos of the Dutch reduction of the world to the dictates of a capitalism that was going global. Central to this operation was a rationale and technology of (capitalist) logistics, which had as its first major project the transatlantic slave trade. According to Brennan (2021), the latter "was driven by a pathological desire for total access: to get pure labour without the inconvenience of the human subject" (p. 144). To understand how the island societies came to be subjected to and by this operation and its desire for total access to the world, I will first focus on what was vital to capitalism going global: the news (media).

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With the establishment of what is known as the world's first modern stock exchange, the *Beurs* [Stock Exchange] in Amsterdam (1602–), the Dutch capital became the "nerve center of *capitalism*, with its primary need for efficient access to information" (De Vries & Van der Woude, 1997, p. 692, *italics in original*). Smart investment depended on accurate information about commodity rates, stock prices, balance sheets, and up-to-date news about "events that might affect business" (Cook, 2007, p. 52). News was at hand in "a society which ran on information" (Der Weduwen, 2017, p. 16). It crossed oceans before docking in Dutch ports together with private shippers, traders, sailors, and diplomats. It moved rapidly over "a dense network of barge and ferry services for the internal communications between various larger and smaller towns" and it was delivered by post and courier services along Europe's imperial post route, which ran from Italy to the Low Countries (Schobesberger et al., 2016, p. 23).

Operating at the crossroads of these and various other official and latent news channels, the 'nerve center of capitalism' attracted merchants from across Europe. These people started gathering, categorizing, and verifying various news

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the WIC transported enslaved Africans over the Middle Passage to Curaçao (and later Surinam) were directly administered by the WIC (Oostindie & Roitman, 2014; Oostindie & Klooster, 2018).

streams and distributing regular price lists and business newsletters. These formed the blueprint for the early rise of Dutch newspapers beginning in 1618 (Cook, 2007, p. 51; De Vries & Van der Woude, 1997; Der Weduwen, 2017; Reinders, 2008). The general format of these papers was to provide a broad compilation of factual news, presented in a detached, business-like format. They were "often printed in several languages and intended for sale throughout Europe" (Smith, 1984, p. 999), which, in turn, led to an influx of foreign publishers, writers and intellectuals. Soon, the Dutch print industry became what Frijhof & Spies (1999) described as Europe's "experimental garden" (p. 177; in Reinders et al., 2011, p. 4).

This metaphor, like that of the glasshouse, should not be understood merely agriculturally – that is, in terms of "planting seeds to get 'growth'" (Cook, 2007, p. 50). The Dutch were not just planters, they were logistical experts, specialized in reducing the world to the dictates of capitalism (production, producers, produce) by "finding the lowest common denominator among diverse items and exchanging them" (ibid, pp. 50–51). And so, "the Dutch invented neither the book, nor the newspaper", but they designed and controlled the "means of making the book market work more smoothly" (Pettegree & Der Weduwen, 2019, p. 12). By the 1640s, newspapers no longer solely served the interests of business elites. They had become big business itself.

The Dutch news market illustrated an early modern process of what Anderson (1983/2006) termed *print capitalism,* which was, in the words of Calhoun (2016), "a form of business enterprise that not only shaped and circulated culture, but a part of capitalist production" (p. 14). The news media served the Dutch operation in a similar two-fold way: they provided the communication infrastructures to implement capitalism into society, while simultaneously offering the information Dutch authorities needed to logistically prepare and coordinate capitalism's expansion. As P.C. Hooft, a regent, would say: "whether it is good or bad news, it is always welcome, because it illuminates the world" (cited in Der Weduwen, 2015, p. 66). The world needed to be illuminated for it to be reduced to manageable and accessible units on behalf of capitalism's demands.

To be clear, the promise of the early modern Dutch press to *illuminate* the world did not necessarily mean it had to *enlighten* it. Even if the news was allowed to flow more freely in the United Provinces than elsewhere, "it was established by practice rather than in legislation and could therefore be restricted at any

time" (Nordin, 2018, p. 38). Restrictions were necessary to manage the risks that came with enabling access to information – such access was demanded by capitalism but could also undermine the capitalist social order. Therefore the global operation of capitalism required *"access to,* and *control over*, information" (Harvey, 1989, p. 156, *my emphasis*). Dutch authorities exercised control over the news through infrastructural means when possible; i.e., via tax regulation (Der Weduwen, 2017, pp. 29–31) and state-governed post offices (Tieleman, 2021), as well as through direct censorship or bans when necessary. The fact that censorship affected critical political and religious publications the most (Nordin, 2018, p. 38) illustrates the risk these formed for disturbing the social order.

What is important here is not whether there was press freedom in the United Provinces, but rather that it was only with the rise of nation states in the 18th century that liberal-democratic principles (press freedom, freedom of expression, etc.) became institutionalized as part of an emerging ideal of the 'bourgeois public sphere'. My point here is thus that Dutch elites (or elites who lived in the Dutch Republic) undertook an operation of developing and transferring a social formula of modern capitalism, to which an ideological framework of the liberal democratic nation-state had yet to be introduced. News (media) was vital to both: in providing the infrastructures and the information to logistically manage capitalism's expansion and in facilitating critical-rational deliberation in the bourgeois public sphere essential to the functioning of liberal democracy. With the rise of nation states, principles of 'journalism' would not replace, but rather be added to print capitalism. In fact, it was the latter that informed this process. By illuminating the world so that it could be reduced to the dictates of capitalism, print capitalism helped to produce "the national units that throughout the history of capitalism have been basic to the organization and protection of capitalist (…) [production]" (Calhoun, 2016, p. 14). This was how logistics – as a spatial rationality and technology of control buttressing capitalism's operation – generated and structured territories. Let me now turn to how logistics "did so, likewise, as a technology of imperialism" (Hesse, 2020, p. 2).

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Dutch colonial rule was less about full scale disciplining and more about openness and constant articulations of power, which also made it fragile. In providing

capitalism efficient access to information, a space emerged where unforeseen news could flow. "The variety of colonial actors, in turn", as Rupert (2019) argued with respect to Curaçao and its surrounding waters, "acted on this space on their own terms and for their own purposes, and, in doing so, they helped shape the contours of empire" (pp. 754–55). Unlike the islands' elites (from WIC officials to private merchants), enslaved and freed laborers were closed off from official, imperial channels of 'the news'. These non-elites, however, came to play a central role in the regional contraband trade and its informal, popular news circuits on Curaçao (Rupert, 2012) and Sint Maarten (Roitman, 2016). News traveled rapidly by word of mouth through these networks and generally far faster than via formal postal services.

When political tides shifted in the late 18th century causing revolutions to erupt across Europe and the Americas, the Dutch colonial government was confronted with the subversive force of these news networks to its ruling power, particularly its control over Curaçao. After all, "Curaçaoans of African birth or descent did not have to rely only on news arriving on foreign vessels or ships from the Dutch metropolis to inform them about the revolt in Saint-Domingue [Haiti]" (Klooster, 2011, p. 66). Popular news networks across the Caribbean laid the basis for the Tula-led slave revolt on Curaçao in 1795. Imposing an instant and very real threat to Dutch colonial rule, these revolts could not be suppressed by means of infrastructural power alone. The Dutch brutally repressed this revolution by military force.

Dutch military force could not stop the shifting political tides across the Atlantic and its effects on the constitutional layout of the Dutch empire. In the same year of Curaçao's slave revolt, the Dutch Republic became the Batavian Republic, then was occupied by Napoleon, integrated in the French Empire, and finally became an independent Kingdom in 1813. After two periods of British rule over the Dutch Caribbean territories, Curaçao and Sint Maarten would remain part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands from 1815 onwards. By then, the Dutch had long passed their position as a world-economic hegemon on to the British who, in turn, passed it on to the Americans. Though world-economic hegemony shifted from state to state, the nature of the social formula of modern capitalism and the logistical rationale and technology by which the social worlds on Curaçao and Sint Maarten were made under Dutch colonial rule, did not change. Rather capitalism reinvented itself – again and again, that is – in a world it kept transforming to its demands.

Dutch and European elites continued to capitalize on, and to further invest in, its infrastructural power embodied in finance markets, news, and (also Dutch Atlantic) logistics (Brandon & Bosma, 2021). Nevertheless, economic malaise permeated the island societies for over a century. This is because they (particularly Curaçao) had lost their primary functions as central, and uniquely free, trade zones in the region in the early 19th century. It was, however, only a matter of time before Curaçao and Sint Maarten again became a logistical nodes for global capitalism. By then, Europe had seen the rise of nation states – a process that was embedded in (print) capitalism, by which "social life became territorially integrated and confined", while "social interaction became more 'nationalized' (…) in the nineteenth century" (Mann, 2008, p. 359). According to Mann (2008), the rising importance of the nation-state (both in power and scope) in the 20th century was intimately linked with "the intensification of infrastructural power" (p. 359).

I argue that such intensification was the case when 'the news' as part of the liberal-democratic nation state was introduced to the islands in the early 20th century. That this intensification of infrastructural power on the islands would, again, be temporal, does not mean that the enforcement of such power declined. Rather it points to what De Vries (2001, p. 184) called with reference to Dutch economic history, "rounds of growth" – a circular, upward movement that became the driving force of our modern capitalist world. This is how Curaçao and Sint Maarten came to resemble what I refer to as glasshouses*: microcosmoses of the Dutch operation of reducing the world (production process, producers, and goods) to the dictates of capitalism, with its primary need for news and information.*

THE GLASSHOUSE CONSTRUCTION OF THE KINGDOM OF THE NETHERLANDS

I set foot on Curaçao at the end of August 2015 and on Sint Maarten in early 2016. This was a period during which many local (and European Dutch) newspapers and news websites were taking a look back on the five years since the constitutional reform on 10 October 2010. This is a key date, commonly referred to as 10/10/10, when the Netherlands Antilles, the political construct that had held the Dutch Caribbean islands together since 1954, ceased to exist. Curaçao and Sint Maarten officially became constituent countries within the

Kingdom of The Netherlands. They followed Aruba which had left the Netherlands Antilles to become a constituent country within the Kingdom in 1986. The smaller islands of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius, and Saba were integrated into the European Netherlands as *openbare lichamen* [special municipalities, literally: 'public bodies'] [see **Figure 4**].

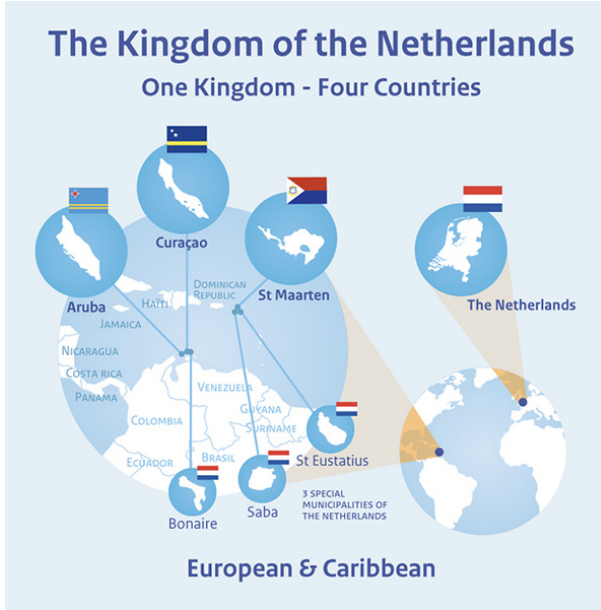


Figure 4: The Kingdom of the Netherlands. Source: Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The relationship between the four countries that constitute the Kingdom – Curaçao, Sint Maarten, Aruba, and The Netherlands – are enshrined in the *Statuut* [Charter] of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, which was enacted in 1954 (Oostindie & Klinkers, 2003). The Charter stresses that each of the countries regulates its own domestic affairs without interference from other Kingdom partners and that only a limited number of policy areas are arranged on the Kingdom level, such as foreign policy, defense, citizenship, and the safeguarding of good governance (Veenendaal & Oostindie, 2018, p. 31). But while the four Kingdom countries are formally equivalent according to the Charter, the latter "also perpetuates the Dutch dominance and responsibility" (Veenendaal, 2017,

p. 82). Along with representing more than 98% of the Kingdom's territory and population, the European Netherlands holds a dominant economic position within the Dutch Kingdom because it is considered among the ten richest countries in the world.[8] These unequal relationships are constitutionally preserved by a democratic deficit through which the Caribbean countries are largely excluded from political decision making on the Kingdom level.[9] Since the 1990s, when the Dutch government accepted that the Dutch Caribbean islands were not going to opt for independence, it has increasingly intervened in the islands' internal governance via the Kingdom Council. This has led to dissatisfaction and a rhetoric voiced by political and intellectual elites on the islands that claims that a 'recolonization' is afoot.

Apart from political rhetoric on both sides of the ocean, the majority of the islanders share an understanding of the need for constitutional ties with the Dutch Kingdom. Curaçao and Sint Maarten have seen ongoing political instability and, respectively, *nine* and *ten* different cabinets in a decade's time (2010–2020). When the constitutional reforms of 10/10/10 drew near, Sint Maarten's governmental institutions were not yet in place and they have been fragile ever since. On Curaçao, a political crisis unfolded around the integrity of politicians who would form the first cabinet of the new country. The first Prime Minister of Curaçao, Gerrit Schotte, would later be convicted of political bribery, forgery, and money laundering committed both during his legislative term (2010–2012) and his political career since 2007. In 2013, Curaçao was shaken by the assassination of the popular politician, Helmin Wiels. It is widely believed that he was killed because of his critiques of political corruption and the gambling industry on both Curaçao and Sint Maarten.

[8] In current USD, the Dutch national GDP was almost $914 billion in 2020, compared to Curaçao with a GDP of close to $2.6 billion in 2020 and Sint Maarten with a GDP of $1.19 billion in 2018 (World Bank, 2022c). In terms of GDP per capita, the numbers for the countries are around $52,340 in 2020, just over $16,700 in 2020 and almost $29,000 in 2018, respectively (World Bank, 2022d).

[9] Kingdom affairs are decided upon by the Kingdom Council (executive organ Kingdom government), consisting of the Council of Ministers of the Netherlands and one Minister Plenipotentiary of each Caribbean Kingdom country. As such, the Caribbean countries are represented yet are far outnumbered by representatives from the European Netherlands. Moreover, the distinction between Kingdom and Dutch affairs is blurred and sometimes affairs that concern the islands are decided upon by the Dutch cabinet without the Ministers Plenipotentiary being invited to the table.

Both islands face problems related to political corruption, fraud, patronage, and money laundering in relation to a powerful lottery industry, the involvement of the Sicilian mafia, the regional traffic in drugs, and an ambiguous offshore trust and financial sector that stretches its tentacles into the political and economic realms of the Dutch Kingdom. To be clear, these enduring problems were deeply embedded in the infrastructures that had been implemented and logistically coordinated as part of the Dutch facilitation of capitalism. The creation of the Charter (1954) had been part (as the constitutional embedding) of the process by which the Dutch imposed a bourgeois superstructure onto these infrastructures. During the past decades, the Dutch government has regularly intervened by establishing supervisory organs and instituting policies on the islands in the name of 'good governance', 'citizenship', and other liberal-democratic norms. Yet the infrastructures that constitute the glasshouses that are Curaçao and Sint Maarten remained untouched.

The endurance of the glasshouse infrastructures on both islands was partly intrinsic to the very set-up of the Kingdom Charter which was the embodiment of the constitutional bourgeois superstructure itself. This was illustrated by the compartmentalization of the Kingdom of The Netherlands into manageable territorial units that were classified hierarchically (nation state, island states, public 'bodies', 'special' municipalities) [see **Figure 4**]. Again, Dutch infrastructural power was not about overt power and full control. The Charter left an ambiguous space for how and when – and under which conditions – the Dutch government could intervene in internal island matters. It was intended to ensure the consideration of what was the most 'effective' option for the islands and only then make a decision. However, the ultimate power over decision-making was left up to the government in The Hague. This was how the Dutch government could dismiss the human rights violations perpetrated against Venezuelan refugees on Curaçao by lumping them under the category of 'domestic affairs',[10] while categorizing the set-up of an anti-corruption taskforce

[10] According to the Kingdom Charter, every constituent country must 'promote the realization' of human rights, while the Kingdom is responsible for 'safeguarding' these rights. In a critical report in 2018, Amnesty International wrote that these constitutional conditions led to a continuous passing on of responsibilities from the Dutch government to Curaçao's government and vice versa (Amnesty International, 2018). In a follow-up report in 2021, the human rights organization noticed that cooperation increased between Curaçao and The Hague, yet primarily in the field of deportation, detection, and detention of Venezuelan refugees. Dutch authorities "have continued to consider the implementation of immigration policy and related irregularities

on Sint Maarten under 'Kingdom affairs' (and thereby also a Dutch matter). In turn, political leaders on Curaçao and Sint Maarten have found and created their own loopholes in (and outside of) the constitution of the Dutch Kingdom. A recent example was the formal complaint that was lodged by the parliament of Sint Maarten with the United Nations (UN) against The Netherlands for being "neocolonial" and "racist" (Van Houwelingen, 2021, n.p.). By employing this international channel, the island's government aimed to circumvent the constitutional infrastructures of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the unequal representation of the Dutch Caribbean islands in it. Yet, in doing so – and this ties in with the two dominant representations of the islands that I described in the beginning of this chapter – rather than countering it perpetuated a notion of the islands as spatio-temporal others. Let me briefly elaborate on this in the following section.

SPATIO-TEMPORAL OTHERS: ISLANDS AS 'SMALL' AND 'DEVELOPING'

Although Sint Maarten was not an official member of the UN, it spoke to the United Nations as an Associate Member of Caribbean *Small Island Developing States* [SIDS] – as both Curaçao and Sint Maarten are known in international institutional settings. The category of SIDS relates to wider (scholarly, institutional) perceptions and dominant (media) representations of Sint Maarten and Curaçao as 'small' and 'developing' islands. Scholarly work in the fields of political studies, law, and development studies, have long focused on the intrinsic challenges that small islands face in adequately dealing with problems such as corruption, clientelism, and censorship – problems that might be related to wider issues but nevertheless unfold in a context of 'smallness'.

There seems to be a two-fold epistemology underpinning this type of island scholarship, namely that small islands "are easy to understand" and, at the same time, that "'big issues' cannot be resolved based on small islands" (Ratter, 2018, p. 12). Again, this binary understanding resembles a logistics-based rationale of reducing the world to make it manageable. On the one hand, the management *of* islands is depicted as 'easy' for islands, given their 'smallness' which could also explain why most islands in the world share a past (and present) of colonialism.

as a country affair", Amnesty International (2021) concluded, and "failed to comply with international standards to protect and respect human rights" (p. 56).

On the other hand, the management *over* islands is assumed to be necessary, since their 'smallness' implies that they are incapable of dealing with 'big(ger) issues'. Recent scholarship in the field of island geography has stressed that 'islands' go beyond the essentialization of "the[ir] powerlessness, dependencies, and negative economies of scale" as these notions are "not determined by the smallness of an island alone but also by national and international political interests and their local effects" (Ratter et al., 2016; in Ratter, 2018, p. 209). Moreover, by predominantly portraying islands as fixed, small 'units' and small 'entities' and, on the basis of that, as vulnerable, constrained, insular and incapable of dealing with their political and economic problems, politicians, policy officers, and scholars risk reinforcing the historical objectification and marginalization of islands (Baldacchino, 2008, p. 39; see also Chandler & Pugh, 2020; Glissant, 1992, 1990/2010; Pugh, 2016, 2018). This was how, by filing a complaint of 'neo-colonialism' and 'racism' with the United Nations, which recognized Sint Maarten as a 'special case' that was categorized as a Small Island Developing State, Sint Maarten's parliament aimed to counter constitutional asymmetry. Ironically, however, at the same time this complaint reinforced the spatio-temporal othering buttressing it.

Either way, and this is my main critique, neither of the representations (and any discourse on 'islands' as units, for that matter) recognize that the distinctiveness of 'island life' lays in its relationality rather than in static notions of 'the island' (Pugh, 2013). Also, and related, they do not acknowledge *how Caribbean communities have always come into being by multiple publics and in between spaces of oppression and invention.* And it is this acknowledgement that informs my understanding of news, to which I now turn.

1.2. NEWS AND 'THE NEWS': THE FORMATION OF MULTIPLE PUBLICS

News and 'the news', the main analytical distinction I will be working with in this thesis, cannot be kept completely separate. They are constantly merging into each other whilst remaining structurally distinct. So, too, in the lives of people on the islands. While they love 'the news', it is common knowledge that they are also quite taken by the 'new' and 'noteworthy' which is prevalent in other realms of public life. Journalists of the traditional media, those who work for newspapers

or TV (so, 'the news'), also engage with 'news' while creating 'the news'. To be clear, 'news' emerges everywhere: on street corners and plaza, in WhatsApp groups, on Facebook timelines, or in a café while grabbing lunch with a good friend. News emerges from the stories people tell and share about what happens around them. News is stories that gather momentum as they become more widely known with more people consuming, remaking, and disseminating them. Through news a common or contested sense of belonging to the islands emerges.

By focusing on news in Curaçao and Sint Maarten as a social process that unfolds in everyday life, this study aims to broaden our perception of what 'news' means and does to people – or, rather, what people do through news. My starting point is therefore not 'the news' – news as a thing (e.g., a news article, a broadcast) or an entity (e.g., a newspaper, the media) – but 'news' as a process of "how societies turn events into stories" (Papacharissi, 2017, p. 154).[11] Nevertheless, it should be clear from the Introduction that this study also engages with 'the news', as the latter also partakes in this ongoing process of newsmaking, news consumption, and news dissemination.

My approach to 'news' as an ongoing socio-cultural practice resembles the work of musicologist Christopher Small (1998, 1999, 2001). According to Small (1999), the function and meaning of music "lies not in musical works, but in taking part in performance, in social action" (p. 9). Small (1998) coined the term *musicking* to stress that the nature of music is embedded in what people do when they "music" (p. 8). Similarly, in this study I explore the meaning and function of news as embedded in social action: what we do when we share, construct, listen to, compose, celebrate, sell, criticize, buy, distribute and (even) avoid news. I simplify this concept by employing the triad of newsmaking, news consumption, and news dissemination. Like musicking, this triad, which involves manifold 'news

[11] I borrow this phrase from media scholar Zizi Papacharissi (2017), who, in the first place, used it in relationship to her understanding of journalism, namely "as a process of turning events into stories" that is guided by certain news values (pp. 150–51). Because news has been subject to change due to digital technologies and "affective news streams" on social media platforms, Papacharissi (2017) urged media scholars to rethink the role of journalism ('the news'). Yet this is not enough, she argued, as "remaking the news is really about remaking the ways in which, societies turn events into stories" (Papacharissi, 2017, p. 154). It is this second and broader interpretation of news that I embrace in this study. In contrast to Papacharissi, I do not use this interpretation as part of a contemporary project to rethink journalism or to remake 'the news'. Rather, I use this conception of news to address how social processes "of turning events into stories" co-exist alongside 'the news' (the profession of journalism and its institutionalization through news media).

practices', are part of a "process of giving and receiving information (…) by means of which the participants not only learn about, but directly experience, their concepts of how they relate, and how they ought to relate, to others in their society and the wider world" (Small, 1998, p. 8).[12] It is through *practicing* news that we make sense of and articulate what we experience in relationship to what we (think we) know about each other, ourselves, and the world. I am once more referring to the importance of news in contributing to common, contested, and cathartic senses of belonging. Understanding 'news' in terms of musicking – as I do in this study – thus relocates the meaning and function of 'news' into the process of how people on Curaçao and Sint Maarten turn experiences into the stories they live by.

The fact that common senses of belonging are always infused with contestations and moments of catharsis speaks to the fact that what is considered 'news' is not uniform. As is the case in other places and spaces, on Curaçao and Sint Maarten people do not experience and interpret the world all in the same way (see also Small, 2001, p. 346). Their personal characteristics and their social position in society matters in relation to how they consume, make, and disseminate news. I argue that, like musicking, (practicing) news functions "as a powerful means of definition, and especially self-definition, of who we think we are socially" (Small, 2001, p. 348). In this case who they think they are is always related to their national identity as Curaçaoans and Sint Maarteners. So, my argument is that their position in society undoubtedly impacts what they experience and how they interpret these experiences. These interpretations may tend to reinforce the values they share with the social group they are a part of, as it gives them a sense of self-worth and makes their lived reality as Curaçaoans and St. Maarteners meaningful. Nevertheless, because they live with multiple others, they can never fully take their interpretations for granted. The common, in other words, is always infused with the contested as well as moments of catharsis.

By looking at news on Curaçao and Sint Maarten with this perspective, whereby I take on board the insight that news practices are "performative

[12] Here, Small builds on Clifford Geertz in understanding a music performance as a ritual, "a pattern of actions in which shared values – that is, shared concepts of right relationships – are affirmed, explored, and celebrated. The ritual order enacts the vision of a social order" (Small, 2001, p. 344). I argue that, like musicking, the social practice that is news functions as a ritual in which the 'lived-in order' merges with the 'dreamed-of order' of the world and its relationships.

enactments of collective subjectivity" (Yeh, 2012, p. 724) by and through which communities are embodied and imagined, I argue that *two publics* emerge in the public sphere of the islands. I employ publics following Craig Calhoun et al. (1992) as the agonistic workings toward a national community, within a global order of states. As such, publics refer to the modern understanding of a differentiated citizenry that therefore creates practices to: 1) check state power(s); 2) promote an imagined national community; 3) but also assert cultural particularity within the national whole. All three meanings feature in my delineation of two contrasting publics in the public sphere on Curaçao and Sint Maarten. I call these respectively the *institutional public* and the *popular public*. These publics unfold simultaneously in everyday island life with each public reproducing specific practices and ideals of the island communities and how the community should be performed – that is, how society should turn events into stories – and turn stories into events.

On the one hand, I argue, there is a public that unfolds in and around the *institutional* realms of social island life which is but a local iteration of the modern dynamics and liberal-democratic underpinnings of a Habermasian ideal *bourgeois public sphere*. This is where 'the news' ought to be located. As a normative concept, Habermas' ideal public sphere is a neutral, open, inclusive (and universal) realm of institutions and practices in between private life (e.g., family, friends) and the state, where private individuals (the bourgeois) engage in critical-rational deliberation based on media information about common affairs. This is Calhoun's conception number one, whereby a public forms to check state power, thereby promoting a common sense of belonging. As a historical-political phenomenon, the *bourgeois public sphere* "had its origins in Western Europe in relation to late eighteenth century ideals of citizenship in the context of an increasingly informed male public, emerging from new forms of political action, and representative and participatory government" (Low, 2017, pp. 155–56, paraphrasing Howell, 1993). It was no coincidence that the increasing power of this male informed public with its liberal-democratic seeds coincided with the height of European colonialism. Like gender this, too, is a matter that Habermas did not pay sufficient attention to. As a result of the colonial-patriarchal world in which it emerged, the bourgeois public sphere – as a liberal-democratic ideal and practice – was transported to and imposed on virtually all communities and would inform modern democracies ever since. This is where conception number two of Calhoun comes in, with the important addition that in this thesis 'the

national'; i.e., the work of publics on Curaçao and Sint Maarten, is part of the working of empire.

Thus, on Curaçao and Sint Maarten a bourgeois-type public, which I term the institutional public, emerged. This should not be surprising as these islands were ruled as a Dutch colony ('Curaçao en Onderhorigheden') and were officially since 1954 integral parts of the Dutch Kingdom. This governance structure meant that all the islanders regardless of color or economic class were awarded equal citizenship rights. Given its location, this public (of which the official media are representatives, no matter how self-critical they seek to be) reproduces the interests, practices, and values of those on the islands and in the wider Kingdom who hold social power. By this I mean those owning and managing the education system, political parties, labor unions, the dominant churches, and the civil associations (see also Small, 2001). Still, often the media houses are in line with Calhoun's third conceptualization of publics – as promoting the particularity of the islands within the Kingdom of the Netherlands. As is the case in the European Netherlands, on Curaçao and Sint Maarten the news media are charged with a central task of ideally providing 'rational', 'neutral', 'objective', 'truthful' information that is needed for critical-rational debate, the formation of critical public opinion and, facilitated by the latter, democratic control over the state (i.e., Harcup, 2021). In principle, even if not in practice, professionals who make 'the news' seek to separate newsmaking from news consumption and dissemination. They are journalists who are supposed to be the specialists who produce news. Yet Habermas was right to a certain extent that, in reality, political and economic elites co-construct 'the news'.[13] Also on the islands, news media *together* with those representing the institutional public – e.g., labor union spokespersons, civil society representatives, politicians, interest groups, experts, consultants and CEOs – turn events into stories that form 'the news'. Therefore, they all are expected to deliberate and safeguard the liberal-democratic norms of the public sphere.

While this institutional public for the most part critically reflects and reproduces the ideals, practices, and relations of the islands'/Dutch Kingdom's formal-institutional order, I argue in this book that in everyday life – the lifeworld

[13] In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas (1991) argues that journalists and the news media, in general, have become merely spokespersons of the political and economic elites. He thus argues that journalists no longer produce the news as they should, whereas I would argue that they never have been alone in producing news.

– a *popular public* exists that is busy creating news rather than solely 'the news'. This, too, is part of the public sphere. While differing and promoting an alternative sense of belonging – which at times contests the common sense of the official public sphere – this popular public is nevertheless intrinsically related to the official media channels that operate in the system's world, to employ once again the terminology of public sphere theorists. It is within the popular public that one recognizes the value of 'musicking' as in rumors, gossip, hearsay, and 'the issues of the day', articulated in complex ways to the discourses of the official public sphere – from the seemingly trivial like advertisements and obituaries to crises in government – to produce 'news'. In doing so, a common sense of belonging is constructed that contests (whether implicitly or explicitly) the version promoted by 'the news'. The popular public on Curaçao and Sint Maarten reveals how social groups without (much) social power turn events into stories. The social groups to which I refer are the poor, the uneducated, the economically deprived, and, more specifically, working class women and irregular migrants. They have been historically excluded from the bourgeois public sphere – both in practice *and* in principle.

1.3. TURNING EVENTS INTO A STORY: THE APPROACH AND OUTLINE OF THIS BOOK

> For to observe, it is not enough merely to look at things. We have to join with them, and to follow. (…) In allowing ourselves into their presence rather than holding them at arm's length – in attending to them – we find that they are also guiding our attention. Attending to these ways, we also respond to them, as they respond to us. Research, then, becomes a practice of correspondence, and of care. It is a labour of love, giving back what we owe to the world for our own existence as beings within it.
>
> – Tim Ingold (2019, p. 666)

The analysis that I present in this book is based on ethnographic fieldwork that I did on Curaçao and Sint Maarten and with Curaçaoans and Sint Maarteners throughout the Kingdom of the Netherlands starting in 2015 until 2019. Between the end of August 2015 through June 2016, I spent six months on Curaçao and four months on Sint Maarten doing participant observation at three different

newsrooms (of a Papiamentu-language and a Dutch-language newspaper on Curaçao, and an English-language newspaper on Sint Maarten); attended government press conferences with freelance reporters; walked along with live-streaming broadcasters in demonstrations; conducted forty-two in-depth interviews with bloggers, reporters, journalists, PR persons, and media directors; had countless more spontaneous short talks and longer conversations at bus stops, on the boulevard, and in the streets; joined newspaper distributors in the early morning; called politicians on their cellphones; and I followed – together with my interlocutors – the issues of the day via many lively Facebook groups and timelines. I was invited to weekly gatherings, to church services, and to many late afternoon *happy hours* at the boardwalk. I co-organized parties and I made friends. In sum, I followed news and, in doing so, attentively and in collaboration with interlocutors, it shaped the course and contours of this research.

My fieldwork was not bounded to the territorial borders of Curaçao and Sint Maarten, nor did it stop once I continued my work in the European Netherlands. The locus of this study, as this first introductory chapter should have made clear, extends into the social-political realm of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. I learned that in order to answer my main research question: *how do popular and institutional practices of newsmaking in the public sphere on Curaçao and Sint Maarten – understood as social processes of turning events into collective stories - generate common, contested and at times also cathartic senses of belonging?;* I needed to acknowledge how news practices in public island life take shape through, while also continuously shaping, the European Dutch realm. By understanding and engaging with this multiscalar and multi-sited 'field', I built on the methodological approach of *multi-sited ethnography*, which I will explore below.

MULTI-SITED ETHNOGRAPHY AND 'THE FIELD'

From the start of this research project, I intended to conduct fieldwork at multiple sites. My research design included two different islands and various institutional and online sites (three different newsrooms, news sites, and social media environments). While multi-sited in design, it was my early engagements in 'the field' that made me aware of the inherent multi-sitedness and multiscalar dimensions of practices of newsmaking.

During my first day in the newsroom of the *Antilliaans Dagblad* on Curaçao, I learned that this space was by no means a stable and neatly bounded site where 'the news' was made. Along with the reporters, business relations, back-office employees, the paper's photographer, the distributor, and family members of the owner, all of whom came and went continuously, multiple other 'sites' entered the newsroom via digital media technologies. Press conferences were usually followed via a live-stream, and the latest updates came in via Facebook or WhatsApp, to name just two examples. At the same time, the newsroom extended into other sites with editors working from home, freelancers on the road, and correspondents based on Aruba, Bonaire, and in the European Netherlands. News circulated via a plethora of channels and vernaculars. News in English from the Windwards met news in Spanish from Venezuela, Colombia, and other South American countries. The central mailbox saw a daily influx of Dutch news items from the ANP (*Algemeen Nederlands Persbureau* [General Dutch Press Agency]) together with dozens of press releases from the island's government, public organizations, and the private sector – the majority of which were in Papiamentu, just as so much of Curaçaoan public life was. The newsroom unfolded as a space of constant translation, not only linguistically, but also of multiple publics that interacted with 'the news' at different scales.

During an initial conversation with the paper's owner and director that first day, news came in via a back-office manager who rushed into the director's office and asked, 'Did you hear the news?' A few hours later, Curaçao's premier resigned – a bit of news that the manager had gotten hold of via his personal network among politicians. This event was hardly surprising to the director. In his editorial the next day, he elaborated on how the now ex-premier had long been under fire from Curaçaoan and Dutch politicians alike – not least, because of the alleged fraud and clientelism of his fellow party member, the plenipotentiary minister stationed in The Hague. Just as news and 'the news' from the island, sister islands and The Hague flew in, it flew back and out through networked channels. These networks were intimately connected with a shared socio-political realm and the circulation of Dutch (Caribbean) people, stories, and imaginations through it. The newsroom unfolded as a situational and relational space where contingent flows of news, people, (his)stories, and practices connected, interacted and, at once, transcended.

In order to make sense of this multiscalar and multi-sited relatedness of news practices on the ground, I built on the methodological approach of multi-sited

ethnography (Marcus, 1995, 1999; Falzon, 2016).[14] Instead of focusing on a single field site, multi-sited ethnography suggests that one 'follows' (his)stories, objects, people, relations, and associations across a spatially dispersed field (Falzon, 2016; Marcus, 1995). It conceptualizes the field as a "complex web of interactions in which anthropologists in collaboration with others, (…) located in a variety of often contrasting settings, trace connections and networks, mutations, influences and cultural forces and changing social pressures" (Marcus & Fischer, 1986, p. XVIII–XIX; in Murrillo, 2021, p. 45). As a methodological approach, multi-sited ethnography stresses that, "in its essence, anthropology is about relationships with actors, not about places in and of themselves" (Van Duijn, 2020, p. 284; referring to Hannerz, 2010).[15]

Building on this relational notion of 'the field' enabled me to (re)conceptualize "a 'site' that is multiscalar, involved in imaginative practices of 'world-making' and material socioeconomic processes and technoscientific infrastructures putting people and things in circulation" (Murillo, 2021: 48, referring to Clifford & Marcus, 1986). Differently said, by following news practices across a spatially dispersed field, I came to understand the sites I engaged with, such as the newsroom described above, as multidimensional spaces constructed by news practices generating senses of belonging in interaction with broader social-economic and media-technological realities operating on the ground. The metaphor of the glasshouse, by which I came to refer to Curaçao and Sint Maarten as *microcosmoses* of an operation of global capitalism, intimately links

[14] In response to an increased awareness of global interconnectedness, anthropologist George E. Marcus (1995) developed the methodological and theoretical foundations of multi-sited ethnography as an approach to study globalized "social phenomena that cannot be accounted for by focusing on a single site" (Falzon, 2016, p. 1). Multi-sited ethnography contributed to a broader reconceptualization of 'the field' in anthropology (i.e., Gupta and Ferguson, 1997; Marcus, 1999, 2009; Falzon, 2016). Moving away from the classic conception of 'being there' (associated with a far-away 'tribe', small village, or island), anthropologists began to reconsider fieldwork at "home", and later would embrace fieldwork as a practice of "being here and there" at once (Hannerz, 2010, p. 60). Multi-sited ethnography further complicated this 'here/there' (or 'familiar/unfamiliar') dichotomy by conceptualizing the situational and processual relationality between.

[15] Multi-sited ethnography is thus more than just the multiplication of sites. Rather, it reconceptualizes a singular, holistic notion of the field. Just to be clear, the latter may inform single-sited and multi-sited ethnographic studies alike. And while many 'single-sited' ethnographies resemble a 'multi-sited' understanding of the field site (e.g., Candea, 2013, p. 252), multi-sited research building on "the model of stable and bounded islands of cultural distinctiveness afloat in a sea of transnationalism remains" (Falzon, 2016, p. 4).

to this epistemological framework of the field as a complex web of multiscalar interactions between people, stories, news practices, and senses of belonging.

Yet, how did this conceptualization of 'the field' affect my fieldwork in practice? And how did I, in collaboration with others located in different settings, navigate and co-construct a complex web of interacting relationships?

DOING MULTI-SITED FIELDWORK

My fieldwork started before I set foot on Caribbean soil. As soon as my research trajectory took off beginning in early 2015, I began building relationships with actors in the field. I reached out to fellow researchers on Curaçao where I would head to in August 2016 before my journey took me to Sint Maarten in February 2017. During this stage, I also started to negotiate access to news media on both islands and as well as those operating across the entirety of the Dutch Kingdom. At the time, I aimed to do participant observation at three newspapers and at digital news media sites, including social media platforms – a decision that was related to previous studies on the important role of radio on Curaçao (Römer, 2017) and Sint Maarten (Guadeloupe, 2008), and the to-date little studied news websites and social media platforms on both islands. I was interested in how emerging online news practices interacted with 'traditional' newspapers, particularly with respect to generating senses of belonging beyond bounded places.

I stuck to my initial plan insofar as I eventually did participant observation in the newsrooms of three different newspapers for three days a week during a 2–3-month period each. At the end of August 2015, I started at the *Antilliaans Dagblad* in Curaçao. Next, in November 2015, I began at the *Èxtra* in Curaçao. I worked at *The Daily Herald* in Sint Maarten beginning in February 2016. Informed by the strategy of juxtaposition of places and data in multi-sited ethnography (Falzon, 2016, p. 2), I selected these particular newspapers for their different characters in terms of language (Dutch, Papiamentu, and English, respectively), professional affiliations, circulation and location, public image, history, and target audiences. *The Daily Herald* was the main and, since Hurricane Irma struck the island in 2017, the only printed daily on Sint Maarten. The newspaper was established in 1994 by the former director of the Curaçaoan daily, *Amigoe,* the oldest still published newspaper in the Dutch Caribbean. In Curaçao, the media landscape is bigger and more diversified in terms of language and, related to this,

is situated within a very clear class divide. The *Èxtra* was established (in 1976) in collaboration with labor unions to cater to the Papiamentu-speaking working classes on the island. Since the mid-1980s, the newspaper has maintained its leading market position and is now read across all sectors of Curaçao's society. The *Antilliaans Dagblad* is a relatively young newspaper, established in 2008, and explicitly targets a smaller highly educated Dutch-speaking segment on the island and throughout the rest of the Dutch Kingdom.

Apart from these relatively stable periods of participant observation at the newspapers, I also developed relationships that took shape in the field. Only two days after I had arrived on Curaçao, media researcher Dr. Renske Pin, invited me to get-together with her friends – among whom were freelance journalists, bloggers, activists, and spokespersons. This network allowed me to join in with and follow practices of newsmaking through, across, and parallel to institutional news practices on Curaçao and across the rest of the Dutch Kingdom. An example was my friendship and collaboration with a freelancer and correspondent for Dutch news media who took me along as he went about his daily routines: from a series of press conferences following up on the resignation of Curaçao's prime minister (an event I described above) to a demonstration against pollution in a neighborhood next to the Isla oil refinery. In retrospect, I learned the most from our conversations on the road and during our weekly gatherings of the above-mentioned group at the boardwalk. These were situations I got involved in by, following Ingold, 'attending to' practices of newsmaking in daily island life.

Another track for my research emerged through the relationship with my host, anthropologist and archeologist Ieteke 'Inchi' Witteveen. In addition to the care she and her partner provided me from the moment I arrived on Curaçao, she taught me about the inner workings of, and relationships between, news and knowledge moving throughout the region, while connecting me with people from Cuba to Coro (Venezuela). Also, it was through her network and efforts on behalf that I was welcomed by the *Èxtra*. This was a newspaper that many in my network had doubted I would be able to gain access to. Curaçao may have been a small island in terms of 'place', yet in terms of relationships and what these meant for practices of newsmaking in the public sphere – the focus of this study – Curaçao was a pluriverse of parallel yet interconnected worlds.

The same was true for Sint Maarten, albeit in a somewhat different way. The circulation of people, stories, and news practices was more volatile and rapid on this island, and so were my relationships and collaborations with actors in the

field. One day, after a brief chat in a coffee bar in Marigot, the capital of the French side of the island, I was invited by a family from New York to join them on a luxurious Catamaran trip. The next day I spent wandering in Dutch Quarter, one of the poorer neighborhoods on the Dutch side, at walking distance from where I was living (in Belvedere, where my hosts, originally from Sint Eustatius, lived) buying fresh fruits from street sellers and chatting about the latest talk of the town. I learned a lot from my friendship with two guys I had met at the boardwalk in Philipsburg: one was an Indian contract worker, the other with one of the island's prominent family names. Having such a last name did not mean that one 'had it made'. On Sint Maarten, many people were living day by day, which, in turn, created bonds, support, and hope.

There were many other meaningful relationships and ways of understanding the news that I experienced during the subsequent period on Curaçao and Sint Maarten. Moreover, my fieldwork was extended far beyond this set period of time and went beyond the islands as bounded sites via my participation in several closed Facebook groups and one-on-one conversations with interlocutors via Facebook messenger. In the European Netherlands, my fieldwork continued by talking with Dutch politicians, with parliamentary correspondents of Curaçaoan and Sint Maarten newspapers, and with Dutch media directors at the Hilversum Media Park. It was at the Media Park that I, myself, was incidentally invited to contribute to 'the news', just as I had come to do at the newspapers on Curaçao and Sint Maarten. My fieldwork in the European Netherlands was no different than on the islands. The 'borrels' [drinks] with my neighbors, for example, were both fun and informative as I lived next to a couple from Aruba (one of whom was a journalist at the Dutch public broadcaster at the time) and a Dutch newspaper journalist with Kingdom Relations in his portfolio. In the same apartment flat in Rotterdam, I got stuck in the elevator together with the very mechanic who was working on its malfunctioning. While waiting for his colleague, he told me about his youth on Curaçao and how he had been able to leave his former 'gangster life' behind. During the 1.5 hours we spent talking, I learned much about extending news networks in the environments his friends were still part of – environments that I had certainly encountered on Curaçao but had not become familiar with. All of which brings me to reflect on my own positioning across the complex webs of interactions in which I participated.

REFLECTIONS: CHALLENGES AND CORRESPONDENCE

In addition to doing participant observation at different sites and moving from one place to another, my fieldwork involved "the description of what it means to be entangled in the very web of relationships an ethnographer may find himself or herself across scales" (Murillo, 2021, p. 45). That "this is, evidently, easier said than done in practical terms", as Murillo (2021, p. 45) noted, was something I experienced during the course of this research trajectory as I collaborated with interlocutors in various, often contrasting, settings.

First of all, I had to navigate my relationships with, in, and between the newspapers where I did my participant observation. During my time at each newspaper, I came to know the editors and other employees better, some of whom I regularly encountered around town if their work schedules allowed this. Journalists work hard on both islands. Most of them work six days a week. Part of negotiating access to the newspapers had therefore been the agreement to contribute my labor to the news production process, including by writing news articles. In practice, there were several challenges I faced with this article writing. Most immediately, there was a language issue, Papiamentu on Curaçao in particular. Although I had done an intensive Papiamentu course in the Netherlands and continued with weekly lessons on the island, I did not become fluent in either speaking or writing it. This was mostly, yet not exclusively, an obstacle during my time at the *Èxtra*, where I eventually wrote one news article. At the *Antilliaans Dagblad* (AD) I wrote more articles, yet in order to do so I also needed my Papiamentu language skills. After all, in the words of the director, the AD was "a Dutch-language newspaper in a 95% Papiamentu-language society" (from my Fieldnotes, September 1, 2015). Apart from linguistic challenges, I faced difficulties with navigating the institutional settings of the newsrooms. At each newsroom, certainly in the beginning, I felt quite out of place. I had never worked in 'the news' before, nor did I have a scholarly background in journalism, media, or communication studies. And while I had read up on recent politics, economic developments, and cultural events on Curaçao and Sint Maarten as much as I could, it took me quite a while before the names of public figures started to ring a bell, let alone before I could place their actions in a relevant context.

Something that was very helpful to me were the in-depth interviews I did with the editors and managers of each newspaper, not only to learn about their news practices and understandings thereof, but also to build one-on-one

relationships which enabled me to get a grip on what was happening around me. I also did interviews with other important news media actors on both islands and in the European Netherlands. I ended up with audio-records of 42 in-depth interviews in Dutch, English, or Papiamentu.[16] These interviews provided useful insights into dynamics at play within the institutional public sphere on both islands and across the Kingdom of The Netherlands. Not only were many of my interviewees working at or affiliated with news media organizations, I, too, as a researcher performed an institutional role. To be clear, the institutional public on the islands and across the Dutch Kingdom is, in itself, a multi-sited and multiscalar sphere. As a Dutch researcher working at the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV) and Leiden University, I regularly found myself in the midst of ongoing discussions about our shared colonial past and ongoing asymmetries embedded in the Kingdom's institutional order and constitution. I also explicitly participated in these discussions, by writing and co-signing opinion pieces for Dutch newspapers (Rotmeijer & Halfman, 2017; Guadeloupe et al., 2018) and by interviews on Dutch radio (e.g., Rotmeijer, 2018; Rotmeijer & Hoogers, 2018).

During my fieldwork, I sometimes encountered explicit reservations from researchers and activists about my affiliation with the KITLV, an institute founded in 1851 to gather scientific knowledge about the Dutch colonies, not least "to ensure that Dutch control could be maintained as long as possible" (Kuitenbrouwer, 2013, p. 13). In line with worldwide academic discussions on decolonization and institutional racism, some of the researchers I collaborated with stressed the enduring lack of research opportunities for people on the islands and, as a result, the ongoing Dutch hegemonic knowledge production about the islands. I thoroughly reflected on this during my fieldwork on the islands and in the European Netherlands. For one blogger and social media activist, my position as a researcher affiliated with the KITLV was an impossible obstacle to collaboration, however introspective I might be. In the email conversation we had, he wrote: "If you really understand decolonial knowledge production and the mechanisms of Dutch white supremacy then you should have divested from KITLV" (Email received on October 20, 2015).

[16] These interviews were, on average, 80 minutes each. It took me several months with professional help to transcribe and process these recordings.

Local journalists and news organizations have also expressed reservations concerning my research. During my fieldwork, news producers sometimes expressed their concern that my Dutch background would color my interpretation of Dutch Caribbean news practices in a negative way. This was based on their experience with ongoing negative Dutch representations of Curaçaoan and Sint Maarten journalism. The concerns and expectations of participants in the field taught me about these multiscale institutional news dynamics as well as my own boundaries. When I continued my research in the European Netherlands, some editors repeatedly asked me to share my results with them, because, as one emailed me, "it's about 'us' after all" (Email received on February 5, 2017). I agreed with this to the extent that the research had become about all of us *in relation to each other*.[17]

The truth is that it took me a while to come to terms with what it meant to be entangled in the complex web of relationships I had come to find myself in across sites and scales. In order to do so, I had to disentangle myself somewhat from the institutional settings and debates I had engaged with. The extensive field notes I made during my fieldwork guided me in this process. These notes reminded me of my continuous experiences in, of, and with that other (different, yet interacting) realm of the popular public. My entanglement with the web of relationships in this public is of a more contingent and personal nature. Born 'op Zuid', as Rotterdam people refer to the (mainly) working-class neighborhoods south of the Maas River crossing the Dutch city, I grew up in what Francio Guadeloupe came to call 'a Caribbean island'. Not only were many of my childhood friends from the (Dutch) Caribbean and the neighborhood a melting pot of different cultures, but daily social life resembled 'Caribbeanness' or what Glissant termed *créolisation:* the continuous transformation that emerges from a loss of place. This was true for not only those who had migrated from other places, but also for those who were then still called 'autochtonen' (basically referring to: native Dutch 'white' people). The latter – of whom I was considered to be one – also sensed a loss of place – of a stable, familiar environment – and had to adapt to the unknown. In retrospect, these early experiences taught me how to navigate the street – or, as a colleague once called me, to be 'streetwise'.

[17] Without doubt, the editor whose email I cite here and who taught me much about working and living on Curaçao, shared this understanding. This was already illustrated by the brackets she used to refer to 'us' in her email.

