

## ABSTRACT

How do they manage? What can we learn from how they manage?

The Aesthetics of the “Mundane”: Techniques of Resourcefulness and Survival  
among Working Class Trinidadians.

Candice Sobers

This thesis examines the intricacies involved in poverty management on a micro- household level, in six extended families in Trinidad. The study seeks to provide qualitative, undisclosed research material on coping strategies devised by families during the experience of deprivation, from an intimate vantage point. This is to add value to research done within the Caribbean geared at quantifying the phenomenon of poverty. Ethnographic field research was conducted between August 2010 and April 2013, among a purposive sample of six extended, vulnerably poor, working class families. Six locations were selected; two families from rural locations, two from suburban communities and two from locations labelled as high crime areas.

Through participant observation, informal conversations and interviews the family members unveiled their lived realities. A forum was created to unearth their coping strategies to overcome the scourge of financial, educational, social, legal and wellness impediments.

The term “mundane”, is used subjectively to refer to the everyday lives of the six participant families. It entails a wide diversity of kinship relations, living arrangements and necessary innovations. My research took the form of a body of conceptual paintings as representations of “defamiliarization”, drawing on Victor Shlovsy’s concept of the habitual way of perceiving the unfamiliar with minimal effort. The paintings are not illustrations of the working class lifestyles but rather uninhibited windows into their ‘lived realities’. The drawings and crafts further aided in understanding the families’ innovations without revealing identities. In addition, by means of ethnomethodology, a handbook of sixty resourceful techniques was archived to preserve the traditional knowledge of the participating families. The study advocates for the importance of informal education in the domestic setting as a key component to survival and family heritage.

Keywords: Candice Sobers; aesthetics of mundane; working class survival.