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

Rotmeijer, S.H.

3 | Who is the "black bourgeoisie"?

Contested senses of belonging among Sint Maarten's middle classes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3.1. A PAN-AFRICANIST ON SINT MAARTEN

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

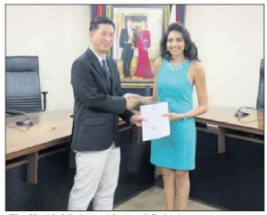
maintaining the oppression of black St. Martiners. This "black bourgeoisie", according to Johnson, could be found across St. Martin's public institutes: in education ("blacks with their PhDs and doctorates", "ready to teach white beliefs and conceptsss"); in the media ("black folks with radio stations,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

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

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

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

The Health Minister with Devlin Alexander.



The Health Minister with Angeli Balani.

Alexander, Balani sworn in as 'health care practitioners'

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

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

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

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

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

By Sanne Rotmeijer

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dr. Umar Johnson.

Audience at Black History Celebration lecture.

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

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

3.2. BLACK NATIONALISM ALONGSIDE A 'CREOLE' ESTABLISHMENT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*

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

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

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

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

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

Last Updated: 29 February 2016 Published: 29 February 2016

0 Comments

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

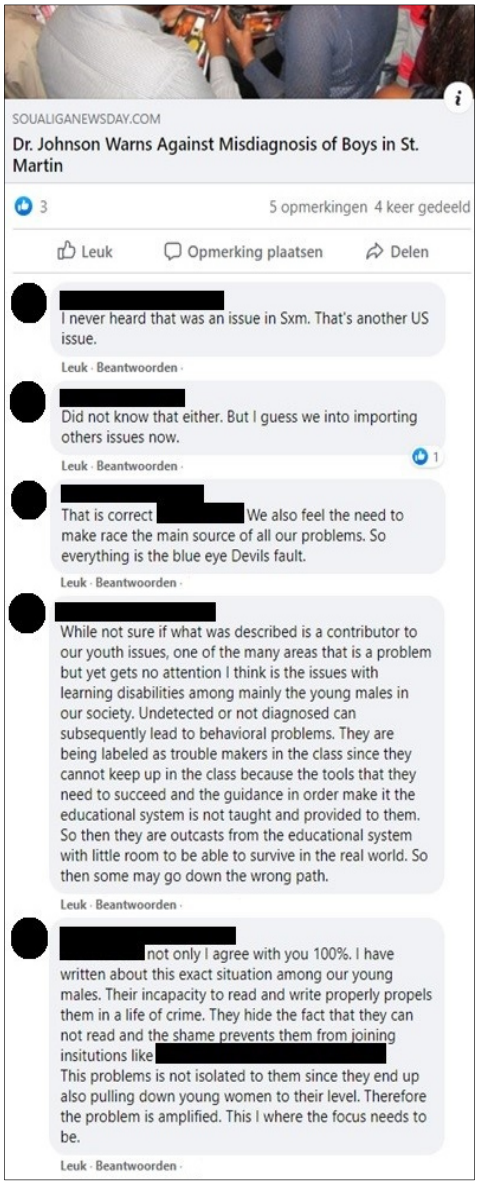


Figure 11: Facebook reactions to news article "Dr. Johnson warns against misdiagnoses of boys St. Martin" shared by *Soualiganewsday.com*.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3.5. POLITICS OF BELONGING IN A SHARED PUBLIC SPHERE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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