While doing fieldwork, even when it was in or around institutional settings, this background made me attentive to practices of newsmaking in, what I came to term, the popular public. To be clear, my engagement with this public did not change the fact that I was a Dutch researcher who represented and was embedded in the higher levels of society and who had access to the institutional public. Yet, in the popular public it was more about what you do than about what you are. In the institutional public, I was (and am) considered a Dutch 'white' (upper) middle-class researcher. In the popular public I could be 'daring', 'different', and 'sturdy' (some of the descriptions interlocutors in the popular public attributed to my presence).

These characterizations also related to my feminine traits and appearance – a woman, yes, but often not quite behaving as one was expected to. Gendered interactions played a role in my engagements in both the institutional and the popular public. The news media and journalism, as a profession, continue to perpetuate masculine professional values and are male-dominated work environments[18] (i.e., De Vuyst & Raeymaeckers, 2017), while (Caribbean) street life has been referred to as embodying "machismo" (cf., Marcha & Verweel, 2005, 2009). Yet rather than being a disadvantage, my femininity often turned out to be a strategic advantage. In the institutional public I was considered to be less of a threat – something I had to self-reflect on continuously, particularly in relation to managing expectations. In the popular public, I felt confident to talk, dance, and have fun together, without feeling threatened.

In the course of my fieldwork, I learned that the meaning of my entanglement and engagement with 'the field' was situational. Not only did my perspectives shift in the course of the research, but also my own sense of belonging *in relation* to "the concrete and diverse realm of lived experience" (Glissant, 1992, p. 109). My collaborations with actors in various and often contrasting settings shaped the field, which, in turn, shaped the course of my research and me, as a researcher and as a person. This was indeed "a process of creation conditioned by relations" (Velázquez, 2010, p. 184). And by attending to this process, my research became "a practice of correspondence" (Ingold, 2019, p. 666) – turning events into the story that is this book.

[18] To give an indication: Of the 42 journalists and bloggers I did interviews with, 18 were women. Three of them were website owners or bloggers, two as (former) editors-in-chief, two as coordinators. Newspaper management functions (owners and publishers) were occupied by men.

Before I turn to the outline of the latter, a brief note on the terminology I employ to refer to people's skin color in this book. It is something that I reflected on a lot in the course of my research, which took place in a time of intensified public debates about (anti-)racism across the Kingdom of the Netherlands. A "black/white binary paradigm" (Perea, 1997; see also Gonzalez-Sobrino & Goss, 2019), long embedded in American racial thought, have become increasingly normalized in Dutch (European and Caribbean) academia and media discourses. I too participated in and contributed to these discourses, at times by explicitly and critically positioning myself as a "Dutch, white researcher" doing research in the Dutch Caribbean (i.e., Rotmeijer, 2017a). While I did so deliberately in order to engage with [anti-]racism and [de]colonial politics in the institutional public, I also realized (and increasingly so, in the course of this research trajectory) that categories of 'white' versus 'black' to address mechanisms of racialization (understood as a politics of reducing people on the basis of their presumed 'race'), simultaneously reproduce the latter. To stress that notions of 'black' and 'white' are political constructs, I use single brackets whenever I mention these terms to refer to people and social groups. I use double brackets when citing interlocutors and respondents employing these notions. Whenever I refer to particular ideological politics (e.g., black nationalism, black power activism, etc.; most prominently in Chapter Two), I do not use brackets. Moreover, I use different terms for and connotations to people's skin tone (from light(er), dark(er) skin color to 'red', 'yellow', 'pink', 'black', and 'white') interchangeably throughout this book. Again, I do so not to ignore or minimize the ongoing injustices that come with racialization, but rather to problematize the essentialist racialized categories perpetuating the latter. Lastly, and related, a comment about my use of the term 'creole' – a commonly used term, certainly in Caribbean contexts, yet with many different meanings. In this book, I use creole (without brackets) to refer to its lingual meaning: a creole language (e.g., Papiamentu, St. Martiners' English). I use 'creole' (with brackets) whenever I refer to people or a social group that resembles a wide variety of different skin tones, backgrounds, and outlooks (such as, in Chapter Two, where I refer to a 'creole' establishment). The reason for bracketing 'creole' with reference to (groups of) people relates to Glissant's notion of *créolisation* (which informs my epistemological framework, see above) in contrast to *creolization* – a term commonly used to refer to a socio-cultural process of intermixing that is historically rooted in the Caribbean (see Price, 2017; Hall, 2015). Critics have pointed to the essentialist 'root-thinking'

(the mixing of entities rooted in a place and 'its' history, rather than the continuous, unforeseen transformations through relational processes) embedded in this notion of creolization (i.e., Wiedorn, 2018). By bracketing 'creole' with reference to (groups of) people, I aim to further problematize essentialist and fixed categories. Now, let me turn to the outline of this book.

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

In the next chapter **(Chapter Two)** I further explore 'the field' through the conceptual lens I came to employ in this study – that is, of news and 'the news'. I do so by following historical traces of 'the news' contested by news on Curaçao and Sint Maarten. Rather than a comprehensive historical overview, my exploration in this chapter serves to illustrate how interactions between news and 'the news' have shaped and been shaped by public life on each island. My starting point is the introduction of 'the news', first on Curaçao and then on Sint Maarten in the late 19th century. Following the interactions with long-standing news networks in the region, I describe how norms of journalism were introduced to 'the news' in the course of the 20th century. After the arrival of the Dutch company, Royal Shell, on Curaçao and the social-political struggle articulated through news and 'the news' that would follow, the island's institutional public – and 'the news' operating in it – split between a bourgeois public sphere with 'institutional news media' and, what I call, a cultural public sphere with 'popular news media'. On Sint Maarten, there was no such split in the institutional public, based on a common understanding of its private nature.

That this allows popular news practices to enter Sint Maarten's institutional public, forms my entry point to **Chapter Three**, where I focus on how news practices generate contested senses of belonging on this island. I do so by highlighting my experiences with interacting news practices around Black History Month (February 2016) on Sint Maarten with the talk given by Dr. Umar Johnson, a clinical psychologist and pan-Africanist from the US. It is a case that brings to the fore the work of a group of activists who were able to push black nationalist politics into Sint Maarten's public sphere. I argue that they used to practice news from 'below', aligned with the popular public, but that today their black nationalist politics are an alternative within the institutional public. In the latter, the middle classes employ institutional news practices to express and generate a politics of contested senses of belonging.

In Chapter Four, I shift to Curaçao and to the popular news practices of the island's working classes in articulating a common sense of belonging. In order to do justice to their modes and articulations of belonging, I build upon an existential anthropological approach (Jackson & Piette, 2015) connected to a phenomenology of hope and fear. They seek a better future via winning the lottery while also paying attention to misfortunes via news and popular news media. I take an existential phenomenological approach here because it is neither a political nor a rational-critical sense of belonging that Curaçao's working classes perform through their practices of newsmaking. It is one that signifies the human condition we all share through our existing (out) in(to) the world. I will elaborate on this approach in the beginning of Chapter Four, before exploring how Curaçao's poor embrace a future-oriented outlook on the world they are being 'thrown' into. I argue that popular news media operating in the cultural public sphere articulate the concerns and outlooks of Curaçao's working classes through an affective register into the institutional public. I conclude with the discrepancy between the outlook in the world of those operating in the latter (one of managing risk) versus those who at the bottom of the glasshouse (one of celebrating chance).

What happens if suddenly, via an outside event, the glasshouse collapses? This is something I look into in Chapter Five. In the aftermath of Hurricane Irma hitting Sint Maarten in September 2017, 'the news' and its institutional infrastructures were obstructed for weeks. Suddenly, everyone depended on popular news and its channels. News during Hurricane Irma's aftermath generated cathartic senses of belonging across the Dutch world: for a moment, all belonged to 'we', Sint Maarteners. Whether this lasts and why (not) is something that leads me to the Conclusion of this book.



2 | An history of 'the news' contested by news

Emerging publics in the public sphere on Curaçao and Sint Maarten

In this chapter, I follow historical traces of 'the news' contested by news on Curaçao and Sint Maarten. Rather than a comprehensive historical overview, my aim in this chapter is to explore how public life on Curaçao and Sint Maarten was shaped by multiple emerging publics, and how this process unfolded differently on each island.

Building on the introductory chapter in which I described how the islands came under Dutch colonial rule, my starting point for this chapter is the introduction of 'the news' on the islands in the mid-19th century. This was a period of ongoing economic recession in the Dutch Caribbean. The islands, and particularly Curaçao as a logistical trade hub, had lost their central position in the Dutch Atlantic economy. With the formal abolition of slavery in the Kingdom of the Netherlands on July 1, 1863, the social order had to be reinvented on the islands. Together with the colonial government, religious institutions played an important role in this endeavor: they introduced 'the news' on the islands as a means to 'civilize' formerly enslaved Curaçaoans and Sint Maarteners.

By then, news and information had circulated widely through overlapping (legal and illicit) trade networks in the (Dutch) Caribbean. People of all ranks in the islands' societies had engaged with popular news practices for centuries. This was not the case for institutional news practices such as formal correspondence and official regulations sent from the Dutch mainland. These had been the exclusive domain of the islands' elites. Yet, in order to get news fast, the latter too had to lean on informal, and cross-imperial, news networks – a dynamic that had been perpetuated by the ongoing economic recession in Dutch Caribbean and the related neglect of the islands by Dutch rulers oversee.

The involvement of Dutch colonial governance in the Dutch Caribbean increased in relation to a general shift in European imperial and colonial policies in the course of the 18th century – a shift that was informed by an ideal 'bourgeois public sphere' in a Habermasian sense. This process began in the British territories, where printers and independent newspapers had already emerged in the course of the 18th century. 'Print capitalism' had flourished early on in the Dutch Republic. However, Dutch elites had long deemed it too costly, generally inappropriate and a potentially undermining influence to introduce 'the news' in the colonies. Enslaved people and free 'black' people were seen as being unable to engage in critical-rational deliberation and to form a public opinion. They were illiterate and 'uneducated', not least of all because Dutch colonial policy had aimed at keeping them ignorant in order to maintain the social order in the

colonies. In keeping with this policy, Dutch rulers long ignored and silenced debates on the abolition of slavery. Only when the system of slavery became untenable in the colonies would the Dutch formally abolish slavery in 1863. This abolition was at least in part due to slave revolts on the islands and in the Caribbean region, as well as the fact that slavery had *de facto* been abolished on Sint Maarten because of the French abolition of slavery in 1848. It was also the result of international (particularly British) pressure. This did not mean that the notion of (now all) formerly enslaved people as being subordinate was gone, nor that their deplorable living conditions would change for the better. It was an incentive though for the introduction of 'the news' in the public domain, first on Curaçao and then on Sint Maarten in the late 19th century. Only later, norms of journalism came to inform 'the news' on both islands. This was in the course of the 20th century, spurred by a new round – and intensification – of global capitalism.

By following several historical traces of news and 'the news', I show that, similar to the export of 'the news' to other colonies of European empires, on the islands "metropolitan news practices were appropriated by local elites to modify the local news system for conscious political reasons" (Nerone, 2013, p. 451). This process, however, was neither linear nor one-dimensional. Not only were there multiple elites at different scales operating on the islands, institutional news practices never fully modified, let alone replaced, popular news practices. Rather, the latter – articulating the concerns of working classes in the popular public – continuously interacted with 'the news' in the institutional public. How 'the news' contested by news has shaped and been shaped by public life on each island is what this chapter is about. I start with Curaçao where newspapers appeared first.

2.1. BETWEEN MISSION AND TRANSMISSION: THE TRANSFORMATION OF CURAÇAO'S PUBLIC SPHERE

'THE NEWS' ON A MISSION

Under the second British occupation (1807–1815), an Englishman who fled from the revolutionary unrest in Venezuela established Curaçao's first newspaper, *The Curaçao Gazette & Commercial Advertiser*, or (later) *De Curaçaosche Courant*

(Coomans-Eustatia, 2001, p. 370). This was in 1812, a year that is often referred to as 'the beginning of journalism' in the Dutch Caribbean (Lent, 1971, p. 54, see also Hartog, 1944; Hendrikse, 1977; Oltheten, 1978). The paper did not yet operate according to liberal-democratic principles of journalism. These principles, as I argue later, came to inform a part of Curaçao's institutional news practices more than a century after the establishment of the first newspaper. *De Curaçaose Courant* served local elites with information on business, commerce, and colonial regulations. It was only after the formal Dutch abolition of slavery on July 1, 1863, that 'the news' was introduced to the island's public domain, based on the notion that "a whole new people had to be civilized" (Rutgers, 1994, p. 338). Formerly enslaved Curaçaoans – including the significant group of earlier freed 'black' Curaçaoans – had been deliberately excluded from education, the Protestant faith, and the institutional public more generally (Römer-Kenepa, 2013, p. 35). Here, Catholic missionaries had stepped in to fill the gaps.

In the early 19th century, Spanish missionaries who had long been going back and forth between the South American mainland and Curaçao, were replaced by representatives of the Dutch Catholic Church, who had their Mission formalized by the Dutch King in 1824. The colonial government and economic elites on the island soon realized the value of the Mission for preserving the social order (Oostindie & Klinkers, 2001, pp. 9–16). As a result, Curaçao's underclasses were Catholic (Groenewoud, 2017, p. 19).

Anticipating the formal abolition of slavery and the increasing number of manumissions that took place in the mid-19th century, the Dutch missionaries convinced the colonial government of the importance of educating the "uncivilized" Curaçaoans (Allen, 2007, p. 93). Throughout the 19th century, the 'civilizing' Mission took shape on the island. The Church set up several small schools to 'uplift' (formerly) enslaved Curaçaoans in line with the Christian doctrine. With the same purpose, the missionaries published booklets and catechisms at the modest printing press of the Roman Catholic Church on the island. Among missionaries there were discussions about the language of communication. Those arguing that the Mission could only succeed by 'lowering' oneself to the 'underdeveloped', including communicating in 'their' creole language, Papiamentu, won out. Establishing a Papiamentu newspaper was soon seen as an additional instrument of the Mission on the island. But the Catholic Church was not the only one with a mission.

The first Papiamentu newspaper was founded by the Freemasons, who were among the most fervent rivals of the Church. Aptly named *Civilisadó*[19] (1871–1875), this short-lived newspaper aimed at elevating the island's underprivileged in line with Enlightenment principles, such as critical and rational thinking (Rutgers, 1994, p. 98). With strong roots in the British, Spanish, and French Caribbean, the Freemasons played a central role in the revolutions against European imperial colonial rule. Freemasonry gained ground among Curaçao's upper strata during the second period of British rule (1807–16), particularly when, in 1811, the famous revolutionary Freemason, Simón Bolívar, fled to Curaçao during the South American wars of liberation against Spanish rule. Ever since then, Curaçao had seen the establishment of Masonic Lodges with members drawn from across the (upper) middle classes and elites on the islands, including Protestants, Jews, and (dissenting) Catholics. Together they formed a liberal counterforce from within Curaçao's institutional public.

With *Civilisadó*, the Freemasons criticized the colonial government and its policies by which, they argued, "the general interests of the Curaçaoan people were being sacrificed to serve the interests of a few merchants" (Abraham-Van der Mark, 2001, p. 630). They also turned against the Church and its Mission, particularly its Christian indoctrination and Papiamentu-language instruction. They ascertained that these were for keeping the island's underclasses in check instead of providing them with opportunities to climb the social ladder. Social mobility was an incentive for *Civilisadó*'s founders to open up a school for poor boys, where Dutch was the primary language of instruction.

In an attempt to minimize the damage the Freemasons could do to the Mission, the missionaries established their own newspaper, *Amigoe di Curaçao,* in 1883. The "apostolate of the press" (Rutgers 1994, pp. 101–102) was soon expanded. *Amigoe* eventually appeared in Dutch and Papiamentu. This was considered a 'mistake' as the Dutch articles did not (and were not supposed to) reach the underclass Curaçaoans (Hartog, 1944, pp. 167–68). In order to maintain its position in the institutional public while continuing its civilizing Mission, the Church decided to continue *Amigoe* as a 'higher level' newspaper in Dutch and to start the 'popular' Papiamentu newspaper, *La Cruz*, in 1900 (Hartog, 1944, p. 38). *Amigoe* contained more diverse and longer news items and was less

[19] Translates as "he who has been civilized" (Roe, 2016, p. 91).

patronizing than *La Cruz,* which featured articles that were highly didactic and moralistic-religious in tone, style, and message (Rutgers, 1994, p. 147).

The introduction of 'the news' went hand in hand with a class-based school system (Donk, 2013, 2019). Education was divided into three multiscalar compartments: public (governmental) schools, denominational institutional (Catholic) schools, and a variety of denominational private schools. Each segment had free, low-level *armenscholen* [schools for the poor] and fee-paying, mid-level *burgerscholen* [civic schools], which, in turn, were split into single-sex boys' and girls' schools. Language of instruction was an additional, yet crucial, differentiating factor: Dutch in public schools, Papiamentu in Catholic schools, and both plus Spanish (and other languages) in private schools.

The establishment of *La Cruz* went hand in hand with a process of convergence in the differentiated school system, resulting in a demarcation between Dutch-language public schools and Papiamentu-language Catholic schools by 1913.[20] The majority of the Curaçaoans went to one of the latter, if only, because there was no other option in the poor rural areas outside Willemstad.

While many pupils worked their way through this school system and some of them were able to climb the social ladder, the demarcation between Dutch-language and Papiamentu-language education limited social mobility among the lower classes. Whereas Papiamentu had been spoken by all layers within Curaçaoan society since the 18th century (Eckkrammer, 2003, pp. 99–100), Dutch-language instruction still was primarily preserved for the upper classes. In order to gain access to the institutional public one had to speak and read Dutch, the official language of the institutional order and its communication infrastructures (e.g., official documents, political reports, and administration). As Roe (2016) argued, "Papiamentu thus bridged the racial divide while also maintaining it" (p. 78). The language of Papiamentu did of course not lead in and of itself to racialization (as a politics of ascribing 'racial' essences to people based on skin tones), but rather perpetuated an unequal racialized class-based social order.

[20] In 1913, there were three public, and 18 Catholic schools on the island. There were no private schools registered at the time (Donk, 2013, n.p.). See Donk (2019) for a detailed historical overview of this process, which resembled and strengthened social class divisions in Curaçao's society.

TRANSMISSIONS OF NEWS

In addition to using Papiamentu to reach the Curaçaoan poor, the missionaries who edited *La Cruz* built on popular news practices and oral storytelling traditions (Rutgers, 1994, p. 62). Among these practices of storytelling were the folktales of *Kompa Nanzi*, the spider-man trickster, in-between good and bad, human and animal, men and God, who was greedy and lazy, yet always smart and inventive in fooling its superiors. Enslaved people had carried Nanzi tales from West Africa to the Caribbean, including Curaçao where they had been transmitted from generation to generation to become part of daily social life (Allen, 2007, 2012; Clemencia, 2001).

La Cruz started to collect *konte kuenta* [folktales] such as of *Kompa Nanzi* and modified these in line with a Christian doctrine (Broek, 2001a, p. 380). These tales used to be read out aloud at home or else publicly by the editors of *La Cruz*. In a similar way, *La Cruz* published and transmitted these popular *kombersashon* [conversations] and Papiamentu proverbs, which were provided by the audience, as long as they 'nicely corroborated – or at least did not defy – particular Roman Catholic moral principles' (Broek, 2001b, p. 178). The popularity of the stories that were published and orated by *La Cruz* strengthened the role and impact of the Catholic Church in the lives of Curaçao's poor just as the provision of formal education and church services had done.

Yet, this did not mean that those among Curaçao's underclasses simply 'took in' the Catholic doctrine. As Allen (2007) argued, Afro-Curaçaoan social life (1863–1917) unfolded "through the creative re-appropriation of Catholic values, norms and practices and their reinterpretation according to local traditional practices and values" (p. 262). These had been developed by enslaved Curaçaoans as a means of physical and existential survival. The transmission of oral traditions had enabled them to preserve their being and senses of belonging amidst severe oppression and dehumanization. While open and direct resistance against the system of enslavement had certainly existed; for instance, by the Tula-led slave revolt in 1795, enslaved Curaçaoans had also found all kinds of creative ways to merely survive day by day.

Among the descendants of enslaved Curaçaoans, daily life continued to be deplorable even after the formal abolition of slavery. They faced severe poverty and were at the bottom of the island's society. Storytelling traditions kept on being transmitted and therefore persisted. Examples of these traditions were

"the persistence of the Guene language, which allowed people to conceal their criticisms of those with power" and the (covert) "interplay of Catholic saints with good and bad spirits" (Allen, 2007, pp. 252–53). The popularity of Nanzi as the trickster archetype able "to weave new opportunities out of disruption, discontinuity and defeat" (De Souza, 2003, p. 345) resembled how (formerly) enslaved Curaçaoans had turned their daily lives into stories. These stories, in turn, had been transmitted and were re-articulated in terms of how poor dark-skinned Curaçaoans navigated daily life around 1900.

While the Church attempted to rewrite – and eradicate – long time popular practices of newsmaking, storytelling and transmission had never been a one-way street. Rather than a practice of orating to an audience, it was a joint performance wherein all were agents, yet not equally so. It was for this reason that the Christian doctrine and behavioral "codes imposed by the Church were at once formally accepted but in actual practice challenged" (Allen, 2007, p. 263) by the poor. This was how those at the bottom of the island society creatively employed popular news practices in conversation with, while also contesting, 'the news'.

PUBLIC TRANSFORMATIONS

Among Curaçaoans it is popularly said that together with the handful of old elite families, the Church and Shell have long governed the island. After the Anglo-Dutch multinational Royal Dutch Shell (Shell) established the N.V. Curaçaosche Petroleum Maatschappij (CPM) on Curaçao in 1918, social and economic changes followed rapidly. By 1938 the *Isla* refinery was Shell's biggest and the third largest refinery worldwide (Van Beurden & Jonker, 2021, p. 71). In 40 years, the population of the island grew from just over 33,000 in 1915 to almost 120,000 in 1955. In addition to the Isla oil refinery, built on the land where enslaved Africans had been traded[21], Shell established a "sales company, an oil storage/ transshipment company, and a shipping company on the island" (Ten Kate, 2011, p. 45). The oil company employed a significant part of the local (and regional) labor force, yet upper management positions were occupied by educated personnel from The Netherlands along with a few members of the historically

[21] Called *Asiento* after the Spanish-Dutch (WIC) slave trade contract (1662–1713), which turned Curaçao into a central Caribbean 'slave entrepôt'.

established local 'white' elites. Professionals hailing from Suriname, Venezuela, and other Latin American countries, for the most part with a lighter brown skin color, formed a mid-level cadre of employees both at Shell and in the island's society, as a whole. The same was true for incoming "Eastern European and Ashkenazi Jews, Lebanese, Chinese, and East Indians [who] entered the retail trades" (Anderson & Dynes, 1975, p. 35).

With the influx of migrant workers, the composition of Curaçao's society changed significantly. At the same time, the Shell, "supported by the Dutch colonial state through laws, favorable tax regulations, and other facilities (…) maintained a policy of segregation (…) [that] manifested itself in terms of race, ethnicity, class, and gender" (Allen, 2013, p. 20). The Shell built upon the years of continuous Dutch colonial rule and further exacerbated the already segregation of the island's racialized class-based order. Dutch white-collar employees were provided housing in newly built gated communities. Blue-collar migrant workers were accommodated in separate compounds on the basis of ethnicity, language and land of origin. The lower-class Afro-Curaçaoans, particularly those living in the countryside, continued to have a subordinate position. The mixed darker and lighter brown skinned working classes living in Willemstad benefitted relatively more from the growing employment opportunities and overall economic prosperity that came with the oil refinery than did those living in the countryside. Among these beneficiaries was a group with a lighter brown skin tone who were able to act on the new chances for upward social mobility. Together with the aforementioned mid-level cadres of newcomers, they formed a new middle class in the island society. Then there was a group of 'lower' Dutch Protestants (and other Europeans with a light skin tone). Of course, not all 'white' people on the island were as privileged and wealthy as those representing the colonial authorities and the sectors affiliated with the government and Shell. Since the colonial heyday, soldiers, sailors, and tradespeople had come to the island. Their position was significantly less privileged than that of the 'higher' Dutch Protestants, although certainly not comparable to the continual oppression the 'black' lower-class Curaçaoans faced. In the newly emerging social order, these lower Dutch Protestants also came to form a mid-level cadre in the (lower) middle classes.

In response to the rapid industrialization, the Church launched a second weekly, *La Union*, in 1922, "for the developed Curaçaoan" (Groenewoud, 2017, p. 72), who, according to the Church, belonged to the urban Afro-Curaçaoan

working classes. As an organ of the R.K. Volksbond [Roman Catholic People's Union] established in 1919 (Broek, 1992, p. 120), *La Union* aimed to inform its members of union activities and encourage them to read 'appropriate news' in their own vernacular of Papiamentu (Hartog, 1944, p. 52). Together with the weekly *La Cruz*, which came to primarily focus on the rural 'black' lower-class Curaçaoans, *La Union* tried to keep the working classes in check by propagating Catholic values and behavioral norms of respectability (Broek, 1992, pp. 121–22; Roe, 2016, p. 92), which continued to play an important role in the institutional public on the island. Consequently, they were contested by news practices in the popular public as described above. As Römer (1979) argued, "this 'R.K. Volksbond' was in fact not a union, but rather a middle-class social organization which tried to promote the cultural, including the religious, interests of the people" (p. 141). Yet, 'the people' were not unaware of this. Rather they utilized the opportunities this social organization provided to attain a level of security and stability amidst rapid social transformation. And so, rather than an interest in the Catholic doctrine, it was because of the services (such as life and health insurance) provided by the Church that a membership of the R.K. Volksbond appealed to Curaçaoan laborers (Broek, 1992, p. 126).

Meanwhile, the Freemasons on the island continued to rival the Church for using Papiamentu to reach the masses. Their concern was not about Papiamentu, as a language, but rather, that the Church was using it to indoctrinate Curaçaoans (Broek, 2001a, p. 378). In 1928, members of the Freemasons established *La Prensa*, a Spanish-language (later Papiamentu) daily that regularly published critical pieces, for example, by former *La Union* writer and orator, W. Kroon, who increasingly turned against the Church and the Mission (Broek, 1992, pp. 128–30). With *La Prensa*, these Freemasons opposed the missionaries who, in turn, used the *Amigoe* to challenge them. This ongoing polemical back and forth between the Freemasons and the missionaries (see Hartog, 1944, pp. 198–99) had long agitated the institutional public. But the rapid process of modern industrialization would stir the institutional public still some more.

With the arrival of Royal Dutch Shell on the island came modern media technologies and liberal-democratic standards of what 'the news' should be and do in the (bourgeois) public sphere. Shell employees started experimenting with radio on the island, which led to the establishment of the *Curaçaose Radio Vereniging* [Curaçao Broadcasting Association] in 1933, followed by the first radio station on the island, *Radio Curom*, in 1937. *Curom* was government subsidized

(Lent, 1971, p. 58). *Emmabode* (1929) was a newspaper exclusively for Dutch expatriates. It was followed by the Dutch-language newspaper *Beurs- en Nieuwsberichten*[22] (*De Beurs*) established in 1935 by a Shell employee from London. The paper was soon embraced by the business sector on the island. There were now two Dutch-language newspapers in the institutional public: the *Amigoe*, owned by the Church and *De Beurs*, owned by Shell. Whereas these represented Catholic and liberal-Protestant principles, respectively, their differences were increasingly pushed to the background by shared commercial and political interests and a common focus on professionalizing 'the news' through the implementation of journalism norms (i.e., accuracy, objectivity, neutrality, and public accountability). As Hartog (1944), a former Dutch-Curaçaoan journalist, recalled: "the first 'professional' journalist was flown over from The Netherlands to become the editor of *De Beurs*" (p. 276). This was an example soon followed by *Amigoe*. The appointment of Hartog as its chief editor in 1940 was accompanied by a process of modernization. With the establishment of the *Paulus Drukkerij N.V.* [printing office], the weekly turned into a daily.

What the above should have made clear is that on Curaçao, the Dutch colonial presence remained tangible, first indirectly, via the Church and the colonial government, and then more directly starting in the early-20th century with the arrival of Royal Dutch Shell. This colonial presence was articulated through and implemented by institutional news practices, which, in close relation to education and language policies promoting differentiation, contributed to maintaining the social order. The Dutch institutional presence and the intensification thereof with the influx of professional journalists and journalism norms into 'the news', reinforced the status quo. It did so by breaking up the institutional public via 'the news'. On Curaçao, the institutional public split into a bourgeois public sphere (representing 'Dutch' liberal-democratic ideals articulated through the Dutch language) and, what I will refer to as the cultural public sphere (representing 'Curaçaoan' culture articulated through the Papiamentu language). Newspapers such as *La Cruz* and *La Union* laid the basis for this Papiamentu language sphere, which would take full shape in the decades to come. I further elaborate on the characteristics and implications of Curaçao's split institutional public in Section 2.4. Let me now first turn to how news interacted with – and often shaped – 'the news' on Sint Maarten.

[22] Translated from Dutch: "news from the stock exchange".

2.2. RUNNING YOUR OWN AFFAIRS ON SINT MAARTEN: NEWS IN A PUBLIC SPHERE THAT IS PRIVATE

ROAMING NEWS ACROSS THE REGION

With the seat of colonial power located on Curaçao, Sint Maarten was what Badejo (1990, p. 121) termed, a 'privately leased colony' under Dutch colonial rule. After the Dutch had conquered the southern part of the island, political jurisdiction had been outsourced to private settlers. The same was true for the neighboring Dutch islands, Saba and Sint Eustatius, as well as the English, Danish, Swedish, and French controlled islands known – together with the Dutch Windwards[23] – as the Leeward island group that were part of the larger Lesser Antilles chain. Sharing the northeastern waters of the Caribbean Sea, the Leewards were intimately connected through a shared language, the circulation of people, informal trade, and information networks. They shared the spoken language of creole English (known as St. Martiners' English on Sint Maarten) which enabled the establishment of information networks and streams of news to flow across the Leeward archipelago. In the island societies, "news spread quickly, and the frequent and intensive connections between people on the Leeward islands facilitated this transmission of information", as Roitman (2016) noted:

> Slaves served as sailors on the vessels that plied the routes between the islands and would have passed on information in each port they entered. Moreover, the population of the islands who were already free formed, in the words of one inhabitant of the colonies, a 'zwervende bevolking' – a roaming group. (p. 380)

Similar trade and information networks had long existed in Curaçao and its surrounding waters. Here too, news travelled quickly from port to port, such as between Curaçao and Coro on the Venezuelan coast – a route well-known to (enslaved or free) sailors, missionaries, and merchants alike (see Rupert, 2009, 2011, 2012). What differed though on Sint Maarten was a less tangible Dutch colonial presence. This was true for other islands that are part of the Leeward

[23] Sint Maarten, Saba, and Sint Eustatius are referred to as the Windward islands in Dutch. Yet internationally they are referred to as being part of the Leeward islands.

archipelago too as "most had relatively weak administrative and military infrastructures" (Roitman, 2016, p. 378). Across the Leewards, informal news circulation was paramount, not only as a primary intelligence source for private colonial authorities, but also as streams of news "that crisscrossed and often subverted official authority" (ibid).

This lack of a strong official (colonial) presence played a central role in the (relatively) early emancipation of enslaved Sint Maarteners. When the Dutch formally abolished slavery on July 1, 1863, slavery on Sint Maarten de facto already belonged to the past (Paula, 1993). Here, the tides had started to shift with the English abolition of slavery in 1833, which not only led to a significant 'roaming group' of free people across the Leewards, but also to an increase in the number of enslaved people who managed to escape to British-ruled islands where they were declared free as soon as they set ashore. When rumor had it that the French abolition of slavery was imminent, Dutch slave owners and authorities on Sint Maarten became increasingly concerned that emancipation on the French-ruled side of the island would lead to a slave uprising on the Dutch side. After all, "if information was easily transmitted across the sea, albeit over short distances, it was that much more easily passed between people on the same island on which there were no real borders" (Roitman, 2016, p. 381).

With the French abolition of slavery on 27 April 1848, the slavery system could no longer be maintained on Sint Maarten. This did not mean that the Dutch government formally acknowledged this situation. Rather, it was in the absence of Dutch colonial governance – in terms of both military presence and direct lines of communication – that the early abolition of slavery became a reality in this 'privately leased colony'. This was illustrated by a letter from the Governor of Sint Maarten to the Captain of the ship "Arend" (likely en route to Curaçao or Suriname) earlier that month, on 10 April 1848. He wrote that, "he [the Captain] will doubtless have heard of the events in France [abolition; declaration of a Republic] from the European newspapers" (Archives of Sint Maarten, 1848).[24] In the letter, the Governor urgently asked for more information. He had no idea what the Dutch stand on the matter was and complained that he had to ask the French notary about the ongoing events to get any information. Direct lines of

[24] I thank my colleague, Jessica Roitman, for providing me with this information, based upon her archival research on Sint Maarten. For more information about the communication between Sint Maarten and the Dutch colonial government in the lead up to the French abolition of slavery, see Roitman (2016).

formal communication with the Dutch mainland and the colonial government in Curaçao were chronically slow and, as a result, rather weak.

To get 'the news' fast, Sint Maarten's administrators had to consult their 'colleagues' on the northern side of the island and on neighboring islands. Also, they read European and regionally published newspapers that circulated from island to island and across imperial borders. The oldest newspaper under Dutch colonial rule was established on Statia with the name *The St. Eustatius Gazette* (1790-1794). In one of the remaining editions of the bi-lingual (English, Dutch) weekly, there were clear references to Sint Maarten (e.g., advertisements, reports of enslaved 'run-a-ways'), which shows that this newspaper was distributed on Sint Maarten (see Hartog, 1948). In addition, and more substantially, was 'the news' coming from St. Kitts, a nearby island that long served as the 'Mother Colony' for not only the British West Indies, but also the neighboring Dutch Windward islands (Johnson, 2021a). On St. Kitts, a free 'black' family with roots in Antigua established *The St. Christopher Advertiser and Weekly Intelligencer* in 1782 (ibid).[25] This paper, which would be published until 1909, circulated among, and reported on, neighboring islands. Saba had its own small column in the St. Kitts newspaper. The St. Kitts newspaper was sent to the colonial government in Curaçao. This was how news and 'the news' travelled through the region and across the Dutch Caribbean.

PRIVATE GATEKEEPERS AND REGULATING 'THE NEWS'

The *de facto* end of slavery on Sint Maarten came during a period of economic hardship on the island that affected slave owners and enslaved people alike. Enslaved people who had managed to flee to the northern side of the island after the French abolition of slavery could hardly provide for themselves. Faced with severe poverty, scarcity, and hunger, many decided to return to the Dutch side of the island and to take up their work in the salt pans and cultivation of sugar, tobacco and cotton (i.e., Haviser, 2015; Milton, 2016). Even before the French abolition in 1848, starting in the early 19th century when economic recession set

[25] Johnson (2021a) notes that the paper was established by members of the Cable family, who "like so many of their class owned domestic slaves in their printing office but were themselves subject to the injustices of the racial hierarchy of the British West Indies". The ownership of enslaved people by free dark-skinned families was not unique in (Dutch) Caribbean island societies, including Curaçao (see Klooster, 1994).

in, many among Sint Maarten's elites had decided to leave the island. The attempt to sell their enslaved chattel, land, and estates was often in vain. Many settlers simply abandoned their properties, which, in turn, created an opportunity for others to step in.

It was a young merchant from a wealthy Amsterdam family, Van Romondt, who would seize this opportunity. He was able "to acquire both property and political power rapidly" (Roitman & Veenendaal, 2016, p. 76), by buying up deserted plantations and estates, while marrying into the governing planter elite. In the decades after Van Romondt's arrival the island's population was cut in half, from 5,500 in 1790 to 2,100 in 1858, and decreased still further to a paltry 1,484 in 1950, a century later (ibid, pp. 76–78). The remaining elite came to form a close network of kin that consolidated its power over generations. While the family name, Van Romondt, would not last on Sint Maarten, the infrastructures through which power and property could be attained were there to stay either by blood, by marriage or – and this is why wealthy newcomers were always again welcome to 'the friendly island' – by buying oneself into the private-public enterprise that Sint Maarten was.

It is important to highlight here that while there was less overt 'Dutch presence' on Sint Maarten than there was on Curaçao, Dutch infrastructural power played an important role in how the social order took shape on this island. In contrast to Curaçao "where they had a regime of civil servants" that served the Dutch colonial government seated on this island, the institutional order of Sint Maarten (and Sint Eustatius and Saba) became "completely modeled after the situation in Holland, whereby an oligarchy of the elite developed that helped each other in the saddle and kept them there" (Johnson, 2021a, n.p.). Similar to how Dutch elites maintained control over the Dutch private-public enterprise, power and property were passed on for generations among a handful of families on Sint Maarten. These were Sint Maarten's "gatekeeping families", who "controlled access to positions of power and regulated the flow of information and political influence" (Roitman & Veenendaal, 2016, p. 83).

In the late 19th century, the colonial government on Curaçao started to stretch its administrative arm to the Windward islands. Better communication and transport infrastructures were key to this attempt. Together with the establishment of a post office on Sint Maarten in 1882 (and by 1884 also on Saba and Sint Eustatius), the colonial government in Curaçao started to contract privately owned schooners in the Windwards to ensure regular inter-island mail

services (Johnson, 2021b). Whether contracted or not, private shippers continued to play a vital role at the turn of the century, not least for shipping mail to and from St. Kitts and St. Thomas, the routes via which the mail services with the Dutch colonial headquarters ran.

That Sint Maarten was a juncture of regional and international news flows was acknowledged by Father R. J. C. Wahlen, the chief-editor of the *Amigoe* (1901–1918), who had boarded a contracted mail boat from Curaçao to the Dutch Windwards and visited the island in early 1916. As part of a series "Bovenwindsche Stemmen" [Windward Voices], Father Wahlen wrote about his experiences with the worldly connectedness of 'the news' on Sint Maarten in comparison to 'the news' on Curaçao at the time [see **Figure 5**].

Around the time Father Wahlen visited Sint Maarten, a few newspapers started to emerge on the island. As was the case on Curaçao, the publishing of newspapers on the island was closely related to the work of missionaries and the development of the educational system. Several Christian denominations were present on Sint Maarten by that time, including the Roman Catholic and Dutch Protestant Church. Yet, "large parts of the inhabitants became members of the Methodist church, which was active in the adjoining British Islands" (Milton, 2016, p. 30). The Methodists had been a presence on Sint Maarten since the 1800s. In contrast to Curaçao, where Church membership was regulated along class-based, racialized, and linguistic social lines, on Sint Maarten the majority of people – whether among the higher or lower rankings of society – were Methodists (Johnson, 2014a).

In the early 20th century, members of Sint Maarten's elite started issuing several irregular and short-lived newspapers (Lent, 1971, p. 60). The first local weekly, *St. Martin Day by Day* (1911–1920), was followed by the bi-monthly paper *Bovenwindsche Stemmen* (1933–1942). The establishment of the latter was the result of committee initiated by a Dutch teacher on Sint Maarten in order to establish a newspaper that would "give St. Maarten and by extension St. Eustatius and Saba a voice which could resonate in the colony" (Johnson, 2016a, n.p.). While the paper was written entirely in English, its Dutch title referred to Wahlen's series of columns in the *Amigoe*, which in turn built on a longer tradition of news bulletins under the header "Bovenwindsche Stemmen" in the *Amigoe*. Since 1912, these news bulletins had been sent in by Catholic missionaries located on Saba, Statia, and Sint Maarten.



BOVENWINDSCHE STEMMEN.

X.

St. Martin ligt lang zoo afgezonderd niet, als men wel zou denken. Men behoeft zich heusch niet te gaan verbeelden van de overige beschaafde wereld te zijn afgesneden ; men leeft er midden in.

Vooreerst heeft men dagelijks verkeer met het Fransche gedeelte, dat wederom in verbinding staat met St. Barths en Guadeloupe. Dan is er geregeld vaart op St. Kitts en de Hollandsche eilanden. De Europeesche en Amerikaansche mail worden meermalen op St. Martin eerder ontvangen dan op Curaçao.

Dank zij de vriendelijke welwillendheid van den HoogEdelGestr. Heer Gezaghebber A. J. C. BROUWER, kwamen we al heel spoedig volledig op de hoogte van het oorlogsnieuws. Bijna dagelijks ontvingen we inzage van *The St. Kitts-Nevis Daily Bulletin.* We vonden den Engelschen Kabel

heel wat meer mededeelzaam dan zijn Franschen collega op Curaçao, en ook meer zakelijk. Meer feiten en minder beschouwingen.

BOVENWINDSCHE STEMMEN

X.

St. Martin is nowhere near as isolated as one might think. One should really not get the illusion of being cut off from the rest of the civilized world: one lives right in the middle of it.

First of all, there is daily traffic with the French part, which in turn holds close connections to St. Barths and Guadeloupe. Then, there is regular sailing to St. Kitts and the Dutch islands. The European and American mail is often received faster on St. Martin than on Curaçao.

Thanks to the friendly benevolence of His Honour Lt. Governor [of Sint Maarten] A.J.C. Brouwer we quickly were fully updated on the news of the war [WW I]. Almost daily we had insight into 'The St. Kitts-Nevis Daily Bulletin'. We found the English Cable to be much more informative than its French colleague on Curaçao[26], and more businesslike too. More facts and less speculation.

Figure 5: Excerpt of the 10th edition of a series "Bovenwindsche Stemmen" [Windward Voices] that was written and published by chief-editor Father Wahlen on the front page of the *Amigoe* in the course of 1916 (Wahlen, 1916, p. 1).

Following up on this practice, news bulletins from the Sint Maarten newspaper *Bovenwindsche Stemmen*, regularly appeared under the same name in *Amigoe*, of which small numbers were distributed on the Windward Islands. The exchange of 'the news' between the *Amigoe* and *Bovenwindsche Stemmen* was another example of strengthened communication infrastructures between elites on both islands. *Bovenwindsche Stemmen* avoided any tendentious issues around inter-island and colonial politics. Its rival, *De Slag om Slag* [Blow for Blow] (1934–1939),

[26] In 1887, Curaçao was connected to the international telecommunication network via the French cable. Wahlen's reference to the English cable versus the French cable was an analogy for the different infrastructures – and interrelated cultures – of 'the news' on both islands: Anglo-Caribbean and North-American-related practices of 'the news' on Sint Maarten versus European (mainland) and Latin-American-connected news practices on Curaçao.

however, did not shun controversy. Also, this paper was written entirely in English, despite its Dutch title. The Dutch title may have been chosen to speak to a similar audience as *Bovenwindsche Stemmen* did: the colonial government on Curaçao and elites throughout the Dutch colony. Despite the paper's editor being the son of the Governor of Sint Maarten (A. C. J. Brouwer) and married to a Van Romondt – just like the editor of *Bovenwindsche Stemmen* –, the editor of *De Slag om Slag* was jailed for publicly criticizing those in power on the island and beyond.[27] On Curaçao, different political, economic, and religious elites ideologically contested each other via newspapers despite the fact that they often (also) shared political-economic interests. On Sint Maarten, in contrast, these political and economic interests were clear to all. In order to successfully run the public-private enterprise that was Sint Maarten, elites avoided any sort of lack of harmony going public – not only to protect business, but also family, property, assets, and capital. It would take another two decades after *De Slag om Slag* was shut down in 1939 before a newspaper would be established again on the island. This re-establishment of a newspaper coincided with the dawn of the island's rapid social-economic transformation.

Life on Sint Maarten would be completely transformed in only two decades starting in the 1960s when its tourism market took off. Until then, "during the old storytime", as Daniela Jeffry (2003) recalled, "the dissemination of news and information, whether it was personal, familiar, professional, trade or official was not only passed on to successive generations of the small population" (p. 10), but also played a vital role in daily island life. In 1932, 75% of the population of Sint Maarten was illiterate (Albus, 2001, p. 447). And while this changed in the decades following World War II, news continued to be a private endeavor and primarily a matter of oral transmission. Looking back on his arrival on Sint Maarten from Saba in 1955, journalist and politician Will Johnson (1989) remembered the "numerous hawkers, vendors and peddlers who (…) passed along the houses in the early morning hours selling their wares, passing on the news of the day and, in some cases, carrying *your* news further down the street" (p. 19, *emphasis in original)*. News traveled fast from person to person along with

[27] When the editor was about to be sent to jail (on Curaçao) a second time for defaming a friendly Head of State, he took his life in 1939 (Johnson, 2016a). The Head of State he had criticized in his newspaper was Adolph Hitler.

commercial exchange on the island and informal trade networks that had long existed across the region (Roitman, 2016, pp. 3–7).

*

Sint Maarten and Curaçao experienced a different run-up to the changes both islands came to face in the second half of the 20th century. This difference stemmed from different forms of governance and communication infrastructures that had developed on each island under Dutch colonial rule. While both islands were neglected by Dutch authorities during the 19th century, on Curaçao the Dutch colonial presence remained tangible and was strengthened with the arrival of Shell on the island. This presence was articulated through and implemented by institutional news practices (Church-, Shell-owned newspapers) that contributed to maintaining the social order, based on a split institutional public.

Sint Maarten continued to exemplify a 'privately leased colony'. Here an oligarchic system unfolded with closely connected private gatekeepers controlling the island's administration and economy. News spread fast by word of mouth on the island and across the region via private (family) ties across the region. The same was true for institutional news practices. Sint Maarten's gatekeepers leaned on 'the news' which came and went alongside commerce and trade networks. While the first newspapers on this island emerged in close relation – whether cooperative or antagonistic – with 'the news' on Curaçao, there was no development of a Dutch(-backed) press apparatus on Sint Maarten. It would take until the late 1950s before 'the news' started to play a more significant role in public island life on Sint Maarten, particularly as a tool of pushing popular concerns into the institutional public. This was also the case on Curaçao during the same period, albeit in a different way as I will explore in the following section.

2.3. ENCOUNTERS BETWEEN THE POPULAR AND THE INSTITUTIONAL PUBLIC ON CURAÇAO AND SINT MAARTEN

SOCIAL INEQUALITY ARTICULATED THROUGH NEWS AND 'THE NEWS': A LABOR REVOLT ON CURAÇAO

In 1957, *La Prensa* ended up in the hands of the Democratische Partij [Democratic Party], at the time the leading political party on Curaçao. *De Beurs* was acquired by the party in 1958 (Hendrikse, 1977, p. 158). Despite attempts to purchase *Amigoe* (Lent, 1971, p. 62), the Church held a firm grip over this newspaper, as it did with *La Cruz* and *La Union*. In 1971, media researcher Lent concluded that "the ownership of influential newspapers is bothersome" and that "editors admit, with a defeated shrug of the shoulder, that they run everything that the government or church stipulates" (p. 62).

An opportunity to mobilize Curaçaoan working classes emerged when unemployment rates climbed rapidly due to automation and the subsequent cutbacks by Shell in the late 1950s and 1960s. After migrant workers had been laid off, many Curaçaoan laborers lost their jobs. Unlike the elites, these workers did not have access to the growing financial offshore sector, which "remained an island on the island with no discernible effect on the stubbornly high unemployment rate of 15–20 percent" (Van Beurden & Jonker, 2021, p. 80). Those who sought social change joined efforts made by the weekly *Vitó* (1966–1971), and the movement that came to carry the same name. Under chief editor and teacher, Stanley Brown, the newspaper was critical of the situation and addressed poverty, racial, and social inequalities. Brown and the paper held the island's elites, and the influential newspapers owned by them, responsible for maintaining the inequalities inherent in the status quo. In addition to criticizing the press organs of the Catholic Church, the Brown and his paper also took aim at the government-owned newspapers. As Van Meyeren (2017) noted in her study of the weekly, "*Vitó* attributes cases of censorship and misinformation to three different networks of influence: (1) political interests (2) capital and (3) family ties" (p. 27). This was the case when *Vitó* wrote about *La Prensa*'s ownership and management in 1967 [see **Figure 6**].



LA PRENSA II

Voor de vrije democraten binnen de Democratische partij, moet het toch wel bezwaarlijk zijn, dat de partijdagbladen, La Prensa en Beurs, evenals de drukkerij, in handen zijn van een „blanke protestante" minderheid, vertegenwoordigd door A. D. Jonckheer (van de schadevergoeding sigarettenfabriek, van de accijnzen-rum, enz., enz.)

Achterdochtige Curaçaoenaars fronsen de wenkbrauwen, wanneer zij horen dat A. D. Jonckheer, feitelijke eigenaar van de La Prensa, het blad in handen geeft aan A. A. Jonckheer, (Hoofdred.), R. Irausquin (Directeur), H. Irausquin (adv.-adq.). Allemaal familie onder mekaar, die dan nog over E. Jonckheer gaan schrijven; NIEUWS!

Het moge dan een historisch toeval zijn dat de familie bij elkaar woont, wij kunnen de indruk niet van ons afzetten, dat wij met een familiebolwerk te maken hebben, waar veel kapitaal achter zit.

LA PRENSA II

For the free democrats within the Democratic party, it must be somewhat problematic that the party sheets, La Prensa and Beurs, just as the printer, are in the hands of a "white protestant" minority, represented by A.D. Jonckheer (from the compensations tobacco industry, from the taxed-rum, etc., etc.).

Suspicious Curaçaoans frown when they hear that A.D. Jonckheer, factual owner of La Prensa, hands the paper to A.A. Jonckheer (Chief-editor), R. Irausquin (Director) and H. Irausquin (Advertisement dep.). All family amongst themselves, who then even will write about E. Jonckheer: NEWS!

It may be a historical coincidence that the family is living together, yet we cannot shake the impression that we are dealing with a family-stronghold with a lot of capital behind it.

