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

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4 | The lottery of life

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Although I had been in touch with the management of the *Èxtra* via mail and Facebook Messenger, what really got things rolling were the social ties among people living in *Mundo Nobo* – the typically working-class neighborhood where I happened to live at the time. Mundo Nobo is on the west side of Willemstad. It had been established in the 1920s when the Roman Catholic Volksbond (see Chapter Two) had initiated public housing projects for laborers. The neighborhood is located near the police station and Curaçao’s electricity and water company, Aqualectra. My host, anthropologist and human rights activist, Ieteke Witteveen, not only actively participated in public debates in ‘the news’, but also played an active social role in the *bario*, as neighborhoods are known in Papiamentu. Just a few blocks from where I was living, there was a small lunchroom, which happened to be run by two employees of the *Èxtra*. They ran it before their evening shifts started. They provided their colleagues at the *Èxtra* with daily lunches, while they also served passers-by and other clients throughout the neighborhood. It was one example of how the *Èxtra* was closely entangled with and embedded in Mundo Nobo. Other examples included the sponsoring of initiatives to promote education for children⁵⁶ and the organization of a yearly New Year’s Eve party open to the neighborhood.⁵⁷ The lines between the *Èxtra* and the neighborhood’s community were short, especially for those heavily involved in the *bario* like Ieteke Witteveen. Soon after she reached out to the chief-editor, I could start at the newspaper.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Yet, by understanding the ‘universidat di kaya’ as such – literally and in its general use (as an academic institute), one could easily overlook what this notion meant and to whom it actually spoke. The expression was not coincidentally bracketed both non-verbally and in text.⁶² It affectively signified the experiences and thoughts of the popular public. For this popular public, the ‘university of the street’ was neither about journalism, nor was it about the quality, form, or skills of the profession of journalism. Rather, it referred to a daily island reality full of limitations, hurdles, and inequality, while it anticipated the hope to overcome these. The ‘university of the street’ thus represented not a choice – for *no* formal education⁶³ – but instead an opportunity for upward mobility. From the perspective of the working classes in the popular public, it was exactly because the institutional order said “you’ll not get in without formal education” that the ‘university of the street’ opened the door for those who did not have access.

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

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

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

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

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

THE LOTTERY OF LIFE: IMAGINING THE GOOD LIFE

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁶⁵ Metaphorically, the hope for a better life ahead was echoed in the names of these lower-class neighbourhoods in Willemstad: *Seru Fortuna* [Hill of Fortune], *Mundo Nobo* [New World].

⁶⁶ Translated from Dutch: “Weet je hoe het zit in het leven? Problemen moet je bij je eigen houden. (...) Je hoeft [ze] niet op straat te brengen”.



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

David: That's culture. That's deeply rooted. Yes, and you hear it back in particular sentences we standardly use. If I say to my mom: 'I will go to Trinidad and Tobago with my girlfriend in November' (...) then she says to me— and she often says this: 'God Willing' and 'it *could* be so that'—

Yordan: 'ku Dios ke'.

David: Your mother is caring. She says that to you and the message is that you are happy. And that God's Will ultimately determines this.

Yordan: 'I have a job at the McDonalds. That must be God Willing that I, that I'— they are searching for acceptance, I think.

(Interview David & Yordan, October 31, 2015)

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

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

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

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

In these same past editions, I noticed what could seem to be a popular news media practice that was in opposition to this moral and didactic function. This was the publication of detailed pictures of bloody crime scenes and traffic accidents. Curaçao’s working classes were not unfamiliar with this combination of paternalistic moral imperatives to act ‘respectable’ and sensational news to get them through the day. These news practices echoed how the Roman Catholic Church had long employed their Mission to ‘civilize’ Curaçaoan laborers. Remember that the Catholic trade union, R.K. Volksbond, had set up newspapers to carry out this Mission, while simultaneously main-

taining “a service provider-client relationship” (Groenewoud, 2017, p. 208) between the elites and the working classes, respectively. The missionary papers had been published in the language of the laborers (Papiamentu) and provided a combination of education and entertainment. While the rise of popular news media, including the *Èxtra*, was often seen as the result of Trinta di Mei and the cultural (Antillean, Afro-Caribbean) and linguistic (Papiamentu) *reevaluation* afterwards,



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4.4. CELEBRATING CHANCE AT THE BOTTOM OF THE SOCIAL ORDER

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

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

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