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

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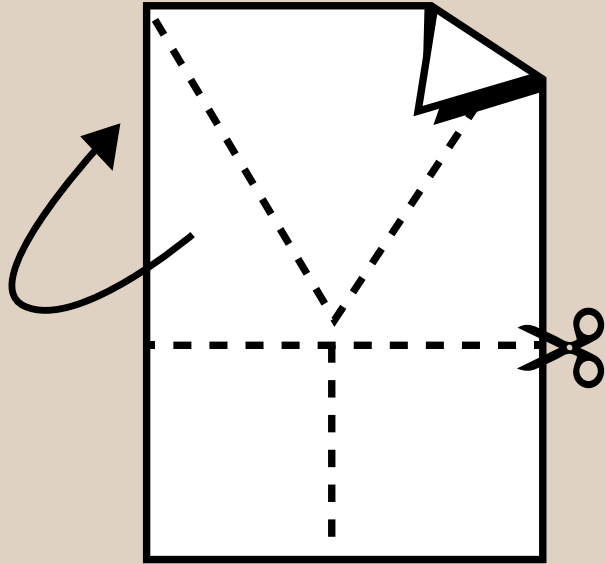
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# 1 | Introduction

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.).<sup>1</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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 17<sup>th</sup> 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 (18<sup>th</sup> 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

– 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'.<sup>3</sup> Curaçao and Sint Maarten are located more than 900 kilometers apart and differ considerably in terms of language, culture, and regional affiliation. What the

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<sup>2</sup> (Snow, 1984, p. 3).

<sup>3</sup> 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.

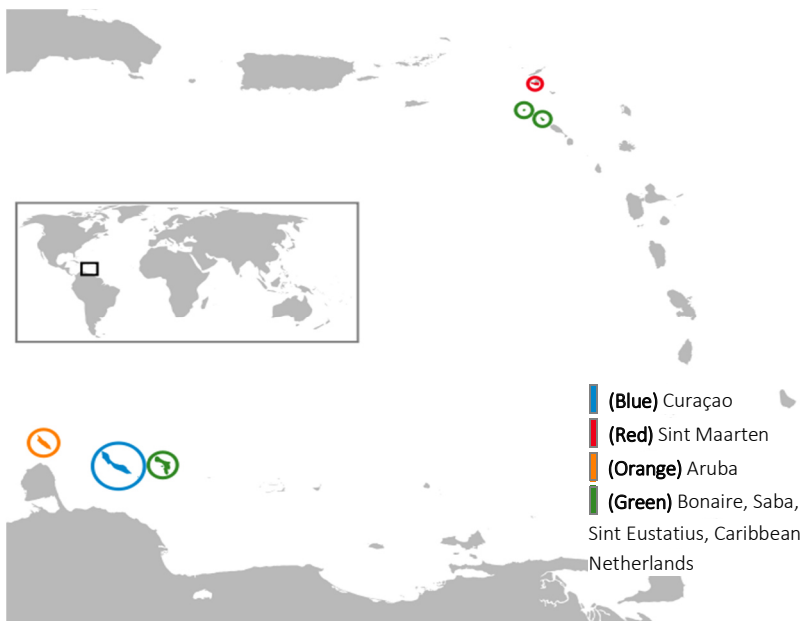
### *Curaçao at a glance*

Curaçao is the biggest island of the Dutch Caribbean with a territorial surface of 444 km<sup>2</sup> [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<sup>2</sup> southern part of Sint Maarten forms a binational island (total 87 km<sup>2</sup>) located in the northeastern Caribbean [see **Figure 3**]. People on the island commonly refer to the island as ‘SXM’<sup>4</sup> – 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

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<sup>4</sup> 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<sup>5</sup> 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

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<sup>5</sup> 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-17<sup>th</sup> 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 17<sup>th</sup> century is generally referred to as the first world-economic hegemon, followed by 18<sup>th</sup> century Great Britain and the United States since the 20<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> When Dutch (and other European) elites started with glasshouse experiments in the 17<sup>th</sup> 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<sup>7</sup> as regulated social spaces for the reproduction of

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<sup>6</sup> 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 17<sup>th</sup> century. For an elaboration on the historical links between botany, horticulture, and Dutch imperialism, see i.e., Cook, 2007; Van Berkel, 2010.

<sup>7</sup> From 1680 until the late 18<sup>th</sup> 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 18<sup>th</sup> 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 18<sup>th</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> 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.

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<sup>8</sup> 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).

<sup>9</sup> 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’,<sup>10</sup> while categorizing the set-up of an anti-corruption taskforce

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<sup>10</sup> 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.

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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).<sup>11</sup> 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

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<sup>11</sup> 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).<sup>12</sup> 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

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<sup>12</sup> 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’.<sup>13</sup> 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

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<sup>13</sup> 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).<sup>14</sup> 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).<sup>15</sup>

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” (Murrillo, 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

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<sup>14</sup> 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.

<sup>15</sup> 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 *Êxtra* 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 Iteke '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 *Êxtra*. 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.<sup>16</sup> 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).

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<sup>16</sup> 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*.<sup>17</sup>

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’.

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<sup>17</sup> 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<sup>18</sup> (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.

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<sup>18</sup> 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-Sobrinho & 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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.