Figure 6: Opinion piece about family ownership *La Prensa* in *Vitó*, 1967 (Zielinski & Antersijn, 1967).[28]

In this opinion piece, *Vitó* not only pointed to the families in charge of *La Prensa*, but also to the extent of their power. By pointing to the family ties as possibly having been an "historical coincidence", *Vitó* addressed how a "white Protestant minority" had come to power beginning with Dutch colonialism and were able to maintain this social position, and its associated wealth, in a capitalist system. This was reflected by their ownership over the means of news (media) production. In addition to these two influential newspapers, the (extended) family also owned Drukkerij De Stad N.V., which became the biggest printer on the island and has

[28] As part of her study, Van Meyeren uploaded a digital collection of *Vitó* editions. (Available at: https://emmavanmeyeren.cargo.site/Trinta-di-Mei).

been responsible for printing all newspapers (plus supplements, folders, magazines), except for *Amigoe*, ever since.

Vitó challenged the establishment so it had to be printed via the "alternative circuit" (Rutgers, 1994, p. 211). Stanley Brown, who came from a mixed middle-class family but had a light skin tone himself, received financial help from obvious and less obvious sources, sometimes to support the cause, but often from those hoping for some sort of personal gain (e.g., sponsors representing opposition parties). Yet Brown's aim with *Vitó* was not to support oppositional voices in the institutional public, but to mobilize Curaçao's lower classes. Here, I recall that Curaçao's institutional public was split. Critical pieces in written Dutch, such as **Figure 6**, spoke to the Dutch-speaking and reading establishment which were part of the bourgeois public sphere and, by extension, the institutional public. To reach the masses on the island, *Vitó* had to shift to Papiamentu, the language of the popular public, by which *La Cruz* and *La Union* had long catered the lower classes. As soon as the paper started publishing in Papiamentu in 1967, it rapidly infiltrated the working class barios [neighborhoods] of Willemstad (Verton, 1977, pp. 80–82). In addition to its distribution (in the streets) and language choice (Papiamentu), which reflected how news was produced and circulated in the popular public, *Vitó* spoke to Curaçao's working classes by politically articulating their daily concerns into the institutional public. As an alternative outlet that was part of 'the news', the paper's founders were able to find support from labor union leaders. In cooperation with these leaders, the paper became an important instrument in mobilizing the labor force on the island.

What started as a labor strike against one of Shell's contractors on the morning of 30 May 1969 evolved into the revolt known as Trinta di Mei [30 May]. With the slogan, "Pan i rekonosomentu!" [Bread and recognition!] around 4,000 laborers poured out on the streets of Willemstad. The strike escalated quickly and two people were shot and killed by the police. Many shops in the neighborhoods of Punda and Otrobanda were plundered and looted. Parts of the city center of Willemstad burned down. When government authorities could no longer control the protestors, they turned to The Hague. Dutch military troops intervened and forcefully suppressed the uprising (i.e., Anderson & Dynes, 1975; Oostindie, 1999, 2014; Römer, 1999).

Trinta di Mei caused a compositional shift in Curaçao's institutional public. The institutional public changed in terms of outlook, yet remained the same in terms of its structural dynamics and power relations. In the immediate aftermath

of the labor revolt, politicians with a dark(er)-toned skin color attained prominent positions in Parliament and in the administrative apparatus on the island. Among these where "black leaders from two parties, the Worker's Liberation Front (Frente Obrero de Liberación, FOL), formed by labor leaders, and the New Antillean Movement (Movimento de Antiyas Nobo, MAN), formed by socialist-oriented intellectuals" (García Muñiz, 2011, p. 548).[29] In 1970, the first 'black' Governor of the Netherlands Antilles was appointed, following the first 'black' Prime Minister of the Netherlands Antilles in December 1969. The latter was a member of the Democratic Party, representing the 'white' Dutch Protestants, while the first represented the Catholic National People's Party. Both parties had been in power since the political constellation of the Netherlands Antilles had been formalized with the 1954 Kingdom Charter. Culturally speaking, nationalist discourses and a policy of what came to be known as 'Antilleanization' became dominant in the institutional public (e.g., Roe, 2016; Verton, 1977). The concept of the *Yu di Kòrsou* [child of Curaçao], which had been used by the Church to promote national belonging among the mass since the 1920s (Allen, 2014, p. 16), became an important national identity marker. The scholarly interest in Afro-Caribbean culture, oral traditions, and creole languages increased, building upon the earlier work of Catholic priests and (religious) intellectuals in the 1950s–60s.

'The news' reflected this process of a wider investment in maintaining the social order. In the aftermath of Trinta di Mei local entrepreneurs and labor union leaders joined forces with wealthy investors on the island to found Papiamentu-language news outlets (Römer, 1979, p. 150). Among the first and still extant newspapers were the daily *Nobo* and the morning paper *Èxtra*, established in 1974 and 1976, respectively. Produced and overseen by elites firmly anchored in the institutional public, the Papiamentu newspaper industry was specifically designed to cater to the working classes. Like the missionaries, they combined popular news practices and oral traditions to provide (religious) education and entertainment. And they did so with a modern twist. Instead of opposing a modern-industrialist lifestyle, as the Church had done, these emerging newspapers embraced it. They capitalized on oral news practices by integrating them into a successful business model. Unlike door-to-door delivery based on subscriptions as practiced by the Dutch-language *Amigoe* and *De Beurs*, as well

[29] The FOL was established by three key persons involved in the Trinta di mei revolt: two union leaders, Wilson 'Papa' Godett and Amador Nita, and *Vitó*'s editor, Stanley Brown.

as Papiamentu-language *La Prensa*, most of the rest of the Papiamentu dailies that emerged after Trinta di Mei were sold by street vendors at busy traffic junctions, on the road, at street corners, and other public sites. With street-selling came an added mode of storytelling: namely through images. To draw attention from passers-by, the front page of a paper sold on the street had to tell a story in a blink of an eye. The emerging Papiamentu newspaper industry soon realized that 'sensation sells'.

*

With a business model that incorporated popular news practices and oral storytelling, the Papiamentu news industry catered to the island's working classes in a modern capitalist world. These newspapers were intended to speak to their dreams and concerns in a *non-political* way. Their articulation of the popular public was thus significantly different than that of *Vitó*. This articulation was in a cultural rather than an explicitly political register. As such, the emerging Papiamentu-language news market reproduced how *La Cruz* and *La Union* had long catered to working class Curaçaoans, yet they transformed these institutional news practices to modern capitalist times. The result was that on Curaçao, the popular public 'news' came to be articulated into 'the news' through an affective register – a register downplayed in the bourgeois public sphere, but central to, what McGuigan (2002, 2005) called, the "cultural public sphere". A characteristic of this public sphere is that it is mass popular culture that appeals to its public emotionally, focusing on the quotidian and extraordinary, straying away from explicit deep analyses of oppressive political and economic structures. As such, Curaçao's institutional public came to consist of both the bourgeois public sphere and the cultural public sphere. In Chapter Four, I will explore the institutionalization of the popular public 'news' in the cultural public sphere through what I will refer to as 'popular news media'. Let me now turn to how news and 'the news' came to meet on a more equitable, and thereby political, footing on Sint Maarten.

PUSHING POPULAR CONCERNS INTO THE INSTITUTIONAL PUBLIC ON SINT MAARTEN

Between the 1920s and 1950s, many young Sint Maarteners left the island for work in the US and in the emerging oil industry on Curaçao and, particularly, Aruba, where the Lago refinery of American Standard Oil (now Exxon) attracted English-speaking workers throughout the Caribbean (Roitman & Veenendaal, 2016, p. 83). The cutbacks following the automation at the Lago refinery during the 1950s and 1960s forced Sint Maarteners to return home. Meanwhile, those who had stayed on the island – often because there had been no pressing economic need for them to leave – had strengthened their position on the island. Among these were the Wathey family who gradually took over from the Van Romondt family in the first half of the 20th century. Together with other prominent families, they had started to promote Sint Maarten as a Caribbean tourist hub and destination. With the returning labor force the tourism market could take off.

Those who returned were not only manual laborers, but also (higher-)educated middle classes. They brought back their experiences with the labor movements in Aruba (and Curaçao) in the 1950s–60s, together with inspiration drawn from black nationalist movements across the Anglophone Caribbean and the US. Of particular importance to these movements was the work and black nationalist ideology of Jamaican-born Marcus Garvey (1887–1940), a US civil rights activist and political leader of the Pan-African Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League (UNIA). In 1933, a branch of the UNIA was established on Sint Maarten. Like other 'Garveyists', those returning to Sint Maarten viewed the labor struggle "through a prism of racial solidarity and Pan-African mobilization" (Ewing, 2017, p. 188). Moreover, as they "were not invested in the personalistic structures of politics on the island", they became fierce opponents of the establishment and particularly critical of "what they perceived to be the Wathey administration's corruption" (Roitman & Veenendaal, 2016, p. 83).

Among the most prominent intellectuals at the time was journalist and politician Joseph Husurell Lake, Sr. In 1959, he established the *Windward Islands'*

Opinion (*Opinion*).[30] Born in the Dominican Republic to a mother from Sint Maarten, Lake Sr. grew up in Middle Region, Sint Maarten. During his years on Aruba, Lake Sr. had been active in the Lago employee council as an editor of its periodical (Sekou, 1996, pp. 75–76). In his late teens, he had already been a member of the international UNIA and its Sint Maarten branch, which explained "he strongly advocated for civil rights for African descendants and espoused Afro-centric views" (Haviser, 2015, p. 252). Lake Sr. established the People's Printery and the *Opinion*. He needed the revenues of this printing office to finance the *Opinion*, which was boycotted by local businesses and thus lacked advertising revenues. The publication of critical pieces had placed Lake, Sr., "in immediate conflict with the establishment on both sides of the island" (Sekou, 1996, p. 70). Based on the memories of his contemporaries, Lasana M. Sekou, one of Lake's sons, wrote in 1996:

> St. Martiners hid in the alleys or *steegjes* [backstreets] of Great Bay to buy the Opinion. Some hid it in a brown paper bag, in their shirt or blouse, and hurried away. It was an unwritten political offense to be caught reading what was then the island's only newspaper. (pp. 71–72)[31]

Like *Vitó*, the *Opinion* aimed at challenging the status quo and those families with capital and political power who had a keen interest in maintaining it. It did so too by building on popular news practices (i.e., street selling, word-of-mouth circulation) to articulate popular concerns to the institutional public. Unlike its Curaçaoan counterpart, the *Opinion* did not face an established press apparatus that was firmly embedded in an institutional public separated from a popular public. As a result, the popular and the institutional public, and respective practices of news and 'the news', met on a more equitable footing on this island. Lake's newspaper blended practices of both news and 'the news' to articulate

[30] Up until 1983, the Windward Islands (Sint Maarten, Sint Eustatius, and Saba) formed one island territory. As such, many names of media outlets, but also political parties, of that time carried the name of 'Windward Islands' instead of Sint Maarten (or St. Martin).

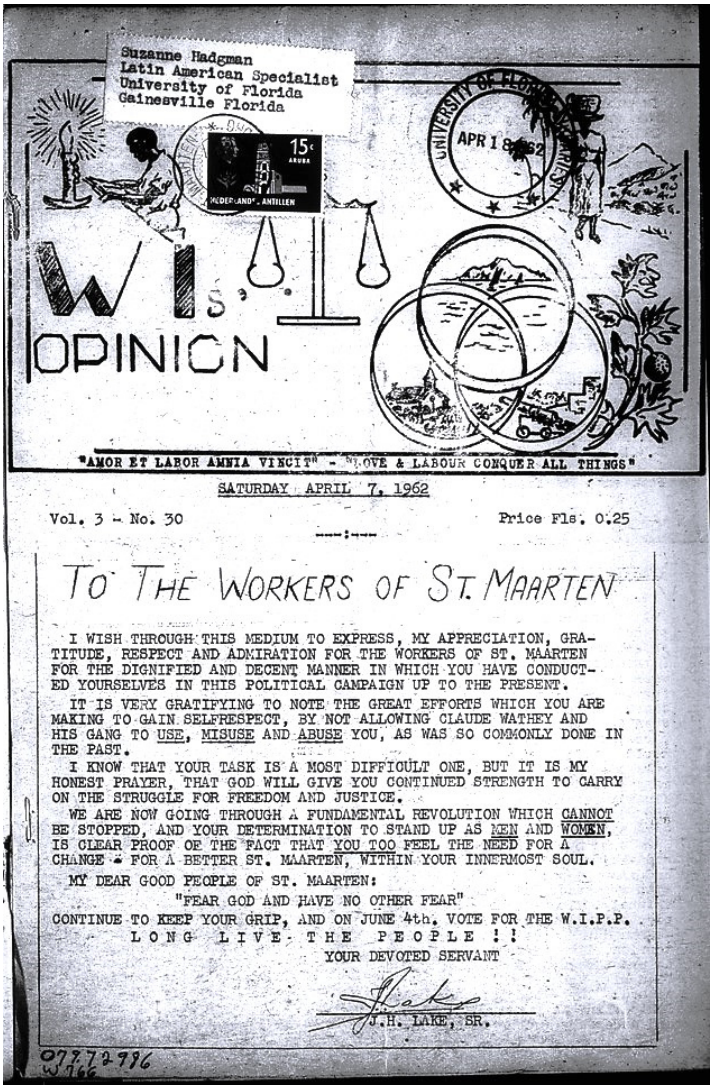
[31] In a conversation with one of Lake Sr.'s sons, I learned that those drawing on Lake's legacy use the notion of St. Martiner (versus Sint Maartener) to counter the colonial and national (French/Dutch) division of the island. Instead of a French versus a Dutch side, they spoke about a northern and southern part, respectively. Many of the old families have members living on both sides of the island. Newcomers too have affiliations on both sides of what continues to be one island with open borders (see also Rotmeijer, 2018, where I spoke about the Sint Maarten border).

the concerns of 'black' Sint Maarten laborers into the public sphere through an explicitly political register – turning it in an immediate political force in both the popular and the institutional public [see **Figure 7**].[32]

Being caught reading the *Opinion* was an 'unwritten political offence' not only because it was the only newspaper, but also because Lake Sr. became "a high-profile politician of his time" (Haviser, 2015, p. 252). In 1963, he was listed as a candidate of the National People's Party (NVP, Sint Maarten) to oppose Wathey and the Democratic Party (DP, Sint Maarten).[33] By then, the DP-controlled government had consolidated their position of power for the transformations to come. In 1951, for example, Wathey had launched a tourism commission tasked with permitting lease and sale contracts of government-owned estate, including "some of the best land on the island, such as the Lowlands, Point Blanche, and Little Bay Point" (Roitman & Veenendaal, 2016, p. 79). Wathey and his cohorts held seats on the commission, thereby ensuring their control over public space and the implementation of the infrastructure necessary for tourism. In 1959, the revolution in Cuba – until than a popular US holiday destination – had provided Wathey's administration a chance to market Sint Maarten as an alternative to US investors, hoteliers, and tour operators. The number of tourists visiting the island increased from around 30,000 in 1964 to 200,000 in 1974. After the return of laborers from Sint Maarten, the island would see thousands of Caribbean migrant workers arriving on the island. In 10 years' time the official population went up from 3,868 in 1964 to 10,310 in 1974 (Lake, 2004, p. 66). In 1984 this number would double to more than 20,000 people. Incoming migrant workers often had no other choice than to accept deplorable working conditions and very low wages. Those who considered themselves as 'native Sint Maarteners' soon were a minority, causing deep feelings of anxiety about the cheap incoming labor force. Unlike poor Sint Maarteners who, along

[32] A few remarks about the symbols displayed. Apart from obvious references: Christianity (three circles – holy trinity); Enlightenment (reading, candle); justice (scale); labor and black nationalism (Sint Maarten landmarks and national symbols, 'black' people) – the symbolic geometry (even more pronounced in early editions, including the display of working tools) and the motto of the paper (which changed from 'labor omnia vincit' to 'Love & labour conquer all things') seem to refer to Freemasonry. Although I could not find any public information of him being member of a Masonic lodge, Lake Sr. was among the charter members of the Rotary Club of Sint Maarten, which has historical links and shares principles with Freemasonry.

[33] Since the Netherlands Antilles had come into being with the Dutch Kingdom Charter in 1954, political parties on both Curaçao and Sint Maarten alligned.



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WIS OPINION

"AMOR ET LABOR AMNIA VINCIT" - LOVE & LABOUR CONQUER ALL THINGS"

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TO THE WORKERS OF ST. MAARTEN

I WISH THROUGH THIS MEDIUM TO EXPRESS, MY APPRECIATION, GRATITUDE, RESPECT AND ADMIRATION FOR THE WORKERS OF ST. MAARTEN FOR THE DIGNIFIED AND DECENT MANNER IN WHICH YOU HAVE CONDUCTED YOURSELVES IN THIS POLITICAL CAMPAIGN UP TO THE PRESENT.

IT IS VERY GRATIFYING TO NOTE THE GREAT EFFORTS WHICH YOU ARE MAKING TO GAIN SELFRESPECT, BY NOT ALLOWING CLAUDE WATHEY AND HIS GANG TO USE, MISUSE AND ABUSE YOU, AS WAS SO COMMONLY DONE IN THE PAST.

I KNOW THAT YOUR TASK IS A MOST DIFFICULT ONE, BUT IT IS MY HONEST PRAYER, THAT GOD WILL GIVE YOU CONTINUED STRENGTH TO CARRY ON THE STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM AND JUSTICE.

WE ARE NOW GOING THROUGH A FUNDAMENTAL REVOLUTION WHICH CANNOT BE STOPPED, AND YOUR DETERMINATION TO STAND UP AS MEN AND WOMEN, IS CLEAR PROOF OF THE FACT THAT YOU TOO FEEL THE NEED FOR A CHANGE - FOR A BETTER ST. MAARTEN, WITHIN YOUR INNERMOST SOUL.

MY DEAR GOOD PEOPLE OF ST. MAARTEN:

"FEAR GOD AND HAVE NO OTHER FEAR"

CONTINUE TO KEEP YOUR GRIP, AND ON JUNE 4th. VOTE FOR THE W.I.P.P.

L O N G L I V E T H E P E O P L E ! !

YOUR DEVOTED SERVANT

J.H. LAKE, SR.

Figure 7: The front page of 30th edition of the *Windward Island's Opinion* in 1962. The editorial, titled "To The Workers of St. Maarten" and signed by José Lake Sr., advocates for laborers to vote against "Claude Wathey and his gang". The WIPP refers to the Windward Islands People's Party. Ideological differences were minimal between political parties (see Roitman & Veenendaal, 2016, pp. 81–82).

with anxiety felt relief at the relative economic prosperity after decades of economic hardship, the returning intellectuals saw the influx of newcomers as a threat to 'the real Sint Maarteners' and considered Wathey's stranglehold on power to be responsible for this economic and existential threat.

Resentment against the 'old' establishment united Sint Maarten's petit bourgeoisie, among whom were returning educated black nationalists as well as 'petit blancs'. They joined forces and decided that 'if one can't beat them, join them'. Lake Sr. was a case in point as he strategically joined the DP after three years in an opposition party. As a candidate on Wathey's list, he obtained a seat on the island council in 1967 and on the Legislative Council in 1969 (Haviser, 2015, p. 252; Roitman & Veenendaal, 2016, p. 83). According to Will Johnson (2016a, n.p.), who was another case in point, it took only a week after Lake Sr. shifted parties before the *Opinion* got an advertisement from Royal Dutch Shell, "whose agent at the time was Claude [Wathey]" (n.p.). Johnson was a light-skinned Saba-born teacher, politician, and writer, who had started his career working at Sint Maarten's post office in 1960. A year later, Lake Sr. had asked him to write for the *Opinion*, which he continued to do even though he soon joined the DP. When Sint Maarten saw the establishment of its first trade union in 1966, Johnson became the editor of its news organ, The Labor Spokesman. Between 1965–68, he also reported 'the news' on *PJD-2*, Sint Maarten's oldest radio station, established by a Dutchman in 1959. While "these were activities highly suspect to Claude and Clem [Labega, DP co-founder]", as Johnson (2016a, n.p.) recalled, it was Wathey's brother and leading businessman, Chester Wathey, who took over *PJD-2* in the early 1960s (Jeffry, 2003, p. 64). The Wathey family was not the only one with members gatekeeping 'the news'. Sint Maarten's Lieutenant Governor Van Delden (1968–1975) happened to have a brother, Henk van Delden, who was the then chief editor of the DP-owned Curaçaoan newspaper, *De Beurs* (Lake, 2004, p. 12).

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Language and inter-island constitutional dynamics make a difference in understanding the Sint Maarten situation in contrast to that of Curaçao. On Sint Maarten, English – in its creole variety – is the language of both the popular and institutional public. Banter and serious news practices take place in one idiom. This was quite different on Curaçao where, for the most part, up until the labor

revolt of 1969 and even up to this day for many, 'the news' is Dutch. While *Vitó* politically addressed the concerns of Curaçao's laborers in the institutional public, it had to shift to Papiamentu in order to reach the working classes. In doing so, *Vitó* entered the 'cultural public sphere' as part of the institutional public. In the aftermath of Trinta di Mei, 'popular news media' came to act in the cultural public sphere next to 'formal-institutional news media' in the bourgeois public sphere. Now turning to inter-island dynamics: it is vital to recognize that while there were class differences on Sint Maarten that corresponded, more or less, to skin tone, there was also 'big brother' Curaçao as the citadel of power in the Netherlands Antilles – the constitutional entity that came to institutionally bind the Dutch Caribbean islands after 1954. In the decades prior to the Dutch Kingdom Charter (1954), the development of transport and communication infrastructures between Sint Maarten and Curaçao had already led to more interaction between the island's elites. With the flux of migrant laborers from the Dutch Windwards to the oil refineries on Aruba and Curaçao, inter-island connections had become more intimate through all levels of the island societies. The 1954 Charter formally recognized these inter-island ties with the formation of the entity known as the Netherlands Antilles. Now, Sint Maarten – once a privately leased colony – became subjected to a central government seated on Curaçao. Of course, Sint Maarten's institutional order was represented in this government too. Yet whether or not Curaçao actually had the last say over the other islands, this was certainly how Curaçao was represented by Sint Maarten's elites. The focus on an outside suppressing power brought people on Sint Maarten together.

What these two factors – language and inter-island constitutional dynamics – entailed is that through the shared language of (St. Martiners') English, concerns in the popular public could be mediatized in the institutional public through an explicitly political register. Thus, the response of the petit bourgeoisie on Sint Maarten in the 1960s and 1970s was to translate the anxiety so deeply felt among the working classes into an advocacy for genuine inclusion into the formal structures of membership, on the basis of black nationalism. In Chapter Three, I explore the legacies of this advocacy in practices of news and 'the news' today. Let me now turn to how both islands underwent far-reaching social-economic transformations that shaped and were shaped by processes of change in the production, circulation, and consumption of news and 'the news'.

2.4. GOING ON AIR AND UNDERGROUND: NEWS AND 'THE NEWS' IN A NEOLIBERAL CAPITALIST WORLD

In the 1980s, Curaçao and Sint Maarten entered a new phase of accelerated global capitalism. The enforcement of global neoliberal programs, and the development of (first electronic then digital) media technologies, deeply affected news practices on both islands. Sint Maarten's tourism market exploded, and the island saw an influx not only of migrant workers and tourists, but also of wealthy investors and suppliers from the US, Europe, India, and later, China. Curaçao, in contrast, faced economic crises beginning in the mid-1980s. In 1985, Royal Dutch Shell sold its refinery for a symbolic price to the Antillean government that, subsequently, leased it to the Venezuelan state-owned company, Petróleos de Venezuela S.A. (PdVSA). The severe currency and debt crises in Venezuela affected Curaçao's tourism industry, while the worldwide economic recession of the early 1980s disturbed the island's international (trans)shipment industry. In the constitutional realm, the Dutch government came to accept "that the decolonisation process would not be completed in the classical sense of a transfer of sovereignty" (Oostindie & Klinkers, 2003, p. 120). Anticipating the ongoing ties with its (former) colonies, the Dutch government decided to increasingly – and more intensively – interfere in political and economic island affairs. In the 1990s, the Dutch involved the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as an intermediary, thereby ensuring that "future aid became contingent upon structural adjustment of Antillean economic policies" (Oostindie & Klinkers, 2003, p. 149).

Caribbean "new media and ICT infrastructure has developed (…) through foreign investment of global capital" (Pertierra & Horst, 2009, p. 103). New policies and tax laws were developed to stimulate e-commerce. Curaçao's offshore-industry 'Free zones' were transformed into ICT-attractive 'E-zones'. Meanwhile, consortiums of international telecommunication companies facilitated the necessary digital infrastructures for e-commerce and online gaming throughout the Caribbean. They constructed a network of submarine optic-fiber cables that turned Curaçao and Sint Maarten into crossroads of major intercontinental cable networks.

MAKE SOME NOISE: RADIO AND TV BROADCASTING ON CURAÇAO AND SINT MAARTEN

Against the background of these processes, by which Curaçao and Sint Maarten became (once again) logistical nodes of global capitalism, the media landscapes of Curaçao and Sint Maarten changed significantly. Reflecting the regional rise of electronic media and (cable) television since the 1980s (Rabess, 1998) and mobile phones, internet, and social media starting in the 2000s, the islands saw a proliferation and diversification of radio and television broadcasting. In Curaçao, the cultural aftermath of Trinta di Mei and governmental policies towards 'Antilleanization', created new opportunities not only for a variety of actors, but also for different content and formats of news production. In addition to "dissatisfaction with the content of mainstream media" (Rabess, 1998, p. 433), which had so far mainly represented and been owned by the 'white' elites, "the reduction of costs of the technology of production and transmission" and "policy shifts by (…) governments, such as liberalization, deregulation, privatization" (ibid, p. 434), created opportunities for local entrepreneurs and (semi-)skilled workers to enter the broadcasting business. Deregulation led to increased competition as the number of registered radio stations grew from four in 1976 to 13 in 1996 (Reinders, 1996) and to 28 in 2016 (Pin et al., 2016).

Most of these radio stations broadcasted in Papiamentu, following the practice of popular newspapers established a decade before. Together these news outlets operated as 'popular news media' in the 'cultural public sphere' as part of Curaçao's institutional public. More so than their print media counterparts, however, radio broadcasting mediated popular news practices directly into the public sphere. This was particularly so for daily call-in talk shows that went on air after a legislative reform in the 1980s (Lent, 1990). As radio broadcasters were no longer "required to pre-record and submit broadcasts for government approval" (Römer, 2017, p. 119), they could experiment with new broadcasting formats blending 'the news' with entertainment and commentary. Live call-in talk radio became a highly successful format for providing Curaçaoans a space to turn events into stories. Römer (2017) explained:

> [M]embers of the working classes— or middle classes who upon being downsized out of their jobs experienced downward mobility and a decline in their livelihoods—turned to radio not only as the last available niche for social

> advancement but also to register their grievances at the politicians and policies that failed them. (p. 121)

The same was true on Sint Maarten where radio became "the most influential local media on the island" (Guadeloupe, 2005, p. 171), with around 10 different stations in 2021 (BTP St. Maarten, 2021). The rapid socio-economic development on the island from the 1980s, in combination with the growing accessibility of electronic media, had provided an opportunity for those seeking upward social mobility – and also for those who sought to maintain the social order. Even up until today, gatekeeping families regulated the flow of information on the island. This was illustrated by two siblings, one owning four highly popular radio channels, one directing the bureau for telecommunications that is in charge of issuing licenses for using radio frequencies. As owner-managers of the main broadcaster on the island, their news practices played a significant role in reflecting and shaping the island's public realm. And they, like their employees and listeners, knew all too well that this realm was, in essence, a private one.

This understanding could be seen in the manager's daily show, "Good Morning, Mr. Governor", which was broadcasted on all four radio channels. Starting (and ending) with an address to the governor, the manager usually read out a short statement on the importance of the island's economy, while pointing out the (lack of) responsibility shown by political authorities in effectively supporting it. In episodes, such as "We must spend money in order to make money" (2016) or "Can government ever operate like business?" (2016), the private sector was spoken of as 'we, community'. A press release that was sent out for a 2014 election debate broadcasted by the company's main channel, *Laser 101*, was another example of this understanding:

> [W]e at [X] broadcasting network, as a corporate citizen of St. Maarten, feel that [it] is our responsibility to our listeners to assist them in providing as much information as possible regarding the position of the different political parties on the issues regarding business and the St. Maarten economy. At the end of the day it is the private sector that is the motor that drives our country (…). (SMN news, 2014, n.p.)

Beyond stressing the importance of the private sector for Sint Maarten, it was the position from which was spoken here – namely that the broadcasting network

was seen *as a corporate citizen* – that spoke to this notion of Sint Maarten's public sphere being private. As the popular and the institutional public on Sint Maarten shared this understanding, it was through radio that these publics met. I further elaborate on the central role of radio, and *Laser 101* specifically, in Chapter Five.

The lasting impact of the Dutch colonial presence on Curaçao was shown by an ongoing influx of Dutch 'media professionals' and 'experts'. During my fieldwork in 2015, for example, I met a Dutch consultant with a significant already established career in Dutch news media who was hired by *TeleCuraçao* to guide its transformation into an interactive 'local TV platform' and to help with the development of an editorial charter. The charter was necessary, as the Dutch media consultant told me, to prevent politicians from enforcing airtime – a common practice on the island, particularly around elections. For politicians (and other prominent figures) it was a relatively cheap yet effective campaigning tool. For broadcasters it provided welcome revenue in the highly competitive news business.

While electronic technologies opened up the island's media landscapes to a variety of new actors, the elites maintained a firm grip on the ownership and regulation of broadcasting. This was most clearly illustrated by the infrastructural power of the Bureau Telecommunicatie en Post (BTP) as the telecommunications regulator was called on each island. To go on air one needed a license provided by the BTP that, in turn, needed the approval of a Minister in charge of licensing. On Curaçao, this was the Minister of Traffic, Transport and Urban Planning, who, until recently, also represented the government as the main stakeholder of the telecom company UTS, the parent company of the public broadcaster, and one of the biggest television and radio license holders, *TeleCuraçao* (see Pin et al., 2016, p. 98).[34] On Sint Maarten, the BTP director was subject to a criminal investigation of the Dutch-initiated Anti-Corruption Taskforce (TBO) on the suspicion of real estate fraud at the BTP in 2019. Sint Maarten's BTP's director was a main stakeholder in various ventures on the island. His business partner, a politician and former Member of Parliament, was sentenced for tax fraud and taking bribes in 2020. Cases of nepotism and corruption in relation to ownership and regulation of 'the news' were closely related to capitalist interests on both islands – interests that, in turn, exceeded way beyond the borders of the island

[34] The sale of UTS in March 2019 did not change this situation as *TeleCuraçao* became a state-owned enterprise.

territories. In his memoirs of Sint Maarten's long-time political leader, Claude Wathey, Will Johnson (2016b) wrote: "Capital which has its own life when coming in to St. Maarten became a factor which could no longer be controlled" (n.p.). The Dutch government became increasingly aware of this. After The Netherlands Attorney General's office had started an investigation, Wathey was charged with corruption, fraud, and participating in a criminal organization. In 1994, he was convicted of perjury and got 18 months in prison. More recently, the Anti-Corruption Taskforce started an investigation into Wathey's grandson, Theo Heyliger, former leader of the DP (later the United People's Party). In 2020, Heyliger was found guilty of taking bribes and wide-scale money laundering and was sentenced to five years in prison.

Since the 1990s, the Dutch government increasingly intervened in the institutional affairs of these islands with the aim of reclaiming control over capital's proliferation on both Curaçao and Sint Maarten. Meanwhile, the development of digital media technologies led to the emergence of unforeseen practices of news and 'the news'.

BREAKING (THE) NEWS: CURAÇAOAN AND SINT MAARTEN NEWS PRACTICES IN THE ONLINE WORLD

While the press was among the first to launch news websites as additions to their core print business, the rise of digital media technologies opened up 'the news' to actors, voices, and flows of information beyond the established news media on the islands. Online infrastructures were implemented and acted upon by a wide variety of infrastructural powers – from global political and economic elites to media and telecommunication multinationals. As Curaçao and Sint Maarten became important regional data and information hubs, the island societies gained access to accumulated news flows via news websites, Facebook pages, mobile phones, and WhatsApp groups. Digital technologies also gave way to new (next to older) news practices and producers, among whom were also many without – or having less direct – access to the (bourgeois) public sphere. Social media, in particular, provided venues for popular news practices to be articulated directly next to, while diffusing, institutional news practices.

During my first week of fieldwork on Curaçao, I was introduced to this diffuse news media landscape. On the annual *Dia di Prensa* [Press Day] on September 1, 2015, I was invited to an informal get-together of freelance

journalists, bloggers, and broadcasters among whom was one of the three most prominent, what an interlocutor termed, "lone wolves" on the island. These were hugely popular freelance reporters who were always on top of 'the news'. They not only brought the news to the public first, but also brought it out in a critical – and, at times – controversial fashion. Facebook was their main platform and many on and from Curaçao told me that checking their pages was the first thing they did when they woke up in the morning. One of these lone wolves was a Dutch freelance journalist working for a variety print and broadcasting news media on Curaçao and in The Netherlands; one was a Curaçaoan radio broadcaster and newspaper reporter, who posted on Facebook with his own name; and one, arguably the most popular, who was a Curaçaoan radio and TV news reporter, who had made Facebook reporting his core business. Together, these lone wolves performed news and 'the news' on the edges of Curaçao's two-fold institutional public: in-between the cultural and the bourgeois public sphere.

In addition to the lone wolves, since the 2000s a variety of news websites and cross-media platforms had emerged on both Curaçao and Sint Maarten. These were often initiatives of (former) radio DJs, TV broadcasters, newspaper managers, and editors as well as PR and communication experts. The latter were not new to 'the news' on the islands. Considering the overall small staff and high workload, which had increased to keep up with around-the-clock online news circulation, the press relied at least in part on incoming press releases to make 'the news'. Many journalists and editors considered it a necessary evil to fill the newspaper with (translated and, at times, adjusted) press releases. Radio and TV stations, in turn, based their news broadcasting on what was published in the newspapers. Communication and politicians' PR spokespersons, political parties, and businesses in charge of writing and spreading press releases thus played a significant role in determining 'the news'. Moreover, they used this position of power in and over 'the news' in the digital era to their advantage. It was therefore not surprising that a government PR and communication official ran a news website on the side (as was the case on Sint Maarten) or that one of Curaçao's main news websites was launched by a former government communication specialist. At the same time, (former) journalists also decided to shift careers and move into PR. This was frowned upon by colleagues – certainly those working for or with formal-institutional news media underpinned by bourgeois norms of journalism. Yet, in reality, and certainly in the daily island reality, wearing multiple

hats was not only common, it was also necessary to make a living. Journalists too were bounded by the capitalist glasshouse order.

While some among the established news media managed to adapt to the digital reality of 'the news' – e.g., by embracing a cross-media business model or by online transitions – others strove to retain control over the flow of information. They did this, for example, by erecting (full or partial) payment walls on their news sites or by suing online news actors for copy right violations (justified or not). For these media businesses, the internet not only posed a threat, but also offered new infrastructures to enforce control. The management of the *Amigoe*, for example, found a way to use (the services of) Facebook against those sharing 'the news' on Facebook itself. Whenever a screenshot or a picture of an *Amigoe* news item was shared on Facebook, the newspaper filed complaints of copy right violations with Facebook, which, in turn, immediately blocked the account(s) of the news actors who had shared the screenshots until further notice. Among those affected by these measures were not only (freelance) reporters, but also others involved in 'the news', amongst others, a Curaçaoan media researcher (in 2017).

For activists and social action groups, emerging online infrastructures also provided a channel for spreading information about their cause and for exposing abuses in the institutional public. Their critical weblogs formed a threat not only to media owners, but also to wider elite networks on the islands and beyond. There were several cases of activist bloggers who, like critical reporters online, faced regular lawsuits (based on claims of, among other things, slander, discrimination, and copyright violation), as well as cyber-attacks, intimidation, and threats. On Sint Maarten, a blogger with numerous weblogs aimed at exposing corrupt politicians and business people on the island was arrested for alleged slander in 2017. I also spoke to a Dutch-Curaçaoan blogger who sought to expose the connections between illegal gambling and online gaming in the Dutch Caribbean in relation to the Kingdom-wide financial offshore. She had been forced to operate underground after receiving death threats.

These and other attempts to control the flow of information were devastating to those directly affected, yet only temporarily hindered news practices online. The islands' elites had long held a firm grip on flows of information in the institutional public, particularly via the press. While newspapers were still important on the islands, they no longer held a monopoly

on ‘the news’. A Curaçaoan journalist with years of experience in both print and broadcasting media on the island told me:

> Now, everyone who is concerned with the media is part of those bringing the news and many people take this news as equally truthful [as the news of established news media]. The role of media has completely changed: it’s only about the game of the news. (Interview Steve, October 13, 2015)

The game of news, as my interlocutor called it, was now played by the rules of digital media, among which were instantaneity, velocity, multiplicity, and proliferation. This was a game that required being first and fast, breaking the news, getting likes, and going viral. For established news media in the institutional public (with its formal procedures, professionalism, and bourgeois conventions), it was hard to adjust to this emerging news reality on the islands. Yet, in the popular public (with its informal communication networks and tradition of word-of-mouth and oral transmission) digital media technologies spoke to how news had long been practiced in Caribbean island societies. This was particularly the case for social media platforms, among which Facebook was the most popular among Curaçaoans and Sint Maarteners and certainly among young(er) generations (CBS Curaçao, 2018). Referring to these, the above-mentioned journalist told me: “They [youngsters] will tell you that they have the news from Facebook or that they’ve heard it from their aunt. To them it doesn’t matter at all who has said it or why, for news is news!” (Interview Steve, October 13, 2015). Indeed, this was how news circulated and became meaningful in the popular public, and certainly not only among the youth. I still vividly remember the answer of a close friend and co-researcher from Curaçao in response to my question about how she got the news from the island: “my mom”.

Facebook had attained a central role in daily island life. It provided not only the latest news (also for those working in and providing ‘the news’), but also smoothed access to one’s social and professional network. In addition to face-to-face contact, Facebook Messenger was the primary communication tool to get in touch with family members, to check in with friends, to plan office meetings, and to do business. The reason for the popularity of social media among islanders was aptly described by a Sint Maarten telecommunication expert when he said in an interview:

> Well, to tell you the truth, St. Martin is Internet savvy from a social networking point of view (…). Because of our oral culture, word-of-mouth has remained the main part of what caused the [online] social network to explode. (Cited in Sekou, 2011, n.p.)

Popular news practices flourished in interactive (open and enclosed) Facebook groups (e.g., "WiVoice" on Sint Maarten) and lively comment sections on Facebook pages from both established popular news media (e.g., *Vigilante* on Curaçao) and public figures – from politicians to rappers, bloggers, and popular news reporters. To (Dutch) Caribbean people, who had always been moving and now lived across the world, social media provided a popular realm to turn events on and beyond the islands into shared stories. Like oral storytelling, online news practices held "the propensity (…) to make the story dramatic to keep the audience's attention" (Storr, 2016, p. 115). On Curaçao, this skill in oral information transfer, the stories it produced, and the social affects it triggered and steered, was commonly referred to as *bomboshi* [literally: drama]. The logic of social media was one of 'bomboshi' too. Whether posting controversial, shocking, cute, or personal content, as long one steered affect, action, and reaction, there was a chance of going viral. Rather than replacing word-of-mouth circulation and informal communication networks, digital media technologies were thus a vehicle for popular news practices to thrive, intensify and expand – or, as in the above quote, "to explode" – on and beyond the islands across the world. I elaborate further on this dynamic in Chapter Five.

The widespread use of social media among Curaçaoans and Sint Maarteners did not mean that access to online news was freely or equally distributed in the island societies. In 2021, the internet penetration (internet users as a percentage of the total population) was said to be 68,1% on Curaçao and 68,6% on Sint Maarten (DataReportal, 2021a, 2021b). There were many explanations for why arguably one-third of the island societies did not use the internet, among which were ageing populations (mostly, on Curaçao) and that many who lived on the islands were not officially registered. With respect to internet access, many lower-class Curaçaoan and Sint Maarten households could not afford a computer, let alone a monthly internet subscription (see, for Curaçao, CBS Curaçao, 2018). And while some of them could go online elsewhere (e.g., at work or via family), Internet access was generally not free. Thus, the World Wide Web

by no means led to the transcendence of longstanding inequities in the access to information on the islands.

Yet amidst these continuing inequalities, people on the islands found creative ways to engage with emerging digital media technologies. From the lower to the higher social levels, most islanders did have a mobile (smart) phone or, whenever they could, bought a pre-paid sim card to go online.[35] I experienced this as I regularly spent an afternoon at an office of Chippie, TelCell, Digicel or one of the other mobile network providers along with many others in line to purchase a sim card. In search of free Wi-Fi across the islands, I could tell when I had found a likely spot because of all the youngsters on their cell phones hanging around certain bars and coffee shops. Moreover, having multiple ways of accessing the internet was a way to deal with unforeseen network failures, whether caused by regular electric power outages (generally due to malfunctioning public utilities on the islands) or a lack of telecom investments in keeping the online infrastructures up to date. Such failures were not new to islanders though. They had found creative ways to pragmatically deal with these as they knew (too) that in the glasshouse they lived, having access to information was necessary to make a living.

With the rise of digital media technologies, capitalism – with its primary need for news (media) – accelerated on a global scale. News from throughout the world now flew in 24/7 to the island societies, which, in turn, contributed to the global network that news had become. Online news infrastructures made information from and about global powers, such as The Netherlands, the UK, and the US, available in an instant. The accessibility to online news and information affected islanders' image of the world, their place in it, and their senses of belonging to it.

2.5. COMPARISON AND CONTRAST

What this chapter attempted to make clear is how public life on Curaçao and St. Maarten took shape by multiple emerging publics, and how this process unfolded differently on each island through interacting practices of news and 'the news'.

[35] There was a wide-spread use of pre-paid sim cards versus post-paid subscriptions, which came with monthly payment obligations and a risk of debt.

I have argued that Curaçao has always known a Dutch presence as an extra layer of ruling power on the island. This power was outsourced on Sint Maarten to private individuals. Now, why is this important to practices of (the) news on both islands in relation to senses of belonging? On Sint Maarten the public sphere is (and always has been since Dutch colonialism) private. Differently said, what connects Sint Maarteners is what anthropologist Francio Guadeloupe (2008) called, quoting his interlocutors, the "money tie system":

> Perhaps these small islanders had come to know one of the barest truths in our capitalist world: to assert our existence, we are all socialized to seek economic and status gains. This is what binds all the peoples of the globe. This is the truth they termed the money tie system, and no interaction is free of this truth. No society is outside the sphere of capitalism. (p. 211)

This truth of the 'money tie system' is clear to all Sint Maarteners, whether one belongs to the lower or higher levels of society. Speaking the same language (literally and figuratively) also means that the popular and institutional public – and related, news and 'the news' – meet on more equal terms. This encounter is political as defined by Collins, "Political means relating to the way power is achieved and used in a country or society" (Collins Dictionary, 2021).

On Curaçao, such shared understandings of what is basically a system of inequality (a class-based social order based on capitalist production relations) is 'disturbed'. Here, the Dutch presence and active institutional involvement has led to a situation in which the institutional public split into a bourgeois public sphere (representing 'Dutch' liberal-democratic ideals) and a cultural public sphere (representing 'Curaçaoan' culture which takes shapes in opposition to the Dutch presence in the institutional public and popular news media). The popular public does not meet on equal terms with the split institutional public on this island.

My point here is that on Curaçao too capitalist production relations prevail. Those who do have access to the island's institutional realm know this. Here, the split institutional public hides the fact that it is actually a "money tie system". On Curaçao, the popular public has been 'trapped' in a cultural public sphere where popular news media effectively articulate the hopes and concerns of those who do not have access to that other part of the institutional public, the bourgeois public sphere. In this bourgeois public sphere, liberal-democratic norms –

including those of journalism – inform interactions between institutional actors. They do this idealistically to monitor and control the proliferation of capital and those in power profiting from this. At the same time, the bourgeois public sphere has also contributed to the maintenance of a class-based order. It regulates access to the institutional public by prioritizing rational-liberal deliberation, education, and professional expertise. This is somewhat 'known' on Sint Maarten, and is less well-known on Curaçao.

The introduction of 'the news' on both islands was part of a Dutch infrastructural investment in maintaining the social order. Institutional news practices, in turn, were used by other powers (from local to global such as the US) on their own terms and differently through time. Infrastructural power and logistics management was thus never a one-way endeavor. Like the export of 'the news' to other colonies, on the islands "metropolitan news practices were appropriated by local elites to modify the local news system for conscious political reasons" (Nerone, 2013, p. 451). Yet, while those in power on both sides of the ocean (and increasingly across the world) engaged with emerging media infrastructures, so did those among the lower levels of society. In this chapter, I have argued that 'the news' has always been contested by news. This process of continuous interaction between practices of newsmaking in the institutional and the popular public shapes public island life.

In the chapters that follow, I build on recent social-economic transformations that came with processes of change in the production, circulation, and consumption of news and 'the news'; the proliferation of radio stations and TV broadcasters in the 1980s; and the rise of online news and social media since the 2000s. With the rise of digital media technologies, global capitalism – with its primary need for news (media) – accelerated once more. Today, news from throughout the world flows 24/7 through the island societies, where news practices in turn affect the global network news and 'the news' have become.

As a result, practices of news and 'the news' came to unfold through the demands of global capitalism. They did this by and while generating a plethora of different outlooks in and on the world – outlooks that open up to and also reduce the world (people, production, produce). The way this, in turn, has affected *how institutional and popular practices of newsmaking in the public sphere in Curaçao and Sint Maarten – understood as a social process of turning events into collective stories – generate common, contested and at times also cathartic senses of*

belonging, is what I aim to answer in the chapters that follow. I start by exploring the legacies of black nationalist politics of belonging through practices of news and 'the news' in today's Sint Maarten.



3 | who is the “black bourgeoisie”?

Contested senses of belonging among Sint Maarten’s middle classes

In this chapter I highlight my experiences with news practices around Black History Month (February 2016) on Sint Maarten. I focus on the lecture of Dr. Umar Johnson, a clinical psychologist and pan-Africanist from the US. It is a case that brings to the fore the contested dynamics between the institutional and popular public in this metaphorical glasshouse. I present a twist, building on the previous chapter, which followed the historical traces of 'the news' contested by 'news' on Curaçao and Sint Maarten. The twist is that the bourgeois public sphere on Sint Maarten was partially transformed from being 'creole' to being black nationalist.

I discuss the work of a group of activists that has pushed black nationalist politics into the public sphere. I reiterate based on Chapter Two that they did so first in the 1970s by (owning and editing) newspapers, and today they do so through YouTube tutorials, Facebook posts, an annual prestigious book fair, the organization of literary salons, and by running an internationally renowned publishing house. They hold their own next to the more traditional media outlets in the hands of Sint Maarten's 'creole' establishment. They used to practice news from 'below', aligned with the popular public. Today they are an alternative within the institutional public.

I then go on to relate these black nationalist intellectuals to the message and reception of Dr. Umar Johnson's performance at the University of St. Martin (USM). He was invited by this group of intellectuals. His invitation to come to the island to espouse black nationalism was 'news' and 'the news'. His talk on the state of 'black' Sint Maarteners as part of the 'black' world sought to interpellate (Althusser, 1971) a common sense of belonging among part of the population. Yet, to others, the lecture and the translation of his views in 'the news' and 'news' mainly fueled anxiety and promoted exclusion. Some people felt that Johnson did not speak to their experiences and understandings of Sint Maarten's community. This feeling of disconnection with Johnson's ideas was particularly strong and got articulated by an emerging group of young Sint Maarteners. Among them were high school seniors preparing for their overseas education, recent graduates returning from abroad, and young entrepreneurs who worked remotely from either the island itself or from other places as they moved around the world.

By focusing on the stories produced by this emerging public on the island, disseminated via institutional media and popular channels (e.g., *The Daily Herald*'s *Teen Times*, Facebook, radio stations and personal blogs), I show how these critical and vocal young(er) Sint Maarteners stress the importance of

dealing with and celebrating the island's current reality. They see it as a highly plural society that has rapidly changed from a fishermen's village into a dynamic regional and global junction of relations between people, politics, technologies, and business.

Sint Maarten's official population grew rapidly from 4,460 in 1965 to 40,812 people in 2020 (World Bank, 2022b). Together with the northern French part of the island, today's island population is close to 80,000 people, of whom more than 70% are immigrants. This number increases significantly when unregistered people living on the island are considered (US State Department, 2014). The tourism industry has led to a rapid growth not only in the number but also in the diversity of the population of the island (De Wit, 2015). Migrants from throughout the region, mainly from Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Guyana, Jamaica, the smaller neighboring islands, and the Dutch Leeward Islands (Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao), reside on the island. Moreover, a globalizing neoliberal economy has attracted businesses from India, China, the US, and Europe to Sint Maarten, often employing nationals from these countries on the basis of temporary three- or four-year contracts. With over 90 different nationalities the island population has become highly diverse and mobile. I learned from several interlocutors that the current population's 'turnover' is around three to five years – the period that migrants stay on the island.

The Sint Maarten of today is thus no longer the Sint Maarten that certain 'locals' continue to claim. And many young and 'new' Sint Maarteners do not long for a Sint Maarten that once was (or should have been). They wish to focus on the opportunities within their everyday reality for creating a better future today. Both these publics (black nationalists and an emerging younger public) belong to the middle-class sectors of society. I show that they share a confident common sense of belonging: they share a sense of being a Sint Maartener and having an equal social standing in society.

3.1. A PAN-AFRICANIST ON SINT MAARTEN

I just had started with my fieldwork in the newsroom of Sint Maarten's biggest newspaper, *The Daily Herald,* when its chief editor suggested to me that I go and talk to some of Sint Maarten's pro-independence advocates. These activists have formed a small yet influential group of people on the island since the 1970s,

promoting anti-colonialist thought and black nationalism. Talking to them could be insightful for my research, the editor argued, and by writing about these encounters I could contribute to the newspaper. The latter was particularly relevant since the 25th anniversary of Black History Month was already in full swing at the time (February, 2016) with daily radio talks, seminars, and reading sessions. These activities were mostly initiated by this group of independence/black nationalist advocates. And so it happened that I headed to the USM on the early evening of Saturday 20th February to attend what had been announced in the newspaper as "the highpoint of this month's activities" (SMN-News, 2016, n.p.): the Black History Celebration Lecture by Dr. Umar Johnson, a clinical psychologist and Pan-Africanist flown in from the US.

Upon entering the full-packed yard of the USM, I somewhat uneasily crossed the masses of people in search of a spot. As one of the few lighter-skinned people in the audience,[36] but more so, as a 'white' woman who was going to write about this Pan-African nationalist event for the newspaper, I could not help the feeling of being an unwanted spectator. Earlier that week, a copy editor at *The Herald* had explained to me that people on the island were, in fact, very wary of the local media, because "everyone knows each other and is afraid to be exposed" (from my fieldnotes, March 4, 2016).[37] The fear of exposure was related to the risk of being misrepresented by journalists, which they would then present what they wrote as a fact. The copy editor regularly noticed that journalists handed in quite different pieces even while covering the very same event. "And still they say they 'just give the facts' and they really believe they do!" As this was a Pan-African/black nationalist event that highlighted differences on the basis of one's skin-color, I became aware that my 'whiteness' could exacerbate this already fraught view of journalists. My feeling of being an uninvited busybody was thus not the result of the tone of my skin *in and on itself*, nor was it because

[36] I later found out that Dr. Jordi Halfman (then a PhD researcher) appeared to be sitting in front together with her USM co-workers (for her analysis, Halfman, 2019, pp. 36–38).

[37] Being part of the very same small society, media workers on Sint Maarten (and on Curaçao) often shared this fear for being "exposed". It could harm (legitimately or not) one's reputation and one's credibility as a journalist on the island. A Curaçaoan editor explained to me that he thoroughly screened new journalists during interviews for things that could be used against them. This is because blackmailing journalists by threatening to expose things that were controversial in the community, such as a criminal record, an addiction, an affair, but also one's sexual orientation, was a tactic used to keep the media 'in line'.

of how people in the yard treated me, which was, in fact, no different than usual.[38]

After finding an empty chair somewhere in the middle of the crowd from where I could clearly see the stage, my neighbor – a man in his early forties – told me he and his friend had decided to come after they had seen and heard about the lecture via advertisements in the press, on the radio, and on Facebook. I could tell they – like many others in the audience – were excited and anticipated something worth listening to.

At that point, Dr. Umar Johnson stepped on stage. "St. Martin make some noise!"[39] This stirred up the crowd. I was immediately enthralled by Johnson's charismatic and imposing appearance. Dressed in an African wax tunic – a stark contrast to the suit he wore on the photo that had circulated in the media – Johnson kicked off what would be a 3.5 hours-long performance of what it means to be a "revolutionary Pan-African nationalist". He started with addressing the ongoing systematic oppression of "black boys", who needed "black male teachers" and authorities to look up to on St. Martin, as elsewhere. He then criticized the ongoing colonization of "black people" on the island by Dutch and French "white folks" as well as the Chinese. He stated, "What must be done for black people must be done by black people". One-liners like this could count on a rousing applause. As the evening proceeded, some in the audience were clearly moved by Johnson's performance. I noticed some jumping out of their seat, while cheering and making emotional gestures to express their approval of Johnson's speech.

Many around me clearly enjoyed the sensation and the arousal that increasingly filled the yard. The majority regularly joined the laughter and the applause. Yet, these expressions did not equate to full support or endorsement of what Johnson had to say. Caution and more straightforward disagreement was often expressed not directly and openly – as in the bourgeois public sphere – but

[38] Here, I do not suggest that Sint Maarteners are 'color-blind' or that anyone, despite one's skin-color, is treated equally on the island. Rather, I wish to point out that the interactions with people in the yard did not make me feel more or less 'white' than any other social setting in daily island life, where – in contrast to the events of this evening – people of all kinds of skin-tones lived, worked, and engaged with each other.

[39] I was able to quote Dr. Johnson in this Chapter (Three) based upon the audio-recording I made of his lecture. I use italics in quotations, whenever Johnson putted emphasis on words or (parts of) sentences by intonation. I capitalize words whenever Johnson emphasized and drew attention to certain expressions by raising his voice.

rather covertly and ambiguously, in a way that is reminiscent of how the popular public communicated through the grapevine by encounters on the street, at the Boardwalk,[40] and wherever else. When, for example, Johnson chanted, "I'm an African before I'm a St. Martiner. I'm an African *before* I'm a Christian. I'm an African *before* I'm a Muslim. I'm an African *first*", I noticed how my applauding neighbor simultaneously shook his head and chuckled, while saying to his friend, "Man, I don't agree with everything he says, about everything he says". When Johnson began lashing out at 'black' men on the island who had contracted interracial marriages by stating, "You're running around here, disrespecting my black sisters with your WHITE women. You're running around here all 'high and mighty' because you married the master's daughter. YOU FOOL!", people only cautiously brought their hands together, while mumbling to each other.

Caution seemed to increase as Johnson proceeded with his talk. After targeting 'white' people and 'black' folks engaging in personal relationships with them, Johnson began to attack his audience directly. He exclaimed, "Guess what St. Martin? *You* are the biggest obstacle in this black revolution, you all practice white supremacy suffering from post-traumatic slavery disorder". According to Johnson, this was particularly true for those in audience, who held a position of power in the island's institutional order. He said:

> And now, listen, I gonna talk about the BLACK BOURGEOISIE on the island *[several approving "yeahs" from audience]*. And I know some of 'm here *[mumbling]*. They had to come and see me! *[laughter]*. Listen now, wherever there's white supremacy, there's a black bourgeoisie, because the only way white people can control black people is by gatekeeping NEGROES *[cautious applause]*.

Here, Johnson linked his notion of a "black bourgeoisie" to what once was a central figure on the plantation: 'the driver', an enslaved 'black' man appointed by the 'white' master to keep the enslaved workers in place and, thereby, the system of the plantation running. Today's gatekeepers, Johnson argued, formed St. Martin's "black bourgeoisie": the 'black' political and economic establishment that copies the behavior of 'white' people and thereby is (partly) responsible for

[40] The Boardwalk is the boulevard in Philipsburg where tourists, fishermen, business people, and street vendors generally gather and meet in the afternoon.

maintaining the oppression of black St. Martiners. This "black bourgeoisie", according to Johnson, could be found across St. Martin's public institutes: in education ("blacks with their PhDs and doctorates", "ready to teach white beliefs and conceptsss"); in the media ("black folks with radio stations, talk shows, newspapers, magazines, websitesss"); in politics and business ("black folks in St. Martin that got a little bit of money" who "ain't got a whole black mind"); and in church (whose "only solution for any problem is praying to a WHITE Jesus").

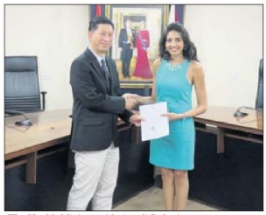
At this point, at least from where I was sitting, the initial excitement and enthusiasm coming from the crowd had significantly cooled down. At times, my neighbor still chuckled, but mainly because he could literally finish Johnson's sentences by now – so he did. Some must have felt singled out by being portrayed as St. Martin's "black bourgeoisie". Yet, more than that, I got the impression that many were just tired of listening to Dr. Johnson's aggressive and, at times, hateful rhetoric. The critical questions that were asked during the Q&A confirmed this impression and so did several conversations I had with attendees afterwards.

Based on these observations, I wrote an opinion piece the next day. This piece was published under the heading; "I'm an African, before I'm a St. Martiner!" in the paper's Monday edition (22 September 2016) on page 10 [see **Figure 8**]. I will come back later to this piece and the (few) reactions I got to it. For now, I wish to highlight the critical response that I received from Donna. She was a researcher working at the USM, an experienced politician and a long-time pro-independence activist on the island. We had previously been in contact to plan a meeting later that same week. Donna emailed me to cancel this meeting. Without explaining why, she expressed her disappointment with my representation of the lecture in the newspaper, writing:

> I read with great interest your article on the lecture by Dr. Umar Johnson on Saturday evening, which I also attended, especially since you mentioned that your research concentrates on the role of the 'local press, particularly newspapers, news blogs and Facebook, in reflecting and shaping debates on identities'. After what you refer to as a '3.5 hour long lecture', which I, and many others present, regarded as an inspirational lecture about Black empowerment, even if it made some among us uncomfortable to hear, I was rather disappointed in the representation of this (full) picture in your article. (Email Donna, February 23, 2016).



The Health Minister with Devlin Alexander.



The Health Minister with Angeli Balani.

Alexander, Balani sworn in as 'health care practitioners'

PHILIPSBURG--Devlin Alexander and Angeli Balani have been sworn in to work as "health care practitioners" in St. Maarten.

Alexander took the oath as a Pharmacist Assistant and will be working at Simpson Bay Pharmacy, while Balani took her oath as a Physical Therapist.

"With this first step these two health care professionals are moving forward to ensuring that the St. Maarten population is provided with quality service and appropriate health care," Health Minister Emil Lee said in a press release on Sunday.

All health care professionals practicing in St Maarten must be sworn in by Governor Eugene Holiday. This task has been mandated to the Minister of Public Health, Social Development and Labour for certain cases. Lee congratulated the two health care professionals.

'I'm an African, before I'm a St. Martiner!'

By Sanne Rotmeijer

PHILIPSBUG--It was one of Dr. Umar Johnson's controversial statements during his Black History Celebration lecture, organised by the Conscious Lyrics Foundation on Saturday, February 20. In a full-packed yard at University of St. Martin (USM), Johnson advocated unification of African people and revolution against global 'white supremacy'. His lecture seemed to be a charge against the establishment on the island; but also against the internalised repression of black African identity.

In his words: "The only thing you belong to is your race. Be an African first, before anything else."

"St. Martin, make some noise!" Johnson stirs up the audience as he enters the stage. A few hundred people have gathered to listen to the 'revolutionary Pan-African nationalist,' as Johnson describes himself, while also being an 'educator, psychologist and political scientist.' Dr. Umar Johnson is known for his controversial ideas about systematic oppression of black people on a global scale. The pharmaceutical industry, politicians, banks and the church: all are part of the "business of racism" against black people.

Johnson's ideology is far from inclusive or nuanced. On the contrary, he advocates "own people first" and "same-racial marriages." "What must be done for Black people must be done by Black people." On an island with more than 100 nationalities from all continents, it is interesting to see how many people – that is Black people from St. Martin and surrounding islands – have gathered tonight. Some are joining a family member out of curiosity; others have been informed by the press.

Odele Anderson of Conscious Lyrics Foundation says: "We are very happy with this huge turnout. Compared to previous years of the Black History Celebration Lecture, this 25th jubilee has attracted a younger audience. The discussions and number of reactions on our Facebook page reflect this too." A 14-year-old girl sitting in the back of the yard says: "My neighbour asked me to join her. I find it very educational."

Despite of the younger crowd, Johnson's lecture is neither easy to follow, nor to handle. He talks, among other things, about the capitalist politics behind democracy: "Elections are an instrument to make you think you have power, but in reality you only choose a face that executes already determined anti-black policy." He also talks about the role of white religious images; "The church promises black people heaven after death, while you're living in hell right now. It's suggestion? Pray to a white Jesus!"

During his almost 3.5-hour-long lecture it becomes clear that Johnson is not afraid of confronting his audience. "Guess what St. Martin? You are the biggest obstacle in this black revolution; you all practice white supremacy suffering from post-traumatic slavery disorder". According to Johnson, this is particularly true for St. Martin's "Black bourgeoisie" that works for the political and economic establishment that is responsible for enduring institutionalised racism on the island.

Johnson's overall message seems to be: racism is in everyone. But instead of exceeding our racial differences to overcome racism, his strategy is one of encouraging racial pride, Black power and exclusion. This tactic is understandable when one thinks of emancipating the oppressed. However, Saturday evening it undoubtedly created discomfort in the audience as well.

First of all this was true for myself, the writer of this article, being almost the only white person in the yard. Moreover, asking several visitors around, it turned out that most of them had mixed feelings about the lecture.

Dr. Umar Johnson certainly addresses issues that makes one think, but whether his exclusionary Pan-African ideology of "own people first" is a constructive one for St. Maarten's society as a whole is very questionable. But, of course, this is probably not in a Pan-African-ist' interest.

Sanne Rotmeijer conducts research on the role of the press in reflecting and shaping national identities on St. Maarten. Her research is part of the "Confronting Caribbean Challenges" project. More info: www.kitlv.nl/research-projects-confronting-caribbean-challenges. Reactions and/or questions? Send an email to rotmeijer@kitlv.nl.



Dr. Umar Johnson.



Audience at Black History Celebration lecture.

BACK TO THE ROOTS of Kali
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 22ND 2016
FULL MOON
OF SAINT-MARTIN SINCE 1983
LIVE REGGAE MUSIC
WITH UP RISING BAND & RAS BIKO
BONFIRE ON THE BEACH
DINNER FROM 7PM TO 10PM
Reservations : (+590) 690 49 06 81 - NO CREDIT CARDS
FRIAR'S BAY

THE FAT TURTLE
Restaurant / Bar / Lounge at IGY Marinas - The Yacht Club at Isle de Sol has the following full time openings:
CHEF
COOKS
mplas@igymarinas.com
Must have legal working documents or Dutch nationality

Figure 8: Opinion piece "I'm an African, before I'm a St. Martiner!" published in *The Daily Herald* on 22 February 2016, page 10.

During Johnson's lecture I had seen Donna sitting front row among those who seemed to be most excited about his performance. It had made me wonder whether she felt addressed when Johnson targeted St. Martin's "black bourgeoisie". After all, she was a 'black' scholar with a PhD working at the university. She came from one of the established families on the island with "a bit of money". As a politician, moreover, she had always (deliberately or not) cooperated with powerful and wealthy "white folks" on the island. In other words, if she did not belong to the "black bourgeoisie", who did?

3.2. BLACK NATIONALISM ALONGSIDE A 'CREOLE' ESTABLISHMENT

As I spent more time on the island, I became increasingly aware that Dr. Johnson's notion of a "black bourgeoisie" – by which he probably did not want to target powerful 'black' people in general, but those 'acting white'[41] – did not speak to Sint Maarten's bourgeois public sphere in which a small yet vocal dark(er)-skinned petite bourgeoisie (Bourdieu, 1984) advocated 'acting black'. Donna belonged to this small yet vocal group of activist intellectuals who had long engaged with popular news practice to advocate for 'their people' against the 'creole' establishment on Sint Maarten. Since 2010, however, this group had been able to push black nationalist politics into Sint Maarten's bourgeois public sphere. The public sphere was thereby partially transformed from being 'creole' to being black nationalist.

To understand this transformation, I refer to Chapter Two where I described how news contested 'the news' on Sint Maarten and how this coincided with an emerging group of black nationalist/independence activists on the island. Inspired by black power movements throughout the region and, particularly, the Black Arts Movement in the US, between the 1970s and 2000s the Lake family published several newspapers and magazines to mobilize 'their people' ('black'

[41] 'Acting white' is a pejorative term from the US mainly used to accuse a (group of) person(s) with a dark(er) skin color of being sellouts. This accusation is usually based on certain behaviors, interests, social contacts, etc. associated with 'white' high cultural (and economic) capital. President Obama, for example, has been accused of 'acting white'. The charge was indirectly leveled by Johnson who argued that Obama had done nothing for 'black' people. 'Acting white' is a term by which 'whiteness' and 'blackness' are performatively constituted (Chadderton, 2018).

St. Martin 'locals' or 'natives') against the old 'creole' establishment. Yet, these popular news practices could not compete with 'the news', which rapidly commercialized as the island's tourism market took off beginning in the 1980s. Around that period, Claude Wathey reached out to CITCO, a Curaçaoan trust company that had bought the *Amigoe* newspaper from the Catholic Church in 1981. He hoped that they could join to leverage Sint Maarten's evolving news industry by setting up a modern daily. In 1985, *The Chronicle* was established. With an experienced news director flown in from Curaçao (previously *Amigoe* director and shareholder, Roger Snow) and a significant budget guaranteed by its private shareholders, *The Chronicle* not only took over the news market, but transformed it into a news industry in which the Lake-family was no longer able to compete. As of the 2000s, they would no longer publish newspapers in Sint Maarten.

But, and this is where the story twists, the Lakes and those closely affiliated to them would never quit their black nationalist activism, nor would they stop employing popular and, increasingly, institutional news practices to advocate their cause. They not only continued but also transformed the 'José Lake media tradition' into a multimedia business infrastructure *parallel to* the island's main media houses in the hands of those representing the island's 'creole' establishment.

Before going into these dynamics, let me briefly go back to when Lasana Sekou, one of the Lake sons, returned to the island. This was in 1984, which happened to be in the middle of a politically and economically roaring decade for Sint Maarten and the Netherlands Antilles. With the largest population, Curaçaoan representatives had always had a majority of seats in the Antillean government. During the 1980s, this became an even bigger thorn in the side of Sint Maarten's establishment. Their economic power grew as Sint Maarten's tourism industry took off, while Curaçao, quite the opposite, faced several economic setbacks. At the same time, Curaçao started to impose 'Antilleanization' policies throughout the Dutch Caribbean. One of these policies was an Antillean-wide implementation of Papiamentu-language education. The English-speaking Sint Maarteners – historically oriented towards the Anglophone Caribbean and the US – were not in favor of this. When ever greater numbers of North American tourists started visiting the island and cable TV became available in 1986, Sint Maarteners increasingly turned to US media and culture. This coincided with a rising call for preserving the 'indigenous', 'local' culture of Sint

Maarten in reaction to the rapid influx of migrant workers from throughout the region. When Aruba successfully negotiated an autonomous country status within the Dutch Kingdom in 1986, local elites in Sint Maarten increasingly raised their voices to argue for leaving the Netherlands Antilles too.

The Lake brothers and those closely affiliated to them utilized this political and economic momentum to organize themselves. Founding several grassroots organizations in the 1980s, they aimed for political influence on both sides of the island.[42] They wanted more than autonomy. They advocated for the independence of a reunited St. Martin that was no longer divided by a colonial border nor dependent on either France or The Netherlands. Lake, Jr. founded the Independence for St. Martin Foundation (ISMF) to work for the "independence option" in both the 1994 and 2000 constitutional status referenda held on Sint Maarten. They were not successful. In 1994, only 6% voted for independence. In 2000, this was just over 14%. Their plea for independence did not speak to the majority of Sint Maarten's electorate and, together with their "our people first" agenda, it certainly did not resonate with the working class newcomers who had left their sovereign home countries in exchange for a better life on the non-sovereign island of Sint Maarten. They claimed that independence in their countries had "only made the rich richer", while it had "secured the middle classes as rising bourgeoisie" (Guadeloupe, 2005, p. 158).

More effective than their (initial) political endeavors were the cultural media activities with the House of Nehesi Publishers (HNP), founded by Lasana Sekou in New York in 1982 and established on Sint Maarten upon his return. As an important publishing company in the Leeward archipelago with close ties to the US and Europe, the HNP would impact cultural discourses on and (far) beyond the island. Like Lake, Jr., Sekou was "strong on Africa and Caribbean unity" (i.e., Badejo, 2003; Florian/Sekou, 2010). He was inspired by Aimé Cesaire's ideas of Négritude, Garveyist black nationalism and, most prominently, Amiri Baraka's articulation of the Black Arts Movement (BAM) in the US. This movement worked towards a radical cultural reformation through 'Black Art' instead of 'art for art's sake'. The BAM envisioned art as a political tool to mobilize Afro-Americans. In doing so, they turned to Africa – and the continent's anti-colonial struggles at

[42] Initially, they had more political impact on the French side than on the Dutch side. This changed around the time of the constitutional reform in 2010 (see also Halfman, 2019, pp. 39–40).

that time – as a reference point.[43] "BAM members took African names, draped themselves in African garb, and projected a revolutionary pose to merge their politico-cultural project with that of their African contemporaries" (Henderson, 2019, p. 376). Sekou had come to know Baraka personally during his time in the US. In 1980 they performed on stage together at the University at Stony Brook, NY, where Sekou was a student and Baraka an assistant professor. A report of the event made it to the front page of *Black World* (Lawson, 1980, p. 1), a student paper of which Sekou was managing editor at the time. Baraka wrote the introduction to one of Sekou's early works. In 2003, Sekou's HNP published two books by Amiri Baraka, who would visit Sint Maarten twice. Baraka was a source of inspiration to Sekou, who followed him in changing his given name of Harold Lake to an African one: Lasana Mwanza Sekou.

Upon his return to Sint Maarten, Sekou continued to build on both the ideals and the network of the BAM. He became internationally renowned for his Black Poetry, with more than fourteen publications of poetry and short stories. These works were all published by his House of Nehesi, described (and promoted) on the publisher's website as:

> For nearly 40 years, House of Nehesi Publishers (HNP) has been a leading organizer and promoter of reading, writing, publishing, and literary criticism and research in St. Martin. The company's essential objective is the critical development of the 'national literature' of St. Martin (North and South) as a natural part of the dynamic, world-class literatures of the Caribbean. (House of Nehesi, 2020, n.p.)

With publications, among which were *The Independence Papers* (Sekou, 1990), *National Symbols of St. Martin – A Primer* (Sekou, 1996), *The Republic of St. Martin* (Lake Jr., 2000), and *Language, Culture, Identity in St. Martin* (Arrindell, 2014), the HNP provided a platform to imagine and develop this 'national literature' in line with black nationalist ideals.

The idea of establishing a printing house may have come from the important and successful publishing arm of the BAM, the Third World Press (TWP),

[43] The Pan-Africanism of the BAM differed from that of other black cultural movements in the US that promoted a return to Africa, both in time (pre-colonial Africa) and in place (physically going back to the African continent). The BAM promoted 'Africa' as a reference point for imagining 'blackness'.

established by Haki Muradhi in Chicago in 1967 which is still running at the time I am writing this work (2022). The aim of this press was to publish black literature and spread black nationalist ideology, "without the editorial censorship of mainstream publishing houses while creating an institution that was black owned and politically oriented to the cultural transformation of black American society" (Henderson, 2019, p. 376). In addition to being a quintessential ideological organ of the BAM, "the press generated funds that could be used to support other black institutions" (ibid). The HNP followed a similar business-model in providing funding for and support to black writers, developing initiatives, organizing events, and supporting writers and schools on the island.

In addition to publishing 'national literature', the HNP organized literary salons, creative writing courses, photo contests, educational/historical for a, and other cultural events. Most prominent of all these events was the annual St. Martin Book Fair, a joint initiative of Sekou's HNP and the Conscious Lyrics Foundation (founded in 1992). Since its first edition in 2003, the fair has grew into an important cultural and literary event on the island with three days of "books, free literary recitals, cultural performances, multilingual workshops, and exhibitions of educational and multimedia tools with upcoming and famous guest authors, expert workshop presenters, and panelists from St. Martin and around the world" (House of Nehesi, 2020). By inviting international speakers and writers from, for example, Palestine and Papua Guinea, the organizers of the book fair seemed to follow Amiri Baraka's shift from black Pan-African nationalism to linking the oppression of black Americans (or Sint Maarteners) to anti-colonial struggles all over the world. His extensive, international program for the fair was made possible by a strategic partnership with the St. Maarten Tourist Bureau (STB) of the Ministry of Tourism, Economic Affairs, Transport and Telecommunication (TEATT), through which the government of Sint Maarten became the head sponsor of the St. Martin Book Fair. The Book Fair was made possible by contributions from the council of the French collectivity of Saint Martin, several public-private partnerships (e.g., with the USM and the utility company NV GEBE), and private sector investments (Motorworld and Nagico, a Caribbean-wide insurance company). Clearly, then, it was by no means an event by a group of activists on society's periphery, but, rather, deeply imbedded in the island's institutional order.

During the same period, the black nationalist activists managed to get into Sint Maarten's politics. Here, they followed the example of Lake Sr. who had

joined the DP controlled by his opponent, Wathey, in the 1960s with his goal being obtaining greater political influence. He had been involved only briefly though and not wholeheartedly. Lake and Wathey continued to represent "the duality of St. Martin's post-1963 political culture" (Johnson, 2014b, n.p.). This dialectic waned in the lead up to the constitutional reform in 2010, which provided opportunities for a generation of political leaders to come. In 2009, Wathey's grandson, Theo Heyliger, decided to leave the DP and to found the United People's Party (UP), in which (one of) the black nationalists got a prominent position. Although Heyliger represented the 'white' Sint Maarteners, the black nationalists' cooperation was publicly justified based on what had become a shared enemy: the Dutch government. Yet, more than a shared ideological stance – unnecessary as Sint Maarten's party programs lacked an ideological vision anyway –, it was matters of finance and economic power that buttressed the reason for joining the party of the 'creole' establishment.

As I described in Chapter Two, this 'creole' establishment consisted of wealthy local families that had attained and further consolidated their political power through business and vice versa (Roitman & Veenendaal, 2016). Among the most successful was the Wathey family, who could enter politics by founding political parties (DP, UP) with family wealth, which, in turn, expanded because of decisions made from their positions in power. The Wathey family was closely linked to the other local families by marriages or joint business interests. As such, not only the Wathey family profited from their own political power, but, in fact, most of those who were considered to be the 'locals' by belonging to or being closely affiliated to this old family network on the island benefited. This dynamic continued up until the writing of this work [2022] (Roitman & Veenendaal, 2016). And since the growth of Sint Maarten's tourism industry, everyone seemed to aspire a share of the economic prosperity, from North American bankers who invested in big hotels and casinos to working migrants who landed a job – or two – in the tourism industry. In this capitalist reality, a truth that Sint Maarteners termed the "money tie system" (Guadeloupe, 2008, p. 211), the 'locals' mostly hoped to protect their political ties and their "virtual monopoly in the civil service and (…) the middle management positions" (Guadeloupe, 2005, p. 158).

When I arrived on Sint Maarten in early 2016, the group of black nationalist activists no longer, if they ever had to begin with, countered the political and economic elites on the island from 'below' by standing with "their people", the black local St. Martiner laborers. They had become (more openly) an alternative

option as part of Sint Maarten's establishment. As 'locals', a small yet influential minority in today's island population, they did not turn their back to the 'other locals;' the 'white' establishment on the island. It was therefore not remarkable when one of the activists, who happened to be Donna, was asked by Heyliger to join his party. As the first Premier of Sint Maarten as a constituent country within the Dutch Kingdom, he appointed her Minister in 2010.

The money tie system also explained the continuing "links between the House of Nehesi and these wealthy and influential families on the island" (Halfman, 2019, p. 42). The sponsorships around the St. Martin Book Fair illustrated these links as did the list of clients that HNP would come to serve. In addition to publishing and educational activities, HNP also offered services such as, communication and media consultancy and research, web design, PR advice, and writing news releases. Among its clients were the St. Maarten Government (Information Service), the St. Maarten Telephone Group of Companies; United Telecom Services-Training & Development Center (UTS-TDC) (House of Nehesi, 2020, n.p.). They thus worked closely with public and private partners across the island's media infrastructure, including telecom organizations, news websites, individual reporters, radio stations, etc. They no longer needed to employ popular news practices to make their voice heard. They had, in fact, become 'the news'.

Here, the plural nature of 'the news' – referring to both its producers and its content – becomes clear. These black nationalists were 'the news' in terms of who (at least partly) produced it, while they were also 'the news' in terms of who it covered. This was why people on the island generally saw local news media, from the press to radio stations and television broadcasters, as stages for middle-class networks. As a vocal opinion maker said about the island's main newspaper, for example:

> It's just how it works. It is the Dutch connection to Heineken, KLM, and one recently…I forget his name— a network. A Dutch network. Money. And power. *The Herald* is not a newspaper, it's a platform, you know that. If you talk about *The Herald,* you talk about it over here, the news, *the news*! (Interview George, March 16, 2016)

Like members of the island's 'creole' establishment, who, as I argued in Chapter Two, not only related to Dutch businesses, but also, and increasingly, American,

Indian, and Chinese businesses on the island and investors from all over the world, the black nationalist activists had created and extended their own network to become 'the news'. They sent in opinion pieces, letters to the editor, and they bought radio time slots to broadcast daily talk shows. Or they sent out 'news releases' to announce events to attract media attention. This was how the St. Martin Book Fair could be 'big news' on the island and got featured in US media (*New York Daily News*) and by news outlets throughout the Caribbean (*Trinidad's Guardian*). And it was also due to these institutional news practices that I, as a representative of the island's main newspaper, attended the lecture of Dr. Umar Johnson.

3.3. THE INTERPELLATION OF A BLACK NATIONALIST COMMON SENSE OF BELONGING

The discussion, above, of the formation of a black nationalist establishment on Sint Maarten brings me back to the Black History Celebration lecture in February 2016 – an event organized by the Conscious Lyrics Foundation in collaboration with a Member of Parliament for the National Alliance Party. The Pan-African message of Dr. Umar Johnson spoke differently to Sint Maarteners. I already described how this was a palpable feeling during the evening itself. Below, I take a closer look at practices of news and 'the news' around his presence on the island. In doing so, I show how these news practices – both popular and institutional – generated different common senses of belonging among Sint Maarteners.

First, let me recall that I actively participated in how Johnson's lecture was news and 'the news'. Attending his talk with the purpose of writing a newspaper article, I decided to bring my audio recorder and to make notes. This did not go unnoticed that evening – and certainly not after Dr. Johnson, who either spotted me or was informed of the attendance of 'the press', had made my presence the center of his speech at one point. When he started to stress that every 'white' person was a racist and saw that this puzzled the audience, he said, "Now, let me explain what I mean…'cause I see some good white folks taking notes for tomorrow's paper!" All eyes were suddenly on me, while the crowd literally unloaded as people started to whoop, boo me, and scream with laughter. Amidst the uproar, I heard Johnson yelling, "There is a black man standing in front of

you!", when a man started shouting, "Hit them hard! Hit them hard! Give it to them! Give it to them!"

Apart from obvious feelings of discomfort that came over me, the reaction of the crowd taught me how news and 'the news' – and, in this case, news (new information) about 'the news' (me as a 'white' representative of the press) – interpellated the particular common sense of belonging Johnson was propagating this night. Althusser's notion of interpellation (1971) refers to concrete situations in which individuals recognize themselves as subjects through responding to and internalizing ideologies.[44] Althusser illustrates this process with the example of someone 'hailing' us in the street with "Hey, you there!" We turn around, at once, recognizing ourselves in and, thereby (accepting) becoming this "you". In a similar way, Johnson hailed me ("Hey you, white folk!") to literally flesh out his us-vs-them ideology. Thus far in his talk he already had built up an ideological imagination of who 'they' were ("white folks") and why they – although close to most in the audience – were no 'us' ("Yesss, your best friend is a racist, your boss is a racist, your doctor is a racist!"). By hailing one of the "white folk" in a crowd that had continuously been interpellated as "black folks", people at once recognized themselves and identified as 'black' ("Give it to them!").

What made this interpellation so effective here was that it resonated with how the popular public turned events into stories. As I described above, the popular public generally avoided 'the news', because of the fear of being misrepresented. Unlike the institutional public, the popular public did not relate this risk of misrepresentation to journalists failing to do their work properly. Rather, they related it to the norm of rationality underlying their very work. This was related to the broader 'rational fallacy' (Benhabib, 1986) embedded in Habermas' bourgeois public sphere. When journalists said 'they just gave the facts' it created a certain distrust among people on the island. This distrust did not emerge because journalists ignored other facts (selective rationalization, which Habermas saw as an important source for social pathology), but because 'the news' dismissed the affective, emotional, and aesthetic dimensions of daily social life on Sint Maarten. These dimensions came to the fore at the corners of

[44] According to Althusser (1971), ideology – defined as "the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (p. 140) – does not exist without interpellation. For Althusser they are, in fact, one and the same in an ongoing process between the ideological state apparatus and individuals. Here, I do not focus on this ongoing process, but on how this process manifests itself in a concrete a particular illustration of interpellation.

Backstreet, after Sunday's Church service or, as I argue, during this Black History celebration lecture. These were all sites where the popular public communicated and was articulated through the non-rational of daily social life.

Johnson's performance called on this affective logic of the popular public. He did so with his charismatic appearance and through a rhythmic rhetoric (recurrent alteration of words, part of sentences, tones sounds and silences), embedded in the aesthetic and poetic tradition of the Black Arts Movement. In doing so, Johnson's speech aroused intense shared feelings that, when his 'news' about 'the news' interpellated the crowd to (indeed) become "black folks", were released through, what Durkheim (1912/1995) termed, collective effervescence. This notion points to an exalted affective energy that tends to arise when people gather and participate in rhythmic ceremonies: from sports events to festivals, religious services or, in this case, a Black History Month celebration lecture. Particularly when led by charismatic performers like Johnson these gatherings "rouse exalted feelings, transferable to all kinds of collective representations" (Møen, 2019, p. 30). Whatever the outcome of collective effervescence, which depends on the group representations offered and to what end, according to Durkheim it is the 'non-rational' from whence the 'rational' could (and should) emerge. Only through (bodily, emotionally, spiritually) *experiencing* a collective, could people *feel* urged to *think* about and *act* on the public good. This is something Dr. Johnson seemed to be well aware of as his performance first and foremost roused collective feelings of a Pan-African/black nationalist ideal of 'blackness'. During his speech, he said:

> More important than the message for us black people is communication of the VIBRATIONNNN that the message will send through. In other words, when you say: Dr. Umar have you heard what I said? I say: sister, I heard what you said, but I really FELT WHAT YOU MEANT! *[Applause]*. Black folks! We communicate no message, we communicate ENERGYYYY.

*

Johnson's lecture was an example of how news was practiced, consumed, and disseminated by the popular public on Sint Maarten. Here, it is important to stress once more that his presence on the island was not only news but also 'the news'. As I described, those who had invited him had in fact become 'the news'.

They were (partly) in charge of 'the news' (its production) while providing 'the news' as their news (its content). And so it happened that Johnson had appeared on radio and TV in newspapers and on news websites, closely chaperoned by those who had flown him in earlier that week. Thus, Johnson had been provided a platform for warming up the crowd of Sint Maarteners without much critical and/or rational interference.

Interestingly, after Johnson's performance it took one whole week before I noticed one single news report on the lecture circulating across multiple news outlets on the island. Solicited and unsolicited copy-pasting of news articles was a regular practice in the media landscape on Sint Maarten (and on Curaçao). Yet, it was also quite common for representatives of the institutional public (from NGOs to foundations, cultural clubs and, also for we as scholars) to send out press releases that were, in fact, ready-to-use news articles. A similar strategy was employed by commercial businesses. They often sent out press releases that, at times, were published as news articles, while being, in fact, advertisements. This explained how it happened that 'news articles' about the newest Happy Meal toys of McDonalds could appear in 'the news' (such as I experienced on Curaçao) or that the release of the Heineken Regatta limited edition cans of Coca-Cola was published as a news article (such as on Sint Maarten). This was not due to an ignorant or oblivious editor. In such cases it had merely been a decision of the paper's management and/or commercial department to do a loyal and generous advertiser a favor (an advertisement for free). While such practices were far from exceptional to news media on the islands (i.e., Maat & De Jong, 2013), the prevalent lack of a workforce and resources within the islands' news media often made them quite eager to publish these articles right away, with or without tweaking the heading. This institutional news practice was a win-win situation. The media saved time and money, while representatives of the institutional public made sure that their message came across exactly as they wanted it to.

With this in mind, I was intrigued by the representation of Johnson's lecture in this news article which basically built on Johnson's quotes interspersed with those of the main organizer of the event [see **Figure 9**]. In the article, Johnson was first and foremost referred to as a US clinical psychologist who had talked about the (mis)diagnosis of black boys on the island and the responsibility of black men for the upbringing of their sons. While Johnson had indeed talked about this, it had only been briefly and at the beginning of his lecture. I found it remarkable that only when the article was concluding was it mentioned by the organizer that

Dr. Johnson Warns Against Misdiagnosis of Boys in St. Martin.

Last Updated: 29 February 2016 Published: 29 February 2016

0 Comments



Umar Johnson (center, autographing book) surrounded by guests at CLF's 25th annual Black History Month Lecture, USM (2.20.16). (CLF photo)

MARIGOT/GREAT BAY:---"When you give a five-year-old, an eight-year-old, or a ten-year-old psychiatric medication, you are interfering with the brain natural growth process," said US clinical psychologist Dr. Umar Johnson at the 25th annual Black History Celebration Lecture.

Dr. Johnson delivered the anniversary lecture, which was organized by Conscious Lyrics Foundation (CLF), "to an audience of over 600 people, at the University of St. Martin," said Shujah Reiph, CLF president.

Dr. Johnson warned against using various psychiatric medications on the island's children—citing their increase use on especially Black boys. He identified some of the drugs and compared what would be their effects here to what he sees in his practice in the USA. "These medications cook the brain of my young St. Martin brothers," said Dr. Johnson, who is also a certified school psychologist.

"I have learned for the three nights that I've been in St. Martin that many of you have been used to fund a multi-billion-dollar psychiatric drug cartel, misdiagnosing your boys with an invisible disease called ADHD and conduct disorder," said Dr. Johnson.

Dr. Johnson read to the attentive audience the definition of ADHD in the DSM-5, the psychiatric diagnosis handbook of the American Psychiatric Association. He then said that such a diagnosis more accurately represents "Ain't no Daddy at Home Disorder."

He went on to stress the importance of Black men's active involvement in their sons' upbringing. "Your son doesn't need drugs; your son needs his daddy," emphasized Dr. Johnson.

Dr. Johnson, who also identifies himself as a pan-Africanist, received a standing ovation after his three-hour lecture, and spent another hour autographing his book, Psycho-Academic Holocaust, said Reiph. While interacting with the guests, a few people could be heard asking Dr. Johnson when he would be returning to the island, said Reiph.

"In fact, soon as the Q&A period was over, the guests had rushed to the book table and purchased all 150 copies of the author's book that were on sale on Saturday," said Reiph.

The history lecture, which took place on February 20, 2016, was organized by CLF in collaboration with MP Christopher Emmanuel. "On behalf of CLF, I thank all of the partners, audience members, and well-wishers who made the 25th annual Black History Celebration lecture a smashing success," said Reiph.

Figure 9: News article about the lecture of Dr. Umar Johnson, published by several news outlets (i.e., *Soualiganews*, *721-news*, *Today newspaper*, *SMN-news*, *SXM-talks*) and shared via Facebook between 29 February and 2 March 2016. The screenshot is taken from *SMN-news* (2016).

Johnson "also identifies himself as a Pan-Africanist", and that he "received a standing ovation after his three-hour lecture and spent another hour autographing his book". It was not stressed though that this standing ovation had been received due to his interpellation of a black nationalist, Pan-African sense

of belonging, rather than because of his analysis of the misdiagnosis of black boys on St. Martin.

The article made me wonder why the organizers had chosen to represent – whether it had been through an interview, a press release, or a ready-to-use article – the lecture in this particular way and why now (a week later). It seemed to me as if they, the group of black nationalist activists, did not want to be represented by and in 'the news' as a group affiliating with Pan-African thought. Of course, this could be understood in light of them forming part of the island's establishment, which had traditionally been 'creole'. As such, as I described above, they had to closely cooperate with not only 'black', but also people with other skin tones – from 'red' to 'yellow' and 'pink'. Moreover, as politicians in office they needed to consider Sint Maarten's highly diverse electorate. Openly advocating black power politics in relation to 'their people' would cost them votes. I come back to this below.

Yet, the news article also led me to reflect on my own opinion piece published a week earlier. It seemed to me as though the organizers had wanted to present a counter-image of the lecture. This was already illustrated by the picture they had used. The one they used depicted Johnson surrounded by the crowd and signing his book. The two pictures that I had selected were different: 1) a close-up of Johnson on stage, pointing his finger in the air; and 2) a shot taken from behind a sitting audience towards the stage on which Johnson was standing. I had selected these two pictures out of only a handful of pictures that I had taken for practical and more substantial reasons. Quite practically, they were among the few that were most sharp of the ones I had taken. In terms of substance, I had wanted to show Johnson in 'full action' – that is, as a powerful speaker that performed with vigor. With the second picture, I had chosen to give an audience perspective (towards the stage), which also allowed me to illustrate that the yard was packed and that there was not an empty chair in sight, but without showing peoples' faces. In contrast, with the picture accompanying the news article above, Johnson looked down which made him, rather than the people standing around him,[45] unrecognizable. This picture literally took Johnson 'off stage' and positioned him on equal level 'with the people' – an image that reminded me of

[45] Remarkably, the single reaction under the Facebook post of the organizer sharing this article was of someone tagging the guy standing in the picture's front with: "[X]...you're famous now bro...lol [laughing out loud]". This is an example of how the popular public communicates and consumes news.

how Lake Sr. had advocated for his cause. Yet, it also made me question my choice of pictures, also in relation to the text. Had I put Johnson 'on stage' in a way that was ignorant or biased towards the event?

The truth is that my intention had been to write a news article about Johnson's lecture to draw attention to his presence on the island. Despite circulating press announcements around Johnson's visit to Sint Maarten, I had found it remarkable that the biggest newspaper on the island had not really paid attention to it. Shortly after the lecture, however, I changed my mind and wrote an opinion piece instead. There were several reasons for this. One was that I wanted to give space to those who had been critical or reluctant to embrace Johnson's black nationalist, Pan-African ideals. While some people had expressed their hesitation and had voiced some criticism during the conversations I had afterwards, during Johnson's performance (counter-)voices had merely lost out to the emerging collective effervescence in the yard. When, for example, a young men asked Johnson what exactly was "our original African religion" and whether that was not Christianity, he was met by instant negativity ("nohoooo") from the audience. This response left the questioner stumbling. He replied, "But, it's just a question…".[46] I, myself, had felt uncomfortable with these dynamics of public effervescence that left limited space to question what Johnson had advocated. In hindsight, this feeling was probably also related to the impact of Johnson's interpellation of me being one of the "white folks making notes for tomorrow's newspaper". As I already had entered the yard that evening with the feeling of being somewhat out of place – exactly on the basis of representing the press as a 'white' person *on top of that* – Johnson's "Hey you!" had been spoken seemingly directly to me.

Apart from the challenges I foresaw with writing a 'factual' description of the evening as 'objectively' and 'neutrally' as I possibly could, I wondered whether such an attempt was feasible at all and, particularly in this case, desirable. Instead of trying to write such a piece, I wanted to give an account that made clear that whatever I wrote reflected my take on the event and reflected the information I had access to. It was therefore quite unfortunate that the

[46] Here, Johnson immediately interfered by critically addressing the audience: "No, let him aks! Not EVERRR criticize a question. Never do that". It was a strategy he often employed during the evening. He stirred the audience, while interpellating an us-versus-them ideology. Yet when people emotionally embraced this ideology and laughed or booed at 'the other', Johnson turned 180 degrees to criticize people for it.

opinion piece I eventually wrote was published not in the opinion section, but in the 'Islands' news section of the *The Daily Herald* on page 10. Despite my name being clearly mentioned on top of the article [see **Figure 8**], the piece's placement amidst news articles on page 10, may have given it an authority as part of 'the news' – that is, being 'factual' – that I had never intended for it have. It was only later that I reflected on why this piece had not been published in the opinion section. At the time, I did not discuss with the editors of *The Herald* what made them decide to organize the article as they did in the newspaper. The initial plan of handing in a news article may have played a role. Yet, it most probably also had to do with the authority I already represented – that is, as a PhD researcher from The Netherlands. In the popular public on the islands, the words of an 'expert' (based on titles and credentials rather than genuine expertise) were often not taken all too seriously. But in the institutional public, in which *The Herald* operated, the words of an 'expert' were in fact 'the news'. And so it happened that the piece was published in the 'Islands' news section on page 10.

Moreover, and this may have been unintentionally, it appeared next to a news article based on a governmental press release that told quite a different story [see **Figure 8**]. This news item was about two newcomers sworn in to work as health care practitioners in Sint Maarten. The two accompanying pictures showed the Health Minister, himself once a newcomer, (he was born in New York as the son of Chinese migrants) congratulating the newly recruited health care practitioners. According to the Minister, citing the press release, "These two health care professionals are moving forward to ensuring that the Sint Maarten population is provided with quality service and appropriate health care". In contrast to my critical representation of Johnson's lecture as a forceful attempt to remind dark-skinned Sint Maarteners of a shared past (African *before* Sint Maartener), this news item evoked a positive notion around welcoming newcomers – wherever they were from – as long as they contributed to Sint Maarten's future ("moving *forward*"). Both in text and image, the second article presented an image of "the friendly island". This is how the 'creole' establishment had long promoted Sint Maarten as a tourist destination. This image was also dominant – if not in news articles, then by (edited) press releases and advertisements – in *The Daily Herald*. This hegemonic representation of the island in 'the news' had driven me to write a piece on an alternative voice in the first place. Yet, the positioning in the newspaper of what had turned into a critical

opinion piece added force to my critical stance, which, in turn, reinforced the dominant representation of Sint Maarten in 'the news'.

At the same time, my aim with this opinion piece was also to nuance what *had* been provided in 'the news' around Johnson's presence on the island. This news had primarily been provided and closely managed by the group of black nationalist intellectuals. It had been based on their press announcements, radio readings, Facebook posts, and word-of-mouth circulation that hundreds of Sint Maarteners had come to the lecture. In the week prior to Johnson's talk, I had noticed a video clip of one of Johnson's radio sessions circulating on Facebook. This clip, where Johnson is recorded as advocating for 'black power' in a way similar to how he conducted himself during his lecture, had already excited many Sint Maarteners and got them to attend his lecture. People had reacted to and shared this clip with comments such as: "Oh my…"; "Powerful! Where will this be tomorrow?"; "Bro, you really need to come!" Some people, therefore, had already been 'warmed up' for the evening that would come.

Others, however, especially those who had merely read press releases where Johnson had been portrayed as, first and foremost, a clinical psychologist who supported the personal growth and development of black people, felt that – once there – their expectations were not met. For some, it was *only there and then* that they found out what Dr. Umar Johnson really stood for. This was certainly the case for those who, whether consciously or not, had identified with those whom Johnson called the "black bourgeoisie". In response to my opinion piece, I received an email of a man that seemed to represent the group of black people on the island that Johnson had targeted:

> I had gone there with the expectation to hear something positive about the black man. "His achievements to society, his positive influence on the human being".[47] But it was a pathetic performance, insulting to anyone present, although many were oblivious to this and kept on applauding derogatory comments that were directed at them. I was about to leave, when he started about "BLACK MAN WITH BLACK WOMAN" and not mixing. But I thought it was better to hear it out and then form an opinion. Thank you for your contribution to The HERALD. Although many will probably think: again a white person

[47] Here, he cited a sentence from the press release about Johnson's lecture, which had circulated across the news to announce and promote the event.

> thinking she can say something about us. A non-issue. You are absolutely right. (Email "Reaction African/St. Martiner", February 23, 2016)

What I found interesting was that this man had written to me in Dutch instead of English. Without knowing who this person was, it made me wonder whether he was highly educated and had studied/lived in The Netherlands. These thoughts were at least partly confirmed when I later found out that this man had been the director of an important public institute on the island. What also caught my attention in this man's reaction was that the man explicitly expressed his frustration with how the public effervescence during the evening had closed people's minds. Johnson's lecture was an insult to all present, he argued, but "many did not notice and kept clapping for the derogatory remarks addressed to them". While I, as I described above, had noticed that people did not always clap their hands because they agreed with everything Johnson said, this man reminded me that not everyone had noticed what Johnson was *doing* this evening, namely inciting a process of interpellation that roused a collective effervescence. This process did not take place on the level of people's understanding, but on the level of what they felt individually and collectively. In other words, people became increasingly affected by Johnson's interpellation, whether they were aware, understood, let alone agreed with what Johnson *said*.

The resulting public effervescence confirmed the lecture's "smashing success", as the main organizer was quoted describing it in the news report one week afterwards. All 150 copies of Johnson's book had sold out quite quickly, and over 600 people attended, according to the organizer. In addition, the organizer stated that Johnson had "received a standing ovation" after his lecture. According to Donna, my opinion piece had ignored these clear signs of how well what Johnson had to say resonated among Sint Maarteners. She wrote to me:

> I humbly suggest, in light of your quest to also focus on what is not said or written (in the local media), is to question why Dr. Johnson's lecture had an unprecedented turnout (never before in the history of ANY activity at USM or by the hosts) and why he resonates so well with young people in particular. (Email Donna, February 23, 2016).

With reference to our previous email exchange, in which I had said I was also interested in what is *not* said/written in the local news, she seemed to argue

here – like the organizer would in the news report – that the "unprecedented turnout" was a clear sign of how broadly Johnson's lecture resonated among black people on Sint Maarten. This, in turn, seemed to point to the 'truth' that he spoke about the lived realities of black people on the island. But was this, in fact, the case? In addition to the fact that this turnout was also or, at least, partly related to the active promotion of Johnson via the organizers' news channels and due to their access to 'the news', I argue that "why he resonates so well with young people in particular" was closely related to what Johnson did this evening, and what the group of black nationalists on the island do in general: 'hailing' people on the island – especially among the younger generations – by stirring public feelings, which were then transferred to a collective representation of 'blackness'.

The black nationalist establishment actively recruited young people to join their struggle for independence and black power. In the week before the lecture, they scheduled Johnson for a two-hour session with high school students in a big sports auditorium.[48] This session may have been the trigger that got some students to attend Johnson's lecture, which, in turn, indeed may have affected a group of Sint Maarten youngsters. The day after the lecture I saw several young(er) attendees posting (and reacting on posts) on Facebook, stating they had found the lecture, among other things, "an eye opener", "inspiring", "a black power experience", and "uplifting". Their comments echoed that of the girl in the audience who had found the talk "educational" [see **Figure 8**].

Yet, what the black nationalist establishment did not point out was that these heightened feelings and accompanied internalizations of a certain 'black' identity could have been confined to the particular moment and space in which these were interpellated. In a reaction on Facebook of one of Johnson's radio clips, a young woman pointed this out by saying, "The sad thing is that the people get worked up and excited for a few days and then return to their same old ways, seen it happen oh so many times".[49] Moreover, the 'black' establishment did not

[48] This session was announced in a press release on 17 February 2016. I did not attend and I did not notice any reports, news articles, or Facebook posts about this event. Therefore, I do not have an impression – whether first- or second-hand – of this student event. Yet, based on other events and statements about the recruitment of young persons in 'the news' by representatives of the black nationalist establishment, this event most probably was scheduled in order to enhance awareness about Johnson's thinking among high school students on the island.

[49] On the evening of the lecture, one of the organizers posted a couple of photos of the event on Facebook. This post was 'liked' by more than 100 people, it was shared by 16 people, and it got

acknowledge that there was an emerging group of young(er) people on the island who were focused on why things did not change for the better on the island. This was in contrast to seeking a shared 'black' identity rooted in an African past (and present). This emerging young(er) generation of Sint Maarteners had not been impressed by Johnson('s talk) and neither had they been interpellated by his ideology of 'blackness'. On the contrary, they were quite critical of the work of the black nationalist establishment on Sint Maarten. In the week after Johnson's lecture, I noticed how this emerging group of young Sint Maarteners practiced news and 'the news' to express an alternative common sense of belonging, to which I now turn in the following section.

3.4. THE COMMON SENSE OF BELONGING OF AN EMERGING GENERATION OF YOUNG(ER) SINT MAARTENERS

When I found the *Teen Times* on my desk at *The Herald*'s newsroom on Wednesday morning February 24, it immediately caught my attention. *Teen Times* was a monthly publication of *The Daily Herald*, which was almost entirely made by and for young people on the island. The front page of this month's edition [see **Figure 10**], which was visually and textually quite provocative, made me curious to find out what was inside. In the middle of the front page was a photo of a dancing woman with long braided locks in a short African tunic. Her posture was strong and active. Her eyes pointed firmly at the camera and – as I still was looking at the front page at my desk – she seemed to look at me. At the level of her shins there was a question printed: "This issue might be TOO BLACK?" (2016, p. 1).[50]

This question immediately brought me back to the end of Johnson's speech, when he had said, "So let me break it down, St. Martin. Am I not TOO BLACK for

14 reactions. The reaction to a post on the same page one week later – the news article looking back on the lecture [see **Figure 9**] – was rather different. Only 30 people liked it, eight people shared it, and there was one reaction of someone who recognized his friend on the photo ("you famous now bro!"). Although such numbers do not say much about the impact of Johnson's lecture, they are illustrative of how people soon went back to their day-to-day lives.

[50] The *Teen Times* was written and edited by (senior) high school students. Because they are minors, I refer to their contributions not as (author/editor), but by the headline of articles and the overall *Teen Times* edition.

some people?" With this in my mind, I assumed that this issue – the *Teen Times* – could also be "too black" for some. In other words, I expected that the articles in this youth paper could give me some insights into "why he resonates so well with young people in particular", as Donna had suggested I investigate. Yet, as soon as I started to scroll through the paper, I realized that the question on the front page was not only directed at the paper's potential readers, but also to the teenage writers who had contributed to this paper themselves. They reflected on whether this issue – black nationalism, black power, and Pan-Africanism on the island – was "too black?"



Figure 10: Front Page of the 2016 edition of the *Teen Times* (This issue might be too black?, 2016, p. 1).

Half of the issue with a total of 24 pages was dedicated to Black History Month. The paper opened with a critical piece, titled: "TO BLACK CONSCIOUS FOLKS: SOMETIMES YOU ARE TOO BLACK", which was followed by a report, "Young and post-racial", taken from *USA Today*. On the following two pages, first there was a piece, "Black History in Caribbean society", about the need for Caribbean people to learn about "black history". Second, in a personal reflection titled "Black Enough?" a student discussed black power ideology as a weapon of exclusivity and segregation. Pages 6 and 7 were dedicated to a photo series featuring models sporting their respective cultural wear (Chinese, African, Indian, and Sint Maarten). The introduction read, "They appear in this month's issue as we celebrate and acknowledge not only black history and culture, but St. Maarten history and culture, which is one of acceptance and diversity". The following article, "I don't 'speak white'", addressed a student's experience with being accused of "speaking white" throughout his life. The next article was titled "Having a colour blind

approach to racism is actually racist", which outlined an argument against the neglect of ongoing (institutional) racism. Then came "The Haitian Revolution and its significance to us" dealt with the historical importance of this epoch for the Caribbean. And after a two-page photo series with Sint Maarten couples and friends with the title, "We may or may not be together", the paper covered general sections featuring, amongst others, students abroad, sexuality and other taboo issues, letters to the editor, sports, and music.

Before focusing on the articles addressing the overarching theme of black history, let me briefly say something about the *Teen Times'* background. One of *The Herald*'s editors, who had assisted in the publication of this month's edition, told me that the *Teen Times* had been an initiative designed to attract high school seniors who were interested in writing and producing their own paper. As such, these teenagers had to be higher educated. In general, they belonged to the middle and upper classes on the island, though there were a few exceptions. The editor pointed out that it was highly interesting to see what was going on in these teenager's minds. The editor said, "They write about sex and drugs and have some very interesting perspectives on actualities. They are not influenced by political parties and opinions. It can be really refreshing" (from my Fieldnotes, February 12, 2016).

I experienced this refreshing take on life on Sint Maarten when I read this month's *Teen Times*. I learned about perspectives and thoughts that I had not encountered in 'the news' before and certainly not in relation to debates about (anti-)racism and black power on the island. What I also found remarkable was how vocal, outspoken, and often self-reflective many of these teenage contributors appeared to be. This was immediately illustrated by the capitalized title of the opening article: "TO BLACK CONSCIOUS FOLKS: SOMETIMES YOU ARE TOO BLACK" (2016, p. 2). What followed was a rather direct attack on black nationalist/pan-Africanist activists like Johnson who advocated a common sense of belonging based on essentialist notions of one's skin-color and presumed ancestry. This piece was written by student who argued that 'black' people on the island ('we') had grown tired of these activists ('you') and what they advocated for "on You Tube and numerous other platforms", in their books, and in their lectures.

What I found interesting about this piece was that the writer targeted these "black conscious folks" on the basis not so much of their cause – as she did not deny the reality of racism and inequality – but on the basis of what they aimed

for and how they tried to reach their aims. In doing so, she countered the idea that the black nationalist establishment spoke with 'black people' as if their imagined ideals of 'being black' *truly* resonated among Sint Maarteners. In fact, she argued that this, what Donna had said to be, 'resonation' was in fact the result of *intimidation*. Deliberately or not, she related this argument to Johnson's lecture:

> We've heard your cries to leave the black church's white Jesus and the Bible, yet we can't help but notice that within your group, you quote elders such as Marcus Garvey, El Hajj Malik El Shabazz and Dick Gregory just as much, if not more than devout Christians recite scriptures from the Bible. We ask: What good is your conscious group if members have joined and turned away from their beliefs, not because they felt you were right, but because they were intellectually intimated by you? We wonder if your intimidation techniques are the reason your movement has been stagnant for years. Many followers; yet few believers. (To black conscious folks: Sometimes you are too black, 2016, p. 2)

As I described above, I wondered whether it was really – and only – "intellectual intimidation" that made people into "followers". In the case of Johnson's lecture it had been, first and foremost, the collective feelings that had been stirred by the 'Prince of Pan-Africanism' whose charisma had been a mix of intellect, personality, and rhetorical talent. That being said, I recognized the writer's criticism of the black nationalists' role in actively hailing and recruiting "followers", while they advocated a *fake consciousness* as if the imagination of a shared sense of 'black' belonging would make the lives of 'black' people on the island truly better and easier. Arguing quite the opposite, she wrote:

> Let's stop pretending that merely reading and reciting information can make the problem go away; let's stop pretending that getting all the people on one page at the same time is possible. Let's deal with what's in front of us. (To black conscious folks: Sometimes you are too black, 2016, p. 2)

The writer pointed out that she found the struggle for a shared 'blackness' reprehensible because not only it was impossible ("There will never be unity, history shows us that our ancestors too went to war with one another") but also undesirable ("We all can't afford to invest in your debates which destroy much

more than they build"). According to her, events like Johnson's lecture that often took place under the premise of empowering 'black people' were doing quite the opposite. They distracted people from taking charge of their own lives in the here and now. She therefore urged for a shift "from reading history to accepting our position in creating a future worth living to see", adding that "The days of black leaders have passed!", and "Personal responsibility is the order of the day!"

It was not the first time that I had heard or read this call for taking personal responsibility in the contingent here and now. In fact, many young people on Sint Maarten had shared with me that they felt that the imagination of a 'black' belonging that was rooted in a past of colonialism and slavery no longer – and, to some, had never been – 'the order of the day' on Sint Maarten. In a conversation with a radio broadcaster in his early thirties who had returned to the island after some years abroad this man related to me that many on the island (including his old friends) continued to be trapped in, what he called, the "no pain, all gain" mentality. One of the biggest reasons for this mentality was, according to this broadcaster, the story of slavery which kept on being reproduced by the island-wide establishment and, in turn, internalized by Sint Maarteners. "Of course, this history is tragic", he said, "but what do you do about it TODAY?" (from my fieldnotes, February 2, 2017). The story of slavery did not help people in dealing with their daily realities. Instead, like the writer in the *Teen Times*, he argued that it made people continue to compare themselves to others, without realizing what they were capable of themselves. With his radio station, which aimed to reach out to young people on the island, he alternated popular music with short moments of discussion and reflection on topics that were generally considered to be taboo among Sint Maarteners. As such, he wanted to make listeners aware that the world was and could be more than the world they believed was theirs. He said, "I want to give people small moments of escape, even if only in their head" (ibid).

The need to deal with 'the order of the day' was not only expressed by young(er) people on Sint Maarten. In a conversation I had with an activist from the older generation who had long (and fiercely) advocated for the 'local', 'native' St. Martiner, he told me that he had come to realize that what had been important and logical 30 years ago was no longer relevant and, in fact, could be counter-productive these days. The reason for this was not only that the population of the island had grown and changed rapidly, but also the powers at work on and beyond the island. Life on Sint Maarten, according to him,

represented the globe on 32 square meters. As such, on Sint Maarten there were now endless opportunities for people that had not been there 30 years ago – opportunities that were mainly provided by digital technologies, global media platforms and expanding networks of people. At the same time, however, the island also and increasingly faced world problems and their consequences. Daily life on Sint Maarten had come to be infiltrated by the effects of international crime, drug traffic (and use), corruption, money laundering, poverty, climate change, and laborer exploitation. To deal with these problems, which affected the daily life of poor people on Sint Maarten the most, promoting an imagination of belonging that was exclusionary and essentialist only made things worse. In fact, he argued, 'own-people-first' ideologies played into the hands of those who *did* have power on the island – like it did with rising populism and nationalism in the US, in Latin America, in European countries, and across the world.

This vision was shared by many on the island and actively expressed by critical higher-educated Sint Maarteners who had studied or were studying/working abroad. By the middle of 2016 when I was doing this fieldwork, not only returnees but also the young Sint Maarteners who were living across the world could engage in news and 'the news' on Sint Maarten. They did this, quite actively, in closed and open Facebook groups (*WiVoice*, *SXM opinions*, etc.) or via comment sections on websites. In reaction to the news article published one week after Johnson's lecture [see **Figure 9**], which was shared on Facebook, I noticed how two persons from Sint Maarten started a discussion [see **Figure 11**]. In the few comments that were exchanged, these persons – apparently both knowledgeable about youth issues on the island – argued that these issues were neither linked exclusively to 'blackness' nor exclusively to 'boys' on Sint Maarten. "That's another US issue", one of them wrote, adding in his next comment, "We also feel the need to make race the main source of all our problems". These higher-educated Sint Maarteners were thus well aware of how debates elsewhere – in this case the ongoing anti-racism debate in the US – affected debates held on the island. Moreover, like in the example here, they often aimed to deconstruct the generalization of debates, by bringing the attention back to Sint Maarten's order of the day. ("This is where the focus needs to be").

Yet it was certainly not only higher-educated young people on and from the island who stressed the need to deal with "what is in front of us". In fact, as the writer of the opening article of the *Teen Times* had already emphasized, "We all can't afford to invest in your debates that destroy more than they build". This

was certainly the case for those on the island who had most to lose. Among them were many who understood that the anti-colonial/black nationalist rhetoric and ongoing plea for independence were most of all, in the words of a popular radio DJ, "the illusions of the *politricksians* [a combination of politician and trickster]" (Guadeloupe, 2005, p. 160). The reason why many working-class people nevertheless voted for "politricksians", as they were commonly referred to (literally or not) in the popular public, was not because they were fooled by their words. Rather, in their view, they supported politicians in return for something (from cash to goods or a job) that could make their lives some-what easier on a short term. In the long run, however, those in office, whether darker or lighter skinned, mainly were and continued to be there, to serve their own interests in-stead of that of the people of Sint Maarten.

That said, it was also in the popular public – where news generally thrived on everything that stirred emotions – that tactics of interpel-

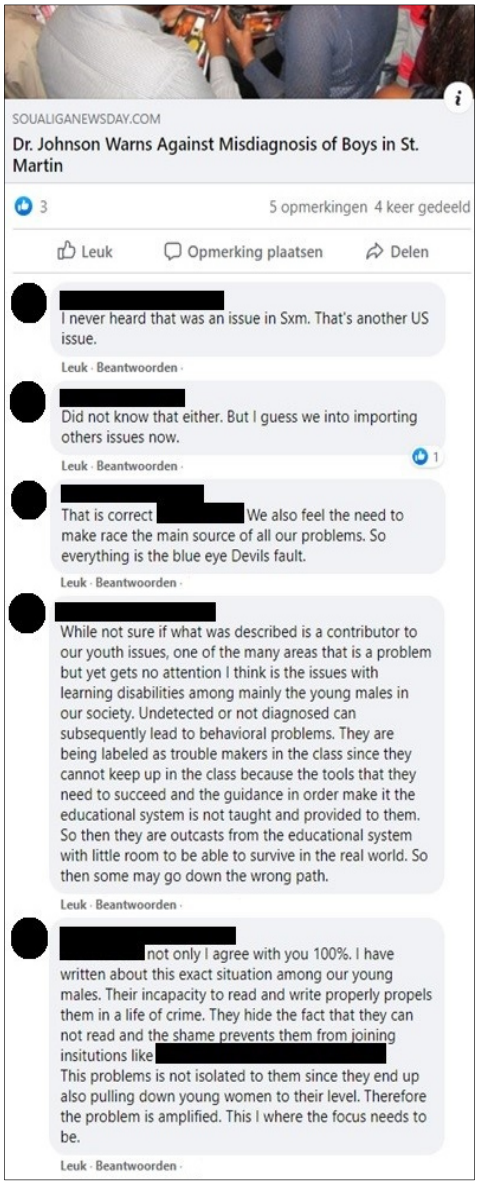


Figure 11: Facebook reactions to news article "Dr. Johnson warns against misdiagnoses of boys St. Martin" shared by *Soualiganewsday.com*.

lation were most effective. Here, one could find young(er) Sint Maarteners who were, in fact, quite affected by the charisma and energy of a person like Johnson. He was a 'bad guy' ignoring the conventions in the same way, for example, famous rap and R&B artists did. As I described before, US media and culture had a big impact on daily life in Sint Maarten. As such, even those who had not attended Johnson's lecture knew who he was. There were ongoing controversies around Johnson (such as the legitimacy of his degrees and the money he had been collecting from 'black' communities for a school he never built) and the arousal he caused in TV talk shows, radio interviews, and other US media. I only found out after his lecture on Sint Maarten that there is quite an active online anti-Umar Johnson movement among 'black' Americans, including anti-Umar twitter accounts, anti-Umar Facebook pages, and websites.

As I followed the social media accounts one of the young Sint Maarteners who had 'liked' the announcement of Johnson's lecture on Facebook, I noticed an interesting conversation between him and his friends under a YouTube clip of Johnson that he had shared in 2019, saying, "I know a lot of y'all don't like Dr. Umar [Johnson] but the brother dropping some gems!!" In reaction, another young Sint Maartener said:

> Question is: why is he [Dr. Johnson] so out there without having to worry about the system fucking him over? He's been sold out, that's why he got connections with people like Jay [Z]. His job is to keep your minds on physical things...Following people like this comes with limits. He would 'Never' teach u anything about ascending spiritually...I know u rock with him bro, but real is real and fake is fake. We both learn that in the streets. He's 'bout his paper not us...simple King. (Facebook timeline, February 13, 2019).

What I found interesting about this reaction was that this person criticized Johnson and his Pan-African ideology by also focusing on the 'order of the day'. Yet, rather than referring to this in terms of (improving) the institutional order as in the Facebook discussion transcribed above [see **Figure 11**], he pointed to what's in front of people "in the streets" and urged looking into one's (spiritual) self. This conversation on Facebook illustrated how, in the popular public, young Sint Maarteners discussed the figure of Johnson. And the quote cited above linked up to the mix of music, education, and awareness by which the previously

discussed radio broadcaster aimed to open up the imagination of Sint Maarten's youth.

The quote also related to the self-reflexivity of critical teenagers in the Black History Month edition of the *Teen Times*. In the opening article, for example, the author advocated taking responsibility by stating, "Let's change the focus of the black conscious community and let our first order of business be learning thyself". In another article titled "BLACK ENOUGH?" a young woman discussed her experiences "as a half-white, half-black individual". She questioned what exactly was 'blackness'? She stated:

> The problem is this incessant need to a) label something in order to feel as if one understands it and therefore masters it – even though NOTHING and NO ONE can truly be known; (…) and b) shove one's individual beliefs down someone's throat even – or especially – when unasked, instead of sticking to one's own beliefs and letting others chose which they can live by. (Black enough?, 2016, p. 5)

For many of these young critical minds, searching one's own soul and taking responsibility for oneself formed the key to "deal with what is in front of us". This emerging group of critical and vocal young(er) Sint Maarteners stressed the importance of dealing with and celebrating the island's order of the day. It was a highly plural society that formed a dynamic regional and global junction of relations between people, politics, technologies, and business. By disseminating this story via institutional media and popular channels alike (e.g., *The Daily Herald*'s *Teen Times*, Facebook, and radio broadcasts), this emerging group of Sint Maarten youngsters countered the ideology of black nationalists on the island. Let me now turn to what these institutional and popular news practices mean for generating common senses of belonging on Sint Maarten.

3.5. POLITICS OF BELONGING IN A SHARED PUBLIC SPHERE

As I showed in the case of Johnson's visit to the island, the (bourgeois) public sphere on Sint Maarten is a contested space. There is a group of intellectuals who view the public sphere as a space for black nationalism. Via practices of both news and 'the news', they advocate a racialized politics of belonging. A new generation, however, does not feel that this politics of belonging represents Sint Maarten's

society today. Via popular and institutional news channels, they challenge black politics by advocating for an acceptance of a contingent present over a fixed past thereby opening up imaginaries to potential futures.

In advocating black nationalism, the group of intellectuals builds on the 'Lake media tradition' that had taken shape as part of a counterhegemonic struggle enacted by those aiming for power. These had been the up-and-coming (petit) bourgeoisie of various shades and ethnic extractions often with credential coming back to the days of slavery and post abolition. They had situated themselves against the local establishment. In this struggle, a black nationalist version of the concerns of the popular public was mediatized in the institutional public through its translation into a politics of belonging that spoke of working-class concerns in a racialized way. As a result, the members of the petit bourgeoisie attained access to the institutional order. The result was that the bourgeois public sphere on Sint Maarten was partially transformed from being 'creole' to being black nationalist.

It is from this position in the institutional public, coupled with the established news media, that they practice news and 'the news' to push their politics of belonging into Sint Maarten's public sphere. In addition to various media practices operated through a Caribbean-wide publishing company and an internationally acclaimed annual book fair, they were able to attain political power. I showed that both in their media and political endeavors, Sint Maarten's black nationalists work closely together with the 'creole' establishment on the island. This establishment has been composed of the gatekeeping families since colonial times. Today's advocates of a black politics of belonging on Sint Maarten are thus part of the island's establishment, while advocating an alternative ('black') sense of belonging in the institutional public.

An emerging generation of young(er) Sint Maarteners feels that this black nationalism is not fulfilling. They do not recognize themselves in an essentialist, racialized politics of belonging. Instead, they use various popular and institutional news channels to express a common sense of belonging that is grounded in their everyday experiences of growing up in the highly diverse and dynamic society that Sint Maarten is today. In doing so, they also point to the power dynamics on the island that go back to colonial times. While the hegemonic arrangement on this island has been significantly transformed since the 1960s – mainly through the emergence of a petit bourgeoisie that includes a significant group of educated Sint Maarteners with a dark(er) brown skin color – the island continued

to be run as a 'family business'. This had had been the case with former transitions between and within gatekeeping families through means of marriages and business endeavors. A new generation of middle-class Sint Maarteners was well aware of how these families, whatever the various shades of their skin color, backed each other to remain in power.

The news media practices of the black nationalist intellectuals that I described in this chapter provided a crucial asset in attaining and remaining in power. It is important to stress here that before 2010, the black nationalists lacked "substantial media support" (Guadeloupe, 2008, p. 216). As of 2010 this had changed for two main reasons. First, they attained direct access to the island's administration by joining the party of Heyliger, Wathey's grandson. As had been the case in previous periods of Dutch neglect of its colony, the prospect of an autonomous status (with minimal Dutch control) created a power vacuum that provided opportunities for those who aimed to reach – or increase – their power on the island. Second, the group of black nationalist intellectuals managed to establish business partnerships with the House of Nehesi Publishers and the annual book fair. Political power on Sint Maarten meant a rapid increase in capital, which, in turn, benefited the established media entities that had managed to survive since the 1960s.

This was how the glasshouse that was Sint Maarten functioned. The politics of belonging perpetuated by black nationalist intellectuals on Sint Maarten is a (media) technology *against* ('white') Dutch control, instead of *for* poor 'black' residents on Sint Maarten. A telling example of this dynamic was when black nationalist advocates took the lead in orchestrating "Stand for SXM", a silent protest that was announced in the media as a bottom-up initiative to work towards a stronger Sint Maarten, but, in the words of an online journalist, "proved to be a loud protest against Dutch meddling in Sint Maarten" (Henriquez, 2018, n.p.). While black nationalist advocates took the lead in fueling anti-Dutch sentiments with slogans, such as "We are still slaves"; "Let our leaders lead"; and "Go away the Netherlands", that dominated social media platforms, in the popular public it was clear that the protest directly related to the Dutch investigation into the criminal activities of Theo Heyliger (and other party members). Heyliger was found guilty of bribery and money laundering on May 15, 2020.

To be clear, my point in this chapter is not to deny that there are deeply embedded processes of institutional racism at work in the Kingdom of the

Netherlands and across today's world. The Dutch world continues to be intrinsically unequal and there are many Sint Maarteners I spoke to who suffer from this. Yet they could be found among the poor irregular migrant workers on the island rather than the black nationalist intellectuals. A racialized sense of belonging did not speak to the first group, nor did any politics of belonging, for that matter. Those belonging to the lower rankings of the social order did not have the time to engage with intellectual discussions on Pan-Africanism, nor to counter the latter by writing critical articles in *The Herald* or its *Teen Times* supplement. These were all news practices, as I have shown in this chapter, through which the middle classes articulated and contested their politics of belonging. In the next chapter, I shift my focus to the common senses of belonging as expressed by the working classes. And I do so by turning to practices of news and 'the news' on Curaçao.



4 | The lottery of life

A common sense of belonging as expressed by Curaçao's working classes

While the last chapter focused on the politics of belonging contested through practices of news and 'the news' of the middle classes on Sint Maarten, in this chapter I follow practices of newsmaking that articulate the common sense belonging of the working classes on Curaçao. I do so via an existentialist anthropological approach (Jackson, 2005; Jackson & Piette, 2015) connected to a phenomenology of hope and fear. In the case I examine in this chapter, this means seeking a better future via winning the lottery and paying attention to the misfortunes that befall others via news and 'the news'.

Departing from the notion that "the determinants of meaning in human life are found in the structures of the unconscious mind, or in political and economic infrastructures, both local and global"[51], existential anthropology redirects its focus to "phenomena that lie outside of logos with terms like 'spirituality', 'mystery', 'intuition', 'soul', 'the more', 'the uncanny', 'the numinous', or 'the love that passes all understanding'" (Jackson & Piette, 2015, p. 4). The existential anthropological approach employs insights drawn from phenomenology. It applies them to anthropology to explore these existential phenomena in concrete day-to-day situations where they emerge in between immediate, sensible experience (e.g., a sensing of hope) and the mediated articulation thereof (e.g., the translation of a sensing of hope, by which we come to terms with it). So, "what characterizes the existential-phenomenological perspective", according to Jackson and Piette (2015),

> Is not only a refusal to reduce human experience to a priori categories such as the social, the cultural, the biological, or the historical, but a determination to open our minds to domains of human experience that fall outside of [this categorization]. (p. 11)

I find this existential-phenomenological approach useful as it allows me to clearly explicate and illustrate the common sense belonging as experienced by the working classes on Curaçao, and demonstrate how it is articulated through practices of newsmaking. As I joined in with and followed these news practices during my fieldwork, I learned that the working classes on Curaçao do not aim to organize and seek revolution as those who participated in the 1969 uprising

[51] The existential anthropological approach was developed in critical reaction to a tendency in contemporary anthropology (and in the social sciences, more generally) to focus on the empirical, rational, and structural-functionalist elements of the human condition.

(Trinta di Mei, see Chapter Two). Neither do they practice a Protestant Ethic (discipline, austerity, rationality) (Weber, 2002). Instead, they work, enjoy life abundantly, and seek via tricks and shortcuts such as the lottery and other games of chance, to leave a life of poverty behind. Their ambition is to live as the elites do rather than to topple the existing structures. An existential anthropological approach allows me to do justice to this mode (and moments) of being and belonging, as it departs from an awareness that:

> The human struggle for love, recognition, respect, dignity, and well-being is never entirely dependent on a person's circumstances – her social class or ethnicity, his location in a social hierarchy, an economic field, or a state – despite the power of such 'givens' to determine the general direction of any life course. (Jackson & Piette, 2015, p. 5)

The position of the Curaçaoan working classes at the bottom of the social structure of the island, within the "official, public-oriented 'formal structure' of membership" (Antonsich, 2010, p. 645; see Fenster, 2005; Yuval Davis, 2006), regularly evoked a questioning in the institutional public (among scholars, policy makers as well as journalists) of how the Curaçaoan poor were able to cope with enduring harsh and humiliating living conditions. A freelance journalist on the island told me about her experiences with these living conditions:

> I've been working for 1.5 months now on a report by joining the Yellow-White Cross – they wash older people in need at home – to get behind those front doors. (…) You come over at people, who don't have a piece of soap in their house. Then how are you going to wash someone's hair? How are you going to take care of someone? There is no clean underpants around. And a lady has been lying in urine for two hours. That kind of situations (…) When I see how high my rent is, how high my water, electricity and everything is, and what I earn. I make a good income compared to others and I don't even have kids. A lot of people have three, four, five kids to take care off. And then I ask myself how people make ends meet. (Interview Emma, September 29, 2015)

As the quote illustrates, the working classes on Curaçao (and for that matter Sint Maarten) faced with poverty and structural underemployment, live lives that are deeply insecure and unpredictable. I encountered many unregistered and

undocumented migrant laborers struggling to make ends meet. This is a note I made on the matter while conducting fieldwork:

> Compared to Juan [a teenager who had fled Caracas with the support of his parents hoping to soon continue his journey to the US],[52] the story Fleur [journalist] told me today was even worse. About an undocumented girl who had to give birth. Her mom, who was in fact registered, had cancer. They came from the Dominican Republic. Because of complications, the girl had to go to the hospital. Here, they had to pay 3000 guilders cash, before the hospital would take her in. The mother went home in panic and came back completely in tears, while crying that this was really anything she had left. They already face a lot of discrimination on the island. And apart from stories about 'illegal' Venezuelan refugees and Venezuelan prostitutes on Cuba Road, it appears as if stories like these often do not make it into Curaçaoan news media.

Yet even for working-class Curaçaoans possessing a Dutch passport, the social markers ascribed to them and their position in the social structure do not meet their need to belong. Belonging understood existentially is best translated as having a sense of *rèspèt* as they say on the island. This means that one's dignity is recognized and that one can live a secure and stable life which allows one to care for self and kin. Occupying the lowest rungs of society awakens a sense of being thrown in the world where they do not belong. Members of the working classes with whom I spoke called this a *bida den miseria* [miserable life] from which they could not escape. They felt abandoned by this world and faced persistent existential dread – something that was expressed by popular Curaçao-an rappers in tracks, such as "Mundu friu" [Cold World] by Rich Kalashh and "Unda bo tabata" [Where were you] by Dongo.

[52] Juan's family belonged to the elites of Caracas. He told me that they had a big wall around their house and an armed guard in a watch tower at the gate. During my time in Curaçao, it was largely young(er) Venezuelans who fled their country with the support of their parents. As the Venezuelan crisis continued, more and more (lower-)middle- and working-class refugees would try to reach Curaçao (and Aruba, Bonaire). They came by boat, as the island was only 70 kilometers away from the Venezuelan peninsula. The resulting refugee crisis on the island and within The Kingdom of the Netherlands only made it clearer that neither the Curaçaoan government nor the Dutch government would take responsibility (see Heintze et al., 2019). These (lack of) responses on the part of the respective governments were, in part, due to a growing anxiety among Curaçaoans who were already facing a persistent economic crisis, as well as reflecting the center-right political cabinet and public discourses in the European Netherlands.

According to Dixon (2010), "being in a state of material poverty can be (…) life-threatening, life-restricting, or life-disempowering [and] [w]hen combined with being socially excluded, marginalized, or disadvantaged, it qualifies those in this dual state for membership of the underclass" (p. 111). This is also true for many among Curaçao's lower classes. During the past two decades, official numbers on Curaçaoan households living below the poverty line have ranged from 25% to over one-third of the population (i.e., Pin et al., 2016). Such percentages are even higher when considering the lingering hidden poverty on the island.[53] Youth unemployment is an even more pressing issue as currently over one-third of young people are without a job (Hermans & Kosters, 2019, p. 7). On the island (as elsewhere), structural poverty and unemployment interacts with severe social problems, among which domestic violence (i.e., Van Wijk, 2012), leaving school without a degree (Revenberg, 2015), child abuse (Hendriksen, 2021), teenage pregnancies (Pengpid, 2020) and (organized) crime (i.e., Jaffe, 2016). These are issues that, in turn, have added to the stigmatization and marginalization of working-class Curaçaoans.

Faced with this intolerable situation, the members of Curaçao's working classes look to an unknown future to escape these social markers (see also Dixon & Frovola, 2011). Again, they do this through a phenomenology of hope and fear. Here, hope unfolds as a future orientation that is not based on fully validated knowledge that a person's acts will get them to a desired place where the dread of their "thrownness"[54] is stilled. Rather it is an "open-ended hope" (Webb, 2007,

[53] The Covid pandemic exposed the range and acuteness of (hidden) poverty on the island and the fragility of the (lower-) middle classes who already lived so close to the poverty line. Unemployment rates rose to 20% because of the global Covid pandemic in 2020 (IMF, 2021). In the summer of that same year, it was estimated than more than half of all Curaçaoans (around 80,000 people) were dependent on food packages distributed by the Red Cross (Van Marrewijk, 2020).

[54] Heidegger's (1927) concept of thrownness (*Geworfenheit)* describes the idea that human beings are 'thrown' into the world. We are born into a specific moment in time as part of a movement in-between from (past) and to (future) that is not chosen and, likewise, not entirely pre-fixed or deterministic. Think of a ball thrown into the air. Thrownness refers to the existential experience that comes with being 'thrown' into the world: a fundamental anxiety that we try to evade and that, simultaneously, leaves an opening for freedom. This freedom is not *despite* the circumstances we find ourselves in, but *through* our being thrown in*to* these. Like a ball thrown into the air, our past sets a certain direction for our lives to move towards a future that is at once known (we die, just as a thrown ball will ultimately hit the ground) and unknown (the course of our lives until we hit the ground may take various intentional and unforeseen directions). The unknown future is open, which leaves us anxious as well as hopeful. Throughout this chapter, I

p. 68) for a better life someday. Fear, its counterpart, is also about the future. It speaks, however, to a future that will arrive but is unwanted.

This chapter explores this pair of existential feelings connected to a common sense of belonging as expressed by the working classes. I shift my focus from Sint Maarten to the island of Curaçao, because this fieldwork site presents a clear case of how the institutional public was able to make the existential concerns of the working classes part of 'the news'. Here I need to reiterate that on Curaçao 'news' entered 'the news' through an affective register – a register downplayed in the bourgeois public sphere, but central to, what McGuigan (2002, 2005) called, the "cultural public sphere". A characteristic of this public sphere is that it is part of mass popular culture that interpellates its public emotionally, focusing on the quotidian and extraordinary, staying away from explicit deep analyses of oppressive political and economic structures. On Curaçao, the institutionalization of the popular public 'news' via the cultural public sphere took place via popular news media that operated parallel to formal-institutional news media in the bourgeois public sphere.

In this chapter I explore the workings of popular news media as the elites' usage of "various channels and circuits of mass-popular culture and entertainment" to (re-)mediate "aesthetic and emotional reflections on how we live and imagine the good life" (McGuigan, 2005, p. 435). Concretely put, I focus on everyday news routines around the lottery and, related to these, the obituaries. These news routines, I argue, serve a double function. While one can make the point that they are means by which the establishment keeps the workers in check, one can also argue that they represent imperfect means by which the working classes on Curaçao seek to escape their position of socio-economic inferiority. Along with being instruments of domination, they are also employed by the working classes to create and express a commonsense belonging connected to a phenomenology of hope and fear, or in Papiamentu, *speransa* and *miédu.* In this chapter, I present the double function of popular news routines. In doing so I demonstrate that the popular news media – in relation to the networks of power and money in which they are embedded – capitalize on existential feelings of hope and fear among the working classes. I argue that they do so by communicating in "a predominantly affective mode,

build upon this conception of thrownness as part of an existential-phenomenological anthropology.

related to the immediacy of lifeworld concerns, instead of the cognitive mode normally associated with the experience of a remote, apparently unfathomable and uncontrollable system" (McGuigan, 2009, p. 15).

This did not mean, however, that the working classes did not sense that their immediate "lifeworld concerns" were related to "a remote, apparently unfathomable and uncontrollable system" (McGuigan, 2009, p. 15). In fact, it was exactly the affective experience of such an enigmatic system through which a common sense of belonging among the working classes took shape. 'Common' here relates to an order that is not fully owned by those in power. One of my interlocutors, Soraya, who came from a working-class family and had been able to move up the social ladder through formal education in The Netherlands in the 1980s, told me that life had become more difficult on Curaçao:

> Look, life's getting harder, you know? It's a very general comment, but if I look at myself, I notice that, yes, the more autonomous we become, the further we go into the 21st century, the harder life gets. It's thus a sort of struggle of how do I survive? What makes me happy? How can I live happily with my family? We used to worry less than now– now we have a lot more worries than before. [Me: what kind of worries?] Financial, security of employment, of income [*pauses for a moment*] of being *happy*. (Interview Soraya, May 27, 2016)

This common sense of belonging, as I argue in this chapter, represented how many among Curaçao's working classes came to recognize that they were living in a glasshouse: thrown in a world at the hands of incomprehensible powers and forces, which could turn life for either better or worse. In the face of the unknown, the future fed feelings of fear. Yet, somewhat paradoxically, this also what bred hope. It was where the imagination for potential (better) futures sprouted. It is this deeply felt common sense of belonging among the working-class members that the popular news media acted on and where it was, in turn, to found. These forms of media provided them access to the issues of the day, an ethic of tomorrow "God Willing", a future through the "university of the street" and a dream of getting out of this glasshouse someday – that is, by winning the lottery.

4.1. THE 'UNIVERSITY OF THE STREET': NEWSMAKING IN THE CULTURAL PUBLIC SPHERE

When I arrived on Curaçao in August 2015, I had not yet been able to reach an agreement on doing fieldwork at the *Èxtra*, the Papiamentu language newspaper. During my first three months on the island, I therefore tried to get in touch with its management via the network I already had on the island. This network mainly consisted of academic researchers and Dutch-language journalists, reporters, and editors. What I found interesting was their reactions to my intention to do fieldwork at the *Èxtra*. Generally speaking, these reactions were two-fold: I was asked why I was interested in the *Èxtra* ("*Èxtra*? What do you want to do there?"), or I was warned that I would not be able to get access ("How do you think you'll get in?"). In retrospect, these reactions illustrated the discrepancy between two different orientations present in Curaçao's institutional public. On the one hand, there were those (my network at that time) in the institutional public who oriented toward a norm of rational-critical deliberation and the role of journalism to facilitate this in the bourgeois public sphere. On the other hand, there were those in the institutional public who operated in the cultural public sphere creating popular news media.

The two reactions I got to my intention to do fieldwork at the *Èxtra* reflected norms underlying a bourgeois public sphere. The first reaction (why is it interesting?) was buttressed by the notion that the *Èxtra* practiced news less 'journalistically' and was not concerned with 'quality' and thereby was less interesting to look at for a news researcher. The second reaction (it is difficult to get access) was underpinned by the assumption that the *Èxtra* was only interested in making money rather than stimulating rationality. Therefore they would not want a researcher, especially one who represented the wider Dutch bourgeois public sphere and who had started doing fieldwork at the Dutch-language *Antilliaans Dagblad*. This paper was commonly seen as a higher 'quality' news outlet.

While preparing for my fieldwork in The Netherlands, I had already encountered similar reactions from Dutch researchers, policy makers, and businesspeople who were involved with the Dutch Caribbean islands. They primarily read the *Amigoe* and the *Antilliaans Dagblad* as well as online news websites, such as Koninkrijksrelaties.nu, because these news outlets were in

Dutch, and were considered to provide 'the news' from and about the islands. As I described in Chapter Two, among Curaçaoans there was a prevailing idea of a division between, on the one hand, the island's 'quality' press – associated with Dutch-language, 'proper' writing and being 'respectable' – and, on the other hand, the sensational news outlets – associated with Papiamentu-language, bloody pictures, and 'poor' writing (see also Römer, 2017). The latter, which I call popular news media, was thus seen among Curaçaoans as inferior to the first, which I refer to as institutional news media, but both were *part of* 'the news'.

This was not the view held by many Dutch experts with whom I spoke. To them, popular news media was not only inferior to but also *different from* 'the news' – so much so that Curaçao's popular outlets were dismissed from being part of 'the news' all together. Such an understanding was grounded in the dominant model of a bourgeois public sphere, whereby the island societies continued to be represented as spatio-temporal others. They were seen as intrinsically different ('islandness', 'Caribbean culture') from the European-Dutch mainland. This spatio-temporal othering continued to buttress public debates on and institutional (public) perceptions of the islands across the Dutch Kingdom. Similarly, it informed the notion that popular news practices on Curaçao were culturally distinct and island-specific (versus the Dutch-European mainland), while being inferior (backward) to liberal-democratic ideals of 'the news'.

However, just as institutional news media operated in the bourgeois public sphere, popular news media operated in the cultural public sphere. They all formed part of 'the news' in Curaçao's institutional public. Apart from the oldest newspaper on the island, *Amigoe,* which reached around a quarter of the island's population (Veenendaal, 2016), the market shares of individual Dutch-language newspapers and radio stations on Curaçao generally did not exceed 5%.[55] They served a niche of higher-educated, wealthier, and relatively older Curaçaoans (ibid) as well as Dutch expatriates on the island. In comparison, *Èxtra* had a market share of almost 70% (Veenendaal, 2016), which was – and had been over the years – by far the biggest market share of all newspapers. It was only in the process of being welcomed by the *Èxtra* staff that I learned about the split institutional public on this island. This split was particularly important to

[55] This percentage (<5%) was mentioned by several interlocutors based on a (confidential) biennial report about Curaçao's media market, which was commissioned by the private business sector (advertisers).

answering the question of why the working classes accepted news practices that capitalized on their existential anxiety and feelings of hope and fear toward the future.

Although I had been in touch with the management of the *Èxtra* via mail and Facebook Messenger, what really got things rolling were the social ties among people living in *Mundo Nobo* – the typically working-class neighborhood where I happened to live at the time. Mundo Nobo is on the west side of Willemstad. It had been established in the 1920s when the Roman Catholic Volksbond (see Chapter Two) had initiated public housing projects for laborers. The neighborhood is located near the police station and Curaçao's electricity and water company, Aqualectra. My host, anthropologist and human rights activist, Ieteke Witteveen, not only actively participated in public debates in 'the news', but also played an active social role in the bario, as neighborhoods are known in Papiamentu. Just a few blocks from where I was living, there was a small lunchroom, which happened to be run by two employees of the *Èxtra*. They ran it before their evening shifts started. They provided their colleagues at the *Èxtra* with daily lunches, while they also served passers-by and other clients throughout the neighborhood. It was one example of how the *Èxtra* was closely entangled with and embedded in Mundo Nobo. Other examples included the sponsoring of initiatives to promote education for children[56] and the organization of a yearly New Year's Eve party open to the neighborhood.[57] The lines between the *Èxtra* and the neighborhood's community were short, especially for those heavily involved in the *bario* like Ieteke Witteveen. Soon after she reached out to the chief-editor, I could start at the newspaper.

The community practices of the *Èxtra* were not merely side activities but, rather, formed part of its very mode of journalistic operation. Media scholars have labeled this "community journalism" or "(hyper)local journalism" (i.e., Harte et al., 2018; Lauterer, 2006) to describe news outlets that intimately involve "themselves in the welfare of the place, in the civic life of their towns" and participate "as an active member of the very community they are covering"

[56] When the *Èxtra* celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2016, for example, its management donated to a foundation that stimulates reading among children in the neighborhoods of Charo and Mundo Nobo.

[57] Also, the newspaper functioned as a central 'lost-and-found' site for the *bario* and beyond. A long time *Èxtra* reporter explained to me that when people found a lost ID, for example, they delivered it at the building of the *Èxtra* rather than to a police station. Lost items were often picked up the very same day.

(Lauterer, 2006, p. xiv). Community or local journalism has long been associated with news production in small geographical places, such as towns, villages and also islands. These places are understood as insular, fixed, and bounded territories that are intrinsically different from large(r) scale cities, metropoles, and mainland countries where traditional (or 'real', 'watchdog') journalism took (and could take) shape. The basic assumption here – again, as I argue, a form of spatio-temporal othering – has been that small scale societies pose insurmountable challenges to a bourgeois ideal of 'real' journalism. This is based on the idea that it is nearly impossible to be independent, neutral, and objective as 'everyone knows everyone'. This bourgeois ideal is also difficult to achieve due to a lack of financial means and manpower in a small(er) economy. My point here is not to downplay the impact of a particular place on news practices. Indeed, many journalists on Curaçao (and Sint Maarten), particularly those working in and with institutional news media, mentioned small-scale-related challenges to practicing 'real' journalism. Rather, I wish to point out that a factor like 'small scale' only becomes an institutional 'challenge' based on a liberal-democratic model of journalism and the bourgeois public sphere.[58]

For the *Èxtra*, its close connection to and with the community was not a challenge. Rather it was the core of what the newspaper had always been about. Carlos, the co-director, reflected on this, saying:

> When I say I want to go back to the community— there the people is. You have to keep them— you have to go to the community, to the people, to the bario. Then you are with the people, then you are at the roots. That is the success of the Éxtra: the people. That has never changed. (Interview Carlos, January 8, 2016)

Interestingly, my trajectory of 'getting in' to *Èxtra* was not very different from how many of its long-time employees had once started working there. Among

[58] Recent media scholarship shows a reconsideration of the notion of 'community'. It is no longer (solely) based on shared geographies and spatial closeness but is seen as taking shape through shared interests and feelings of belonging (i.e., Hesse & Waller, 2014). At the same time, '(hyper) local journalism' has received increased attention among media scholars, who have stressed its crucial role for democracy (i.e. Harte et al., 2018). Despite these shifts in academic thinking about mode(s) of 'community journalism' (now extending spatial boundaries) or 'local journalism' (now considered to be crucial to democracy), a bourgeois ideal of 'real' journalism remains the norm in both scholarly and (institutional) public debates.

them were some who told me that they already did all kinds of odd jobs for the *Èxtra* when growing up in Mundo Nobo. Others had started at the newspaper via a family member or acquaintance. Therefore, the *Èxtra* did not have to, as Carlos suggested, "go back" or "go to" the community – as in reaching out to the community from elsewhere. Rather, and quite literally, it *brought in* the community by employing people from the neighborhood or closely related to those who already worked for the newspaper.

One of them was Rosita. She had made it to the position of senior editor, after she had started as a temp at the reception decades ago. Back then, she recently had finished her HAVO (*Hoger Algemeen Voortgezet Onderwijs* [senior general secondary education])[59], but had not been sure about continuing studying. One of the chief-editors, who she happened to know, offered her the opportunity to, first, 'get in' and, later, to start as a reporter at the newsroom. Through the years, Rosita had learned the craft on the job. I learned that Rosita's story was not unique as many current journalists and editors had once started as either typists, translators, or receptionists at the *Èxtra* after which senior journalists had taken them under their wings.[60] They had learned by doing and by participating in short-term journalism courses on the island.

During my time at the newspaper, none of those working at the newsroom of the *Èxtra* had a journalism degree (see also Pin et al., 2016, p. 209).[61] However, and contrary to the opinion of most of those working in or for institutional news media on the island, they did not see nor represent themselves as being 'uneducated'. In the conversations I had with reporters and editors at the *Èxtra,* they often mentioned that they had gone to the so-called "universidat di kaya" [university of the street] This 'university' offered them an alternative for claiming knowledge and skills equivalent to what one learned through formal education. At least this was how many in Curaçao's news media who had in fact a (journalism or academic) degree looked upon this notion of the 'university of the street'.

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[59] In the Dutch secondary education system, a HAVO diploma provides access to higher professional education (Universities of Applied Sciences/Polytechnics).

[60] Once part of the editorial team, junior reporters started with covering court and crime news from which they gradually got more subjects to cover. Some of them made it to chief editor or head of the editorial section – basically a position akin to that second chief editor, who is also concerned with managing the editorial office. During my research, two senior reporters attained this position.

[61] In 2016, the management appointed a reporter who had received a journalism degree in The Netherlands.

Yet, by understanding the 'universidat di kaya' as such – literally and in its general use (as an academic institute), one could easily overlook what this notion meant and to whom it actually spoke. The expression was not coincidentally bracketed both non-verbally and in text.[62] It affectively signified the experiences and thoughts of the popular public. For this popular public, the 'university of the street' was neither about journalism, nor was it about the quality, form, or skills of the profession of journalism. Rather, it referred to a daily island reality full of limitations, hurdles, and inequality, while it anticipated the hope to overcome these. The 'university of the street' thus represented not a choice – for *no* formal education[63] – but instead an opportunity for upward mobility. From the perspective of the working classes in the popular public, it was exactly because the institutional order said "you'll not get in without formal education" that the 'university of the street' opened the door for those who did not have access.

That said, Curaçao's working classes continued to put their faith in the very authorities representing the institutional order. They tuned in to radio programs that were bought to them by individual politicians. They lined up whenever the Dutch King and Queen visited the island. They went to church every week. And, as I will show in the next section (4.2.), they bought their *brièchi* [lottery ticket] for the *Landsloterij* [National Lottery] and handed in their lucky number at the *Èxtra*. For those operating in the institutional public who built upon the norms of a bourgeois public sphere, popular expressions of distrust *and* trust towards authorities formed a puzzling paradox – one that was often understood as the result of either an emotion-versus-rationality dichotomy, of 'false consciousness' or, else to an overall lack of education among Curaçao's working classes. However, there was no paradox. These were all part of the weapons of the weak to never show one's teeth too easily to predators. They knew that in the social structure they were at the bottom and could lose the very little they had by acting as though they were 'aping their betters' or in other ways behaving as people

[62] This was the case, for example, when the *È*xtra commemorated one of its co-founders in the newspaper with: "Hopi periodista awe entre otro na EXTRA aktualmente el a duna e oportunidat pa siña e trabou, drentando e 'universidat di kaya' manera el a yam'é semper" [She gave many journalists, some of them currently working at the *Èxtra*, the opportunity to learn the ropes by entering the 'universidat di kaya', as she always called it] (Èxtra, 2016, n.p.).

[63] My point is not that past and current reporters of the *Èxtra* did not have this choice. Whether or not they could obtain a higher education and for whatever reasons they did not, my aim is to highlight here to whom the 'university of the street' speaks and what it means for those who find themselves in a world where choices are limited.

from the middle class would. Instead, their persistent economic dependency forced them to be receptive to services, materials, and goods provided by those in power. Crucially, this meant that they were expected to behave in a way that was seen to be fitting to their 'station' in life and not to challenge the established order (see Nauta, 2011, p. 165; Van Hulst, 1997, pp. 97–98). Trinta di Mei did a little but not much for them. And they realized this all too well.

4.2. SOMETIMES YOU WIN, SOMETIMES YOU LOSE: THE FACTS OF DAILY ISLAND LIFE

THE LOTTERY OF LIFE: IMAGINING THE GOOD LIFE

Driving up the parking lot of the *Èxtra,* I noticed how busy it was. Many people drove by, stopped their car in front of the office, stepped out and walked quickly to the mail slot next to the entrance door, after which they continued their journey elsewhere. Others parked their car on the parking lot to enter the *Èxtra*'s office, where they – as I knew by now – used one of the ballpoint pens attached to the reception desk to fill in their lucky number for the daily lottery. It was mid-November 2015 and only a week since I had started with my fieldwork at the *Èxtra*. At this point, I had gotten used to the daily coming and going of people at the building of the *Èxtra* as they handed in a piece of paper cut or torn out of the newspaper to take part in the newspaper's lottery.

Èxtra was located along a main road in the *bario*. Given the steep prices of electricity and the uncertainty of what tomorrow would bring, working-class Curaçaoans, including those living in Mundo Nobo, bought their electricity via *Pagatinu* [prepaid system]. There were more than sixty Aqualectra service points across the island, yet its main office was located on the other side of the road from *Èxtra*. The Pagatinu was a reminder of the daily difficulties in making ends meet. Many people crossed the street to get out of their difficulties. The newspaper's lottery was part of this.

With the newspaper in one's hands, it was hard to miss the opportunity to win money. Right on the front page the daily amount of money was mentioned under the heading "Gana ku Èxtra" [Win with Èxtra] [see **Figure 12**]. At the back of the newspaper, there was a page outlined with advertisements and a box in the middle with the heading "GANA HOPI PLAKA. Kesh ku Èxtra" [Win lots of

money. Cash with Èxtra] [see **Figure 12**]. Here, one could find yesterday's results of the newspaper's lottery, which was attached to the biggest official drawing on the island, the *Wega di Number* [Game of Numbers]. The winning number of the Wega di Number was listed here on top of a list with the winning numbers of related lotteries on Bonaire, Sint Maarten, and even the Dominican Republic. This is illustrative of the transnational scope of lottery networks as well as working classes' engagement with them. In the middle of the page, there was a blank form accompanied by the text, "Yenando bo number deseá di Wega Number Kòrsou pa awe i entregando e kupon na Èxtra, bo tin hopi chens di gana plaka kesh!!!" [By filling in your lucky number for the Wega Number Kòrsou of today and handing in the coupon at Èxtra, you have a great chance to win cash!!!]. The lottery brought many Curaçaoans to the office of the *Èxtra* daily. They passed by to deposit their lucky number – filled in on the form back in the paper – to join the next day's lottery.



Figure 12: [Up] "Gana ku Èxtra" [Win with Èxtra] on the front page of the *Èxtra* (November 23, 2015). [Down] Lottery page in the back of the *Èxtra*, including the winning numbers of the previous day, a blank form to join tomorrow's lottery of tomorrow, and the results of the other other lotteries in the region.

There were many Curaçaoans whose everyday work was somehow linked to the Wega di Number or to one of the other lotteries present on the island.

There is a history to this which began at the beginning of the 20th century. Back then, gambling was already very popular among Curaçaoans who bought their tickets from lotteries abroad. To counter the loss of capital to foreign countries resulting from this, the colonial government issued the *Loterijverordening* [National Ordinance on the Lottery] in 1909. This law enabled the Governor of Curaçao to issue permits – mainly to private organizations, but also the Roman Catholic Church – to organize lotteries on the island (Landsloterij, 2020a). Yet, foreign lotteries and illegal gambling circuits continued to emerge and with that their popularity among Curaçaoans. To regulate the ongoing proliferation of illegal gambling throughout the Dutch Caribbean and the loss of revenues to foreign countries, further measures were taken in 1949, when the state-owned *Landsloterij* was established by the National Ordinance on the National Lottery (Landsloterij-verordening) and in 1987, with the legalization of the Wega di Number.

The institutional embedding of lotteries was accompanied by a growing labor force. There was a gendered aspect to this, and an economic one. Both were related to (changing) family structures on the island. Like elsewhere in the Caribbean, matrifocality (a family structure of interlinked relations centered on women in their role as mother) had prevailed among the Afro-Curaçaoan population until the early 20th century. This changed with the arrival of Shell and the processes of modern industrialization that followed. While the Church and Shell supported the nuclear family structure (e.g., providing services and financial benefits to married laborers), "the decline of women's access to subsistence opportunities, together with full employment for men, caused an increase in the gap in earnings between the sexes" (Abraham-Van der Mark, 2003, p. 83). When lay-offs and economic recession set in, the position of those among Curaçao's lower rankings worsened. "At the same time", as Abraham-Van der Mark (2003) argued, "the percentage of female-headed households increased, the divorce rate went up and the marriage rate went down" (p. 85). The female-headed households among Curaçao's poor since the late-1960s were not equivalent to the matrifocal family structures of the past. Strong maternal support networks were no longer evident in modern-day Curaçao. They had been transformed into a patriarchal system. Poor female heads of the household (among whom were many single mothers) came to rely on their sons, their (ex-)husbands, public services, and their own creative ability to get some income. Unlike women of society's middle and higher rungs, who would find their way in and up the island's

administrative apparatus in the aftermath of Trinta di Mei (see Abraham-Van Der Mark, 1993, 2003), the majority of poor women without any formal education or training got caught up in a daily struggle to make ends meet. They became dependent on the *onderstand* [welfare] and/or a *karchi ku kuminda* [resilience benefit, literally: food voucher], which only provided minimal assistance from which they could not live let alone provide for their households with multiple mouths to feed.

The need for extra cash was exacerbated by living continuously in debt. This was the result of both a strong necessity to make a living and a deceptive 'buy now, pay later' campaign in the past decades. This is a business strategy "that exploits their permanent lack of cash and makes them ('later') pay at least 30% extra" (Abraham-Van der Mark, 2003, p. 85). This is just one example of how the private sector capitalized on feelings of hope for an unknown future. After all, one was surely not able to pay now, but one was never sure – and there always *could* – be able to pay later. It was the same future-oriented outlook that drew working-class women to the slot machines in one of the (in 2016, 14) casinos on the island. They hoped to win some cash, while to some it also provided a way, as Abraham-Van der Mark (2003) quoted a working-class lady she had spoken to in the late 1990s, "to get away from everything, from all that thinking" (p. 85).[64] Caught up in this spiral of persistent poverty, working-class women tried to earn a bit of money as a cleaning lady, by selling *pastechis* and *bolo pretu* [Curaçaoan street food], or through the resale of legal and illegal lottery tickets (Abraham-Van der Mark, 2003, p. 83). During my fieldwork in 2015–2016, I saw that these activities continued.

Reselling lottery tickets, along with buying them – or going to the casino, for that matter –, was a way of seeking to escape one's "miserable life" and inferior position in the social structure. Since my start at the *Èxtra* I had often noticed an older woman sitting in a plastic chair in front of the paper's building. Wearing a big fanny pack around her waist or a bag around her shoulder, a sun cap or long sleeves and many layers of clothing to cover her body from the sun, she always held a stack of *brièchinan* [tickets] for what I later found out to be the Landsloterij.

[64] The skyrocking unemployment rates around that time illustrate the distress that poor women must have felt. In 1990, youth (15–24 years old) unemployment had risen to 53.4%, while only one out of four female heads of household was employed (24%) versus 58% of the male heads (Abraham-Van der Mark, 2003, p. 85).

She exemplified this diffusion of the lottery throughout Curaçaoan society, especially amongst working-class women.

Since its establishment in 1949, the Landsloterij had attained an important position in the Dutch Caribbean and – with its head office in Otrobanda, Willemstad – particularly in the Curaçaoan community. The Landsloterij generated funding for various community-based, arts and charity initiatives as well as employment for "elderly people in need of supplemental income" (Landsloterij, 2020a, n.p.). Older working-class Curaçaoan women, whose chances for survival had long related to reselling (illegal) lottery tickets, were particularly represented.

At the time of my fieldwork there were over 600 Landsloterij resellers like the lady who sat in front of the *Èxtra* on Curaçao alone, a substantial number on an island with a population of around 150,000 (Landsloterij, 2020a). And so 'the lottery seller' had become a cultural phenomenon on Curaçao [see **Figure 13**] and could be found along the busy Schottegatweg [Schottegat Road], at the *snèk,* at tokos, shopping malls or banks; basically, at any location where they were likely to sell a numbered *brièchi* [ticket] to passers-by. Many resellers, however, had built up a loyal clientele of elderly Curaçaoans who had great faith in their lucky number which could only be reserved by personal agreement with a particular reseller (Landsloterij, 2020b).

The belief that certain numbers, events, persons, or places would bring good or bad luck was certainly not limited to the island's working classes, nor to its elderly, yet it did relate to the lack of stability in one's life. Poverty continued to be persistent on the island and not only affected those living in poor(er) neighborhoods such as Seru Fortuna or Mundo Nobo.[65] Added to this was a lingering hidden poverty among Curaçaoans, including those who had moved to The Netherlands in the hope of a better life. In a 2017 newscast on persistent poverty and gambling addiction among Curaçaoan elderly in The Netherlands, one of the interviewees said, "You know what it is in life? You need to keep problems for yourself. (…) You don't have to bring [them] out on the street" (in Jones, 2017).[66]

[65] Metaphorically, the hope for a better life ahead was echoed in the names of these lower-class neighbourhoods in Willemstad: *Seru Fortuna* [Hill of Fortune], *Mundo Nobo* [New World].
[66] Translated from Dutch: "Weet je hoe het zit in het leven? Problemen moet je bij je eigen houden. (…) Je hoeft [ze] niet op straat te brengen".



Figure 13: Wall-painting 'The Lottery Seller' by artist Merly Trappenberg in Otrobanda, Willemstad. Source: Trendbeheer (Dees, 2019).

During my fieldwork I learned that airing your dirty laundry, including your poverty, in public is not done among Curaçaoans. One is expected to keep up appearances and act 'respectable' – a social norm that reflected the ongoing legacies of the colonial socio-political system. This system was in place until the late 19th century. The status of the 'white' *shon* [master] was maintained by the *respèt* [respect] the subordinated *katibu* [enslaved] had to show (see Hoetink, 1958). After the formal Dutch abolition of slavery in 1863, the Roman Catholic Church took on its Mission to 'civilize' the formerly enslaved Curaçaoans and educate them to become *hende drechi* [decent people] (Allen, 2007, pp. 149, 172). Among Curaçaoans social control of norms of behavior on the importance of acting 'respectable' persists up until today. Behavior that is considered *faltu di respèt* [disrespectful] and *sinberguensa* [shameless] is often publicly condemned, based on the association with *hende brua* [rude people] – those who must be 'civilized' and who are at the bottom and the margins of society. While many Curaçaoans among the working and the lower middle classes alike live in hidden

poverty, they generally do not reveal their financial problems out of shame and fear of stigmatization.

I experienced quite closely how deeply these feelings of shame and fear actually go when a friend lost a respected job. She hid at home and went hungry until finding new work just as prestigious rather than accepting what she considered to be a less respected job. Losing one's social status formed a real risk for those who had a certain social status to maintain. In the institutional public, one's leeway was limited. There were only so many 'respectable' positions available and, on a personal level, everyone knew everyone. If you had been fired at one organization, it could easily reduce one's chances of finding a job elsewhere. And when the debt collector recognized your family name, she could easily come by your relatives who happened to be living next door. In Curaçao's class-based social order, the higher one went up, the smaller the island got. Among elites everyone knew everyone through nètwèrks [networks] as these close and opaque webs of elite relations were called in the popular public (Römer, 2017, pp. 198–99). For those who were part of these exclusive nètwèrks, there was a lingering fear of losing one's job, and with that, one's face (and thus privilege) overnight.

In the popular public it was not about what one could lose, it was about what could be won. And the latter spoke to people across all ranks of island society. "Certainly", as Cosgrave (2021) argued, "lotteries, due to widespread participation and their ability to generate 'collective effervescence', (…) are an expression of the 'popular'" (p. 133, citing Durkheim, 1912/1995). A case of popular news media generating collective effervescence was the Landsloterij campaign launched in 2019. With the slogan "AT'ABO SA!" [Look! *You* know!][67] its aim was to attract young(er) Curaçaoans. The well-known Curaçaoan rapper, Dongo, became the face of this campaign in newspaper advertisements, TV commercials, and on billboards along busy roads. Accompanied by hashtags #WannaBeAMillionaire and #Gana1Mion [Win 1 million], a series of clips circulated on social media in which Dongo jumped on a shopping cart and 'surfed'

[67] The slogan refers to the practice of buying one's *brièchi*, which then is handed over by the lottery seller: "Atá" means 'look!' (as in: 'here you are'). "Abo sa" (English: "you know", with an emphasis on *you*) signifies multiple 'knowledges' among Curaçaoans, from the routine of buying one's *brièchi* (*you* know!) to the chance, albeit small, one might win (*you* know!) and to the hopes and dreams that come with the latter (*you* know!).

through a supermarket grabbing as much as he could in one minute [see **Figure 14**].

The scene was hilarious and ironic at the same time. Wouldn't we all be greedy after winning a 1-minute supermarket run? Instead of hiding greed, shame, fear, and hope, the campaign starring Dongo emphasized these emotions. It did so in satirical contrast to everyday realities on the island. This too was the case for Dongo's video clip "Brièchi" that became a hit with over 50,000 views on YouTube in 2019. The chorus of the song spoke to what was common knowledge in the popular public: "Tur hende ke gana (Brièchi!) | Bintidos Wega pa aña (Brièchi!) | Kumpra un kas pabo mama (Brièchi)!" [Everyone wants to win (Ticket!)| Twenty-two draws a year (Ticket!) | Buying a house for your mom (Ticket!)]. The latter bit articulated the reality of female-headed households (including single-mothers) among Curaçao's working classes as well as illustrating



Figure 14: Screenshots from the "At'Abo Sa!" [Look, you know!] campaign of the Landsloterij in 2019. From left top to bottom right: 1. A still from video clip "Brièchi" featuring Dongo making a selfie while on a jet ski with two ladies (one them waving a stack of lottery tickets) and a lady in front pointing a water gun. The scene speaks to dreams of owning a jet ski, while ridiculing acting 'as if' one already has one. It only becomes clear that this jet ski is placed in a rental truck when the camera zooms out; 2. Still from "Brièchi" clip where Dongo walks through a busy colorful small street in what seems to be Otrobanda, buying his *brièchi* from a lottery seller; 3. Still figuring an ecstatic mom, wearing a fur coat, luxurious jewelry, and holding a Chanel bag, as she receives the keys of a new house (when the door opens, Dongo jumps in a pool (Teamdongo, 2019); 4. Still from a Landsloterij promotion clip where Dongo jumps on a shopping cart in a 1-minute supermarket run (Èxtra, 2019).



Figure 15: Screenshots from the video clip "Bida" (Teamdongo, 2015). From top left to bottom right: 1. opening shot of Dongo eating *funchi ku jogurt* [funchi with yogurt], a staple dish for poor Curaçaoans; 2. Dongo illustrating the violence one faces living e bida di kaya in front of the Isla Oil Refinery which produces pollution that affects the poor barios on the west side most (i.e., Jaffe, 2010); 3. Dongo *ta bai keiru* [drives around] – a common practice on the island, while passing children and a *kachó di kaya* [street dog], whose life is often compared to that of the Curaçaoan poor; 4. Text on a building, saying: "If you can dream it, you can do it" – only for most to find out the limitations to fulfill one's dreams; 5. The latter is what Dongo realizes as he enters a toko and the shot becomes blurry; "dikon ni ta pasa tampoko ma bida ta blur" [why nothing happens, my life is blurred]; 6. Dongo raps "bo ke kore den Benz anto ami ta draai riba sunny [you think about driving your Benz, but I turn towards sunny (the light)], adding: "mi ta diskrimina dilanti pa bai riba junkies" [I am discriminated for going to junkies], while he, at that point gives a neighbor some cash for cleaning his (old) car.

the financial support that was expected of children for their mother(s). The latt was (or could be) an act of love for one's caregivers. It was also a social norm of 'respectability'. In addition to displaying the dreams of Curaçaoans that could be 'fulfilled' if one won, Dongo's video clip ridiculed acting 'respectable' in terms of pretending one was (or had) more than one really was (had) [see **Figure 14**].

As a popular rapper who knew *e bida den kaya* [the street life], Dongo also articulated the sense of what working-class Curaçaoans called *biba den miseria* [living in misery]. During my fieldwork in late-September 2015 Dongo released another hit-track: "Bida". In contrast to the video clip for "Brièchi" which showed what the Curaçaoan poor longed for, shots from the music video for "Bida" illustrated what those living in the poor *bario* wished to escape, namely *tur kos malu* [all bad things] as the result of poverty, feelings of misery, and persistent stigmatization and discrimination [see **Figure 15**].

Compared to the brightly-colored clip of "Brièchi", the clip of "Bida" showed dusty yellowish shots which reflected how the island was often covered by dusty Sahara sand carried by the ever-present *passaatwind* [trade wind]. Life at the lower rungs of society was rough and dirty. Yet, it was also full of mo ments of joy, of care, and of comradery , as well as of freedom to focus on these. This was at the core of the song's lyrics, for example in "Bo ke kore den Benz anto ami ta draai riba sunny" [You think about driving your Benz, but I turn towards sunny (the light)]. Thrown into this life, one had a choice to focus on what it offered, rather than on what it lacked. This message spoke to many among the working classes on and beyond Curaçao. "Bida" had more than 1.4 million views on YouTube (December 2021).

By attracting a popular rap artist *di kaya*, the Landsloterij used channels of mass-popular culture to relate to the affective modes through which the popular public expressed aspirations and dreams of (a better) life. Buying one's *brièchi* was such an expression. That is, it is an expression of a dialectic of hope and fear that reflected deeper social concerns about the insecurity and instability many Curaçaoans had to live by or, rather, made the most of. Many, like Dongo, chose to turn towards the 'sunny'.

OBITUARIES: HOPE AND FEAR IN THE FACE OF A CERTAIN FUTURE

Like the Landsloterij, the biggest newspaper on Curaçao, *Èxtra*, operated in the cultural public sphere of the institutional public and through affective modes of public expression. I remember being rather skeptical about its lottery as I started my fieldwork at *Èxtra*. This skepticism originated from my own institutional education underpinned by liberal-democratic norms. In the Dutch institutional public, the lottery was seen as a 'tax on stupidity' and a losing game. Participating in games of chance was therefore rationally biased and the hope for winning

someday was an illusion. This reasoning was confirmed by those working for and with institutional news media on the island. They, like their counterparts in The Netherlands, did not engage in – or, at least, did not publicly promote – gambling. Similar to the Dutch 'quality' news media, they promoted rational-critical deliberation in the (bourgeois) public sphere.

This was different for Curaçao's popular news media though, and Marc, *Èxtra*'s chief editor, was well aware of this. When I expressed my skepticism to him, he replied: "The lottery is something of this people. It's just a fact of life. It's just a fact of life" (Interview Marc, December 11, 2015). With "this people", Marc who, just like me as well as the paper's management, operated in the institutional public, explicitly referred to that 'other' public: the popular public on the island. Yet, I learned that the lottery formed 'a fact of life' for the institutional public too. It was, for example, part of the media practices of the *Éxtra*. As part of the island's institutional public, *Èxtra*'s new practices around the lottery represented both the commercial interests of the newspaper management and, for the working classes, the "routinely mediated aesthetic and emotional reflections on how we live and imagine the good life" (McGuigan, 2005, p. 435). The full page dedicated to the lottery in the back of the daily made the lottery a *daily life event*. It was 'the news' on numbers, drawings, and results while simultaneously perpetuating feelings of hope and fear as reflections of the lottery *as a story of life*.

This story specifically spoke to Curaçao's working classes. They lived life day-by-day with the only certainty being that life was insecure and, ultimately, in the hands of powers and forces outside one's own control. This common sense of belonging revealed what life in this glasshouse meant to those who struggled most. In the face of an unknown tomorrow, Curaçao's working classes – but, in reality, all of us – experienced an unsettling anxiety. They found themselves in 'the lottery of life' – a world full of chance. It was this common sense of belonging articulated through existential feelings of hope and fear that was affectively mediated through the popular news media.

This was probably best illustrated by the evening programming on television, which continued to be the most popular medium among Curaçaoans (CBS, 2018). Each night, Curaçaoans tuned in to the main channel of *TeleCuraçao*, Curaçao's national broadcaster, to find out whether today was their lucky day. The daily draw of the Wega di Number had among the highest ratings on national television. And even if one tuned in to a different channel, one could not avoid

the smaller viewing box broadcasting the draw in the corner of one's screen.[68] And so, the live broadcast was on screen in most Curaçaoan living rooms, cafés, *snèks*, *tokos*, and late-night offices, including *Èxtra*'s newsroom, where I noticed editors and reporters looking up from their desk and watching the TV hanging above them as soon as the numbers were drawn.

Immediately after the day's winners were decided by a randomly drawn series of numbers, the evening programming continued with what appeared to be that other, yet definitely more certain, "fact of life": death. In the program "Partisipashon di Morto" [Mentioning of the Death], the names of those who had died were announced. Or, at least, the names of those whose families could afford and were willing to pay *ƒ* 100 [Netherlands Antillean Guilders][69] or, when including a picture of the person, *ƒ* 175 [see **Figure 16**].



Figure 16: Screenshot *TeleCuraçao* business page for "Partisipashon di Morto".

Publication of the names of those who had passed on was extremely important to Curaçaoans and deeply embedded in practices of news and 'the news' on the island. The founder of the *Èxtra* told me that the daily obituaries in the *Èxtra* were the main reason that the newspaper had attained and maintained its dominant

[68] In fact, only since 2014 has the live broadcast of the drawing no longer entirely interrupted other programs running on national TV (Qracao, 2014).

[69] The Netherlands Antilles Guilder (ANG, or *ƒ*) is the official currency of Curaçao (and Sint Maarten). ANG is pegged to the US dollar (*ƒ* 1 ≈ $ 0.55).

market share in the local press. Chief-editor Marc added the following explanation of why the obituaries were so important to Curaçaoans:

> If you buy the *Èxtra* in the morning, that you know (…) all of whom passed away. *Verrryyy* important for the Curaçaoan community. To know all who passed away and when the funeral is! *[punches fist on the table].* Because contrary to in The Netherlands, here you don't receive an invitation to— *no*! You are *expected* that you— you know that person, or you know his sister, or you know his brother, or you know his brother-in-law, or whomever— come to the funeral. Ok? Then [buying the *Éxtra* – SR] everyone knows it. *Very* important. (Interview Marc, December 11, 2015)

Here, the chief-editor related news practices around funerals to social norms of what I described above as acting 'respectable'. On Curaçao, one did not receive an announcement with information about a funeral, as is the custom in the Netherlands, nor was one personally notified in case someone had passed. Instead, one was expected to know and to subsequently show up at a funeral out of respect for the one that had passed on and his/her loved ones (see also Allen, 2007, pp. 248–49). This expectation of 'just' *knowing* who had passed and acting 'respectable' by attending a funeral had generated popular news practices of buying the *Èxtra,* in which, according to its management, 99% of the daily obituaries could be found. Respectability was but one aspect however, as I came to realize. Checking the daily obituaries formed a daily news routine of the working classes on the island as they attempted to get some grip on their lives and achieve a common sense of belonging amidst the difficulties of daily life. Attending a funeral was not solely about respectability but also about a solidarity whereby the working classes congregated to be reminded that chance and unpredictability were parts of the common sense of belonging for everyone regardless of one's social station. It was showing respect to the ultimate life giver who is also its taker: God. Thus, the death announcements in 'the news' and funeral attendance with all its rituals in the popular public were ways of coping with feeling of insecurity and social inferiority underpinning the day-to-day experiences of Curaçao's working classes.

In a similar way, popular news practices around the lottery – from the daily routine of handing in one's lucky number at the *Èxtra* and buying one's *brièchi* to watching the live broadcast of the daily drawing – reflected a shared need among

the working classes to get some grip on a life that was deeply uncertain. News practices around both obituaries and lotteries highlighted the slogan of the Landsloterij, "AT'ABO SA!" [Look, you know!], because one *had* to know and, at the same time, *longed* to know (get some grip). And this two-fold motive for engaging with 'the news' was known to all (you know?). It was therefore no coincidence that the Wega di Number and the "Partisipashon di Morto" were broadcasted during the same (prime) time slot at night. It also explained why – and this was common knowledge on the island – Curaçaoans read the newspaper from future to present. Many made sure to first check out who had lost (obituaries) and who had won (lottery results) before turning to the rest of the newspaper. Curaçaoans jointly oriented towards the future: its endless possibilities and the ultimate inevitable. And in doing so, they put their faith in God that ultimately decided who would win the next draw and whose life would end tomorrow.

4.3. TOMORROW, *KU DIOS KE*: A COMMON SENSE OF BELONGING TO THE KINGDOM OF GOD

In this last section, I explore how the *Èxtra* preached and practiced a kind of religiosity that was closely tied to long-standing social hierarchies in society (Groenewoud, 2017, pp. 221–26). Like other popular news media, the *Èxtra* built upon the news practices of the Roman Catholic Church on the island. The Mission's press apparatus had articulated an understanding of prevailing inequality in this life through a prism of eternal salvation in the afterlife. It had taught Curaçaoans that behind those who exercised worldly power – from the Dutch colonizer to local political leaders, Royal Dutch Shell, and (even) Catholic missionaries – there was ultimately God, and *all* belonged to Him. This constituted the common senses of belonging of Curaçao's working classes. They sensed that they belonged *equally* to that one eternal realm: the Kingdom of God.

Among Curaçaoans, God was *bida* [life] in all its complexity and contingency. And they made sure to remind each other of God's omnipresence daily. In my conversation with David and Yordan, the initiators of a popular, satirical weblog on the particularities of Curaçaoan culture, they reflected on the ongoing expression of *ku Dios ke* [God Willing] in daily island life. They said:

David: That's culture. That's deeply rooted. Yes, and you hear it back in particular sentences we standardly use. If I say to my mom: 'I will go to Trinidad and Tobago with my girlfriend in November' (…) then she says to me— and she often says this: 'God Willing' and 'it *could* be so that'—
Yordan: 'ku Dios ke'.
David: Your mother is caring. She says that to you and the message is that you are happy. And that God's Will ultimately determines this.
Yordan: 'I have a job at the McDonalds. That must be God Willing that I, that I'— they are searching for acceptance, I think.
(Interview David & Yordan, October 31, 2015)

With the expression "ku Dios ke" Curaçaoans recalled that life – just as death – was ultimately "God Willing". Yet, I learned that more than a search for acceptance, as David and Yordan explained here, or as in "an impulse to passively 'persevere in being'", the notion of God Willing consisted of "the search for 'adequate ideas' that enable us to actively sustain our sense of presence and purpose" (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 316; in Jackson & Piette, 2015, p. 12).

The *Èxtra* acted on this sense of presence and purpose so deeply felt by Curaçaoans by building on the biblical notion that the good work on earth would be consummated in the Kingdom of God (Philippians 1:6). Eternal salvation in the Kingdom of God had to be sought in this world, where one had "to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:10). The *Èxtra* mediated God's good works: acting 'respectable', educating oneself (which, as I showed above, was also possible through the 'university of the street'), trusting in God (e.g., pray, go to church) and handing in one's number (after all, the Kingdom of God could be close). The working classes, in turn, connected to these news practices by the *Èxtra* in the hope of achieving what they longed for most: an escape from their *bida den miseria* [miserable life].

Among *Èxtra*'s religious-like news practices were those that related to the norm of 'respectability'. This norm was closely tied to how social control was exercised and social hierarchies were maintained in the institutional public. Yet for those without real access to this public, acting 'respectable' was part of 'the good work' in life that could bring salvation closer. And it was based on this perception that *Èxtra* interpellated the common senses of belonging among the working classes. When I looked up past editions of the *Èxtra*, my eye was caught by regular text boxes in the newspaper with moral imperatives to act

'respectable', such as: "Respeta bo mayornan" [Repect your parents]; "Ban kombati Kriminalidat!" [Fight Crime!]; or "Kuida bo salú, STOP di HUMA!" [Think of Your Health, STOP SMOKING!] [see **Figure 17**]. These had been reminders of the 'good works' and also – given the frequent inclusion of the newspaper's logo in these boxes – of the didactic role and authority of the *Èxtra* as a moral compass.

In these same past editions, I noticed what could seem to be a popular news media practice that was in opposition to this moral and didactic function. This was the publication of detailed pictures of bloody crime scenes and traffic accidents. Curaçao's working classes were not unfamiliar with this combination of paternalistic moral imperatives to act 'respectable' and sensational news to get them through the day. These news practices echoed how the Roman Catholic Church had long employed their Mission to 'civilize' Curaçaoan laborers. Remember that the Catholic trade union, R.K. Volksbond, had set up newspapers to carry out this Mission, while simultaneously maintaining "a service provider-client relationship" (Groenewoud, 2017, p. 208) between the elites and the working classes, respectively. The missionary papers had been published in the language of the laborers (Papiamentu) and provided a combination of education and entertainment. While the rise of popular news media, including the Extra, was often seen as the result of Trinta di Mei and the cultural (Antillean, Afro-Caribbean) and linguistic (Papiamentu) *reevaluation* afterwards,



Figure 17: Examples of the good works articulated in the *Èxtra* between 2000-2005.

it actually *continued* the way in which the missionaries had catered the working classes in the cultural public sphere.

With its establishment in 1976, the *Èxtra* (and other popular newspapers) had filled a gap that was left by the Catholic press that had long catered the working classes. Soon after Trinta di Mei, both *La Cruz* and *La Union* folded. This was the result of the cultural reevaluation in the 1970s. The patronizing tone and 'entertaining' stories in *La Cruz* and *La Union* no longer resonated with their audiences. Curaçao's working classes had moved into the modern world, but this did not mean that they no longer longed for religious guidance – quite the opposite in fact. And so *Èxtra* took up this 'service' by reproducing the longer-standing missionary news practices (religious education and entertainment), but with a modern twist. Catchy one-liners came to exemplify the 'good works' while old-fashioned 'entertainment' was turned into what the working classes really craved: blood and sensation. This continuation in a modern jacket was not surprising nor unique for popular news media. As I described in the introduction of this chapter, Trinta di Mei had not resulted in a significant shift in the social order on the island. The *Èxtra* was part of this social order.

Meanwhile the insistent one-liners had become outdated too. The *Èxtra* no longer explicitly published the 'good works' in the newspaper. Instead, the paper itself had become the epitome of how one lived in accordance with the path to salvation. The concept and practice of the 'university of the street' was an example of this and acting 'respectable' was another. During my time at the popular newspaper, a returning topic of conversation was not to make mistakes because the *Èxtra* was now a respected role-model. And once in this position – which was one of power on the island – one had to behave as such. *Èxtra*'s co-director told me that when, a year ago, a bloody picture had happened to have made it to the front page, he immediately got calls coming in with complaints. "At night", he added, "the president of the Chamber of Commerce calls me: 'Hey, why did you do that? The *Èxtra* is not like that. You are not like that'" (Interview Carlos, January 8, 2016).

Complaints like this referring to not being "like that", were obviously not expressed by those *who* were associated with being *like that.* They were the poor and disadvantaged on the island and were seen to be the *hende brua* [rude, angry, cursed people] who had a *faltu di respèt* [disrespectful]. It was unlikely that the *Èxtra* had ever been associated with the *hende brua,* and its managers certainly were not. They had been part of the institutional order all along. And

while the paper adjusted some of its news practices to the spirit of the times, the *Èxtra* had never and would never radically question the social structures they were part of and embodied.

In this social structure the *Èxtra* obviously represented those who provided services to their clients. The newspaper was big business. When I spoke to the longtime director and co-founder of the newspaper, Antoni, he told me that his focus had always been business oriented. He managed his newspaper as a (media) company and did not interfere with the editorial room. During the evening peak hours in the newsroom, I hardly ever saw the directors. By then, both the management and the back office had called it a day. Yet it was also during one of these evenings that I was shown the previous day's newspaper with a big cross through the (apparently wrong) price mentioned on the front page. "Antoni supervises and monitors everything", editor Paulo told me. At times, Paulo found the paper on his desk full of critical comments and corrections, which felt like a punch in the gut (as he non-verbally demonstrated to me). Antoni held a keen eye for the accuracy of the winning numbers and the daily price, family names in the obituaries, and Papiamentu spelling in the newspaper. These elements were perhaps not seen as part of the news content. Therefore, commenting on them was not viewed as substantively interfering with the editorial room. For popular news media, however, they were essential to 'the news'.

Antoni's background was not in journalism and the only thing he demanded of the newsroom was neutrality, as he told me. To be clear, the demand for neutrality and accuracy was not informed by journalistic ideals but was a form of risk management to uphold the paper's central market position. If one kept neutral the risk of offending (potential) advertisers and customers was minimized. It was thus part of a business strategy with which Antoni had been able to build, in the words of one of *Èxtra*'s editors, a "media imperium" [media empire]. This empire once included two other dailies and now was made up of the *Èxtra* and, in the building next to the paper, the biggest printing office on the island. Except for *Amigoe*, all newspapers on the island were printed at *Èxtra*'s print center.

At this point in our conversation, I assumed that the idea of attaching a lottery to the newspaper had to be commercial too. "You sell more papers, of course", Antoni confirmed, adding:

> But it has also helped many people. They come here: 'I had that 2000 guilders just in time, I had big debts. I came out of them by the *Èxtra*— because of *Èxtra*'. A lot of people. (…) They buy the paper and then I give something back. Because I can also just stop it, this [lottery]. So they have— they can win something. (Interview Antoni, January 11, 2016)

I was not surprised that people expressed their gratitude for winning 2,000 NAF to pay off their debts. Those who came to the office of the *Èxtra* to hand in their lucky number daily did so because they were desperate for some cash. Although it was not the annual millionaire jackpot of the Landsloterij, to them it was a fortune. This was something the co-founder of the *Èxtra* knew as he said it helped many people. What caught my attention were Antoni's words; "they buy the newspaper and then I give something back", followed by "because I can also just stop it". Serving in the same sort of symbolic role as many men on the island throughout history such as Catholic priests, politicians, and businessmen, *Èxtra*'s co-founder performed as a kind of 'holy father', providing services to his clients. To be clear, *Èxtra*'s co-founder was a benevolent and highly respected man. Yet, he was not Him. Only God gives for free. The director's gift was conditional. He could always take it back. And what he could take back was not the monetary prize (alone), but the game of chance and thereby people's hopes for getting out of the glasshouse one day. It was by providing a chance to escape the burden of debts that the *Èxtra* could capitalize on feelings of hope and fear among poor Curaçaoans. This capitalization was of course not reserved for the *Èxtra* alone. It was inherent to what a game of chance was all about.

During my fieldwork, I noticed how a new generation of management gradually shifted the direction of the paper from reproducing missionary news practices to walking ahead of the working classes towards the future. These younger managers had witnessed and had been actively involved in the (institutional) public debates around the status referenda that would ultimately result in the constitutional reform in 2010 (see Oostindie & Klinkers, 2012). During this two decade-long period, there had been ever more voices in Curaçao's institutional public calling for Curaçao to "grow up", "develop", and "stand on its own". As part of this institutional discourse, I noticed a decline in paternalistic moral dictates printed in the *Èxtra* after 2005. These sorts of directives no longer matched the institutional imagination of being autonomous. One now had to act decently and 'respectable'. It was not just moral one-liners

that declined. Sensational and bloody front pages also faded way in the *Èxtra*. These news practices were no longer in line with being a 'respectable' newspaper. There was also a more practical reason, as one of the managers told me: "It was no longer necessary to increase the sales". Since 1986, the *Èxtra* had maintained its dominant market position. Once it published the most obituaries, Curaçaoans made sure to get a hold of the daily that, in turn, continued to attract most advertisers.

The lottery was part of this business model. And the younger newspaper managers had no intention of stopping the paper's lottery. In addition to the obvious commercial reasons, the lottery was and would never be a point of discussion. It was a fact of daily island life. And so was poverty. Trinta di Mei had barely done anything for the working classes. And 10/10/10, the date on which the constitutional structure of the island shifted had done even less. The gap between the rich and the poor on the island had not shrunk and had, in fact, increased since 2010. As a 'community newspaper' operating in the cultural public sphere, the *Èxtra* continued to be part of the institutional order to which Curaçao's poor had no access. As such it did not radically question the devastating reality that the working classes faced. For the *Èxtra* and other popular news media, the lottery was not so much a social-economic fact, but a cultural fact of daily life. Yet by understanding gambling solely as a cultural phenomenon, while reproducing this very understanding through performing the role of a benevolent 'holy father' (as a role-model and a provider), the *Èxtra* did not question the glasshouse wherein the under-privileged continued to find themselves thrown.

The same was true for the other part of Curaçao's institutional public that were closely tied to the Dutch institutional order and wherein formal-institutional news media on both sides of the ocean shaped and were shaped by liberal-democratic norms of the ideal bourgeois public sphere. They understood and represented lottery participation (and popular news practices in general) "as a cognitively biased decision arrived at by an incorrect understanding of the statistics of the game" (Beckert & Lutter, 2013, p. 1154; Devereux, 1949/1980). This reasoning was limited. It was based on a rationalization of lottery participation in terms of its risk, which reflects "a calculative interest in rendering events knowable and manageable" (Cosgrave, 2021, p. 131; referring to Weber, 1974; Beck, 1992). For sure, a calculative rationality was employed by lottery institutions, whether state-owned or private, as well as by affiliated institutional

actors. Yet, in general, "the lottery ticket buyer is not taking a risk or risking their money (given the very long odds), they are orienting positively to and embracing chance" (Cosgrave, 2021, p. 131).

This embrace of chance was a positive future orientation among Curaçao's working classes. As I have argued in this chapter, games of chance formed an escape from an experience with a daily present at the bottom of the social order. Buying (and selling) a *brièchi* or watching the daily drawing during prime time TV were future-oriented social practices "as compensation for and release of tensions arising from social inequalities and feelings of deprivation" (Beckert & Lutter, 2013, p. 1154; Devereux 1949/1980). By portraying lottery practices as 'irrational', the institutional order tended to not only denounce this future orientation related to a present dominated by an unequal, class-based social order, but also to ignore that this was a "collective representation" (Durkheim, 1885/2014) of a common sense of belonging among working-class Curaçaoans. So, "the prompting of a chance orientation as a form of social action [was] an effect of social structure, a response to the 'forced division of labour'" (Cosgrave, 2021, p. 131, citing Durkheim, 1885/2014, p. 293).

What is important to highlight here is that this response – the common sense of belonging as expressed by Curaçao's working classes through news practices around games of chance – unfolded alongside, and in contestation to, liberal-democratic norms buttressing the Kingdom's institutional order.[70] While those operating as part of the institutional order were rationally oriented towards mitigating risk, Curaçao's working classes celebrated chance. Chance was, in turn, institutionalized (and legalized) via the lottery and articulated by popular news media into Curaçao's institutional public through an affective register. Whether it was through an affective or a rational register though (representing the cultural and the bourgeois public sphere in Curaçao's split institutional public), the common sense of belonging felt by Curaçao's working classes could never be totally institutionalized and thereby reduced, measured, calculated, rationalized. Those who were thrown at the bottom of this glasshouse knew that despite these

[70] Although I do not wish to make an historical argument here, it is salient that "lotteries were used in the early development of capitalism as a form of state financing, prior to the development of banking systems. The Dutch were early users of lotteries, starting in the fifteenth century. The Dutch state-owned *Staatsloterij* [State Lottery], established in 1726, is the world's longest-running lottery" (Cosgrave, 2021, p. 125).

institutional efforts to reduce the world, human life was, in fact, a lottery. And they celebrated it, sensing that no living soul could escape this contingency.

4.4. CELEBRATING CHANCE AT THE BOTTOM OF THE SOCIAL ORDER

My aim in this chapter has been to reflect on the nature of news practices around the lottery and, related to the lottery, the obituaries. Via an existential-phenomenological analysis I have argued that these news practices articulate the common sense of belonging of Curaçao's working classes related to a dialectic of hope and fear. They found themselves thrown at the bottom of the social order of the glasshouse that was Curaçao. To escape their daily reality in this glasshouse, the working classes oriented towards the future: its endless possibilities and the ultimate inevitable.

This future orientation fed feelings of fear, yet it was also what bared hope. It was where the imagination for potential (better) futures sprouted. It is this deeply felt common sense of belonging among the working-class members that the popular news media acted on and where it was, in turn, to found. These forms of media provided them with the issues of the day, an ethic of (tomorrow) 'God Willing', a future through the 'university of the street', and a dream of getting out of this glasshouse someday by winning the lottery.

From the daily routine of handing in one's lucky number at the *Èxtra* and buying one's *brièchi* to watching the live broadcast of the daily drawing news practices around the lottery reflected a shared need among the working classes to get some grip on a life that was deeply uncertain. To them, buying a lot was not about rationally deliberating whether this was worth the risk. After all, they had nothing to lose really. They sensed that all belonged equally to the Kingdom of God. And His salvation was their only escape out of the glasshouse they found themselves in. They submitted to a higher power not "to forfeit one's own agency but to recover it through a relationship with something beyond oneself" (Jackson & Piette, 2015, p. 12). They were able to take a hand in their 'lot' by "orienting positively to and embracing chance" (Cosgrave, 2021, p. 131) in the hope for a better life one day, *ku Dios ke*.



5 | A shattered glasshouse

Cathartic senses of belonging in Hurricane Irma's aftermath across the Dutch world

While previous chapters have shown the infrastructural logics (and logistics) of the glasshouse by exploring practices of news and 'the news', in this last chapter I shed light on what happens when the glasshouse suddenly breaks down. Such a situation took place on Sint Maarten when Hurricane Irma hit the island in September 2017. As a hurricane of the highest level in strength, Irma had a devastating impact on the material, institutional, and social infrastructures on Sint Maarten. In a moment, Sint Maarteners daily lives radically changed.

The focus of this chapter is on how news practices unfolded in Hurricane Irma's aftermath and generated cathartic senses of belonging across the Dutch world. After Hurricane Irma hit the island, its media houses were heavily constrained in providing 'the news' on Sint Maarten. The telecom infrastructures were severely damaged, reporters could not travel the island, and local officials long kept silent in reaction to the chaos on the island. As 'the news' was cut off and the island government remained silent, Sint Maarteners on the island and throughout the Dutch world (and beyond) had to turn to popular news practices and communication networks that were operative, such as family, social media, and digital (radio) platforms. As news found its way through live YouTube footage, one radio station, Facebook groups, and Twitter, the aftermath of Hurricane Irma led to the exposure and intensification of more popular news practices that now answered a widespread need for information by not only the popular but also the institutional public on Sint Maarten.

In fact, the sudden and violent disruption of social life as it used to be broke down the glasshouse and with it the division of an institutional public versus a popular public on Sint Maarten. Now, every Sint Maartener stood in the face of the unknown, while many related to and affected by the disastrous event were confronted with feelings of hope and fear. They scrolled the internet for a sign of life of a loved one; listening day and night to the only locally operative radio station; and they joined the rapidly emerging Facebook groups in need for emotional release and some comfort. Amidst severe existential insecurity, these and other news practices generated cathartic senses of belonging. In the face of the unknown, all belonged to 'we', Sint Maarteners.

In this chapter I show that these cathartic feelings of belonging were not constrained by territorial or national borders of the island but stretched into the Dutch Kingdom (and beyond). In The Netherlands, the news media no longer portrayed Sint Maarteners as the Others, far-away and backwards on a distant Caribbean island, but, rather, as Dutch citizens in need of help. On Curaçao, the

call to stand with "our Antillean brothers and sisters" was spread via popular and institutional news practices, alike. For a moment, 'we' were all in this together. Whether this moment lasted – and why (not) – is a question that I will (try to) answer in the conclusion of this thesis.

5.1. A HOUSE WITHOUT A ROOF: NEWS AND 'THE NEWS' IN THE EYE OF THE STORM

After weeks of speculating about its path, scientists were clear about what would be a most unfortunate yet certain truth: Hurricane Irma's path headed directly to Sint Maarten. I still vividly remember staring at my screen looking at the NASA satellite shots of what appeared to me to be a giant white monster. Perhaps this was my way of trying to come to terms with something beyond my imagination that was unavoidably going to happen. I recall I felt humble at this point, not only vis-a-vis this force of nature but also in relation to everyone on Sint Maarten who were bracing themselves for the coming storm. I could only imagine what they were going through. Or maybe I could not imagine it which was in and of itself a position of privilege, I realized. It was early September 2017 and I felt nervous, anxious, and helpless from behind my desk in The Netherlands.

I nurtured myself with thoughts about the conversations I had had with Sint Maarteners during my stay on the island a year before, in 2016. Many had recalled their experiences with that other massive Hurricane, Luis, in 1995 and how they had dealt with it. I come back to this previous hurricane and how it lived on in the stories, embodied memories, and senses of belonging among Sint Maarteners, in the next section. To me these stories were a reminder that Sint Maarteners were resilient. I told myself they knew what was – or, at least, could be – ahead of them and how to brace for it.

With only hours to go before Hurricane Irma would make landfall on the island, 'we' could only wait. At this point, most Sint Maarteners were inside in their (or their relatives') boarded and shored up houses. Among those whose housing was unsafe, some had made it to the few public shelters, others did not go because of a lack of trust that these shelters would hold or because of a lack of time and information (Abayneh Abebe et al., 2018). The government had only belatedly ordered some of the public shelters to be opened prior to the hurricane's passing and not after, as the latest official press release had

announced (Government of Sint Maarten, 2017). The government's inability to reach the broader population with 'the news' about the shelters was a prelude to the absence of governmental communication in Irma's aftermath. This shows the importance of popular news networks and channels even prior to the hurricane making landfall.

Ignoring the official warnings, Kenjiro, a police reporter who was always on top of breaking news on the island, went out. While driving his truck, his mobile camera live recorded how the storm surge was already pushing the ocean into the nearly empty streets of Philipsburg. "This is silence before the storm", he said. Together with hundreds of others who were watching on Facebook, I could only keep my fingers crossed for all those who had not fled the island – either because they could not or because they did not want to leave their homes and relatives. At one point, my eye was caught by a comment made by a viewer from the US. She was asking for help on behalf of a friend who got stuck at home on the island. She was alone and in panic. Could Kenjiro help her with making it to a public shelter? The curfew was already in effect and there was no time left to move her friend. Yet, after exchanging cell-numbers, Kenjiro made sure to contact her friend, after which he got her to a safe place where she had company.

It was neither the first nor the last time that Kenjiro played an important role in communicating information and needs among Sint Maarteners via his Facebook channels and WhatsApp news groups. In one of his last-minute live streams, he urged:

> Let we make Facebook the *center* of the communication, ok? And to do it, is passing my network to your network and your network passing to other networks. Because not everybody has the same friends. (…) The WhatsApp [group] is the same thing. Broadcast and re-broadcast my news constantly. Among your group, among your friends and different groups that you're in. Let we spread the news *out.* (Facebook timeline, September 5, 2017)

Kenjiro urged that people build on popular communication channels and networks. He had already tried to translate all government information and 'the news' which was provided in English (or French, on the northern part of the island) to Spanish to inform migrants from Spanish speaking countries in the region. The lack of access to 'the news' among migrant workers on Sint Maarten was not new. During my fieldwork on the island, journalists, editors, and media

managers told me that they had once considered producing multilingual news, yet the market for 'the news' was simply too small to be profitable.[71] This was a concern in the institutional public. Moreover, to cater the migrant population on Sint Maarten, news in Spanish alone was not enough. Those working in and for 'the news' were not the only ones aware of this. In a comment on Kenjiro's call to "spread the news out" in Spanish, someone wrote, "Once u go Spanish, u vanish, u need a Haitian gf [girlfriend – SR] for us to get it in Kreyol". Although there was a substantial group of Spanish-speaking Dominicans on the island (est. 5.8% of the official population in 2011), the commenter pointed to the significant Haitian community on the island (est. 6.9%). They spoke Haitian creole or Kreyol. Moreover, those from Dominica, Guadeloupe, and other (formerly) French colonies in the Lesser Antilles, spoke their version of Kreyol (or Patois). Many languages were spoken on Sint Maarten and among these, Spanish only played a limited role.

There was an urgent need, though, to reach migrant workers with information now that a catastrophic event was about to unfold. Among them were the most vulnerable – and marginalized – on the island, particularly the estimated 15,000 persons without official documents (De Wit, 2015). They had been forced to build their dwellings up against the hills, which made them prone to landslides caused by heavy rainfall. Others lived in often deplorable conditions in Sint Maarten's poorest neighborhoods. Either way, they were in severe danger. Yet, with a hurricane like Irma on its way, no one was truly safe. And it was in the face of this truth that Sint Maarteners went into a long night of waiting in fear for what would come.

It was in the early morning of Wednesday September 6, 2017 that Hurricane Irma made landfall on Sint Maarten. Around 7 am (local time) NASA-NOAA shared a rare satellite shot of the island caught in the eye of the storm [see **Figure 18**]. Irma hit Sint Maarten directly. After 45 minutes of relative calm weather, the second half of the hurricane roared over the island for a few hours more. By the end of the morning, Sint Maarteners found themselves in a world unmade. With winds over 300 km/h, massive storm surge, heavy rain, and flooding, Irma caused widespread devastation on the island. Houses, shops, and public buildings had crumbled, boats and containers had crashed against the shores and further

[71] See also the blog "The privilege to inform and be informed" (Rotmeijer, 2017b) that I wrote in Irma's aftermath in which I made this point.

inland, roads had become impassable, crops had been stripped, and trees uprooted. The hurricane had left the once lush island brown, the ocean grey, and the nights dark. Electricity had gone out soon after Irma's landfall. The fire department and the airport were so badly damaged that they were unusable. There was no running water. And because telephone and internet networks were down, there was hardly any communication on, from, and to the island.

Some pictures and recordings sent by island residents to their overseas family members in the eye of the storm had made it online. These showed horrifying images of the damage that had already been done. Yet, as a resident of Point Blanche, close to Sint Maarten's harbor, would later say to The New Yorker:

> You thought that was bad already, but then, after the eye, the tail of the hurricane came, and that was even worse. I swear to God, I was holding on to the edge of my bed. And that's when the damage was really done. My neighbor had lost part of his roof already— I think he was hiding in the closet. And another neighbor was hiding in a bathroom with his son and his wife. All the windows and the doors, everything was blown off. (…) After the storm, it was complete devastation. There was not a roof in sight. (E. Velasquez, cited by Meade, 2017)

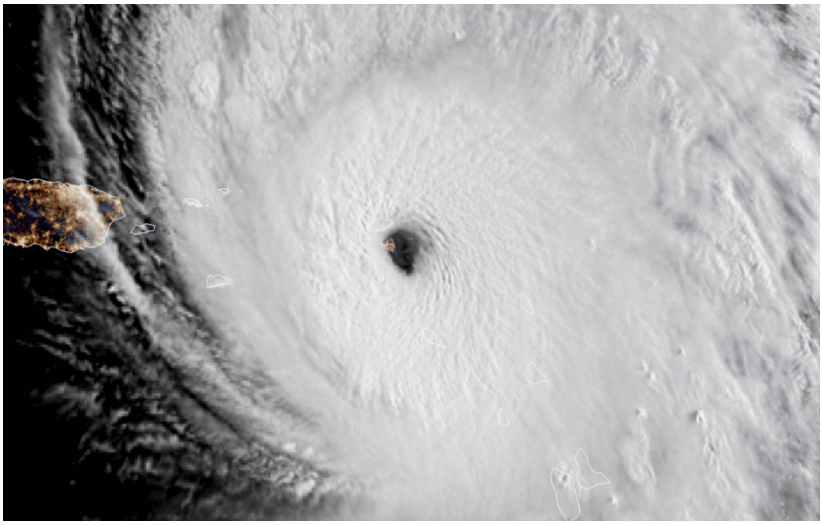


Figure 18: Sint Maarten in the eye of Hurricane Irma as seen from space (Image credit: NOAA/GOES)

Island residents had to cope with this disruptive reality at once. People elsewhere were still in the dark. Among the first impressions that came out were the aerial views provided by the Dutch Ministry of Defense [see **Figure 19**].



Figure 19: Devastation on Sint Maarten, 6 September 2017 (Image credit: Netherlands Ministry of Defense/Gerben van Es)

A few days prior to Irma's landfall, Dutch marine and military forces had departed from Aruba and Curaçao together with local militias and police to provide first aid in the hurricane's immediate aftermath. When their ships arrived on the 6th of September, a Dutch military helicopter took off just before sunset to map the immense destruction on the island. As news media were dependent on scarcely available information at this point (see Hadders & Evers, 2017), these shots were shared by news outlets across the globe.

Among friends, relatives, and others with close connections on the island, myself included, these images evoked intense feelings of insecurity, fear, and anxiety. In desperate need of some sign of life from sisters, brothers, (grand)parents, neighbors, and friends, many people turned to those channels that were still operative. On Twitter for example, the Dutch Navy account was used by relatives asking for help in finding their loved ones. "Could you search for my little sister on Saba?" a Dutch lady asked, "from Windward side to Momo Cottages, first to the left, around the little gardens. Thank you"[72] (response to Frank Boots Twitter, September 6, 2017). After it became clear that the Royal Dutch Navy could not address individual requests[73], people desperately asked, "How can we get in touch with our family members, many people are anxious as there is no communication possible" (response to Koninklijke Marine Twitter, September 7, 2017). Many put their faith in the Dutch military because their satellite connection provided a way to get information from the island to the rest of the world – and vice versa.

This connectivity also became clear to Harris, a freelance journalist, and Dutch Caribbean correspondent for the Dutch public broadcaster (NOS), who had made it to Sint Maarten by hopping on one of the Royal Dutch naval vessels leaving Curaçao. This meant he had direct access to the military satellite connection and many of those in urgent need for information, including the Dutch press, turned to Harris for 'the news'. Yet, to spread 'the news', as Harris could, one had to get it first. Harris was among the first civilians to go ashore, but only briefly and his access was limited to the Marine-protected harbor area at

[72] I have translated the original Dutch-language quotes as reported in Dutch news media and on social media have into English in this chapter.

[73] The Royal Dutch Navy replied to messages like this that its mission was to support local authorities who, in turn, determined its actions, but another person responded to the query: "The brother of my co-worker knows her. There have been no casualties and her house is still intact. He'll try to contact her" (response to Koninklijke Marine Twitter, September 7, 2017).

Philipsburg. From there he reported to Dutch TV, "It's like a warzone, a deserted warzone. (…) Desolate, you could say. *Uncanny* it even felt to me", while adding that "it must be *insane* in the city. When I zoom in with my camera from the harbor, all I see are houses destroyed" (Nieuwsuur, 2017a, n.p.). Thus, while Harris witnessed the destruction Hurricane Irma had left, he could also barely imagine what was going on in the streets and what Sint Maarteners were really going through.

This became clear when Harris posted an update on his Facebook timeline on 8 September 2017. It was only two days after the passing of Irma, but Sint Maarten had to brace for yet another massive hurricane (José). While Harris was back on board the ship to wait out the hurricane's passing offshore, he noted, "The residents of SXM probably have no idea that a second hurricane is on its way". This supposition resonated with a common perception in the Kingdom-wide institutional public. How, after all, was it possible to get information when the telecom infrastructures were severely damaged, the government remained silent, and the island's press was heavily constrained? "There is no order, enforcement, and authority", as Harris wrote, and related to that, "There is no communication anywhere". There was indeed a profound lack of 'the news' on (and about the situation on) the island. Yet Sint Maarteners on the island and throughout the (Dutch) world soon found other ways to get the news and spread it. They did this through popular news practices and communication networks via family, Facebook, and radio transmissions.

5.2. THE INTENSIFICATION OF POPULAR NEWS PRACTICES IN IRMA'S AFTERMATH

ON-THE-GROUND ACCOUNTS AMIDST CHAOS AND DEVASTATION

In the wake of Irma's passing, first-hand stories, pictures, and recordings started to trickle in online. Despite the immense devastation of buildings, utilities and communication infrastructures on the ground, some residents found a way to connect online. "There is an underground glass fiber", one of them explained to a Dutch newspaper, and went on to say, "While all wires are damaged, at times we have Wi-Fi somewhere" (cited in Van Wijk, 2017, n.p.).

In the "NOS Achtuurjournaal" (Eight O'clock News) on the day after Irma's devastating landfall on the island, a woman who was visiting her family on Sint Maarten tried to describe what she and others were going through. While a video recording made from a car driving the streets was shown on screen, she said in a voice-over:

> It's as if a lawn mower has come down from heaven and just went straight over the island. Yes, so how people are doing here? People are truly *helpless.* It's just really, they just don't know what to do. You see the fear in their eyes. People are just still looking for people. Of course there is also looting going on. No one knows for how long your rations at home— for how long they last you. So you see that people are really plundering supermarkets. And yes [sights], we also do not get much information. We also don't know where we stand. For how long we have to deal with this of course. We just really don't know what to do! People are just standing here— their house has just been razed to the ground. And it's really just, yes, *hor-ri-ble.* (NOS, 2017a)

Like other first on-the-ground accounts, one could hear, see, and sense the utter despair and anxiety felt by Sint Maarteners at this point. Pictures showed how residents were wandering the streets in shock over how Sint Maarten, their home, had been razed to the ground overnight [see **Figure 20**]. In such an environment of complete devastation and disorder, people were in desperate need of a sign of their loved ones. Yet, as a witness told to the Dutch broadcaster, "Many houses are destroyed, no one knows where the inhabitants are" (NOS, 2017a).



Figure 20: A panorama picture of people wandering the streets on Sint Maarten in the wake of Hurricane Irma, taken and posted on Facebook by a resident (anonymized by me).

Without any operating telecom network, Sint Maarteners had to lean on personal networks and popular news practices to find anything out. The latest updates on who was where in what state could be found in the streets, where information circulated rapidly from neighbor to neighbor and among friends and family. This

was particularly the case in urban areas on higher ground, where one was able to go out and meet one another. Some of the lower-lying areas, however, were completely flooded, while roadblocks meant that (more) remote neighborhoods, like Point Blanche, were closed off for days. Several interlocutors later told me that they had witnessed people risking their lives to reach their loved ones and find out whether they were alive. Over the next few days, official sources reported that four people had lost their lives during the hurricane's passing. Hundreds of people were injured. They needed urgent medical help. The hospital, however, was severely damaged just like the fire department, the police headquarters, and other public services. "I don't see ambulances", a resident said, and "one is helping another" (NOS, 2017a). Sint Maarteners were thrown back onto themselves and each other in the chaos the island now faced.

This situation led to cases of looting. Many had lost nearly everything and faced severe insecurity about what was ahead. They had made it through the hurricane alive. Now, they had to make sure to survive its aftermath. Of course, looting was not only a matter of immediate survival. In addition to supermarkets for food and water, looters were spotted at electronics shops, jewelry stores, wholesalers, and distributors of various goods. Images and live recordings of looting circulated online, showing people carrying flat screen TVs, smartphones, and other luxury goods. Although the main – and after Irma, only – newspaper on the island, *The Daily Herald*, was severely limited in publishing 'the news' daily, the paper's building "escaped Irma's wrath fairly unscathed", as a former employee and current news website owner in the Netherlands wrote (Hokstam, 2017, n.p.). Moreover, it still had access to glass cable internet and, therefore, could publish 'the news' online at times. In an article on its website, it described a case of looting:

> 'Come look, a generator', shouted a shirtless man to his fellow looters just hours after monster storm Hurricane Irma devastated St. Maarten/St. Martin. He was pushing a new generator out of the ripped doors of Safe Cargo, one of the island's main shipping companies. He was by far not the only opportunist after the devastating hurricane left the island's shores. Many people converged on supermarkets, food warehouses, liquor depots, furniture stores and electronic equipment stores to cart away as much as they could with absolutely no shame or remorse. (The Daily Herald, 2017, n.p.)

The Herald was not the only one shaming those involved in looting, particularly of what were considered luxury goods and non-essentials. Looting was widely condemned in the institutional public and the popular public alike. Some, however, also understood that in the glasshouse Sint Maarten was (or, rather, used to be), those who found themselves in in the lower ranks of society dreamt of a better life someday. To these people, Irma's aftermath provided an opportunity to fulfill this dream now that the island's social order was destroyed all at once. Local officials and authorities kept silent in reaction to the chaos on the island. There was no structural law enforcement in the streets. The subsequent disorder was what life meant in a glasshouse broken into pieces overnight. Finding oneself in this broken glasshouse was daunting. People on Sint Maarten hankered after some stability and to know where they were at. And it was one of Sint Maarten's (commercial) radio stations, together with popular Facebook groups, that met this deeply felt need.

NEWS VIBRATING IN THE ETHER AND CIRCULATING ONLINE

While the electricity was down and the local transmission tower destroyed, radio station *Laser 101* managed to go back on air and to remain in the ether in the days and weeks following the hurricane's passing. Thanks to a backup FM antenna and an emergency generator the radio station came to play a pivotal role in providing information to people on the island and beyond. Via battery operated portable radios, Sint Maarteners tuned in to the station en masse. "Ask a random person on Sint Maarten how to get information after hurricane Irma, and he or she will respond, 'via radio station Laser 101'" (ANP/Redactie, 2017) The DJs, editors, musicians, and technicians who were all part of the station's "Storm Watch Team" worked around the clock. Many of them had lost their homes too, but even those whose houses had been spared practically lived in the studio. Working at the only operative news outlet on the island meant that there was simply no time to call it a day.

When shortly after Irma's passing, Hurricane José was on its way, most on the island heard about this via the latest updates of the "Storm Watch Team". And when emergency first aid finally arrived on the island, it were *Laser 101* DJs who informed their listeners about the where, when, and how of food and water distribution. Even those who were outside the reach of the radio station, either because they could not tune in – having no radio or (full) batteries at hand – or

because they did not master the English language, were indirectly informed by the on air news broadcasts. On Sint Maarten news spread fast by word of mouth. While people on the island depended on what they heard via the ether, *Laser 101* depended on the information and help they got from the island community. There was a continual circulation of people in and out of the studio. “Some want to tell their story or they search for information”, the owner of *Laser 101* said, “Others bring pizza, for example, after they’ve heard our DJs feeling hungry on air” (ANP/Redactie, 2017). Everyone on the island turned to popular news practices now that all building and communication infrastructures on the island were destroyed.

The same was true for those residing beyond the island who were in desperate need for on-the-ground accounts of what was going on. Because *Laser 101* had been able to regain its internet connection soon after Irma’s passing, the radio station broadcasted online and streamed live out of Sint Maarten. It enabled people from all over the world to tune in to *Laser 101*, which became a key gateway to get and spread news from and to the island. Via the station’s hotlines, relatives called in on air to ask, “Have you heard something of my little sister, living in St. Peters?” or “Could someone please check on my mom in Belvedere?” and “Have you found my brother yet? I haven’t heard from him since Tuesday?” The phone lines of the “Storm Watch Team” were ringing off the hook. “Yes, it is still difficult at times”, one of the radio DJs said after a week of phone lines ringing off the hook, “Some people call- they are very emotional. But we keep holding on” (Nieuwsuur, 2017b). Most of the time, the Storm Watch Team could not provide concrete information about the state of relatives on the island immediately. But a listening ear to people in despair and explaining to them that they probably hadn’t heard anything from their loved ones because the electricity and telecom networks were down, already gave callers some solace. As such, *Laser 101* became much more than a news outlet “spreading the news out”. Its broadcasts allowed for a sense of continuity and provided mental support and comfort to its listeners on the island and beyond. Hence it also got calls from people expressing their gratitude. “Oh my God, I cannot imagine how we could hold on without the radio, without listening to a familiar voice” (ibid).

Similar words of appreciation about the radio station were expressed on Facebook, such as though of a Canadian resident who posted, “My wife [X] was able to speak on air with radio laser101. Omg we are so Grateful of the amazing work they do to help the right information circulate. Thx laser101❤” (Facebook,

September 10, 2017). Popular news practices on Facebook, and particularly in Facebook groups, unfolded in close relation to the broadcasts of *Laser 101*. One of the most important Facebook groups, "Hurricane Irma – Contact and Aid – SXM"[74] (henceforth, ICA- SXM) [see **Figure 21**] was launched on the day that Irma hit Sint Maarten by several young(er) Sint Maarteners who resided both on island and in diaspora. They sensed and acted on the urgent need for an online platform to "find missing persons, report emergencies, get aid and help others" in Irma's aftermath.

In close relation to radio station *Laser 101*, the ICA-SXM Facebook group provided critical information and support to people on and beyond Sint Maarten. Updates and needs that were broadcasted by *Laser 101* were often simultaneously posted in this Facebook group and vice versa. In this way, both channels performed a necessary function in enhancing the reach of information so that pressing needs could be met. Among many examples were: the sharing of the latest information about water distribution points and the redistribution of water supplies among people on the island; arranging the delivery of medical supplies for the hospital's emergency room via an aid organization from the US; and informing people about the setup of relay websites to the *Laser 101* online stream so the existing streams would be overloaded [see **Figure 22**]. This was how, via the ether and online, news spread fast so that urgent needs could be met and aid could be organized rapidly.

With close to 10,000 members, the ICA-SXM Facebook group became a central space for relatives on and beyond the island to reach out to each other. As soon as the group was online, hundreds of people from all over the world started to post photo's, names, and locations of missing relatives on the island, often accompanied by heart-rending texts that expressed a deep-felt despair in the face of the unknown. Three days after Hurricane Irma, a daughter residing in the diaspora, for example, reached out to the online community in her search for her beloved father [see **Figure 23**].

[74] On March 15, 2020, the name of the Facebook group was changed to "COVID-19 Info SXM (Hurricane Contact & Aid)" and has since been used for "sharing and verifying information" about Covid-19 (casualties and statistics) on Sint Maarten. I will briefly reflect on the impact of Covid-19 on daily island life – on top of enduring struggles since the passing of Hurricane Irma – in Section 5.4.



Figure 22: Spreadsheet posted in the Facebook group "Hurricane Irma – Contact and Aid – SXM" on September 10, 2017

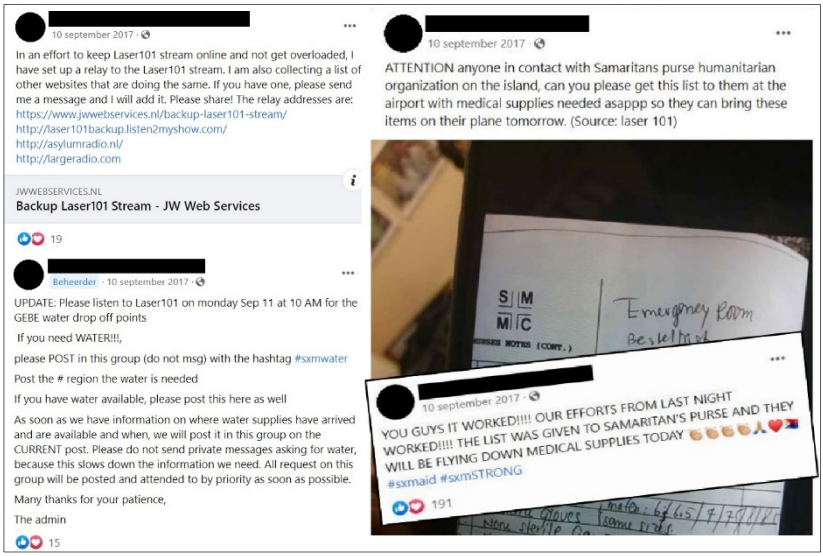


Figure 21: Examples of interactions between *Laser 101* and Facebook posts in the group "Hurricane Irma – Contact and Aid – SXM" on September 10, 2017.

Among the reactions her post generated were practical tips, such as adding the name of her father to the list of missing persons on the website *irmatracker.com* which together with the Dutch Red Cross site *ikbenveilig.nl* [safe and well] served as central registers of missing persons. Moreover, there were many people offering mental support to this daughter and her family by expressing under-



Figure 23: An example of a post by a worried daughter in search of her father and some of the reactions she got. Source: Facebook group "Hurricane Irma – Contact and Aid – SXM", 9 September 2017.

standing about the helplessness one felt being far away and by encouraging each other not to "give up hope". As such, online platforms like the ICA-SXM Facebook group became a space for relatives to articulate shared feelings of hope and fear as they awaited a sign of their loved ones. Later that day, the daughter responded to her original post with relief. She had heard via another family member that her father was safe and sound. Although his family living far away remained anxious about the devastating conditions he was in, they found some comfort knowing that his neighbors were looking out for him. In Dutch Quarter, one of the poorest neighborhoods on the island, people cared for one another. They had, in fa ct, long done so in their daily struggle to make ends meet. This father's children were well aware of this as expressed by a later post, in which the daughter said, "I am just happy some districts are taking care of one another. That's how it should be! Coming together [and] being one in this time of need!"

The examples in **Figures 22** and **23** serve to demonstrate how

Sint Maarteners on the island and throughout the (Dutch) world came to depend on popular news practices and communication networks during Irma's aftermath. As the hurricane had devastated the institutional order by destroying most buildings and communication infrastructures on the island, 'the news' was cut off and the island government remained silent. There was no central coordination, nor was there an institutional authority to depend on. People were on their own, helping each other. This was also the case for news media on the island.

Kenjiro, the breaking news reporter I mentioned above, had asked his sister to post an update on his behalf on his Facebook news page. He was without an internet connection and the truck that had allowed him to drive the streets hours before the storm was destroyed. He reached out to his media colleagues at *The Daily Herald* with whom he had cooperated before to ask them to provide him with a workspace and access to Wi-Fi. As the building of *The Herald* only had minor damages, it not only "accommodated its employees who have lost their houses, [t]he paper also shared its good fortune by allowing competing news organizations to use its offices and by giving residents access to use the WIFI or charge their phones" (Hokstam, 2017, n.p.). Due to the curfew that came into effect soon after Irma and its personnel's other priorities (dealing with private devastation), it would take more than two weeks before the first printed edition of *The Herald* came out. Nevertheless, the paper's management opened its facilities to media colleagues, among them Kenjiro, and residents alike. According to one of the managers it was an extraordinary decision in an extraordinary situation, saying:

> People wanted to communicate with the outside world. So we decided to open it, for people to be able to send WhatsApp messages to concerned friends and families abroad. Before you knew it there were up to 40 people at a time outside our building, using our internet. (…) We were really lucky to have electricity while others didn't. Allowing people to charge their phones so they could use the internet to let their families know they were okay, was the least we could do. (Cited in Hokstam, 2017, n.p.)

At the same time that media outlets like *The Herald* and also *Laser 101* provided residents access to whatever was left of communication infrastructures on the island, it was common people on the island who provided news to 'the news' on

the island and across the world. A case in point was Jeremy, one of the administrators of the ICA-SXM Facebook group and arguably "the best-known Facebook vlogger of Sint Maarten since Hurricane Irma" (Nieuwsuur, 2017c). Without having a vehicle and with his own house destroyed, Jeremy did all he could to distribute water and information among those who needed it the most across the island. The videos he made of the stories and sights he came across during his busy days, were sent out across the world. In an interview with the Dutch program "Nieuwsuur", Jeremy said, "It just blew up, my sons getting contacted by CNN, BBC, City News in Canada and they started to share my videos. Cause, according to them, I was one of the first ones up and on the air" (ibid).

As 'the news' on the island was cut off, the aftermath of Hurricane Irma led to the exposure and intensification of more popular news practices that now served a widespread need for information not only in the popular but also in the institutional public on Sint Maarten and the (Dutch) world. In fact, the sudden and violent disruption of social life as it used to be broke down the glasshouse – and with that the division of an institutional public versus a popular public on Sint Maarten. Now, every Sint Maartener stood in the face of the unknown, while many related to and affected by the disastrous event were confronted with feelings of hope and fear. They scrolled the Internet for a sign of life from a loved one; listening day and night to the only locally operative radio station; joining the rapidly emerging Facebook groups in need for emotional release and some comfort. Let me now turn to how popular news practices amidst a glasshouse shattered to pieces came to articulate and enforce cathartic senses of belonging to 'we', Sint Maarteners across the Dutch world.

5.3. ALL BELONG TO 'WE', SINT MAARTENERS: CATHARTIC SENSES OF BELONGING IN THE DUTCH WORLD

> Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Peace, be still!'
> And the wind ceased and there was a great calm. (Mark 4:39, NKJV)[75]

In this section I explore how popular news practices became a cathartic vehicle to share and release feelings of hope and fear in Irma's immediate aftermath.

[75] Shared by Kenjiro on his Facebook timeline.

Understood here as "a purification or purgation [of emotions] that brings about spiritual renewal or release from tension", (Merriam-Webster, *n.d.*) catharsis provided a way to cope with and to heal from the traumatic disruption of what used to be familiar – and to do so side by side, together. In the wake of Hurricane Irma, the tragedy and loss so widely shared was turned into a story of solidarity and spiritual renewal; of rising again from the shards and fragments of a broken glasshouse. I explore the generation of cathartic senses of belonging across the Dutch Kingdom through news practices unfolding through sharing food ("Breaking bread together") and music ("Musicking the world anew").

BREAKING BREAD TOGETHER

In the wake of Hurricane Irma, rations were running out, supermarkets were empty, and ATM machines were out of order. Whole families lived on one canned meal a day. Some survived by eating dry biscuits for days. Amidst severe scarcity and insecurity about when outside emergency aid would arrive, news about small eateries, restaurants, bakeries, and supermarkets who started to open what was left of their establishments to feed their brothers and sisters on the island, spread fast. A case in point was the family-run bakery and supermarket, Cake House, located in the (Dutch) Sint Maarten residential area of Cul-du-Sac. The then still operating newspaper Today,[76] reported online, "The day after Hurricane Irma passed word spread fast in the Cul-de-Sac area and beyond that Cake House Supermarket was giving out free bread to neighborhood residents" (StMaartenNews, 2017). Soon, not only families from St. Peters, Saunders, and other Cul-du-Sac districts, but all the way from Sucker Garden and other outside districts headed to Cake House to wait for free food in the bread line.

News about the initiative spread rapidly by word of mouth via the ether and online. When *The Daily Herald* uploaded the article, "Cake House giving out bread". It soon circulated across the web and was widely shared on social media. In the "Hurricane Irma – Aid & Contact – SXM" (ICA-SXM) Facebook group, I noticed how the sharing of this news article was often accompanied by posts that

[76] *Today* was Sint Maarten's second newspaper. In Irma's immediate aftermath, *The Herald* opened its facilities to what had been its only competitor since 2000. After Irma had forced *Today* to cease printing, its former editor-in-chief would continue to write for the newly established news website StMaartenNews.com, where the article about Cake House also would be uploaded.

articulated and generated feelings of hope and togetherness amidst adversity. This was illustrated, among others, by a post in the ICA-SXM Facebook group on September 11, 2017 [see **Figure 24**]. This group member articulated feelings of gratitude and relief – as expressed, among others, in the emoticons, such as ✊ ❤ 🙏 and 🙌 😇 – aroused by the article about Cake House giving out bread for free. She also noted what was needed ("It takes a village…" and "#MoreGoodVibes") to improve things and bring people together.

To understand this post in its context, I need to point out that the owners of Cake House were Taiwanese, who islanders viewed as virtually indistinguishable from the Chinese community on the island. In the glasshouse that used to be Sint Maarten, politics of belonging related to black nationalism and a struggle for independence (as I discussed in Chapter Two) involved, at times, xenophobic rhetoric towards 'outsiders', among whom those with a Chinese background. Related to the increasing Chinese institutional presence in the wider Caribbean, the success of Chinese (family) businesses on the island had often been condemned as being at the expense of "local black entrepreneurs". The owners of Cake House, who ran a successful retail busi-ness and were in charge of the local department of the Tsu Chi Buddhist charity organization, which operated worldwide, had also been accused of increasing their wealth and influence on the backs of "local black Sint Maarteners". Whether or not these accusations held water, my point is that when Irma broke the glasshouse down, these politics of belonging made place for cathartic senses of belonging as articulated and enforced by posts about Cake House giving out bread for free. From this angle, the hashtag #ThisIsSt.Maarten in the post above was not so much a description of what Sint Maarten used to be, nor was it explicitly referring to the Cake House initiative. Rather it articulated what Sint Maarten could become and, according to this group member, needed to become to overcome despair. With the last sentence, "I feel a shift in the atmosphere", this woman added to the performativity of her post by expressing her feeling that change was in the air, it simultaneously enabled and enforced this very change.

The telling and retelling of stories about sharing food formed part of how Sint Maarteners coped with and healed from the devastation of Hurricane Irma. They turned it into a story through which imagined futures could emerge. By imposing "a narrative structure and order onto an event that seems to defy any structure or order", practicing news became "itself a form of catharsis"

(Gerstenberger & Nusser, 2015, p. 8). The intensification of popular news practices after the hurricane resembled what Aristoteles called "aesthetic catharsis" which describes "not the thing that has happened, but a kind of thing that might happen, i.e., what is possible as being probable or necessary?" (Paskow, 1983, p. 60).

Another example of aesthetic catharsis through communicating news around food sharing in Irma's after-math was a post by Kenjiro on his Facebook timeline on September 24, 2017 [see **Figure 25**]. Kenjiro was a religious man as are many people on Sint Maarten as well as on Curaçao, the island where he was born and raised. It had been three weeks since Irma had passed, an event that Kenjiro came to terms with by understanding and articulating it as God's grace. Instead of focusing on the destruction that He had poured down upon Sint Maarten (as if a "lawn mower came down from heaven and went over the island"), he turned it into a story of how Irma had brought people together. Rather than focusing

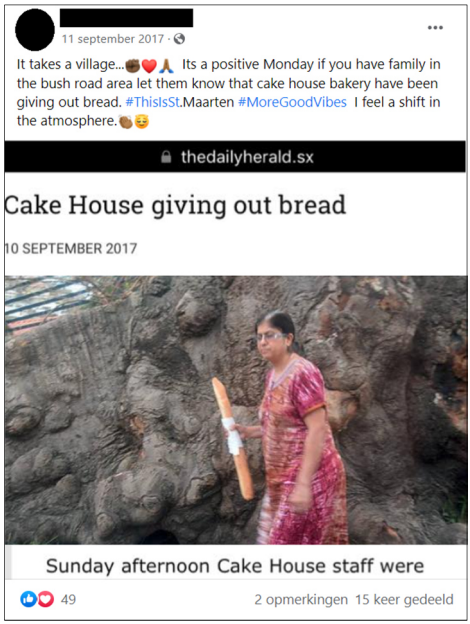


Figure 24: Post in the ICA-SXM Facebook group sharing the article "Cake House giving out bread" by *The Daily Herald* on September 11, 2017.



Figure 25: Post by Kenjiro on his Facebook timeline on September 24, 2017.

on political divisions based on skin color, gender, nationality, or ethnic background, Kenjiro emphasized how God had deconstructed the capitalist social order of the glasshouse which was based on class divisions. By writing that "GOD bring the rich and the poor at one table, so they can eat from the same pot", Kenjiro articulated the biblical notion 'to break bread together'. To him, sharing food was not only a matter of survival, but a religious ritual to (re)connect, bury anger, and experience joy and peace that transcended inequality in the island's social order.

Kenjiro's post was also a form of aesthetic catharsis in not only describing experiences with breaking bread together in Irma's aftermath, but also in acting on an imagination of equality as being probable: after all, we were all equal in His eyes. As such, his post was an aesthetic practice of emotional release and spiritual relief which resonated among many of his followers who reacted with "Amen!","Sure did", "No lie about that", as well as by expressing emotions of pity ("Sad, but true"); and even by provoking laughter through bittersweet humor with reference to the early initiative by Cake House to break bread together ("Put us all in the same breadline  "). The aesthetic catharsis of and brought about by Kenjiro's post also resonated through time in bringing experiences of the past and hopes for the future together. A man, for example, recalled his experiences in the aftermath of Hurricane Luis, which left the island devastated in 1995, writing, "Well those of us who [were] around for hurricane Luis living it for the second time when your enemies asking you if everything is OK and want to share the little that they have with you". Some were somewhat skeptical of whether such cathartic senses of belonging to 'we', Sint Maarteners – previously experienced after Luis and now in Irma's aftermath – would last long-term. Others, including Kenjiro himself, held on to the opportunity that Irma (God) provided for people to unite, which was expressed in comments, such as, "The people need to try and live as one (…). Having no electricity was disgusting yess, but not having it We the neighbors enjoyed the quality time together".

Sharing food not only brought together neighbors, friends, and foes on the island. Popular news practices around 'breaking bread together' also evoked and enforced cathartic senses of belonging among people who had never set foot on Sint Maarten, let alone experienced anything like a hurricane of the highest category and waking up in a world unmade.

When "Nieuwsuur" shared the video portrait of Jeremy distributing water to those in need on the island, his actions spoke to brothers and sisters

throughout the Dutch Kingdom. A Dutch woman living in Amsterdam, for example, was deeply moved by what she saw and heard in the video and reacted:

Ja is ook echt wel vreselijk.	Yes, [this] is actually really dreadful.
Van het 1 op andere moment.	From one moment to the other.
Je huis kwijt	Losing your home
Al je spullen	All your stuff
Geen water	No water
Echt wel heel heftig.	Really very tough indeed.

(*Nieuwsuur*, 2017c)

It were on-the-ground accounts, such as those given by Jeremy, which aroused not only feelings of pity and compassion, but also generated emphatic engagement throughout the (Dutch) world and across the institutional and popular public. We were no longer strangers, but, rather, brothers and sisters who all belonged to 'we', Sint Maarteners.

The widely shared, deeply felt urgency to help our brothers and sisters called for action. Under the name "One Love SXM", Curaçaoan radio and television stations worked together with bloggers, DJs, rappers, and local aid organizations to raise funds (UTS, 2017). At the same time, the Dutch Red Cross and the Dutch public broadcaster (NPO) joined forces in organizing the national fundraising campaign "Nederland helpt Sint-Maarten" [The Netherlands helps Sint Maarten] on September 15, 2017 (NPO, 2017a).[77] After the Dutch Minister of Kingdom Affairs had started the event in the early morning, politicians and 'BNers' ('Bekende Nederlanders' [famous Dutch people]) took their seats to take calls from people making donations. Both public and commercial radio and TV live-broadcasted and streamed thousands of smaller and bigger relief efforts and initiatives that took off across The Netherlands on that day. Sport clubs organized sponsored walks, hairdressers cut for free (in exchange for a donation) and whole neighborhoods collected clothes, baby food, and building materials. Efforts ranged from school classes heading to the studio to hand in refundable bottles to small children baking (cup)cakes and selling cookies all day. In response to the question of why they wanted to help, a girl said, "Because we really want to support them very much. We think it's super very bad and we just hope

[77] The total sum of money raised by the campaign was over €18.9 million (Rode Kruis, 2021, p. 53).

everything will be ok soon" (NPO, 2017b). Now, we all – children and parents, brothers, and sisters, rich and poor, kin and strangers – were breaking bread together.

MUSICKING THE WORLD ANEW

It was not a coincidence that fundraising campaigns across the Dutch Kingdom were carried by and echoed through radio broadcasts. Radio stations throughout the Dutch realm provided, like *Laser 101*, the sound of support and resilience during Irma's aftermath. As radio DJs played requested songs throughout the day, listeners called in to express their worries, pity, and compassion. In search of some comfort and solace, we all tuned in to this 'playlist' that was unfolding on the air. Certainly, in disturbing times like this, it was through sound and music that people came together. In other words, it was through 'musicking' that cathartic senses of belonging were expressed and enforced.

I recall, based on the Introduction of this dissertation, that the term 'musicking' was coined by Christopher Small (1999) to stress that the function and meaning of music "lies not in musical works, but in taking part in performance, in social action" (p. 9). I explained how, like musicking, I understand practicing news as a "process of giving and receiving information (…) by means of which the participants not only learn about, but directly experience, their concepts of how they relate, and how they ought to relate, to others in their society and the wider world" (Small, 1998, p. 8). What I came to notice in the aftermath of Hurricane Irma was that news – as a process of how society turns events into stories – resembled the socio-cultural process articulated by Small's notion of musicking. Moreover, people came to practice news not only *as if* musicking but literally *through* their engagement with music.

Sint Maarteners on the island had soon 'musicked' their experiences into shared stories via *Laser 101,* the only operational news outlet in the days following Hurricane Irma. By hearing a familiar voice on the radio who played the songs they knew, Sint Maarteners had found something to hold on to. "Immediate and quick discontinuities create anomy, (…) a loss of norms, maxims and values", as anthropologist Guadeloupe (2021, n.p.), who resided on Sint Maarten when Irma passed, explained:

> In such a situation you *need* continuity, because the landscape has changed. And what happens? Where do you find the continuity? We found it in the soundscape. Where the landscape had changed, the soundscape needed to enact continuity. And that happened by radio stations, like *Laser 101*, playing music that everyone had listened to the days before. So you had hip-hop, you had Bachata, you had Soca, you had all Calypsos. And I realized then that radio was of importance because it was distributing a particular kind of sensibility. It was saying: despite the discontinuity, there is a continuity. We are still here.

Even though the world had become unrecognizable overnight, the soundscape in the ether reminded Sint Maarteners that they were still alive and breathing. They also had to move on. And it was through creating and engaging with new songs that Sint Maarteners on and beyond the island played their way into a future worth living. In the weeks and months after Irma, making, producing, experiencing, listening to, and enjoying music together intensified. Musicking became a cathartic vehicle to turn the devastating event of Hurricane Irma into a story of all.

For Yogsta, a dancehall singer and music artist who resided on the northern (French) side of the island, Hurricane Irma made clear, as he told SXM Friendly Magazine (2017), that "even when everything has been destroyed and it feels like there is no more hope, the music is still there".[78] It became the inspiration for writing the track "Pen & Paper" which had a video clip that was recorded amidst the devastation on the island just after the hurricane had passed over the island. Two months later, when the island was gradually recovering, Yogsta came out with a second track, "Hard Like Metal", which was both an homage and an encouragement to his brothers and sisters to stay strong and keep grinding on day by day. This story was also visualized in the video clip which was released on YouTube on 4 December 2017, by shots of friends, family, and neighbors repairing each other's roofs and houses [see **Figure 26**]. The clip showed how metal tools (hammers and saws) substituted for guns – one of which was literally put into the ground, symbolizing the burying of anger. In a recurring shot, Yogsta and his fellows took turns writing on a whiteboard what "SXM lifestyle" was about (i.e., "St. Martiners look out for each other"; "like to mix!"; "Don't give up").

[78] Translated from French. The original quote was: "Même quand tout a été detruit et que l'on a l'impression qu'il n'y a plus d'espoir, la musique est toujours là".

The story of "Hard Like Metal", as told through sound and image, was not only describing what "SXM life" was about. It also musicked an aesthetic imagination of what the world could be through "SXM life". This was a world that was both known and new to fellow islanders, among whom one commented on the video, saying:

> Nobody has the same flow as YOGSTA and Yogsta a flow that nobody has. It comes from St. Martin, we speak English, French, Spanish, Creole and many more. His lyrics, this English and this accent, that are in his music (…) the sound is too freeesh. I don't even have the words to explain to you how killing it is.[79]

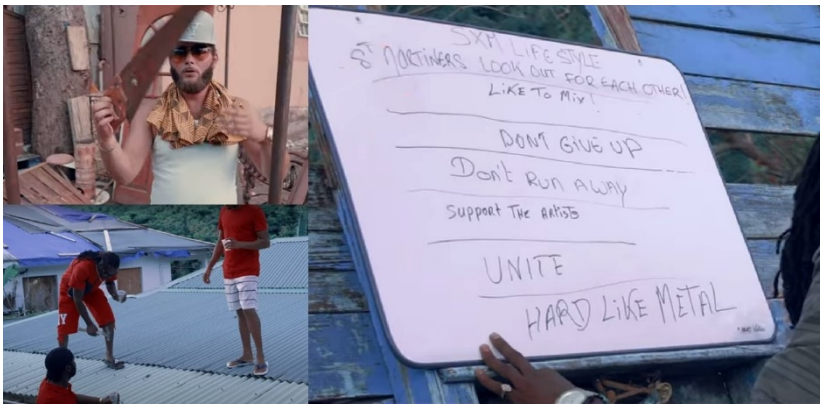


Figure 26: Stills from the video clip of "Hard like Metal", showing friends repairing a roof together; Yogsta holding a saw; a whiteboard with one-liners about "SXM life" (Yogsta, 2017).

Music(king) told a story that was difficult to rationalize and put into words. As a form of aesthetic catharsis, it spoke to people because it resonated with something one recognized while at the same time confronting one with something (a)new. It was through experiencing this ambiguity that the commentator cited above recognized the sound of the island in Yogsta's music ("his lyrics, this English, this accent") which sounded both unique ("a flow nobody has") and novel ("too freeesh"). Yogsta's track could therefore speak to many on *and* beyond the island, as illustrated by the reactions it generated on YouTube

[79] I slightly edited the comment (i.e., punctuation) to enhance the readability here.



Figure 27: Examples of music events organized throughout the Dutch Kingdom. From left to right: flyer of 'mediathon' + concert during fundraising day "One Love SXM"; flyer of benefit concert "Unity 4 St. Maarten" in Bird; flyer of benefit concert "St. Maarten Benefiet" in Annabel.

from people all over the world, including comments such as "Force Haiti 👊👊👊 " and "St. Martin all good bro's one love 🙌🙌🙌🙌🙌🏾👊👊👊🔥🔥🔥💯😂💯 😁😁 Amsterdam here bless up bro thug😎".

Music did not know territorial or national boundaries. Curaçaoans sang and danced on Brionplein in Otrobanda, Willemstad during the closing concert of the "SXM One Love" fundraising campaign for their affected sister islands. Dutch YouTubers joined forces by composing and performing the song "Ik geef om jou" [I care about you] in support of those affected by Irma. And musicians organized benefit concerts such as "Unity 4 St. Maarten" in Bird and "Irma x Anna" in Annabel, both in Rotterdam, The Netherlands [see **Figure 27**]. The cathartic force that came with musicking – whether it was through preparing, making, performing, listening – brought people together in new ways. I experienced this myself when I attended the above-mentioned benefit concert "Irma x Anna" on October 12, 2017. The musical event was initiated by the reggae rock band Orange Groove which was based in The Hague, The Netherlands. Although based in The Netherlands, as the Sint Maarten-born lead singer said, "the Caribbean has shaped us" (Orange Grove, 2019, n.p.). Several band members were born and raised on Sint Maarten, and they had felt an urge to do what they could. Music was their outlet and certainly was their means to do something now.

In the weeks after Hurricane Irma, I had seen the Orange Groove band members regularly on Dutch TV. On the evening of the national fundraising campaign on 15 September, they sat at the table in the late night talk show, "Pauw", together with the Curaçaoan jazz singer, Kris Berry, who gave a performance of "O Sweet Saint Martin's Land", the national anthem of the island.[80] The first stanza of the anthem [see **Figure 28**], written by a Dutch Catholic missionary on the French side in 1958[81], told a similar story about "SXM life" as Yogsta would do almost 60 years later. Sint Maarten spoke to the world by resembling it, anew. More than the lyrics, though, was the sound of all belonging to 'we' Sint Maarteners that was played on Dutch television and that echoed across Dutch living rooms. The news media no longer portrayed Sint Maarteners as the Other, far-away and backwards on a distant Caribbean island, but, instead, as Dutch citizens in need of help.

O Sweet Saint Martin's Land
Where over the world, say where,
You find an island there,
So lovely small with nations free
With people French and Dutch
Though talking English much,
As thee Saint Martin in the sea?

Figure 28: The first stanza of Sint Maarten's national anthem, as sung by Kris Berry in "Pauw", September 15, 2017.

After Orange Grove had announced its plans to organize a benefit concert, the Rotterdam pop podium Annabel soon brought together numerous artists, live painters, DJs, and bands who wanted to perform free of charge. After the date and location were set, news about the upcoming event spread fast via social media. On the event's Facebook page, well-known (Dutch) artists and media personalities expressed their words of love in support of the benefit concert, while businesses throughout the city offered free things (e.g., ice-cream at De IJssalon) if one showed one's ticket for the concert. The event was also shared in the ICA-SXM Facebook group, to which many had initially been drawn in their search for a sign of their loved ones. Now, a month after Irma's passing, they were looking for ways to help their relatives in need. And as news about fundraising initiatives such as #RebuildSXM, private 'gofundme' pages, and bene-

[80] While the French national anthem is the official-institutional anthem for Saint Martiners, "O Sweet Saint Martin's Land" – the official national anthem of Sint Maarten (Dutch side) – is seen by all on the island as the local anthem.
[81] Father Gerard Kemps was knighted as a "Ridder in de Orde van Oranje van Nassau" in 1984.

Figure 29: Compilation of Facebook posts around and impressions of the benefit concert "Irma x Anna". Photo credits: Mark Bolk.

fit concerts like "Irma x Anna", circulated online, Facebook groups like the "Hurricane Irma – Contact and Aid – SXM" offered a space that brought the Sint Maarten diaspora home.

To me, experiencing the "Irma x Anna" benefit concert [see **Figure 29**] brought Sint Maarten home and not only because the venue, Annabel, was just a five minutes' walk from where I, born and raised in Rotterdam, lived or because I recognized many of the artists in the line up. It was also not because I saw many familiar faces. In fact, I barely recognized anyone in the highly diverse crowd. Rather, it was by enjoying the music, live art, and performances and by dancing, drinking, and eating together (there were several food trucks too) that I suddenly felt a strong connection to those in whose midst I was standing. We were no longer strangers divided by our backgrounds, skin tones, social classes, mother tongues, and dialects. In this cathartic moment, we suddenly became aware that all of us had been connected to each other all along.

This was common knowledge in the popular public, where reggae, hip-hop, dancehall and other Caribbean(-infused) music styles thrived. Without a doubt, there were corporate and political interests involved in what had turned into a booming Caribbean music industry in The Netherlands (and, particularly, in Rotterdam, with its large diasporic communities from the Caribbean and elsewhere). Yet, as Flores (2004) eloquently argued in addressing unfolding "Caribbean soundscapes" as a process of "transnationalism from below":

> Caribbean music today, and its movement to and from its massive diasporas, remains *popular* music in the deepest and most persistent sense: whether in the region or in its diasporic settings, and in its migration back and forth between them, it lives on as the vernacular expression of people and communities seeking, and finding, their own voice and rhythm. (p. 292, *emphasis in original*)

This proces of finding and seeking a transnational "voice and rhythm" from below through Caribbean music is what I experienced during the benefit concert. It was there and then, for and with Sint Maarten, that I felt home to 'we' and we all did. As such, we were musicking our shared world again, and anew.

As popular news practices intensified in the wake of Irma, we musicked the passing of the hurricane into a story of us all. These popular expressions of cathartic feelings of belonging were not constrained by territorial or national borders of the island but stretched into the Dutch Kingdom (and beyond). In The

Netherlands, the news media no longer portrayed Sint Maarteners as the Other, far-away, and backward on a distant Caribbean island, but, instead, as Dutch citizens in need of help. On Curaçao, the call to stand with "our Antillean sister islands" was spread via popular and institutional news practices, alike. For a moment, we were all in this together. Whether this moment would last is a question that leads me to the concluding paragraph of this chapter.

5.4. BUILDING BACK BETTER?: A GLASSHOUSE RECONSTRUCTED

> Sometimes you have to ask yourself: where to begin at such a moment? Today has really, yes [sighs], I think, been very useful to have seen with my own eyes how this terrible storm wreaked havoc. And also to show in this way the people of Sint Maarten and also the Governor and the Prime Minister [of Sint Maarten] that we, as a Kingdom, stand here together and will solve this together.
>
> - King Willem-Alexander (NOS, 2017b)

These words were expressed by King Willem-Alexander in an interview with the Dutch public broadcaster *NOS* during his visit to the island on 11 September, one week after Hurricane Irma had hit Sint Maarten. As the head of the Kingdom-wide institutional order, the King spoke about a 'we' that he had always represented – namely all of us, Dutch citizens, belonging to the Kingdom of The Netherlands. For him, this 'we', as a Kingdom, was not only about the present ("stand here together"), but also about the future ("will solve this together"). Thereby he articulated what all of us felt at the time as expressed through the cathartic senses of belonging throughout the Kingdom which I discussed above. Yet, what happened after the first emergency aid and relief shipments arrived and the long-term process of rebuilding the island's infrastructures began?

Here it is important to stress (once more) that in Irma's direct aftermath, Sint Maarten's political leaders remained silent for a long time. It was only after the gradual restoration of electricity and telecom networks which, in turn, enabled the use of official communication infrastructures, that the island's government appeared back on (the institutional) stage. Meanwhile, the Dutch government decided to pledge 550 million euros to help rebuild the island, but

on two conditions. One was that Sint Maarten's authorities would establish an 'Integrity Chamber' and temporarily hand over its border control to the Dutch military. The second was to pledge to improve its own border control in the long run. These conditions were not new to Sint Maarten's authorities as The Hague had already issued them earlier in the year (2017). Yet, with the passing of Hurricane Irma the position of the island's national leaders in the negotiations with Dutch authorities had changed significantly. With damages estimated around €2.5 billion ($3 billion) and a population that was in dire need of relief and help, the island's government had no other choice than to accept the Dutch conditions. At least, that seemed inevitable in popular and institutional settings alike. Yet, Sint Maarten's Prime Minister, William Marlin, refused to accept the conditions which triggered the collapse of the island's administration in November 2017. It was not the first nor the last time that Sint Maarten's people had witnessed political crises and instability. Since 2010, when Sint Maarten became a constituent country as part of the Dutch Kingdom, the island has seen ten different cabinets installed.[82] Sint Maarteners were all too familiar with the games of "politricksians" (see Chapter Three), which were played over the heads of common people and that, certainly now, were played at the expense of Sint Maarteners who had lost everything and faced utter despair, trauma, and anxiety.

While the government of Sint Maarten accepted Dutch relief funding on the terms offered by The Netherlands by the end of 2017, the power play and mutual distrust between the Dutch and Sint Maarten governments endured. The Hague decided to outsource the coordination and supervision of recovery funds to the World Bank. Without going into the details of this complex tripartite construction, it soon became clear that the Trust Fund's slogan to "Build Back Better" was not only severely hampered by World Bank bureaucracy and ongoing political instabilities, but also left behind the most vulnerable on Sint Maarten. These were the poor laborers, particularly undocumented migrant, female, and lower-educated workers and pensioners (Collodi et al., 2021, p. 210). With the help of private international investors hotels, resorts, and casinos were rebuilt in no time, while many who lived in poorer neighborhoods, such as Dutch Quarter,

[82] At the moment of writing (2022), the 10th government of Sint Maarten (installed on 28 March 2020) was still in office.

were still waiting for a roof over their heads in 2022. They found themselves back again at the bottom of the social order in a glasshouse reconstructed.

The series of events that I have described so far became part of a story that prevailed in the institutional public. 'The news' was keen on covering the political power play that unfolded in the Kingdom-wide institutional public. Although news outlets on the island faced ongoing difficulties (e.g., infrastructural damages, low advertising revenues, etc.), those who were able to operate soon competed again to get out 'the (latest) news' first. The same was true for the Dutch press, in which statements made by politicians on both sides of the ocean increasingly came to dominate the headlines about Sint Maarten. After a brief moment in which Dutch news media had focused on Sint Maarten people as Dutch citizens in need for help, 'the news' returned to portraying 'Sint Maarten' (the institutional territory rather than the people) as the Other, far away, and backward Caribbean island. This is not to say that there were no longer efforts – whether individual or editorial – to tell a different story. There were many exceptions to the rule such as, for example, the series of articles for which newspaper *Trouw* followed "the unofficial mayor" of Dutch Quarter. Human interest stories like these were more nuanced yet also – according to journalism norms and values in the bourgeois public sphere – less important than so-called 'hard news'. Human interest stories did not make it to the headlines, let alone to the "NOS Achtuurjournaal" [Eight O'clock newscast]. By then, the primary Dutch newscast had long gone back to the order of the day.

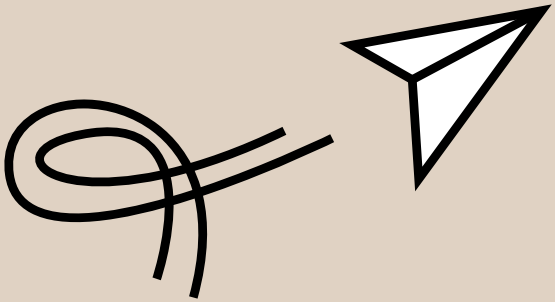
As Dutch politicians and experts in 'the news' predominantly spoke about corruption on Sint Maarten, the island's political leaders found their own channels (e.g., US news media) to blame the Dutch for neocolonialism and racism. Moreover, the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic and Black Lives Matter protests would add to political tensions. As a Sint Maarten blogger summarized the ongoing bickering as displayed by 'the news':

> Dutch Government Are Racist. And Sxm Government Are Criminals. (…) It's that simple. The latest back and forth between Knops [Dutch State Secretary for the Interior and Kingdom Relations] and Jacob's [PM Sint Maarten] seems to be the same vitriol on repeat. The world is watching. (StMaartenNews, 2021, n.p.)

What happened with the world we came to share in Irma's immediate aftermath? And what about the popular news practices and their intensification that had

generated cathartic senses of belonging throughout the (Dutch) world? These practices were by no means gone. In daily island life news continued to spread fast by word of mouth as neighbors, friends, and family were helping each other to get through the day. The Facebook groups that had been launched to search for a sign of loved ones, get information, and organize aid fast still brought a worldwide community together. The "Hurricane Irma – Contact and Aid – SXM" group, for example, still existed, albeit under a different name. On March 15, 2020, the group was changed to "COVID-19 Info SXM (Hurricane Contact & Aid)" and has been used since then for "sharing and verifying information" about Covid-19 (casualties and statistics) on Sint Maarten. All of us were affected by the worldwide pandemic and for Sint Maarteners on the island it came on top of long-running struggles since Hurricane Irma. Sint Maarteners in the diaspora therefore continued their efforts to draw attention to the difficult conditions our overseas brothers and sisters found themselves in. Many of the small fundraising organizations that had been initiated by them continued to exist. And amidst all this, it was still through music(king) that cathartic senses of belonging were brought about. After all, "Caribbean music today, and its movement to and from its massive diasporas, remains *popular* music in the deepest and most persistent sense" (Flores, 2004, p. 292). It was through musicking – both in direct relation to music and in more general terms of practicing news – in the popular public that we could still feel that we belonged to 'we'. This would not change.

What did change though was that with the reconstruction of the formal-institutional order and its underlying liberal-democratic norms and news practices such as those described above were pushed back into the popular public. The popular news practices I explored in this chapter were thereby dispossessed from 'the news' again. In the ideal bourgeois-public sphere, 'the news' was key to critical-rational deliberation, which, in turn, was vital for maintaining the social order. When the infrastructures of media, politics, and business were restored, so was a capitalist mode of being in society. Hence, 'we' all found each other back in the glasshouse again.



6 | Conclusion

In this book I have sought to answer the question of *how institutional and popular practices of newsmaking in the public sphere in Curaçao and Sint Maarten – understood as social processes of turning events into collective stories – generate common, contested and at times also cathartic senses of belonging?*

My main argument in this book has been that to appreciate the meaning and function of news on Curaçao and Sint Maarten, particularly as a marker and generator of senses of belonging, one has to study the dynamics of, and interactions between, the institutional public and the popular public.

News and 'the news': The analytical distinction I have worked with in this thesis recognizes how news practices shape and are shaped by these two publics. 'News' is about news practices employed in the popular public (so, popular news practices), while 'the news' represents the news practices in the institutional public (institutional news practices). Practices of news and 'the news' cannot be kept separate. They are constantly interacting with each other whilst remaining distinct. So too in the lives of people on the islands, as I explored throughout this book. Just like in so many other places in the world, people on Sint Maarten and Curaçao love 'the news' and are also quite taken by the 'new' and 'noteworthy' which is prevalent in popular realms of public life. Journalists, reporters, and other media actors working for or with established news media also engage with news while creating 'the news'. News emerges from the stories people tell and share about what happens around them, and gathers momentum once these stories become widely known with more people consuming, remaking, and disseminating them. Through news *common, contested, and at times also cathartic senses of belonging* emerge. In other words, practicing news unfolds *as a social process of turning events into collective stories*.

Building on the methodological approach of **multi-sited ethnography** I have followed practices of news and 'the news' in the popular and institutional public respectively across a spatially dispersed field. I conducted fieldwork on Curaçao and Sint Maarten and with Curaçaoans and Sint Maarteners throughout the Kingdom of the Netherlands starting in 2015. Between the end of August 2015 through June 2016, I spent six months on Curaçao and four months on Sint Maarten doing participant observation at three different newsrooms (of a Papiamentu-language and a Dutch-language newspaper on Curaçao, and an English-language newspaper on Sint Maarten) and at several news websites and social media platforms. I conducted 42 in-depth interviews with journalists,

editors, and news media owners. I followed practices of newsmaking through everyday island life. My fieldwork was not bounded to the territorial borders of Curaçao and Sint Maarten, nor did it stop once I continued my work in the European Netherlands. The locus of this study extends into the social-political realm of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

Doing multi-sited fieldwork enabled me to understand the sites I engaged with in interaction with a multiscalar 'field' that unfolds through processual and situational relationships. The metaphor of the glasshouse, by which I came to refer to how social life on Curaçao and Sint Maarten became intrinsically entangled with colonialism and the imposition of capitalist modes of being, intimately links to this epistemological framework of the field. This is via a complex web of multiscalar interactions between people, (his)stories, news practices, and senses of belonging.

The metaphor of the **'glasshouse'** refers to how social life on Curaçao and Sint Maarten was designed under Dutch colonial rule and has evolved as part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands since colonial times. Like (real) glasshouses, constructed as regulated artificial atmospheres to optimize the growth of plants outside of their natural environment, I argue that as part of the Dutch colonial enterprise, Curaçao and Sint Maarten were designed and regulated as social environments to optimize processes of production and distribution. As a metaphor, the glasshouse resembles a microcosmos of an operation of reducing the social world to capitalist production relations. News media were vital to this operation, as were the many informal circuits of news circulation.

The latter formed the entry point of **Chapter Two**, where I followed historical traces of 'the news' contested by news on Curaçao and Sint Maarten. In doing so, I showed how public life on Curaçao and Sint Maarten took shape via multiple emerging publics, and how this process unfolded differently on each island. I argued that Curaçao has always known a Dutch presence as an extra layer of ruling power on the island. This power was outsourced on Sint Maarten to private individuals. The effect of this was that the public sphere on Sint Maarten was private (based on capitalist social relations). This was clear to all Sint Maarteners, whether among the lower or higher levels of society. Speaking the same language (literally and figuratively) also meant that the popular and institutional public – and news and 'the news' – met on more equal, and thus political, terms. I argued that on Curaçao such equal understandings of what is basically a system of inequality (a class-based social order based on capitalist production relations) is

'disturbed'. Here, the Dutch presence and active institutional involvement has led to a situation in which the institutional public split into a bourgeois public sphere (representing 'Dutch' liberal-democratic ideals) and a cultural public sphere (representing 'Curaçaoan' culture). The representation of this culture in this sphere basically takes shape against the Dutch presence and is located in the institutional public and popular news media. The popular public does not meet on equal terms with the split institutional public in the public sphere on this island.

While those in power on both islands and sides of the ocean (and increasingly across the world) acted on emerging media infrastructures, so did those among the lower rungs of society. 'The news' has always interacted with and been contested by news. This interactional process between practices of newsmaking in the institutional and the popular public continues to shape current public life on the island. Through the proliferation of electronic and digital media technologies during the past decades, practices of news and 'the news' came to generate a plethora of different outlooks in and on the world – outlooks that open up to and, at the same time, reduce the world (people, production, produce) to the demands of global capitalism.

The analysis I presented in this chapter ties in with the first part of my main research question, namely *how institutional and popular practices of newsmaking in the public sphere in Curaçao and Sint Maarten* were shaped by the imposition of a capitalist mode of being and, in turn, acted on (and were contested by) by news practices on the island. Following these traces back is important because they continue to be manifested in everyday public articulations of *common, contested and at times also cathartic senses of belonging.* These I explored in the rest of the chapters of this book.

In Chapter Three ("Who is the 'black bourgeoisie'?") I explored how institutional and popular news practices in the public sphere of Sint Maarten generated contested senses of belonging among the middle classes on the island.

Using my experiences with the lecture of Dr. Umar Johnson (a clinical psychologist and pan-Africanist from the US) during the Black History Month (February 2016) on Sint Maarten as my point of departure, I showed how this event was both news and 'the news' (as the event was turned into stories in both the popular and the institutional public). Dr. Johnson was invited by a group of activists who have pushed black nationalist politics into the public sphere. They did so first in the 1970s by owning and editing newspapers. Today they do so

through YouTube tutorials, Facebook posts, an annual book fair, the organization of literary salons, and ownership of an international publishing house. They used to practice news from 'below', aligned with the popular public. Today they are an alternative within the institutional public where they advocate a racialized politics of belonging. A new generation, however, does not feel that this politics of belonging represents Sint Maarten's contemporary reality. During Black History Month on Sint Maarten they challenged black politics by advocating – via practices of news and 'the news' – the acceptance of the island as it is – a highly plural society that has rapidly changed from a fishermen's village into a dynamic regional and global junction of relations between people, politics, technologies, and business. Both publics (black nationalists and an emerging younger public) belong to the middle class. While engaging in contestations based on contrasting politics of belonging, I show that they share a confident common sense of belonging. They share a sense of being a Sint Maartener and having equal social standing.

My aim with this chapter was to show how a common understanding of the capitalist infrastructures buttressing Sint Maarten's (bourgeois) public sphere – a public sphere that is private – allowed different publics to articulate popular concerns into the public sphere. On this island, it was this common understanding together with a shared language (St. Martiners') English by which the popular public and the institutional public could meet on equal terms through a *political* register.

This was different on Curaçao as I showed in **Chapter Four** ("The lottery of life") where I focused on *how institutional and popular news practices in the public sphere on Curaçao generated* ***a common sense of belonging*** among the working classes on the island.

On this island, popular concerns (news) entered 'the news' through an affective register that was central to the 'cultural public sphere' as part of the (split) institutional public on this island. In the cultural public sphere, mass popular culture interpellates its public emotionally, focusing on the quotidian and extraordinary, straying away from political analyses. On Curaçao, the institutionalization of the popular public 'news' via the cultural public sphere took place via 'popular news media' that operated parallel to 'formal-institutional news media' in the bourgeois public sphere.

To illustrate the common sense belonging of Curaçao's working classes and connect these to the relationship between the (split) institutional and popular

public on this island, I employed an existential anthropological approach connected to a phenomenology of hope and fear. The working classes on Curaçao do not organize and seek social change like black nationalists on Sint Maarten do. Their ambition is to live as the elites do, not to topple the structure. It is this mode of being generating a common sense of belonging among Curaçao's working classes that I explored by focusing on everyday news routines around *the lottery* and *the obituaries*. In doing so, my aim was to show that along with being instruments of domination by keeping the lower class in check, they are also employed by the working classes to express a common sense of belonging. This was important as they found themselves thrown to the bottom of the social order of the glasshouse that was Curaçao. To escape their daily reality in this glasshouse, the working classes oriented themselves towards the future in the hope of a better life one day (lottery) and fearing a future that was inevitable (obituaries).

Curaçao's popular news media acted on this future orientation among the working classes by providing them the issues of the day, an ethic of (tomorrow) 'God Willing', a future through the 'university of the street', and a dream of getting out of this glasshouse someday – that is, by winning the lottery. From the daily routine of handing in one's lucky number and buying one's *brièchi* (lottery ticket) to watching the live broadcast of the daily draw – news practices around the lottery reflected a shared need among the working classes to get some grip over a life that was deeply uncertain. To them, buying a lot was not about rationally deliberating whether this was worth the risk – after all, they had nothing to lose really. They sensed that all belonged *equally* to the Kingdom of God. And His salvation was their only escape out of the glasshouse they found themselves in. Their faith enabled them to take a hand in their 'lot' and to celebrate chance in the hope for a better life one day.

What happens when the glasshouse, due to an external catastrophic event, breaks down, was the central focus in Chapter Five ("A shattered glasshouse"), where I explored *how institutional and popular news practices in Hurricane's Irma's aftermath on Sint Maarten generated* ***cathartic senses of belonging*** *throughout the Kingdom of the Netherlands.*

I argued that the aftermath of Hurricane Irma led to the exposure and intensification of more popular news practices that, at that moment, served a widespread need for information not only in the popular but also in the institutional public. The sudden and violent disruption of social life as it used to

be broke down the glasshouse – and with it the infrastructures upon which the division between these publics existed. Now, every Sint Maartener stood in the face of the unknown, while many related to and affected by the disastrous event were confronted with feelings of hope and fear. They scrolled the internet for a sign of life from a loved one. They listened day and night to the only locally operating radio station. They joined the rapidly emerging Facebook groups because they were in need of emotional release and some comfort. Amidst severe existential insecurity, these and other news practices generated cathartic senses of belonging. In the face of the unknown, all belonged to 'we' Sint Maarteners.

In this chapter I showed that these cathartic feelings of belonging were not constrained by the territorial or national borders of the island but stretched into the Dutch Kingdom (and beyond). In The Netherlands, the news media no longer portrayed Sint Maarteners as Others, far-away and backward on a distant Caribbean island. Rather, they were Dutch citizens in need of help. On Curaçao, the call to stand with "our Antillean brothers and sisters" was spread via popular and institutional news practices alike. For a moment, we were all in this together.

What happened with the world we came to share in Irma's immediate aftermath? And what about the popular news practices, the intensification of which had generated cathartic senses of belonging throughout the (Dutch) world? These practices were by no means gone. In the popular public news continued to spread fast by word of mouth as neighbors, friends, and family (whether on or beyond the island) were helping each other to get through the day. In the popular public we still could feel that we belonged to 'we'. This would not change. What did change though was that with the reconstruction of the formal-institutional order and its underlying liberal-democratic norms, popular news practices and the (common and cathartic) senses of belonging generated by these, were pushed back into the popular public. 'News' was thereby removed from 'the news' again. In the institutional public of the Kingdom of The Netherlands, 'the news' was key to critical-rational deliberation, which, in turn, was vital for maintaining the social order. When the infrastructures of media, politics, and business were restored, so was a capitalist mode of being in society. Hence, 'we' all found each other back in the glasshouse again.

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This glasshouse, as I have explored throughout this book, was not constructed and upheld by total control and discipline. Just as uncontrolled metamorphoses of plants and wildlife (ants, bugs, fungus) take place in actual glasshouses, so too unexpected flowerings and mushrooming happen on Curaçao and Sint Maarten. News in the glasshouses that are Curaçao and Sint Maarten does not necessarily follow the script of a bourgeois liberal imagining of a common sense of belonging. 'The news' attempts to do so but is constantly thwarted by news. The latter articulates how the island communities are continuously constructed in-between regulation. It is reproduced by the bourgeois public sphere and its institutes, as well as by the popular practices that emerge in relation to this regulation. It is not so much despite oppressive infrastructures since colonial rule but due to oppression that invention, creativity, and resourcefulness emerge in daily island life. News practices – again, understood as the social processes of turning events into collective stories – articulate the creative transformation that emerges from contestation into new ways of imagining and constructing the island communities.

Based on the acknowledgement that apart from 'the news' in the institutional public there is always also news in the popular public, I have aimed to problematize two prevalent dominant representations about 'the islands'. One is based on 'spatio-temporal othering' and continues to buttress public debates, political campaigns, and media representations across the Kingdom of the Netherlands as well as to inform the many 'development projects' employed on the islands. The other one is employed by those who wish to counter the first representation by highlighting Afro-Caribbean cultural practices and 'black' forms of expression. Throughout this book, I have shown that both these representations tend to ignore how Caribbean communities have always come into being by multiple publics and in between oppression and invention.

This leads me to the answer to the main research question of this thesis; *how do institutional and popular practices of newsmaking in the public sphere on Curaçao and Sint Maarten – understood as social processes of turning events into collective stories – generate common, contested and at times also cathartic senses of belonging?*

I argue that popular and institutional practices of newsmaking – news and 'the news' respectively – unfold through contestation that enables emergent counter publics to form on Curaçao and Sint Maarten. In daily island life, news in the popular public and 'the news' in the institutional public interact continuously,

whilst remaining different. These interacting social processes of turning events into collective stories may generate common senses of belonging. This was the case, as I argued, among Curaçao's working classes, who articulate a sense of all belonging to the Kingdom of God through news practices around the lottery and the obituaries. It is shown through contested senses of belonging as illustrated by Sint Maarten's middle classes between those who practice news and 'the news, to either generate a black nationalist politics of belonging or a 'creole', cosmopolitan sense of belonging. We also see the cathartic senses belonging in the intensification of popular news practices across the Kingdom of The Netherlands in Hurricane Irma's aftermath. Just as multiple publics and counter-publics interact, while remaining distinct, so do the news practices in these publics and the senses of belonging these generate. The contested politics of belonging among Sint Maarten's middle classes is underpinned by a common sense of belonging to Sint Maarten and having access to and meeting on equal footing in the island's institutional public. The common sense of belonging as expressed by Curaçao's working classes in relation to news practices around the lottery unfold in a parallel realm and through a phenomenology of hope and fear. Contrast this with the senses of belonging among those practices of 'the news' around lotteries from a position in the institutional public. To understand the function and meaning of news, as a marker and generator of senses of belonging, it is necessary to take multiple emerging publics and their interactions in the public sphere on Curaçao and Sint Maarten into account. Also, I argue that processes of news and 'the news' in public life on these islands are multiscalar. They connect intimately, yet differently, to the realm of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and a shared past of colonialism and the imposition of a capitalist mode of being.

Public life on Curaçao and Sint Maarten and across the Kingdom of the Netherlands has always come into being because of contestation that enables emergent counter-publics to form. And by highlighting these processes of contestation in daily life, I have shown that those excluded from the (bourgeois) public sphere become central to its construction and, in fact, have always done so.

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SUMMARY

News in a Glasshouse:
Media, Publics, and Senses of Belonging in the Dutch Caribbean

What is 'the news' and how does it differ from 'news'? The latter speaks to power, plurality of news media, and a recognition of multiple publics, including what Habermas singularly termed the public sphere. This dissertation is an ethnographic study of 'the news' and 'news' on the Dutch Caribbean isles of Curaçao and Sint Maarten.

News and 'the news', the analytical distinction I work with in this thesis, recognizes how news practices shape and are shaped through two parallel yet interacting publics: the institutional public and the popular public. 'News' is about news practices employed in the popular public (so, popular news practices), while 'the news' represents the news practices in the institutional public (institutional news practices). Practices of news and 'the news' cannot be kept separate. They are constantly interacting with each other whilst remaining somewhat distinct. For analytical purposes I treat them as ideal types. Like elsewhere, many people on Curaçao and St. Maarten love 'the news' and are also quite taken by the 'new' and 'noteworthy' which is prevalent in popular realms of public life. Journalists, reporters, and other media actors working for or with news media also engage with news while creating 'the news'. News emerges from the stories people tell and share about what happens around them and gathers momentum once these stories become widely known with more people consuming, remaking, and disseminating them. In this thesis, 'news' is understood in terms of 'musicking' (music as a verb – what we do when we 'music' – rather than an object), thereby relocating the meaning and function of 'news' into the processes of how people on Curaçao and Sint Maarten turn events into collective stories. News however also usually engages with 'the news', hence, recognizing this dialectic allows for a study of newsmaking and community which critically represents the common, contested and at times cathartic senses of belonging expressed on Curaçao and Sint Maarten.

By focusing on news in Curaçao and Sint Maarten as a social process that unfolds in everyday life, the aim of this thesis is to broaden our perception of what 'news' means and does to people – or, rather, what people do through news. My starting point is therefore not solely or exclusively 'the news' – news as a thing (e.g., a news article, a broadcast) or an entity (e.g., a newspaper, the media) – but 'news' as a social

process that generates common and contested senses of belonging. The main research question addressed: *how do institutional and popular practices of newsmaking in the public sphere in Curaçao and Sint Maarten – understood as social processes of turning events into collective stories – generate common, contested and at times also cathartic senses of belonging?*

Through **multi-sited ethnographic research**, this thesis explores this question by following practices of news and 'the news' in Curaçao and Sint Maarten and throughout the wider Kingdom of the Netherlands. I followed other sites, including the Netherlands, via electronic media or by engaging with my interlocutors who also moved. I build primarily on participant observation at three different newsrooms (of a Papiamentu-language and a Dutch-language newspaper on Curaçao, and an English-language newspaper on Sint Maarten) and at several news websites and social media platforms; over 40 in-depth interviews with journalists, editors, and news media owners; and observations and engagements with everyday practices of newsmaking between 2015 and 2019. I contend that the analysis presented in this thesis is not bounded to the territorial borders of Curaçao and Sint Maarten but extends into the realm of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Some of my interlocutors moved across islands and to the Netherlands. I will elaborate on this in work I plan to do and publish after this dissertation.

The metaphor of the '**glasshouse**', my major conceptual contribution, introduced in the Introduction and Chapter One, refers to how social life on Curaçao and Sint Maarten was designed under Dutch colonial rule and has evolved as part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands since. As a metaphor, the glasshouse resembles a microcosmos of a logistic operation of reducing the world (production process, producers, and goods) to the dictates of capitalism. Like (real) glasshouses, constructed as regulated artificial atmospheres to optimize the growth of plants outside of their natural environment, I argue that as part of the Dutch colonial enterprise, Curaçao and Sint Maarten were designed and regulated as social environments to optimize processes of production and distribution. Yet, just as uncontrolled metamorphoses of plants and wildlife (ants, bugs, fungus) take place in actual glasshouses, so too unexpected flowerings and mushrooming happen on Curaçao and Sint Maarten. News in the glasshouses that are Curaçao and Sint Maarten does not necessarily follow the script of a bourgeois liberal imagining of a common sense of belonging. 'The news' attempts to do so but is constantly thwarted by news. The latter articulates how the island communities are continuously constructed in-between regulation. It is reproduced by the institutional order, as well as by the popular practices that emerge in relation to this regulation. It is not so much despite oppressive infrastructures since colonial rule but due to oppression that

invention, creativity, and resourcefulness emerge in daily island life. News practices – again, understood as the social processes of turning events into collective stories – articulate the creative transformation that emerges from contestation into new ways of imagining and constructing the island communities.

This too was the case on Curaçao and Sint Maarten as shown in **Chapter Two.** In this chapter, I present **an history of 'the news' contested by news** on Curaçao and Sint Maarten. Public life on these islands took shape via multiple emerging publics, and differently so. Whereas Curaçao has long known a Dutch presence as an extra layer of ruling power on the island, this power was outsourced on Sint Maarten to private individuals. The effect of this was that the public sphere on Sint Maarten was private. This was clear to all Sint Maarteners. Here, the popular and institutional public (news and 'the news') met on more equal, and thus political, terms. On Curaçao such equal understandings of what is basically a system of inequality (a class-based social order based on capitalist production relations) was 'disturbed'. On Curaçao, the popular public does not meet on equal terms with the split institutional public in the public sphere on this island. While those in power on both islands and sides of the ocean acted on emerging media infrastructures, so did those among the lower rungs of society. 'The news' has always interacted with and been contested by news. This interactional process between practices of newsmaking in the institutional and the popular public continues to shape current public life on the islands. Through the proliferation of electronic and digital media technologies during the past decades, practices of news and 'the news' came to generate a plethora of different outlooks in and on the world – outlooks that open up to and, at the same time, reduce the world (people, production, produce) to the demands of global capitalism.

The analysis presented in Chapter Two ties in with the first part of my main research question, namely *how institutional and popular practices of newsmaking in the public sphere in Curaçao and Sint Maarten* were shaped by the imposition of a capitalist mode of being and, in turn, acted on (and were contested by) by news practices on the islands. Following these traces back is important because they continue to be manifested in everyday public articulations of *common, contested and at times also cathartic senses of belonging.* These are explored in the rest of the chapters of this book.

In **Chapter Three** I explore *how institutional and popular news practices in the public sphere of Sint Maarten generated* ***contested senses of belonging*** among the middle classes on the island. Using my experiences with the lecture of Dr. Umar Johnson (a clinical psychologist and pan-Africanist from the US) during Black History Month (February 2016) on Sint Maarten as my point of departure, I show how this event was both news and 'the news' (as the event was turned into stories in both the

popular and the institutional public). Dr. Johnson was invited by a group of activists who have pushed black nationalist politics into the public sphere. They used to practice news from 'below', aligned with the popular public. Today they are an alternative within the institutional public where they advocate a racialized politics of belonging. A new generation, however, does not feel that this politics of belonging represents Sint Maarten's contemporary reality. During Black History Month on Sint Maarten they challenged black politics by advocating – via practices of news and 'the news' – the acceptance of the island as a highly plural society and a dynamic regional and global junction of relations between people, politics, technologies, and business. Both publics (black nationalists and an emerging younger public) belong to the middle classes. While engaging in contestations based on contrasting politics of belonging, they shared a common understanding of Sint Maarten's public sphere as being private. On this island, it was this common understanding together with a shared language (St. Martiners') English by which the popular public and the institutional public could meet on equal terms through a *political* register.

This was different on Curaçao as I argue in Chapter Four which focused on *how institutional and popular news practices in the public sphere on Curaçao generated* ***a common sense of belonging*** among the working classes on the island. On this island, popular concerns (news) entered 'the news' through an *affective* register. On Curaçao, the institutionalization of the popular public 'news' via the cultural public sphere took place via 'popular news media' that operated parallel to 'formal-institutional news media' in the bourgeois public sphere. In this chapter, I explore the common sense belonging of Curaçao's working classes in relation to interactions between the (split) institutional and popular public. I do so by employing an existential anthropological approach connected to a phenomenology of hope and fear. The working classes on Curaçao do not organize and seek social change like black nationalists on Sint Maarten do. Their ambition is to live as the elites do, not to topple the structure. It is this mode of being generating a common sense of belonging among Curaçao's working classes that I explore by focusing on everyday news routines around the lottery and the obituaries. Along with being instruments of domination by keeping the lower class in check, these news routines were also employed by the working classes to express a common sense of belonging. This was important as they found themselves thrown to the bottom of the social order of the glasshouse that was Curaçao. To escape their daily reality in this glasshouse, the working classes oriented themselves towards the future in the hope of a better life one day (lottery) and fearing a future that was inevitable (obituaries). Curaçao's popular news media acted on this future orientation among the working classes by providing them the issues of the day,

an ethic of (tomorrow) 'God Willing', a future through the 'university of the street', and a dream of getting out of this glasshouse someday – that is, by winning the lottery.

What happens when the glasshouse, due to an external catastrophic event, breaks down, is the central focus in Chapter Five, where I explore *how institutional and popular news practices in Hurricane's Irma's aftermath on Sint Maarten generated* ***cathartic senses of belonging*** *throughout the Kingdom of the Netherlands.* I show that the aftermath of Hurricane Irma led to the exposure and intensification of more popular news practices that, at that moment, served a widespread need for information not only in the popular but also in the institutional public. The sudden and violent disruption of social life as it used to be broke down the glasshouse – and with it the infrastructures upon which the division between these publics existed. The intensification of popular news practices generated cathartic senses of belonging throughout the (Dutch) world. For a moment, all belonged to 'we', Sint Maarteners. What happened to these popular news practices and the world we came to share in Irma's immediate aftermath? These news practices were by no means gone. What did change was that with the reconstruction of the formal-institutional order and its underlying liberal-democratic norms, popular news practices and the (common and cathartic) senses of belonging generated by these, were pushed back into the popular public. 'News' was thereby removed from 'the news' again. In the institutional public of the Kingdom of The Netherlands, 'the news' was key to critical-rational deliberation, which, in turn, was vital for maintaining the social order. When the infrastructures of media, politics, and business were restored, so was a capitalist mode of being in society. Hence, 'we' all found each other back in the glasshouse again.

Based on the acknowledgement that apart from 'the news' in the institutional public there is always also news in the popular public, this thesis problematizes two prevalent dominant representations about 'the islands'. The first, is based on 'spatio-temporal othering' and continues to buttress public debates, political campaigns, and media representations across the Kingdom of the Netherlands as well as to inform the many 'development projects' employed on the islands. In this institutional public the islands are places characterized by lack. The other one is employed by those who wish to counter the first representation by highlighting Afro-Caribbean cultural practices and 'black' forms of expression. This is a version of black nationalism. Throughout this book, I show that both these representations tend to ignore how Caribbean communities have always come into being by multiple publics and in between oppression and invention. In daily life on Curaçao and Sint Maarten, news in the popular public and 'the news' in the institutional public interact continuously, whilst remaining somewhat distinct. These interacting social processes of turning

events into collective stories may generate common, contested and at times cathartic senses of belonging. To understand the function and meaning of news, as a marker and generator of senses of belonging, it is necessary to take multiple emerging publics and their interactions in the public sphere on Curaçao and Sint Maarten into account. Moreover, these publics connect intimately, yet differently, to the realm of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and a shared past of colonialism and the imposition of a capitalist mode of being. Public life on Curaçao and Sint Maarten and across the Kingdom of the Netherlands has always come into being because of contestation that enables multiple publics to form. And by highlighting these processes of contestation in daily life, this thesis shows that those excluded from the (bourgeois) public sphere, become central to its construction and, in fact, have always done so.

SAMENVATTING

Nieuws in een Glazen Huis:
Media, Publieken, en Gevoelens van Thuishoren in de Nederlandse Cariben

Wat is 'het nieuws' en hoe verschilt het van 'nieuws'? Het laatste spreekt tot machtsverhoudingen, diversiteit van nieuwsmedia en een erkenning van meerdere publieken naast wat Habermas 'de *bourgeois* publieke sfeer' noemde. Dit proefschrift is een etnografische studie naar 'het nieuws' en 'nieuws' op de Nederlands Caribische eilanden, Curaçao en Sint Maarten.

Nieuws en 'het nieuws', het analytische onderscheid dat ik maak in dit proefschrift, erkent hoe nieuwspraktijken vormgeven aan en worden gevormd door twee parallelle, op elkaar inwerkende publieken: het institutionele publiek en het populaire publiek. 'Nieuws' gaat over nieuwspraktijken in het populaire publiek (dus populaire nieuwspraktijken), terwijl 'het nieuws' de nieuwspraktijken vertegenwoordigt in het institutionele publiek (institutionele nieuwspraktijken). Praktijken van nieuws en 'het nieuws' staan niet los van elkaar. In de dagelijkse praktijk zijn ze in hun verscheidenheid nauw met elkaar verbonden. Voor analytische doeleinden behandel ik ze als ideale types. Zoals elders, houden veel mensen op Curaçao en St. Maarten van 'het nieuws' en zijn ze ook erg geïnteresseerd in het 'nieuwe' en 'opmerkelijke' dat prevalent is in populaire domeinen van het openbare leven. Journalisten, verslaggevers en andere media-actoren, zijn ook betrokken bij nieuws terwijl ze 'het nieuws' creëren. Nieuws ontstaat in de verhalen die mensen vertellen en delen over wat er om hen heen gebeurt en krijgt momentum zodra deze verhalen breder bekend worden en meer mensen ze consumeren, recreëren en verspreiden. In dit proefschrift wordt 'nieuws' begrepen in termen van '*musicking*' (muziek als werkwoord in plaats van als object – wat we doen wanneer we muziek maken, luisteren, afspelen, bespelen, optreden, bezoeken, faciliteren, bemiddelen, managen, etc.), waardoor de betekenis en functie van 'nieuws' worden verplaatst naar de processen van hoe mensen op Curaçao en Sint Maarten gebeurtenissen omzetten in collectieve verhalen. Nieuws betrekt zich echter meestal ook op 'het nieuws', en dus leent deze dialectiek zich voor een studie naar nieuws en gemeenschap in relatie tot hoe gevoelens van thuishoren [*senses of belonging*] tot uiting komen op Curaçao en Sint Maarten.

Met een focus op nieuws als een sociaal proces dat zich in het dagelijks leven op Curaçao en Sint Maarten ontvouwt, beoogt dit proefschrift om ons begrip van wat

'nieuws' voor mensen betekent en doet te verbreden – of liever gezegd, wat mensen doen via nieuws. Mijn uitgangspunt is daarom niet alleen of uitsluitend 'het nieuws' – nieuws als een ding (bijvoorbeeld een nieuwsartikel, een uitzending) of een entiteit (bijvoorbeeld een krant, de media) –, maar nieuws als een sociaal proces dat gemeenschappelijke, betwiste en soms cathartische gevoelens van thuishoren genereert. De hoofdvraag die ik stel is: *hoe genereren institutionele en populaire praktijken van nieuwsproductie in de publieke sfeer op Curaçao en Sint Maarten – begrepen als sociale processen van het omzetten van gebeurtenissen in collectieve verhalen – gemeenschappelijke, betwiste en soms ook cathartische gevoelens van thuishoren?*

Op basis van ***multi-sited*** **etnografie** onderzoekt deze dissertatie deze vraag door praktijken van nieuws en 'het nieuws' te volgen op Curaçao en Sint Maarten en in het bredere Koninkrijk der Nederlanden. Andere locaties, waaronder Nederland, volgde ik via elektronische en digitale media of door in contact te treden met gesprekspartners, waarvan sommigen verhuisden tussen eilanden en naar Nederland. Ik baseer me voornamelijk op participerende observatie bij drie verschillende nieuwsredacties (van een Papiamentstalige en een Nederlandstalige krant op Curaçao en een Engelstalige krant op Sint Maarten), verschillende nieuwswebsites en sociale media-platforms; meer dan 40 diepte-interviews met journalisten, redacteuren en eigenaren van nieuwsmedia; en observaties en betrokkenheid bij dagelijkse praktijken van nieuwsproductie tussen 2015 en 2019. Ik stel dat de analyse die in deze scriptie wordt gepresenteerd, niet beperkt is tot de territoriale grenzen van Curaçao en Sint Maarten, maar zich uitstrekt tot het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden. Ik zal hierop voortborduren in het werk dat ik van plan ben te doen en te publiceren na deze dissertatie.

De metafoor van het **'glazen huis'**, mijn belangrijkste conceptuele bijdrage, geïntroduceerd in de inleiding en hoofdstuk één, verwijst naar hoe het sociale leven op Curaçao en Sint Maarten vorm kreeg onder Nederlands koloniaal bewind en sindsdien is geëvolueerd als onderdeel van het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden. Als metafoor lijkt het glazen huis – oftewel, een ***kas*** – op een microkosmos van een logistieke operatie om de wereld (productieproces, producenten en goederen) te reduceren in opdracht van het kapitalisme. Net als (echte) kassen, gebouwd als gereguleerde kunstmatige atmosferen om de groei van planten buiten hun natuurlijke omgeving te optimaliseren, betoog ik dat Curaçao en Sint Maarten als onderdeel van het Nederlandse koloniale project werden ontworpen en gereguleerd als sociale omgevingen om processen van productie en distributie te bevorderen. Maar net zoals ongecontroleerde metamorfoses van planten en dieren (mieren, insecten, schimmels) plaatsvinden in echte kassen, vindt er ook onverwachte bloei en

wildgroei plaats op Curaçao en Sint Maarten. Nieuws in de kassen die Curaçao en Sint Maarten zijn, volgt niet noodzakelijk het script van een burgerlijke liberale verbeelding van een gemeenschappelijk gevoel van *belonging*. 'Het nieuws' probeert dit wel, maar wordt voortdurend gedwarsboomd door 'nieuws'. Het laatste articuleert hoe de eilandgemeenschappen voortdurend worden geconstrueerd tussen regulering vanuit de institutionele orde en populaire praktijken in relatie tot deze regulering. Het is niet zozeer ondanks onderdrukkende infrastructuren sinds de koloniale overheersing, maar juist vanwege onderdrukking dat uitvinding, creativiteit en vindingrijkheid oprijzen in het dagelijkse eilandleven. Nieuws-praktijken – begrepen als sociale processen van het omzetten van gebeurtenissen in collectieve verhalen – articuleren de creatieve transformatie vanuit strijd rond het (her)verbeelden en construeren van de eilandgemeenschappen.

Dit was ook het geval op Curaçao en Sint Maarten, zoals blijkt uit **hoofdstuk twee**. In dit hoofdstuk presenteer ik ***een geschiedenis van 'het nieuws' betwist door nieuws*** op Curaçao en Sint Maarten. Het openbare leven op deze eilanden kreeg vorm via meerdere opkomende publieken, weliswaar op een verschillende manier. Waar Curaçao sinds de Nederlandse kolonisatie lang een Nederlandse aanwezigheid kende als een extra laag van heersende macht op het eiland, werd deze macht op Sint Maarten uitbesteed aan particulieren. Het effect hiervan was dat de publieke sfeer op Sint Maarten privaat was. Dit was duidelijk voor alle Sint Maarteners. Op dit eiland ontmoetten het populaire en institutionele publiek (nieuws en 'het nieuws') elkaar op meer gelijke, en dus politieke, voet. Op Curaçao werd een dergelijk gedeeld begrip van wat in feite een systeem van ongelijkheid is (een op klasse gebaseerde sociale orde op basis van kapitalistische productieverhoudingen) 'verstoord'. Op Curaçao vormde zich een gespleten institutioneel publiek. In de publieke sfeer op dit eiland ontmoetten het populaire publiek en het gespleten institutioneel publiek elkaar niet vanuit gelijke voorwaarden en gedeeld begrip. Terwijl degenen in machtsposities op beide eilanden en zijden van de oceaan handelden naar opkomende media-infrastructuren, deden degenen onderaan de maatschappelijke ladder dat ook. 'Het nieuws' heeft altijd interactie gehad met en is betwist door nieuws. Dit interactieve proces tussen institutionele en populaire praktijken van nieuwsmaken blijft het huidige publieke leven op de eilanden vormgeven. Door de proliferatie van elektronische en digitale mediatechnologieën gedurende de afgelopen decennia, kwamen praktijken van nieuws en 'het nieuws' tot stand die een overvloed aan verschillende perspectieven op de wereld genereren – perspectieven die de wereld (mensen, productie, product) openstellen en tegelijkertijd terugbrengen tot de eisen van het mondiale kapitalisme.

De analyse in hoofdstuk twee sluit aan bij het eerste deel van mijn hoofdvraag, namelijk *hoe institutionele en populaire praktijken van nieuwsmaken in de publieke sfeer op Curaçao en Sint Maarten* werden gevormd door de oplegging van een kapitalistische manier van zijn en, op hun beurt, werden beïnvloed (en betwist door) nieuwspraktijken op de eilanden. Hoe deze dynamieken zich manifesteren in alledaagse publieke uitingen van *gemeenschappelijke, betwiste en soms ook cathartische gevoelens van thuishoren*, wordt verkend in de rest van de hoofdstukken van dit boek.

In **hoofdstuk drie** verken ik *hoe institutionele en populaire nieuwspraktijken in de publieke sfeer van Sint Maarten* ***betwiste gevoelens van thuishoren*** genereerden onder de middenklasse op het eiland. Op basis van mijn ervaringen met de lezing van Dr. Umar Johnson (een klinisch psycholoog en pan-Afrikanist uit de VS) tijdens Black History Month (februari 2016) op Sint Maarten, laat ik zien hoe dit evenement zowel nieuws als 'het nieuws' was (aangezien het evenement werd omgezet in verhalen in zowel het populaire als het institutionele publiek). Dr. Johnson werd uitgenodigd door een groep activisten die een politiek van zwart nationalisme [*black nationalism*] inbrachten in Sint Maarten's publieke sfeer. Voorheen deden ze dat met nieuwspraktijken van 'onderop', gericht op het populaire publiek. Tegenwoordig zijn ze een alternatief binnen het institutionele publiek waar ze een geracialiseerde politiek van thuishoren bepleiten. Een nieuwe generatie op het eiland voelt echter niet dat deze politiek de hedendaagse realiteit van Sint Maarten vertegenwoordigt. Tijdens Black History Month op Sint Maarten daagden ze de *black nationalist* politiek uit door te pleiten – via praktijken van nieuws en 'het nieuws' – voor de acceptatie van het eiland als een zeer plurale samenleving en een dynamisch regionaal en mondiaal knooppunt van relaties tussen mensen, politiek, technologieën en bedrijven. Beide publieken (*black nationalists* en een opkomend jonger publiek) behoren tot de middenklasse. Hoewel hun strijd gebaseerd was op een contrasterende politiek van *belonging*, deelden ze een gemeenschappelijk begrip van Sint Maarten's publieke sfeer als privaat zijnde. Samen met een gedeelde taal (*St. Martiners' English*), was dit gemeenschappelijke begrip de reden dat het populaire publiek en het institutionele publiek op dit eiland elkaar konden ontmoeten op gelijke voet, via een politiek register.

Dit was anders op Curaçao, zoals ik betoog in **hoofdstuk vier**, gericht op *hoe institutionele en populaire nieuwspraktijken in de publieke sfeer op Curaçao* ***een gemeenschappelijk gevoel van thuishoren*** *onder de arbeidersklassen op het eiland genereerden.* Op dit eiland kwamen populaire zorgen (nieuws) via een affectief register 'het nieuws' binnen. Op Curaçao vond de institutionalisering van het populaire publiek 'nieuws' plaats via 'populaire nieuws media', die opereerden in een

'culturele publieke sfeer' parallel aan 'formeel-institutionele nieuwsmedia' in de '*bourgeois* publieke sfeer'. In dit hoofdstuk focus ik op het gemeenschappelijke gevoel van thuishoren onder Curaçaose arbeiders (en hen in de onderklassen) in relatie tot interacties tussen het (gesplitste) institutionele en populaire publiek. Ik doe dit met behulp van een existentiële antropologische benadering verbonden met een fenomenologie van hoop en angst. Ik stel dat de arbeidersklassen op Curaçao geen sociale verandering beogen zoals de *black nationalists* op Sint Maarten. In plaats van de structuur omver te willen werpen, is hun ambitie om te leven als de elites. Het is deze manier van zijn die een gemeenschappelijk gevoel van thuishoren onder de arbeidersklassen van Curaçao genereert, dat ik verken door me te richten op alledaagse nieuwsroutines rond de loterij en de overlijdensadvertenties. Naast instrumenten van onderdrukking om de onderklasse in bedwang te houden, werden deze nieuwsroutines ook gebruikt voor het uitdrukken van een gedeeld gevoel van thuishoren onder hen aan de onderkant van de sociale orde in de 'kas' die Curaçao was. Om aan hun dagelijkse realiteit in deze kas te ontsnappen, oriënteerden de arbeidersklassen zich op de toekomst in de hoop op een beter leven (loterij) en met vrees voor wat onvermijdelijk was (overlijdensadvertenties). Curaçao's populaire nieuwsmedia speelden in op deze toekomstgerichtheid onder de arbeidersklassen door hen 'de waan van de dag' te bieden; een ethiek van (morgen) 'als God het Wil'; een toekomst via de 'universiteit van de straat'; en een droom om op een dag uit dit 'glazen huis' te ontsnappen – namelijk door de loterij te winnen.

Wat er gebeurt als het 'glazen huis' instort door een externe catastrofale gebeurtenis, staat centraal in **hoofdstuk vijf**, waarin ik kijk naar *hoe institutionele en populaire nieuwspraktijken in de nasleep van orkaan Irma op Sint Maarten* ***cathartische gevoelens van thuishoren*** *genereerden* in het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden. Ik laat zien dat de nasleep van orkaan Irma leidde tot de blootstelling en intensivering van meer populaire nieuwspraktijken die op dat moment niet alleen in het populaire, maar ook in het institutionele publiek de behoefte aan informatie vervulden. De plotselinge ontwrichting van het sociale leven zoals het was, brak het glazen huis af – en daarmee de infrastructuren waarop de scheiding tussen deze publieken bestond. De intensivering van populaire nieuwspraktijken genereerde cathartische gevoelens van thuishoren in de (Nederlandse) wereld. Voor even behoorden allen tot 'wij', Sint Maartenaren. Wat gebeurde er met deze populaire nieuwspraktijken en de gemeenschappelijke wereld in de nasleep van Irma? Deze populaire nieuwspraktijken verdwenen niet. Wat veranderde was dat met de reconstructie van de formeel-institutionele orde, populaire nieuwspraktijken en de (gemeenschappelijke en cathartische) gevoelens van thuishoren die hierdoor werden gegenereerd, werden teruggedrongen naar het populaire publiek. 'Nieuws' werd daarmee weer naast 'het

nieuws' geplaatst. In het institutionele publiek van het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden was 'het nieuws' essentieel voor kritisch-rationeel overleg volgens liberaal-democratische principes, die op hun beurt weer essentieel waren voor het handhaven van de sociale orde. Toen de infrastructuren van media, politiek en bedrijfsleven werden hersteld, werd ook weer een kapitalistische manier van zijn in de samenleving hersteld. En zo vonden 'we' elkaar allemaal weer terug in een 'glazen huis'.

Op basis van de erkenning dat er naast 'het nieuws' in het institutionele publiek altijd ook nieuws in het populaire publiek is, stelt deze dissertatie twee dominante representaties van 'de eilanden' ter discussie. De eerste is gebaseerd op '*spatio-temporal othering*' en de reproductie daarvan in publieke debatten, politieke campagnes en mediarepresentaties in het hele Koninkrijk der Nederlanden, evenals in de vele 'ontwikkelingsprojecten' op de eilanden. In dit institutionele publiek worden de eilanden gerepresenteerd als plaatsen van gebrek. De andere prevaleert onder hen die de eerste representatie willen tegengaan door Afro-Caribische culturele praktijken en 'zwarte' vormen van expressie te benadrukken. Dit is een versie van *black nationalism*. In dit boek laat ik zien dat beide representaties geneigd zijn te negeren hoe Caribische gemeenschappen altijd tot stand zijn gekomen door meerdere publieken en tussen onderdrukking en uitvinding. In het dagelijks leven op Curaçao en Sint Maarten interacteren nieuws in het populaire publiek en 'het nieuws' in het institutionele publiek voortdurend, terwijl ze enigszins onderscheiden blijven. Deze op elkaar inspelende sociale processen van het omzetten van gebeurtenissen in collectieve verhalen kunnen gemeenschappelijke, betwiste en soms cathartische gevoelens van thuishoren genereren. Om de functie en betekenis van nieuws als generator van gevoelens van thuishoren te begrijpen, is het noodzakelijk om rekening te houden met meerdere publieken en hun interacties in de publieke sfeer op Curaçao en Sint Maarten. Bovendien hebben deze publieken een intieme, maar verschillende verbinding met het domein van het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden, een verleden van kolonialisme, en de oplegging van een kapitalistische manier van zijn. Het publieke leven op Curaçao en Sint Maarten en in het hele Koninkrijk der Nederlanden is altijd ontstaan door de strijd waardoor meerdere publieken vorm krijgen. in staat stelt om te vormen. En door deze processen van strijd in het dagelijks leven te benadrukken, laat deze dissertatie zien dat zij die uitgesloten zijn van de (*bourgeois*) publieke sfeer, centraal staan in de constructie ervan en dat zij dat, in feite, altijd al hebben gedaan.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Sanne Rotmeijer obtained her research master's degree in Humanistic Studies (*Cum Laude,* University of Humanistic Studies, Utrecht) in 2010. During her master's, Sanne worked as a research assistant in the 'Citizenship in an Intercultural Society' research group and as a research intern at the Harvard-affiliated Pluralism Knowledge Programme (Kosmopolis Institute/Hivos) together with social and academic partners in India, Indonesia, and Uganda. Drawing from political and economic philosophy (capability approach, human development) and postcolonial theory, she wrote her master's thesis on diversity, conflict, and the positioning and perceptions of media activists in Jammu and Kashmir, India. After working as a program maker at the Studium Generale of Utrecht University and coordinating various academic conferences, she worked as a public sector consultant on collaboration projects in the domains of care and wellbeing, education, and spatial planning in Amsterdam. In 2014, she worked as a lecturer at the sociology department of Erasmus University. Rotterdam. During her employment as a PhD researcher at the Royal Netherlands Institute for Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV) from 2015 - 2020, Sanne took served on the PhD council of the Research School for Media Studies (RMES), a steering committee on career development of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW), and the international research network NewsTalk&Text. In 2018, Sanne initiated and co-organized the international workshop 'Academic research in a decolonizing world' with funding from the KITLV, the Volkenkunde Museum, and Leiden University. As a PhD researcher, Sanne presented her work at several international conferences and published her research in a peer-reviewed journal. In 2021-2022, Sanne worked as a lecturer in media studies at Leiden University and the Leiden University College in The Hague. Since February 2023, she has been working as a lecturer in interdisciplinary social science at the University of Amsterdam.